

## **Acts Chapter 12**

**12:1 "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth [his] hands to vex certain of the church."**

“Herod the king”: Herod Agrippa I reigned from A.D. 37-44 and was the grandson of Herod the Great. He ran up numerous debts in Rome and fled to Palestine. Imprisoned by Emperor Tiberius after some careless comments, he eventually was released following Tiberius’ death, and was made ruler of northern Palestine, to which Judea and Samaria were added in A.D. 41.

As a hedge against his shaky relationship with Rome, he curried favor with the Jews by persecuting Christians.

“Herod Agrippa”, referred to only as Herod, nephew of Herod Antipas, and brother of Herodias (Matt. 14:1-11). Agrippa was schooled in Rome but lived as a prodigal both in Rome and Palestine. When his friend Caligula became emperor in A.D. 37, Agrippa received the title of king and part of Palestine to rule.

When Antipas requested the same honor, he was deposed and Agrippa received his realm. Shortly afterward he was given all of Palestine. He is mentioned only in Acts 12 when he beheaded James and intended to do the same to Peter. But God intervened and it was Herod Agrippa who died violently under God’s judgment.

Three of Agrippa’s children are mentioned in Scripture: Drusilla (24:24), Bernice, and Agrippa II (who alone is referred to as Agrippa in Scripture – 25:13).

“About that time”, during which the famine occurred, “Herod” Agrippa I, king of Palestine, and grandson of Herod the Great, began persecuting the “church.” According to Josephus’s reckoning, this was shortly before the closing events of (chapter 11), because Agrippa died in A.D. 44 (see the note on 25:13).

We see here, that the opposition to the church has gone violent. About that time means about the time Saul and Barnabas were preaching together, and about the time the followers of Jesus started to be called Christians. This Herod is Herod Agrippa probably. He ruled over Judea and Samaria at the time this happened.

Verses 2-4: James’s death is the first and only apostolic martyrdom recorded in Scripture. Herod intended to make “Peter” the second martyr and took extreme measures to secure his imprisonment, leaving four soldiers to guard him at all times. Though “Easter” does communicate correctly the time of year, the Greek word must be translated “Passover.”

To this point , the apostles of Jerusalem are favored by the “people” of Israel and resisted only by the council the official religious authority in the city.

His reign is characterized by conflict , violence and caprice.

Luke does not make clear why James is beheaded and why Herod is condemning the apostles and the church. This is the first death of one of the 12. James the brother of John one of the sons of Zebedee.

We have no record of James being replaced. However we do have a record of James the brother of Jesus takes a leadership role in the Jerusalem church.

Herod seizes Peter and puts him in prison.

He does this to please the Jews – they are pleased because of James’ beheading. So it seems secular authority is siding with the temple authority (Sanhedrin) for reasons we are not aware.

Peter is being treated like Jesus as a criminal.

Vvs 5-11

So therefore - marks the climactic scene of the drama.

The response to Herod’s action is fervent prayer. Is that a model for the world today?

Peter is bound with chains and sleeping between two guards. I guess if the person he is teaching about is raised from the dead and come back to life even from a blocked and guarded tomb, they are taking no chances with Peter.

Heaven is the answer and lo and behold an angel comes.

The angel and Peter are able to pass not only the guards but through a locked iron gate, which is miraculously open to them.

In the Greek there is a word play between iron gate and outer gate that shows how they get through one gate and out another, they get to the home of prayer where the community is gathered.

All this happens while Peter is in a daze. He thinks he is dreaming. He finally realizes that the “light” shone in his cell (the Lord rescued him).

The text really doesn’t make clear if the plan to bring Peter out was for malicious purpose or not, but if so it would make a turn from his public popularity.

VVS 12-17

Peter recovers his sensibility and goes to the house of Mary.

It is the truth of Acts. Believers gather with other believers for prayer.

The assumption is the community is unaware that their prayers for Peter are answered. So Peter is at Mary the mother of John Mark's house. She must have had some means as it is her home and she has a maid servant.

It is another tale of the woman (here Rhoda the maid) recognizing Peter for the first time and it is a tale of the first Christian woman in Acts, testifying to profound response to prayer.

Of course no one is sure she is telling truth.

It takes persistence from Peter and Rhoda to finally get them to come to the gate and open it.

Amazement is typically the result of a mistake in Acts.

James and the brothers have not yet been made aware of the story. Luke makes assumptions of his audience. He expects they know James is the brother of the Lord.

With Peter's departure and James arrival we get a shift in Spiritual authority.

Vvs 18-25

A new day dawns. Soldiers search for Peter and he is not to be found.

Of course this all signals a shift in public thinking. The people seem to have turned from the apostles, the 12 are no longer together, Herod is mighty and angry and kills the guards that let Peter escape.

Herod's tyranny makes him God's foe.

We don't know what triggers all of Herod's action but he is vile and inhospitable. He is opposed to God's message of love, charity and hope. Tyre and Sidon are free cities and depended on the kings food.

These representatives appear as witness to the difference between secular and sacred. The Antioch church from the same region offers support, charity and hope. God's church offers positive response to crisis.

Two events summarize the fallout from Peter's escape.

The death of Herod – worms and holy angel of death signify Holy terror. Herod's death and Peter's escape are much like the Passover event.

In contrast to Herod's death – the word of God continues to advance and gain adherents.