

“Persecution Approved by the Populace”

Acts 12:1-19, ESV

Introduction: As chapter 12 unfolds, the situation for the early church takes a dark, sudden turn- James is martyred by Herod. The beheading of James pleased the Jews; consequently, Herod turned up the heat on the Christians. How did the church respond? What can we learn from their response?

First, Let Us Look Carefully at Acts 12:1-5: James is Killed and Peter is Imprisoned.

- ❖ We are told **Herod** the king “laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church” (v. 1).
- ❖ Herod was perceptive in his **awareness** that a sect of Jewish Christians were upsetting the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem. Thus, he set out to do something about it. First order of business-beheading James.
- ❖ **James** was the **first** of the Apostles **martyred** (v. 2).
- ❖ This execution **pleased the populace!** Therefore, Herod arrested **Peter** and put him in **prison** (v. 3-4).
- ❖ BUT THE **CHURCH** WAS **PRAYING**. TO **GOD**. ON BEHALF OF **PETER** (v. 5).

Application:

Did the church pray for James? Of course. God allowed James to be executed. The people were heartbroken, but they did not despair. Sometimes, God does not give us that for which we pray. Further, even praying churches collide with persecution and difficulty. We see this in the early church.

Second, Let Us Look Carefully at Acts 12:6-19: An Angel of the Lord Rescues Peter.

- ❖ Peter is led out of the prison by an **angel** of the Lord (v. 6-11).
- ❖ Folks, God shows up! Angel in the cell. Chains fell off Peter’s hands. Not seen by the guards. Iron gate opens on its own. Peter thinks he is dreaming. THIS IS NO DREAM. **THIS IS GOD!** Peter becomes aware of what is happening...his escape **orchestrated by the hand** of Almighty God. He is rescued.
- ❖ Peter tells them **how the Lord** brought him out of prison (v. 17).
- ❖ “Tell these things to **James** and to the brothers.”- (v. 17). Peter leaves.
- ❖ Who is this James? It is the **brother of Jesus**, who also **authored** the book of James. He is the **leader** of the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 15**).

Application:

The church was together praying; then, they are shocked at the answer to their prayer. “God often gives us more than we expect and always more than we deserve.” Praise God.