

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

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

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.)

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 to bring him forth to the people.

“about that time” – In context with the previous chapter, this would seem to indicate during the time of the famine or when it was prophesied.

“Herod the king” – Research identifies this man as the grandson of Herod the Great who was Herod when Jesus was born. This Herod was known as Herod Agrippa I. It was eventually his son, Herod Agrippa II, who ended up sending Paul to Rome to appear before Caesar Nero. His grandmother was a Maccabean by descent, and this made Herod part Jewish; accordingly, he was known to observe Jewish law.

Herod was popular with the Jews, and he began persecuting the church to increase his popularity. He murdered James the brother of John as part of this persecution; James was the first apostle to die a martyr’s death. Guzik notes an interesting bit of information from Eusebius who “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 along side of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).”

When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jews, he decided to kill Peter also. Luke further makes note that this occurred during the “days of unleavened bread,” or Passover. So Herod had Peter arrested and put in prison with the intent of executing him after the holy days.

Note: The Greek for “Easter” references “Passover.”

While in prison, Peter was guarded by four quaternions of soldiers. These were groups of four soldiers that served three-hour rotations throughout each day. Two would be stationed in the prison chained to Peter and two at the gates to the prison.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

Acts 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, 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.

Once the body of believers in Jerusalem heard about his arrest, they began to earnestly pray for him. The night before Peter was to be executed, an angel of the Lord appeared in the prison to wake Peter up and release him from his chains. The angel then told Peter to put on his clothes and sandals and follow him. Peter did as he was told, but evidently thought he was dreaming. Once they reached the iron gate that opened to the city, it opened automatically. The angel left Peter alone after taking him down the first street.

I think it is significant to note that Peter was sleeping. He wasn't suffering a sleepless night in light of his coming execution. He had grown into a man of great faith who completely trusted that he would suffer death only if it were God's will—and he was totally surrendered to God as his Lord. I was reminded of the words of David.

Psalms 4:8 "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety."

Psalms 56:11 "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me."

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

Peter quickly realized that God had once again done what seemed impossible; He had rescued Peter from certain death in spite of all Herod's precautions.

Mark 10:27 "...with God all things are possible."

Peter realized that God had truly sent an angel to deliver him from Herod and from those who had desired his death. He then decided to go to the house of Mary, John Mark's mother, where many were gathered together praying (for him is implied I think). Some commentators posit that this house probably served as headquarters for the Jerusalem church, and this makes sense to me since that is where Peter chose to go.

Note: This would appear to be the same John Mark that wrote the gospel of Mark, cousin to Barnabas.

When Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer the knock; but she got so excited when she heard Peter's voice that she forgot to open the gate. She ran to tell everyone that Peter was there, but they didn't believe her; they thought she was seeing his ghost. It seems that they were praying with very little faith.

Peter continued knocking, and they finally came and opened the gate and were astonished to see that Rhoda had been telling the truth. He warned them to keep quiet and told them how the Lord had sent His angel to rescue him. He then instructed them to go tell James, the Lord's half-brother and recognized head of the Jerusalem church, and the other "brethren" what had happened; I think this is probably a reference to the other apostles. Peter then left to go to another place.

The obvious question: Why did the Lord rescue Peter and not James? The obvious answer to me: Because James had already fulfilled his purpose in God's plan, and Peter had not. I am reminded that scripture tells us that all our days are numbered before we are ever born.

Job 14:1-5 "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble....Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass...."

Psalms 139:16 "Your eyes could see me as an embryo, but in your book all my days were already written; my days had been shaped before any of them existed." (CJB)

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

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.

When the morning dawned, the soldiers became quite distraught to find Peter missing. They knew the consequences for letting a prisoner escape. Once Herod realized that Peter was truly gone, he commanded that the soldiers guarding him be put to death and left Jerusalem to go to Caesarea to live. I would imagine he didn't want to face the Jews he had meant to please by killing Peter.

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*.

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

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

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.

Luke now proceeds to explain events that would lead to the death of Herod. For some reason he was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, cities that were dependent upon him for their food supply. They had made friends with Blastus, the king's chamberlain, and sought his intercession in arranging an opportunity to make peace with Herod. On a certain day, Herod, in all his royal regalia, sat upon his throne and addressed their representatives. The people responded to his speech by declaring him to be a god—not a man. Instead of correcting their blasphemy, Herod basked in their adoration. Immediately, the angel of the Lord struck him with an infection of worms (probably intestinal) because he did not give glory to God as LORD. He died from the infection of worms. Commentators note that this was in 44AD.

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

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 chapter ends with a statement that the word of God grew and multiplied in spite of all the persecution the church had experienced.

Luke also notes that having completed their ministry to the Jerusalem church, Saul and Barnabas returned (to Antioch I presume) taking John Mark with them.