



# DIGGING DEEPER

The Hidden Hand of God

**PLEASE READ** – Acts 11:19 – 13:3

## LOOKING AT THE TEXT

What is the overall message of this section (11:19 – 13:3)? Try and summarise in a simple sentence. How does it contribute the message of the book of Acts?

Are there any key verses which help us see the point Luke (the author) was trying to get across?

Do you think the following is a reasonable breakdown of the passage?

- |   |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
| A | 11:19-26 | How the church in Antioch started and got established        |
| B | 11:27-30 | Prophets from Jerusalem                                      |
| C | 12:1-4   | Increasing persecution in Jerusalem under Herod and the Jews |
| D | 12:5-18  | Account of Peter's miraculous escape                         |
| E | 12:19-23 | Herod's demise   |
| F | 12:24-25 | Barnabas and Saul return – compare 11:30                     |
| G | 13:1-3   | Prophets in Antioch  |

Some questions for discussion to get you thinking about the passage. You could ask similar questions of each of the other sections...

### Section B.

Why is this included, how does it contribute to the overall message?

Why would Antioch send help to Judea when they also would suffer?

### Section D

Why is so much time and detail spent on Peter's escape (what would be lost by simply reporting 'an angel rescued him')?

Why do you think they were so surprised at Peter's release – what do you think they had been praying for? Does Acts 4:23-31 shed any light on this?

## PROVIDENCE – OR THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

See extra thinking on page 3 if you want to pursue this in more depth...

### GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN THE WORLD

Up till now persecution has been religious. In chapter 12 it is political. But God is sovereign in the affairs of the world as much as in his church.

What do you think this chapter teaches us about...

- 1) God's timing
- 2) The authority of world leaders
- 3) How to pray

### LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

Review what you've thought about. What difference should it make to us when:

- 1) We grow weary praying for family and friends
- 2) We hear of God's blessings in other places
- 3) We have opportunity to spend time with those outside the church
- 4) The unexpected messes up our carefully planned schedule
- 5) We pray for those suffering persecution
- 6) We pray for our own leaders and law-makers
- 7) We ... (*add your own!*)

During the coming week reflect on:

***The word of God continued to increase and spread*** Acts 12:24

***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*** Genesis 50:20

## Extra thinking...

### PROVIDENCE – OR THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

The expansive progress of the gospel and the providence of God are evident throughout the whole of the book of Acts but are particularly noticeable in this section.

Some suggestions follow:

- 1) If there had been no persecution, not so many would have travelled so far (Acts 11:19)
- 2) Among them were people who were from gentile areas (Acts 11:20) They may have been Jewish or converts to Judaism, but having lived in non-Jewish environment were more likely to relate to and speak with gentiles.
- 3) The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas, who was himself both Jewish (a Levite) and from a gentile area (Cyprus) and someone who was open to new things – eg he welcomed Saul when others were reticent (Acts 4:36)
- 4) Saul had had something of the order of a decade (estimates vary; for some help on Paul's timeline look at Galatians 1&2) to have a time learning from the Spirit how the Scriptures (ie Old Testament) pointed to Jesus. He had previously studied under Gamaliel, so knew the Scriptures thoroughly (Acts 22:3) He was thus able to teach the church in Antioch from the Jewish Scriptures.
- 5) Around the same time persecution increased in Jerusalem (Acts 12) thus increasing the 'emotional' distance between the old Jewish laws and lifestyle and the freedom found in it's fulfilment in Christ.
- 6) All this served to consolidate the shift of focus from Jewish Jerusalem to Gentile Antioch

Discuss the above – do you agree / disagree / modify? What lessons can we learn for today?