

## ACTS CHAPTER 12

### IMPRISONMENT AND DELIVERANCE

#### Acts 12:1-11

"About this time Herod the king began to take hostile action to inflict injury on certain men of the Church. He killed James, John's brother, with the sword. When he saw that this gave pleasure to the Jews he went to arrest Peter too. (These were the days of unleavened bread). When he had seized Peter, he put him under arrest. He handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard, for he wished to bring him before the people after the Passover Feast. So Peter was continuously guarded in prison. Prayer to God for him was earnestly offered by the Church. On the night before Herod was going to bring him before the people, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by two chains; and guards kept continuous watch before the door. Now, look you, the Angel of the Lord stood by and a light shone in the house. He struck Peter's side and wakened him and said, 'Rise quickly.' The chains fell from his hands. The angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' He did so. He said to him, 'Wrap your cloak round about you and follow me.' So he went out and followed him. And he did not know that what was happening through the angel was real but thought that he was seeing a vision. They went through the first and the second guard and they came to the iron door that led into the city and it opened to them of its own accord. They went out and proceeded along one street; and thereupon the angel left him. When Peter had recovered his faculties he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and rescued me from the fate that the people of the Jews looked forward to for me.'"

A new wave of persecution broke out instigated by King Herod.

Targeted church leaders

HEROD'S

1<sup>st</sup> in NT: Herod the Great - reigned from about 41 B.C. to 1 B.C.

He was in power when Jesus was born, Matt 2  
He met with the Wise Men from the East  
He massacred the children.  
Was married ten times.  
Family mentioned in NT

(i) Herod Philip the First.

1<sup>st</sup> husband of the Herodias (she had John the Baptist killed)  
Called Philip in Matt.14:3; Mk.6:17; Lk.3:19.  
Had no official office.  
He was the father of Salome.

(ii) Herod Antipas.

The ruler of Galilee and Peraea.  
2<sup>nd</sup> husband of Herodias  
Consented to the death of John the Baptist.  
The Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial (Lk.23:7ff.).

(iii) Archelaus.

Ruler of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea.  
Thoroughly a bad ruler  
Was deposed and banished.  
He is mentioned in Matt.2:22.

(iv) Herod Philip the Second.

He was ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis.  
He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi which was called after him.  
Is called Philip and is mentioned in Lk.3:1.

(v) Herod the Great had another son called Aristobulus;

His mother was Mariamne, a princess who was descended from the great Maccabean heroes.  
He was murdered by his own father  
He had a son called **Herod Agrippa who is the Herod of our present passage in Ac.12.**

(vi) Herod Agrippa I was the father of

(a) Agrippa the Second, before whom Paul was examined and before whom he made his famous speech (Ac.25--26).

(b) Bernice, who appeared with him when Paul was under examination.

(c) Drusilla, who was the wife of Felix, the governor before whom Paul was tried (Ac.24:24).

Herod Agrippa I of this chapter was a direct descendant of the Maccabees through his mother Mariamne.

He had been educated at Rome

Herod Agrippa was brought up in Rome with Caligula and Claudis.

On the accession of Caligula to the empire, he obtained from him the dominions of this uncles, Philip and Herod Antipas - Batanaea, Tachonitis, and Auranitis (after the death of Philip); Galilee and Peraea (on the banishment of Antipas to Gaul); and Abilene with the title of the King.

On the accession of Claudius he was further invested with the sovereignty of Samaria and Judea; thus having at length all the dominions over which his grandfather (Herod the Great) had reigned, and from which he derived an immense revenue.

He lived for 30 years in Rome; boon companion in every kind of vice of the son of the emperor.

He also had Jewish interests.

He interceded when Caligula wanted to set up an image of himself in the Temple; Agrippa did try to persuade him not to!

He sedulously cultivated the good graces of the Jewish people by meticulously keeping the Law and all Jewish observances.

For these reasons he was popular with the people;

It was no doubt in order to achieve further popularity with the orthodox Jews that he decided to attack the Christian Church and its leaders.

This particular wave of persecution was not due to any man's principles, however misguided; it was due simply to Herod's bid to gain popular favour with the people.

## **The martyrdom of James**

***1) It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2) He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.***

James is the first of the twelve who followed Jesus to be martyred.

When we come to chapter 12, the church has been on a "hot streak," experiencing one exciting conversion after another.

Saul of Tarsus,

the Gentile centurion Cornelius,

the mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch.

But in chapter 12, the opposition to the church begins again

James was not the first Christian to die for the Lord

James was one of the special intimates of Jesus, often mentioned with his brother John and with Peter (Matthew 17:1, 26:37, Mark 5:37, 9:2, 14:33; Luke 5:37, 9:2, 14:33).

Jesus had warned even these His closest followers; to be ready for persecution (Matthew 10:16-26).

In Mark 10:35-40, John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief lieutenants.

Jesus replied to them, You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they could.

Jesus promised them, You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized.

This was the fulfillment of that promise for James.

John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

Normally, "with the sword" means that James was beheaded.

It is interesting that there was no attempt to "replace" James as there was to replace Judas.

Antioch will now be the center of Christianity, not Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, as the headquarters of the Church, passes out of sight.

It appears only two more times:

Council regarding Gentile obligations (Ch 15); and

Paul's visit, compelled to seek Roman protection for his life (Chapters 21,22).

### **Peter is imprisoned by Herod**

***3) When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4) After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.***

Seeing his approval ratings rising in the polls when he kills James, Herod seeks to improve his ratings even more by killing Peter.

Saul of Tarsus persecuted out of sincere conviction,

Herod out of purely political motives.

Even his conduct in the arrest of Peter shows his desire to conciliate the Jews.

The Passover Feast was on Nisan 14th, for that day and the seven following no leaven must be used and the week was called "the days of unleavened bread."

During that time no trial or execution could be carried out and that is why Herod purposed to defer Peter's execution until the week was finished.

Three reasons for the delay in executing Peter:

(1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover;

(2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot;

(3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish leaders.

Knowing that Peter (with the other apostles) has mysteriously escaped from prison before (Acts 5:17-21), Herod assigns a high-security detail to guard Peter.

"Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled."

Quaternions: squads of four men each (third time for Peter).

"Easter" - Passover in the original.

## The church prays for Peter

**5) So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.**

Peter is in prison but there are two forces at work:

Kept in prison by Herod

Prayer made earnestly of the Church.

Herod has his soldiers and his prisons;

but the church has the power of prayer.

The outcome will be decided easily!

Which would you rather have?

Constant has the idea of earnest; literally,

the word pictures someone stretching out all they can for something.

Luke uses this same word 'ektenos' for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

The cause of the powerlessness of much of our prayer is betrayed by its lack of earnestness;

too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about.

Earnest prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God; but it demonstrates that our hearts care passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you (John 15:7).

It is also important to see that the church prayed to God; it may seem obvious, but often our prayers are weak because we are no consciously coming into the presence of our great and holy God, offering our requests to Him.

Notice how fervent the prayer of the church was; they are gathered together for prayer at a time when most everyone else would be asleep.

***Jam 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.***

## God sends an angel to free Peter from prison

**6) The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7) Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.**

**8) Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9) Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10) They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.**

**11) Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."**

Peter was guarded by four quaternions of soldiers.

A quaternion was a squad of four.

The day and the night were divided into four watches each three hours long.

Each squad consisting of four men, was on duty for three hours. Then off duty for nine hours and on duty again for three hours.

Normally a prisoner was chained by his right hand to his guard's left hand.

Peter was chained by both hands to a guard on each side of him.

The two remaining soldiers of the quaternion kept watch at the door.

Precautions could go no further. The chains, the guards, the prison doors mean nothing to God and His appointed messengers; Peter is instantly set free.

Peter shows no signs of anxiety; he is able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution.

**(Psalm 127:2**

**In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat--**

**for he grants sleep to those he loves.)**

Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening;

sense that God was doing something; the explanation could come later.

**Peter presents himself to the Christians who have been praying for him**

*12) When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13) Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14) When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"*

*15) "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."*

*16) But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17) Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.*

This Mary was the mother of the writer of the gospel of Mark.

Barnabas was her brother. (**Col 4:10**),

**Col. 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)**

This was probably the same upper room in Mary's house in Jerusalem that was used for the Last Supper and on the Day of Pentecost.

As we've seen Barnabas was also a man of substance (**Acts 4:37**) as evidenced by his great contribution that caused Ananias and Sapphira to get into trouble

The whole family must have been wealthy.

Mary's house must have been the headquarters of the Christian Church in Jerusalem.

After his escape from prison, when Peter found himself on the street and realized what had happened, that he was not dreaming, he went straight to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark.

Rhoda is so excited to hear Peter's voice, that she leaves him standing outside at the gate!

We too are often guilty of having far too little faith.

These Christians; like ourselves, even while they are praying for Peter, find it hard to believe that God has actually answered their prayer.

The Jews believed in the idea of "guardian angels,"

When Rhoda rushes in and interrupts the prayer, claiming that Peter is at the door, the 'believers' explain it away by saying it's just his angel.

- o Why would they believe this? Why would they even say it?
- o And why would they not get excited by it, if it were true?
- o And, if it were Peter's guardian angel – if he had one at all – why would the angel have left Peter to go to the prayer meeting without Peter.

We will often create an absurd explanation for what we don't believe in spite of the evidence before us.

These early believers were apparently so used to angels, they didn't even bother to get up and check it out.

The early Church seemed to have an awareness that angels were always around.

We've lost that awareness. Our eyes have become dull.

This story shows that the Lord responds to prayer even when it's not accompanied by a great deal of faith.

*Mat 17:17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He \*said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, **if you have faith the size of a mustard seed**, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]*

*Mat 21:21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, **if you have faith and do not doubt**, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. 22 **"And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."***

These believers were praying fervently and intensely, but you cannot say they were praying the prayer of faith since they didn't even have enough faith to believe Peter was free when he was knocking at their gate!

Alot of times when I pray I'm not sure anything's going to happen and I don't really expect things to happen..

God can still work through a tiny smattering of faith.

Sometimes it takes only enough faith to pray, for a miracle to happen.

Peter himself would later write these words:

***For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. I Peter 3:12***

When it looked like it was going to be his last night on Earth Peter could sleep because he believed that in spite of his circumstances the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous.

As a result Peter had peace.

The ears of the Lord are open to prayer, that's why the Church could pray for such an audacious thing.

But, the face of the Lord is against evil which is why Herod was about to die.

In verse 17 Peter tells the believers gathered in Mary's house in prayer to go contact James and the other brothers. Since Herod was attacking the church leadership they were probably in hiding.

The James Peter is referring to is not the same James who was just martyred by Herod.

This would have been James, the half brother of Jesus, who by this time was also a believer and was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.

The brothers referred to were probably Jesus other brothers and not necessarily other believers as we call other believers brother.

***Mat 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?***

In the East it would have been the natural thing for the next brother to take on the work of an elder brother who had been killed; but from the gospels we learn that:

Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (**John 7:5**)

They actually thought him mad (**Mark 3:21**).

During his lifetime James was not a supporter of Jesus.

After Jesus rose from the dead he made a special appearance to James (**1 Cor.15:7**).

Peter then left them and went to some other unnamed place.

This is the last time Luke speaks of Peter in the Book of Acts

We know that later, Peter would:

meet with Paul in Antioch (**Galatians 2:11-14**), and

that he would write in two letters that we know as First and Second Peter.

### **The soldiers who guarded Peter are executed**

***8) In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. 19) After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.***

After it was discovered that Peter had escaped, the soldiers were questioned about the escape.

The search was carried out in an attempt to find Peter who by this time had departed for the unnamed place. He could not be found

Because the search did not result in Peter's recapture, his guards were led away to be executed in Peter's place.

If a criminal escaped, the law stated that his guard must suffer the penalty that the prisoner himself would have suffered.

This is why the Roman guard in Philip I was going to fall on his sword after the earthquake thinking that Paul and Silas had escaped. He intended to take his own life rather than suffer the fate of the prisoners he was in charge of.

## A TERRIBLE END

### Acts 12:20-25

**"Herod was furious with the people of Tyre and Sidon. But they came to him with a common purpose. They gained the ear of Blastus the king's chamberlain and sued for peace because their country was dependent for its sustenance on the king's territory. Upon an agreed day Herod put on his royal robes and seated himself on a throne and made a speech to them. The people cried out, 'It is the voice of a God and not of a man.' Immediately the angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God. And he was eaten with worms and died. The word of God increased and was multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their errand of mercy, and they took with them John who was surnamed Mark."**

There was there was some problem or disagreement between Herod and the people of Tyre and Sidon.

The issue must have been a serious matter because it infuriated Herod.

Tyre and Sidon were located in northern Palestine.

Herod could make things very difficult for them in two key ways.

He could direct trade from Palestine away from their ports. The revenue loss would be serious.

Even worse, Tyre and Sidon were dependent upon Palestine for their food supply. If these supplies were cut off their situation would be serious indeed.

The people of Tyre and Sidon banded together and succeeded in gaining the ear of Blastus, the king's chamberlain. In time, a public audience before Herod in the amphitheater was arranged.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes how, on the second day of the festival, Herod entered the theatre clad in a robe of silver cloth. The sun glistened on the silver and as Herod began to speak the people cried out that he was a god come among them.

Herod of course being carried it did not refuse their praise nor did he give glory to the true God

Herod was struck with a sudden and terrible illness from which he never recovered.

Do not assume that worms actually began to eat Herod's flesh right then and there in front of a crowd.

Josephus' actual words are:

"Herod was at Caesarea, presiding over the games in honor of Caesar. On the second day of the games, Agrippa entered at daybreak, clothed in a robe of silver, on which the rays of the morning sun were alighting, he appeared as if all irradiated with glory; numerous voices saluted him as a god; and on his making an oration to them they shouted, 'We have taken thee for a man, but henceforth we recognize in thee a god!' The king rebuked them not, nor showed any displeasure at this impiety; he saw an owl perched on a rope over his head, and immediately, taking this for an ill omen, he was filled with remorse, and was seized with violent pain in his bowels, exclaiming to his friends, 'Your god is already come to his life's end, and he who you saluted immortal is going to away to die.' To such a height did the pain rise that he had to be carried hastily into the palace, where, after 5 days torture, he expired in his 54th year."

Historical documents indicate that during the autopsy of Herod's body, his insides were found to be full of worms.

We can't be sure whether the worms ate him from inside out, or from outside in — either way, it was gross!

The Lord doesn't tell us this to gross us out. He tells us this to fill us in, for I believe the purpose of this account is to teach us the absolute necessity of giving God glory.

Interestingly, Herod's grandfather, Herod the Great, died of the same horrible disease.



**But the work of God continues without hindrance**

**24) But the word of God continued to increase and spread.**

**25) When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John also called Mark.**

**Acts 12:24-25** take us back to where **Acts .11:27-30** left off.

Paul and Barnabas had fulfilled their errand of mercy from the church at Antioch to the Church at Jerusalem and have now returned the 300 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch, taking John Mark to Antioch. (Mary's son and Barnabas Matthew) with them.

In Mark chapter 14 -- the gospel written by John Mark largely based on Peter's input -- Mark makes reference to an event in the Garden of Gethsemane the other Gospels do not mention.

**Mar 14:51 And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: 52 And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.**

Most Bible scholars believe the John Mark is talking about himself as the young man who slipped out of bed at Passover night and followed Jesus and the disciples to Gethsemane where he witnessed Jesus arrest. It is believed that Jesus and the disciples and celebrated at Passover feast in John Mark's home -- his mother Mary's house.

Paul uses the same style of speaking in the third person when he talks about being caught up to heaven in Second Corinthians chapter 12.

**2Co 12:1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) 4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.**

Paul's experience probably coincides with the time he spent in Arabia.

**End of the First half of Acts (Peter's half)!**

<b>Similarities:</b>	<b>Peter</b>	<b>Paul</b>
First Sermon	2	13
Lame man healed	3	14
The Sorcerer	Simon, 8	Elymas, 13
Influence	shadow, 5	handkerchief, 19
Laying on hands	8	19
Worshiped	10	14
Raised	Tabitha, 10	Eutychus, 20
Imprisoned	12	28

Chapters 1-12: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

Chapters 13-28: Uttermost part of the earth.