Preparing to Teach Acts 12 and 13

Sometimes, when God is at work, it is difficult to see. Chapter 11 ended with persecution based on the blood-lust created from the execution of Stephen and Chapter 12 begins with persecution that is increased because of blood-lust from the execution of James. I told you last week that I disagreed with Norman L. Geisler when he called it the persecution surrounding Peter [Geisler, Norman L., *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007),   
p. 129.]. I disagreed because of the specific wording of Acts 12:2 where Herod Agrippa I decides that the execution of James had pleased the Jews. In today’s politics, we’d say that he was playing to his base. Yet, regardless, we have to say that persecution accelerated the expansion of the gospel.

God uses all circumstances, especially difficult ones, to advance His redemptive plan. In tonight’s session, we’re a little bit off chronologically. Traditionally, the eastern church (Orthodox) thought that James was martyred on December 26 along with his brother John [Foakes-Jackson, F. J., *The Moffatt Commentary: Acts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 104.]. Of course, the western church had John escort Mary the mother of Jesus to Ephesus and die of old age outside of Ephesus. In fact, there is a picture of his supposed burial site on the slide.

We’re also slightly out of chronological order because I’m sharing a monologue of Herod the Great on Sunday, but he isn’t the Herod we’re looking at in Acts 12. In fact, this is Herod Julius Agrippa I [Conzelmann, Hans, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 93.], the grandson of Herod the Great, son of Aristobulus who was sentenced to death along with his brother Alexander after they attempted to undermine their stepbrother Antipater III [Sandmel, Samuel, “Herod” in Buttrick, G. A. and others (eds.), *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: E-J* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 590.]. I can’t resist but share something of the account from Flavius Josephus. The Jewish historian asserts that Herod the Great didn’t even allow Alexander and Aristobulus to appear in court (held at Berytus, modern Beirut) to defend themselves because he was afraid the crowd and court would pity them [Josephus, Flavius, *The Life and Works of Josephus: Wars of the Jews: Book I, Chapter 28, Paragraph 2* (William Whiston, trans.) \*Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston, Co., 1957), p. 653.]. However, that didn’t stop Herod from pontificating that condemning them was just like condemning himself [Josephus, I.28.3, p. 653.]. About a year later, Antipater was accused of poisoning Herod’s brother Pheroras and plotting against Herod. Antipater III is executed, but that didn’t make Herod Agrippa the successor. Archelaus, another stepbrother, was named successor [Sandmel, p. 590.].

Caesar Augustus didn’t trust Archelaus so he named him ethnarch of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria while making Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee and Philip the tetrarch of several smaller, scattered cities [Sandmel, p. 591.]. Archelaus treated both Jews and Samaritans so horribly that word went to Rome and he was removed and sent to what is now France, where he died in exile. Meanwhile, the territory was divided between Herod Philip and Herod Antipas until Philip’s death in AD 34. Philip’s wife, Herodias becomes involved with Herod Antipas and that proves the end of John the Baptizer.

But now, in AD 37, Herod Agrippa I, the Herod of today’s text, becomes a friend and supporter of Caesar Caius Caligula. Tiberius threw Agrippa in jail for that and it wasn’t until Caligula succeeded Tiberius that Agrippa was given Philip’s tetrarchy and the title of king [Bruce, F. F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974—original 1954), p. 246.]. When Caligula was murdered, Agrippa helped Claudius to the throne and Claudius made Agrippa King of the Jews from AD 41-44 [Sandmel, p. 592.].

It is during this period that Herod Agrippa I decides that he will shore up his support among the Jews by persecuting the Christians. Indeed, his success with persecuting the Christians may be behind the Claudian persecution of Christians in the later 40s since he and Claudius were on such good terms. He was already more popular with the Jews than his predecessors. The Mishna Sotah shows just how much Agrippa I curried their favor. After stating in Mishnah Sotah 7:2 that certain readings were specifically to be read aloud in Hebrew, including the king’s sabbatical year reading, it goes on to record a specific incident with Agrippa I in 7:8. Here’s part of it:

At the conclusion of the first day of the festival of *Sukkot*, on the eighth, after the conclusion of the Sabbatical Year, they make a wooden platform for the king in the Temple courtyard, and he sits on it, as it is stated: “At the end of every seven years, in the Festival of the Sabbatical Year” (Deuteronomy 31:10). The synagogue attendant takes a Torah scroll and gives it to the head of the synagogue that stands on the Temple Mount. And the head of the synagogue gives it to the deputy High Priest, and the deputy High Priest gives it to the High Priest, and the High priest gives it to the king. And the king stands, and receives the Torah scroll, and reads from it while sitting. King Agrippa arose, and received the Torah scroll, and read from it while standing, and the Sages praised him for this. And when Agrippa arrived at the verse in the portion read by the king that states: “You may not appoint a foreigner over you” (Deuteronomy 17:15), tears flowed from his eyes, because he was a descendant of the house of Herod and was not of Jewish origin. The entire nation said to him: Fear not, Agrippa. You are our brother, you are our brother. And the king reads from the beginning of Deuteronomy, from the verse that states: “And these are the words” (Deuteronomy 1:1), until the words: “Hear, O Israel” (Deuteronomy 6:4). [https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah\_Sotah.7.8]. Though Agrippa was part Jewish through his mother, he was probably reacting to the Herodian Nabatean/Edomite ancestry [Bruce, p. 247, n. 4.]

Hopefully, since Luke has a tendency to refer to Herod Julius Agrippa I as Herod and Herod Marcus Julius Agrippa II as Agrippa [Conzelmann, p. 93.], this will help us keep the characters straight for the rest of the book. ***1) Around that opportune moment [or season], Herod the King [Agrippa I] thrust [literally threw] his hands upon some from the church to accomplish evil [against them], 2) killing James the brother of John with a sword.*** **[PJT]**

Since the time sequence is seasonal and somewhat indefinite, it seems likely that this period is roughly between the prophecy of the famine by Agabus in 11:28 and the arrival of Paul and Barnabas in Jerusalem after they left with the offering in 11:30 [Bruce, p. 247, n. 5.; Munck, Johannes, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967), p. 113.]. Since the events in Acts 12 need to take place before Herod Agrippa’s death in AD 44 (and that is too early for the actual famine), Acts 12 probably takes place simultaneously with the gather together for the prophesied famine as opposed to after Paul’s and Barnabas’ arrival in Jerusalem [Marshall, I. Howard, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 207.] Notice that this is not a passive persecution. The verb I translated as thrust means literally to throw. It can mean “cast” as in casting a stone [Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume III: The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 163.]. We’re talking deliberate violence here.

The question becomes, “Why James?” Wouldn’t you have expected Peter to be the first target? We suspect that Jesus had this in mind in Mark 10:39b when He promises that James and John will drink the cup He will drink and be baptized with what He is baptized. James becomes the first recorded martyr among the apostles but his brother John, contrary to a manuscript by the very unreliable Papias of Hieropolis, seems to have outlived all the other apostles [Bruce, p. 247; Munck, p. 113.] Perhaps, this 19th century commentator was correct: “Herod put James to death, and seized on Peter with the intention of slaying him also, because they were the two most prominent leaders of the

Christian church in Jerusalem: the one was designated by the Lord ‘the Son of Thunder,” and the other “ the Rock.” [Gloag, Paton J., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), p. 416.]

What then of John? Was Jesus’ word to the brothers only half-true? Of course not. The cup and the baptism of which Jesus spoke wasn’t necessarily martyrdom, but death. James would have a violent death where John likely died of old age on a hill outside Ephesus. After all, we have to correlate this word from Jesus with the Master’s command to take care of Mary after Jesus died and Jesus’ reply to Peter when Jesus indicated martyrdom for Peter but said that it was Jesus’ own business how long John lived. Jesus indicated that he might even live until Jesus came again in John 21:22. Interestingly, we don’t even know what happened to Peter after the 12th chapter of Acts. Tradition has him beheaded, but we just don’t know. But we do know that there was a high cost to serving the Lord.

By the way, there is an interesting account from Clement of Alexandria. According to Clement, after accusing James, his accuser was so taken by James’ demeanor and seeming lack of fear of death that he confessed Christ and was converted. After he confessed, they were both beheaded together   
[Du Veill, Carolus Maria, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. Haddon, 1851), p. 270; Gloag, p. 414.] Munck, p. 113.].

***3) So, seeing it was well-received by the Jews, he added on to seize Peter, but it was the days of unleavened bread.*** **[PJT]** Luke uses a Hebrew-style phrase to describe Herod turning his targeting reticle onto Peter [Robertson, p. 164]. It’s only used one other place in the New Testament and that’s in Luke 20. You’ve heard of BOGO (Buy One, Get One] in the modern world; this is KOGO [Kill One, Get One]. The idea is piling onto what one has already done in search of “more.” It certainly makes sense that Herod would target the Christian leaders to gain the approval of the Jews. By New Testament times, the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread were spoken about interchangeably in popular usage [Smith, T. C., “Acts” in Allen, Clifton J. (ed.), *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 10: Acts-1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 76.].

William H. Willimon makes note of the irony of the timing here. “Ironically, Peter’s imprisonment comes during Passover, the great and festive day of deliverance from Egyptian slavery. The day finds Peter languishing in bondage, not celebrating liberation.” [Willimon, William H*., Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 111.] Do you notice another echo here? Maybe verse 4 will help you to “hear” it.

***4) So, when he had seized him, he placed him in prison, handed over to a guard of 16 soldiers [four groups of four] guarding him in prison, thinking that after the Passover, he would bring him out to the people.* [PJT]**

An execution during Passover wouldn’t do [Arrington, French L., *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 124.].Marshall, p. 208.]. After all, they had killed Jesus just before the Passover and it had started a whole movement with which the bulk of the Jews were unhappy. And, there was a tradition, see Jesus out on the portico with Pontius Pilate, of releasing a prisoner during the Passover celebration. They certainly wouldn’t want to release Peter. So, Herod decided to wait [

King Agrippa I was taking no chances. Maybe he had heard about Peter’s escape in Acts 5! Nonetheless, the 16 soldiers represented two soldiers inside, chained to Peter at all times [standard procedure observed by Seneca and cited by Du Veill, p. 271; Conzelmann, p. 93; and Gloag, p. 417, though Peter is bound to two guards while common practice was only one.], and two soldiers outside the cell. These would have been shifts of four soldiers in four shifts of six hours each [Robertson, p. 165.]. This makes any kind of human escape extremely improbable. Then, as if to underscore the situation, Luke continues in verse 5:

***5) Therefore, Peter was closely guarded in prison, BUT extended prayer was being made to God concerning him by the church.* [PJT]**

“But the church swings into action, using its power against the power of Herod. … The power of the church is the power of prayer.” [Willimon, p. 112.] Earlier, another commentator made a similar statement: “Τo oppose the power of Herod, the church betakes itself to earnest prayer,—a weapon more powerful than all the resources of the monarch of Judea.” [Gloag, p. 416.] I want to second that by pointed out that the adjective I translated as “extended” is sometimes translated as “earnest” or “fervent” prayer. The adjective comes from the verb, “to stretch” [Robertson, pp. 165-166.] and it can challenge our prayer lives in a lot of ways. First, to stretch can refer to the time we spend in prayer. Second, to stretch can mean to make a physical effort or to go the limit of one’s ability. Third, to stretch can mean to expand the limit of one’s expectation or understanding. Does anyone remember what Jesus said when they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and discovered that the remaining disciples had failed to cast out the boy’s demon? He said that “this kind requires much prayer.” Sometimes, we only need a simply prayer. At other times, God wants us to spend effort. Do we?

**6) On the night before Herod was bringing Peter out [for trial], Peter was constricted by two chains and sleeping [while] guards kept watch over the prison.**

**7) So, check it out, the Angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shined in the room. He hit Peter on the side and awakened him saying, “Get up in a hurry.” The chains fell off his hands.**

**8) Then, the angel said to him, “Tie [your robe] and put on your sandals. Then, he did it, and [the angel] said to him, “Wrap your garments around yourself and follow me.”**

Please be aware that I have gone out on a limb in my translation. The Greek does not have the definite article, the, in “angel of the Lord.” Therefore, most translations simply make this “an angel of the Lord” as opposed to the technical term in the Old Testament as “the Angel of the Lord.” [Arrington, p. 125; Foakes-Jackson, p. 105; Gloag, p. 417; and Marshall, p. 208.]. F. F. Bruce cites the individual as a unknown visitor or mysterious guide [Bruce, pp. 248-249.], following the idea of an indefinite angelic messenger, as well. So, even though I’m being a contrarian here, I should observe that “Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament was a technical term, equivalent to the divine name. It was often interchangeable with God’s name, Yahweh. It was a perfect example of God accommodating Himself to human capacity to see and understand the message and/or deliverance that God was giving an individual. Though Luke 2:9 also has Angel of the Lord” without the definite article (and the light which shone all around, as here), I have always taken the phrase “Angel of the Lord” to be the title as opposed to a generic heavenly messenger. Regardless as to whether one thinks as I do that this is God’s direct intervention as in Old Testament times or thinks it is just one among many angels as per the vast majority of commentators, the text wants us to be sure and know that God intervened, indeed in a response to the church’s “extended” prayer.

As noted in the above paragraph, the shining light coming from this manifestation was also present in God’s Christmas message to the shepherds in Luke 2:9. The New Testament teaches that our God dwells in an unapproachable light and light, as energy being expended and illumination being provided, is regularly associated with God’s message, if not God’s presence.

There is an interesting textual variant in the Bezae manuscript (to which I have referred in previous sessions) where one of the copyists seems to have added that Peter and the angel traversed down “seven steps.” [Conzelmann, p. 94.] That this only appears in this Greek manuscript from the 5th century doesn’t mean it is impossible that it happened, but the use of “seven” was probably the copyist feeling prompted to make sure that the reader knew he credited God with the escape (seven being the divine and the created order in proper relationship).

Miraculously, the chains fall off of Peter. We aren’t told that they fell soundlessly, but we almost have to assume that as a result of the guards not waiting. Indeed, it must have been so surreal that Peter himself thought it was a vision (v. 9). He couldn’t quite comprehend that it was really happening, even when he obeyed the heavenly individual representative of the Lord so that he dressed and followed this supernatural guide.

The two passed through two gates before reaching the outer and final gate of the prison. Though all the gates were, presumably, guarded, Peter was likely allowed to pass through the first two because the guards might have seen him as a servant [Bruce, p. 249.]. But while that doesn’t seem out of the ordinary, the fact that the outer door to the prison opens on its own (the Greek word is **αὐτομάτη** from which we get the English word, automatic) is clear that this is no ordinary experience.

And note, again, that as soon as they are outside the prison, the angel departs. It seems consistent that God withdraws the direct intervention at the point that we should be able to solve things or accomplish things in a normal fashion. Or, in this case, it may well be that the angelic light would have given away Peter’s presence if anyone came looking for him. But it is only as the angel departs that Peter realizes that he is actually free as a result of divine intervention [Marshall, p. 209.], though some may suggest that the story could also reflect an “inside job” by a mysterious benefactor who served in the prison [Bruce, p. 249.]. The latter does not explain the “light,” however.

And I also pointed out that as soon as Peter knew he was free and recognized God’s hand at work, he went to where he knew others were worshipping. One lesson that we really need to learn is that when God is working in our lives, we need to share it with each to encourage each other, as well as to have our experiences, impressions confirmed by mature and faithful brothers and sisters.

I think it’s both sad and encouraging that when Peter arrives at the doorstep of the house where the church is praying, we see reactions just like we see when God is at work in the modern world. Rhoda comes to the door, recognizes Peter’s voice, gets all excited, and immediately goes to stir everyone up.

In the meantime, she forgets the practical chore that needed to be done. She’s all excited and can’t wait to tell people, but she doesn’t answer the door. And we see this in revival meetings and at retreats all the time—people who are so excited that they want to tell everyone but not disciplined enough to serve where they can.

In addition, whenever we see God at work, we see people who want to discount what God has done. The first response was that she was crazy. The modern response is that someone saw or heard what they wanted to see, less mental illness than self-delusion. “They thought she had lost her wits and in unbelief, passed it off as Peter’s guardian angel. God does often answer prayer in spite of imperfect faith.” [Arrington, p. 125.] As this quotation puts it, first they blame the messenger with the idea that she or he “got it wrong,” and then, they substitute their alternate theories.

One alternate theory (before Peter got in the door) was the guardian angel theory. “This curious reference must be to some kind of ‘heavenly’ counterpart to a person, having the same physical appearance. The Jews believed that people had guardian angels (see Matthew 18:10 for an echo of this belief, and there is some evidence (admittedly much later than the New Testament…) that guardian angels were thought to bear the image of the persons whom they protected.” [Marshall, p. 210; also Conzelmann, p. 95.] Another, though less palatable to modern sensitivities is that it might mean “his spirit” as in his ghost [discounted in Gloag, p. 420.].

* **Rhoda recognizes his voice and gets excited (v. 14)**
* **Despite prayer, they thought she was crazy (v. 15)**
* **They sought alternate explanation (angel, messenger) (v. 15)**
* **Peter kept knocking (v. 16)**
* **Saw and were astonished (v. 16)**
* **Shared and confirmed (v. 17)**

I find it interesting that Peter keeps knocking until they finally open up and verify that it is, indeed, Peter. Now, they seem to be so excited that Luke adds an interesting detail. Peter has to motion them to be silent. There is a time to make noise and a time to use discretion. In this case, it seems most reasonable to think that Peter doesn’t want to have excess noise calling attention to his escape [Smith, p. 77.] This could also explain why he seems to have left so soon after telling his story. [Note: We don’t know where he went. Some think he went on to Antioch and then, later to Rome [Du Veill, p. 274.].]

And remember what I said about confirmation? They are supposed to pass along the word as to what happened to James. Of course, this is not James the brother of John who was executed early in the chapter, but either James the brother of Jesus who seems to have the highest authority in the church at Jerusalem [Foakes-Jackson, p. 106.] or James, the son of Alphaeus [Gloag, p. 421.].

The next portion shares probable death of the soldiers chained to Peter. It doesn’t specifically say that they are executed, but we know that it was standard procedure [remember the Philippian jailor’s fear and intent to commit suicide in Acts 16?]. Indeed, the phrase “led out” usually means being led under guard for the purposes of judgment or execution [Arrington, p. 127.].

The next portion deals with an International crisis regarding Tyre and Sidon, in modern Lebanon, and where Herod had cut off Galilean exports of agricultural commodities to Tyre and Sidon as both punitive (for their trouble-making) and practical (to send them to Caesarea instead). So, the coastal cities sent a delegation to seek an audience with Herod Agrippa I in Caesarea of Phoenicia/Lebanon. At which time, he puts on a royal robe with enough silver to catch the rays of the sun and cause him to look like a supernatural being emanating light. “[He] was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another, from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god; …” [Josephus, p. 582.] The Jewish historian also rather pointedly indicates that Agrippa I didn’t rebuke them or deny the blasphemous flattery.

If you compare his account with that of our text, Josephus said that the people thought he *looked* like a god. However, in our text, his speech is so elegant and sonorous that the people think of him as having the *voice* of a god. Even in verse 23, he is attacked by either “the” Angel of the Lord (as some translations make it such as Du Veill, p. 277, and as I am tempted to make it] or “an angel of the Lord” as most do. The important thing is not whether God directly chastened him or used an intermediary, but that the punishment was for assuming the glory of God for himself.

As a result, he is eaten by worms—either a literal tapeworm-like death or an apt metaphorical description of a deadly internal disease. Note that the phrase “eaten by worms” is a sign of disfavor as in texts like 2 Maccabees 9:5-9 [Arrington, p. 126.]. That intertestamental text is quite vivid. After Antiochus threatens to kill so many Jews that Jerusalem would become a cemetery, the Revised Standard Version reads: “5) But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him an incurable and unseen blow. As soon as he ceased speaking he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief and with sharp internal tortures—6) ‘and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. 7) Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to hasten the journey. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. … 9) And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench, the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.”

Regardless, Agrippa I dies and the gospel carries on v. 24 which is a segue to v. 25. In verse 25, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch along with John Mark (whose mother’s house was the one where the congregation had prayed for Peter earlier in the chapter.

The return to Antioch sets up the next scene: ***13:1) So, there were, accordingly, in Antioch within the church which was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simon called Niger, Luke the Cyrenian, Manaen who was fostered with Herod [Antipas] the tetrarch, and Saul.*** **[PJT]** So, before we get to the roll call of dignitaries in Antioch, let’s consider the significance of prophets and teachers. This isn’t the only place we see them listed; they are also mentioned close together in Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Eph. 4:11 [Munck, p. 118.]

Some people want to make them specific offices in the church, but we need to be cautious regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts which may overlap. Speaking on 1 Corinthians 14, but also citing this verse, Gordon Fee observes: “Although some people are called ‘prophets,’ probably because they were frequent speakers of ‘prophecies,’ in ch. 14 the implication is that it is a gift widely available—at least potentially—to all.” [Fee, Gordon E, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), p. 170.]

What does that tell us? It tells us that prophecy [more “forthtelling” or offering frank-speaking correctives and direction than “foretelling” in terms of predicting the future, though there is some of that] and teaching are important functions within the church. However, you can’t always delineate between them like with a job description because Paul tells us that he has done both.

We all know that Barnabas, originally from Cyprus, means “son of encouragement” or “son of comfort” but did you know that Maenan can also mean “son of consolation, encouragement” [Munck, p. 118]? You may also notice that I used the term “fostering” here with regard to him. It was often the custom for upper-class Romans to send their young men to live with other aristocratic families (this continued even through the Middle Ages in the western world). I bring this up so that you can see that some of the members of the early church were of very high social standing. Here, Manean was fostered in the home or court of Herod Antipas the Tetrarch [Munck, p. 118.].

Simon is called by the Latin name, Niger, which would mean black. Presumably, that would suggest that he is of dark skin. He may also be the father of Rufus and Alexander of Mark 15? [Bruce, p. 260.] Being listed in combination with Lucien (Luke?) of Cyrene (most likely North Africa) suggests that we have people of the African race represented in the early church.

***2) While worshiping [or “serving”] the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said [to them]: “Separate out Barnabas and Saul to Me for the purpose of the work to which I have called them. [PJT]***

What do you think about fasting? The early church was very sensitive to the Holy Spirit when fasting [Bruce, p. 261.], e.g. Acts 10:9 where they affirmed Peter [Arrington, p. 133.]. As a result, it seems like fasting was regular preparation for receiving a revelation from God [Conzelmann, p. 99.].

Notice also that only Barnabas and Saul/Paul are mentioned as being set apart. The church in Antioch didn’t know John Mark, but they had already observed the teaching, preaching, and exhorting ministry of Barnabas and Paul. Mark is mentioned afterwards with a title like “minister” in v. 5. This is after the appointment and blessing, so it is likely that he was like the paid janitor/synagogue school teacher known as the *chazzan* in Hebrew who is a paid employee.

As part of the procedure, we see the leaders of the church laying their hands upon Barnabas and Saul/Paul. Laying on of hands added no magical power, “But by this means the church of Antioch, through its leaders, expressed its fellowship with Barnabas and Saul and recognized them as its delegates or ‘apostles.’” [Bruce, p. 261]. Paul didn’t assign significance to laying on of hands (Galatians 1:1) [Arrington, p. 132.], so there’s really no conception of “office” indicated here.

So, why does the first missionary journey start with Cyprus?

1. Already believers from Cyprus who went to Antioch
2. Allow Barnabas to minister to his home country?
3. Convince remaining believers there not to Judaize?
4. Expand the ministry there to preach to the Gentiles? [Smith, pp. 80-81.]

After ministering in Salamis, we see the trio (Barnabas, now Paul, and the paid intern, John Mark] walk roughly 100 miles to the capitol city of Cyprus (a senatorial province of Rome), Paphos. There we run into the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. He seems to be the same as Caesar Claudius’ caretaker of the banks of the Tiber [Bruce, p. 264; Smith, p. 81.], an influential and affluential job. Of course, in this posting, he would have been posted by the Senate with the approval of Claudius.

Unfortunately, there is a sinister influence in Sergius Paulus’ court. He is someone who combines the religious ideas with those of the occult. Bar-Jesus means “son of salvation (Yahweh delivers)” and Elymas may mean “skillful” [“wise?”] [Arrington, p. 132], though it is somewhat akin to *magos* or magician [Bruce, p. 264.]. That he has the trappings of religion can be seen by his Aramaic name and the other name suggests the contamination with the occult that Paul curses in verses 10-11. A miracle where the sorcerer is surrounded by mist and totally blinded is conducive to the rather decisive conversion of Sergius Paulus. I like the following quotation which puts this incident into perspective.

“The author of Luke-Acts extends the picture to characterize the apostolic mission of the post-Easter church as well. Satan’s ‘fall’ is revealed in the successive humiliation of his allies, the demons and the magicians. … Paul’s effective curse on Elymas the Magus, ending the latter’s rivalry in the court of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:4-12), is a further example, along with Paul’s exorcism of the python-spirit from the slave girl in Philippi (ruining her masters’ fortune-telling business, 16:16-21), and the spontaneous burning of magical scrolls by converts (worth fifty thousand silver coins! 19:18-19). [Meeks, Wayne A., *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 116.]

By the way, did you notice that Paul’s name has officially been changed from Saul for the duration of Acts? The transition occurs right here. Why the name change now? After all, he had presumably had both the Jewish name Saul and the Roman name Paul since birth [see Munck, p. 119.]. I chose to quote the following explanation: “There are two plausible reasons. One is that he may have ingratiated himself with he Roman proconsul on Cyprus—Sergius *Paulus*. The more important reason is that once this missionary journey had begun, Saul had become Paul—the apostle to the gentiles. His special commission to reach the gentiles would explain why he became known exclusively as Paul.” [Campbell, Constantine R. and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 165.]

In the session, I showed you on the map how the trio would have traveled from Paphos to, more than likely, Attalia (I say that because Paul sails out of it at a later point in the book and because it was the primary point for Perga). From Perga, they travel to Pisidian Antioch (the middle of what is now Turkiye) where they follow the standard approach of reading and preaching in the synagogue first. Here, Paul preaches his longest recorded sermon from verses 17-22. If you want three points, they are, essentially: calling, fulfillment, and potential.

1. **God’s goodness to Israel (vv. 17-22)**
2. **Fulfillment of Messianic Promise in Jesus (vv. 23-37)**
3. **Forgiveness of sin through Christ (vv. 38-41)**

* **Positive Response (vv. 42-49)**
* **Counter-response in Persecution (vv. 50-52)  
  (but filled completely with joy through the Holy Spirit)**

[Arrington, pp. 138-141.]

I particularly like how Paul takes us through David in verse 22 before moving to the Son of David, Messiah in verse 23.

I pointed out that there is often a backlash after God’s work and that Paul’s experience is no exception. But the irony is found in that final assessment, “filled completely with joy through the Holy Spirit.”