

Acts Chapter 12

V: 1 Herod: Herod Agrippa I, grandson to Herod the Great, the king who reigned at the time of the birth of Jesus, and ordered the death of all the infant boys in Bethlehem.

- Herod Agrippa was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, the Herod who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist.
- He was also the father of Herod Agrippa II, whom Paul stood before and shared his testimony and the gospel, who said to Paul, “**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**” (**Acts 26:28**)
- Raised in Rome, friends with Caligula who appointed him King over Palestine from AD 37-44.
- Herod determined to “vex” - to harm, or do evil to, it’s also used to describe putting one in a bad mood towards another. He intended to persecute the church.

V: 2 Herod executes James the brother of John “**with the sword**” Foxe’s Book of Martyrs records that he was beheaded. James is the first of the actual Apostles to be martyred, the first of the inner circle of three, Peter, James, and John.

- Foxe’s Book of Martyrs is a must read for any serious Bible student; it details the various deaths that the Apostles and the early disciples faced, including James, the brother of John.
- The Jews had four methods of capital punishment: stoning (the most common), burning, beheading, and strangulation. According to the Talmud, beheading was reserved for anyone who tried to draw another person away after a strange worship. Because James was leading people to worship Jesus as the Son of God, they chose beheading as his means of execution.

Jesus warned His disciples:

Matthew 10: 22, 24 “**22And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.**” - “**24The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.**”

- We’re not told why he was killed other than he was part of the “church” the “ecclesia” the called out ones, those that identified with Jesus and apparently that was enough.
- This is also interesting in light of events 10 years prior: **Matthew 20:20-23** ([Turn to / read](#))

- James is killed by the sword and John would later be persecuted and exiled to Patmos.
- It would be said that James died a martyr's death, and John lived a martyr's life.
- But suffering with Christ also means rejoicing with Him later.

Romans 8:16-17 “¹⁶The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ¹⁷and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.”

2 Timothy 3:12 “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

V: 3 Herod was 1/2 Jewish popular with the Jews because of his attempt to keep the Law and the Jewish observances. He sought to maintain their favor and when he realized that killing James pleased the Jews, meaning the religious Jews of the Sanhedrin, then he decided to do the same with Peter.

- It's a dangerous and difficult thing when we seek to please men rather than God, it never ends.

Galatians 1:10 “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

- Peter was taken into custody during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Key fact)

V: 4 Peter was heavily guarded. 16 soldiers, chained, three layers deep in the prison. It all seems like over kill, pretty serious. Why? Priors...

Acts 5:17-23

- Herod's intention was to bring him before the people sometime after “Easter” for some kind of public execution.
- KJV is unique in that it is the only translation that uses the word “Easter” (*pascha*) here, it's not in italics to indicate that it was added in, this is simply how they translated it.

Exodus 12:1-28, Leviticus 23:5-6, Numbers 28:16-17 all describe as we just went over this last Sunday the chronology of the Passover.

- On the 10th day of the first month / Nissan they selected the lamb. They kept it until the 14th day which was the Passover, wherein they killed it and took it's blood and applied it to the door posts and lintel of the house.

- Then the 15th day of the month was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a 7 day feast that continued through the 21st day of the month, a Holy convocation.
- So it's the Passover first, then Feast of unleavened bread.
- If Peter is arrested during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that means that the Passover has already happened. Easter is actually a reference to the pagan feast of "Ishtar."
- King Herod celebrated the pagan festival of Ishtar, which later became Easter, when the earth regenerates itself, thus they have fertility symbols like eggs and bunny rabbits.
- Easter / Ishtar was around long before the resurrection of Jesus, and is different than the resurrection of Jesus, it all goes back to the tower of Babel.
- In the book "The Two Babylons" by Alexander Hyslop, he describes the origins of what we call Easter. There are other resources that have more information on this subject.

1. The pagan celebration of "Ishtar" takes place at the vernal / spring equinox, which is the first day of spring, and it celebrates fertility and new life.
2. Again this all goes back to the tower of Babel. Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of fertility known also as Semiramis was the wife of Nimrod. He was worshipped as the sun god, he had different names such as Marduk, Ninus, Bel, Baal, Tammuz, and many more.
3. Ishtar later became Easter and was worshipped as the "moon goddess", the goddess of spring and fertility, also known as the "queen of heaven."
4. The Babylonians celebrated the day of "Ishtar" as the return of the goddess of spring, the re-birth or re-incarnation of nature.
5. The Babylonian legend says that each year a huge egg would fall from heaven landing in the Euphrates, the fish would push it to the river bank, then the doves would alight upon it to "hatch" it - then Ishtar / Astarte / Venus would emerge and spring would begin.
6. In her yearly re-birth, Ishtar would break out of this egg and if any of those celebrating this occasion found her egg, Ishtar would bestow a special blessing that person.

7. This is the origins of the modern Easter egg hunt. It's become a tradition and most people are ignorant of it's origins and meaning. There is much more that could be said but think about this:

- During the 1st century, thousands of Christians were martyred because they wouldn't take a pinch of incense, throwing it on the altar and say that Caesar is Lord - what would it matter, they didn't really believe that, so why not just do it?
- Because it did matter and they wouldn't compromise, they wouldn't worship or do an act of worship knowing that Jesus alone is God, and that He'd forbidden it.

Matthew 4:10 “Then saith Jesus unto him, get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

- For most people the rub here is their kids, and the fact that they enjoy the way the world celebrates this holy day. What we're teaching our kids is that what the world says trumps God's Word, and don't think it will stop there. Some day they'll get tired of Easter eggs, then the world will be talking to them about other, less "innocent" things like morality and other issues that strike much closer to home.
- We're supposed to train up our children in the fear and the admonition of God's Word, not just accommodate their pleasures and desires.

Galatians 1:10 “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

- All that to say the word “Easter” is the more accurate or correct translation in this passage, as it speaks to the timing of these events.

V: 5 While Peter was kept in prison, the church was praying for him, “*without ceasing.*”

- Without ceasing: (G1618) “Extenes”; earnestly, fervently. The idea is that they prayed with such fervency that they didn't stop.
- The only other place it's used in the NT is 1 Peter 1:22

1 Peter 1:22 “... see that ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently.”

- Don't stop, keep loving, un-ceasingly!
- The church was doing what they / we should be doing, praying!

V: 6 The night before Herod would have brought Peter out: Again he's a high risk prisoner, heavily guarded by 16 men assigned to the task in shifts. Bound with two chains, plus the keepers of the prison guarding the doors.

V: 7 An angel of the Lord appears and lights up the room.

- Angels in and of themselves don't necessarily produce or emit their own light. I do believe that like Moses who at one point was in the presence of God, this angel reflected the glory of God and his mere unguarded or unveiled presence lit up the room - he came from the throne room of God, God's presence into a dark jail.
- We go in the opposite direction: Peter is going from darkness to light, and so are we!

1 Peter 2:9 "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

- The angel had to shake Peter awake. That means that Peter was sound asleep, that means that he was at peace with whatever might be in store for him.

Isaiah 41:10 "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness."

Philippians 4:6-8 "6Be careful / anxious for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Jesus said:

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

- Part of it might also have been that in **John 21:18-19** Jesus told Peter that he would be an old man, that he would be crucified upside down on a Roman cross - maybe he figured he wasn't old yet.
- So here we see Peter at peace, at rest, and the angel has to wake him up.
- As Peter wakes up, the chains fall off.

V: 8-10 Get dressed, let's go. "And so he did..." Peter's obedience is noted. One of the hallmarks of a true disciple of Jesus is obedience.

- Peter was about to be delivered in a miraculous way, but he was called to do some ordinary things, he had a role to play, in this case putting his shoes on and getting dressed.

- Peter might have thought that he was dreaming all of this, but he followed the angel to the last gate which appeared to open of its own accord - in reality, God opened the door.

Revelation 3:7-8 “⁷And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; these things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; ⁸I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.”

- The angel escorted Peter out of the prison, and a little way farther, then departed.
- **Cause and effect:** Cause: ⁵Fervent prayer - Effect: ⁹⁻¹⁰Peter is delivered.

V: 11 Peter came to himself, he realized it wasn't a dream and that God had indeed delivered him.

- Delivered him not only from Herod's evil plan, but also from the expectation of the Jews, the Sanhedrin.
- Couldn't God have sent an angel to deliver James? Yes, but in His sovereignty God determined that James was done, and that Peter wasn't.
- It's noted that they prayed for Peter, but nothing is said of them praying for James.

James 4:2 “... yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”

V: 12-17 Peter went to where he knew other believers would be gathered.

- Peter knocks, Rhoda (Rose) hears Peter, recognizes his voice but in her excitement left him standing at the door.
- The other believers who are praying for his deliverance don't believe that it's Peter. God had more faith in their prayers than they did!

1 Peter 3:12 “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”

- It was God's faithfulness as opposed to theirs! They were praying, but at the same time they were putting their own limitations upon God as they prayed.

Mark 9:24 “... Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

- They were excited, Peter quiets them down and says “go tell James...”

- Since James the brother of John had already been killed, this is likely referring to the early church leader and 1/2 brother to Jesus.

V: 18-19 Against all their precautions Peter was gone. The guards were responsible for their prisoners, if their prisoners escaped then they received whatever punishment the prisoner would have received, which in this case they were all executed.

- These soldiers needed someone to step in and be their savior. Makes you wonder if Peter as Paul later would, if Peter had an opportunity to share the Gospel with any of them before they died.

V: 20 Politics. We're not told what the problem was, nor is it recorded in secular history; just what we see here that the leaders of Tyre and Sidon needed to make amends with Herod.

V: 21-23 **Josephus**, in The Antiquities of the Jews, records this incident in secular history as well. Apparently, Herod went down to Caesarea and held some games in honor of the Roman Emperor Claudius.

- On the second day, he put on a garment made entirely of silver. When he walked into the amphitheater in the morning, the sun hit upon his garments making shine brilliantly.
- The people of Tyre & Sidon, and the rest who had come seeking his favor stared in amazement and began to cry "he is a god" and other similar things.
- He didn't rebuke or correct them, he received their worship. But just then looking up Herod saw an owl sitting on a rope above his head and believed it to be an omen.
- He started suffering violent pain in his bowels. Herod, then sorry, exclaimed "your god is already come to life's end."
- The pain increased so severely that he had to be carried hastily into the palace where after five days of torture, he died at the age of fifty four.
- Herod got too full of himself, he believed his own press and he allowed himself to be worshipped as god, and was mocking God in so doing. And God dealt with that.

Isaiah 42:8 "I am the Lord: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images."

- The angel of the Lord smote Herod and he was eaten of worms and died. Sounds painful.

- While Herod certainly brought this upon himself, this was also a way of protecting Peter. Herod would no longer pursue after him.

John 8:36 “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

V: 24-25 The Word of God grew, it spread, and multiplied. The enemy sought to persecute the church, to vex the church - but the church always thrives under persecution.

Joseph addressing his brothers declared:

Genesis 50:20 “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,..”

Paul went even farther:

Romans 8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

- Mark was to Peter what Timothy was to Paul.

1 Peter 5:13 “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.”

- This is Mark that wrote the Gospel of Mark, which is generally believed to have been more or less dictated by Peter.

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- What was the turning point in this chapter? A church that was on it's knees, praying, fervently.

1 Peter 3:12 “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”

- We've seen both in this chapter.