



ACTS 12

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. **3** When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival 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.

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

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 has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”

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 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 other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

18 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.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. **20** He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply.

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. **22** They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” **23** Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

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

STUDY NOTES

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Herod the king: This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus’ birth [Matthew 2:1-16]. Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus [Luke 23:7-12].

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword: This was a new development in the history of the church. Of the twelve who followed Jesus, James was the first to be martyred. Up to Acts 12, the church had been on a streak of success, experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the highly successful work among Gentiles (and Jews) in Antioch. But in Acts 12, the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raised its head.

James was certainly not the first Christian to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen (Acts 7:58-60) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection. But Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution (Matthew 10:16-26).

With the sword: Normally, this means that James was beheaded. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was also willingly executed for Jesus alongside of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3). Significantly, there was no attempt to replace James, as there was to replace Judas (Acts 1). This was because James died as a faithful martyr, but Judas revealed his apostasy in betraying Jesus. There was no need for another man to take the office of James.

Intending to bring him before the people after Passover: Herod decided to deal with Peter at a politically opportune time, fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims filled Jerusalem. Horton suggests 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 population.

Delivered him to four squads of soldiers: Knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before (Acts 5:17-21), Herod assigned a high-security detail to guard Peter. "So there were always four soldiers guarding Peter. Extraordinary precautions were also taken by chaining him to two soldiers instead of one as usual. The other two soldiers kept watch outside the cell." (Hughes)

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but the church was free to pray. When every other gate is shut and locked,

Many of us worry about the **iron gate** before we get to it. But **God will take care of it** when we come to it.

the gate to heaven is wide open. We take advantage of that open gate through prayer.

That night Peter was sleeping: Peter showed no signs of anxiety. He was able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution. Remember, He gives His beloved sleep (Psalm 127:2).

Did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision: Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening. He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.

Many of us worry about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month beforehand, and we are anxious about the iron gate! But God will take care of it when we come to it. For Peter, it opened *of its own accord*.

And has delivered me from the hand of Herod: James was martyred (Acts 12:1-2) and Peter was rescued. The reasons God does such things, or does not do them, are often known only to Him.

But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" We are comforted (and amused) by the little faith of these Christians. Even while they prayed for Peter, they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.

Go, tell these things to James and the brethren: The James that Peter told others to report to was not the James who was just martyred. It was probably James, the brother of Jesus, who was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.

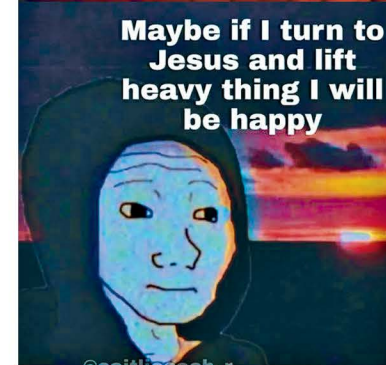
He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death: The execution of the guards was customary. In that day, if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner - in this case, death.

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