

Acts 068

Why Elder Rule?

Acts 11:30–12:4

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Let's take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 11. Wednesday evenings we are continuing our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts. We had that wonderful section, Acts 10:1-11:18, concerning the conversion of Cornelius—the first full-fledged Gentile that got saved in the Church Age.

That section was followed up beginning in Acts 11:19-30, on what the Lord was doing up north in Antioch—the church spreading from Jerusalem up north. We talked about how Antioch is a big deal, because it is from Antioch that the three missionary journeys are going to be launched (coming up in Acts 13).

You can take that information about Antioch and you can divide it into two parts: the development of the church in Antioch; and how that church became a giving church—you see their benevolence.

- I. Development of the Church (Acts 11:19-26)
- II. Benevolence of the Church (Acts 11:27-30)
 - A. Agabus' prophecy (27-28)
 - B. Relief fund (29-30)
 - 1. Money collected (29)
 - 2. Money sent (30)

That benevolence section really begins with a prophecy that Agabus made. Agabus, along with Barnabas, came from Jerusalem to investigate what was happening at Antioch. Agabus predicted a famine all over the known world (Acts 11:28) that would take place in the reign of Claudius.

The church at Antioch realized that the church in Jerusalem would suffer because of this. That was their mother church. You don't want to neglect your mother in her older age, and that is how Antioch felt about Jerusalem. They took up this collection to help the Jerusalem-ites (the Jerusalem saints in particular), because they knew that this famine was coming, thanks to Agabus's prophecy. Agabus's prophecy is described in Acts 11:27-28. The relief package is described in Acts 11:29-30. The money is collected (Acts 11:29), and now the money is sent (Acts 11:30).

Acts 11:30 says, *"And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."* The money was delivered by Barnabas and Saul. You will remember the last time we left Saul he was in Tarsus, at the end of Acts 9. Barnabas was dispatched from Jerusalem to see what was happening in Antioch. "Is this really a work of God or not?" Barnabas rejoiced that he saw the grace of God at work in Antioch, and considerable numbers were being brought to Christ (Acts 11:12-14).

Barnabas at that point finds Saul, who is still in Tarsus, and brings him to Antioch. The two of them teach this giant flock of believers for over a year. Now it is Saul and Barnabas who are being dispatched from Antioch to go back to Jerusalem to deliver this relief package. The money is sent through Saul and Barnabas (Acts 11:30).

This, of course, reminds us of the qualifications of elders and deacons. Paul the Apostle, in 1 Timothy 3, is going to lay out the moral qualifications of being an elder or a deacon in a local church. This is important for us because in this church, when people's terms are up, we accept nominations from the congregation concerning who would be a good elder or who would be a good deacon. Who do you pick for those positions? The person that is the best looking? Do you pick the person that is the most popular? Do you pick the person that is the most successful in business? What you will discover is that God is very clear concerning the people you pick.

The qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Almost all of them, if not all of them, relate to Christ-like character. Our culture is focused on talent, but I don't even see talent as one of the criteria. The only thing it says about teaching is that they have to be *"able to teach"* (1 Timothy 3:2). It doesn't even use the Greek word *"charismata"* (having the spiritual gift of teaching)—they just have to be able to teach.

As you peruse those verses, it says this of deacons: *"Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain"* (1 Timothy 3:8). You would not want a person in the position of deacon who has a weakness with money, because they are dealing with a lot of church money. Our deacons are back there every Sunday, counting money, recording donations, and making sure funds get to where they are supposed to go.

You can imagine the disaster that would be if you put someone in that position who had a weakness for materialism or material gain. It would be like a Judas situation. Judas had control of the money bag in the ministry of Jesus, and he used to help himself regularly to whatever was in there—he just took. (Today we call that "embezzlement.")

In fact, that is why he got upset when one of the sisters began to pour expensive ointment on Christ. You will find this in John 12:1-6. Judas said that this expensive oil should have been sold and the money should have been given to the poor (John 12:5). Then John adds this parenthetical comment:

"Now this he said, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it" (John 12:6).

He was just looking for more money to steal and masqueraded his true motive as he cared for the poor. That is the situation you have if you don't have people of character in the position of deacon.

In the case of Acts 11, Saul and Barnabas are men of character. They are taking this contribution—this financial relief—from Antioch back to the mother church in Jerusalem, because of the famine that is coming that they are now aware of, thanks to Agabus' prophecy.

Something that is very interesting that gets overlooked by a lot of commentators, is this: Saul and Barnabas are taking the money from Antioch back to the elders in Jerusalem. This is very interesting because this is the first use of the expression "elders" in the whole Book of Acts as it relates to the church. As Luke is recording the birth and growth of the church, this is a key point of development in the leadership structure of the church.

What is the leadership structure of the church supposed to look like? You have your first clue here, as those leaders in Jerusalem are referred to as elders. Basically any church that you go to today on the denominational landscape will have one of three models for church government, because somebody has to make the final decision about all kinds of matters.

Local Church Government

1. Episcopal / bishop rule—Acts 15:2, 6
2. Congregational rule—Acts 6:1-7
3. Presbyterian / elder rule—Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; 4:14

The first model is called the Episcopal model. That is the model that I grew up in, the Episcopal Church. It is what is called "bishop rule"—the idea where a bishop rules over multiple churches (or parishes).

Every model claims scriptural support. The Episcopal model claims Acts 15, because they say that the decision that was made in Acts 15 affected all of the churches. The only problem with using Acts 15 is that it is talking about the apostles. I don't think we have any apostles today. If you are an apostle, tell me how you keep yourself looking young, because you should be about 2,000 years old by now. Looking at what the biblical criteria are for an apostle, which we have already studied in Acts 1, an apostle is someone that had to have seen the risen Christ.

The second model is called the congregational model, where the seat of authority is in the congregation. There are perpetual votes and majority rule (kind of like how America is set up). It is the people that are supposed to be the monarchs. What the people want goes. The congregational method group claims Acts 6:1-7 for support, where a decision was made by the apostles. It says in Acts 6:1-7, dealing with the distribution of food to widows, that "the statement found approval with the whole congregation" (Acts 6:5).

They derive that you can't go forward with a decision in the church unless the congregation votes for it or backs it up. The problem with what they are doing with Acts 6 is that it doesn't say the authority rested with the congregation. It just says they happen to, in this instance, agree with what the apostles were doing, but when you read through Acts 6, you see that they really had no authority to veto what the apostles were doing. Those are the verses that are used to support the congregational rule method.

The basic problem with congregational rule is that, if the purpose of the church is to lead the flock to maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16), then you have a scenario where the inmates are running the prison. In other words, you are putting people that are in a state of immaturity in a position of authority over those leading the flock into maturity. It is like a parent taking orders from their child. That is really the problem with congregational rule.

Then there is the last model here, which I think is the one that has the best biblical support. You are in a church (Sugar Land Bible Church) that follows this last model: elder rule. The word elder in Greek is *"presbyteros."* It is this idea that a congregation is governed by a plurality of godly men. It doesn't say anywhere how many elders you have to have, but it does indicate a plurality of elders.

We think that this is the form of church government which has the best biblical support. Acts 20:17, for example, when Paul, on his third missionary journey, stopped off at Miletus and summoned the leadership of the church at Ephesus to instruct them, says,

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." There was a plurality of godly men that was governing the church at Ephesus.

In that same context they are called overseers. Acts 20:28, speaking of those who are called elders in Acts 20:17,

"Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Of these overseers—or elders—it says, "which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). That is the criteria that we, at Sugar Land Bible Church, use on the elder board when someone's term is ending. If you read our Constitution, elders are not in that position forever. They rotate terms, and we have to fill vacancies. We try to lay hands on the people that we think God would want in those positions.

One of the things we do as elders, when terms are continuing and we don't have an immediate need for a replacement, we look at the flock and see who is functioning as an elder already without the title. We try to look at what God is doing through a person—through a man—and that is the person we want to pick for leadership. We want to pick those whom God has picked, and not grab somebody and jam them into leadership whether God wants them there or not. I have been in situations where churches do that, and it has a tendency to be very disastrous. This is what you call the elder led elder rule model.

First Timothy 4:14 says,

"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

Timothy became a pastor because he had a particular gift for it, and it was recognized by the elders of the church. They laid hands on him and put him in the position that he went into as pastor over the church at Ephesus. That same word, *"presbytery"* is translated as *"eldership"* in the New King James Version (1 Timothy 4:14).

I am trying to show you that this elder led philosophy is not something that we came up with. I don't know of anyone who would design their business that way. Usually you have a CEO who is in charge of everything, maybe answering to a board of some kind, but that is really not the model that we have. It is equality among peers.

Even though I am probably the most visible elder, because I am the pastor/teacher/elder, I have no more voting power than anybody else on the elder board. I am currently one of six elders, and they are the ones that set my salary. I don't set my own salary. In fact, our Constitution says that when they make salary decisions, the person that is benefiting or not benefiting, is supposed to leave the room while the others vote. I think that is wise.

The way our accounting is set up is that the senior pastor has no knowledge of who gives what; and I am not even sure that our elder board has a knowledge of this. The only thing we really see, or that I see personally, is a big budget—how much comes in financially. Otherwise, I have no knowledge of who gives what. Who is a big donor? Who is a little donor? Who is in between? I have no knowledge of that. I like that because it allows me to be an equal opportunity offender. I can just offend anybody. If I knew who was given the big bucks (if anyone is), I would kiss up to him a little bit, but our accounting system is wisely set up so that that kind of thing is avoided.

We think that the elder led church model is Biblical. I am giving you the verses that support it. First Timothy 5:17 says, *"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."* I like that, but it says elders. There is a distinction between ruling elders and teaching elders. The elders that rule well are not to be maligned behind their back. They are to be honored. It says, "Especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

First Timothy 5:19 says, *"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two to three witnesses."* That becomes important, because if an elder steps out of line or does something immoral and someone says, "I saw an elder so-and-so do such-and-such," our response is, "Do you have two to three witnesses lined up?" You cannot convict an elder—accuse an elder biblically—without two to three witnesses.

That is good because it protects elders from the rumor mill and people running around and spreading rumors about elders with no basis in fact. It also reveals that elders are not untouchable. Elders can be removed from their positions on the basis of immoral conduct, as is evidenced by two to three witnesses.

Titus 1:5 says this of elders,

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

"The first thing you need to do, Timothy, on the island of Crete, as you are trying to bring these house churches under control, is to appoint elders in each of those house churches." That was the first thing that Paul told Timothy to do, as he was overseeing a whole bunch of house churches on the island of Crete.

1 Peter 5:1-4 says,

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid

gain, but with eagerness; not as yet lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

"Elders, if you do your job well—if you are not in it for sordid gain, or to meet some psychological need in your life, or for power or something; but if you are doing it for the right reason—when the chief Shepherd appears, He will give you a crown for a job well done. The elders are nothing more than undershepherds. Jesus, being the ultimate Shepherd of the sheep, has undershepherds called elders. That is what elders are supposed to be doing—they are supposed to be shepherding the flock of God.

If you want to know what an elder is supposed to do, all you have to do is look at the function of a shepherd in the natural world. A shepherd in the natural world does three things: he guides the sheep; he grazes the sheep (meaning that he feeds the sheep); and he guards the sheep (protecting the sheep from false doctrine).

A shepherd also protects the sheep from things as simple as (or as complicated as) putting your kids in a nursery, and making sure there are no pedophiles in the nursery (which is a big problem in the church world). Pedophiles—those that want to have sex with children—love the church world, because there are a lot of unguarded children in the church world. Obviously, as elders, we would try to keep all that nonsense out of here. We physically protect the sheep.

That is why we have a policy where, if you want to work in the nursery, not only do you have to pass a background check, but there have to be two of you as workers in the nursery. We don't allow unvetted or unsupervised people into the nursery. I would put that under the category of guarding the sheep.

When the Muslims come in here; and want to give out their gift bags that look identical to ours; and instead of a copy of the Bible or of John's Gospel, they put a copy of the Koran in there; and they want to come into the parking lot and sometimes come into the building during church time; and they want to invite you to their cultural center—"Oh, we have got wonderful finger painting and face painting for the kids. Come over and we will put a happy face on Islam for you"—that is where elders, doing their job, stand up and say, "Thanks, but no thanks. We are not interested." Those are examples of guarding the flock from physical and spiritual harm.

Then, of course, grazing is feeding the flock, which is hopefully what I am doing here by teaching the Bible verse-by-verse. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Deuteronomy 8:3).

That is a biblical understanding of what elders are. Sometimes that gets lost, because a lot of the things you talk about in elder meetings are business and finance related—"Are we going to do a building project or not do a building project?"—those kinds of things. It is easy to see people's business mentality take over, which is nice. You get the idea that an elder is really a top notch business person, and that really is not what the Bible teaches. An elder is a shepherd, and a shepherd does three things: he guards; he grazes; and he guides.

We try to function according to a plurality of elders, meaning that it is not one person's will that controls the elder board. The issue comes up and we look for a meeting of the minds amongst the elders. I think it has worked fairly well since the time I have been here, at least since 2010.

There are a lot of churches that reject this. I know of one major movement—they totally reject elder rule, and they put the pastor in control of everything. You ask them for biblical support for that, and they call it the Moses method or the Moses mentality, where Moses was making decisions for the whole nation of Israel—1.5 million people coming out of 400 years of Egyptian bondage.

A lot of pastors say, "This church is not a democracy; it is a theocracy." They put themselves in a position where they are in charge of the whole church. You ask them for biblical support, and the only thing they can give you is something that happened 1500 years before the time of Christ. They don't have support from the New Testament, which governs the Church Age. It is a method that really has no biblical support. Maybe it works well in some circumstances, but the issue is not what works well. The issue is: what does the Bible reveal?

What you are seeing develop for the very first time in Acts 11 is elder rule, as this money is being sent from Barnabas and Saul in Antioch back to the elders of the church at Jerusalem. Now here is what is very interesting: when we have seen leadership of the church at the Church of Jerusalem before, we have not seen that church ruled by elders. We have seen it ruled by apostles.

For example, they made a big decision concerning the appointment of deacons in Acts 6:1-7. The guys that made that decision are called the Twelve (Acts 6:2). In Acts 6:6 they are called the apostles (there were twelve of them). They made a decision to appoint seven men who later became deacons, as we explained back in Acts 6. Why is it then, that if the apostles are making decisions for the church at Jerusalem, the gift is sent from Antioch through Barnabas and Saul? Why is it sent to the elders of the church at Jerusalem? Shouldn't it say apostles?

What you are starting to see here in the Book of Acts is that God is phasing out apostles. The gift of apostleship was not designed to last forever. Eventually the ball had to be handed off to another leadership structure called the elders. What you are watching here in the Book of Acts is a transition from apostles to elders over the Jerusalem church, and that fits very well with what the Apostle Paul says about apostles. He will later say in Ephesians 2:20, concerning the church, *"Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone."*

When he makes the point that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles, how many times in a building structure do you lay a foundation? We lay at one time. That is what you are seeing here in the Book of Acts. The whole church got off the ground through the apostles. They are the key decision makers in Acts, but now the money is being sent back to the elders (the first time we see the word *"elders"* in the Book of Acts). What is happening is that the foundational gift of apostleship is starting to fade away, and to pave

the way for the governing structure over congregations that we know of today, called elders.

Backing up just a little bit, when we make decisions as elders at Sugar Land Bible Church, we are not doing it as bishops. We are not making decisions for other churches. We have had people come here and ask for our advice on different things, but it is just advice. It has no authority to control another, or to have any binding influence over another flock. They are going to have to make up their own decisions, because we reject the bishop rule model.

When we make decisions as elders, we would certainly consult the congregation. That is just common sense. "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" However, when it comes to a final decision, it is not the congregation that makes that decision—it is the elders.

I think there might be one exception to that in the constitution of Sugar Land Bible Church, and that is related to debt. We can not go into debt without congregational approval, and that is what our Constitution says. Other than that, it is elders that make the primary decisions, listening to the voice of the congregation, but understanding that it is not the congregation that has the final say.

We do not believe in a theocracy, in the sense that the pastor controls everything, because there is no biblical support for that other than Moses, which is a different dispensation entirely—the Nation of Israel under law. We are not in that dispensation. We are in the Church Age. We do believe that the local church should be governed by a plurality of godly men (the Bible doesn't say how many) seeking a common mind through prayer about different decisions.

You will notice in Acts 11:30 that the money was not sent to judges, kings, patriarchs, prophets, or tribes. Why wasn't the money sent to judges, kings, patriarchs, prophets, tribes, etc.? Because that is how Israel functioned. The church is not Israel—the church is a new man. It is not even a nation. It is a spiritual man. It has a completely different leadership structure, and that leadership structure is the plurality of godly men on the elder board.

Acts 12: Here we are dealing with the fourth persecution of the Jerusalem church. The church at Jerusalem has already been persecuted a number of times by the leadership structure of unbelieving national Israel. This happened in Acts 3, 4, and 5, and again in Acts 8. Now here we are in Acts 12, and it is happening all over again.

This time the unbelieving Israel structure is not going to go after a deacon (Stephen, the first martyr of the Church Age); they are not going to go after the Christian Jewish population in general; but they are going to actually try to take out two apostles. The first apostle they are going to kill (his name is James); and the second apostle they are going to throw in prison (his name is Peter).

- I. James' Death (12:1-2)
 - A. Herod's goal (1)
 - B. Herod's victim (2)

- II. Peter's Imprisonment (12:3-5)
 - A. Peter's arrest (3)
 - B. Peter's incarceration (4)
 - C. Church's reaction (5)

We pick it up here in Acts 12:1-2 with James's death. We have a guy named Herod in control. We have his goal and we have his victim. I am in Acts 12:1 it says,

"Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them."

You notice this expression here: *"Now, at that time."* The reader is supposed to contrast what is happening in Acts 12 with what just happened in Acts 11. Acts 11 is a beautiful picture of the church at Antioch. Acts 12 is a horrific picture of unbelieving Israel. You are supposed to contrast those two, because what God is doing in the Book of Acts is raising up the church and laying aside, for a season, the Nation of Israel.

In fact, the Nation of Israel, having rejected their King nationally, is going to get worse and worse and worse. Not that some Jews don't get saved—many are. I am talking about nationally and leadership-wise, it is going to get worse and worse and worse, culminating in the divine discipline of A.D. 70, which will take place right after the Book of Acts closes. Titus of Rome will sack Jerusalem and push the Nation of Israel into worldwide dispersion.

The reason why that dispersion is coming is highlighted by the guilt of the nation, not only having rejected their King, Jesus Christ, but rejecting His church. That spiritual callousness is supposed to be contrasted with the love and the beauty and the growth of the church at Antioch. That is why it says, *"Now, at that time."*

What we have here is a general goal of persecuting the church. The guy orchestrating this is King Herod. He is a member of the Herodian dynasty. The Herodian dynasty is the dynasty that you see in power all the way through the Gospels and into the Book of Acts. They are basically puppets of Rome. Rome, the occupying power, keeping control over the Nation of Israel through this puppet regime called the Herodian dynasty.

The Herods were not pure Jews. They were Edomite—coming from Esau. They are the people that were in power to function as puppets of Rome, to keep the Nation of Israel under control. The particular Herod that is in power here is a guy named Herod Agrippa I, who was a grandson of Herod the Great (the Herod that was in power in the life of Christ).

Now we have a different Herod in this Herodian dynasty, Herod Agrippa I. He wants to persecute and mistreat "the church." The church, of course, is those people (primarily Jewish at this point) who have trusted in Yeshua for personal salvation—the very Savior that the Nation of Israel nationally rejected. Herod's goal is: "I want to mistreat these people. I want to persecute them."

He has a particular victim in mind; his name is James. You see it in Acts 12:2: *"And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword."* The New Testament is a little

tricky because there are four prominent Jameses that we know of. Acts 1:13-14 lists all four Jameses.

First of all, there were John and James, and then there was another James, the son of Alphaeus. There was another James, the son of Judas (not the Judas you are thinking of—Judas Iscariot, but a different Judas). Jesus had at least two half brothers. They weren't full brothers because Jesus was born of a virgin. However, following the virgin birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had a normal marital sexual relationship. From that union came forth what we call the half brothers of Jesus Christ—sharing the same mother, but obviously not the same father.

Two of Jesus' half brothers wrote New Testament books, and those are James and Jude. I think there were a few others of them, as well. Of course, the Roman Catholics don't want you to know about these half brothers, because they want you to believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary, that she just stayed a virgin her whole life. That is a false doctrine. The Bible doesn't teach that. Surely she was a virgin at the time of Christ's conception and birth, but she did not stay a virgin her whole life. If she did, where did these half brothers come from?

The two Jameses in the middle are not the James whom we are talking about here (the one who was killed). Jesus' half brothers at the very end—James and Jude—is not the James we are talking about here. The James that we are talking about here, who was martyred by Herod Agrippa I, is the first James mentioned.

Acts 1:13 says, *"When they entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James."* This particular James is the brother of John, the son of Zebedee; the two of them were called the Sons of Thunder (I guess this particular James was pretty aggressive). He was one of the original Twelve.

The two in the middle are lesser known Jameses. We do not hear much about them as we continue through the New Testament. Of course, we are not dealing with the half brother of Christ, James, because he is going to write an epistle about AD 44, which comes later. We are dealing with John's brother, the son of Zebedee, one of the Sons of Thunder. That is the one that Herod Agrippa I took out.

The James who was martyred, was part of the inner circle. The inner circle of Jesus consisted of Peter, James, and John. They are always together in the Gospels. On the Mount of Transfiguration, in Matthew 17:1 it says, *"Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them on a high mountain by themselves."* The three of them were always together with Jesus. Two of them were brothers, and when you throw Peter into the mix, you have this inner circle. This is the James that is killed in Acts 12 by Herod Agrippa I.

It is interesting that there was a prophecy given about them, those Sons of Thunder. It says in Matthew 20:20-23,

"Then the mother of [James and John] the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons bowing down and making a request of Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Command that in Your kingdom

these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right hand and one on Your left."

Sounds like a typical mother, right? Dare I say, a typical Jewish mother? "Hey, when You bring in Your kingdom, I want my two sons, James and John, to be seated on either side of You." It is a pretty bold request. "But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink from the cup that I am able to drink?' They said to Him, 'We are able'" (Matthew 20:22).

Jesus lays down a principle: first comes the Cross, then comes the crown. "If you want a position of prominence and authority in the Millennial Kingdom, are you willing to suffer what I am going to suffer?" The two sons say, "Yeah, no problem. We are able." Jesus says something very interesting in response. Matthew 20:23,

"He said to them, 'My cup you will drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.'"

"Are you able to suffer with Me?" "No problem." Jesus turns around and says, "You will." "Are you willing to drink the cup that I am going to drink from—the cup of suffering?" "No problem." Jesus turns around and says, "You will." When he turns around and says, "You will," I think it is a prediction of what would happen to one of the brothers, James. James would suffer martyrdom, and that is a prophecy that was fulfilled not long after Jesus made the statement right here in Acts 12:2.

This is not the first martyrdom. Stephen was the first martyr (Acts 7), but this is the first martyr of an actual apostle. We know from Acts 8:1 that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem primarily when Saul of Tarsus brought persecution against the church in Acts 8. It says in Acts 8:1,

"Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

That is why the apostles are still in Jerusalem—to be martyred by Herod Agrippa I. We are not dealing with a general persecution anymore. Acts 8:4 talks about a general persecution: "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." Acts 8:3: *"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."*

Acts 11:19 picks up on this, and it says,

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to the Jews alone."

So far we have seen the martyrdom of a deacon (Acts 7). We have also seen general persecution, but we haven't seen anything like this yet, where the leader of the Herodian

dynasty just took out an apostle. What Luke is developing for us is that Israel's national hatred for the things of Jesus Christ is getting worse and worse and worse. This is going to explain the reason why God is going to lead them into discipline in A.D. 70.

God never leaves the earth without a witness of Himself. He is raising up the church, not to permanently replace Israel (or else we would be teaching replacement theology). In the future Israel will come back into the fold, but in the meantime, Israel is under discipline.

Israel has been in time out for the last 2,000 years—under the rod of divine discipline. That is what God said would happen going back to the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 28. God doesn't leave the earth without a witness of Himself, so He is raising up the church as His witnesses—those who have trusted in the very Messiah that national Israel rejected. Acts 12:1-2, James dies.

The second thing that happens in this chapter is that Peter doesn't die, but he is thrown in prison. Herod Agrippa I is going after Apostle number two. We see Peter's arrest there in Acts 12:3, *"When [Herod Agrippa] saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread."*

Herod Agrippa I has a motive. He saw when he killed James that it pleased the Jewish population. One of the things to understand about the Herodian dynasty, because they were partially Edomite and half-breeds—really puppets of Rome when you get right down to it—they were very insecure over their own throne.

Herod Agrippa I, like all of the Herods, had a real insecurity problem. You see that with Herod the Great. In the Christmas story, when the Magi came from Babylon. "We have come to worship the king." Herod wanted to know, "Where is the king? Because I am the king." He located Bethlehem as the place where the infant was so that he could murder Him and all of the innocents in Bethlehem. He was very insecure over his own throne, as was his grandson Herod Agrippa I.

Part of that insecurity is related to the fact that Israel is supposed to have a king over them who is one of their own, not an Edomite, and not a half-breed. Deuteronomy 17:15 says,

"You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your own countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countrymen."

"If you want to have a king, he must be just like you—Jewish." Here is a guy who is an Edomite. He was always nervous that the Jews were going to revolt against him and take his power away, just as Herod the Great was nervous about that as well. He was always trying to make the Jews happy, and there we see his motive. He decides to take out Peter because he saw how happy it made the rest of the Jews.

"Boy, we are happy you killed James." Herod says, "I am going to keep making them happy, because I am afraid they might turn on me since I am not fully Israeli. I like being the king. I'll take out the second apostle in the church." The second apostle of the church is a guy named Peter.

When it says, *"It pleased the Jews,"* that is showing the guilt of first-century Israel. This is why God is about ready to send Israel into discipline and raise up the church in Israel's place, for a season, during the Church Age. *"When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also"* (Acts 12:3).

Peter is arrested. He is the second apostle to be persecuted. The first apostle to be persecuted is James, one of the Sons of Thunder. Peter is not martyred, as was James, but he is thrown into prison. This is going to be Peter's third time in prison in the Book of Acts. The guy is in and out of prison all the time. Acts 4:3: *"And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening."* Acts 5:18: *"They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail."*

For Peter it is round three. Notice the timing in Acts 12:3: *"Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread."* Here are Israel's feasts, going back to Leviticus 23: four in the spring, and three in the fall. You can see where these feasts fall on Israel's calendar. You can see what Israel's months of the calendar look like compared to our months of the year.

LEVITICAL FEASTS (LEVITICUS 23)			
FEAST	SEASON	PURPOSE	TYPE
Passover	Spring	Redemption	1 Cor 5:7
Unleavened Bread	Spring	Separation	John 6:35
1st Fruits	Spring	Praise	1 Cor 15:20
Pentecost	Spring	Praise	Acts 2:1-4
Trumpets	Fall	New Year	Matt 24:31
Atonement	Fall	Leviticus 16	Zech 12:10
Booths	Fall	Wilderness provision	Zech 14:16-18

The way it worked is that there was Passover, commemorating what happened in Exodus 12 with the Passover lamb. Then there were seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Herod was waiting for Passover to run its course, and he was waiting for the Feast of Unleavened Bread to run its course, because who wants to kill somebody during a feast?

Then Herod was going to present Peter to the Jews and say, as with Barabbas and Jesus, "What shall I do with this man?" Herod was trying to make the Jews happy, because he saw how happy they got when James was martyred. "Let's let the Passover run its course. Let's let the Feast of Unleavened Bread run its course. We will just keep Peter incarcerated for a little while—a few days. When those few days run their course, then I'll bring him out and I'll make the Jews happy, because I know what they are going to say. They are going to say, 'Kill him,' just as with James."

Then you have the incarceration of Peter described in Acts 12:4. It says, *"When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him."* The incarceration is described. There were four squads of soldiers. What does that mean? It means four soldiers for each six hour shift. Every six-hour shift you get a new set of soldiers, meaning a total of 16 soldiers were guarding Peter around the clock. Two of them were chained to Peter, and two were standing guard either inside or outside the prison door.

This is overkill. Why are they putting Peter under such harsh circumstances? Peter is a guy that got out of jail before, and I have a tendency to believe that Herod Agrippa I knew about that. Acts 5:19 says, *"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out..."*

Herod Agrippa says, "We are not going to let that happen again. We have these 16 soldiers—four soldiers for each six-hour shift—guarding Peter around the clock. As they are guarding him, Herod Agrippa I is delaying the sentence of Peter. Peter is imprisoned, but he hasn't been killed, like James was. Although Herod Agrippa I's intention is to kill Peter. You see that in the second part of Acts 12:4, where it says, *"intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people."*

"After the Passover—after the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—I'll bring him out, and the Jews will say, 'Kill him,' just like with James. That will make me popular with the Jews, because I can see how happy it made them when I killed James. I can keep my own throne that I really shouldn't be on anyway, because I am not fully Jewish, but an Edomite."

This sets the stage for one of the greatest miracles in the Bible—a prison escape. We are not dealing with escape from Alcatraz or something like that. We are dealing with the intervention of the angel of the Lord.

What is the church doing as this catastrophe is happening? Are they picketing and petitioning? Are they sending emails? Are they on social media talking about how unfair it is? No. They are in prayer, and boy, do their prayers get answered. We will pick it up next time in Acts 12:5.