

Lesson 11: The Word Increases

Acts 11:19-12:25

Our reading this week concludes with: “but the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied” (Acts 12:24). It grew in their hearts, in their communities, in their world. I don’t think that just means knowledge increased or understanding was gained, though certainly that would have played a role. John tells us in the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is the Word of God – the Lord Himself spoken into a world desperate for a Savior. An understanding of the written word of God is never void of the living presence of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. He came because of our weakness; He came in spite of rejection; He came in the face of opposition. And His word continues to increase in light of the same.

“But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”

Acts 12:24

I don’t know what it would mean for the word of the Lord to increase in your life. But I trust He’s willing. I trust He’s present. I trust that in spite of, and because of, and regardless of your present circumstance, He comes to increase His word in and around you. Word of God, meet us in your written word. May Your word and Your presence grow and be multiplied among us.

The Church at Antioch

Read Acts 11:19-30.

1. Who is preaching at Antioch in Acts 11:19? What theme does that continue from our previous readings? (See Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.)
2. Who were they preaching to according to Acts 11:19-20? Depending on which translation of the Bible you’re using, verse 20 may read *Greeks* or *Hellenists*. From the context, who do you think Luke was talking about – Jewish people or Gentiles?
3. What did they preach (11:20)? In your own words, what do you think that means? How would you do that?

4. Barnabas is reintroduced to us in this chapter and will continue to play an important role in the development of the church. Looking back to Acts 4:36-37 and at 11:22-24, summarize what we know about Barnabas.
5. Acts 11:23 says that Barnabas “witnessed the grace of God” when he arrived in Antioch. What do you think that means? Is there a time when you have seen the grace of God?
6. How did Barnabas exhort the believers in Antioch in Acts 11:23? Read Hebrews 12:1-3. How do those words exhort you in your own walk of faith?

Here we come to the return of Saul/Paul in Luke’s story of Acts. We don’t have a lot of information about what Saul has been doing to this point, but from here on out, Scripture provides many details of his life. He will soon become the focal point of Acts and many of the letters of the New Testament are written by him.

7. Why did Barnabas go find Saul at this point?
8. According to Acts 11:26, what name was given to believers in Antioch? (We will come back to this later in the *Prepare for Life* section.)
9. Who came to Antioch in Acts 11:27? What did they foretell?

When the disciples (the believers) at Antioch heard of the coming famine, they decided to send relief to the believers in Judea.

10. How do you respond when you hear of another believer’s distress? What are some ways that we might support other believers in difficult circumstances?

Peter's Arrest

The events of Acts 11:19-30 and Acts 12 probably overlapped in their timing. Acts 12 opens with Herod Agrippa I as king of Judea. He was king from 41A.D. until his death in 44A.D.,¹⁰ which probably means that Peter's arrest in Acts 12 occurred in 43 or 44A.D. In Acts 11:28, we read that the prophesied famine in Judea occurred during the reign of Claudius, who was emperor of the Roman Empire from 41-54A.D.¹¹ Most likely, Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem sometime around 45A.D.,¹² which would have put them in Antioch around 44A.D. – approximately the same time that Peter was arrested by Herod.

Read about the events that occurred in Jerusalem in Acts 12:1-19.

11. From Acts 12:3, what appears to have been Herod's motive in persecuting the believers?

Because Herod was appointed King of Judea by the Roman Emperor Claudius, he was not very popular with the Jews,¹³ and so he sought to gain their favor by persecuting the believers.

12. In this portion of Acts 12, what two specific actions did Herod take to persecute the church?

13. How did the church respond to Peter's arrest by Herod according to Acts 12:5?

14. What do you learn about prayer in the following verses?

- ❖ Ephesians 6:18
- ❖ Colossians 4:2
- ❖ 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- ❖ 1 Timothy 2:1:

¹⁰ Brisco, Thomas V. *Holman Bible Atlas*. Holman Reference. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Page 197.

¹² *English Standard Version Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008. Page 2106.

¹³ Wong, John-Michael. *Opening Up Acts*. Opening Up Commentary. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010. Page 87-88.

❖ James 5:16:

15. From Acts 12:6, what do you observe about Peter's response to his arrest? Read Jesus' words to Peter in John 21:18-22. What do you think Peter learned from the resurrected Christ and how might it have affected him?

16. Briefly summarize Peter's escape (if you can call it that) from prison or record anything that stands out to you from Acts 12:6-17.

In Acts 12:15, we see a hint of confusion in the early church regarding angels. Angels are real, active, created beings, but confusion and misconception often swirls around the topic of them. It is possible that this early church was under the impression that each believer had a guardian angel who looked like the believer and might appear upon the believer's death.¹⁴ Today, there is a common misconception that believers become angels when they die, so we might be tempted to read that understanding into the early church's response.

17. What do you learn about angels in Nehemiah 9:6 and Psalm 148:1-5 (especially verses 2 and 5)?

18. What job description is given to angels in Hebrews 1:13-14?

Angels were created by God – separate from mankind, and one of the roles of angels is to minister to believers. When believers die, they do go to heaven, but they do not turn into angels.

19. How does Acts 12:18-19 come to a close?

The Death of Herod

Read Acts 12:20-25.

¹⁴ Gangel, Kenneth O. *Acts*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 196.

20. What did Herod do when the people called him a god?
21. How did God respond? How does Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 contribute to your understanding of this event?
22. Compare Peter's response to being worshipped as a god in Acts 10:25-26 to Herod's response. What do you learn and how should we as believers apply this to our own lives?

In Acts 12:25, the events in Jerusalem and Antioch converge, and the stage is set for Paul's missionary journeys to begin.

Prepare for Life

In Acts 11:26, we read that the name *Christians* was given to the believers by outsiders, probably Gentile non-believers with the intention of differentiating those who believed in Christ from the Jews. It means "Christ followers" or "people of Christ's party."¹⁵ Some scholars even believe that it was first used in a derogatory manner, a mocking label for those who chose to follow Christ. Interestingly, the word appears only three times in Scripture: Acts 11:26, 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16, and it does not seem to have become widely used by believers themselves until the second century.¹⁶

23. What do you believe is the significance of descriptive names or labels that are put on us by ourselves or by others?
24. Have you ever been labeled with a name that may or may not have been an accurate reflection of yourself? How did you respond? Have you allowed these labels to define who you are?
25. What does Revelation 2:17 promise?

¹⁵ Gangel, Kenneth O. *Acts*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998. Page 181.

¹⁶ Polhill, John B. *The New American Commentary: Acts*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995. Page 273.

Spend some time resting in the intimate presence of the God who will one day whisper to you your new name – a perfect name given you by the Lord Himself.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 11