

# Opposition to the Church

by Steve Gallagher

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*The sermon explores the transition from Peter to Paul in the early church, highlighting the significance of Barnabas's role in Antioch and the collection taken up to support the church in Jerusalem.*

**Duration:** 56:36

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:23, Psalm 116:15, Acts 12:5-24, Hebrews 9:27

**Topics:** "Early Church", "Persecution"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the transition period of the early church, focusing on the shift from Peter as the main actor to the rise of the Apostle Paul. It covers the birth and growth of the church at Antioch, the martyrdom of James, Peter's miraculous escape from prison, and the death of King Herod Agrippa. The sermon also explores the chronology of events and the significance of prayer in the believers' lives.

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## Transcript

Okay, so this morning we are going to be in our last session, the early church. We're going to cover the last half of chapter 11 and all of chapter 12. This is a transition section of scripture.

We're transitioning from the main actor being Peter, and we'll see him prominently in the lesson today for the last time. Then he just at least historically, I don't know exactly what happened at the time, but historically he fades from view. Other than a couple of brief mentions elsewhere, he's not heard of again other than his epistles he wrote later.

So Peter will ease out of the picture after these chapters, and in about a month we'll get into the life and writings of the Apostle Paul. That'll be exciting. All right.

So what I want to do this time is I want to just briefly lay out an outline of the events of these two chapters. I have a reason for doing it, and let me just blow through the way it's laid out in the text. Starting at chapter 11 verse 19, and basically to verse 26, you have the birth and the growth of the church at Antioch in Syria.

Just so you know, if you in your mind's eye could see the Mediterranean Sea, Antioch was in the far northeastern corner of the sea. Right up there by Cyprus and a little east of Tarsus. So the church begins there, and then a famine hits, and the church at Antioch sends relief to the church of Jerusalem.

Then we go into chapter 12, James the Apostle is martyred, and then a big story about Peter getting arrested, and his escape, and all of that. Then finally, this story about the death of King Herod Agrippa. All

right.

Now, I want to look at the chronology here for a minute. Because up till now, trying to date the events and the different stories that we've been looking at has been pure guesswork. It's impossible to know when exactly Jesus was hung on the cross, when Stephen was martyred, and these different events that happened.

But now, we finally have a date that is concrete. We absolutely know that Herod died in 44 AD. So that gives us a fixed historical point to work from which we can use.

As we go through the life of Paul later, there will be some other points like that, that we can also use to create dating throughout the whole story from here on out really. So 44 AD, Herod dies. This is shown in the last part of chapter 12, but we have a little problem here.

Because there's a famine discussed at the end of chapter 11, and historically speaking, the only famine that is mentioned occurring at this time in Palestine was mentioned by Josephus that happened in 46 AD. So we've got a problem here. In the text, you have the famine, and then at some point later, Herod dies.

Looking at all the different commentaries and stuff, but really the Sondervan expositors commentary, I felt like had the best explanation. Wangennecker says that he believes that the events of chapter 12 actually occur between verses 26 and 27 in chapter 11. What I'm going to do is, I'm going to go through that here in a second.

But in other words, Luke is a historian, and he's writing these different stories and events, telling about these different things that are going on, and he's not so much concerned about adhering to a strict chronological layout. He's approaching a lot of this thematically. So when he put this whole package together, he's got a number of things he's got to consider.

I think that's why he laid it out the way he did. Anyway, that seems like the best explanation that I've seen. So let's look at it chronologically speaking.

So we have in chapter 11 verses 19 to 24, is talking about the birth and the growth of the Church of Antioch. This is happening right on the heels of Saul's persecution. So go all the way back to chapter 6, 7, and 8, when Stephen is martyred, Saul starts persecuting the church hotly, and the Hellenized Jews start scattering across the Roman world.

That's what this is talking about right here. So that's the dating on that happening coinciding with Philip's ministry in Samaria, and before Peter and Cornelius. That whole story unfolds.

Okay. So then Barnabas goes to Tarsus, which is probably 100-150 miles away. It's not that far.

He gets Saul, brings Saul back to work at the Church of Antioch. That was probably early 44 that that happened. Then the martyrdom of James, the arrest of Peter, all of that stuff happens.

Also early 44, death of Herod, sometime in 44, and then in verse 25 of chapter 12, kind of a summation, preparing the readers for going into the story of chapter 13, we're told that Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch. All right. Then, after all of that has occurred, then the famine discussed at the end of chapter 11 happens.

Let me also say a couple of things about that because, of course, we're going to get into this. We're going to go through this whole story, but in fact, I'll just wait for that. Then we go into chapter 13, and Barnabas and Saul are appointed and sent as missionaries.

If you look at it from that standpoint, all of these things happen, and then the famine, and then verse 25 of chapter 12, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem back to Antioch. Chapter 13, verse 1. Remember, there was none of these chapter breaks in the Bible. That all came from some monk later in the 12th century.

They come back, and then they are called forth to go out as missionaries. That's the chronological layout, it seems like a good explanation to me. Let's get into the story here.

Chapter 11, verse 19. I'm just going to go ahead and read some of it. So then, those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen, made their way to Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. Now, it does seem like there's a little bit of a gap there. Like at first, it was just speaking to the Jews, and then maybe these guys came a little bit later, and started speaking to Gentiles also.

Okay, in verse 21, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Man, praise the Lord. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem. I'll say something about that. Here in a little bit, but news reaches Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.

Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. For he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. He left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

Go get the troublemaker. For an entire year, they met with the church and taught considerable numbers, and that year right there is what I'm saying, is I think all this stuff transpires in the story now. There's a year period, and then after that year, after all this other stuff's happened, then we go into this whole famine story.

But anyway, so for an entire year, they met with the church and taught considerable numbers, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Now, as we've already seen, the persecution has driven the Hellenized Jewish Christians out of Judea across the Roman world.

We've already heard about that, but there's a little phrase in Acts 9.31. I just want to read this, because at the time we kind of blew over, and actually I made a different point out of this. It says, so the church, meaning the corporate body of the church, so the church throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria. In other words, there are pockets of Christianity.

He's only referring to Palestine here, but this is the case really all over the Roman Empire in various cities. In fact, later we'll see how probably the church in Rome started at the same time. So these little pockets of

Christianity are beginning in different places.

Again, this is way back in chapter, beginning in chapter eight. So these guys go there and start witnessing and sharing their faith with Gentiles. Now, we've already talked last week about Peter and the story with Cornelius, and why it was so imperative that Peter be involved with bringing the first Gentile into the church.

Remember, we talked about how, especially the Judaizers, their influence, the party of the circumcision in the Jerusalem church, they had to be quieted. And the only way that was gonna happen was for someone with the prominence of Peter to be the one who's actually used. But it's very possible that actually, Cornelius wasn't the first Gentile to get saved.

It very well could have been some of these guys in Antioch. But the way I see it is you got Antioch way up here, you know, in Syria, and Jerusalem way down here, and I could just see the Lord just shielding the church in Jerusalem from knowing about that. It says right here, the news about them reached the church in Jerusalem, but how long afterwards, we don't know, you know.

But definitely we can see that they've already worked through all the issues. There's no arguments in the church in Jerusalem about letting these Gentiles in. That's already been settled with the Cornelius issue.

So chronologically, even though they may have got saved before Cornelius, are you guys staying up with me? They may have got saved before Cornelius, but the church didn't find out about it until it had gone through the whole thing with Peter and all of that. So that's important to note that. Let me read a couple of quotes here.

First, McLaren. Some Cypriot and African Jews, men of no note in the church, unimportant people, just regular lay people, regular guys, okay, whose very names have perished, with no official among them, with no vision nor command to impel them, with no precedent to encourage them, with nothing but the truth in their minds and the impulses of Christ's love in their hearts, solve the problem of the extension of Christ's message to the heathen, and quite unconscious of the greatness of their act, do the thing about the propriety of which there had been such serious question in Jerusalem. And I love the way he said that.

I mean, it's that old English stuff of 150 years ago, but I still love the way he expresses how these men were compelled to go forth. When you have the spirit of the living God inside you, and especially when you first come to the Lord and you're in that first passionate love for God, and then it was only intensified by persecution. You know, it doesn't quench it, it inflames it all the more.

I remember when I came to the Lord in 1970. Man, I was on fire. There was nothing we wouldn't do.

We would go out and witness in different places, and God was moving, it was during the Jesus movement, and his power was being manifested, and the Lord was doing tremendous things. But there was a lot of enthusiasm in the church in those days, at least amongst the young people such as myself. And that's how I can envision what was happening here at this time, except far more so, with far more power and far more of the Holy Spirit on the heels of the Pentecostal outpouring.

All right, Longenecker says, news of the situation at Antioch was of definite concern to believers in Jerusalem. With the conversion of Samaritans, the conversion of some Gentiles in Caesarea, and now the report of a mixed congregation in Syrian Antioch, many in Jerusalem were doubtless fearful that the Christian mission was moving ahead so rapidly as to be out of control. The Jerusalem church, therefore,

as in the case of the Samaritan conversions, decided to send a delegate to Antioch, probably in order to regularize whatever had gone awry and report back to the mother church.

Here was a crisis point in the history of the early church, for much depended on Barnabas's reaction, counsel, and report, all right? So Barnabas is playing a very significant role here. Why is he chosen? He's in with the in group, he's highly respected, he's a Hellenized Jew from Cyprus, just a little ways off the coast from Syrian Antioch. He's probably familiar with that city, maybe he knew some people there, I don't know.

But he was definitely a solid man of God who they sent up there to find out what's going on and to, if there was anything out of whack, to bring some order or whatever. And he was just the right guy for the job. And we're also told here that this is where they were first called Christians.

And that is significant as well. You know, we don't think anything of it because this is all we've ever known, is that we're called Christians. That's how most of us think of our faith.

But this really was a term of derision. The Gentiles in Antioch, they were probably like, well, who is this new group here? These people that are always out preaching and telling us about this guy that died and supposedly came back to life, they were making fun of them. And we know it wasn't Jews because Jews would never take a sacred name like Christ and make it a subject of mockery.

The Jews wouldn't do that because that was sacred to them. But anyway, so it was certainly heathens that did this. And up until Stephen's death, you had different sects of Judaism.

You had, of course, the two big ones, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, but then you also had the Herodian party and you had the Essenes and maybe there were some other small ones. And the Christians just became one more of the groups, offshoots of Judaism there in Jerusalem at the time. That's how they were seen in those earliest days.

And then something happened with the whole Stephen persecution. There was a real breach and things started separating between the church and the Jewish faith. And the church starts flourishing.

It's getting bigger and bigger. This is not like the Essenes or whatever. This is becoming a real movement.

And so they moved past the whole concept of a Christian being just another group. Now it's becoming something as a real, what would you say? Just another group that would really compete with the Jewish faith. I like what Barnes says about them calling the believers Christians.

He says this, this binds them all together. A name which rises above every other appellation, which unites in one the inhabitants of distant nations and tribes of men, which connects the extremes of society and places them in most important respects on a common level. And which is a bond to unite in one family, all those who love the Lord Jesus, though dwelling in different climates, speaking different languages, engaged in different pursuits of life and occupying distant graves at death.

Yeah, and you know, that is the wonderful thing about being a believer. And I've visited with believers, fellowship with believers in different countries around the world. It's instantaneous, it's such a blessing.

When they're true believers, it's like an instantaneous connection on whatever level that you have in the Lord and they have in the Lord, it's meaningful, it's such a blessing. All right, now we're gonna continue the

story textually, in textual order, not chronological. So let's just continue reading here, verse 27.

Now at this time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. They say came down, we would think of it as going up, but you know, Jerusalem was in the mountains. Anyway, one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the spirit, I don't know exactly what that means, but that those, that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world.

And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them to determine to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Okay. So we see here a collection being taken. Now what is a prophecy? A prophecy is something that's given beforehand.

We don't know when this prophecy was given. There had to be some time for these poor people in Antioch to start contributing towards a common, you know, gift that they would eventually, when they had enough to make a difference and to help, would take down there to Jerusalem. So this may have happened a year before.

I don't know, but it definitely took time, especially when we get into the life of Paul and later on he takes up the offerings from all the churches, remember to bring back to Jerusalem and the problems they had back then. That took a period of time and you really see it in that story. Well, in this one, it doesn't come across so clearly, but it almost certainly took a matter of time.

And so they take up this offering and they send it down to Jerusalem with Barnabas and with Saul. So this crisis paves the way for the troublemaker to return back to Jerusalem. Only now you don't read anything about him arguing with the Jews or preaching at the temple or causing problems.

Why is that? Is he backslidden? Has he become complacent? Has he lost his fire? No, I think that what it is is he's lost his natural zeal, has been constrained by the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit is on you, the passion will come forth when it needs to come forth. It doesn't need to be there all the time.

That's not the Holy Spirit. There's something not right there. And we know that Saul had a tremendous experience with God and was filled with the Holy Spirit at his conversion and all of that, but it takes time to mature in the Lord.

And whatever those years were, I don't know, four or five years in Tarsus, that time was spent probably some of the suffering that he tells about later on in, what is it? First Corinthians or second? No, second Corinthians. Some of those things that happen there that don't show up in the story in Acts probably happened during those years in Tarsus when he still needed to learn to just calm himself down a little bit. He probably was causing a lot of problems there.

So by the time he gets to Antioch and by the time he goes down to Jerusalem, he's been subdued. He's been humbled a lot, no doubt. But also this visit served another purpose in the development of the early church.

I don't know if it's clear to you, but especially in the story last week, how prideful or how much pride there still was in the Jerusalem church. Let's face it, the Jewish people in those days were just full of pride, self-righteous pride, self-importance, they were better than the rest of the world, all of that kind of ugly

stuff. And it was in the church, even though many of those people really had a life in God and had really been humbled and all that, many of them, I don't think, were ever even really converted.

So there's a lot of pride there. Now they're in the position to where they have to receive gifts from pagan Christians in some pagan city. To me, that was like, wow, that's just the way the Lord operates, isn't it? That's the way he does things, puts us in the position where we have to humble ourselves, whether we like it or not.

So it was all mercy, praise the Lord. All right, let's get into chapter 12. Now about that time, Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

And he had James, the brother of John, put to death with a sword. All right, this is Herod Agrippa I. His son, we will see later on in Paul's, towards the end of Acts when he gets arrested and so on. But Herod Agrippa I is the grandson of Herod the Great.

And Herod Agrippa had a reputation as being a smooth political operative, if I could say it like that. In other words, he was a savvy politician. And he understood that generally speaking, the Jewish people hated the Herod family, dynasty.

And so he sets about to be as good to them as he possibly can. And he really was. He married a Jewish woman.

And in fact, one of the Jewish writers of that time said, the king is guided by the queen, and the queen is guided by Gamaliel. And so that's the way he operated. And from a political standpoint, as far as the Jewish people were concerned, that was all positive.

The problem was for the Christians that they are now at odds with the Jews. So that's what motivates Herod to have James the Apostle put to death. Now James was one of the favored three disciples, right? Peter, James, and John.

And notice that James' name goes before John's, probably meaning he was the older of the two, they're brothers. And that was probably the meaning of that. Well, we don't know what all happened in James' life, but he was one of the sons of thunder, you know? And we can only imagine.

Well, let me read what the biblical expositor said about him. We may be sure that Herod selected the most devoted and energetic champion of Christ to satisfy his cruel purpose. And yet, though James was thus privileged and thus faithful and thus honored by God, his active career is shrouded, thick round with clouds and darkness.

We know nothing of the good works and brave deeds and powerful sermons he devoted to his master's cause. We're told simply of the death by which he glorified God. All else is hidden with God till that day when the secret thoughts and deeds of every man shall be revealed.

And man, again, that is so much like how the Lord operates. There are some heroic efforts that we will never know about until we get to glory, you know? Things are not as they always seem. In fact, in most cases, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, you know? So it's just a tremendous thing in the kingdom of God that nothing is missed that's done on behalf of the Lord in the right spirit.

All right, the pulpit commentary also weighs in on this. James shrank not, nor drew back. To him to live was Christ and to die was gain.

And so his end came, the end of his toil. But surely he is among those whom his brother saw in vision half a century afterwards. And he quotes out of the book of Revelation.

I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Wow, can you imagine what that must have been like? You know, when John had that tremendous vision, that sight, and they're in that multitude.

Hey, there's my brother James, you know? How exciting that must have been to him. Sure, I don't doubt that. It doesn't say anything about it, but there's a lot of things that are left unsaid in scripture.

All right, let's continue reading. I can see you're not very excited, but I am. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

Now, it was during the days of unleavened bread. In other words, during the Passover time. And we see here that it pleased the Jews that this godly man was taken out and his head whacked off.

That this pleased the Jewish people. And I tell you, it just shows you how fickle the world can be with us. You know, earlier on, they had the favor of all the people.

Now the people long to see these Christians persecuted and put to death. Verse four, when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. All right, now, no doubt the Jewish leaders told Herod about Peter having some magical ability to bust out of jail, you know? So he puts four squads of soldiers, and apparently they're believing each other every three hours.

So you have two soldiers chained on either wrist to Peter. They're in that jail. And then two soldiers standing at the door, at the gate.

Absolutely impossible to get out. There is no way he can get out of this. All right, verse five.

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. Now, if there's one thing that should be clear to us, it is that this is a praying church. Let me just remind you of a few things.

Chapter one, we're told the 120 were continually devoting themselves to prayer. And then in chapter two, the same exact phrase is used to describe the whole church, which has now grown to 3,000 at that point. In chapter three, Peter and John are on their way to a prayer meeting when they healed the paralytic.

In chapter four, after Peter and John were released, the disciples lifted up their voices to God with one accord. In chapter six, it says the deacon, I mean, the disciples said, we will devote ourselves to prayer. And then in chapter nine, when Peter was told about Tabitha dying, he knelt down and prayed, restoring her to life.

And finally, in chapter 10, Peter was having one of his regular daily prayer times when he had that tremendous vision of the sheep coming down from heaven. These are just a few little instances that are mentioned in passing, but it was very much part of the daily life of the believers of those days. If you took one of those Christians in the early church and planted them in the American church, they would not even

recognize this as Christianity.

They would not be able to comprehend that these people call themselves believers because these people were separated. They were earnest about the things of God. God meant everything to them.

They spent time in prayer, not only their own personal prayer time, but it was clear that they had regular prayer meetings. Part of it, you have to understand, is we are surrounded with distractions, entertainment, things we can do, anything to escape the horrors of boredom. Heaven help us if we'd have to sit in boredom for three minutes, what would we do? And they didn't have all that we have.

You know, their whole life was made up of boredom other than, well, they would work. So that for them to have a prayer meeting once a week or three times a week or something, it's like, yeah, let's do it because they just weren't bogged down with the world like we are today. They understood the word ask.

They were asking, they were seeking, they were knocking. It was a regular part of their daily life, whether they were in a prayer meeting or not. So here you have this situation.

What could be more absolutely impossible to hope for an answer to prayer than the situation with Peter chained with four soldiers around him? You know, absolutely impossible. McLaren says, two chains, three gates with guards at each of them. Herod's grim determination.

And what had the handful of Christian people? Well, they had prayer and they had Jesus Christ. That was all, and that is more than enough. Yeah, amen.

Matthew Henry said, prayers and tears are the church's arms, therewith she fights. And that is spiritual warfare. Nevermind all the nonsense you hear about some of these spiritual warfare conferences where they're putting on their armor and they're pulling down the strongholds over cities and just such a bunch of nonsense.

Spiritual warfare is going to prayer, just praying for the Lord to do his work amongst people. That is spiritual warfare. And the enemy opposing that.

And all that warfare goes on behind the scenes in the unseen realm. And we don't know what all goes on there, but it happens through prayer on our part. Okay, let's continue reading our story.

On verse six, on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, the last minute, that's typical of the Lord, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell and he struck Peter's side and woke him up saying, get up quickly, and his chains fell off his hands. All right, so, you know, Peter's out of it, he's sleeping, and all of a sudden this angel shows up, he no doubt puts these guards into a deep sleep, something they are not gonna come out of without, you know, until the angel is gone.

Anyway, he gets him roused up and he gets him out of the jail. And then Peter says he comes to himself, it's the same words used about the prodigal when he says that he was in the pig pen and he came to his senses, it's the same in the Greek. Okay, so he gets out of jail and he shows up over at this house.

Where am I at in this story or I'm getting myself mixed up here? Verse nine, and, you know, when he came to himself, I'm getting a little ahead of myself. When he came to himself, it's just clear that these men lived

very close to this unseen spiritual realm. And at times they seemed to switch from one realm to the other or had one foot in one realm and one foot in the other.

I mean, it was that way. When you're really walking closely with God, that's the way it can be. And I have experienced that a little bit in some times in the past at the faith homes and Brownsville where God's presence is so strong.

It's just such a tremendous thing. I'm not saying it was at this level, so don't get me wrong, but I understand it at least. But this thing of Peter not even knowing, you know, am I in a vision? Am I seeing, dreaming? Is this real? He didn't know what was what.

It reminds me of when Paul had his vision, you know, he talks about in 2 Corinthians 12 where he didn't know if he was in the body, out of the body, you know, but he just slid into that other realm. What a thing. All right, so you got all these people gathering in fervent prayer at the house.

And Peter shows up at this house, which is obviously one of their gathering points where the disciples would hang out. And he starts banging on the door and the servant girl comes out and she sees that it's Peter. Instead of opening the door, this silly girl runs in and just announces to all these people, breaks into the prayer time and says, Peter's at the door.

And what's their response? They're full of faith, they're praying fervently. They're expecting God to answer, right? And she says, Peter's here. And they say, are you crazy? You know, it's just kind of a funny story.

It's just, I appreciate Luke putting stuff like that in, you know, showing our warts, showing our lack of faith, you know, and showing exactly what people are in, not being afraid to tell the truth, but it's just kind of hilarious. That he would, Luke would include that. So Peter keeps knocking and then he comes in and he says, listen, just take it easy.

You know, just, this is what happened. Report these things to James and the brethren. All right, now this is the first mention of James we have in the story of Acts.

We see him and Jesus's other brothers mentioned in the Gospels, but back then, like for instance, in John seven, they didn't believe in Jesus. They thought he was crazy, you know, and so this is the first mention of James. In fact, one of the early church writers said that when Jesus died and these stories were circulating around that he had come back to life, that he said, I will not believe unless I see him.

And of course, in first Corinthians 15, Paul mentions that Jesus did, in fact, appear to James and his brothers and 500 people. You know, so Jesus graciously came to his brothers he grew up with, his little brothers, and showed them that he really was alive still. So this is James.

We did see in chapter 11, the brethren. Remember when, this is important, okay? It's just a little detail, but it's really important in the story because in chapter 11, we saw, well, in chapter 10, Peter went and had this experience with Cornelius. In chapter 11, he shows up back at the church in Jerusalem and he comes to the disciples and the brethren.

All right, who's the brethren? Who are these new guys, you know? Well, apparently they were the elders of the Jerusalem church that had been risen up by the Lord to act as leaders in that church, to free up the disciples to go forth as evangelists, really. They were witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And as church history shows and early traditions, they fanned out across the entire world.

Like for instance, Thomas, I think was murdered in India. And all of them actually were killed, all the disciples martyred, except for John, didn't end up being martyred apparently. But anyway, there's a transition going on here from chapter 11 to chapter 12.

And from here on forth, James is now the leader of the church with the brethren around him. And Peter is more like outside of the leadership team, but still an important voice there in the church, but he's not in the decision-making position anymore. Now it's James.

So that's just an interesting thing to keep in mind as the story unfolds, especially in the life of Paul, as we get into that. All right, so then in verse 18, there's a major disturbance when they find out that Peter has magically disappeared once again, made another jailbreak. This guy's worse than Houdini.

I mean, nothing can hold this guy in. And so, Herod has these poor hapless guards, the four who just unfortunately were on duty right then, they're taken out and executed. They were probably tortured for who knows how long beforehand, but one of the commentators, my wife's up here feels bad for him, and I do, I'm not, you know, but one of the commentators said, who knows how vicious these men were and how they treated Peter.

We don't know, you know, what's what with all that. But anyway, they were the unfortunate ones who were there when Peter made his escape. And so Herod has them put to death.

All right, so then we get into the story of Herod. It's interesting that he murders one apostle, then he arrests another one, two of the main apostles, two out of three. He kills one, arrests the other, he's gonna kill him too.

He escapes, and then he goes down to Caesarea and gets attacked with whatever this thing happens. Basically the story here, I don't need to get into it, but people of Tyre and Sidon were dependent on the people of Palestine to supply them with food, wheat, and so on, grain. And so they had to stay on good terms with the king, and they somehow got out of favor with him, so they come up flattering him and kissing up to him and stuff, and he gives a speech, and he's just so full of himself, and God strikes him down.

And Josephus actually talks a lot about, in great detail about this death, and we don't have the time to get into it. It's kind of a side note thing anyway. But apparently it seems as though he probably had intestinal roundworms that got inflamed inside of his intestine.

It can create a blockage of some sort, and it can be extremely, extremely painful, and you can die from it, and that seems to be what happened according to Josephus' story. All right, now I just want to make a couple of comments as we're wrapping up here today about these six deaths, and the one death that was supposed to happen and didn't. I just got to thinking about this, and I started thinking about why do people die, and how does that come about? You basically have here three groups, so to speak.

You have James who's martyred, he's a believer. You have four Roman soldiers who are killed, executed, and then you have Herod who was struck down by the Lord. And I just, I covered a lot of this in my book, *The Time of Our Lives in Light of Eternity*, where I really kind of get into these kinds of issues, and I'll just bring out a couple of points here.

In regards to unbelievers, there's two possible explanations. The first is that every person alive has a fixed day that God has established for their days on earth to end, all right? And that it's part of his plan.

Whoever you are, you are gonna die on this day in a car accident.

You are gonna die this day in some freak accident. You are gonna die of cancer. You are gonna, you know, that he's got it, every single bit of it laid out, planned out, figured out, and all that.

And, you know, there is some scripture that seems to support that theory. For instance, it is appointed unto man to die, right? In Hebrews 9, it doesn't say it like that. It is appointed unto man to die once and then judgment.

So, yeah, okay, well, it could be that. It could mean that, not only that the Lord has the foreknowledge of when that day is coming, but that he actually appoints that day. That's one possibility.

The other possibility is that with the exception of certain situations like Herod and Ananias and Sapphira and others like that where it's divine judgment that is being rendered against that person, that that person is being, you know, put to death by the agency of the Lord in some way, that other than those exceptions, that most of the world of unbelievers, they are just simply left to living out their lives in a cruel, devil-inhabited earth and that bad things happen. And that it isn't that God has every single one of them planned out and figured out in that sense, but that it's just part of going through life unprotected. If you don't have the Lord, you have no protection over your life.

And bad things happen. And I tend to think it's more like that. I'm not, you know, saying of any strength, but I tend to think that's more like the way it would be.

That if you don't have the Lord, and of course the Lord knows who are his, he knows who's going to respond to the Holy Spirit and who's not. So I'm not saying that if you, you know, if things happen right in circumstances in your life that one day you're gonna come to the Lord, but hey, you're unprotected now. No, I don't believe that.

I do believe that God keeps his hand on your life. I know he kept his hand on my life. No question in my mind that God spared my life before I came to the Lord.

So anyway, that's kind of how I see that. But what about believers? Now, believers, we know that the Lord has his hand all over our lives, but why did James get put to death and Peter was spared? Why did that happen? Well, we'll get to that in a second. Let me read this little one paragraph out of my book, *A Time of Our Lives*.

Life is fragile at best, but it is of the utmost comfort to believers that theirs are carefully watched over and guarded by the Almighty. He is personally and intricately involved in the lives of his people. David said, the Lord knows the days of the blameless.

Psalm 37. Think of that. God is intimately familiar with every 24-hour period you will experience during your stay on earth.

He knows what each day will bring as you move down your timeline. David went on to add, the Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.

Also in Psalm 37. All right, so let's get back to the story. Why James but not Peter? Matthew Henry says that he believes that James was rushed to judgment so quickly that the church didn't have time to pray for his deliverance and that's why he was put to death and Peter wasn't.

And in one of the rare times that I disagree with Matthew Henry, because I really respect Matthew Henry. He's so usually right on in his observations but this time I just cannot agree with that. You know, this is one of God's children, speaking of James.

And the death of the saints are precious in the eyes of God, we're told in Psalms. And I cannot believe that the Lord would just allow one of his people to be put to death just because the church didn't get it together quickly enough to pray him through or something. I just, that's too much for me to swallow.

I can't take that. But anyway, I just think that it was part of God's plan for the life of James. Let me finish by reading this quote from the biblical expositor.

Why was not the same assistance vouchsafed to James? Who had just been put to death? Simply we reply because God's hour was not yet come for Peter. James's work was done and therefore the Lord summoned his servant to his assigned post of honor. The Lord did not allow Peter's death because he had much work to do as the apostle of the circumcision in preventing that schism with which the diverse parties and opposing ideas of Jew and Gentile threatened the infant church in smoothing over and reconciling the manifold oppositions, jealousies and misunderstandings which are ever a part of such a season of transition.

And yeah, you know, even though Peter's life, historically speaking, fades out of view, he continued to play a very prominent role behind the scenes in this transition of the church, this transition period the church was going through. Remember, it was confined to one city. Imagine all of Christianity confined to Cincinnati, Ohio or Sacramento, California or whatever.

And there's a whole world of need in sitting in darkness there, but it's ours. And you know, forget about them, they got to fit themselves into our way of doing. Can you imagine? And so the Lord is looking at this vast need.

It's what I was talking about last week about the purpose of God involved in the church. He wants to reach the masses. He wants the word to get to every tribe and nation in the world.

And so to do that, he's got to break it out of the confines of this narrow Jewish thinking. And so that's what is going on. And it was so important that Peter remained at his post through this transition period until that is firmly established, you know, which really he got called home some 25 years later after this.

So yeah, I agree with that. That sounds right that the Lord still had to work for him to do. All right, so that's the end of the early church series.

We'll get started on the life of Paul next. And let me just close in a word of prayer. Lord, I thank you for helping us through this series, these eight different messages that you've helped us to put together and share.

I pray that they bless the lives of many of your people. In Jesus' name, amen. God bless you all.

God bless you all.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/steve-gallagher/opposition-to-the-church/>

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