

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 9, Acts 12

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: Does the kingdom of Satan give up territory without a fight?

Chapter 12 The Old Kingdom Fights Back

Section 1: Acts 12:1-5 The Attack Comes From the

Top

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ²He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread¹. ⁴After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by

¹ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 447

four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

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

We saw in the beginning of Acts, Satan had tried to stop the rise of the church when he sent Saul to attack and imprison those in the Way. But God won that battle. Saul was converted after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. Here Satan tries again, using the king of this region, Herod, to kill the Apostle James and to imprison Peter.

James was the first Apostle martyred.² Andrew, Peter, John, and Paul would all follow him later on.³ This attack on the church happened during the Feast of Weeks, around the Passover. It was a time when the Jews felt very religious and in touch with their faith. They would have seen attacking Christians as a righteous thing to do. It became part of their religious celebration. Like Saul, they were attacking God's people in the name of God.

Peter is to be brought to public trial. In other words, he was part of the entertainment.

Section 2: Acts 12:6-11 God Frees Peter

⁶The 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. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord

² *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 631

³ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 561

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.

⁸Then 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. ⁹Peter 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. ¹⁰They 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.

¹¹Then 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 part of the account is almost comical. Even with everything Peter has seen being with Jesus for 3 years—seeing the resurrected Christ, spending the last year having God work mightily through him—he was not prepared for this experience. In fact, he thought the whole thing was a vision and not really happening. How did his chains fall off? How did the door open? How did he walk past this large guard? How did he walk out of the prison and into the city without anyone stopping him? The answer is easy. He did this because God wanted it. Chains and guards cannot thwart God.

Section 3: Acts 12:12-17 Peter Goes to Church

¹²When 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. ¹³Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴When 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."

¹⁶But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷Peter 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.

Can you imagine the change in this prayer meeting? Whereas they were praying for Peter's deliverance and safety, now they are lifting up thanksgiving for God's answer.

These last words are interesting—Peter left for another place. There is more here than changing location. Peter's part in the Book of Acts also changes. Whereas Peter has been the main player up to this point, he is going to be replaced by Paul in the mission field and James in church leadership. This does not mean that Peter stops

being an important part of the church. It is more that Luke is laying out the ministry of Paul from the ministry of Jesus (The Book of Luke) to the end where he is imprisoned in Rome.

Wasn't James killed by Herod? Actually, this James is a different James. This James was the brother of Jesus who became the leader of the Jerusalem church. He is the one who wrote the Book of James in the New Testament.

Section 4: Acts 12:18-24 God Deals With All

¹⁸In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰He 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.

²¹On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²They 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.

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

Herod killed the guards. Any time a Roman guard failed at his duty, he was executed. This is why the guards at the tomb of Jesus go to the Jewish leaders with the news of the resurrection and not the Roman authorities.

Although this is a very interesting story, there is a point to it. You may wonder why Peter wasn't arrested again. The only person who wanted Peter imprisoned and killed was Herod. There were no charges against him. Once Herod was dead, there was no longer any case against the Apostle.

It is the Angel of the Lord who strikes down Herod. Ironically, the king who accepts the worship as a god, who believes himself eternal and all powerful, is eaten alive by worms and dies. This is not the first time the Angel of the Lord killed His enemies. He killed the 185,000 Assyrians who were getting ready to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35).

The result of all this was that the church spread and flourished (was healthy and alive).

What have we learned?

Everything that happens is God's will. How do we know this? Because God has the power to change any situation. We just saw Him spring Peter from a heavily guarded jail right in front of the guards. We saw him reach out and take the life of a megalomaniacal king who saw himself on par with God. God can always rescue, but he doesn't.

When we read Hebrews 11:1-34, we are hit with the amazing faith that saints had throughout the centuries. But these amazing rescues are followed by the following:

35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. **36** Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. **37** They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- **38** the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. **39** These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

Those who were put to death had just as much faith as those who were rescued. We could say that James had just as much faith as Peter. So what made their fates different? Only one thing—God's choice. When we belong to God, we leave our fate up to Him. If He chooses to deliver us, we will praise Him. If he chooses to leave us to die, we will praise Him. Our faith and praise is not at all conditioned by our circumstances. It is motivated by the One Who we praise, and He never changes.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 12:1-5

During the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread King Herod delights the Jewish people by killing James the Apostle. He decides to follow this up with a trial and execution of Peter. He puts Peter in prison under a strong guard. The church turns to the only One Who has the power to change the situation—God.

Section 1 Acts 12:6-11

While Peter slept an angel appeared and filled the room with light. He strikes Peter in the side to wake him up. The angel leads Peter to freedom—out of the chains, through the bars, past the guards, and out the front door. Peter has trouble not believing this is all a vision, but it's real.

Section 1 Acts 12:12-17

When Peter returns to the church, they can't believe it's really him—even though they had been praying constantly for his release. After letting them know he is okay, Peter leaves, most likely to keep them out of danger.

Section 1 Acts 12:18-24

It is Herod who arrested Peter and wanted to use him to please the crowds. There are no formal charges against him. So, with Herod out of the picture, the charges against Peter would disappear. We need to be careful not to think that God will always rescue us. He did not rescue James. His will be done.

Connecting to the Scripture

The world will not step aside and let the Kingdom of God usurp it, breaking its strongholds, converting its members, and establishing Spirit filled communities of life and grace and hope.

Satan will do everything he can to stop the forward movement of people sold out to God. He will give us personal attacks. He will tempt, distract, and cut us off from the things of this world. If need be, he will step up the tormenting and bring on direct physical confrontation and even murder.

AW Tozer wrote that if Jesus is not our Lord, He is not our savior.⁴ If Jesus is our Lord, then anything He wants is okay with us. It was okay with James that he was killed for his faith in Jesus. If this was God's will for him, it was also his will. We are so used to living a lie. We believe that Jesus only wants part of us. He wants a few hours on Sunday and maybe a meeting during the week. He wants some of our money. This is completely wrong. When we came to Christ, we—everything we are and have—was bought with a price. We have handed over the deed of our lives to Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:20).

This is very serious. We happen to live in a time where Christians are allowed relative freedom in America. This may not always be the case. Governments change, social movements rise up, Satan gets new strongholds.

Peter would eventually die for Christ. He was crucified upside down. But he had already given all to God. If/when our persecution starts, how will we respond?

⁴ *And He Dwelt Among Us*, pg. 88

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Acts 12:1-5

1. What is going on here? How does God see the situation? How does Peter see it? How does the church see it? How does Satan see it? How does Herod see it? How do you see it?

Section 1 Acts 12:6-11

1. Peter is sleeping. How could he have been so calm?
2. This incident shows that nothing can stop God from doing whatever He wants. Consider a problem that you are having right now involving your faith. Discuss the problem and how you can give it over to God's able hands.

Section 1 Acts 12:12-17

1. We are going to have a special time of prayer over the problems you mentioned. During our prayer time, we will glorify God, praising Him for Who He is and giving Him all these situations.

Section 1 Acts 12:18-24

1. What does this tell us about the reach of God's power?
2. What does it tell us about the power of governments? Or armies?
3. How did this incident affect the church? Why do you think that James being killed, Peter being saved, and Herod being killed have this effect on the church?