

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Acts 11-12”

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With

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Acts 11 & 12

This episode continues with the expansion of the early church. In the wake of Cornelius' conversion, early Christians (who are mostly converted Jews or converted Jewish proselytes) are learning that the gospel is meant for Gentiles as well. This episode focuses on why that was news, how the book of Acts continues to telegraph the reclamation of the nations in the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, and some interesting points of angelology in Acts 12.

Here are the papers referenced in the show:

[Kallai Patriarchal Boundaries Canaan and Land of Israel Patterns](#)
[Application Biblical Historiography](#)
[ANE Pagan Divination Practices](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 48, Acts 11-12. I'm your residential layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you?

MSH: Very good. Good to hear you again.

TS: Absolutely. So, this week, we're going to get right into Acts 11-12.

MSH: Yes we are, so we have two chapters to cover so let's just jump right in. So beginning in verse 1 for Acts 11,

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. [**MSH: Of course that's a reference to Cornelius back in chapter 10 from last week**] ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order: [**MSH: And then he goes into what happened back at Cornelius' house, the whole event of the vision with seeing the sheet, and the clean and unclean, and what happened to Cornelius, visited by an angel, and so on and so forth. So I', not going to read through all of that, but I do want to skip down to verse 15**]

¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

MSH: So park on this whole incident just a little bit, in verse 1, again, we see the reference to Gentiles. Gentiles also received the word of God, pointing back to Cornelius and his household; we have a reference to the circumcision party who were critical of Peter. If you remember last time in our last episode, there were certain categories of the way you Jews viewed Gentiles, and that's going to spill over into the church. Again, we're seeing it right here in chapter 11 when we get into Paul's travels, and he runs into the people at the synagogues. You're going to see it even Jewish people who believe, and I think it's pretty clear that the circumcision party here in verse 1 are Jewish believers. They are people who've accepted the Messiah, Jews who have accepted the message of Jesus as Messiah and that's because of verse 18. When they hear Peter's explanation, they don't continue their criticism. They said, well, then, to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life. So I think it's pretty fair to say these are Jewish believers. Later on I think, not these particular ones necessarily but just in general, this segment within the church, Jews who have come to embrace the gospel message, the identity of Jesus Messiah as the Christ, some of them, whether based on their own misunderstanding of the gospel in part or maybe more self-serving reasons or maybe because they're fearful of non-believers in the Jewish community, we don't necessarily know. It's probably going to be varied as far as explanation but later on, we're going to see this group, or at least this kind of group, be referred to as Judaizers.

These are the Judaizers. So you're going to have a significant element within the church because frankly up until this point, up until Cornelius chapter 10, the identity of the early church is Jewish believers. Now we've run into proselytes before, people who were Gentiles who converted to Judaism and then converted to be believers, followers of Jesus. So we've seen that party as well. We've seen references to the Hellenists where the Hellenistic Jews, Jews again but who were more accepting of Gentile culture, so there's a number of parties, a number of sects within the early church. But it's going to be dominated, at least initially, by Jewish converts or proselytes, who had converted to Judaism and then later, follow the Lord. So you get a little bit of the dynamic coming out here. But I think it's fair to say when you see verse 18, they realize, okay, this is linked back to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter references this, what happened at Pentecost, and if it's the same thing, then we have to abide by that, then this is the will of God. Then to Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life. So they're fine with it, but you run into different settings, different situations, later on either with Peter or especially with Paul, where it's not going to work so smoothly. Another question to ask is, when you read verse 18, they shut up. They quit criticizing Peter, and they say, okay, I guess Gentiles can be part of the people of God. Why was that such a surprise you might wonder? I think the answer is partly a little obvious but may be partly not so obvious. It's a surprise because for Jews, think back to the whole Deuteronomy 32 worldview, this Divine Council worldview that we should be familiar with from the Old Testament. For Jews, who understood their Bible, the nations were something that needed judgment. Now granted, there was this hint in the covenant with Abraham that they would be brought back into the fold, but a lot of Jews presumed that they would sort of be brought back kicking and screaming. In other words, in the context of a judgment because they had worshiped other gods. They had followed other gods and so they needed to be dealt with harshly, and then brought back. It's sort of the same dynamic as the American Civil War. What do we do with the Confederacy? What we do with people who were loyal to the south to unite the nation? Well, there was a lot of difference of opinion. Basically, they need to get kicked in the butt first and then brought back in the fold, or they need to be completely forgiven and then brought back to the fold. There was just a spectrum of approaches. For a lot of Jews in their context, they are thinking, yeah, God ultimately is going to use us to bring you back into relationship with him, but you're going to get what you deserve. And the thinking was that this judgment was supposed to happen at the hand of God and his military Messiah. Remember, the Jewish conception of Messiah was a person in the line of King David, someone ruling, someone with political and military authority, sort of aligning the vision of Messiah with the divine warrior of the Old Testament because you do get a number of passages that talk about the day of the Lord, when the nations bow down to Yahweh, when they worship the Lord as the true God. Those are in the context of the day Lord judgments. And so these ideas were sort of conglomerated in the Jewish mind. And so when a Jew thinks about the nations, it's almost like it shouldn't be this easy. You just sort of repent and believe and your good? What happened to spanking you a little bit for worshiping other gods? What happened to that? It should be harder. There should be more of a cost. And still thinking about the Messiah in terms of this military deliverer, when that's not what you get with Jesus, for those of you who have been listening to the podcast for a little while, you'll remember when we started in Acts 1 and 2, we talked about this, about how even after the resurrection that Jesus had to open the minds of the apostles to understand that, hey, the Messiah was actually supposed to suffer and die and be raised from the dead, all these ideas that we, as Christians, think are so elementary and so obvious. They're

not obvious in the Old Testament, if you remember our discussions way back when, because all of the elements of the Messiah, especially when it comes to suffering and dying and the resurrection and all that sort of thing, none of those elements are in one place. You don't have a verse that links the Messiah to a death and a resurrection. Well, what about Isaiah 53? Well guess what? The word Messiah is not in that passage. So the portrait, the profile is the word I like to use, the profile of the Messiah is a mosaic. It's scattered all over the place, and you can see it, in hindsight. But again, we have that advantage. You're looking at the apostles here at the beginning of the book of Acts, and this isn't far removed from the crucifixion, the resurrection. What in the world is going on? The Lord appeared to us in the upper room or the road to Emmaus. They still don't get it, and the text literally says he had to open their minds so they could discern what really was going on. So if you didn't have that event, lots of Jews who come to embrace Jesus at the Pentecost, they go back in the nations or the gospel spreading in Judea into the rest of Canaan, they didn't have that event, that clarification moment. They didn't have the Lord directly opening their minds to understand this. This is still a tough thing because they're just thinking about the Messiah in one way. They're thinking about the Gentiles in one way. And so they have to be taught in here in Acts 11 and back into Acts 10. These supernatural events confirm for people that there's a connection between what's happening here with the Gentiles and what happened at Pentecost, and that's connected to things that Jesus taught. And it just takes a little bit of time for the picture to unfold. And here in verse 18, you have the circumcision parties say, okay, I guess were good. To the Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life. They don't need a butt kicking first. This doesn't have to wait until the day of the Lord when there's upheaval and punishment and violence and all this other stuff when wickedness is judged in this sort of this final, it has this feel of finality. We don't have to wait until then for the nations to be drawn back. It's happening now. Again, these were new thoughts to them, and they have to be pieced together. So if we keep going in Acts 11 in verse 19, we read,

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch,

MSH: So here again you have believers who have to get out of town because Stephen had been executed or stoned. So there were lots of people who had accepted the Messiahship of Jesus and the gospel and they're getting out of town. And here it mentions Phoenicia Cyprus and Antioch, and what were they doing? They were speaking the word to no one except Jews. That's not because they're racist or biased. This was normal because, hey, it's the Jewish Messiah. Who else would we talk to? Again, they haven't had these revelatory events in their life. They're still thinking this is for us. It's our Messiah. We're Jews. We need to accept this now and that's who we're going to talk to, because those are the people who are going to understand. Verse 20,

²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, [**MSH: So now we're widening the net here a little bit**] preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. [**MSH: So now they're winning Hellenists, Greek speaking Jews or non-Jews. Hellenists itself is a bit of a fuzzy category. But they're widening the net, they're going outside the immediate**

transparently Jewish community either in terms of very observant Jews or drifting over into Gentile territory. And people are believing]

²²The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

MSH: Now let's just stop there. We've got another reference to other places. And I've said before in Acts and just generally on the blog and in other contexts, when place names show up, it is often worth your while to go in and look at some of those things. What's the history there? Here we have Phoenicia Antioch and Cyprus. Now this is the first reference to Phoenicia in the New Testament, so this is not a territory specifically mentioned in Acts 2. So we're picking up more of the nations that were not specifically listed in Acts 2, saying God as is reclaiming this territory as well. Antioch, we would have run into proselytes from Antioch before in Acts chapter 6, specifically verse 5. That's the first reference there. But, again, proselytes being people who had converted to Judaism and then being confronted with the gospel, have to believe that, or reject it. And then Cyprus was also mentioned earlier in Acts 4, again, in connection with Barnabas, who was a Levite. So in those initial mentions of Antioch and Cyprus, these are places that weren't part of the picture in Acts 2, so we get more confirmation that what is happening here can indeed be connected back to the events of Pentecost, Peter says that here in chapter 11. He said it in chapter 10. And the reader, knowing that, can look at these place names and think, okay, I see what's going on now. This is part of the reclamation of the nations. And the writer wants us to know that these places weren't skipped, that it's not haphazard. There's a thoroughness to it and so these place names are being gobbled up in a narrative or doled out in the narrative to get us to think about what's happening here in all its fullness, rather than restricting it to just of the names in Acts chapter 2. I'll say one more thing about Phoenicia, and I have I given Trey an article by a guy named Zecharia Kallai entitled the Patriarchal Boundaries, Canaan and the land of Israel: Patterns and Applications in Biblical Historiography. It's a scholarly article from the Israel Exploration Journal, and you'll have access to that via the podcast entry for this episode. But the question is, were Tyre and Sidon, who are the two major Phoenician cities in the Old Testament. Were they within the boundaries of the Promised Land? This is somewhat of an important question I think and I'll try to capture why. If you had read through my series on why an obsession with prophecy is a waste of time, you might recall the importance of Tyre and Sidon. Specifically, if you look at, and they're not all the same, I've blogged this before at Naked Bible, the descriptions of the boundaries of the Promised Land are not always the same. So there's this questionable of what is the Promised Land? With respect to Tyre and Sidon, they become important because, if you use the boundary descriptions in Genesis 15, this is when God is making his covenant with Abram, Abraham, and he splits the animals, lays them side-by-side, and then you have the deep sleep fall upon Abraham, and we talked about that last week, too, and the theophany passes through to make the covenant, if you take those

parameters and then align them to the historical events of the time of David and especially Solomon, the north and south borders of the “promised land” do fall under Solomon's kingdom, his control, except for one thing. I'm going to mention it here in a second. But if you look at that, there are some people who would conclude, again, this is part of the discussion prophecy, there are some people who would look at that and say look, the land promised to the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled during the days of Solomon. The northern and southern boundaries here are met. What more could we ask for? This is what's described. In Genesis, we see the fulfillment of this, in the descriptions of Solomon's kingdom. What's the big deal? This would explain, therefore, why Paul in Galatians 3, when he explicitly says that Gentiles have inherited, they are the heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, which means that the church is Israel in some sense, the church is the people of God, and so are Jews. There's no Israel church distinction anymore, at least in some sense, because Paul is very explicit there in Galatians 3, specifically verses 26 to 29. This would make sense then that Paul doesn't mention the land in Galatians 3 because the land was already fulfilled, and then Israel's later history, when they become apostate, they sent it away. They lose it because Leviticus 26 and lots of passages in Deuteronomy had specifically said that the condition for being in the land, the condition for possessing the land, is absolute loyalty to Yahweh. You can't go worship other gods or else you're going to get sent into exile. That's exactly what happened. So the side who would look at all this and say, the kingdom was fulfilled. It was sent away, and that's why Paul doesn't mention it. And what Paul does mention in Galatians 3 is that the Gentiles are heirs of Abrahamic covenant. We're all the children of Abraham now. The church is Israel. We don't need to look for any sort of physical earthly kingdom like a millennium out there anymore because the promises have been fulfilled. It's just too bad that Israel sinned the land element away but who cares anyway, because now, if all the Gentiles are part of the people of God and the church is in some sense Israel, hey, the globe, the entire planet is kingdom turf, not just this little strip the size of New Jersey, so what what's the big deal? Of course the other side, sort of in popular evangelicalism, you see this a lot, the left behind view, if you want to call it that, to be more charitable, a pre-millennial view traditionally would say well, the land element has not been fulfilled yet and it's still out there. We can't expect this until we see the return of the Lord and we get a millennium. Well, here's where Tyre and Sidon become important. Kallai's article will give you the reasons why the answer is yes. Tyre and Sidon fell within the boundaries of the Promised Land and, here's the kicker, if you go back and look at the dimensions of Solomon's kingdom, they do not include Tyre and Sidon. So Tyre and Sidon, Phoenicia, was outstanding. It was not turf brought under the kingship of Solomon. In fact, Solomon had a good relationship with Hiram of Tyre. Hiram of Tyre was the guy who'd given materials and personnel to build the temple. So they were not under the dominion of Solomon's kingdom, and so somebody could look at that and say, well, look, the kingdom really wasn't fulfilled in the Old Testament. Therefore, it should still be out there. It doesn't really address to the question why Paul doesn't bring it up. There would be an argument from silence. Paul doesn't bring it up because it still hasn't been fulfilled yet, even though Israel and the church are in some sense six of one half dozen of the other. The land promise is still out there and there we go. So your two views of eschatology are actually linked to this question, and here with this reference to Phoenicia, it's interesting and important that Luke in Acts specifically mentions Phoenicia as being part of the immediate landmass, being absorbed into and by the kingdom of God. So you have to deal with that, too, in your discussion of prophecy and your understanding of, is it a millennium or not, or something else. Phoenicia very specifically here is being

reclaimed. This is why it's mentioned. It's linked back to what exploded back in Acts chapter 2. So that it's a good illustration, too, that there's a lot to think about when it comes to this whole prophecy discussion. The whole question of the Promised Land, what is it with the boundaries, is so complicated that's why I like to say anybody who tells you they've got this all figured out and they put it in a neat box and tie little bow on it and say give money to my TV ministry now and whatever, just ignore them, because it's amazingly complicated. It is not an easy thing to unravel. And there are ambiguities, there are things that could go either way when it comes to how we understand if the covenant was fulfilled or sent away or still in effect and how it's tied to the land, how that's tied to the second coming. It's just complicated, so don't be deceived by easy answers to things. So have a look at that article. It's a technical article but I think if you are into this question, the whole issue of the promise land and what that means in the New Testament context, you'll find that article interesting. Let's move on to, I'm going to skip the last few verses of chapter 11. It's the first mention of Agabus. He gives a prophecy about a famine in the world that does happen, so I think that's in there because that confirms that Agabus is speaking for God and he's going to show up later in Paul's life in a pretty important way, but we'll wait until we get to that portion of Paul's life, to get back to him, to get back to Agabus. So let's go to, I should comment on, before I leave that, let's go back here to verse 18. This comment about 'then to the Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life' and this whole thing about verse 26, 'in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.' For those of you who are language geeks, there's actually a controversial verb form going on here in that little line, the disciples were first called Christians. The word called there is an aorist active form. But if you look at the translation, and the translation makes sense, the disciples were called, it's translated as a passive. And so Greek scholars love to bicker over this. They say, well, that's not a good translation. We can't really, what's the line trying to say? If it was a passive form, it would be obvious. They were called by someone else outside Christians, someone external to them. This is kind of for the language geeks, like I said. There is something in language called an intransitive active and you can translate those passively. Josephus actually has this same verb form in relationship to people being called something, and even he also mentions Christians in his writing. So a passive translation is legitimate but here's the one thing I want to add. There are those who think, and if you know a little bit of Greek or English grammar really well, who think that the form could also be a middle and you would translate it this way, if that's the case. 'In Antioch, the disciples first called themselves Christians,' in other words, representatives of the messiah. What does it really matter? Well, it doesn't really matter a whole lot for interpretation. The reason it's brought up here is that apparently Christians are becoming so numerous, and, again, most of them up to this point are Jews, that either they themselves were someone else, the larger community has to invent the term, has to coin a term to distinguish Jews who followed Jesus, we're going to call them Christians now. They have to be distinguished from the rest of the Jews because the numbers are swelling to such an extent that a label is needed. Whether that label comes from inside the community, they called themselves that, or outside, not a great deal of importance there, but again, it's a good illustration of how language, it is tricky. It could matter but I came across that and I thought I'd throw that one in for people whom I've had MEMRA's course in Greek. It's another little interesting thing to sort of park on and see what the options are and if it matters or not. So let's run into Acts chapter 12 here. This is where James is killed and Peter's in prison. There could be two things I want to park on here. Verse 1 in Acts 12,

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. **[MSH: Now this is not Herod of Jesus' day. He's already dead. This is Herod Agrippa and not the previous Herod the Great.]** ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

MSH: Now the rest of the story you probably know. Peter's in prison and he's going to get released, rescued by an Angel, so let's just read a few verses of that.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." **[MSH: So hewre you have an instance where an angel is in physical form. This goes beyond the visual. This is a corporeal form because he hits Peter on the side. He has to wake him up.]** And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

MSH: So then what does he do? You remember the story?

¹² When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"

MSH: And we know the rest of the story, where Peter keeps knocking. They finally go out and look and it's him. What is this line about, it's his angel? Well, it's kind of interesting but there

are a few references in rabbinic texts. There's an account in the book of Tobit, in the Apocrypha. There's something in the Shepherd of Hermas, which is an early Church writing about certain beliefs connected to this passage. And specifically, Judaism believed in protecting and guiding angels, the guardian angel thing. We get this from places like Psalm 91:11, so there's Old Testament precedent for this, which says, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone." Now that's the passage that is brought up to Jesus during his temptation by Satan. If you actually look in the passage, it's not totally restricted to the Messiah. It's broader than that, and so there was this belief within Judaism because of this verse, that there were Guardian Angels assigned to people. Matthew 18:10 says the same thing. We get this in the New Testament where Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven." Again, it's a guardian angel concept. Hebrews 1:14 says something similar, where the writer remarks about angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" So in both Testaments, there's this sense of guardian angelships, so that could be the referent to what the people at Mary's house are saying. Look, it's not really Peter. It's his guardian angel, which raises the question, wouldn't you want to see that? They don't really think they're going to see it. They think it's a disembodied voice and making sounds, that kind of thing, which sort of begins to sound like what we think of as ghosts and whatnot, and that is actually come into play in a little bit here in a moment. One of the views could be that this is what's going on in their heads. They think it's not really Peter. It's his guardian angel. It's this angel assigned to him. Now there are other texts. There were rabbinic texts based on their interpretation of certain passages in the Old Testament where you have the notion that a spirit being assigned to a person is for all practical purposes a double, like a heavenly double, a celestial double. So it's the idea that you have out there, your guardian angel, it looks like you or is your double. This is the way certain things were interpreted and the text I'm thinking of is something called Genesis Rabbah, which is a commentary on Genesis 33:10 in the Hebrew Bible, that's one of the Jacob incidents and I'll read you verse 10, Genesis 33:10.

Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me."

MSH: Now this is what Jacob says to Esau. And so certain rabbis looked at this verse and presumed on the basis of this verse that there is an idea lurking behind this. When Jacob says to Esau, it was like looking in the face of God or the face of an Elohim, they gather from that that you can say, that you can teach, that for each person, the physical you saw there was also a celestial, a spiritual, a heavenly Esau, a double in effect, this is angel assigned to this person kind of thing. And the rabbis would wax eloquent on this idea based on certain texts. There are other references to the idea. I'm just sort of bring it up right now, but that could also be lurking behind this reference in Acts 12. In other words, instead of when they said, hey, it's his angel, it's not really him, it's his angel. It could mean that it's his guardian angel. It could also mean that not only is it his guardian angel, but it's in effect a double. Now that presumes that she had seen something, but she hasn't yet because she has an open the door, but it's part of this idea that the guardian angel looks like you. It's essentially your double or, again, this is typically the way we

think of as ghosts, it could be that they believe Peter's dead, that he's been killed, and the fact that this double, this guardian angel is showing up at the door means that he has died. And so that his spirit, his double, his ghost, and whatnot, the spiritual being that corresponds to him has now come to the door and this is essentially what they're supposed to think, the message they're supposed to take away. Now eventually, they go out because she's persistent. It's almost like they don't want look because they don't want Peter to be dead. They don't want to know what they think has happened to have actually been the case. But she keeps it up. The little girl will not let them go, and, probably a teenager, preteen, something like that, and eventually they go out to look and it's him. So they were wrong, but it's just a real interesting insight into how first century Jews and take note folks, these are believers. These are not cultists. These are not people who are into esoteric practices. These are not the ghost hunters. They're believers. They're serious about their faith. But this is part of their worldview. Ghosts, in effect, are part of this worldview. Now I've blogged a good bit about the Old Testament distinction between evil spirits, they can be contacted by mediums, and the spirits of the departed dead. Now either way, you're not supposed to contact beings on the other side, whether they're evil spirits or they just happen to be the disembodied human dead. You're not supposed to do that. I've put this paper on my website before and I think I even still sell it on a site, even though you get it free in other ways because I'm just not on top of that. But I have a whole paper on the Old Testament response to pagan divination. And the paper's about the fact that there some things that are condemned. In Deuteronomy 18, the profits actually do and they're not condemned for it. There are other things, of course, that they don't do. This is actually in that list. They are forbidden and they never attempt to contact the dead. And the rationale is that you don't do that because it works. You can be deceived by what you contact. You can be deceived by what communicates with you. You could potentially even be harmed. So God wants to control the flow of information. If you want that paper, you could e-mail me. I can send it. I'll probably just end up sending it to Trey now that I've mentioned it so that you can download it there. But again, this part of their worldview and so going back to 1 Samuel 28 when we actually see this happen in the Old Testament, when Saul approaches the medium at Endor and says, hey I need to talk to Samuel. And she gets freaked out either because she'd been faking it before or it never really worked before. We don't really know. We're not told, but when she calls up Samuel, and she says, I see an Elohim coming up out of the earth, and Saul says, well, what does he look like, and she describes him, yup that's him. And then they have a conversation, Saul and the disembodied Samuel, and the content of that conversation was something only Samuel would know because it contains information from God for Saul that's going to be a bad news for him or really repeat it again. But the point is that this kind of thing is part of both the Old Testament and the New Testament worldview. It has a place in the supernatural worldview of Orthodox faithful worshipers of Yahweh and believers, Christians. Nobody stands up here in Acts 11 and the writer doesn't make any editorial comment like, well, you should have asked questions like that, or that's forebotten to talk about that. We don't talk about ghosts here. We don't do any of this. They don't do that. It's just part of their worldview. It's based upon certain things in the Testaments, certain things in intertestamental writings and, of course, later literature, the rabbinic literature, is going to get into this, too. So I wanted to bring that up because I do get questions about this periodically. So here you have a glimpse. You have a glimpse in this passage where stuff like this is actually in your Bible. You don't get a lot of it but you do get some of it and you can draw certain conclusions. I'll give you a little bit of evidence here. I've never

personally had a situation like this but I've had two pastors and other people I know that are serious Christians tell me that they have encountered ghosts. And not like evil spirits, but deceased loved ones, people they knew in their church. And even a pastor who had died basically come back, show up, and in one case the guy showed up at his own funeral, and it was a message of comfort. It wasn't anything sinister. It wasn't anything revelatory, like, oh, we need to add to our Bibles now because of my experience. It's nothing like that. It's just, they show up, people are comforted, and that's the end of the story. Again, I think in a biblical worldview that can happen. God can permit that to happen. It was part of the worldview of the biblical times by people who are theologically serious, not nut cases. They're not doing occult stuff. It's just normal to them. It's not something that they have no category for. They do have a category for it. I think we can just learn something from that. And so if you or maybe somebody you trust, that you believe has high integrity, tells you one of these stories, don't just say, you were contacted by an evil spirit. You have to listen to the story to be able to rule that out or whatever, even in your own case or someone else's case but don't just go there because your tradition doesn't have a category for this. There is a category for this in Scripture.

TS: Alright. Well, I can admit that I've had an encounter when I was 18 so I know for a fact, I mean I don't even question it because of my encounter. Briefly, it was when I was going to college. I didn't know what I wanted to do. Very stressful for me to the point of I was mentally broke down because I was all by myself on the campus. My mom went to go ask some questions. I'm all by myself. The night before, my mom and I prayed for peace and guidance or whatnot, and out of the middle of nowhere, there was a man sitting next to me. Now I would not have cried in front of anybody else. I just would not have done it but I was by myself. In the middle of nowhere, this older gentleman said, hey, are you okay? He was sitting there leaning against the wall, reading a book, was not there before. I mean, not there. And he looked like he'd been there the whole time. I had a conversation about what I wanted to be and do and just in the middle of a conversation, I can't describe it, but a sense of peace came over me that every ounce of despair, sadness and fear that I had in my body was gone. And the tears stopped. I just had a sign of relief. I figured out what it wanted to do and even my mom came out and saw the guy and was like, who was that. I was like, I don't know. And then later, years later, did I not connect the dots and say that has, he was not there. And in remembering how I felt, I think for me, it was an encounter. It was life-changing.

MSH: You read all the time, too, about the typical guardian angel story. People break down in the middle of nowhere. They turn around. There's this guy there. There's a truck there. It wasn't there before, and then it's not there. There's no tracks going anywhere. I look at it this way. Not only do I think it is a biblical category for this kind of thing, but I think you have to be deeply, deeply cynical to say that everybody in the world who's ever reported this is lying. You've just got to be beyond what the normal mental processes for cynicism are at that point.

TS: And there's no gain for my story. I wish I could share the feeling, and how I know it's 100% is just the, to be able to be in despair and immediately be lifted in peace, it's only a feeling that you can feel. You can't describe it. It doesn't do it justice. You have to go through it, and such a powerful thing emotionally to go through that nothing I can do, say, or articulates that's going to

translate into, it was powerful, and it is just pure peace. That's what it was. I don't even doubt it. I don't even question it.

MSH: Yeah, I used one of these as sort of a, I didn't follow the details of it, but I sort of use it in my stories as a template in the Portent, where, I have to be careful here. I know there are going to be people who haven't read the book. But there's a scene in the book where there are two people relating to Brian and Melissa, and some other people, sort of an event that changed the direction of their lives in a significant way and it had an immediate application or are paying dividends to the that specific scene in the book, where they had an appearance and then they were given direction very specifically. I used something that happened to my parents for that scene and I can tell you the story with my parents because I'm not giving anything away here. It was just a template. But when my dad's dad died, and this is a guy, this was not a good guy in a number of ways, and I, as a teenager, as a new believer, had witnessed to him a couple times, told him the gospel. He actually went to a church all his life. He was the 33rd degree Mason. So who knows what's going on in the guy's head and in his heart when it comes to thinking clearly about spiritual things. But anyway, I know he had heard the gospel before. When he was just prior to his death, they had them home. He was a bedridden, could not communicate, was conscious but you really didn't know how lucid he was. I went to see him for the last time and then, we were all living in different locations, so I left. Shortly after that, he died and I went back for the funeral, and a few days later, I got a call from my mom and dad. They had since gone home. They lived in Maryland. This was all in Pennsylvania at the time. And they say we just wanted to tell you something because I'm the theology guy. I'm the one everyone tells these stories to, and I'm supposed to have answers or supposed to be able to explicate these things. And they said, we were lying in bed and they had a clock in their bedroom. This would've been in the 80s, late 80s. It was one of these clocks that would talk and it would say things like it's eight o'clock, get out of bed. It wasn't of the Batman and Robin one which I had as a kid. It was something a little more sophisticated than that. But there were a limited number things this could say, just according to its programming. And my mom and dad said, we were laying in bed, thinking about the events of the last few days, and the clock said to them, everything is okay okay okay. And that was something that my grandfather just said. It was one of his little quips. He said it all the time, and my dad said, when they heard that, it just freaked them out. My dad looked at my mom and said did you hear that? And my mom said, yeah. They both heard it, so they got up. They took the clock out. They put it in a box. Put it away on a shelf somewhere. The clock left the room, but they thought about it and they thought, well, was that his way or God's way of saying everything is okay? So it helped them, comfort them. I'm not taking any doctrine from it. I'm not even taking any certain conclusions about his eternal destiny from it. I'm just telling you this is my parents and they have no reason to make this up. And they both heard it simultaneously, so it's not like one was dreaming that.

TS: And the next day the clock was back in its original spot right?

MSH: No the clock was history after that.