

The Great Escape

1. What do you think would be most difficult about being a missionary? Explain.

Bow in Prayer: Father God, make us eager and ready to be Your witnesses. As we intermingle with those You sovereignly bring into our lives, show us how to reach across barriers—show us how to meet each person where they are with the glorious message of the Gospel!

As soon as the church in Jerusalem became accepting of Gentile converts, Christianity exploded into new Gentile frontiers. ***Read*** Acts 11:19-30 to see what happened next.

2.
 - a. Using Map 1 locate Jerusalem and Phoenicia. (“Syro” was a prefix given to the region after it was annexed to the Roman province of Syria.)
On Map 3 locate Cyprus and Antioch.
(Cyrene was a Mediterranean seaport city in north Africa.)
 - b. Answer the following questions after reviewing the Chart of the book of Acts.
What title is given to Acts chapters 10-12?
By the end of chapter 12 how many years will have passed since Jesus’ ascension into heaven?
3. What new audience do the scattered believers find (verse 20)? How does Luke describe what is happening there?
4. How does this small beginning turn Antioch into a place where the believers aggressively preach to Gentiles (verses 22-26)?

Life Lesson

Saul and Barnabas saw the importance of teaching and training new believers. Have you helped someone to believe in Jesus? Have you spent time teaching and encouraging that person? Do you know someone who has taken that first important step of faith but needs a spiritual mentor? Are you willing to be that person if God opens the door? Are you prepared?

5. Comment on how God is speaking to you in this “life lesson.”

6. a. From Luke's narrative review what we have learned about Barnabas. (*Revisit* Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-28; and 11:19-30.) What were his qualities and motivations?

 - b. What did Barnabas encourage new believers to do (11:23)?

 - c. List as many synonyms as you can for the word "encourage."
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7. What is the relationship between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 11:27-30)? How do they evidence "a body of Christ mentality?"

[*On Map 3 finish tracing Paul's travels from Acts 11:25-30 and 12:25.*]

8. How does chapter 11 set up the transition between Peter and Saul/Paul?

Important Facts about the City of Antioch in Syria

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of around 500,000. Only Alexandria and Rome were larger. When persecution against Christians broke out in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, many Christians fled to Antioch. This city would be home to the church, who for the next decade would direct the expansion of Christianity under Paul of Tarsus. The Antioch church became Paul's home church and the point of departure for Paul's three missionary journeys. It was in the metropolitan city of Antioch, with all its diversity, where disciples of Jesus were first called Christians.

Acts chapter 12 takes us back to Jerusalem where we learn about some tense and traumatic times. **Read** Acts 12:1-24 prayerfully and thoughtfully. (Review the information about the family of Herod's from the handout "Understanding Jewish Leadership.")

9. What seems to motivate Herod's actions (12:1-5)?

Four generations of the Herod family are mentioned in the Bible, each leaving behind an evil legacy. This is a prime example that for good or for evil, parents have a lasting and powerful influence on their children.

10. **Stop and Think:** What kind of example are you setting for your children and grandchildren? In prayer, ask God to show you one or two areas where you need to care more for the spiritual growth and well being of your family. Note them here.

11. Describe the evil actions of King Herod from verses 2, 3, 4, 19.

12. Who is this James mentioned in Acts 12:2 and what is the significance of his death? (See Matthew 4:20-22, 10:2, 17:1; Mark 5:37, 10:35-39; Matthew 20:20-23.)

When the death of James is viewed through the eyes of faith and belief in the sovereignty of God, we must conclude that in God's wisdom, James' death fulfilled a divine purpose—even if that purpose is not wholly apparent to us.

13. Are there events in your life in which you need to apply this truth? Please elaborate.

14. What were Herod's plans for Peter? How did the church respond to this new crisis (Acts 12:5, 12)?

How quickly and persistently do you turn to prayer? How would you rate the health of your prayer life? **Mark one:** Unsatisfactory Growing In communion with God every day

Imagine that you are Peter. You are scheduled for execution the next day.

15. In light of this, note the details Luke carefully relates to us in verse 6. (*We can imagine that Luke enjoyed recounting this story.*) What is striking to you about the facts we are given? Also recall Acts 5:17-20.

What comes next is one of the most exciting and humorous scenes in the book of Acts! Ask someone in your group to *reread* Acts 12:7-17 aloud.

16. What highlights would a reporter who is at the scene be likely to mention?

17. Relate how this incredible sequence of events has spoken to you personally.

18. What relationship do you see between the death of James, the prayers of the believers, and Peter's rescue?

Note: Under Roman law, a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered. Reflect on Acts 12:18-19.

19. For what sin does Herod experience immediate judgment (Acts 12:21-23)? What does the shocking picture of Herod's demise demonstrate about God? (Also consider 1 Samuel 15:23; Proverbs 8:13.)

Observe the complete reversal of the church's situation at the beginning of Acts chapter 12 and the closing of Acts chapter 12. Ponder the poignant contrast found in Acts 12:23-24.

20. The earnest prayer of the church significantly affected the outcome of events in this chapter. How is your motivation to pray influenced by this truth? *Talk to God about this in the space below.*

The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer. -F.B. Meyer