

## *Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 12*

### *Peter's Miraculous Escape From Prison*

*12:1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 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.*

When Chapter 11 ended, “the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (v21) Now things have changed, King Herod has beheaded or killed the apostle James, the brother of John and the Jews were pleased. With the same first names, it makes you wonder how they could keep track of kings with the same names.

- a. This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great
- b. Herod the Great ruled in the days of Jesus’ birth (Matthew 2:1-16).
- c. Herod Antipas was the uncle of Herod Agrippa I, who had a part in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:7-12).

The death of James was a significant blow to the Christians because it showed there was no divine protection for the apostles. The King had Peter arrested. He was being guarded by sixteen soldiers. The trial was going to be held after the Festival of the Unleavened Bread which is part of Passover.

*12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

*6 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. 7 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.*

While Peter was in prison, the believers prayed for him. It would not be easy for Peter to escape because he was chained to two soldiers and there were two sentries guarding the door. An angel appeared, lit the cell and woke up Peter and the chains fell off his wrists.

*12:8 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. 9 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. 10 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.*

*11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”*

This angel is different from the angel and Spirit in Chapter 10 seen by Peter and Cornelius because what is happening is real and in Chapter 10 it was a vision. Peter thought he was in a vision. Peter was NOT met with resistance as he left the prison. He walked past the guards. Peter was not sure that it was not a vision until he got outside the prison and the angel left him.

*12:12 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. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"*

*15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."*

*16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 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 other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.*

Once Peter came to his senses, he went to the house of the mother of John Mark (author of the Book of Mark). Peter chose to go to this house because he knew people would be gathered and praying. The girl that answered the door was so excited about hearing Peter's voice that she left him outside. The people that had gathered inside the house told her that she was out of her mind. Their explanation was that it must be "his" angel. This verse leads some to believe in guardian angels. Peter kept knocking on the door. When they went to the door they were astonished because there stood Peter. Peter told them to tell "James and the other brothers and sisters about" his escape. Has Peter lost his mind? James, the brother of John was dead. This must be another James, the brother of Jesus. Galatians 1:19 tells us, "*The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord's brother.*" Then Peter headed to another place.

*12:18 In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. 19 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.*

The escape of any prisoner was not a small problem for the guards. They not only lost Peter but they lost their lives.

"The execution of the guards was customary. In that day, if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner – in this case, death." (Guzik)

### ***Herod's Death***

*Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. 20 He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing 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.*

***21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." 23 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.***

In these verses we find Luke adding some historical information. King Herod traveled to Caesarea where he was quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon, who depended on Israel for food. It is interesting to note that more than 1000 years before this happened, King Hiram of Tyre struck an agreement to supply cedar to build the Temple and other building projects for King Solomon. In return for the cedar, King Solomon would supply huge amounts of food to King Hiram of Tyre (See 1 Kings 5:10-12). Herod was arrogant and did not praise God. The people shouted that he was a god and not a man. Herod was struck dead because he was corrupt inside and out.

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus – writing to the Roman world – also described the death of Herod in gory detail (*Antiquities*, XIX.8.2).

“He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god...A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner...when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life.”

***12:24 But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.***

***Barnabas and Saul Sent Off***

***25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.***

Verse 24 says, “The word of God continued to spread and flourish.” Barnabas and Saul returned from their mission to Jerusalem bringing with them John Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark.