

Acts 12

Acts 11:29-30 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The next problem is the power of the state. As the church won influence among the Gentiles evermore widely extending itself ... it is inevitable that it would attract the attention of the civil authorities. This chapter relates the first conflict between state and church.

Acts 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth [*his*] hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

A comparison of the last verses of Acts 11 and Acts 12 suggests that Barnabas and Paul made that trip to Jerusalem with relief for the victims of the famine at about the time of these events in Acts 12 take place. This being in 44 AD, a date determined by the death of Herod Agrippa I. Herod had succeeded in putting together the whole domain of his grandfather Herod the Great, and had also been given the title of king by his friend Claudius. Herod was a staunch friend of the Jews and was no doubt influenced by the High Priest and rulers of the Jews to make the move to destroy Christianity.

He martyred James, seized and imprisoned Peter, planning to execute him publicly after the Passover holidays. Nowhere in the New Testament does the intervention of Almighty God on behalf of His church appear any more timely and dramatic than in this chapter. With their friend on the throne, the Jewish hierarchy decided to exterminate Christianity; and there was no reason why they could not have succeeded, except for the intervention of the Father in heaven.

When the earthly fortunes of the Christians seemed the most precarious, however, providential events took place with sudden finality, lifting the threat completely. At the precise instant when one apostle was already dead, another imprisoned and condemned, and the entire Twelve marked for death by an all-powerful ruler acting as a Jewish High Sheriff. King Herod Agrippa worked out the whole procedure, out of a desire to please the High Priest and Rulers of the Jews who helped him keep his subjected Jewish nation in line. At the very moment when everything looked hopeless ... God sent an angel to release Peter and shortly thereafter struck Agrippa dead. The event doomed secular Israel as a nation.

The Encyclopedia Britannica has this regarding Herod's death:

His sudden death in 44 A.D. ... at Caesarea during games in honor of Claudius was a disaster for Jewry, because with all his faults of sycophancy and ostentation he had successfully kept the balance between Rome and the Jews. Herod Agrippa had shown Rome that he could keep the Jews in subjection to Rome and himself and that the two could co-exist to the advantage of both. The Jews had forgotten:

Daniel 2:20-21 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

The Jews had, in the elevation of Herod Agrippa I, for Kingship achieved for them-selves tolerance and accommodation with Rome. Isn't it ironic that they should at the very same time, refuse so adamantly to extend the same tolerance and accommodation to Christian Jews? God thwarted their campaign against the Church of Christ, by the Divine summary execution of Herod, also in that same event God removed the one man who could have preserved the Jews

toleration by Rome. The final result of God sending an angel to destroy Herod Agrippa was realized some 25 years later when the Roman Army under Vespasian and later his son Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Thus making impossible the Worship of the Jews under the Old Testament sacrificial covenant system ... this event made way for only Spiritual New Testament Worship. The finger of God is clearly seen in this chapter.

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

In the year 41, the Emperor Claudius had added Judea and Samaria to Herod Agrippa's former dominions, so that, at this time, Herod ruled over all Palestine. While voluptuous, and exhibitionist in life he had none of the restraints of holiness, but he was a strict observer of the Jewish ceremonies, and hostile to Christianity, because it was subversive to Judaism.

"... to vex certain of the church." Some of its leaders

Acts 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

One of the three apostles most intimate with the Savior.

Now, James is killed while Peter is to be miraculously rescued.

James was allowed to be killed and the Apostles death is just reported with no details ... whereas the death of Stephen was given in full detail. Why is the death an ordinary member detailed and that of an Apostle meagerly reported?

People in the Book of Acts are detailed as each contributes to the whole history. Stephen's death was important in breaking the Gospel loose from its confines. James death says that no Christian, not even an Apostle, can expect to escape the normal hazards of life including man's hate for man.

Peter has important work to do. Each man's life is important as it relates to World Conquest and the progress of the Gospel.

Only seven words in the Greek, translated by eleven in English, recount the martyrdom of the first apostle; and such restraint by the Bible historian shows how different are the words of inspiration from those of ordinary writers. It should be noted that the New Testament records no appointment of a successor to James. Why? He is still an apostle and he is still "reigning over the twelve tribes of (spiritual) Israel" as Jesus promised ... cf:

Matthew 19: 27-28 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? 28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Death never removed an apostle. It was not death but transgression that removed Judas (Acts 1:25).

"... with the sword." He beheaded James. This James, the apostle, is to be distinguished from James, the brother of the Lord, whose name appears after this in Acts, and who also wrote the Epistle of James.

So one of the brothers James and John went to God the first, the other the last, of the apostles. This has been viewed by some as a kind of fulfillment of James and John's desire to sit "one on the right hand, the other on the left" of the Lord in his kingdom.

Mark 10: 35-39 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 36 And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 37 They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in

thy glory. 38 But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? 39 And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:

Acts 12:3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

“Then were the days of unleavened bread.” The Passover week cf: Exodus 12

Acts 12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put [*him*] in prison, and delivered [*him*] to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter (Passover) to bring him forth to the people.

“ ... to four quaternions (KWA-te-ni-ens) of soldiers.” Sixteen soldiers divided into four watches or guard posts, so that four would be on watch over Peter personally all the time. Two in the prison chained to Peter and two at the door ... 4 others at the first “ward” (gate) and 4 at the 2nd “ward” gate and four at the Iron door. These were Herod’s handpicked personal guards ... corrupt Herodians professional soldiers, who acted as muscle for the King’s ruling elite.

Herod was not about to repeat the mistakes of Jewish ruling elite: the Doctors of the Law, the Scribes, the Pharisees , and the Sadducees ... Herod was determined there would be no more episodes like that at the burial Tomb of Jesus where the Jews own hand-picked Levitical Temple guards had reported to the High Priest that they saw Angels and the resurrection of Jesus ... or that of Acts 5 where they imprison all the Apostles only to have them miraculously escape ... not to run away but to be found standing in the Temple the next day teaching the people ... and Saul their own chief prosecutor and high sheriff

changing sides ... Herod was determined these embarrassing magical mysteries would come to an end.

Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Webster and Wilkinson's Greek Testament declares that "The Greek intimates that it was constantly kept up, with prayers always going on." Thus it was a kind of perpetual prayer meeting that the church organized on behalf of Peter. The reason why this was not done for James, is he was executed almost as soon as he was arrested, giving no time for such an effort as this on behalf of Peter.

Acts 12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

"And when Herod would have brought him forth ..." To execution, probably on the day after the Passover week ended. The Jews thought that executions during this week were a desecration.

"Peter was sleeping . . . bound with two chains" The Roman method was adopted. He was chained to a soldier who slept on each side of him, while the other two soldiers of the watch stood before the prison door. These precautions were taken for fear of him disappearing as he had done while in the custody of the Jews.

Acts 12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon [*him*], and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from [*his*] hands.

The angel delivered the light of the word of God to Peter, cf:

Psalms 119:105 Thy word [*is*] a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path

He smote Peter on the side ... You older brethren will remember the way Pullman porters on passenger trains always awakened their sleeping guests in exactly the same manner as here, striking them gently on the side, through the curtains, there has never been a better way of waking a sleeping person without startling or frightening the sleeper. Thus, in a small infinitesimal detail such as this, one sees the internal evidence of the glorious truth of the word of God.

Acts 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

In other words, dress yourself. Peter had taken off his outer garments while he was sleeping, and his sandals were taken off. The garment to be put on was a cloak. There was no haste when God puts guards to sleep they don't wake up.

Acts 12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist (knew) not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

Peter thought he saw a vision or was dreaming a dream.

Everything seemed so strange that, Peter just awoken from sleep, was uncertain whether this was really real.

Acts 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward (gate), they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

“... past the first and second ward.” These were watches or guard post each manned by solders ... whom the Lord had put to sleep.

Peter did not stop following the angel until the iron gate opened and closed behind him. That gate took twenty-five men to open and close it. It was the gate of a fortress that was impregnable.

Acts 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and [*from*] all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Peter's deliverance was so fantastic and contrary to all natural things that he found it nearly impossible to believe it himself until he was out brought him to the full realization of what had happened

The only explanation of Peter's escape from prison is that of Luke in this chapter. The stupid and unreasonable conclusion by Herod that his own soldiers had released Peter was the only alternative to such a supernatural deliverance as actually occurred; and Herod's execution of his own guard proves only how determined that evil ruler was to deny the true explanation of Peter's escape. Not very long after this, God would deliver another message to Herod which he would find no way to deny.

Acts 12:12 And when he had considered [*the thing*], he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

This Mary was the mother of Mark, called in Acts both John and John Mark. Cf: Acts 13:5 & 13 Acts 15:39 . She was related to Barnabas cf: Colossians 4:10. Many were gathered together praying for Peter's deliverance.

The house of Mary was one among many such gatherings throughout the city. The church at this time numbered many thousands of faithful Christians. The choice of Mary's residence as the place where Peter went might have turned on the deep personal attachment of the apostle Peter to John Mark, after a long companionship with Peter, would write the apostle's gospel under the title of the Gospel of Mark.

Acts 12:13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

The scene that emerges here is one of affluence, if not wealth. Mary's house was large enough to contain a gathering for prayer meeting, having a courtyard and a gate attended by a servant. From Mary's example, we may conclude that there were many who had not sold all their possessions during those occasions mentioned earlier in Acts.

Acts 12:14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

It is of interest that there was no class distinction in the primitive church. This serving girl was as happy to see Peter as were any the others and, in her joy, she forgot to open the gate for him to enter.

Acts 12:15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

Some believe this verse proves that in the apostolic church the Christians believed that every Christian has a guardian angel.

The thinking of those who said this seems to be that "Since Herod has already killed Peter, it must be his personal angel who is knocking at the gate."

Acts 12:16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened [*the door*], and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter kept on knocking, however; and the stunned hearers finally let him in.

Acts 12:17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

An angel had acted as God's servant, therefore it was altogether correct to say that the Lord had done it.

“... unto James ...” This is not James the son of Zebedee, already slain by Herod in V2 but James the Lord's brother, one of the church leaders in the Jerusalem Church, and the author of the book of James.

Perhaps the other apostles had escaped the city for fear of Herod.

“...to the brethren ...” there must have been a organized messenger system who carried the news to the Christians throughout the city, assembled in just such places as Mary's house, and who were also praying for Peter.

Went to another place ... he went to a place of greater security.

Acts 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

The sleeping soldiers did not discover that the prisoner was gone until morning. They were answerable for him and were totally discombobulated.

Acts 12:19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that [*they*] should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and [*there*] abode.

Examined the guards ... Anyone familiar with how such examinations were conducted must know that had any of those men really been involved in Peter's escape, there could have been no way for them to conceal it. That sixteen men kept their mouth shut and died to cover the blame of some of the others is incredible ... they would have squealed like pigs ... as is also the monstrous notion that all sixteen were involved in it and kept their mouth shut unto death?

The only explanation of Peter's escape from prison is that of Luke in this chapter. The stupid and unreasonable conclusion by Herod that his own soldiers had released Peter was the only alternative to such a supernatural deliverance as actually occurred; and Herod's execution of his own guard proves only how determined that evil ruler was to deny the true explanation of Peter's escape. Not very long after this, God would deliver another message to Herod which he would find no way to deny.

To Caesarea ... There at Caesarea, God would terminate the ability of Herod to harass and persecute the church. Claudius the emperor of Rome and personal friend of Herod had just returned from a journey to Britain, an event celebrated widely throughout the Roman Empire. Herod was presiding over extensive Olympic games and ceremonies honoring the emperor at Caesarea in 44 A.D. In the midst of those festivities, Herod was about to be cut down forever and ever ...

Acts 12:20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's [*country*].

The reason of this displeasure is not known. These cities were on the sea-coast under Herod's dominion.

"... having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend." They probably bribed him. The chamberlain guarded Herod's bed-chamber while he was asleep and would be a trusted friend and adviser.

Acts 12:21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

The Jewish First Century historian Josephus in his Antiquities 19: 8, confirms Luke's account. He states why Herod was at Cæsarea, speaks of the assembly, the royal robe, the oration, the impious shout

of the people, the sudden death of Herod, and pronounces it a judgment.

Acts 12:22 And the people gave a shout, [*saying, It is*] the voice of a god, and not of a man.

After the fashion of the Roman Emperors the King accepted their worship of himself.

The vast majority of people of Cæsarea were heathen. As we learn from Josephus, on the second day of the games, Herod, clad in robes of silver cloth, entered the theater, and standing in the sunshine, his robes reflected as if it was his splendor.

Then he made an speech, and the people raised their shout: “... It is the voice of a god.” It is thought that his speech was an announcement of his decision in the matter of dispute between Tyre and Sidon, and that their ambassadors were present.

Acts 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

This judgment of Herod is confirmed in its entirety by Josephus. Luke was a better historian than Josephus who said:

“When Agrippa had reigned three years over Judaea, he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar; on the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning, the silver of his garment reflecting the sun’s rays, spreading a horror over those that looked His flatterers cried, from one place, and another, that he was a god, adding, Be merciful to us; for, although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature Presently a severe pain arose in his belly, and began

in a most violent manner Herod said, "I whom you call a god am presently commanded to depart this life I am bound to accept what Providence allots."

"... because he gave not God the glory ... This means that he would not give God the glory for releasing Peter, a refusal that could have originated in nothing else than his pride and stubbornness. Given the nature of the prison and the extent of Peter's guard, Herod knew that God had delivered him; but he would not give God the glory, putting sixteen innocent men to death in order to emphasize his denial. This was exactly the same kind of conduct as that of the Pharisees who decided to kill Lazarus to prevent people from believing in Jesus who had raised him from the dead.

Acts 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

This is the third summary in the book of Acts.

The first summary was Cf:

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

At the close of the Jerusalem episode the summary said "the Word of God increased" with the number of "disciples multiplied" especially ordinary "priests" ... showing the persecution by the High Priest and Sadducees boomeranging on them.

The second summary was cf:

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

This summary is at the close of the broadening in which Samaria and Ethiopia were touched and Saul the high sheriff and chief prosecutor is converted and the summation emphasized peace and growth.

Now with this third summary the Gentile church is firmly established once again it is “ the word of the Lord that grows and multiplies.” The word expands geographically and it increases in the sense of the church comprehending its meaning and implications

Against all human interference, infidelity, unbelief, and opposition, there is opposed to all this is the divine word: "BUT."

“But the word of God grew and multiplied.” The success of God’s plans is never in question. All that God intended shall surely come to pass.

Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled [*their*] ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

This is a reference to the same journey mentioned in Acts 11:30; but here is the additional word that John Mark now accompanies them.

“... when they had fulfilled [*their*] ministry,” This means that they accomplished the purpose of their journey, delivering to the elders in Jerusalem the money for support provided by the generosity of the Gentile Christians of Antioch to relieve the victims of that famine in the reign of Claudius.

The year 44 AD was the time of these events, this being one of the points at which Acts touches firm dates in the secular history of the first century collaborated by outside sources.

“... John whose surname was Mark ... Just as Stephen's martyrdom was made the occasion, by Luke, of mentioning Saul of Tarsus, here is the introduction of another brother who would figure prominently in

Luke's subsequent chapters of Acts, John Mark. If Luke had ever seen Mark's gospel, this would have been a "must" occasion for his mentioning it; and therefore the silence of Luke here concerning the gospel of Mark is a strong suggestion that he knew nothing of Marks Gospel and Luke states in his introduction that used many sources for his history found in Luke and Acts ... Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical Church History says Matthew was written by 37 AD and every man then used the Logos (word) as he was able. Concerning MATTHEW he writes as follows: "*So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.*"

With the conclusion of this chapter, Luke had set the stage for the World Conquest the program of evangelism to the Gentiles.

In the next chapter Acts 13 we at once move to the narrative of Paul's first missionary journey.

As we consider World Conquest in the First Century, our work is so much easier ...

From the safety of your home for \$75 a week you can take the Gospel to Africa ...

For \$75 a week we can reach China, India & the Pacific

For a \$100 a week we can reach N. Africa, Europe through Russia.

Two or three partners can be combined to make a broadcast.

We have 21 broadcasts now and our prayer is to reach the whole world every hour with just "Jesus Christ and Him crucified"

Sources: KJV Bible, theWord.com, Coffman, B.W. Johnson, Adam Clarke & J.W. McGarvey commentaries along with Google images.