

Acts 12 Led by an Angel

- Emphasis on importance of power & prayer.
- This may be the most striking story on prayer.

1. Death & Prison – v. 1-5

- 1: Herod Agrippa I died 44AD, persecution occurred 43/44AD; 4th persecution in Acts, 1st not by Sanhedrin.
- Herod Agrippa I: grandson of Herod the Great (ordered baby Jesus killed), family thought they were gods. 11 members of family mentioned in Scripture, 10 by name.
- Sister: Herodias (married one uncle, Herod Philip I, then a second husband, Herod Antipas > death of John the Baptist).
- 4 kids, 3 in Acts: Drusilla (wife of Felix, 24:24), Herod Agrippa II (25:13-26:32), Bernice (25:13, incest relationship shocked even the heathen).
- 2: NEB “beheaded,” James, brother of John, 1st death of an apostle, ‘inner circle.’ No indication for a replacement, no apostolic succession.
- 3: people’s response everything Herod could have hoped for. Feast of Passover: why Herod was in Jerusalem, also have a bigger audience.
- 4: public execution during feast time would be offensive. Plan: keep Peter imprisoned for the week of feasting, execution after everyone leaves. KJV error in translation: Passover not Easter; makeshift max. sec. prison, 16 total soldiers taking shifts
- 5: what to do? Pray!
- No doubt they had prayed for James, but he died (disappointment), prayed for a week (delay), would be easy to give up (discouragement), but they kept praying!

2. How God Answers Prayer – v. 6-17

- 6: how could anyone sleep the night before execution? Showed confidence in God and slept so hard on the cold floor between two soldiers the angel had a hard time waking him up!
- 7: fervent prayer & patient endurance are always rewarded by God; upon Peter’s obedience, the chains fell
- 8: sandals would normally make noise; almost speaking like a parent to a drowsy kid
- 9: Peter may have thought this was a great dream – “hope to never wake up!”
- 10: iron gate: taken up to 25 men to open/close; by itself: automatos (automatic)
- Travel down 7 steps (traditional) and angel leaves.

- 7 miracles: 1. angel appeared; 2. light in cell; 3. chains fell off; 4. those chained to Peter did not wake up; 5. passed one guard and another (6.) without them knowing; 7. outer gate automatically opened
- 11: plan of action: tell brethren, then hide
- 12: Mary: prob. widow, John Mark's mom (Peter's convert? 1 Pet. 5:13) spent time there
- 13: door/gate: one large one to allow wagon/animals; 2nd smaller door for people; Mary prob. well off financially; Rhoda: little rose
- 14: so excited, she ran to tell others and left Peter outside
- 15: prayed to God and were surprised when He answered prayer; assumed Peter dead
- 16: pounding at gate
- 17: Peter tried to quiet excitement, knew this was a miracle; James & brethren (15:2,22): James, ½ brother of Jesus, author of *James*, and elder at Jerusalem church > tell elders
- Mary's house well known place of Christians, would've searched there for Peter first! Last major incident of Peter.

3. Death of Herod – v. 18-25

- 18: classic understatement: can you imagine the disbelief of the soldiers?
- 19: massive search commences, Herod Agrippa looked the fool; examined: GK question thoroughly; blamed the guards instead of believing a miracle
- 20: principal city of Phoenicia; prob. bribed chamberlain for a meeting
- 21: Josephus: garment wholly silver, illuminated by sun and reflected sun's rays
- 22: calling him a god should have scared him to death!
- 23: see Is. 42:8, 40:23; struck as in v. 7; there a blessing, here a curse. Josephus: severe pain in belly violently, carried to palace, 5 days of pain, died at 54, 7 yrs into reign
- Could literally have been eaten by worms/parasites; also, a punishment from the Lord, Mk. 9:48; died 44AD, important for dating other events in Acts; beginning of the end for the Herods and for the Jews: he held Rom gov't off, 26 years later they would destroy Jerusalem
- 24: non-Chr. Saw Herod's death & believed, would've been frontpage headline news! Herod thought he could destroy the church, but instead, he was destroyed.
- 25: picks up where 11:30 left off; Saul & Barnabas arrived in Judea about the time James was killed; not told how meeting & giving of funds went
- John Mark is Barnabas' cousin, sets up 2nd half of the book and missionary journeys.
- Journey #1 is Paul, Barnabas, John Mark (who will desert and cause a rift between P&B).
- Journey #2 is Paul & Silas and Barnabas & John Mark go on their own journey.

Lessons:

- James lost his life for the Gospel. Peter would later write we must suffer as a Christian, 1 Peter 4:16, cf. Ps. 116:15.
- We learn a valuable aspect about prayer: it works! Sometimes God grants our petitions, and at others He denies them – but He always answers according to His will.
- God used the gruesome death of Herod to increase people’s belief in the Gospel. Opposition to God never yields desired results.

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