

# Bible Study August 25, 2021

## ACTS 12 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

### James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

*<sup>1</sup> About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword, <sup>3</sup> and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*

King Herod Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus and the grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who had been responsible for the death of John the Baptist (see Mark 6:17-28). Herod Agrippa I was partly Jewish. The Romans had appointed him to rule over most of Palestine, including the territories of Galilee, Perea, Judea, and Samaria. He persecuted the Christians in order to please the Jewish leaders who opposed them, hoping that this would solidify his position. He died suddenly in AD 44 (see Acts 12:20-23). His death was also recorded by the historian Josephus.

### Herodian Dynasty

<b>Herod the Great</b>	Ruler over Judah at the time of Jesus birth. Sought to kill Jesus by slaughtering all infant boys	Matt 2:1-20
<b>Herod Archelaus</b>	Oldest son of Herod the Great. King when Joseph, Mary and Jesus left Egypt	Matt 2:22
<b>Herod Philip</b>	Another son of Herod the Great and first husband of Herodias, who left him for his brother.	Matt 14:3
<b>Herod Antipas</b>	Youngest son of Herod the Great and the king who killed John the Baptist. Jesus was sent him during His trials.	Matt 14:1-11
<b>Herod Agrippa I</b>	Grandson of Herod the Great and killer of the apostle James.	Acts 12
<b>Herod Agrippa II</b>	Instrumental in saving Paul from being tried and imprisoned in Jerusalem.	Acts 25 – 26

James and John were two of Jesus' original 12 disciples. They had asked Jesus for special recognition in his Kingdom, and Jesus had only promised them that they would suffer with him (Mark 10:35-40). James and John did indeed suffer—Herod executed James, and later John was exiled (see Revelation 1:9).

Herod had Peter arrested during the Passover celebration. This was a strategic move because more Jews were in the city than usual, so Herod could impress a good number of people. Herod undoubtedly planned to execute Peter, just like James, but the believers were praying for Peter's safety. The earnest prayer of the church significantly affected the outcome of these events. We don't understand how prayer works, but God consistently commands us to pray (Luke 18:1). In this situation, the Lord responded to the believers' prayers and sent an angel to release Peter from prison, all for God's glory and to fulfill his plans. (See Daniel 9:21-23 for another time when angels responded directly to prayer.)

*Matt 20:22-23* <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, *"You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"* They said to him, *"We are able."* <sup>23</sup> He said to them, *"You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."*

### **Peter Is Rescued**

***<sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.***

God sent an angel to rescue Peter. Angels are God's messengers. They are divinely created beings with supernatural power, and they sometimes take on a human appearance in order to talk to people. Angels should not be worshiped, because they are not divine. They are God's servants, just as we are.

***<sup>8</sup> And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." <sup>9</sup> And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup> When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. <sup>11</sup> When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."***

Why did God allow James to die and yet miraculously save Peter? Life is full of difficult questions like this. Why is one child physically disabled and another child athletically gifted? Why do people die before realizing their full potential? We cannot possibly answer questions like these in this life because we do not see all that God sees. He has chosen to allow evil in this world for a time. In the face of suffering, remember that God has promised to destroy all evil and make everything right when Jesus returns. He is also able to use our suffering to strengthen us and bring glory to him. In the meantime, ask him to fill you with hope. (For more on suffering, see the notes on Job 1:1–2:13; 2:10; and 3:23-26. For more on hope, see Romans 15:13.)

***12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.***

John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. His mother's house was large enough to accommodate a meeting of many believers. An upstairs room in this house may have been the location of the Last Supper, Jesus' final gathering with his disciples before his crucifixion (Luke 22:8-71).

***13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"***

The prayers of this group of believers were answered even as they prayed. But when the answer arrived at the door, they didn't believe it. Luke displays real life with a sense of humor in this part of the story. Can't you see this young woman so overcome with amazement, relief, and joy that she was beside herself with emotion? She didn't even open the door because of her excitement. This was also a humble reminder for Peter that, even after an angel had supernaturally broken him out of prison, he and his friends were still just people. He couldn't open the jail bars without an angel's help, and he had to wait for the servant girl to let him in the house. We should be people of faith who believe that God answers the prayers of those who seek his will. When you pray, believe you'll get an answer. And when the answer comes, don't be surprised; be thankful!

***16 But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.***

This James was Jesus' brother, who became a leader in the Jerusalem church (15:13; Galatians 1:19). The James who was killed (Acts 12:2) was John's brother and one of the original 12 disciples.

***18 Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.***

Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. Thus, these 16 guards were sentenced to death.

The Jews considered Jerusalem their capital, but the Romans made Caesarea their headquarters in Palestine. That is where Herod Agrippa I lived.

***John 21:18-19 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.*** 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ***"Follow me."***

### ***The Death of Herod***

***20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. 21 On an appointed day***

***Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" <sup>23</sup> Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.***

These coastal cities, Tyre and Sidon, were free and self-governing but economically dependent on Judea (see the map in the introduction to Acts for their location). We don't know why Herod had quarreled with them, but now representatives from these cities were trying to appease him through his personal servant.

Herod died a horrible death accompanied by intense pain; he was literally eaten alive, from the inside out, by worms. Pride is a serious sin, and in this case, God chose to punish it immediately. God does not immediately punish all sin, but he will ultimately judge everyone (Hebrews 9:27).

***<sup>24</sup> But the word of God increased and multiplied.***

***<sup>25</sup> And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.***

John Mark was Barnabas's cousin (Colossians 4:10). His mother, Mary, would often open her home to the apostles (Acts 12:12), so John Mark would have been exposed to most of the great men and teachings of the early church. Later, John Mark joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but for unknown reasons, he left them in the middle of the trip. John Mark was criticized by Paul for abandoning the mission (15:37-39), but he wrote the Gospel of Mark and was later acclaimed by Paul as helpful in the growth of the early church (2 Timothy 4:11).

### **Midnight Prayer (EST): August 25, 2021**

YouTube Live: <https://bit.ly/LFCCCorner>

**Acts 16:25-26** **25** And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. **26** And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.