

Acts of the Apostles
Week 5 Summary
Acts 12:1–13:52

The book of Acts divides roughly in half: chapters 1-12 and 13-28. In 2:36, Peter concludes his address to the crowd at Pentecost saying, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” The main emphasis in this first half of Acts has been the proclamation of Jesus as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Chapter 12 will resolve this question by showing us who the King of the Jews truly is: Jesus or Herod. In chapters 13-28 Jesus is proclaimed as the world’s true Lord (SPOILER ALERT: it turns out not to be Caesar).

Chapter 12 divides neatly in half (vv 1-18 and 19-25). In the first half a second wave of persecution breaks out against the Church. In chapter 4 Peter and John are detained by the Temple rulers and answer the question of authority: by whose name do you do these things? Here in chapter 12 Herod himself leads the assault. Up to this point, Peter has been the leader of the Jerusalem church and is most likely Herod’s target. James (brother of John, son of Zebedee) is executed in order to test the public’s appetite for this. The popularity of this inspires Herod to go after Peter who is put in prison due to the Passover festival which parallels Jesus’ trial.

When Peter is miraculously delivered from jail he goes to Mary’s house (Barnabas’ sister-in-law, John Mark’s mother) where the church is praying for him. Peter sees that he is now a marked man and can no longer serve as before and passes leadership to (another) James.

After “re-assigning” Peter’s detainers, Herod moves on with his administrative duties by going to Caesarea (probably Philippi) and deal with a delegation from Tyre and Sidon. Herod adorns himself in dazzling robes and addresses the crowd. The response of the delegation is to declare Herod a god. This is ironic since they are located in a city names after the current self-proclaimed lord of the earth, namely Caesar. Because Herod did not acknowledge YHWH as the true King an angel strikes him down answering our question of who is Israel’s King.

Chapter 13 begins the 2nd half where the Lordship of Jesus confronts the lordship of Caesar. Jerusalem is still the center of the movement of this Jewish message but our starting point becomes Syrian Antioch. Saul (who will now be called Paul) and Barnabas are set aside for a work of God. John Mark comes along for the first bit of this work.

On Cyprus (Barnabas’ hometown) they meet a sorcerer named Elymas. As Peter confronted a magician in chapter 8, Paul confronts one here. Paul pronounces blindness upon him as a judgement which parallels his own from ch 9. The island’s proconsul Sergius Paulus becomes a believer.

From here they go to Pisidian Antioch where they attend the local synagogue. Although the narrative is moving into gentile territory, the motif of “the Jew first and also the Greek” remains where practical. They are asked for a word of encouragement (think of the name Barnabas). Paul gives a re-telling of the history of Israel. In this re-telling, Paul by-passes Abraham (but does say God chose us); briefly mentions the exodus; skips Moses, goes right to the monarchy. John the Baptist is included in this re-telling probably for his call to repentance and for his openness to the gentiles (Do not think to say, Abraham is my father...). Although the fore-runner to Jesus, he is mentioned afterward probably to keep David and Jesus closer together in the proclamation. Call it my personal bias.

Paul uses the same “proof-texts” Peter used in chapter 2 to show Jesus’ claim to David’s throne (Ps 2 and 16). In verse 39 we are told that the proper response to the Gospel (belief) will accomplish what the Law could not: remission of sin.

Then there comes the strange warning from Hab 1:5. In its original context, it was a warning that God was raising the Assyrians to crush Israel in divine judgement. Here in its new context we should hear it as Paul expressed it in Romans 11: God is raising up the gentiles not to crush Israel but to bring her to repentance.

Some people that Luke calls “the Jews” do respond with jealousy but rather than repent they drive Paul and Barnabas out of the city. In his leaving, Paul locates his mission to the gentiles within the mission of the servant of YHWH as found in the servant song of Isa 49: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” This same idea was spoken over Jesus at this dedication by Simeon in Luke 2:32.

Faithful Presence

“Chapter Four”

1. On page 72 Fitch says, “Reconciliation is so central to the good news of what God has done in Christ that to see no reconciliation in our churches suggests there is no gospel in them. Do you agree or disagree?”
2. At Life on the Vine they use the phrase, “I submit to you.” What sort of language would be helpful at Northview as we engage in the practice reconciliation?
3. What do you think of reconciliation in the three spheres? What might it look like for Northview set within Argyle Park and Regina at large?