

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #240

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 12

Herod Kills James

1. Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.
2. Then he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

Chapter 12 brings us to the close of Peter's ministry in Acts. Certainly, he continued to be used mightily, but the narrative of Acts will shift to the ministry of Paul. Peter is mentioned only one time after Chapter 12, and then only as being part of the Council in Jerusalem which was debating the matters of circumcision and the laws of Moses as pertained to the Gentiles. The Church of Jerusalem had been the center of the Christian movement, but, unfortunately, it became more and more legalistic and Pharisaical. The Church of Jerusalem had carried the Gospel to Judea and Samaria, but now the Glory of God seemed to rest more and more on the Church at Antioch and Paul, who was carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles and to the uttermost parts of the known world.

James is the first martyr among the twelve Apostles. This must have been a heart-wrenching blow to the early Christian Church and especially to James' brother John. Yet this was fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 20:20-23 when James and John's mother asked that they be assigned a seat on Jesus' right and left in His kingdom, and Jesus finally tells them that they will drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism.

The Herod family was for the most part very vicious, according to New Testament accounts of each one. William Barclay and Herbert Lockyer give us information about this family, which played a prominent role in Biblical times:

- A. Herod the Great: 41 BC to 1BC-This Herod was the Herod of Matthew 2 who had all the children massacred when Jesus was born. He was married ten times. He murdered several of his own sons, and died a horrible death. Yet he was charming and became close friends with Mark Anthony and later Augustus and Agrippa. His greatest achievement was the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.

- B. Herod Philip 1st: He was the first husband of Herodias and the father of Salome. He had no official office but is mentioned in Matthew 14:3, Mark 6:17, and Luke 3:19 under the name Philip.
- C. Herod Antipas: He was the second husband of Herodias, his brother's wife, and had John the Baptist beheaded at the request of Herodias through her daughter Salome. He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial in Luke 23:7.
- D. Archelaus: He was the ruler of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea. He is mentioned in Matthew 2:22 and was a terrible ruler who was finally banished.
- E. Herod Philip II: He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi, which was named after him. In the New Testament he is called Philip and is mentioned in Luke 3:1
- F. Aristobulus: He was a son of Herod the Great, was murdered by his own father, but he had a son called Herod Agrippa, who is the Herod of this passage in Acts 12.
- G. Herod Agrippa in Acts 12 was the father of Agrippa II, before whom Paul was examined (Acts 25); Bernice, who appeared with him when Paul was being examined; and Drusilla, who was the wife of Felix, the governor before whom Paul was tried (Acts 24:24). Herod Agrippa had been educated at Rome, but he meticulously kept the Jewish law and Jewish observances, making him very popular with the Jewish people.

Peter Is Miraculously Released from Prison

- 3. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.
- 4. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.
- 5. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
- 6. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers, and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.
- 7. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison: and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands.

8. Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals;" and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me."
9. So he went out and followed him and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.
10. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.
11. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people."
12. So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.
13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.
14. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.
15. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So she said, "It is his angel."
16. Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.
17. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.
18. Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.
19. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

Because Agrippa wanted to further his popularity with the Jews, he had Peter arrested. Furthermore, he did not initially execute Peter but planned to wait because it was the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, and, according to Jewish law, there were to be no executions until seven days after Passover had passed.

Herod Agrippa went to great lengths to see that Peter could not escape. He assigned four guards, working in 3 hour shifts. One guard was chained to

Peter's right hand and another to Peter's left hand. The remaining two guards kept watch at the door. When Peter escaped, unfortunately, these soldiers were led away to execution because it was a law, that, if a criminal escaped, the guards had to take whatever his punishment he was to suffer.

One of the most profound statements in this chapter is verse 5. The Church was in constant prayer to God for Peter. I think we have yet to tap into the power of prayer in this generation to break shackles and set men free. I believe there is coming an anointing in the area of prayer that will break the power of principalities and the kingdom of darkness.

Kevin Conner asks some interesting questions pertaining to this passage of scripture:

Why should Peter and the Apostles be delivered by angels out of prison, yet Paul is left to die in prison writing Letters to the Churches which he founded?

Why should God let James be beheaded, yet the same night Peter is to be beheaded sends an angel to deliver him out of the same prison?

The Only answer is that God rules in the heavens and in the earth, and it is His Sovereign will that is being done, in all and above all and through all, and in spite of men and devils. The Early Church surrendered to His Will. We must learn to recognize that God is above all and to submit to His Sovereign Will.

Apparently the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, was the headquarters of the Christian Church. Many believe that this was also the site of the Last Supper and the Pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Also, apparently, James, the brother of Jesus, was the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem. Peter instructs them to go and tell James what had happened. John 7:5 tells us that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him and actually thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21). They did not follow Jesus before the crucifixion. 1st Corinthians 15:7 tells us, however, that Jesus made a special appearance to James. This was his 9th out of 10 times that He is recorded in scripture to have appeared to people in the 40 days between the crucifixion and His ascension. Apparently James then naturally realized that Jesus was whom He said He was, and James dedicated his life to serving Christ.

Herod Blasphemes and Dies

20. Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.
21. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.
22. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"
23. Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.
24. But the word of God grew and multiplied.
25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the time, wrote that Herod, dressed in a robe of silver cloth, with the sun shining on the silver, spoke to the people of Tyre and Sidon. Perhaps to win his favor, they cried out that this was a god and not a man speaking to them. Because Herod did not rebuke the people but accepted their compliment, he was smitten by an angel. Conner tells us that *eaten by worms* is symbolic of *the worm that never dies* in Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:44-45 and points to the Lake of Fire.

No man can stop the Word of God. It is eternal, incorruptible and liveth and abideth forever (1st Peter 1:23).

Barnabas and Paul have finished their ministry in Jerusalem, and taking John Mark, they start their first missionary journey. We will cover this missionary journey in Chapters 13 and 14 of Acts.

Sweet, Sweet Spirit
By Doris Akers

There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord.
There are sweet expressions on each face,
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.

There are blessings you cannot receive,
Till you know Him in His fullness and believe.
You're the one to profit when you say,
"I am going to walk with Jesus all the way."

If you say He saved you from your sin,
Now you're weak, you're bound, and cannot enter in,
You can make it right if you will yield;
You'll enjoy the Holy Spirit that we feel.

CHORUS

Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet Heavenly Dove,
Stay right her with us, filling us with your love.
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived
When we leave this place.