

# ACTS

## Chapter 12

### Note from Kathy

*Planning for our posterity is not something we wake up and do that often, but perhaps it should be. The seeds we sow today will be the harvest we reap in the future. Even the best seed planted, if neglected, will not flourish. Let's read the chapter at least twice watching for anything the Lord might want to bring to our attention. Spend a few minutes in quiet meditation, listening for all he longs to say.*



### Observation

#### Acts 12:1-4

*"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with the approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. <sup>4</sup> Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover."*

1. The church has experienced tremendous hatred and persecution. Just when you think it could not get any worse, King Herod chooses to get involved. What was the motive behind King Herod's actions in Acts 12:1-4?
2. Herod was being very strategic. Many Jewish people were in Jerusalem at that time for the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Do a bit of research, and briefly describe this celebration. If you have a study Bible there may be notes or scripture references you can read.
3. Acts 12:2 identifies the first of the apostles to be martyred for preaching the gospel. Which apostle was it, and how did he die?
4. What was Herod's plan for Peter according to Acts 12:4?

▣ **Acts 12:4-7,9,10**

*“After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.<sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying for him.<sup>6</sup> The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.<sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’ he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists...<sup>9</sup> Peter followed him out of the prison...<sup>10</sup> They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself.”*

▣ **John 21:18**

*“Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”*

▣ **Acts 12:12**

*“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.”*

5. Acts 12:4-10 reveals God’s amazing hand of deliverance. Herod had Peter arrested and placed in prison. Why would it have been futile for Peter to even consider trying to escape? Describe the conditions of his imprisonment.
6. Those who loved Peter began to earnestly pray for him. James had just been beheaded and that had brought great pleasure to the Jewish leaders. What do you suppose his Christian friends were asking God to do for Peter?

7. Who appeared to Peter in the middle of the night?

One of the things I found amazing was that Peter was sleeping. What distractions could have kept him up that night?

8. What do you believe helped him sleep so soundly that he had to be prodded awake? Read what Jesus told Peter in John 21:18.
9. When Peter awoke what happened that made it possible for him to leave?

10. What did this visitor tell Peter to do?

11. Understandably, Peter did not know for sure what was happening. He had experienced visions before, and so he thought that must be what was happening. When did Peter realize it was real?

12. Where did Peter go as quickly as possible?

According to Acts 12:12, what were his friends still doing?

13. Peter told them to be very quiet. Why do you suppose he wanted to see these believers before leaving Jerusalem?

14. What did the prison guards discover the next morning?

Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. What happened to the guards?

**Acts 12:21-23**

*“On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.<sup>22</sup> They shouted, ‘This is the voice of a god, not of a man.’<sup>23</sup> Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”*

**Hebrews 10:31**

*“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

**Life Application Bible Notes**

*“God’s power is awesome, and his punishment terrible. These words give us a glimpse into the holiness of God. He is sovereign; his power is unlimited; he will do as he promises.”*

**Acts 2:1**

*“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”*

**Acts 12:3**

*“This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.”*

15. Herod had other issues that were pressing for his attention. I’m sure he thought it would have been great if his plan for Peter had worked, but on to other matters. He headed for the coast to meet with some of the leaders from Tyre and Sidon. Scripture tells us that on the appointed day he appeared before them, seated on his throne and began to give a speech. It must have been an amazing speech. What did the people say when he finished?
16. Herod may have loved receiving this kind of praise and worship, but who did not love it? \_\_\_\_\_ Read Hebrews 10:31 and the Life Application Bible notes on this issue.
17. Despite all that is against the followers of Christ, what did God continue to do for them?

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## Application

1. No one likes to suffer, and the persecution the church of Acts endured was not merely discrimination and hateful words. There are those in other countries today that can honestly relate to the persecution of the early Christian church. What a heart for the Lord it must have taken to remain faithful during all these trials. Have you or your family suffered because others knew you loved and followed Jesus?
2. Herod was interested in one thing, the stability and security of his reign. He did not care who he hurt to make that happen. When he had James killed he saw the pleasure that gave the Jewish leaders. The timing was perfect—it was Passover celebration, and the city was brimming with people. To make his position stronger he had Peter arrested too. Have you ever found yourself or a loved one in a position of total powerlessness? If so, what did you do?
3. The previous holiday mentioned was Pentecost in Acts 2:1. Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after Passover. What do these two facts tell you about the timeframe of Acts 1-12?

What changes have these believers witnessed in this relatively brief amount of time?

4. In the gospels we read of the close relationship shared by Peter, James, John and Jesus. Now, James has been martyred, and Peter lies stripped of his clothes and chained between two Roman guards. Peter finds himself in a situation that he has no hope of fixing on his own, yet he is sound asleep. Would you be able to sleep soundly if you knew the next morning you would face a trial by a ruthless ruler who had just beheaded one of your dearest friends?

When you find yourself in a situation that is out of your control, are you able to rest knowing that God is always in control?

Share with your small group a scripture verse that brings you comfort and helps you rest at times like these.

5. Peter's had some amazing friends. They did not simply text him and say, "Man, we're praying for you." No, they earnestly, fervently and continually prayed for Peter. But like many of us, when they prayed did they picture God delivering Peter as he did?

When was the last time you fervently and continually kept a prayer vigil going day and night for someone?

**Acts 12:12 and 16**  
*"When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying...<sup>16</sup> when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished."*

6. God miraculously answered their prayers. Peter was out of prison and went straight to the house where they were praying. Acts 12:12 and 16 say many people were gathered together and praying for God to save Peter, but they were astonished when they saw him. Share a time when God answered your prayer in a way that totally surprised you.

What does it do for your faith when God answers your prayer?

7. Peter knew that this was a faith-building event. His friends had prayed for him, and he could not leave town without letting them know the details of God's miraculous deliverance. Are you careful to go back to your praying friends and let them know how God has answered their prayers?
8. Pride filled Herod's heart as he accepted the praise of the people from Tyre and Sidon. Pride is a serious sin. It cost Herod his life. Has your pride ever cost you?

9. Read the below verses on pride and humility and paraphrase them.

Verse	Paraphrase
Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.	
Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.	
Proverbs 29:23 One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.	
James 4:6 "...God opposes the proud but gives graces to the humble."	
Proverbs 16:5 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.	
Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.	
Proverbs 29:5-6 A man that flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad.	