

## Acts 12-Persecution of the Church

Paul And Barnabas are busy working among the churches of Judea. Luke turns his attention to the church in Jerusalem and introduces a curious turn of events which befell the apostle Peter. He has related to us the threats and intimidations of the Sadducees and Pharisees against Peter and John; the death of Stephen, and the harassing of the Christians in Damascus after the church in Jerusalem had been scattered. The disciples who were scattered went about preaching the gospel (Acts 8). The apostles continued to go about their work with the church in Jerusalem. Then suddenly a persecution arose from a totally unexpected source. We come to Acts 12.

### I. Martyrdom of James .

#### A. Now about that time...

1. Time period when Barnabas and Saul came to Jerusalem from Antioch with relief for the Judean Christians.
2. This would be approx. A.D. 44

#### B. Herod.

1. This Herod was King Agrippa I, grandson of King Herod the great.
2. Ruled from A.D. 42 to A.D. 44.
3. Herod evidently recognized the great hatred of the Jews for the Christians and he capitalized upon their resentment.
4. The attitude of the Jews had radically changed towards the Christians after the death of Stephen
5. The apostles were now the targets of their persecutions.
6. King Herod simply joined hands with the Jews in mounting new persecutions against the Christians. "vex certain..." [to afflict, to do harm to...]

#### C. Killed James.

1. This James was the brother of John
2. They were the sons of Zebedee
3. James was the first of the apostles to suffer the death of a martyr.
4. His brother, John, was the last apostles whom Domitian Caesar sent into exile on the Isle of Patmos about A.D. 96.
5. Execution, by means of a sword showed, as in the case of John the immerser, that the sentence was pronounced by civil rule. [Jews stoned their victims].

#### D. Saw that it pleased the Jews.

1. Illustrates his motive.
2. Acting to promote his own popularity.
3. He sought to enhance the favor he was finding with the Jews by seizing Peter also.
4. It was during the days of unleavened bread (Feast of Passover).
  - a. Large number of Jews in Jerusalem.
  - b. Jesus had been arrested during this same time period some years earlier.
5. Peter kept in prison.
  - a. Four quaterions of soldiers.
  - b. Each quaterion (squad) consisted of four men.
    - (1) Two chained to him.
    - (2) One at the door and one at main door of prison.
  - c. Why so much security? (Acts 4:3; 5:18,19)
  - d. Kept in prison till after, was to avoid offending the Jews.
6. Note: "Easter"
  - a. Elsewhere translated "Passover"
  - b. There never was a more absurd or unhappy translation than this.

- c. The original is simply after the Passover.
- d. One of the instructions given to the translators by James, King of England, was that they were not to change any of the accepted terms found in the Bishops' Bible (which was more or less the basis for the KJV).
- e. Before this version, Tyndale and Coverdale had used the word "Easter" at this place; and hence, it had become a "customary" rendering of this verse before it was ever incorporated in the KJV.
- f. No such festival as Easter was observed in the early church ... was not for several centuries.
- g. Christians celebrate His resurrection every Lord's Day by keeping the Lord's Supper.

## II. Peter Released from Prison (12:5-11)

### A. First of all prayer...

- 1. Without ceasing.
- 2. Fervent—intensity and continuity.
- 3. Continued to pray for Peter night and day. Sometimes praying is all you can do.
- 4. Herod was about to ring him forth.

### B. Angel smote Peter on the side.

- 1. Awakened Peter.
- 2. Chains fell off.
- 3. Get dressed and follow me.
- 4. Peter was not sure this was real.
- 5. When they passed the other guards and the gate (which opened by themselves), Peter knew it was real.

## III. Peter Rejoins the Disciples.

### A. He went to Mary's house.

### B. They were praying.

- 1. Most likely they were praying for Peter's faith and courage to remain strong in the hour of death.
- 2. Wisdom in trying to decide what they themselves should do.
- 3. At least six Mary's mentioned in the Scriptures and each one has a particular description. Mary of Cleopas (John 19:25); Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2); Mary mother of Mark (Acts 12:12); Mary, sister of Lazarus (Luke 10:42); Mary a Roman Christian (Romans 16:6); Mary mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30).
- 4. This John, surnamed Mark, would later be the author of the book of Mark, would turn back from working with Paul and Barnabas, and contention would arise (Acts 12:25; 13:13; 15:39).

### C. They were astonished...

- 1. Wonder if they thought it was the persecutors.
- 2. Visitors would call out. If voice recognized, doorkeeper would grant entrance.
- 3. She recognized the voice, but ran back in and announced it.
- 4. They thought she was mad, . . . then, it was his angel.
- 5. Finally let him in.
- 6. Peter tells them what has happened (v.17).
  - a. Peter had to quiet them down.
  - b. Departed and went to another place (safety, escape death)

### D. No small stir...

- 1. What had happened to Peter?
- 2. "Stir" – "disturbance" Scurrying around as they frantically searched for the missing prisoner, with apprehension about what would soon happen to them if he is not found.
- 3. Examined the guards, and had them executed.

## IV. Herod's final days.

- A. Tyre and Sidon were trying to get back his favor to them.
  - 1. Made friends with Blastus, the king's chamberlain.
  - 2. Persuaded most likely with bribes.
  - 3. They were seeking peace.
- B. Called Herod a god!
  - 1. Josephus thus describes the dress which Herod wore on that occasion. "He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture, and early in the morning came into the theater place of the shows and games, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently on him."
  - 2. Sat upon his throne - This does not denote a throne in the usual sense of that word, but "a high seat" in the theater, where he sat, and from whence he could have a full view of the games and sports. From this place he made his speech.
- C. Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him...
  - 1. He should have rebuke the crowd for giving him honor due only to God.
  - 2. Josephus states that he lingered, in excruciating torments, for five days.
- D. Herod dies, but God's word continues to grow and multiply.
- E. Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem and took John Mark with them.

Con:

Persecution of the church had now spread to the apostles. Peter is awaiting his death when he is miraculously released from prison. The church continued to grow because the gospel continues to be preached in the face of persecution. What about you? Have you obeyed the gospel?