

**Acts 11:19:** *'Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, **preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.**'*

As the Apostles continue to preach to Jews only, they are in direct disobedience to Jesus' command before He rose back up to Heaven:

*'And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel **to every creature.**'* Mark 16:15

*'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. <sup>19</sup> Go ye therefore, and **teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>20</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.'* Matt 28:18

They were in not obedience but direct disobedience! They were being led by their own lifelong prejudice against Gentiles and can be said of them, what was said of the Pharisees who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ: *'For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.'* John 12:43

We will see this borne out when Peter withdraws from eating with the Gentiles when the representatives come from James in Jerusalem... but that will be for a later lesson.

This may sound harsh regarding the Apostles but it's true, nonetheless; it will be left to Paul to confront Peter, at that time, and to dispel this terrible mindset founded on pride! Yes, pride! *'We are Israel, God's only people; Gentiles are less, Gentiles are unclean!'*

**Verse 20:** *'And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.'*

But we do see some of the new Christians preaching to Gentiles and *'a great number believed!'*

**Verse 22:** *'Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. <sup>23</sup> Who, when he came, and had seen **the grace of God**, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'*

Remember, Barnabas has been recognized as an important member of the inner circle of Church government. We first saw him when he chose to sell a piece of property and donate the proceeds for the needs of the new Church. Soon, we'll see him joining Paul in his crucial ministry of proclaiming God's New Covenant, His Gospel of Grace, that we are saved by God's Grace through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gift of God: *'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'* Ephesians 2:8

**Verse 24:** *'For he (Barnabas) was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.'*

Antioch is about 300 miles north of Jerusalem in what is, today, southern Turkey. It was an important city for trade and commerce, located on a major road linking Rome with India and Persia (modern Iran); in fact, by this time, it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind only Rome and Alexandria, Egypt. It was a wealthy city populated by Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Jews and many more and It was the perfect hub for the further, worldwide distribution of the Gospel.

Now we're seeing the Gentilization of the Church; God will bring Gentiles, by the millions, from every nation, tribe and tongue into the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church will grow as being mostly Gentile. That's not to say that He was not and is not bringing Jews into the True Church as well - He is.

Jews are saved in exactly the same way as are Gentiles: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross to pay the full penalty for all our sin.

God has not cast Israel off; every promise to Israel will be fulfilled to the letter! Israel is still precious to God but Israel is not the Church, and the Church is not Israel. He has, however, caused a 'blindness' to affect Israel as a whole, for a time, so that they cannot, so that they will not hear the Gospel except as individuals; as well, they could not, they would not see, recognize and receive their Messiah when He first came to them:

*'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:'* John 1:10

*'But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: <sup>38</sup> That the saying of Esaias (Isaiah) the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? <sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, <sup>40</sup> He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.'* John 12:37

*'And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.'* Isaiah 6:9

Israel's blindness and deafness, all God's work in response to their hard hearted rejection of God, didn't begin with the New Covenant Church; God hardened Israel long before, according to their willful rejection of His Prophets; then, when their long awaited Messiah came they could not see and they could not hear but instead of simply ignoring Jesus Christ, considering Him to be just another deluded imposter, they hated Him with supernaturally murderous hatred to the extent that they tortured Him beyond recognition until they murdered Him by the most insultingly contemptuous way conceived by the dark and sinful hearts of men.

Because of that abominable sin, their national heart was darkened even further; they would be persecuted more than any other people for the next 2000 years but finally, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to Armageddon, at the end of the soon coming 7-year Tribulation, their national blindness and deafness will be lifted; the eyes and ears of every Jew still alive at that long-prophesied moment in time will be opened; they will all, as one, recognize and turn in faith to their Messiah: the Son of David, the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord and King of all the Universe, physical and spiritual!

***Verse 25:*** *'Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'*

He's looking for Saul of Tarsus so he naturally travels north to Tarsus, looking for Saul; perhaps he thought that Paul/Saul, being from Tarsus which is not very far from Antioch, that Saul would know best how to teach them instead of any of the original Apostles who were all from Israel/Galilee. When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch where they spent an entire year together, teaching and training all the new Believers from Antioch and now, thanks to the Antiochian Believers, we are all called Christians but make no mistake: a genuine Christian is only one who has, by faith, trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross for Salvation, that He paid the full penalty for all the sin of every person trusting in Him.

***Verse 27:*** *'And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. <sup>28</sup> And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.'* Great dearth, here, means famine.

Here, during the early years of the True Church, God continues to use sign gifts to confirm His Word, to strengthen and encourage His flock and to warn of coming difficulties. We see the gift of prophecy exercised by Agabus.

Later, Paul will write: *'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; <sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: <sup>14</sup> That we henceforth be no more*

children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; <sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: Ephesians 4:11

Paul is, by implication, saying what he made more clear in his first letter to the Corinthians:

*'Charity (love) never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.<sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. <sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.'* 1Corinthians 13:8

*('That we henceforth be no more children...' '...when I became a man, I put away childish things')*

Paul is saying that the sign gifts were specifically given to confirm the Word of God before it was compiled in written form: the time when they could be 'tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine;' Paul had to write in opposition to false teachers who were bringing those false winds of doctrine. Before the Word came in full, the new Christians were like children, understanding like children but when the Word was fully given, they could grow up into 'Him, (mature) in all things.' ... from immaturity unto maturity in the Lord.

When the Word had come, Peter could write: *'According as his divine power hath given unto us **all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him** (in His Word) **that hath called us to glory and virtue:** <sup>4</sup> Whereby are given unto us **exceeding great and precious promises:** (in His written Word) **that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'** 1Peter 1:3*

So we see in Agabus, the gift of prophecy has not yet failed... it was still being used by God in confirmation.

**Verse 29:** *'Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: <sup>30</sup> Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.'*

Saul and Barnabas are clear up in Antioch, southern Turkey. Remember, Antioch is a very prosperous city of international crossroads, made wealthy from trade. Down in Jerusalem and Judea, it was overrun with new Christians; thousands had come for Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the Church was born. Many stayed, they had nowhere else to go, to learn, being taught by the Apostles. Many would have been poor, homeless, jobless while the Christian residents would have been overwhelmed. Paul is organizing offerings to be sent down to Judea. We don't know how many churches were involved in financially helping Judea but this established one of the marks of the True Church: love and sacrificial giving to missions, both foreign and domestic as well as the caring for each other: every local body caring for its own.

Paul references the giving by the churches up in Turkey in his first letter to the Corinthians: *'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. <sup>2</sup> Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. <sup>3</sup> And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.'* 1 Corinthians 16:1

**Acts 12:1:** *'Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. <sup>2</sup> And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.'* Here is the death of the first Apostle: James.

This Herod is the son of Herod the Great who was regional king over Judea when Jesus was born, the one who ordered the death of all the baby boys, hoping to kill the rightful King, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is his son who will very soon die a most ignominious death.

This James whom Herod kills is not James, the brother of Jesus and Jude, author of the Book of James. This is James of James and John, 'Sons of Thunder.' *'And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:'* Mark 3:17 Of 'Boanerges,' Strongs says: 'Boanerges: 'sons of thunder' a nickname given to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, by the Lord. The name seems to denote fiery and destructive zeal that may be likened to a thunder storm.'

This fiery zeal is, perhaps, what contributed to Herod's desire to shut him up permanently. James, like John the Baptist, may have been railing against Herod's lifestyle: he had divorced his first wife and illegally taken his brother's wife, Herodias, as his second wife.

***Verse 3:*** *'And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)*

Herod is a Jew and those who were 'pleased' by his murder of James were also Jews; they are 'pleased' with the persecution and murder of Christians and why this instance surrounds Passover and unleavened bread: Passover is Nisan 14. The 'days of unleavened bread' are the days of Nisan 13-21. This commemorates their Exodus from Egypt. Leaven is a type for sin; they were required to cleanse their homes of any and all leaven in preparation for the all important observance of Passover.

***Verse 4:*** *'And when he had apprehended him (Peter), he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.'*

A quaternion of soldiers is a quartet of soldiers, 4, which is the normal night watch for a prisoner. This seems to say that Herod ordered 4 quaternions or 16 soldiers to watch Peter; he had heard of the miracles accomplished through the Apostles; he was taking no chances; he would outsmart God, or so he thought...

The Greek word used here, translated 'Easter,' is Pascha/pas'khah; the word is used 29 times in the New Testament; 28 times, it's translated: 'Passover' but this once, it is translated as 'Easter.' I don't know why they would have done so... but they did.

***Verse 5:*** *'Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.'*

All the Christians in Jerusalem were praying for Peter; we will soon see God's response...

***Verse 6:*** *'And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.'*

Peter is in the prison; he is bound with 2 chains and sleeping with a soldier on either side of him while other soldiers guard the prison door; it would be impossible for Peter to escape! Impossible!

***Verse 7:*** *'And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.'*

Well, that's pretty dramatic: an angel comes into the prison; a bright light shines all around; the angel kicks him, wakes him up and says, 'get up! chop chop! let's go! and both chains simply fall off his hands...

***Verse 8:*** *'And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.'*

Get up! Get dressed! Put on your shoes! Put on your coat and follow me!

Peter would have followed immediately but was it really happening? Or was he dreaming?

***Verse 9:*** *'And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.'*

Peter isn't sure it's happening; he thinks he's maybe just seeing a vision that isn't real...

***Verse 10:*** *'When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.'*

We'll start with this verse next time... God's plan was to free Peter. All the Christians were praying. God didn't need their prayer to release Him to fulfill His plan but, in His love for His children, He invites us to have a part in His work. We can know that our prayer is important, that He hears us and that He responds to our prayer but we must never think that He is ever limited by our prayer or lack of praying; God is Sovereign at all times, in all places and over every human, spirit and occurrence; He is all powerful, all knowing and everywhere at once. God is God Almighty! He is Creator, Sustainer and Director over, under and throughout ALL.