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Acts 12

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Acts 12.

Topics.

- Herod the king lays violent hands on some who belonged to the church.
- Herod killed James with the sword.
- An angel sets Peter free from prison.
- A unique era.
- Peter is delivered from Herod.
- Peter goes to the house of Mary.
- Herod is struck dead and eaten by worms.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Peter told the Jews that God has granted to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life and the disciples in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. The chapter ended with Saul spending a year in Antioch with those being added to the Lord and brothers sending Barnabas and Saul to take their giving to the elders in the land of Judea because they were suffering a great famine.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

ACTS 12:1-2

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Herod the king lays violent hands on some who belonged to the church

- **Acts 12:1-4:** About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ²He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴And 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.

Herod: (Herodes) means hero it is a compound of the word heroes (a hero) and Greek (eidos) heroic and the name of four Jewish kings.

This chapter shows the aggressive persecution the early church suffered not only from the secular rulers, but also from the Jewish religious rulers. It is easy to read over Luke words, "Herod the king violently laid hands on some who belonged to the church." Herod was a very powerful man who was determined to destroy those he considered to be against the Roman kingdom. Ruthless Roman soldiers were sent out with full authority to destroy and wreak havoc on anyone who was teaching Christ. King Herod's hatred toward those who confessed Christ was so great he killed James the brother of John not because James had committed any crime, but because he was teaching Christ.

Herod killed James with the sword: the words, "He killed James the brother of John with the sword" (v2) probably means Herod had James beheaded, but equally as wicked as Herod was the attitude of the Jewish religious leaders of Herod's generation. These men standing in the position of priests of God had total authority and influence over the nation of Israel and yet they were pleased that James had been murdered (v3) and it was their joy that James had been killed that motivated Herod to

seek out Peter and have him held in prison. It is most likely Herod intended to hold Peter until the days of the Passover Feast were over and then present him before the people (v4) expecting that the Jewish people influenced by their prideful and hypocritical religious rulers would condemn Peter to death as they did when Pilate presented Jesus to the Jewish rulers who enticed the people to cry out crucify him.

During the Days of Unleavened Bread: the words, "This was during the days of Unleavened Bread" (v3) means all of this horror was happening sometime from Passover Day and on through the Seven Day Feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately followed both were a major annual feasts and a time of celebration for the Jewish nation to which all Jews would attend if they were able.

ACTS 12:5-11

An Angel sets Peter free from Prison.

- **Acts 12:5-11:** So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. ⁶Now 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. ⁷And 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. ⁸And 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." ⁹And 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. ¹⁰When 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. ¹¹When 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."

Brothers and sisters were earnestly praying for Peter yet they had no faith that he would actually be released from prison, we know this because when he was, they didn't believe it (v15) showing that our heartfelt earnest cry is in some prayers is more powerful than our faith.

A unique era: this period of time was unique, God was moving in a spectacular way through miraculous healings, prophecies and angels, it is a time much like the era of Moses when God was setting His people free from the bondage of Egypt and giving birth to a totally new nation called Israel. Now through the book of Acts God is setting free His people who have been held spiritually captive by prideful and hypocritical legalistic Jewish religious leaders and giving birth to an entirely new nation in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles called a new creation, the body of Christ and the church.

NOTICE: the words, "Peter thought he was seeing a vision" (v9) the word vision can relate to a spectacle gazed at by the eyes or a movie played out in the mind. In most cases God gives the picture or vision then the prophet speaks or writes it in their own words. Sometimes the same biblical event or experience is spoken of as an actual and real event, while at other times the same event maybe recorded as a vision (an image or mental experience within the mind).

A biblical vision is always under God's control and can appear as a movie played out on the screen of the imagination of the mind (similar to a dream) or it may appear as a hologram appearing in the air that is actually seen by the eyes of the prophet or to whoever God chooses to give the vision to. The vision communicates the LORD'S will or future events to the prophet who then proceeds to tell the vision to the people, sometimes in their own words and at other times in the exact words the LORD has spoken to them in the vision. Peter has had visions in the past so the fact

that he thought that this was a vision shows how real some visions appear to those who are having the vision, thus the reason they sometimes are recorded as a real event.

Peter is delivered from Herod: it appears Peter followed the angel in an almost dreamlike state not sure whether he was dreaming; having a vision or whether what was taking place was actually real until he finds himself outside the gates of Jerusalem.

NOTICE: Peter says, not only has God rescued him from Herod but also from the Jewish religious rulers' expectation, no-doubt referring to their hope that Herod would have Peter killed as he did James.

ACTS 12:12-17

Peter goes to the house of Mary.

- **Acts 12:12-17:** When he realised 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. ¹³And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴Recognising Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵They 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!" ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷But 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 is fabulous, Peter goes to Mary's house where unbeknown to Peter brothers and sisters are gathered praying for him, he knocks and Rhoda a servant girl recognising Peter's voice is so excited that instead of letting Peter in she runs and tells those who are praying for him. Their response is one of absolute disbelief telling the girl she is out of her mind, but even more stunning is the fact that they found it easier to believe it was Peter's angel rather than Peter himself. After much disbelief they eventually go out to see for themselves, imagine for a moment their stunned shock and joy when they see Peter standing at the gate, though they were praying for him they had absolutely no idea that he would actually escape, it is most likely they were praying God would give him courage, strength and peace to face what they thought would be his certain death.

ACTS 12:18-25

Herod is Struck Dead.

- **Acts 12:18-25:** Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰Now 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. ²¹On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. ²²And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" ²³Immediately 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. ²⁴But the word of God increased and multiplied. ²⁵And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

The people of Tyre and Sidon being depended on Herod for food and knowing that Herod was against them approached Blastus Herod's official administrator to asked Herod to make peace. Herod on the appointed day to speak to the people regarding their request for peace took his seat

upon the throne clothed in royal robes and delivered an oration to them which incite the crowds to shout, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory. After Herod's death the word of God multiplied since the terror and persecution Herod brought upon those confessing Christ was no longer a threat. The words, "When Barnabas and Saul had completed their service in Jerusalem" refer to them giving the relief money to the elders in Judea that the brothers and sisters in Antioch had entrusted them with because the land of Judea was suffering an extreme famine at this time (Acts 11:27-30), once they had finished this duty they returned with John Mark back to Antioch.

Herod was eaten by worms: the expression, "He was eaten by worms," (v23) implies that he was not given a royal burial as fitting of a king, but most likely was left to rot and decay on the surface of the earth showing that he was not a king his subjects respected or honoured.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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