

**Ministry of The Holy Spirit**  
**Government Persecution Begins**  
**Acts 12**

Last time...Peter was confronted for what “he did” with Gentiles in Cornelius’ home  
Peter made a stand for what he knows the Lord did, standing on

- his testimony
- the Word of God
- the Spirit of God
- the testimony of eyewitnesses
- reason

Then, in Antioch, Saul’s ministry resumes and a warning from the Lord to the Church:  
“Hard times are coming. Get ready.”

This time...an aspect of those hard times starts – persecution by the Government

We are in Acts 12

v1 Now about that time, Herod...vex certain of the church:

About the time of Ch 11:27-28, things take another turn for the worse for the  
Church in Jerusalem

Herod Agrippa I

- grandson of Herod the Great, who slaughtered all the males 2 years old and younger in Bethlehem in an attempt to murder Jesus
- son of Herod Antipas, who murdered John the Baptist and who teamed up with Pontius Pilate in the persecution of Jesus
- father of Herod Agrippa II, who was almost persuaded by the Apostle Paul to be a Christian (Acts 26:28)

makes a political decision to endear himself to the Jews by persecuting the  
Church

Thus far, the persecution of the Church has come from the Jews  
Now, persecution comes also from the Romans (the Gov’t)

And Herod Agrippa I, to get the biggest political gain, seemingly targets the  
11 apostles...leaders of the Church  
He is a child of the devil, doing as his father does

v2      killed James...with the sword:

Herod Agrippa I's first target was the Apostle James

- brother of the Apostle John
  - son of Zebedee
  - former business partner of John, Peter, and Andrew
  - a "Son of Thunder"
  - one of Jesus' "Inner Circle" (JJ&P)
    - raising Jairus' daughter from the dead
    - Transfiguration
    - Q & A on the Mount of Olives
- (Olivet Discourse in Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21)

Herod had James beheaded

Of course this was not justice for a capital crime,  
for James committed no crime

This was a political assassination, Gov't persecution for purely political purposes

Thus, James is the 1<sup>st</sup> Apostle to be martyred...alluded to in advance by Jesus in  
Matt 20:20-23

What does this mean?

The Lord was done with James (John 19:10-11)  
James had finished well his course

v3-5a   because he saw it pleased the Jews...Peter...in prison:

Because the execution of James went so well, it was so pleasing to the Jews,  
Herod Agrippa I gives the people an encore – Peter, the undisputed  
"voice" of the early Church

The timing is the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread, which explains why Herod  
is in Jerusalem

During the Feast, no trials or executions were allowed, so Herod had Peter thrown  
in prison until after the Feast

Herod assigned a 24/7 security detail for Peter to ensure he would see another big  
uptick of political favor from the Jews

4 squads of 4 Roman soldiers

4 watches/shifts, each manned by 4 soldiers

This security detail would watch Peter until after "Passover"

("Easter" is an unfortunate translation by the KJV translators, reflecting  
the corruption in the Roman Church at the time)

Once the Feast was over, then Herod would kill Peter

v5b but prayer:

Peter is in maximum security jail...”but prayer”

Prayer: Conversation by the children of God with their Father, whereby they gain access on earth to the power of God in heaven

When Peter was arrested, the Church fought the good fight of faith – praying without ceasing (“earnestly”, “fervently”)

The Church is a fighting unit and does fight battles on earth!

2 Cor 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

John 14:14 *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*

The Church fights spiritual battles with spiritual armor and weapons (Eph 6:10-18)

The Church does not fight national Gov’t’s...that is God’s work, to lift up and take down (Dan 2:21, Dan 4:17)

Our enemy is not the Gov’t...even if it persecutes us...but the principality and power, the wickedness in high places, behind the Gov’t

Facing a frontal assault, the Church fights with fervent, unceasing prayer

Luke 18:1-8

1 Thes 5:17

v6-8 the same night...sleeping...angel of the Lord:

On the last night of the Feast...Herod will execute Peter in the morning, to the delight of his constituency...who is doing what?

Peter: chained to a Roman soldier on both sides, being watched by 2 other soldiers at the jail doors  
with no way of escape and facing certain and unjust execution, he is... sleeping, at rest in the Lord

He is not fearful or all stressed out, wailing and gnashing his teeth  
He knows James was immediately in the presence of the Lord in heaven, as was Stephen  
He knows he will be too

He is not hanging onto this probationary life on earth or anything in this world, his heart and mind are settled on things above

Col 3:1-4

Matt 6:33-34

1 Peter 5:7

The Lord God: acting, right on time (not too soon and not too late), doing the impossible

Mark 9:23     **If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.**

The Gospel of Mark is authored by the Holy Spirit, inspired words given to Peter and recorded by John Mark

sends an angel, a ministering spirit sent to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:14)

Into the darkness of night and of a Roman jail comes a minister of light to deliver Peter from death:

- nudged Peter in the side to rouse him from sleep...touched Peter
- spoke to Peter, "Get up quickly." (Your sleep study is over)
- caused the chains binding Peter to simply fall off
- spoke again to Peter, "Put your cloak and sandals on and follow me."

Why is the Lord delivering Peter when He did not deliver James?  
James had finished his God-ordained course, Peter has not

John 21:18-21

The Lord still has ordained work to do in and thru Peter

v9-11    wist not that it was true...was come to himself:

Peter did everything the angel told him to do

But he thought it was a dream/vision; he was acting out his dream...

REM Behavior Disorder-ish

He followed the angel past the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> guard

(Soldiers 3 and 4, as if they had been blinded)

to the prison gate, a big heavy iron gate that "opened by itself"

He followed the angel out of the jail to safety, at which point in time this ministering spirit from eternity leaves him

Ps 91:11     he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

Heb 13:2     Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares

Once delivered from death and into safety, Peter comes to his senses and realizes this was not a dream but that the Lord had literally and physically delivered him from death at the hands of Herod the murderer and to the delight of his unbelieving countrymen

btw...the Lord still does!  
[ Brother Yun book ]

v12 came to the house of Mary:

When it was clear in his mind about what had just happened, Peter makes a beeline to the house of Mary, site of v5  
Mary is the mother of John Mark, the recorder of “Peter’s” Gospel

The Church is gathered in her house...the early Church gathered in houses  
It was not until the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century, after Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official state religion of the Roman Empire, that the Church began to build dedicated structures that we call “churches”  
Before that, they gathered in people’s houses;  
the Church was mobile, not identified by a building

We are a “house church” in a time where there are a great many dedicated buildings called “churches”

v13-14 Peter knocked at the door...knew Peter’s voice...opened not:

Peter is an escaped Roman prisoner;  
Rome did not take kindly to escaped prisoners!

When he gets to Mary house, the door is locked, no doubt due to the Gov’t persecution

Peter knocked on the door, wanting to get off the street and into the safe confines of Mary’s house

A young lady named Rhoda answered the knock on the door, but did not open it  
She recognized Peter’s voice and, so excited by the answer to all their prayers, ran off to tell everyone...leaving Peter outside standing on the street, exposed

v15 You are mad:

Praying without ceasing (fervently) for Peter, what did the Church do when they got the report that their prayers were answered?

They did not believe the report!

They thought the report-er was crazy!

That's crazy talk!

It is impossible for Peter to have escaped!

You only heard what you wanted to hear.

The Church was praying, NOT believing

Mark 11:24 *Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*

But Rhoda made a stand – she knew what she knew and spoke the truth in the face of unbelief

Nonsense!

You heard his angel

Is that reasonable?

Why would the Father answer His children's prayers for Peter by sending an angel?

The mindset of the Church: Peter had been killed...NOT the Lord would actually deliver Peter

So...why and what are they praying about?

“Lord, the Gov't has taken James and Peter. Please, Lord, not us next!”?

Prayer is a very curious activity if it is done NOT believing

v16-17 continued knocking...astonished...hold their peace:

In the very same way in which Jesus taught them/us to pray, Peter kept knocking until he got an answer

Those inside heard the knocking and went to see who was at the door

Oh my gosh, it is Peter!

Well, shut my mouth!

And they made a joyful noise unto the Lord

In response to which Peter said

Yes, shut your mouth!

For heaven's sake, shhhhh!

I am an escaped Roman prisoner!

You are going to wake up the neighbors and when the Roman army comes looking for me, the neighbors will rat me out

So please, come inside and settle down!

Once safely off the street and behind closed doors, Peter bears witness of what the Lord had done

Then he told them to go give this praise report to

- James
  - the brother of Jesus
  - the son of Joseph and Mary
  - not believe in Jesus until after His resurrection and appearance to him (1 Cor 15:7)
  - the pastor of the Church in Jerusalem
- the brethren
  - the other 9 apostles
  - the rest of the believers

Then Peter went into hiding

He is going “underground” for a while

Apart from his participation in the 1<sup>st</sup> Church Council presided over by James in Acts 15, this is the end of the record of Peter’s testimony in the Book of Acts

We will see him again in Antioch with Paul (Gal 2:11-14)

We also read of him in the writings of the early church fathers (disciples of the Apostles)

Most of their testimony is of Peter’s ministry as the Lord’s “Simon Magnus hunter”

An example of why Peter and not James (v6-8)

v18-19 no small stir...put to death:

At sunrise on the day after the Feast...no Peter, only empty chains and open gates  
And the 4 soldiers of that watch freak out!

Herod Agrippa I has lost a ripe political moment with the Jews because there is no apostle to behead!

As Roman Law enforcement officers, the soldiers knew the consequences – if the prisoner doesn’t die, someone else is going to die – them!

Herod sent out a search party while he interrogated the 4 soldiers;  
he desperately wanted the political capital of high profile beheading  
Peter was not to be found, Herod has egg on his face before the Jews...  
and the 4 soldiers are executed in Peter’s place

Then Herod slithers back to Caesarea, the Roman HQ for Judea now that the Feast is over...where there is a believer named Cornelius and where this serpent will meet his end

v20 highly displeased...Tyre and Sidon...their country was nourished:  
At this time their appears to be a trade agreement dispute between Herod and Tyre and Sidon (Phoenician traders)  
Every trade agreement dispute involves terms and money...so a big deal to a very worldly guy

His frame of mind toward them was disturbing to the traders from Tyre and Sidon because they depend on the food they got in exchange from Judea;  
No trade, no food...and food is starting to get scarce because of the famine

So they make a political foray by recruiting Herod's "bedroom manager" to be their friend to help them make peace with Herod, their valuable food source

v21-22 royal apparel...the voice of a god:  
Josephus, the Jewish army commander commissioned by Rome to write the history of the Jews, gives details not recorded in Scripture

Herod Agrippa 1 held some shows in Caesarea to honor Emperor Claudius (the Roman Empire was BIG on entertainment for the masses)  
On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the event, he put on a garment made entirely of silver  
In the morning as he walked into the theatre (we stand in it when we tour), the rays of the sun made the garment glisten!  
This amazed the trade representatives from Tyre and Sidon...and they erupted as recorded in v22  
To which Herod basked in the glory, not correcting or rebuking them

Well...The OTL God is a jealous God...

v23 immediately...smote...eaten of worms:  
8x in Scripture we read that God is a jealous God

Ex 34:14 thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God

Deut 4:24 the LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire, *even* a jealous God

Nahum 1:2 God *is* jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and *is* furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath* for his enemies

The Creator and Savior will NOT share His glory with any creature  
1 Cor 1:31



So, immediately, a messenger is sent from heaven to strike Herod Agrippa I.  
Worms/maggots began eating his insides  
Per Josephus, Herod, in front of the packed theatre, was stricken and rushed back  
to his palace, where, after 5 days he died a horrific death

The next word?

v24 But the Word of God:

Gov't persecution of the Church has begun  
The Apostle James was murdered  
The Apostle Peter was imprisoned but delivered and gone into hiding

This is a time of purification of the Church and, as a result, the Church was  
strengthened  
Disingenuous Christians fell by the wayside, returning to the world they never  
really left  
Genuine Christians grew and were multiplied  
The children of God are not exterminated by persecution, they are multiplied in it

At this point in time...about 45 AD (15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ)...  
the Church is facing

- persecution by the Jews
- persecution by the Gov't
- a great famine
- a simmering divide over what to do with the Gentile believers

And James, the pastor of the Church in Jerusalem, writes a letter to Jewish believers living  
elsewhere in the Roman Empire, where they have been scattered...no doubt delivering to  
them the message he delivered in-person to the Church at Jerusalem

Therefore, next week in our chronological study of the Ministry of the Holy Spirit, we will put a  
placeholder here at Acts 12:25 and move to the Epistle of James...  
after which we will return to Acts 12:25 *ff* to consider the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary team, which is sent from  
Antioch, not Jerusalem

But before we leave Acts and go to James, what lessons can we learn from Acts 12?

## Application/Lessons

### 1. Prayer...not an idle exercise!

Pray without ceasing, with fervency...like we really mean it!

Pray believing, doubting nothing

Pray until we get an answer e.g. Charity, and not done yet

Note: Why was Charity afflicted as she was?

To teach us to pray?

To encourage us to pray, knowing God hears us and does impossible things?

In these days of mayhem and lawlessness in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,  
shine as lights in the darkness and pray for

- the Body of Christ
- parts of the Body
- national repentance and revival

### 2. Prison and chains...not binding!

Jesus Christ leads out of prison all who will believe

Heb 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage

2 Tim 1:7

Jesus Christ alone delivers us from our enemy, death

Rom 6:23

Jesus Christ alone can break the chains that bind us, the sin that so easily besets us

Peter did not break the chains that bound him, he merely rested in the Lord

All that remains of the old man is empty chains

### 3. Finish well our course

Why did the Lord not deliver James?

James had finished well his course

Why did the Lord deliver Peter?

Peter's course was not yet finished

What is a "course"

David, in preparation for the building of the Temple (by Solomon) organized the priests and Levites into 26 annual work shifts, each group serving in the Temple for 2 weeks, called a "course"

We believers, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, have been made into priests (Rev 1:6, Rev 5:10), of a superior order (Mel, Jesus being our High Priest)

We serve Jesus in the Temple of God on earth today (our bodies, His Body)

But our work shift, our course, is 24/7

What is my course?

God's plan for my life

2 Tim 1:9      Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (Jesus' calling)

Eph 2:10      For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (our calling)

We all have different courses, yet we travel together

Do not stumble before crossing the Finish Line!

Finish strong, finish well

Press on for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus –

“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!”

4. Is anyone here (in-person or virtually) not delivered from death and still bound in chains?  
Do you want to be delivered, set free, and given eternal life?