Acts 070

The Priority of Prayer

Acts 12:12-19

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We are going to entitle our message this evening, "The Priority of Prayer"—Acts 12:12-19. It is a difficult chapter in the sense that chapter 12 of the Book of Acts records the fourth persecution of the church in Jerusalem.

We have had the death of James (Acts 12:1-2). This is the first time an apostle has been targeted by the unbelieving Nation of Israel, and martyred. That led to Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:3-5). Peter was marked for execution. Herod Agrippa was just waiting for the proper feast days to get out of the way; but he, Peter, was about to die.

III. Peter's Deliverance (12:6-17)
- A. Peter's escape (6-11)
- B. Peter's arrival at Mary's house (12-17)
  1. Peter arrives at Mary's house (12)
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     - a. Peter knocks
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The highlight of the chapter is Peter's miraculous escape from prison. The last time I was with you, Peter, through the influence of an angel, released him from his prison. He is out of prison (Acts 12:12-17), and what does he do? He travels to Mary's house. Acts 12:12-17 records his arrival at Mary's house after he is released from prison. He arrives at Mary's house (Acts 12:12), and there is this exchange between Peter and Rhoda at the doorstep of Mary's house, (Acts 12:13-15). Then Peter meets the disciples (Acts 12:16-17), having been released from prison.

Notice, first of all, Peter's arrival at Mary's house. We see that in Acts 12:12. It says,

> *"And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."*

Notice the beginning of Acts 12:12. It says, *"And when he realized this."* What does that mean? If you drop back to Acts 12:11, towards the beginning of the verse it says, *"When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel..."* Do you remember earlier in the chapter, Peter being released from prison by an

angel in the middle of the night? As far as we can tell, he does not really know if this is really happening. Is this a dream or is this really a prison escape?

The reason he thought it was a dream is because God had just given him a dream in the prior chapters (Acts 10-11). It was the vision of the sheet with the animals in it. It was not a real sheet that fell down, that is just what Peter saw in the vision. As he was being released from prison by an angel, he was trying to figure out, is this the real deal? Is it live or Memorex? As the commercial used to say. He has come to the realization back in Acts 12:11 that this is a real prison escape. "Peter, you really got out of prison; an angel helped you."

As you look at Acts 12:12, it says,

> *"And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark."*

This gets a little confusing, because in the Bible there are 6 Marys. (I guess it was a pretty common name.) There was, first of all, Mary, the mother of Jesus; also the mother of the half brothers, James and Jude, the half brothers of Christ. That is Mary number one. Then number two is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Next there is Mary Magdalene; then there is Mary, the wife of Cleopas; and Mary, the mother of James and John. That particular James of that Mary is the one that was martyred in Acts 12:2.

There is another Mary (as if all of this was not enough)—there is Mary, the mother of Mark. It is that last Mary that we are dealing with here. *"He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark"* (Acts 12:12).

Here we are introduced to this guy named John Mark, the son of this particular Mary. Who is John Mark? John Mark is going to be a pretty influential person in the Bible, because he is going to author a book of the Bible called The Gospel of Mark.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this of John Mark:

> "John Mark played a minor role in the book of Acts, but a major role in the history of the church in that he wrote the Gospel of Mark. He had two names John, which in Hebrew is 'Yochanan' and Mark or Marcus, his Latin name. He probably also had a Greek name, but it is not given. According to Colossians 4:10, John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. He was best known among the Romans, and it was for them that he wrote his Gospel. This is also the reason that he is better known by his Latin name, Mark, rather than his Jewish name of 'Yochanan' (or John)."[1]

Mark is going to be a big deal in the sense that he is going to write a Gospel cataloging the life of Christ; and he is going to write it to the Romans. That is why that particular Gospel goes by his Latin (or Roman) name. Most know him as Mark, but his full name is

[1] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 273-74.

John Mark. John is his Jewish name; Mark is his Latin name. He is being prepped for us because he is the one that is going to go on the first missionary journey.

Around Acts 13:13, he is going to bail out of the first missionary journey into southern Galatia, and he goes home. Why does he go home? Why did he bail out? We are really not told. Maybe it was youth; maybe it was inexperience; but he is going to want to go on the second missionary journey after the Jerusalem Council. It is Barnabas who is pushing for this because, as you can see here from this quote from Fruchtenbaum, John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas.

Barnabas is going to insist that Mark go on missionary journey number two. Paul the Apostle says, "No way. That guy bailed out on missionary journey number one. Why in the world would we put him on missionary journey number two?" Barnabas is pushing this because John Mark is a family member.

At the end of Acts 15, there is going to record a vigorous split. The Greek is extremely strong—a sharp dissension between Paul and Barnabas over this issue. In fact, the dissension is going to be so sharp and the dissension is going to be so strong, that you are going to have two missionary teams coming out of it instead of one. Barnabas is going to go his direction with Mark, and Paul is going to go his direction.

Then Luke is going to focus on what happens to Paul, and Barnabas and Mark fall out of the narrative at that particular juncture. It just shows you that men of God do not always agree on everything. There are realities of splits between men of God. In this case, I think the split was a good thing because instead of one missionary team, now we had two. That is all coming in Acts 13 and Acts 15. We are introduced to the culprit of the split right there in Acts 12:12. That is a little bit about Mark's background.

Fruchtenbaum continues:

> "John Mark appears a total of eight times in the New Testament: [Acts 12 twice; Acts 15 twice; and you can see all the Scriptures—Colossians, 2 Timothy, Philemon, 1 Peter]. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter referred to Mark as his 'son,' which means Peter was the one who led Mark to the Lord. Subsequently, Mark became his disciple."[2]

You might wonder how Mark, who was not one of the original apostles, was able to get a book into the canon of the New Testament called Mark's Gospel. Generally the books of the Bible are written by the apostles. Because of this 1 Peter 5:13 reference, Peter, who was one of the original 12, could authenticate to the inerrancy and veracity of Mark's Gospel. In fact, probably Mark got a lot of information about the life of Christ through his relationship to Peter. Every single Book of the New Testament was either written by an apostle or someone who knew an apostle.

That is the significance of Mark in subsequent biblical history. Here you are getting an introduction to John Mark for the very first time. Acts 12:12 says,

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[2] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 273-74.

> *"And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."*

You notice for the early church that prayer is not a last resort—prayer is a first resort. If you go back to Acts 12:5, it says,

> *"So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."*

That is why I titled this "The Priority of Prayer." You will notice for the early church, when they got into trouble (and they got into trouble here), they just had one of their apostles martyred, and the next one arrested and about to be martyred. You notice they did not picket; they did not get on social media and complain about the government; they did not do all the things we do.

Their first order of business was immediately to pray. That is where the power of the Christian is: it is in prayer. Not that picketing and all these other things do not have a place, but I think sometimes they have a tendency to eclipse prayer and not supplement prayer.

You see the exact same thing in the life of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he told his soothsayers (back in Babylon, sixth century BC), his magicians, and his wise men, "Do not just interpret the dream, but tell me what the dream was." How would you like to have Nebuchadnezzar as a boss? Talk about an impossible standard. "Oh, and by the way, if you do not give me the dream and its interpretation, then all of your heads are going to be cut off." You could see what a tough job that is.

What do Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do as their first order of business? The very first thing they did was not to complain, not to petition, but the first thing they did was they started to pray.

Daniel 2:18 says,

> *"So that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."*

Daniel was now marked for destruction, as were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Because they were considered wise men in training, all of their lives are on the line here if they do not cough up—not just the interpretation of the dream, but what the dream was. They are put in this impossible, pressure-filled situation. The first order of business is prayer.

That is what the early church was doing here with Peter. It is convicting because I know the way I live my life many times is I pray as a last resort. Nothing else seems to be working, I had better pray. When you can see from these Bible characters, the first thing they did was pray.

Peter has arrived at Mary's house, and now there is this exchange between Peter and Rhoda (Acts 12:13-15). Peter knocks on the gate. (It is not really the door, but it is the gate.) It says there in Acts 12:13:

> *"When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer."*

What does this mean, Peter "knocked at the gate"? How do you knock at a gate? It is not the door to the house that he knocked on, but it was the door that led through the gate into a passage which led to the house. He is not outside the door knocking; he is outside the gate knocking. If the gate opens, there is a pathway leading to another door leading to the house, so he must have been knocking pretty loudly, I would think, to be heard.

Then you run into this servant-girl named Rhoda. To my knowledge, is the only place she is mentioned in the whole Bible. It says,

> *"...a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer."*

That is a pretty good position to be in as a servant. Jesus said that the servant is in the greatest position of all. She hears what is going on, and she goes out to answer.

Then you go to Acts 12:14, where you have Rhoda's report to the apostles.

> *"When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate."*

She is so excited that she sees Peter, because everything they had been told up to this point is that Peter is going to be martyred—he is in prison, and he is going to be martyred. Now Peter is outside the gate knocking, and she is so excited about the whole thing that she does not open the door; she goes and tells the rest of the apostles.

Watch the apostles' response here—It is a response of unbelief. Acts 12:15:

> *"They said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, 'It is his angel.'"*

You will notice that even though she is rejected by the apostles initially, she keeps right on insisting: "Peter is out there at the gate; he wants to get in here." That helps us understand that sometimes when God calls us to do something, men may reject you; church leadership may reject you, very sadly' elders may reject you, very sadly; your pastor might reject you; or those whom you hold in high esteem spiritually might say, "That is just crazy."

When that kind of thing happens, and if you believe God has called you to do it, you should persist in it in spite of men's rejections. What you will discover is that God has a way of changing people's hearts, which is what is happening here with Rhoda. Peter is out there, and they are saying you are out of your mind.

She does not curl up in the fetal position and die; she keeps right on insisting, because she knows the truth. It is never fun to be rejected by your peers; it is never fun to be rejected by leadership; but if God has put something on your heart and you believe it is of the Lord, just keep right on going. God has a way of changing people's hearts.

Why did they doubt this way? "They said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept on insisting it was so." There were probably seeds of doubt already planted in their minds because James, in Acts 12:2, had already been martyred. They were probably pretty down on that. They probably thought, "James has been martyred; Peter is going to be martyred too." This might explain their reaction to Rhoda.

We are told in the Bible that when we pray, we are not to doubt. Speaking of prayer, James 1:6-8 says,

> *"But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

We are told to ask with confidence. It is true that God is not obligated to answer prayer requests that are outside of His will, but a lot of times we do not know exactly what the will of God is in a circumstance. We should not look to defeats in our lives or setbacks that happened earlier and let our minds be controlled by doubt. We should ask in faith.

The apostles are not doing that. They have been asking the Lord for Peter's release. They are getting the answer to the prayer right here in a very fast time. They are obviously in a state of unbelief because they do not believe this prayer request could be answered—"This one is too big, even for God" kind of attitude. We can get like that; we can look at how big an obstacle is and say, "I guess God cannot even handle this one." As if God has any problem with anything.

As the Scripture says,

> *"For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).*

God is the one who spoke and the heavens and the earth leapt into existence. If that is true, then getting someone out of prison is no big deal at all. They make this statement concerning Peter, here at the end of Acts 12:15:

> *"They kept saying to Rhoda, 'It is his angel.'"*

What a weird statement. Number one: you are out of your mind. Number two: you are seeing his angel. What does this "his angel" stuff mean? It is a statement rooted in truth. There is a reality of guardian angels in the Bible. When you get into the Jewish literature on this, this was a well-attested belief.

You know some of the Scriptures on this already. Matthew 18:10:

> *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones for I say to you that their angels"—their angels, their possessive angels—"in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."*

Then we have Hebrews 1:14, which makes this statement of angels:

> *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"*

Salvation there is the future tense of salvation—our glorification, which we are candidates for. We are going to inherit salvation.

To make sure that we arrive at our intended destination, we have guardian angels. How many angels do you have? Do you have one? Do you have two? Do you have three? I do not know. I do know this much: that when God created the angels, in Revelation 5:11 it says that there were *"myriads of myriads"* of angels. The way that reads in the Greek is "10,000 times 10,000." That is why they are called stars. Just as the stars cannot be counted, you cannot put a mathematical number on the angels. There are a lot of them.

I know that when we had the Luciferian rebellion, one-third fell with Lucifer, who became Satan. You will get that number from Revelation 12:3-8. That means that two-thirds of them are on our side. Does that make you feel better? The ones that are fallen are pretty bad, let us be truthful. That is why we are told to *"put on the full armor of God"* (Ephesians 6:11); and that we wrestle *"not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness"* (Ephesians 6:12).

That is all true, but two-thirds of them are on our side. That is great. I will take that number any day of the week. Not only that, I have a God that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent on my side—all-knowing, everywhere at the same time, all-powerful—plus a supermajority of the angels are on my side. I am going to arrive at my intended destination and glory one day; and God is going to help me every step of the way.

There is truth to this statement "it is his angel" because they obviously had a belief in guardian angels; but they are using it to mock her. They are taking a true statement and they are making fun of her. "It is not really Peter; it must be some guardian angel you are thinking about." They are mocking her because they really did not think God could answer the prayer, even though they were praying.

Sometimes unbelief comes at you that way. People just make fun of an idea, make fun of you, when in reality it is a heart issue of "I just do not believe; it is crazy." This is what Rhoda, the servant-girl is facing, not from low-level people—these are the apostles doing this to her. You would think she would quit or give up or, as I said before, go into the fetal position; but she does not do that. She keeps insisting that, "Yes, it is really Peter."

Who ends up being right here? Rhoda ends up being right. It is Peter, and he meets with the apostles (Acts 12:16-17) in Mary's house. The disciples finally come to their senses and realize what is going on. Acts 12:16:

> *"But Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door, they saw him and they were amazed."*

Notice that Rhoda keeps persevering in spite of man's rejections. Peter does the same thing. He does not knock at the gate, not get an answer, and then just wander away and give up. He keeps knocking as well. There is something to be said for just good old-fashioned perseverance. I think God honors perseverance. If you hit a roadblock, do not quit; do not quit when people reject it; or do not quit when you do not immediately get an answer. Keep going.

It reminds me of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:7-11 He says,

> *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf of bread, will you give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"*

When you go back to Matthew 7:7, it says to ask, but do not just ask, seek; and do not just seek, knock. That is perseverance. The last time I tried studying that in Greek, what it is actually saying is, "Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking."

It reminds me of the parable Jesus told about the unrighteous judge. It is in Luke 18, and it basically deals with this judge who is an unrighteous guy. He does not care about anybody but himself. This widow kept petitioning her case before him, over and over again. The point of the parable, Jesus says, is that finally this judge gave in to this lady because he wanted her to go away.

If a judge with that kind of character answers petitions, how much more will your Father who is in heaven respond to petitions? Who does not have a defective character like this judge that just wants to get rid of somebody? A lot of people say, "The judge is God. No, the judge is not God. The argument is from the lesser to the greater—the judge was not godly at all, but he responded to a perpetual petition. If someone with that limited of a character can do it, why would we expect God to do any less?

Jesus prefaces it by saying that men ought to pray and not faint (Luke 18:1). Do not faint, but pray and persevere in prayer. This is the kind of thing that you see happening here. You see two great examples of perseverance. Peter continued knocking and Rhoda kept insisting.

Acts 12:16 says,

> *"But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed."*

Why be amazed? You are dealing with God. I remember coming to Christ; I can recall vividly the very first prayer that God answered of mine. I prayed for something, and it happened. "I am shocked. I cannot believe this happened." Why? Why be shocked? If we are believing in faith, when the prayer request is answered (sometimes even bigger than what you prayed for), there is nothing to be shocked about at all, because we are dealing with God, who knows how to give good gifts to His children.

If you know how to bless your children, your grandchildren, even though you have a sin nature, if they ask for something you are not going to give them a stone or a rock. Is not God going to be like that and more, because He is not corrupted by a sin nature?

It seems to me, in the Bible Church movement, this is one of our weaknesses: we are really good at exegesis, and calculations, and budgets, and formalities. I am not putting any of that down; all that stuff needs to be done; but sometimes I am wondering if that sometimes becomes a substitute for just good old-fashioned faith. Praying to God for something and expecting His hand to move because we are dealing with God.

Upon this realization that it really is Peter, it is not his angel, Peter reunites with the apostles. He gives an explanation, and then he gives them a charge. Notice the first part of Acts 12:17:

> *"But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.'"*

They were talking. Why? Because they were stunned and startled. That is what stunned and startled people do: they start talking. "Oh my goodness, I cannot believe it." He takes his hand out, which is a polite way of saying, "Y'all just shut up for a minute."

The word described there is "diegesato," which means "to give the full story." Peter gives the full account on exactly how he got released from prison with angelic help. It is hard to do that when everybody is talking. He has to quiet them down, and then he gives this full account, and then he gives this charge to this group that is huddled in Mary's house.

This was probably the house church that Peter presided over, because the church in Jerusalem at this point obviously did not have sanctuaries and church buildings. They met in homes, and because of persecution they were scattered throughout Jerusalem. Each of the disciples probably headed up a house church. I am thinking this was the house church that Peter headed up. That is why he went back there. That is why they were praying for him.

He says in Acts 12:17:

> *"'Report these things to James and the brethren.'"*

Who is James? That is a little tricky, because according to Acts 1:13-14, there are four Jameses. Now there are three, because one of them just got martyred—James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, one of the sons of Thunder. Which James is he talking about here? This would be James, the half brother of Jesus; because the virgin,

Mary, the Holy Spirit, used her womb to bring Jesus into the world, the virgin-born Son of God. After He was born, contrary to what Roman Catholicism will tell you, Mary and Joseph, who were married then, had a normal sexual relationship.

From that sexual relationship, following the virgin birth, came the half brothers of Jesus. These were brothers that shared the same mother; but they did not share the same father, because Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. Joseph was the biological father of these other brothers. We refer to them as the half brothers of Christ. Two of them wrote books of the Bible. One of the half brothers of Christ wrote the Epistle of James. The other half brother of Christ wrote another book of the Bible that is one chapter, called the Book of Jude.

It was James, the half brother of Christ, that became the pastor of the church at Jerusalem. He is going to become pretty prominent with the Jerusalem Council meeting in Acts 15. He is the one that is going to write that five-chapter book called the Epistle of James. He is a leader in the church, and that is why Peter tells this group in this house church, consisting of some disciples, "Communicate my full disclosure of what just happened to James," because he is a leader in the early church.

I love this in Acts 12:17, how Peter glorifies the Lord.

Peter does not take any credit. There is no credit for Peter to take. He was asleep when the angel woke him up and said, "It is time to go." It was miracle after miracle that got him out of that place to Mary's house. You do not see Peter talking about his five-step approach to his great escape from Alcatraz. "Here is how I did it." He does not glorify himself at all—He gives glory right back to the Lord where it belongs, which is how we should be when the Lord delivers us.

I cannot tell you how many things have happened in my life where the only way I got out of it was the Lord. There is no other human explanation, but there is such a human tendency to want to take credit for it. "I did this and I read that and I was in the right place," and we just need to stay away from that nonsense and give glory where it belongs: the Lord.

Isaiah 42:8 says,

> *"'I am the Lord, that is My name;*
> *I will not give my glory to another,*
> *Nor my praise to graven images.'"*

By the way, this is why God picks unqualified people to do His work. God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. We will see that in the Book of Exodus on Sunday mornings, because there was not a more unqualified guy than Moses; yet, that is the kind of guy God wants to use. The problem with using the qualified person is that the qualified person has a tendency to step into the limelight and somehow communicate that what happened happened because of them, and their talents and credentials.

That is a problem God has with people. One way around it is that He picks people who are totally unqualified, where something happens and you say, "It could not have been that guy that pulled it off. He is totally unqualified." Therefore, God gets the glory.

As you look in the Bible, whether it is Gideon, Moses, or even the disciples—they were not much when the Lord found them—He does not pick the most qualified people. In some cases He does, there is a Paul; but in other cases He just picks run-of-the-mill people, because that is a way for Him to receive the glory in the end, rather than the glory going to the human instrument. That makes me feel better, because that means I can apply for the job. If God is looking for unqualified people, I qualify for that one, and so do you. Praise the Lord.

Look at Acts 12:17, a really important part of the verse. It says,

> *"Then he left and went to another place."*

What does that mean *"he left and went to another place"*? Arnold Fruchtenbaum says,

> "After having spoken to the disciples, Peter departed and went to another place (v. 17b). He fled out of Jerusalem. Luke chose not to disclose where Peter went, but we do know about Peter's travels from other passages. According to I Corinthians 9:5, he had an itinerant ministry—"[3]

This ministry was along with his wife, by the way. Peter was married, because Paul says, "Do I not have a right to take on a believing wife, as Cephas and the rest?" (That is the Aramaic name for Peter.) We know from 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Peter was married.

Roman Catholicism wants you to believe that Peter bought into the celibacy of the priesthood because he was the first pope. It is not what the Bible says; the Bible says he had a wife. As I mentioned earlier, Mary had other children after the virgin birth of Jesus—the half brothers of Christ. Roman Catholicism wants you to believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary—she stayed a virgin her whole life. The Bible does not say that; the Bible says there are these half brothers of Christ that came through Mary and Joseph.

> "According to I Corinthians 9:5, he had an itinerant ministry; according to I Corinthians 1:12, he spent some time in Corinth; according to Galatians 2:11, he was in Antioch of Pisidia; according to I Peter 1:1, he was in Asia minor; and according to I Peter 5:13, he was in Babylon."[4]

You say, "What does Babylon mean?" Babylon means Babylon. One of the things people do in the Book of Revelation, when they see the word "Babylon," is they say Babylon does not mean Babylon, because in 1 Peter 5:13 we all know Peter went to Rome, but he used Babylon as a code for Rome. That whole theory collapses if Peter actually went to Babylon.

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[3] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 276.

[4] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 276.

There is no reason why he could not have gone to Babylon. That is where the early believing Christians were located. It would have been a logical place for Peter to travel. There is a lot of circular reasoning that goes on. People say, "We all know that Babylon is a code word for Rome in 1 Peter 5:13." How do we know that? "The Book of Revelation uses Babylon as a code word for Rome." Then you take them all to Revelation 17-18, and they say, "We all know that Babylon is a code word for Rome." "How do you know that?" "That is the way it is used in 1 Peter 5:13."

It is hilarious to watch this happen—complete and total circular reasoning. The truth of the matter is, Babylon means Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13; and Babylon means Babylon in Revelation 17-18. If you start talking like this, you are accused of being un-scholarly—you are not being academic enough; you are being literal. I am going to be literal here, because if the Bible is not literal here, maybe it is not literal in other places. Whenever you get an opportunity to take the Bible at face value, take it at face value.

At this point Peter drops out of the Book of Acts. Peter is the apostle to the circumcised; Paul is the apostle to the uncircumcised (Galatians 2:7-8). At this point there is a big transition going on as Peter has been the main guy, but he is phasing out of the narrative. He still has a life in Christ; he still has a big ministry in front of him; he even has a martyr's death in front of him, through which he will glorify the Lord; but Luke stops talking about Peter primarily, and he puts the spotlight on Paul, because the Book of Acts is about the transition from Peter to Paul.

In the first part of the book the main center of everything is Jerusalem; but in the second part of the book the center of everything is Antioch, the sending church up north that we read about in Acts 11 that financially bailed out the church at Jerusalem because of Agabus's prophecy. That is where Paul is going to launch his three missionary journeys from.

From Peter to Paul				
REFERENCE	**CENTER**	**PERSON**	**PLACE**	**OUTREACH**
Acts 1–12	Jerusalem	Peter	Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria	Jewish
Acts 13–28	Antioch	Paul	Uttermost parts	Gentiles

In the first part of the book Peter is the central person; in the second part of the book Paul is the central person. In the first part of the book the ministry consists of the church's outreach in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria; but in the second part of the book the outreach is to the uttermost parts of the earth. In the first part of the book the outreach is Jewish; in the second part of the book, the outreach is primarily Gentile.

From Peter to Paul

PETER	PAUL
Heals a man lame from birth (3:1-11)	Heals a man lame from birth (14:8-18)
Heals by shadow (5:15-16)	Heals by handkerchief (19:11-12)
Success is a cause of jealousy (5:17)	Success is a cause of jealousy (13:45)
Confronts a sorcerer (8:9-24)	Confronts a sorcerer (13:6-11)
Raises Dorcas (9:36-41)	Raises Eutychus (20:9-12)
Jailed and miraculously freed (12:3-19)	Jailed and miraculously freed (16:25-34)

We have only had one Gentile convert up until Acts 10, but things are going to change once Paul leaves the Land of Israel. On the missionary journeys you will see the church becoming primarily Gentile. What is happening in the second part of the Book of Acts is that Paul is reiterating what Peter did. Peter healed a man lame from birth; Paul does the same thing (Acts 14). Peter healed by a shadow (Acts 5); Paul heals by a handkerchief (Acts 19). Peter is so successful that the Jews become jealous (Acts 5); Paul is so successful in ministry that the Jews become jealous (Acts 13). Peter confronts a sorcerer (Acts 8); Paul confronts the sorcerer (Acts 13). Peter raises Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9); Paul raises Eutychus from the dead (Acts 29).

There is this really strange thing that goes on right here in Troas. Paul is preaching to the church in Troas, and he gets long-winded. He preaches all night long. There is this guy in the window sill on the third floor named Eutychus; and he falls asleep during the sermon. He falls out of the window and hits the ground and dies. Paul lays hands on him and brings him back to life.

I have heard some of the weirdest sermons on that. See what happens when you fall asleep in church? Why is that even there? It is not there to blast people for falling asleep in church. (Although you should not should not do that.) It is there to show that Paul did exactly what Peter did. Therefore, Paul's ministry is just as legitimate as Peter's. Do you see that deliberate literary parallel that goes on there?

Peter was jailed and miraculously freed (Acts 12); the same thing happens to Paul (Acts 16). This material is being strategically woven together for the benefit of the recipient of the book, theophilus, who was a Roman Gentile. He was wondering if Christianity was for him, because the whole thing looked so Jewish.

When he reads this and he sees these parallels, and he understands that Paul, in his ministry to the Gentiles, was just as legitimate as Peter's ministry to the Jews—because Paul did the exact same things that Peter did—Theophilus is going to say, "You know what? The gospel reaching me was as much of God as was any outreach to the Jews. Therefore, I am not going to question anymore whether I, Theophilus, a Roman Gentile, was ever contemplated in the plan and program of God." That is what all of this means when it says *"Peter went to another place."*

Now Herod Agrippa is going to die (Acts 12:20-23). Herod Agrippa, who was going to martyr Peter before Peter escaped, is going to die, which is going to give Peter confidence to come back to Jerusalem momentarily to participate in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). After that, we just do not hear anything about Peter—the whole spotlight is on Paul.

A lot of people call the Book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles. It is really not a book about the acts of the apostles, it is primarily a book about two apostles, Peter and Paul. It is not that the other ones weren't important, it is just that they do not fit Luke's literary purpose in writing as he is addressing Theophilus.

IV. Results of Peter's Escape (12:18-25)
- A. On Herod (18-23)
  1. Soldiers' reaction (18)
  2. Herod's reaction (19)
     a. Examination of the soldiers
     b. Execution of the soldiers
     c. Departure to Caesarea
  3. Herod's death (20-23)
- B. On the Church (24-25)

Then you come to Acts 12:18 and you see the results of Peter's escape first of all on Herod. In Acts 12:18, look at the soldier's reaction. It says,

> *"Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter."*

The soldiers are in a state of great disturbance, because Peter got out of jail on their watch. You will notice that it says, *"There was no small disturbance."* That is a figure of speech. The Bible speaks plainly, but it also speaks figuratively at places. This is a well-known figure of speech called a "litotes."

> "Litotes. A litotes is an understatement or a negative statement to express an affirmation." This is the opposite of hyperbole. When we say, 'He is not a bad preacher,' we mean he is a very good preacher. The understatement is made for emphasis. When Paul wrote, 'I am a Jew ... a citizen of no insignificant city' (Acts 21:39), he meant that Tarsus was in fact a very significant city. A litotes is at times a belittling statement, as in Numbers 13:33, 'We seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.' Luke used a number of litotes. He spoke of 'no small disturbance amongst the soldiers' (Acts 12:18), 'no little business' (19:24), 'no small storm' (27:20). When Luke wrote that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch 'a long time' (14:28), the Greek has a litotes. It is literally, 'they stayed there not a little time.' Paul belittled himself with a litotes in 1 Corinthians 15:9, 'For I am the least of the apostles.' This statement of

> genuine humility was written to highlight God's grace in his life as an undeserving sinner (see v.10)."[5]

It is this idea that you are expressing something big by making a negative statement. When it says, "there was no small disturbance amongst the soldiers," that is a way of saying there was actually a big disturbance—a common figure of speech in the Book of Acts.

We will end with Acts 12:19, that is the soldier's reaction to the escape. Herod's reaction to this, to the escape—what does Herod Agrippa do? Acts 12:19:

> *"When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards..."*

Now the word for "examine" is "anakrinas" meaning "examine thoroughly." "I want to know exactly how Peter got out of here." Then these soldiers., Under whose watch Peter escaped, are led off to execution. This is a big deal if someone escapes on your watch.

Acts 12:19:

> *"When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution."*

Why is that a big deal? That is a big deal because we are coming up on Resurrection Sunday—the empty tomb. It would be a very easy thing for the early critics of Christianity to go into the tomb of Jesus, roll out Jesus and his corpse and say, "He never rose from the dead. He is right here." The Romans, the Jews, and the skeptics could have shut down Christianity just like that; but they never did that. Why did they never do it? Because the tomb was empty.

The burden of proof shifts to the unbelievers to give an explanation for the objective evidence of the empty tomb. This is the best they can come up with. It takes more faith to believe these than it does the straightforward biblical account. Some say Jesus never died and He snuck out in the middle of the night.

They say the resurrected Christ was a hallucination—when people saw the resurrected Christ, they were seeing what they wanted and not what was actually there. Do you mean all 500 people had the same hallucination? When you study hallucinations, they are very personalized. A whole group of 500 people does not have the same hallucination.

They say the tomb was empty because they all went to the wrong tomb Sunday morning. I could imagine that 1 or 2 of them may not have remembered exactly where the tomb was. They only buried him just a few days earlier, but every one of them went to the wrong tomb.

Naturalist Theories for the Resurrection

1. Swoon Theory

[5] Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p.156-57.

2. Theft Theory
3. Hallucination Theory
4. Wrong Tomb Theory

One of the prominent theories was that the body was stolen—Rome stole the body; Jews stole the body; the disciples stole the body. I am here to tell you folks that that body could not have been stolen, because if a body was stolen on your own watch as a Roman soldier, you were destined for execution. You see that here in Roman law and Roman customs, when Herod cannot find evidence for how Peter got out of jail, all of those soldiers (there were six of them), are now destined for execution.

When people cough up these things that someone stole the body, that is impossible because the soldiers kept watch as aggressively as could ever happen. They would be executed if the body was stolen on their watch.

You see the same thing happening in Acts 16. You will remember, Paul and Silas had the opportunity to get out of jail in the middle of the night; and everyone else fled when there was an earthquake in Philippi. The chains were broken; but Paul and Silas stayed there to lead the Philippian jailer to Christ. Do you remember what the Philippian jailer said?

> *"When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing the prisoners had escaped"* (Acts 16:27).

If a prisoner gets out on your watch, you are destined for execution. The Philippian jailer said, *"I might as well just kill myself now." That is when Paul and Silas say, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"* (Acts 16:28). Then the Philippian jailer asks life's most important question: *"'What must I do to be saved?'"* (Acts 16:30).

The fact that there was going to be an execution here, of these prisoners, is something to think about as we approach Resurrection Sunday in order to dismiss the theft of the body theory. Confucius's tomb is occupied; Buddha's is occupied; Mohammed's is occupied; but Jesus's tomb is empty. You can take that right to the bank.

Then finally, in Acts 12:19 what does Herod do when all of this is over? It says,

> *"Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there."*

Now why is that a big deal? Because that is an historically accurate statement. Herod Agrippa leaves Jerusalem and goes to Caesarea. I have been there myself—a beautiful, coastal beach area.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this:

> "It was then that Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea, and tarried there. That was also a standard procedure for the ruler of Judea following the Passover. Once again, Luke proved his Jewishness by showing that from Jerusalem one always goes down. The king tarried in Caesarea

> because the city was the political capital and Roman headquarters of Judea."

This is the kind of thing that rulers did constantly around Passover time. Herod is fitting the pattern. What I am trying to communicate is you are reading a history book that fits the culture of the time. This is not a bunch of tall tales—Jack and the Beanstalk stuff.

When he says, "Herod Agrippa went down from Jerusalem to Caesarea" it shows that the guy who wrote this (we believe is Luke), obviously understood the topography and the geography of the Nation of Israel, because Jerusalem is always located up. That is why the Jews, when they would go to celebrate the various feasts in Jerusalem, on their way up sang the Psalms of Ascent. If you want to know where the Psalms of Ascent are, they are Psalms 120-134. Psalms of Ascent—psalms sung by devout Jews traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the various feasts. That is why there are Psalms of Ascent, because they are going up.

Herod, in this case, as he is traveling from Judea to Caesarea (which is what the kings always did at the close of Passover), is going down. I love this kind of thing, because it shows me that this book was written by someone with a first-century understanding.