

# ACTS

## Chapter 12

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.<sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.<sup>3</sup> When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.”

<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.<sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”<sup>15</sup> “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”<sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter.<sup>19</sup> 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.

**12:1** *about this time.* Some hold that the events recorded in ch. 12 group together matters concerning Herod and may not be in strict chronological order. For example, the arrival of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem (11:30) may have followed Herod’s persecution and Peter’s release from prison. Since the date of Herod’s death was A.D. 44, these events would probably have occurred in 43. According to this view, the famine of 11:28 occurred c. 46, following Herod’s death (v. 23). Others hold that such juggling of events

is not necessary. Thus the relief gift of 11:30 came before Herod's death in 44, and the return of Barnabas and Saul (v. 25) followed Herod's death. According to the former view, the Jerusalem visit of Gal 2:1–10 was the famine visit of v. 25; 11:30. According to the latter view, the Gal 2:1 visit was the Jerusalem council visit of 15:1–29.

*King Herod.* Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (see notes on Mt 2:1; 14:1 – Was the king who had the infants of Bethlehem slaughtered in an attempt to kill the King of the Jews, Jesus.) and son of Aristobulus. He was a nephew of Herod Antipas, who had beheaded John the Baptist (Mt 14:3–12) and had tried Jesus (Lk 23:8–12). When Antipas was exiled, Agrippa received his tetrarchy as well as those of Philip and Lysanias (see Lk 3:1). In A.D. 41 Judea and Samaria were added to his realm. Early in A.D. 41 Emperor Claudius made Herod Agrippa I king over all Palestine. Jerusalem was his capital, and since his elevation to kingship he had been busy courting the favor of the Jews, especially that of the Pharisees. This was fertile ground for Satan when he was allowed to unleash his fury again. And unleash it he did, suddenly and unexpectedly. Christians found themselves rudely ripped from their homes and places of business, arrested solely because they were Christian. Again the lash of the scourge was felt, and prison doors clanged shut behind them.

**12:2** *James.* Brother of John the apostle and son of Zebedee (Mt 4:21). This event took place about ten years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus had warned of their coming suffering (Mt 20:23). – The fact that Herod singled out an apostle shows to what lengths he intended to go to curry the favor of his Jewish subjects. (LL)

*death with the sword.* Beheaded, like John the Baptist.

**12:3** *Feast of Unleavened Bread.* See note on Lk 22:1. – Here again the ruling hand of God is plainly evident. Because it was the time of the Passover, Peter escaped the immediate execution accorded James. To place his Jewish subjects forever in his debt, it appears that Herod planned to bring Peter to public trial and execution on the same day Jesus was publicly tried and crucified. (LL)

**12:4** *four squads.* One company of four soldiers for each of the four watches of the night. – It was Roman practice to attach each of the prisoner's two chains to each of two guards. Not only were there two more guards from the squad standing watch, but other soldiers were stationed as sentries. Security was tight. (PBC)

*Passover.* Another way of referring to the whole week of the festival (see note on Lk 22:1).

**12:6** **SLEEPING** – Peter slept like a baby! Not a care or worry in the world! No mulling over the speech he would probably be asked to make tomorrow – only sleep. No – “Lord, what will happen to the church or my family” – only sleep. How eloquently and beautifully this sleep said that “to live is Christ and to die is gain”

**12:7** *a light shone.* The glory of the Lord (see Lk 2:9).

**12:9** *prison.* Probably the tower of Antonia, located at the northwest corner of the temple—the “barracks” where Paul was later held (see 21:34).

**12:10 IRON GATE** – The massive iron gate locked with a huge bolt, was guarding the entrance to the prison. Normally it took four or five men to open the bolt and swing the gate open. (LL)

**STREET** – The street on which the angel left him wasn't accidental, for it led him to a home where some close friends lived. (LL)

**12:11 THE LORD SENT** – Immediately Peter spoke his thanks by acknowledging the Lord as his rescuer. (LL)

**12:12 Mary.** The aunt of Barnabas (see Col 4:10). Apparently her home was a gathering place for Christians. It may have been the location of the upper room where the Last Supper was held (see Mk 14:13–15; see also Ac 1:13) and the place of prayer in 4:31.

*John ... Mark.* See note on v. 25.

**12:13 Rhoda.** A hired servant, but in sympathy with the family and the church.

**12:15 his angel.** Reflects the belief that everyone has a personal angel who ministers to him (cf. Mt 18:10; Heb 1:14), adding the idea that such an angel occasionally showed himself and that his appearance resembled the person under his care.

**12:16 they were astonished.** Though they had been “earnestly praying to God for him” (v. 5). – We can imagine what was going on inside that house. Remember, it was probably two o'clock in the morning. The small group of Christians had been praying non-stop since Peter's imprisonment. All hope of an answer from the Lord was almost gone. But they kept on praying. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Was it Herod's soldiers seeking more victims? Consternation and fear ran through the group. (LL)

**12:17 James.** The Lord's brother, a leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal 1:19). James, the brother of John, had been killed (see v. 2).

**ANOTHER PLACE** – Means that Peter left the city. (PBC)

**12:18 NO SMALL COMMOTION** – One can feel the absolute and incredible fear that ran through the prison at about 5:30 that morning. Everything was in place except the prisoner. The how didn't matter, for they knew the consequences. (LL)

**12:19 Caesarea.** Not only a headquarters for Roman procurators, but Agrippa used it as his capital when no procurators were assigned to Judea (see notes on 8:40; 10:1).

**Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while.** <sup>20</sup> He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured 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. <sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” <sup>23</sup> 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.** <sup>24</sup> **But the word of God continued to increase and spread.** <sup>25</sup> **When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from<sup>a</sup> Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.**

**12:19** CAESAREA – It was a part of Judea, but the Jews regarded it as a Roman rather than a Jewish city. Herod the Great had built it in honor of Caesar Augustus. There was no Roman governor at the time (Pilate had lived there when he was in charge.), and so Herod Agrippa used the city as his capital. Being on the Mediterranean shore, it was cooler in summer than Jerusalem. (PBC)

**12:20** *Tyre and Sidon.* The leading cities of Phoenicia (Lebanon today). They were dependent on the grainfields of Galilee for their food. – These were two Roman free cities in Phoenicia. They had depended on Galilee for grain and olive oil since the time of King Solomon (1 Kings 5:11; Ez. 27:17). When there was a quarrel between those cities and King Herod, their food supply was endangered. They tried to mend the breach with the help of Blastus, probably bribing that official to intercede on their behalf. (PBC)  
*Blastus.* The treasurer; not otherwise known.

**12:21** *On the appointed day.* A festival Herod was celebrating in honor of Claudius Caesar (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.8.2).

*wearing his royal robes.* The historian Josephus describes a silver robe, dazzling bright, that Herod wore that day. When people acclaimed him a god, he did not deny it. He was seized with violent pains, was carried out and died five days later (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.8.2).

**12:23** *angel of the Lord.* See note on v. 7.

*eaten by worms.* A miserable death associated with Herod's acceptance of acclaim to be divine, but may also be seen as divine retribution for his persecution of the church. – Intestinal worms consumed his digestive tract and he died five days later. (PBC)

**12:24** *the word of God ... spread.* Third summary report of progress (see 6:7; 9:31). Three more follow (16:5; 19:20; 28:31). – The threat of famine and the outbreak of persecution did not stifle the church or stop the gospel's spread. On the contrary, the word was preached ever more widely and effectively. (PBC)

**12:25** FINISHED THEIR MISSION – It might seem that Luke has been telling us that Herod's persecution and his death all took place while Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem. That was not the case. Luke simply wants us to know about the persecution, which probably took place before Barnabas and Saul brought the relief funds to that city. No he returns to the story of Barnabas and Saul. (PBC) – Second Corinthians 8:1-9 tells how part of the collection was done and how God can work great miracles.

*John ... Mark.* See v. 12. He was perhaps the young man who fled on the night of Jesus' arrest (Mk 14:51-52). He wrote the second Gospel (see Introduction to Mark: Author; John Mark in the NT) and accompanied Barnabas and Saul on the first part of their first missionary journey (see notes on 15:38-39).

