

## REFLECTION GUIDE

### ACTS 12:1-13:12 | COLABORING WITH GOD IN PRAYER

#### KEY TERMS

**Herod** - This Herod is Herod Agrippa I, who ruled from 41-44 AD, and was the grandson of Herod the Great. The Herod who played a part in Jesus' arrest and execution was a different Herod called Herod the Tetrarch.

**Worshipping** - From the Greek word *leitourgeō*, which means "to serve." This term was used to describe priestly service in the temple (see 2 Chron 11:14, Ezek 45:4, & Heb 10:11) and might suggest in Acts 13:2 that the activities mentioned (fasting and prayer) have superseded the sacrifices as the primary components of corporate worship.

**Sergius Paulus** - The Roman governor of the island of Cyprus. He was an influential Gentile who Luke describes as being *a man of intelligence* (13:7).

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Herod's sudden and unexpected death (12:23) is also described by the historian Josephus, with many of the same key details described in Acts 12.

#### BACKGROUND

While the gospel is spreading in Antioch, persecution ramps up in Jerusalem as Herod kills James (the brother of John, not James, the brother of Jesus) and arrests Peter, planning to kill him as well (vv. 1-3). Luke describes how Herod made sure Peter was more closely guarded than normal, likely because Herod knew about Peter's previous prison escape (Acts 5:17-26). And then Luke provides some foreshadowing in verse 5 saying, *So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church*. And then, the night before his execution, an angel comes to Peter and rescues him from prison (vv. 7-11). After being freed, Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John, where people are gathered together praying even though it is late at night (v. 12). After meeting with the group, Peter flees Jerusalem. Before moving the story back to Antioch, Luke tells his readers about Herod's fate – a sudden and unexpected death administered by an angel due to his pride and refusal to rely upon God (vv. 20-23). In contrast to Herod, the Christian Church *increased and multiplied* (v. 24).

Luke then shifts back to Antioch where a group of Christians is *worshipping* when the Spirit directs them to set apart Barnabas and Saul and send them out to spread the gospel (13:1-3). Barnabas and Saul head to Cyprus where they are opposed by Bar-Jesus/Elymas, a *magician* and *Jewish false prophet* (13:6-8). However, the magician is blinded (13:11) and the governor of the island, Sergius Paulus, believes the gospel (13:12).

#### GOING DEEPER

Read Acts 2:42 and James 5:16. In light of these verses and Acts 12:5, why do you think it's important for Christians to pray together? Read Matthew 6:6. Why do you think it's important for Christians to pray privately? Is private or corporate prayer easier for you? How can you grow in both areas?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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#### LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 12:1-13:12. Make 4-5 observations. What stands out to you from these stories?
2. Verse 5 of chapter 12 connects the prayers of the church to Peter's rescue, but at the same time, the angel sent by God is clearly in control during the escape. How does this story highlight the tension between the power of our prayers and God's sovereignty?
3. In 12:15, the group praying at Mary's house doesn't believe their prayers have been answered and that Peter is really free. Why is it so hard to believe God will actually answer our prayers?
4. In 12:5, 12:12, and 13:5, we see groups of Christians praying together. Why do you think it's important to pray together with other Christians?

#### LIVING THE WORD

5. Do you find it difficult to pray, easy to pray, or somewhere in between? Why?
6. How are you encouraged by the fact that our prayers are one of the means God uses to accomplish his purposes in the world?
7. What examples of answered prayer have you seen in your life?
8. Spend some extended time in prayer. Pray for needs in your life and your small group. Pray for salvation and renewal in our city. Pray for our Easter service next week, that people would wake up to deep, meaningful life in Christ.