

## Acts 12 Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

#### Outline

#### II. Persecution & Peace Chs. 8-12

##### I. Persecution Renewed Ch. 12

##### 1. Peter is arrested & delivered 12:1-19

##### <sup>1</sup> Now about that time

Right about 44 AD, so roughly 10 years after the death & resurrection of Jesus.

##### Herod the king

Agrippa 1, grandson of Herod the Great.

stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. <sup>2</sup> Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

We looked at this in depth 2 Sundays ago, so we'll be summary & fill in some of the gaps tonight.

<sup>3</sup> And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. <sup>5</sup> Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. <sup>6</sup> And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.

<sup>7</sup> Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. <sup>8</sup> Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." <sup>9</sup> So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup> When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

As I mentioned 2 Sundays back, notice how *hurried* this angel is.

He *pokes* Peter, prods him awake, *urges* him to get dressed & follow him.

The language a rush & when they're clear of the prison, the angel vanishes without so much as a tip of his *Aerostale* cap.

Think about *other* angelic encounters in Scripture – many of them carry a similar sense of *urgency*.

An angel appears, speaks its piece, then jets.

The only angels that linger are the fallen angels of Genesis 6 who got into all kinds of trouble & were judged by God.

The reason for angelic urgency is because as Hebrews 1:14 says, *they're servants*, whose mission is to minister to God's people.

We're not to have *a relationship* with them; they exist to *facilitate our relationship with God* & one another.

They have incredible power, but it's meant for one thing = to serve.

They spend as little time as possible in the tangible realm because of the *danger* it presents.

Tell me, what do humans typically *do* when confronted with an angel? *Worship*.

Angels are so powerful, wise & beautiful our awe at them stimulates a strong urge to worship.

But whenever a human does fall before an angel in Scripture, the angel *always* forbids it *vehemently!*

They forbid it because worship belongs to God *alone*.

But there's another reason why they refuse worship: *One* of the heavenly creatures, a cherub named Lucifer, once made the error of *pursuing* worship.

More than likely, the reason angels don't manifest *more often* is because of the danger it presents us, and maybe them – it's the *allure of being worshiped*.

If that's true – then it's informative because of all the interest invested in angels over the last decade.

It's all pointless because angels themselves prefer to remain *behind the scenes*.

They don't *want* us seeking relationship with them.

The exist to facilitate our relationship with God & one another – anything else presents a distraction & danger.

**11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." 12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." 16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.**

The James mentioned here is the *brother* of Jesus, not John's brother—he'd been martyred by Herod. James had already risen to a place of prominence & leadership in the Church, even though he was not one of the Apostles.

How is it possible that since none of Jesus' brothers had believed in Him until after the resurrection, James could now be in a position of leadership in the Church.

In fact, as we'll see in a few chapters, James becomes **THE** leader of the Jerusalem Church.

How?

The answer lies in understanding *Jewish leadership customs*.

In synagogue life – the archisynagogue, or "ruler of the synagogue" usually passed on his role to his son or next closest male relative.

They derived this custom by considering how the high priesthood was passed on – it went from father to son.

The administration of the Jewish *church was patterned after the synagogue*.

So it was *custom* Jesus' relatives would take on role of leadership after Him.

And while it was custom – it wasn't necessarily what God intended.

If James was to lead the Church, it ought to have been based on God's appointment & gifting, not some tradition.

**18 Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. 19 But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there.**

Because it was the capital, and quite frankly, the climate was much nicer.

The *penalty* for allowing a prisoner to escape was to suffer the intended sentence, the fate of the prisoner.

Since Peter was going to be executed, the guards who lost him were put to death.

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Now Luke gives us an interesting if disturbing post-script to the story of Herod Agrippa I, this man who was willing to persecute & kill God's people for sake of political gain.

## 2. Herod croaks 12:20-23

**20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.**

History is mute on the cause of Agrippa's rage at Tyre & Sidon.

These were important seaports north of Caesarea in the region of Lebanon, which was part of his territory.

Whatever the cause of Herod's anger, it was hot and the people realized they needed to patch things up.

They depended on food imports from Galilee, another region Herod had direct control of. Cutting off food supplies as a means of coercing populations has been a regular practice throughout history.

In modern time, Stalin starved millions of Ukrainians to death by shifting food supplies. Whatever the cause of Herod's anger, the people of the northern seaports knew they needed to mend his good will.

So they greased the palm of his personal assistant, who softened Agrippa up.

When he deemed the time was right, he sent a message to Tyre & Sidon, who sent a huge delegation south to Caesarea to renew their pledge of loyalty to Herod's throne.

**21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of these times, said Herod's garment was made of silver threads that reflected the sun & dazzled the eyes of the crowd.

This was a garment so spectacular, it would have made P. Diddy & Gwen Steffani *both* jealous. (Thanks Jon Courson for the idea. He said 'Elton John' – a bit dated now.)

Remember Herod Agrippa's desire to win the heart & loyalty of the Jews.

In the pursuit of that both he & his wife had given themselves to a very strict observance of Jewish religious & social customs; dress diet, cleanliness.

But when he went to pagan Caesarea, the modern Roman town built by his grandfather, Herod the Great, he had no qualms about adopting ultra-pagan fashions & customs.

The word "oration" refers to a public speech.

The grammar Luke uses here means Herod was chewing them out, giving a list of all the reasons why they were wrong and how innocent he was of their resistance to his gracious and wise rule.

They responded with massive *mea culpas* & a growing surge of praise that rose to a crescendo in the declaration that he was one of the gods.

Of course, the praise of the Sidonians & Tyrians wasn't sincere – it was bald-faced flattery, aimed at restoring themselves to Agrippa's favor.

As the Book of Proverbs so often warns, beware of flattery.

It's a double danger, as we see here.

- 1) The first danger is that flattery is naught but a mask to manipulate the one flattered into doing something.
- 2) The second danger is that if flattery is believed, it creates a base of pride that will only lead to more trouble.

You might not be able to STOP people flattering you, but for goodness sake, don't believe them!

Herod not only believed them, he kept himself in the place where they could heap more praise on him.

All of this only served to incur God's wrath, for he will share his glory with no one.

**23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.**

There came a point at which the cautioning voice of the Spirit was finally rejected by Herod, and bothered him no more.

He knew it was wrong to accept & cultivate their praise, but it felt good, so he went for it.

He resisted the voice of conscience, and the Spirit turned him over to his sin.

At that point, there was nothing left for Herod but judgment, which began with an angel's smiting him with an affliction.

Josephus tells us Herod died of severe abdominal problems.

Even while speaking to the crowd there at the theater in Caesarea, he was struck with intense pain and was hurried to his palace a stone's throw away.

5 days later, he was dead, his digestive system infested with parasitic worms.

This judgment was simply a manifestation in his *body* of what had taken place in his him *spiritually*.

The Holy Spirit was his spiritual immune system, but he rejected the Spirit's voice and let in the moral disease of pride.

So God sent an angel to flip a switch in his body halting his body's defenses against the parasites already there – and in a matter of mere moments, they'd exploded in a flurry of growth, eating him from the inside out.

### **3. Barnabas & Paul return to Antioch 12:24-25**

#### **24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.**

Despite all Herod's attempts to assist the Jewish rulers in eradicating the Church, it just kept growing. As I said last week, the Church is an anvil that's worn our many hammers throughout history.

#### **25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.**

Barnabas & Paul had taken relief from the church at Antioch to the believers in Jerusalem when a word of prophecy reached them about an impending famine.

When they return to Antioch, they took young John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, with them.

This is the man who would later write the Gospel of Mark – but only after a rather shaky start as a follower of Christ.