

Acts 071  
Hall of the Humbled

Acts 12:20-25

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Let us open our Bibles, if we could, to Acts 12:20. This is a pivotal chapter because everything is going to change when we hit Acts 13. I am hoping, Lord willing, we can finish chapter 12 tonight.

Fourth Persecution of Jerusalem Church (12:1-25)

- I. James' Death (1-2)
- II. Peter's imprisonment (3-5)
- III. Peter's Deliverance (6-17)
- IV. Results of Peter's Escape (18-25)
  - A. On Herod (18-23)
    - 1. Soldier's reaction (18)
    - 2. Herod's reaction (19)
    - 3. Herod's death (20-23)
  - B. On the Church (24-25)

In Acts 12, you have James's death. That is the first time the Nation of Israel has taken out an apostle, unbelieving Israel (Acts 12:1-2). That is followed by Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:3-5). Then Peter has been miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 12:6-17). Then the rest of the chapter is about the results of this miraculous escape (Acts 12:8-25).

What are the results on Herod Agrippa, who had Peter incarcerated? (Acts 12:18-23). What effect did this have on the church? (Acts 12:24-25). We have seen the soldier's reaction—they are in an uproar. Acts 12:18 says, there was *"no small disturbance"* occurring amongst the soldiers when it was discovered that Peter had escaped. One of the reasons for that is, as you can see from Acts 12:19, if a prisoner escaped on their watch, they were to be executed. That is why the soldiers are in a panic.

Then you see Herod's reaction, Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:19). He basically examines the soldiers, and he sends them off for execution because a prisoner escaped on their watch. It is at that point that Herod Agrippa leaves Jerusalem, where these events all happened. He goes ahead and heads up north to Caesarea. That fits the history of the time period, because around feast days that is where the Herodian dynasty or members of it went for time off. That is where Herod Agrippa goes.

Then we hit Acts 12:20-23, which is a description of Herod Agrippa's death. This whole thing begins with Herod's displeasure with Tyre and Sidon. Notice, if you will, Acts 12:20 which is speaking of Herod Agrippa who had killed James, imprisoned Peter, and then ushered these soldiers off to execution because a prisoner escaped on their watch.

*"Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon..."*

Who are the people of Tyre and Sidon? They are up north in modern-day Lebanon. When it says that he was angry with them, the Greek there reads this way: "a hot quarrel." He was hot; he was foaming at the mouth; or we might say "hot under the collar." He was very angry at these people who lived up north in Tyre and Sidon.

What is he so upset about? The second part of Acts 12:20 says,

*"...and with one accord they came to him, having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country."*

What had happened is Herod had cut off their food supply. There is a verse in the Old Testament that describes this food supply coming from Israel to Tyre and Sidon (modern-day Lebanon). In fact, the Old Testament describes these people living in Tyre and Sidon as Lebanon. It says this in 1 Kings 5:9,

*"My servants will bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; and I will make them into rafts to go by the sea, to the place where you direct me, and I will have them broken up there, and you shall carry them away. Then you shall accomplish my desire by giving food to my household."*

There is an economic relationship between Israel and Lebanon, and Herod Agrippa had cut off their food supply. The economic relationship that he had with Tyre and Sidon was such that they had to import grain from Galilee. For whatever reason, Herod Agrippa had cut that off. There is this person here in Acts 12:20, named Blastus.

*"With one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain..."*

Blastus, the king's chamberlain, was in charge of Herod Agrippa I's bedchamber. The people up north in Tyre and Sidon who were upset at Herod Agrippa won over this man named Blastus, who was in charge of his bedchamber; and with a bunch of ambassadors had come to Herod Agrippa to complain about the economic situation that Herod Agrippa had put them in.

Then when you look at Acts 12:21, Herod gives a speech against these people at a particular festival. Acts 12:21 says,

*"On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them."*

I guess the way I am seeing it is that he is there in Caesarea, and they have come with this man named Blastus and some ambassadors to voice their concern about their food supply being cut off. Herod, in reaction to this, addresses them at a festival. I would think it was the same festivals that we read about here going on in Acts 12—Passover leading to Unleavened Bread. Remember that Herod had Peter incarcerated so that those festivals could run their course, and then he would put Peter to death to please the Jews. I am thinking it is the same festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread, but we are not completely sure about that. It just says,

*"On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them" (Acts 12:21).*

Now the word for "address" here in Greek is "an angry speech"—you might call it a harangue. Basically what he continued to do is scold the people. "How dare you come to me and complain about your food supply?" What people is he aiming this at? The people up there in Tyre and Sidon who probably came to meet him there in Caesarea.

Now, the interesting thing is that Josephus records this speech that Herod gave. Josephus is tricky because sometimes there are different numbering systems. Some use a two-section or two-part numbering system. Other editions of Josephus use a three-part numbering system. Josephus, who was a first century historian, in his "Antiquities" in 17.6.8 and then again in 19.8.2, which I think stands for book, chapter, verse, like what we have in the Bible. Josephus is organized that way as well, under some systems.

The point is, if you went and looked all that up, Josephus talks about this speech. I bring that up just to show you that here is something, yet again, taking place in Scripture that is validated in secular history. This happens all of the time in Scripture. It is as if Herod Agrippa is scolding these people.

Then what gets the guy in trouble? He is all dressed up in his royal apparel; his ego is probably a bit unchecked at this point. "Who are you people to question me? Do you not know who I am? I can shut down your food supply if I want to," kind of attitude. What gets Herod Agrippa into trouble with the Lord is the people's response to Herod Agrippa's speech, and then Herod's response to what the people are doing to him.

What the people start to do is to start to worship him, and they start to venerate him. You can see that in Acts 12:22. It says,

*"The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!'"*

What the people are doing here is ascribing worship to Herod Agrippa. You will notice that it says here, "they kept crying out." This was not just a one-time action—this was a repeated thing. They were venerating him. I do not know if they were doing it to win him over; I do not know if they were doing it to butter him up. We are not given a lot of details, but the fact is they were doing this.

As this began to happen, Acts 12:23 indicates that immediate judgment came upon Herod Agrippa. It says,

*"And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."*

Looking at Acts 12:23 and taking it apart piece by piece, the first part of the verse says, *"And immediately."* This reminds me of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. You will remember, Nebuchadnezzar was out and about, and he made the statement: "Is this not the great Babylonian Empire that I myself have built and constructed?"

It says in Daniel 4:30-31, 600 years earlier:

*"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the Great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'"*

Nebuchadnezzar has a really bad case of the I's and the me's and the My's. What is interesting is that he should have known better. When you go back to Daniel 2, when Daniel finally had an opportunity to interpret that statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw, Daniel is very clear: "You, Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold—the first empire during the times of the Gentiles. The reason you are there is because God put you there."

Somewhere between Daniel 2 and 4 he forgot that, and he began to take credit for the great Neo-Babylonian empire, which was the great political power of the known world back in the sixth century. He basically said, "I built it by my power, for my purposes." That is in Daniel 4:30-31. It says,

*"While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you.'"*

When you read the rest of Daniel 4, it is a description of him being reduced to the level of an animal in his mind. There actually is a disease where people think that they are animals. I think it is called lycanthropy or something along those lines. I find that interesting because a lot of the kids today in the schools call themselves furies, where they bark and meow and all this kind of stuff; and they have to be given their own little room to do all this. If you do not cater to all this, you are violating their rights. That is what happened to Nebuchadnezzar: he became a furry for seven years—he lost his sanity and his mind.

However, God was merciful because when Daniel predicted all of this would happen to Nebuchadnezzar, he analogized it to a tree being cut down. A tree that was once the home of the birds is going to be cut down, but leave the stump alone. In fact, put an iron gate around the stump. There is an indicator in that prophecy (Daniel 4), that Daniel knew all this was going to happen before it happened in Nebuchadnezzar. God showed it to him in a vision, that the tree is going to be restored.

After a period of seven years, Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his throne and his sanity was returned. I see in that a type of the Nation of Israel, who is going to go through a Tribulation period that will last seven years or seven times—exactly what Nebuchadnezzar went through here. At the end of it, they are going to be restored to their place of right relationship to God. That is a little bit of typology in Daniel 4.

The only reason I am bringing this up is because this happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he was boastful and not giving God the glory that He deserves. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar took full credit for the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It says that while the word was in his mouth, God announced judgment. This is the same thing, going back to the Book of Acts, that happens to Herod Agrippa.

Acts 12:22:

*"The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a God and not of a man!'"*

They kept saying it over and over again. Herod Agrippa is not doing anything here to deflect glory back to God—he takes the glory for himself, just like in Daniel 4 where it says that immediately God brought in judgment.

There are a lot of sins out there that, to be honest with you, it seems to me God has more grace on. Sin is sin, but it is like in the eyes of God, some sins are a lot worse than others. You will notice in the Bible that some sins God seems to put up with for a season. I do not find that with pride. I find that when someone moves into pride God deals with them almost immediately. This is what happened to King Agrippa.

The judgment was that an angel of the Lord struck him. We know that angels are involved in bringing judgment. In fact, in Genesis 19:15, we learned that it was an angel that brought destruction on Sodom and Gomorrah. God delegated the job of judgment to an angel.

Genesis 19:15 says,

*"When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.'"*

*"Then the angel said to Lot, 'Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.' Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar" (Genesis 19:22).*

Angels are involved many times in bringing God's judgment. We know that in the Tribulation period that is coming, whether we are talking about the trumpet judgments or the bowl judgments. Revelation 18:2 and 16:1 are God's judgments. God has delegated the task of sounding the trumpets or pouring out the different bowls on the inhabitants of the earth to angels. When an angel struck Herod Agrippa dead, that is not a surprising thing. Angels are used like this by God constantly.

Acts 12:23 says,

*"And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him..."*

Why did the angel of the Lord strike him? Here's the bottom line: because he did not give God the glory. He basically did what Nebuchadnezzar did. Nebuchadnezzar should have been glorifying God on account of the existence and majesty of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar did not do that; he took credit for something that God had done, and God dealt with him. The same thing is happening here to Herod Agrippa. He did not give God the glory.

Compare that to the church at Jerusalem. When they learned that a Gentile got saved, a man named Cornelius, do you remember what the church did in Acts 11:18:

*"When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"*

Notice that the early church is glorifying God on account of a Gentile salvation. Their right motives and right heart is contrasted with Herod Agrippa, who did not glorify God—Acts 11, they glorified God; Acts 12, Herod Agrippa did not glorify God. It is a contrast between the church and first-century Israel—the right motives of the early church versus the wrong motives of first century Israel. It becomes an explanation as to why God is raising up the church and taking the Nation of Israel (nationally, I am talking about), and setting them aside for a season—not for forever, but for a season.

Why is God doing that in the Book of Acts? Because the hearts of the Nation towards God were wrong in its leadership. They would not glorify God, but the hearts of the church were right before God. They were glorifying God on account of Cornelius's salvation.

Isaiah 42:8 says this:

*"I am the Lord, that is My name;  
I will not give my glory to another,  
Nor My praise to graven images."*

That is why I said a little earlier, the sin that God does not seem to have any grace towards at all, and does not seem to put up with for very long, is pride—people acting as if they are gods or God themselves, taking credit for things that only God can do.

Here is a list I put together related to Scripture and pride.

#### Scripture and Pride

- Proverbs 16:18
- Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-17
- 1 Timothy 3:6
- Acts 12:21-23
- 2 Corinthians 12:7
- 1 Peter 5:5

The first verse that comes to my mind on this is Proverbs 16:18, which says that a haughty spirit (an attitude) precedes destruction. The second one I have there is Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17, which I believe are descriptions of what was going through Lucifer's heart before he was banished from heaven. In Isaiah 14 you will see Lucifer indulging in the five "I will" statements. He had a pretty bad case of the I's and my's also. Ezekiel 28 talks about how he was corrupted on account of his beauty.

First Timothy 3:6 is relevant because we are in the process of selecting elders and deacons. It says very clearly there: do not put a new Christian, a novice, into a position of elder; or else when God uses him in that role, he will be lifted up with pride and fall into the condemnation of Satan. What is the condemnation of Satan? It is right here in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Acts 12 is the one we are looking at here. "The voice of a god and not

man," they kept saying, and he took credit. As a result, he was immediately struck dead by an angel of the Lord.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:7, describes his thorn in the flesh, where he asked the Lord—he implored the Lord—three times to take it away. We do not know what the thorn in the flesh was, exactly, but a thorn hurts. It was some kind of pain—emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, relational issue, or whatever in his life. He kept asking God to take it away, and God said, "No, My grace is sufficient for you."

It is really not until you read the first 4 verses of that chapter that you understand why God did it. Paul, 14 years earlier, had been caught up—that is our word for the Rapture, "harpazo." He had his personal Rapture. Was he in his body or out of his body? He does not even know. He was caught up to The third heaven.

My understanding is that he is using imagery that the Greeks understood. The first heaven is basically from the earth up to the clouds. That is where the birds are, etc. The second heaven is from the clouds to the stars. The third heaven is beyond the stars—it is where God lives.

Paul was caught up to the third heaven. It happened 14 years earlier; and he says, "I heard things that could not be described in human language," which always makes me suspicious when people claim they have these visions from God and they can come back and tell you every little thing that happened. One guy wrote a book and said he went to the water of life, and he got in a splash fight with Jesus and all of these kinds of things. How can you remember in such detail what happened when Paul, with his experience, said it was indescribable?

By the way, when Paul came back, he did not write a book about it. He was embarrassed about it and did not even bring it up for 14 years. When someone has their personal encounter with God and they immediately come back and they go into print and they make a movie about it and they can describe every detail, then excuse me for being just a little bit suspicious of that. Because Paul had had this experience, he struggled with pride.

If you knew things that no one else knows, would that not lead to pride? God, to keep Paul usable, introduced into his life this thorn in the flesh, which put him in a place of dependence upon God. As long as he was there, he was emptied of pride and was usable; but without the thorn in the flesh, he would be lifted up with pride and unusable, because God does not put up with pride.

First Peter 5:5 actually indicates that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. In other words, there is a class of people on planet Earth that God resists, and that is prideful people. People that think they are gods themselves. Unfortunately for Herod Agrippa I, he gave way to this kind of pride, and that is why God brought immediate judgment upon him.

Here is a list of people that I call the "Hall of the Humbled." These are people that God deals with dramatically because of pride.

Hall of the Humbled (Prov. 16:18; 1 Peter 5:5)

- Satan (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17; 1 Tim. 3:6)
- Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16)
- Herod (Acts 12:20-23)
- Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-10)

The first one being Lucifer, and novice elders who fall into the pattern of Lucifer (1 Timothy 3:6). The second one is Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16), who was a king, but he decided to be a priest one day, and he usurped priestly prerogatives. He went into the temple, and he offered the incense.

In the Nation of Israel the kings did their thing, and the priests did their thing. You were never supposed to mix the two offices. The only person you can mix the two offices for is Jesus. Other than that, a king is not supposed to be a priest; and a priest is not supposed to be a king. Uzziah just decided the rules did not apply to him. They begged him not to do what he went in and did; but he went into the temple and he offered the incense; and he was smote from head to toe with leprosy. He spent the whole rest of his life as a leper.

Second Chronicles 26:16 tells you what the problem is. The problem is the man was lifted up with pride because, earlier in the chapter, he had come off a whole string of military successes. The problem with being successful at something is that you start thinking that the rest of the rules do not apply to you. "They may apply to other people, but they do not apply to me." That is pride. You step outside of the boundaries God has set up.

I read a statistic from Randy Alcorn years ago in his book that was very helpful to me as a new Christian called, "Money, Possessions, and Eternity." He talked in that book about how extramarital affairs (typically among men) happen after the man gets a raise or promotion or something. Once they reach a certain income level, suddenly they think, "I am successful and the rules do not apply to me. If I cheat on my wife, that is a rule for other people, but not for me." It is just the age-old pride issue. The third one, I have Herod Agrippa, who we are reading about. Then Paul, with his thorn in the flesh. Be careful about that particular sin, folks. The Bible warns us about it over and over again.

Going back to Acts 12:23. What happened to Herod Agrippa? It says,

*"And immediately the angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."*

Not surprisingly, this is an actual medical condition. We would expect that in a book by Luke, because Luke is a physician (Colossians 4:14). Arnold Fruchtenbaum, in his commentary on Acts, says,

"As a result, Agrippa was eaten by worms. The Greek expression is 'genomenos skolekobrotos' and literally means 'becoming worm-eaten.' Robertson notes: 'The word "skolex" was used of intestinal worms and Herodotus...describes Pheretima, Queen of Cyrene, as having swarms of worms which ate her flesh while still alive.' In other words, Agrippa died of acute intestinal problems. This was not an uncommon way for someone to die in ancient times. Josephus described the death as occurring five days



after the painful stomach condition started, stating 'that the rotting of his flesh produced worms, an item in harmony with the narrative in Luke.'"<sup>1</sup>

You notice that Josephus chimes in here talking about what happened to Herod Agrippa. That fits because I told you earlier that Josephus records this speech, this harangue, that Herod Agrippa gave. Josephus gives further commentary on the timing of his death. Once again, you are reading something in the Bible that can be validated in other historical sources. It is not some weird thing that is being described here—it is an actual medical condition. God allowed it to happen because this man would not give God the glory.

What do you do with a pastor, and people come up to that pastor all the time and say, "You are so blessed. You are gifted. Your life has really blessed me. You are so wonderful." What do you do with that kind of situation? How does a pastor survive that? If he is effective in what he is doing, and he hears that over and over and over again, what do you do? Because the human tendency when you start hearing stuff like that regularly is to start taking credit.

"That was a great sermon, Pastor." The human tendency is, "It was a pretty good sermon, and I stayed up late Saturday night working on it." You start to take credit for something God did in a person's life. This is why Timothy is very clear: do not put a novice into a position of spiritual authority in the church, because a novice does not know how to handle this situation at all.

They will start taking credit for God's work; and as they take credit for God's works, then they are going to fall into the condemnation of Lucifer, who became Satan, because God just does not put up with this for long, as you can see from the biblical record.

How does a spiritual leader handle that? I would suggest to you the way to handle it is you just say, "Praise God." "That book that you wrote was so great, and it helped me in this way, and it helped me in that way. I saw you on YouTube, and I was blessed by this, and I was blessed by that." You just say, "Praise God."

God used a donkey, right? God spoke through a donkey. He could speak through me and he could speak through you. When you say, "Praise the Lord," what you just did is you took attention off yourself. That should be a default mode, I think, for us, because God is going to use your life too. If and when He uses your life, it is human nature that people have a tendency to glorify the vessel. You just say, "Praise God." That way you are deflecting glory back to God, which is where it belongs, right?

All these guys here—Satan, Uzziah, Herod—did not deflect glory back to God. Paul did, but he had to be reminded through perpetual pain to glorify God. This is a very dangerous line that people cross. In fact, when ministers fall, it is always the same three things. I think I heard this from Billy Graham. These all start with G. Billy Graham said once: Do not touch the gold, meaning financial scandal. Number two: Do not touch the girls, meaning sexual scandal. Number three: do not touch the glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 278-79.

You watch when people fall—I have a list, a long line of people that I love that are not in ministry anymore (or if they are in ministry their role is very limited compared to what they once had). It is always those three things, always; or some combination thereof. You hear some scandal on television about some minister that falls. I just ask myself, "What was it this time? Was it gold? Was it glory? Was it girls? Or was it some combination thereof? There is a lot we can learn here in terms of what not to do. Amen.

By the way, I love how our accounting situation is set up here at the church where the pastor has almost no knowledge of the finances other than big budget kinds of things. I love that because I do not really want to know who the big givers are. If I know who the big givers are, the tendency is to suck up to them a little bit; but if you do not know who they are, you can be, what I like to call, an equal opportunity offender. You can offend everybody just out of ignorance.

I think the more pastors can get their hands out of the finances and let others in the church orchestrate that—the way this system was set up here before I got here, which I am thankful for—I think that is a good thing. I think it is a good thing when pastors do not set their own salaries.

I love the way our church constitution reads, where if there is some kind of vote being taken in the elder board that might financially benefit somebody (like a raise or a salary discussion or something), that person has to leave the room. I love all that because it just makes life so much easier where you are not tempted by all this kind of stuff. We have a lot of churches that are having trouble because they really did not put good rules in place when that church was founded.

Herod Agrippa goes down in history as this sad story of a guy that thought too much of himself. That is what Israel was like. That is why God is putting Israel aside—sending them off into discipline. He is raising up the church. The church is glorifying God (Acts 11). Herod Agrippa, the leadership of Israel, is not.

Then you come to Acts 12:24-25, where we have the effect of Peter's escape on the church. We have a progress report (Acts 12:24); then Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch (Acts 12:25).

B. On the Church (24-25)

1. Progress report (24)
2. Paul & Barnabas return to Antioch (25)

Notice, if you will, Acts 12:24:

*"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."*

You will notice that persecution has happened—James has been killed (Acts 12:2); Peter was incarcerated, although he escaped—and it did not stop the church at all. The church continued to grow.

If you want the church to grow, there is a way to get the church to grow. It is to come against the church—come against from the outside, against the church of God. When

that happens, you will start to see the church growing. If some psychotics show up on your sidewalk screaming and yelling slander, is that a bad thing or is that a good thing? When you think about it, that kind of thing could actually be a good thing, because it is a subtle type of persecution.

That type of persecution is so minor compared to getting your head cut off in the Congo. The Muslims there (I forgot which city) went in and decapitated 70 Christians because they were Christians. We have little things here in our country. We think they are big deals, but they are not.

However, even subtle persecution like that is a good thing, because Satan has two strategies against the church. Strategy A is to persecute the church; but the problem with strategy A is when you persecute the church, the church multiplies. Was it Tertullian who said, "The seed of the church is the blood of the martyrs?" We are seeing the church persecuted up to this point in the Book of Acts, and it has not slowed anything down. The number of disciples is multiplying.

The second strategy Satan has, which is way more effective (maybe I should not even say this publicly, because I do not want to give Satan any advice), is to join the church. If you do not persecute the church, then just join the church. Apply for membership, teach Sunday school—that kind of thing. Get yourself on the leadership of the church, get yourself in the pulpit. That is an eternal corruption of Christianity. Satan apparently is not doing this at this point. He is trying to persecute it—to snuff it out—but it keeps growing.

In the process, Doctor Luke, our author, gives one of the strongest progress reports in the whole Book of Acts. It says,

*"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (Acts 12:24).*

Luke is trying to put this historical account together to present to Theophilus an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church, so as to affirm Theophilus in what he has believed. The message of the Book of Acts is the birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically, and ethnically.

Luke documents the geographic growth of the church by tracing its trajectory from Jerusalem to Rome. We have not even started getting outside the borders of Israel yet, but we are going to see that change in Acts 13. Next, he is documenting the church's progress ethnically, by tracing it from an offshoot of Judaism to a Gentile-dominated body.

Finally, he is documenting the growth of the church numerically by giving progress reports. These progress reports keep showing up consistently in the Book of Acts. The clearest progress reports are: the church had about 3,000 converts (that is very clear); and as you keep reading it says then they had about 5,000. You have these crystal clear progress reports. The verse we are in here, Acts 12:24, is also considered one of the clearest progress reports.

You will see Luke keeps saying this: the church kept growing, the church kept growing, the church kept growing; because he is trying to show Theophilus that this gospel that

reached him through the church is an authentic move of God. Therefore, do not doubt the authenticity of your Christianity. Acts 12:24 is just a wonderful progress report.

The last verse of the chapter, Acts 12:25, is Paul and Barnabas now returned to Antioch. It says,

*"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem..."*

Apparently. Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem when all these things happened in Acts 12, with Peter, etc. They now leave Jerusalem and go back up north to Antioch, because before this chapter unfolded, they were ministering up there in Antioch to considerable numbers of converts.

Then you come to the second part of Acts 12:25. It says,

*"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission."*

What mission is that? You might remember back in Acts 11:29-30 it says,

*"And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."*

You might remember, in Antioch up north, Agabus had a prophecy that there was going to be a famine in Judea, which is where Jerusalem is located. The Antioch church decided to financially help the mother church, the sending church, the Jerusalem church. They took up this big collection, and they sent it to the Jerusalem church to help them in the midst of this famine that Agabus predicted was coming. It was a very real prophecy, because that famine came in the days of Claudius, we were told.

Now that the mission is finished, now that they have dropped off the financial relief package, Paul and Barnabas are free to leave Jerusalem and go back up north to complete their ministry of ministering in Antioch.

Look at the very last phrase of Acts 12:25,

*"...taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."*

The whole verse is:

*"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was called Mark."*

We ran into John Mark in Acts 12:12—that is the Mary who was the mother of John Mark. It is a little tricky because there are about 6 or 7 Marys in Scripture; but Peter, when he got out of prison, went to this particular Mary's house church. It is there we learned that her church was meeting in a house, and she was also the mother of this person that is mentioned in the Book of Acts called John, John Mark.

Paul and Barnabas complete their project—they have dropped off the financial relief package. They go from Jerusalem, back up north to Antioch; and they take along with them a guy that we are introduced to for the very first time in Acts 12:12, named John Mark.

All of this is preparatory for missionary journey number one, where John Mark is going to bail out. He does not want to be involved anymore, so he leaves. This is going to lead to a big split between Paul and Barnabas, who was related to John Mark, concerning whether the kid should go on missionary journey two.

Paul says, "Forget it. That guy bailed out the first time. He is going to bail out the second time." This leads to a split between Barnabas and Paul at the end of Acts 15, which I think Luke records, because now you have two missionary teams instead of one. More ground is going to be covered. God used a split here between these two men of God to further the progress of the church.

Where is that particular missionary trip into southern Galatia going to be launched from? It is going to be launched from Antioch, which we have been reading about, not Jerusalem. That is why you have all this information in the Book of Acts about Antioch having to financially bail out Jerusalem. That is what Paul and Barnabas were doing in Jerusalem: they were bailing them out.

What is God doing? He is raising up Antioch. Even though Jerusalem has been the mother church all this time, He is raising up Antioch up north for a reason. From Antioch are going to be launched missionary journey number one, missionary journey number two, and missionary journey number three. Antioch now is becoming the sending church, which is a big, big deal because now the church, for the first time, is going to leave the borders of Israel and go into foreign territory.

That kind of thing never happened in the Old Testament. There is no example of a prophet leaving the borders of Israel and ministering to the Gentiles, except one guy. Who am I thinking of? Jonah. He was a successful prophet in that sense, but was mad about it. The Nation of Israel did not do missionary trips; Jesus did not do missionary trips. Jesus's whole ministry took place within the borders of Israel.

Now something completely radical is about to happen. The church is going to leave the borders of Israel and move into southern Galatia. The missionary team is going to consist of Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark. That is why the three of them are highlighted there at the end of Acts 12. It is getting us ready, if you will, for the first missionary journey.

Acts 13:2, which we will look at next week, says,

*"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,  
'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.'"*

They leave the borders of Israel. It is the very first time that Christianity, as we would call it, is outside the borders of Israel. They are doing something here that is almost unparalleled. Even the ministry of Christ did not do that. Remember what Jesus said to

the disciples in the Upper Room? He said, "You are going to do bigger things than Me." John 14:12: "You are going to do greater works than me."

People take that to mean, "I guess I can walk on the water, or turn water to wine," but that really was not what he was talking about. What he was talking about was this: You are going to do greater things than Me first of all, numerically. Jesus had a hard time hanging on to a crowd when He was not doing the miracles of water, fish and bread. Once He stopped that, the crowds dissipated (John 6); but Peter preached the gospel and he saved 3,000 people (Acts 2). Peter did greater things than Jesus.

It is speaking numerically, and it is speaking geographically, of how the church is going to cover geographical regions that Jesus never went to. Here we are sitting in this room in 2026, and simply through technology this teaching could be heard all over the world. That is a fulfillment of what Jesus said would happen. "You are going to do bigger things than Me." It is exciting. Obviously we are not gods like Jesus is God, but He did say, "You are going to do bigger things than Me—greater things."

The church is about to do that in Acts 13. Everything is going to change as the church is going to leave Antioch and go into southern Galatia. We will read about that next time.