

Lesson 9 – Christians in Antioch

Text: Acts 11-12

Main Characters: God, Peter, Barnabas, Saul, Herod, James

Key Passages:

- Acts 11:26 – The disciples of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch.
- Acts 12:22-23 – Herod was killed by God because he accepted the blasphemous praise of the people.

Main Storyline:

After Cornelius and those with him heard the Gospel from Peter and were added to the church, word spread to the disciples in Jerusalem that Gentiles were being taught. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the disciples (former Jews) rebuked Peter for associating and eating with the Gentiles. Peter explained everything regarding his vision and what had happened in Caesarea with Cornelius and the others. When the disciples heard Peter, they began to glorify God for granting the Gentiles an opportunity to have eternal life as well.

Following the persecution which arose after Stephen's death, many people scattered to the regions around Jerusalem but only preached to the Jews. Some of the men, however, went to Antioch, where they preached to many Gentiles there about Jesus. God was with those men, and a large number of Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord. When the church in Jerusalem heard about Antioch, they sent Barnabas to help and encourage them to continue with the Lord. After a while, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch as well. For an entire year, Saul and Barnabas stayed with Antioch and taught many of the people there. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

During that time, some prophets from Jerusalem came to Antioch. One of them, Agabus, prophesied by the Holy Spirit that there would be a great famine in the world. As a result, the Christians in Antioch decided to send relief (money/food) to the other disciples living in Judea. Barnabas and Saul delivered the relief to the elders of the churches in Judea for them to distribute.

Around that time, Herod (Herod Agrippa I) began to persecute the church. Herod was a wicked man, though he tried to appear as a devout Jew (particularly as a Pharisee). As part of his persecution of the church, he had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he decided to arrest Peter and planned to kill him as well. He had arrested Peter during the Passover feast, so he planned to wait until it ended before executing Peter before the Jews. Herod kept Peter in prison, guarded by 4 squads of soldiers (16 soldiers total). While he was in prison, the church offered constant prayer to God on his behalf.

On the night before Herod planned to bring Peter out to the people, Peter was asleep and chained between two guards in his prison. There were also guards at the door to the prison and other posts. An angel appeared suddenly next to Peter and struck him on the side to wake him. The angel instructed him to put on his clothes and sandals and to follow him. The chains fell off of Peter, and he obeyed the angel. While he followed the angel, he wondered if what he was experiencing was real or just a vision. After they came out of the prison, the angel went with him a little ways and then disappeared.

When Peter realized what had happened, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many of the Christians were praying. When he knocked on the door, those inside were in disbelief that it was truly Peter. Some believed it was not Peter, but just his spirit. When they finally allowed him in, Peter explained what had happened, but then left and went to another place. The next morning, Herod found out that Peter had escaped, and he executed all of the soldiers who had been put in charge of guarding him.

Some time later, Herod was giving a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon in his royal clothes. The people were awed by his appearance and words, and they shouted, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Herod apparently accepted this blasphemous praise; God struck him with worms so that he died as a result.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) Forgiveness of sins is available to everyone in the world, regardless of their race or previous religion.
- 2.) Prayer is effective, and we must be in constant prayer to the Lord to help us and others in difficulties.