

Acts Chapter Twelve

Acts 12:1-5

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

- Herod the King: This is Herod Julius Agrippa/ Agrippa I—son of Aristobulus—one of many sons of Herod the Great—half brother of Herod Antipas-- mentioned in the gospels. Agrippa II shows up in Acts 25-26.
- Herod—earthly king of the Jews—threatened by true King of the Jews.
- This family is in continual enmity with God.
- Mistreat: to vex—brutal and unfeeling
- James: brother to John—one of the two sons of Zebedee—inner circle of 3 who were with Jesus (as opp. to James the son of Alpheus or James the brother of Jesus). Consider Mk 10:35-40
- Put to death with sword—beheaded
- Transition of focus and leadership begins to take place in this chapter (the 12 are mentioned less—less said about Peter—James the brother of the Lord takes on greater leadership).
- Passover—time to celebrate God's deliverance from slavery—this is when Peter is seized and placed in bonds.
- Passover—time when church is celebrating the Resurrection (one leader dies—one is set free—familiar scenario).
- Until now—persecution of the church has been through religious rulers (Saul/Sadducees). Now it extends to the realm of government.
- Fervent prayer—same word used: ektenos—to describe prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane.

Acts 12:6-10

And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in

the cell; and he struck Peter's side and roused him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him.

- An angel—not The Angel—referring to the preincarnate manifestation of Christ in the OT.
- Something so extraordinary is taking place—that a natural response is completely altered.
- Specific direction given by angel—acted upon by Peter—deliverance is secured.
- Multiple step process accomplished—required multiple stages of obedience.

Acts 12:11-17

And when Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. And 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." But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

- All believers were not in the same place
- There is no information given for where Peter goes to get away
- Story is retold with enough bloopers that we know it is not invented.
- Peter will meet up later with Paul in Antioch—Gal 2:11-14

Acts 12:18-19

Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers *as to* what could have become of Peter. And when Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away *to execution*. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

- Church will benefit from Herod leaving the city
- Herod—cruel/cold-hearted—executes guards to communicate to world that he does not believe that escape is due to an act of God.

Acts 12:20-25

Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and *began* delivering an address to them. And the people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with *them* John, who was also called Mark.

- Crowd came from Tyre and Sidon—reliant on King Herod for provision (the famine prophesied in last chapter has not fully developed yet—it will take place under Claudius).
- Crowd—listening to Herod's speech—proclaim his deity.
- I John 2:18—a good description of Herod
- Isaiah 42:8 fulfilled
- This ends the second period in the Book of Acts

Acts Chapter Twelve—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

Read Isaiah 14:4-21. How is the outcome for the king of Babylon (a 'type' of satan) similar to Herod?

Dig:

- 1) How does Herod persecute the church?
- 2) What is the motivation for persecution of believers?
- 3) What do you know about the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Why was it celebrated?
- 4) How many soldiers were tasked with guarding Peter? Why so many?
- 5) What events in this chapter are supernatural/miraculous?
- 6) Why does the church do in the midst of this time of persecution?
- 7) What happens when Peter disappears?
- 8) What activities are angels accomplishing in this chapter?
- 9) Who is the companion to Saul and Barnabas in chapter 12?

10) What is the outcome of arrogance in Herod's life?

Discuss:

- 1) When is the church most likely to gather in fervent prayer? Have you participated in one of these times?
- 2) Are there ways we limit our prayers to ask for what is only humanly possible?
- 3) How is power exercised in this chapter? Who has it? How is power manifested in the church today?

Point of Prayer:

As a small group—spend time offering fervent prayer for someone held in bondage to something or someone.

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) Where is the church being persecuted in the world today?
- 2) What is the response of the church to this heightened level of persecution?
- 3) When do you become fervent in your prayer life?

- 4) Has God ever surprised you with the way He answered one of your prayers?
- 5) How do you 'watch' as you pray?
- 6) Share a miraculous outcome from a time of prayer.
- 7) Do you anticipate angelic help for the church today? Have you heard any stories about miraculous help?