

Acts

Lesson #10

St. Peter Arrested . . . again!

(11: 19 – 12: 25)

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Review

In Lesson #9 we followed St. Peter to Lydda and Joppa, where he healed Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, and he raised Tabitha from the dead. Meanwhile at Caesarea Maritima, an angel had visited Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who told him to send messengers to Joppa to bring Peter to Caesarea. St. Peter was staying at the home of Simon the tanner and around noontime Peter had a vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven, containing a large collection of both clean and unclean animals. What could this mean?

When Peter arrived at Caesarea, Cornelius greeted him, telling him about the angel visiting him, and Peter proclaimed the gospel to Cornelius and his family. They became believers as a result, and they received the Holy Spirit and were baptized.

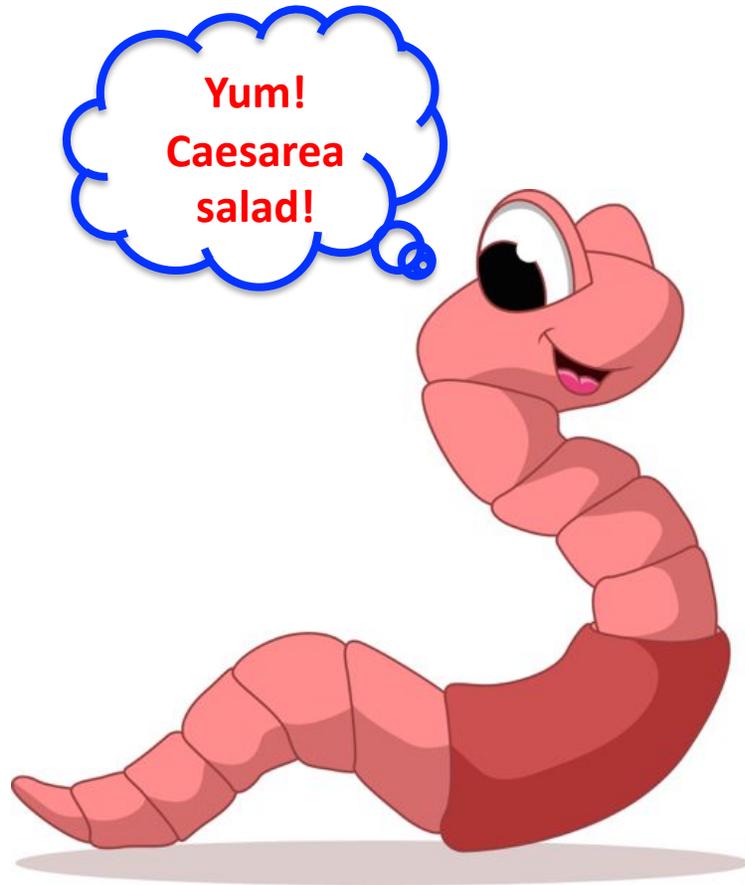
No one in the Church ever imagined that the gospel had anything to do with Gentiles; it was purely an internal Jewish movement. With the conversion of Cornelius and his family, *everything* changed. No longer was the Church limited to being a minor movement within Judaism; now, with Gentiles becoming believers, the Church gained the potential to become a global enterprise, embracing *all* of humanity.

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Preview

As Lesson #10 opens, the Church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Syrian Antioch, where Gentiles were actively being proselytized. It was one thing for Cornelius and his family to become believers, but the vast majority of the Church still held that the gospel was primarily meant for the Jews. On arriving in Antioch, Barnabas investigates the situation, and he approves Antioch’s “open door” policy for the Gentiles, encouraging them to “keep up the good work.” Since Antioch is less than 150 miles from Tarsus (both are in southeastern Turkey of today), Barnabas decides to visit Saul, and when he does, they both return to the church at Antioch, where they stay and become teachers.

Preview



Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Herod Agrippa has arrested the Apostle James, the brother of John, and Herod has beheaded him. Herod then arrests Peter, planning to execute him as well, but in the middle of the night, Peter is broken out of jail by an angel, much to the horror of the sixteen soldiers who are guarding him, for they pay for their dereliction of duty with their lives.

Later, at a public assembly in the theater at Caesarea, Herod is stricken with intense pain, collapses, and is “eaten by worms” and dies!



The conversion of Cornelius and his family has enormous implications for the Church. Rooted deeply in feelings of tribal and religious exclusivity, Jewish animosity toward Gentiles had always been intense.

- Back in Abraham's day he made his servant Eliezer swear *"that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites . . . but that you will go to my own land and to my relatives to get a wife for my son Isaac"* (Genesis 24: 3-4);
- Isaac and his wife Rebekah feel the same way when Rebekah complains to Isaac about their son Easu's wives, *"I am disgusted with life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob also should marry a Hittite woman . . . why should I live"* (Genesis 27: 46);
- Miriam and Aaron *"spoke against Moses on the pretext of the Cushite woman he had married"* (Numbers 12: 1);

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•Samson’s mother and father are distraught that their son would marry a Philistine, *“Is there no woman among your kinsfolk or among all your people, that you must go and take a woman from the uncircumcised Philistines?”* (Judges 14: 3).

•Ezra the priest is horrified that after returning from the Babylonian captivity, some of the Israelite men—the priests and leaders among them—*“have taken some of their daughters [those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites] as wives for themselves and their sons, thus intermingling the holy seed with the peoples of the lands”* (Ezra 9: 1-2).

•Consequently, Ezra imposes strict ethnic cleansing on the Israelites: *“We have indeed betrayed our God by taking as wives foreign women of the peoples of the land Let us therefore enter into a covenant before our God to dismiss all our foreign wives and the children born of them”* (Ezra 10: 2-3). And that’s exactly what they do. Those who object have their property confiscated and are banished.

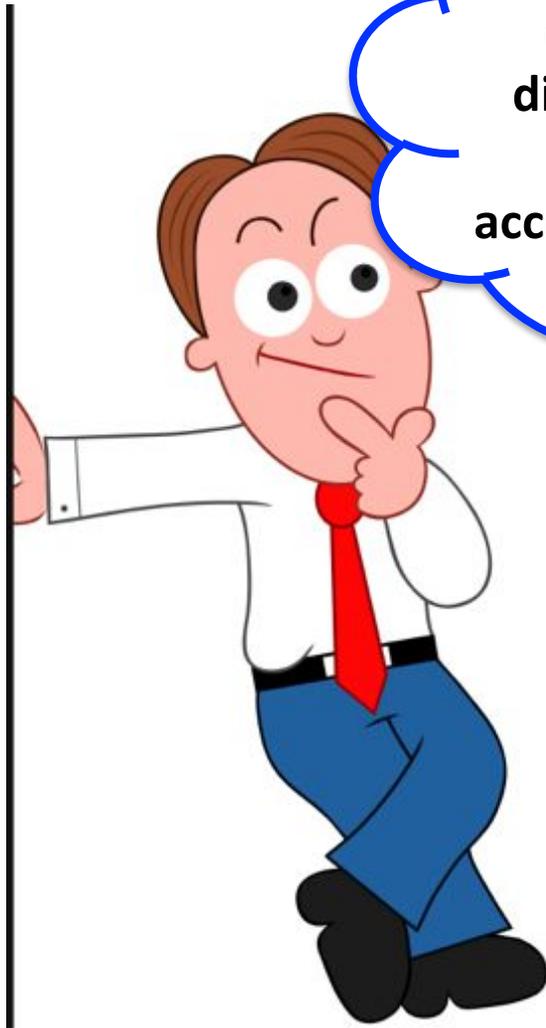


Michael Angelo Immenraet. *Jesus and the Woman of Canaan* (oil on canvas), c. 1673-1678.
Union Church, Idstein, Germany.

Even Jesus reflects this exclusivity early in his public ministry in the story of the Canaanite woman:

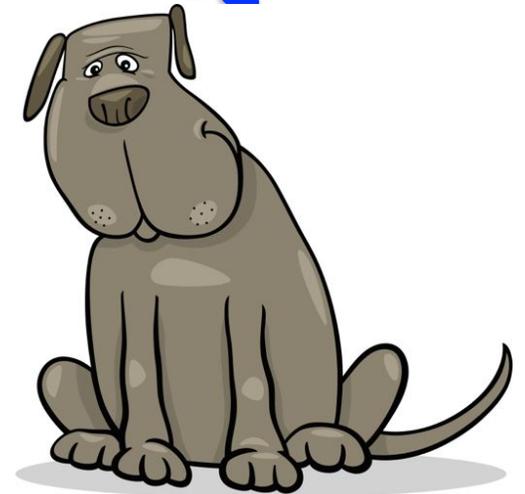
“And behold, a Canaanite woman of the district came and called out, ‘Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.’ But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, ‘Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.’ He said in reply, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But the woman came and did him homage saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He said in reply, ‘It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.’”

(Matthew 15 22-26).



Given such a long cultural and religious history of Jewish exclusivity, it will be **VERY** difficult to integrate Gentiles into the “The Way,” accepting them fully as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It sure will!



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But the Holy Spirit can get it done! By the time St. Paul writes his epistle to the churches in Galatia—around A.D. 51—he offers a vision of what life in Christ should be:

“For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise.”

(Galatians 3: 26-29)

It will happen, but it will take great time and effort to get there.

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“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that arose because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word **to no one but Jews**. There were some Cypriots and Cyrenians among them, however, who came to Antioch and began to speak **to the Greeks as well**, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas [to go] to Antioch.”

(11: 19-22)

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Those who had fled Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen took the gospel message with them, but many presented it only to Jews; others presented the gospel to Gentiles, as well—and tension between the two increased.

In both cases, Syrian Antioch became the primary target of the Church’s missionary activity.



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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!



Seleucus I, one of Alexander the Great's generals, founded Syrian Antioch near the end of the 4th century B.C. Located on the eastern side of the Orontes River (about 12 miles northwest of today's Syrian boarder), it was geographically positioned to take full advantage of the spice trade, the Silk Road and the Persian Royal Road.

Antioch eventually rivaled Alexandria, Egypt as the jewel of the east. With a population of nearly 500,000 people, Antioch was the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire, a vibrant center of learning, culture and trade.

Antioch was also the center of Hellenistic Judaism during the 1st century A.D., making it ripe for Christian missionary work.

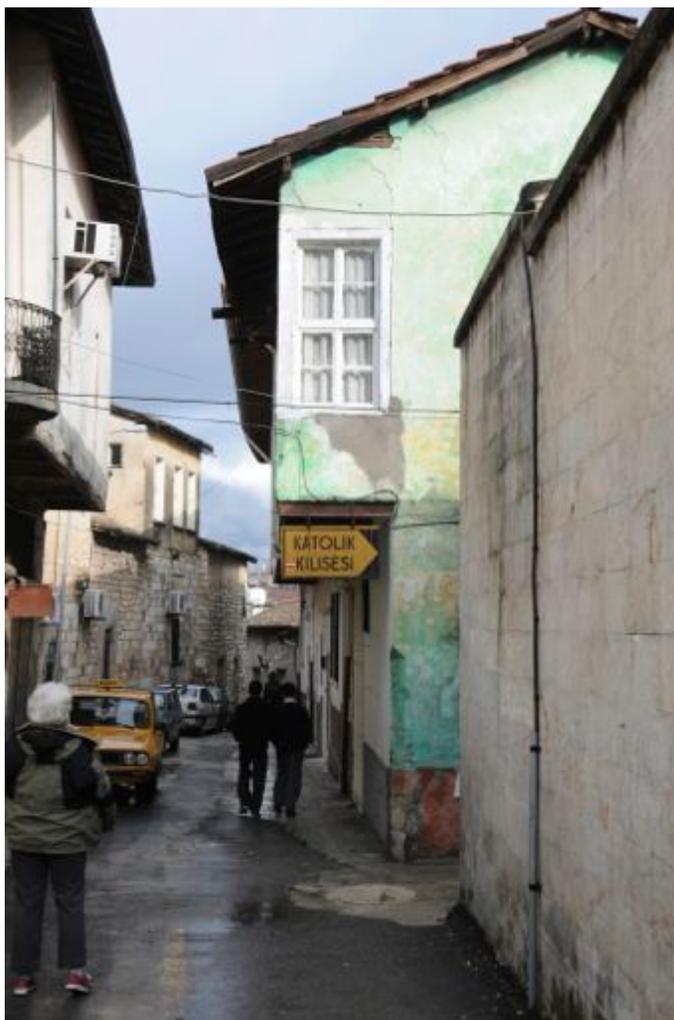
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Antakya [Antioch], Turkey today boasts a district population of 470,000.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Nearly all of Antioch’s residents are Moslems; there are only three small Christian communities: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Presbyterian. As we wander the narrow streets, we see a sign for the “Katolik Kilisesi,” the Catholic Church, so we follow it.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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This is the only Roman Catholic church in Antioch today,
with 1 priest and 70 baptized parishioners.

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The pastor, Fr. Domenico, invited us to celebrate Mass with him in the chapel dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul.

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When news reached the Apostles in Jerusalem that large numbers of Gentiles were becoming believers, they were alarmed, so they sent Barnabas to check it out.

“When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart, for he was a good man, filled with the holy Spirit and faith. And a large number of people was added to the Lord. Then he went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a large number of people, and **it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.**”

(11: 23-26)

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Grotto of St. Peter in Antioch.

Tradition holds that Barnabas, Paul and Peter met here with the believers.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Interior of St. Peter's Grotto.

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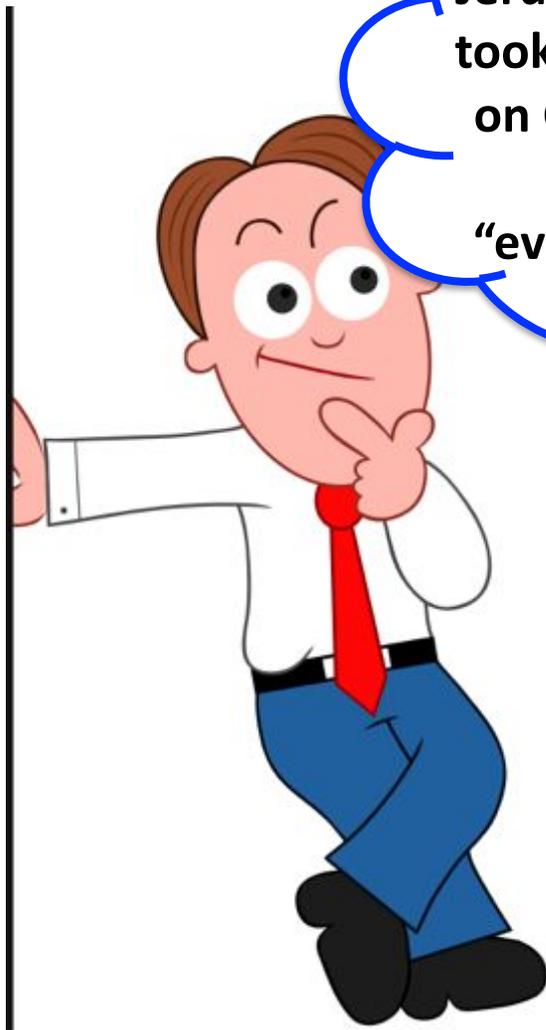
We were first called “Christians” here.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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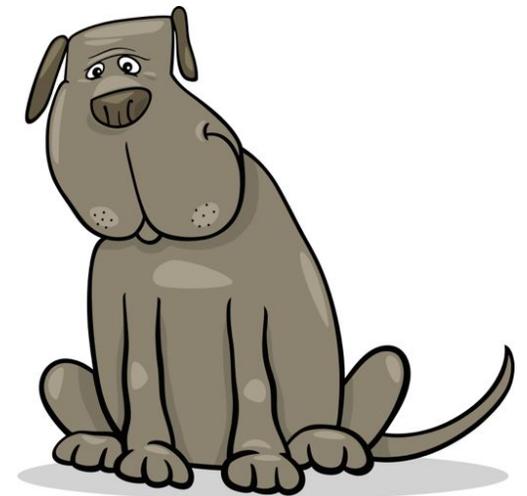
St. Peter Arrested . . . again!

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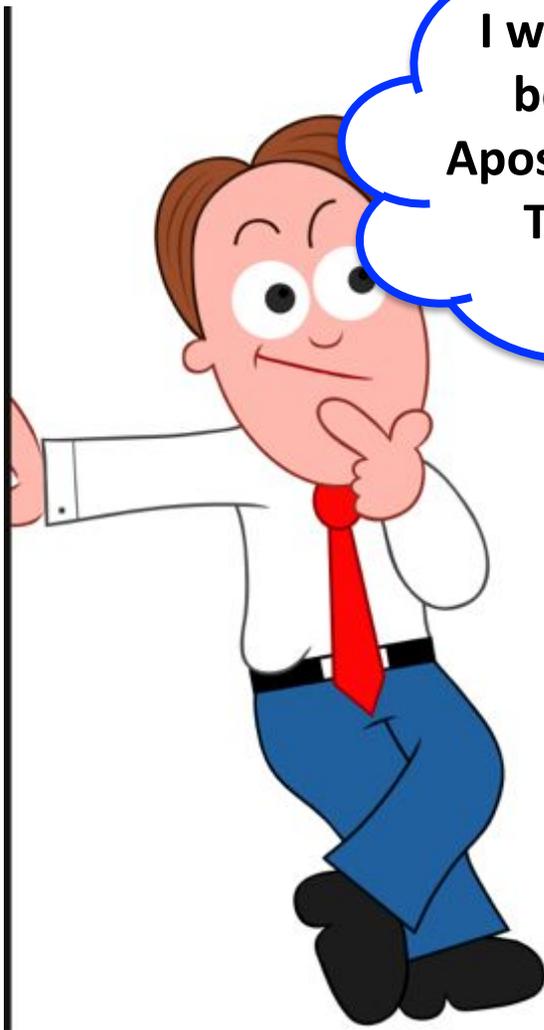
It seems like the believers in Jerusalem, including the Apostles, took a more conservative position on Gentiles entering the Church, so they send Barnabas to “evaluate” what’s going on up in Antioch.

And the more “liberal” Barnabas likes what he sees!

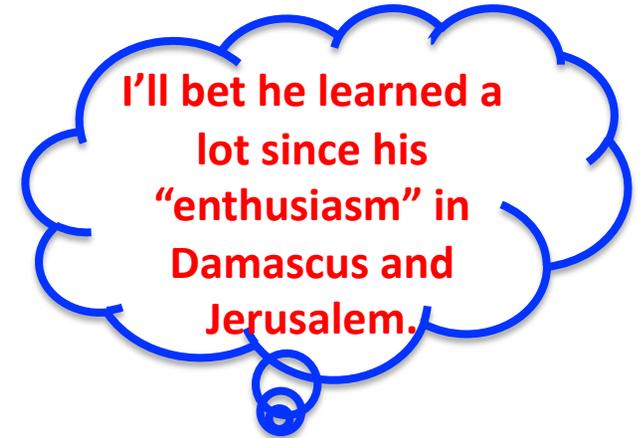


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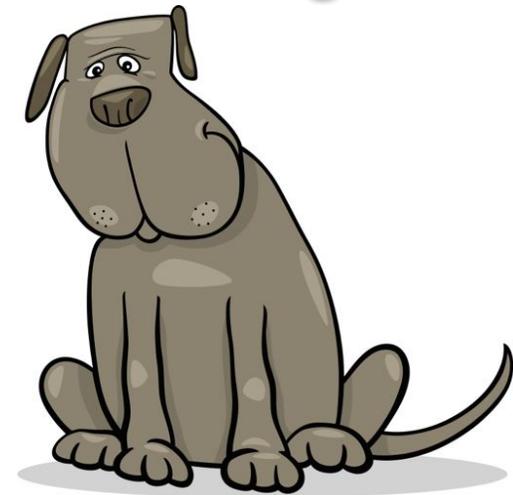




I wonder what Paul had been doing since the Apostles sent him home to Tarsus several years earlier?



I'll bet he learned a lot since his "enthusiasm" in Damascus and Jerusalem.



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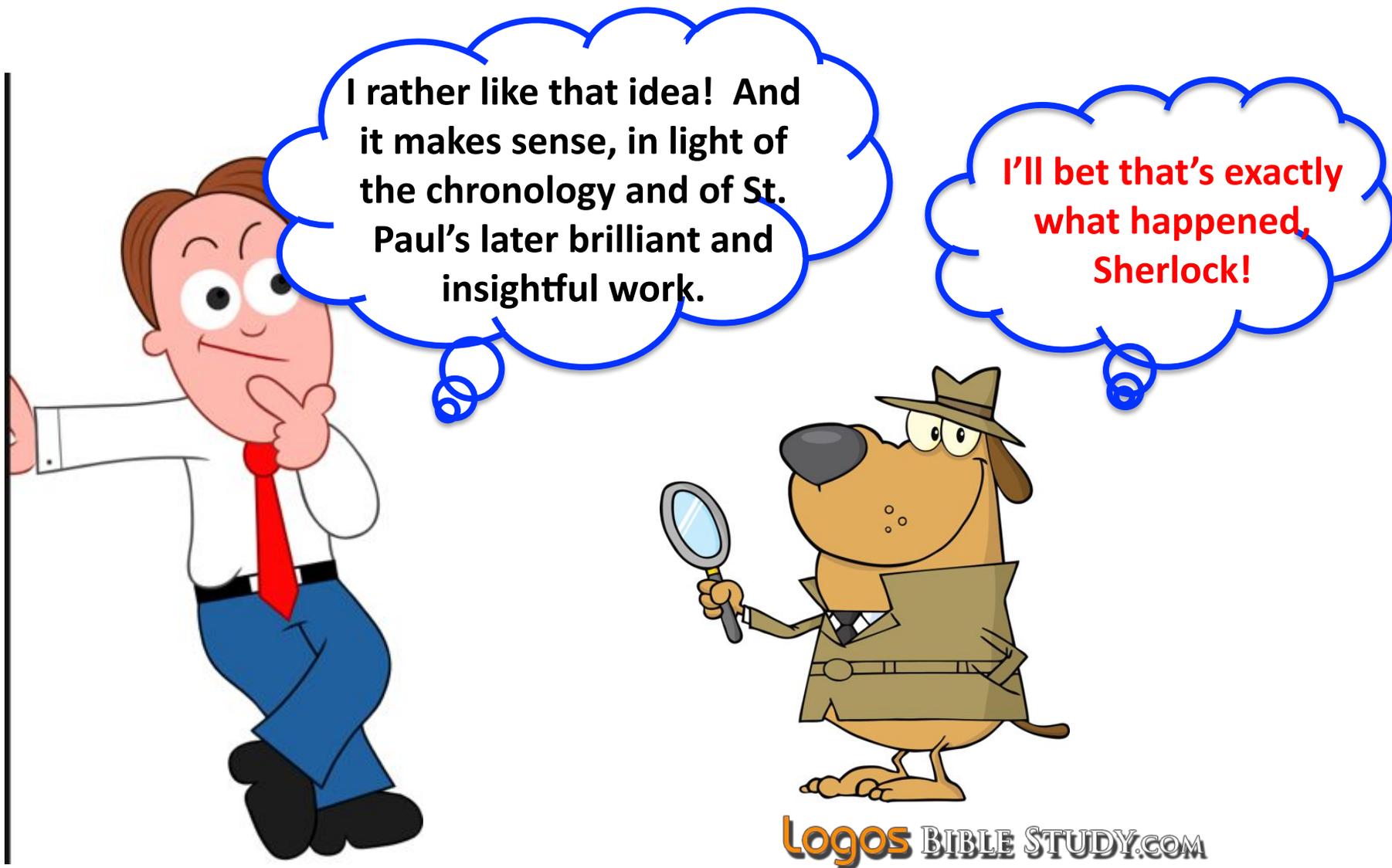
St. Paul's "missing years" require more than a little speculation, but we can piece a few things together.

- In the following verses in Acts, Agabus predicts a famine that, in fact, occurs during the reign of Claudius, A.D. 41-54, suggesting that Paul and Barnabas arrive in Antioch prior to A.D. 41.
- If the stoning of Stephen is around A.D. 35-37, then Paul's "missing years" are around A.D. 37-41.
- Paul writes in Galatians that *"the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 1: 11-12).



• Paul then writes that *“when [God], who from my mother’s womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood . . . I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas [Peter] and remained with him for fifteen days . . .”* (Galatians 1: 15-18).

• Could it be that St. Paul spent the 3-year “gap” with the risen Christ in the deserts of Arabia, where Christ revealed the Gospel to him, preparing St. Paul for his mission, as Christ had spent 40 days with his Apostles in Jerusalem preparing them for their mission?



“At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine all over the world, and it happened under Claudius. So the disciples determined that, according to ability, each should send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. This they did, sending it to the presbyters in care of Barnabas and Saul.”

(11: 27-30)

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• Dio Cassius (*History* 60.11), Suetonius (*Claudius* 18.2) and Tacitus (*Annals* 12.43) mention famines during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41-54), and Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.101) dates the famine A.D. 44-48.

• Accordingly, the church at Antioch takes up a “relief” collection for the Jerusalem church, and they send it in care of Barnabas and Paul.

• That must have occurred in early 44, for Herod Agrippa dies in the next chapter, Acts 12: 23.

• The word “presbyters,” by the way, is πρεσβυτέρους, most often translated “elders.”

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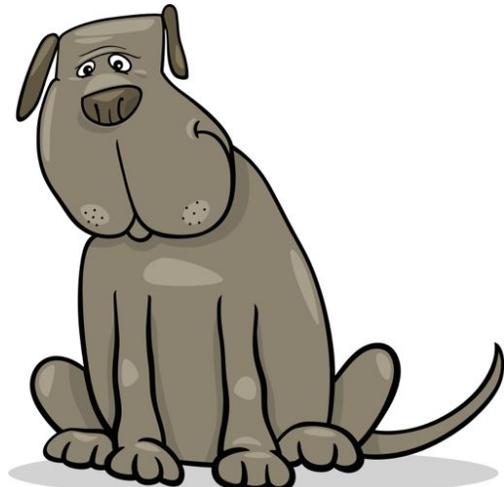
“About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (It was [the] feast of Unleavened Bread.) He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.”

(12: 1-5)

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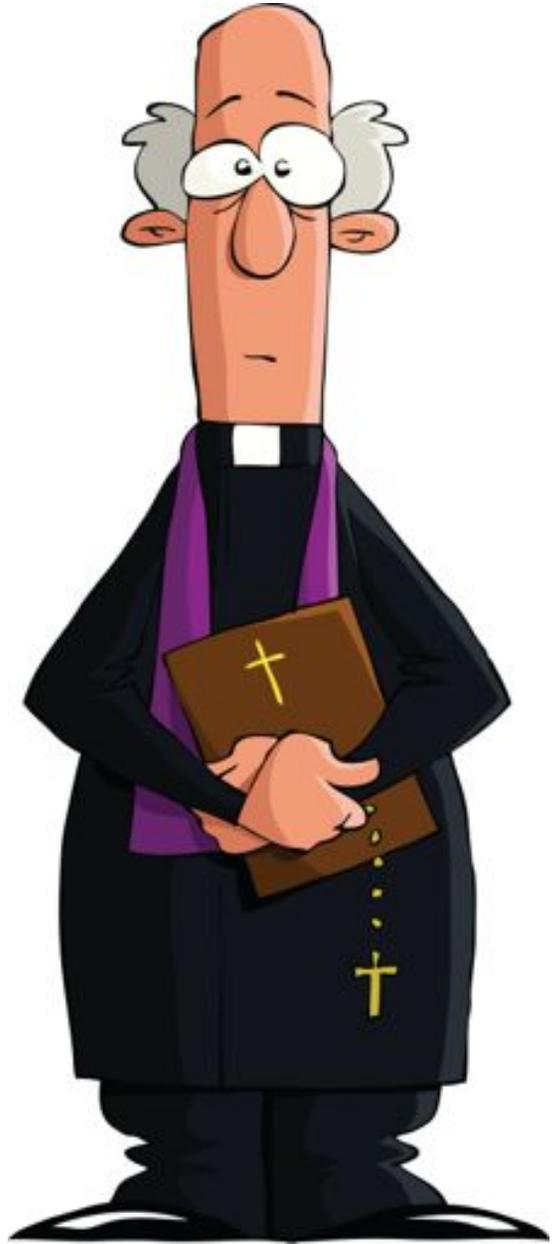


Wow! James, the Apostle John's brother and one of Jesus innermost circle (Peter, Andrew, James and John), is beheaded in A.D. 44. He's the first Apostle to be martyred.



I'll bet there's a story to that!

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Indeed, there is.

Tradition tells us that after the arrival of the Holy Spirit, St. James journeyed to Galicia, Spain where he worked as an evangelist. When he returned briefly to Jerusalem in A.D. 44 he was arrested and beheaded by Herod Agrippa I. His remains were then returned to Spain (the accounts differ as to how they were returned, and most of the stories involve a huge dose of the miraculous!).

Today St. James' remains are in the crypt of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Since the Middle Ages pilgrims have walked "The Way" to the cathedral by the tens of thousands.

It is a "bucket list" experience!

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Rembrandt. *St. James the Greater* (oil on canvas), 1661.

[Owner unknown. The Stephen Carlton Clark family, heirs to the Singer Sewing Machine Company, owned the painting until 2006, when it was given to the family's Shippy Foundation. The foundation then sold its art collection for \$28,000,000 at a Southeby's auction on 25 January 2007, and the painting is now in the hands of a private collector.]

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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!



Dr. Creasy and his Logos pilgrims about to begin their journey to Santiago de Compostela.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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The happy pilgrim!

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!



Ana takes a break along the trail!

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Almost there. The mileage is down to single digits!

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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!

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Arriving in Santiago.

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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!

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The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

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The crypt of St. James, son of Zebedee, brother of the Apostle John—Jesus' friend.

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“On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison. Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ The chains fell from his wrists. The angel said to him, ‘Put on your belt and your sandals.’ He did so. Then he said to him, ‘Put on your cloak and follow me.’ So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him.”

(12: 6-10)

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**Bartolome Esteban Murillo. *Liberation of St. Peter* (oil on canvas), c. 1667.
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.**

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St. Peter Arrested . . . again!

“Then Peter recovered his senses and said, ‘Now I know for certain that [the] Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting.’ When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where there were many people gathered in prayer. When he knocked on the gateway door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. She was so overjoyed when she recognized Peter’s voice that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. They told her, ‘You are out of your mind,’ but she insisted that it was so. But they kept saying, ‘It is his angel.’ But Peter continued to knock, and when they opened it, they saw him and were astounded. He motioned for them with his hand to be quiet and explained . . .

[to them] how the Lord had led him out of the prison, and said, 'Report this to James and the brothers.' Then he left and went to another place. At daybreak there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. Herod, after instituting a search but not finding him, ordered the guards tried and executed. Then he left Judea to spend some time in Caesarea."

(12: 11-19)

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***Peter Returns* (English woodcut), 1695.**



Ha, ha, ha!

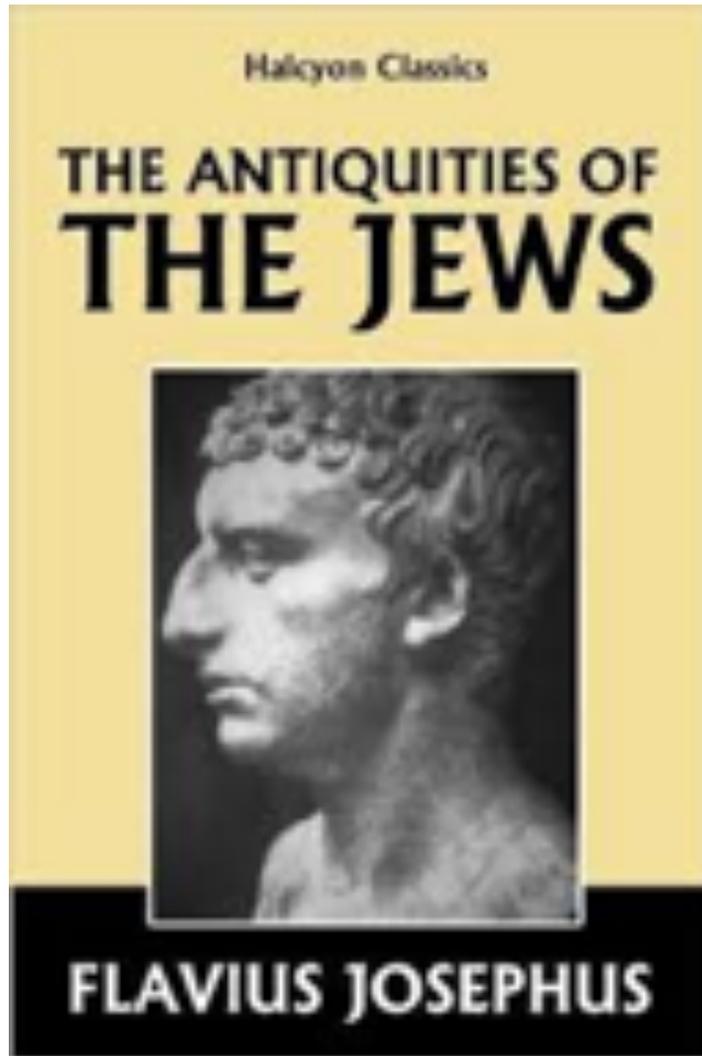
Hee, hee, hee!



“He [Herod] had long been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, who now came to him in a body. After winning over Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they sued for peace because their country was supplied with food from the king’s territory. On an appointed day, Herod, attired in royal robes, [and] seated on the rostrum, addressed them publically. The assembled crowd cried out, ‘This is the voice of a god, not a man.’ At once the angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not ascribe the honor to God, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. But the word of God continued to spread and grow. After Barnabas and Saul completed their relief mission, they returned to Jerusalem, taking with them John, who is called Mark.”

(12: 20-25)

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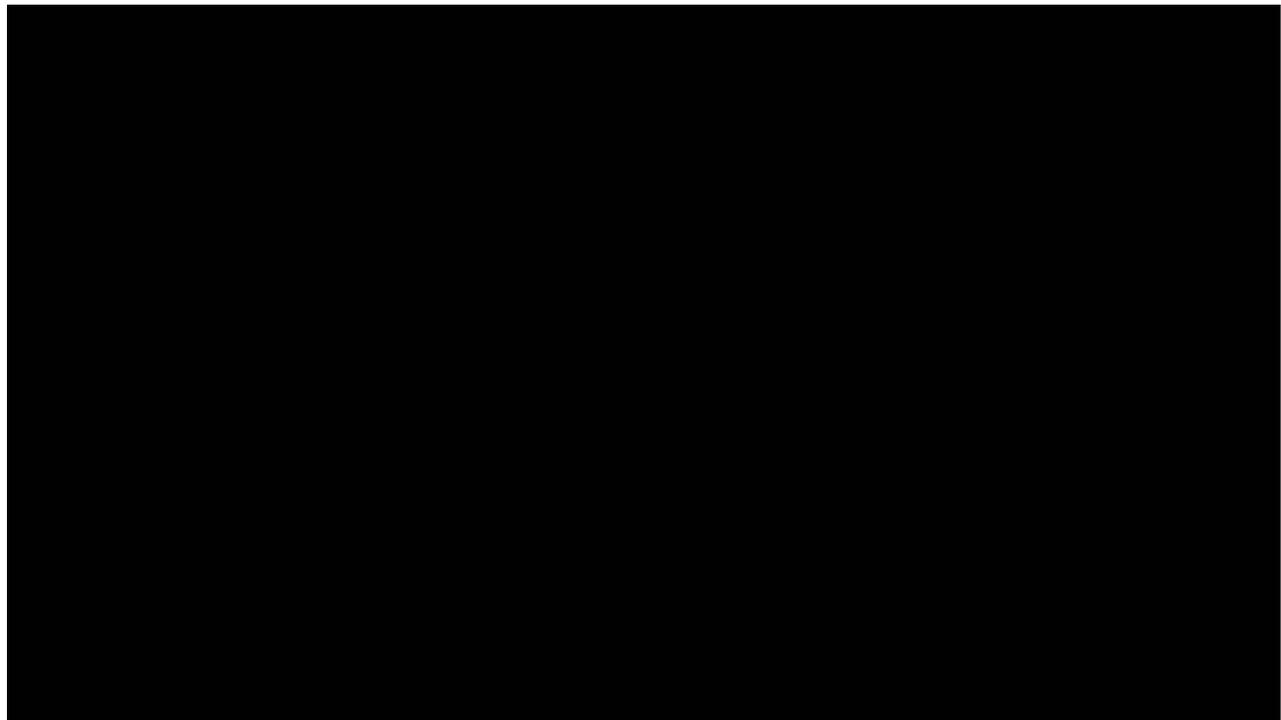
Josephus gives us a more complete account in his *Antiquities* (19.8.2).

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Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited spectacles in honor of Caesar, for whose well-being he'd been informed that a certain festival was being celebrated. At this festival a great number were gathered together of the principal persons of dignity of his province. On the second day of the spectacles he put on a garment made wholly of silver, of a truly wonderful texture, and came into the theater early in the morning. There the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays, shone out in a wonderful manner, and was so resplendent as to spread awe over those that looked intently upon him. Presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good) . . .

that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king neither rebuked them nor rejected their impious flattery. But he shortly afterward looked up and saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, just as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain arose in his belly, striking with a most violent intensity. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproveth the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to"

be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner." When he had said this, his pain became violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad everywhere that he would certainly die soon. The multitude sat in sackcloth, men, women and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground he could not keep himself from weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age and in the seventh year of his reign.



Questions for discussion and thought

1. When the church begins moving out from Jerusalem to the larger Roman world, why does Antioch become the focus of attention?
2. How does Luke establish a solid chronology in this portion of the *Acts of the Apostles*?
3. Why does Herod Agrippa I arrest the Apostle James, and then follow it up by arresting Peter?
4. How does Peter know to go to the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, after his jail break?
5. How does Herod Agrippa I die?

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