

# ACTS CHAPTER 12

## James Killed and Peter Imprisoned (12:1-5)

- **About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church (12:1)**
  - o **Herod Agrippa I**, Ruler of all Palestine from A.D. 41 to 44.
    - Grandson of **Herod the Great** (Lk 1:5) *"In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechari'ah, of the division of Abi'jah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth."*
    - Brother in Law of **Herod Antipas** (Lk 23:7) *"And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time."*
    - Was popular among the Jews, in part because of his persecution of the Christians. Was especially loyal to the party of the Pharisees (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.6 1-4)
- **He killed James the brother of John with the sword; (12:2)**
  - o *The Important James' of the New Testament*
    - *James son of Zebedee (James the Greater)*
      - *Apostle*
      - *Brother of John the Apostle*
      - *Fisherman from Galilee*
      - *Originally a follower of John the Baptist*
      - *Was in Jesus' "inner circle". With Peter and John he witnessed:*
        - o *The raising of Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:51)*
        - o *the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28)*
        - o *The agony in Gethsemane (Mt 26:47; Mk 14:33)*
      - *First Apostle to be Martyred (44 AD) Acts 12:2*
      - *According to a tradition, which, as we learn from Eusebius (Church History II.9.2-3), was received from Clement of Alexandria the accuser who led the Apostle to judgment, moved by his confession, became himself a Christian, and they were beheaded together.*
      - *Feast day July 25th*
    - *James son of Alphaeus (James the Lesser)*
      - *Apostle*
      - *Possibly the son of a woman named Mary (Mk 15:40; 16:1; Mt 27:56)*
      - *Martyred by crucifixion in Egypt according to tradition.*
      - *Feast Day May 3.*
    - *James of Jerusalem (James the Just)*
      - *Not an Apostle*
      - *Kinsman of Jesus (Mk 6:3)*

- *The Lord's Brother (Gal1:19)*
  - *Witness to the Resurrection (I Cor 15:7)*
  - *One of the pillars (Gal 2:9) of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-18)*
  - *Wrote the Letter of St. James*
  - *First Bishop of Jerusalem (Eusebius History 2,1 and 4,5)*
  - *Martyred in A.D. 62, thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple (Josephus, Antiquities 20,200)*
- ***...and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.(12:3)***
- *In the first century the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened bread were celebrated simultaneously and the titles are interchangeable as in John's Gospel.*
  - *Peter is arrested at the same time of year that Jesus was.*
  - *This is the second wave of persecution against the Christians. See (8:1). While the hierarchy had formerly been left alone, now it is being targeted.*
- ***And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. (12:4-5)***
- Squad (Quaternion) – a group of 4 soldiers... thus 16 soldiers.
    - This is the third time Jesus is arrested
      - By the priests and Sadducees(4:3), later released
      - By the Saducees (5:19) and released by an angel (5:19-21)

**Peter Delivered from Prison (12:6-19)**

<b>PARALLELS WITH ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT</b>	
<b>EXODUS</b>	<b>ACTS</b>
the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt (12:51)	the Lord had brought him out of the prison (12:17)
and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians (3:8)	rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting (12:11)
It is the LORD's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast (12:11-12)	This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover... (12:3-4)
Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, (14:19)	and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him (12:7)
In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. (12:11)	And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." (12:8)

- Funny aspects of the story
  - Peter doesn't seem to wake up right away
    - and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly."
  - He also seems to not have woken up quite yet...
    - And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your mantle around you and follow me."
  - Peter left outside
    - Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate... But Peter continued knocking

Q: WHAT DO THESE FUNNY ASPECTS OF THE STORY MEAN TO US WHO READ THEM NOW?

- ***The House of Mary (2:12)***
  - he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.(12:12)
    - tradition holds it was also the Upper Room where the disciples met in prayer between the Ascension and Pentecost (Epiphanius, *de Pond. et Mens.* c. 14; Cyril Jerusalem. *Catech* 16 [note 35]).
    - Some hold that it was also the same room in which the Last Supper (First Eucharist) was celebrated.
    - John Mark is the author of the Gospel according to St. Mark. He also accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and was subsequently the point of discord between them.
      - \*3 of the 4 Evangelists are named in this chapter!
    - Regardless it was a place of prayer and gathering for the Early Christian community. Possibly referred to elsewhere in Acts:
      - *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes (Acts 2:46)*
- ***"It is his angel!"(12:15)***
  - See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.(Mt 18:10)
  - For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Ps 91:11-12)

### **The Death of Herod (12:20-25)**

- Compared to the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 2 Mac 9:5-12
  - And so the ungodly man's body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay... And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these

words: "It is right to be subject to God, and no mortal should think that he is equal to God."

- His end is also recorded by Flavius Josephus who reports that Herod received the delegation during a festival celebrated at the theater in Caesarea and was wearing a marvelous silver garment that reflected the sunlight: ... *and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery ... A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner ... and when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life (Antiquities of the Jews, 19.8.2)*
- And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.
  - Seen as a transition signaling the beginning of Paul's mission to the Gentiles.