

Acts Chapter 12

As we begin chapter 12, we see King Herod begin a violent persecution of God's church. After murdering the Apostle James, and seeing how much it pleased the Jews, Herod turns his attention on Peter. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he has Peter seized and imprisoned. His plan, as it were, is to have Peter executed after Passover is finished.

God, apparently, has other plans. The night before he is put to death, an angel comes to rescue him; "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly." Peter's chains fall off, and under the guidance of the angel, he makes his escape.

He then heads to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. When he knocks on the door, though, a young girl named Rhoda answers, and is so excited she runs off to tell the others without letting Peter in!

First they claim that she is crazy, and then they say it is his angel. Peter is constantly knocking during this time, however, so they finally open the door and let him in. Although they are astonished, Peter tells them to hold their peace (implying that they were probably speaking and shouting in a frenzied manner). He then recounts the story of his miraculous release, and leaves.

The next day, when Peter's escape is discovered, there was a "stir" among the soldiers of the prison. When Herod seeks him that morning (assumedly to put him to death, as expressed earlier) he finds out that Peter was gone, and puts the soldiers who were guarding him to death.

Near the end of the chapter, a recounting of Herod's death occurs. Tyre and Sidon make appeal through the king's chamberlain Blastus, for an audience with the king. The text makes it clear that Herod is angry with them, but they depend upon the king for their economic well being. So when Herod is seated on the throne, the people cheered him, and called him a god. When Herod fails to denounce this (presumably due to his pride), then "immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

The last paragraph is a detail about Saul and Barnabas, their return from Jerusalem, and their enlisting of Mark.

Throughout this narrative, we see an expounding of God's methodology in early church times, which allows us to get a look into God's character. These actions were isolated incidents, and were indicative of the age; therefore, we cannot expect these same results today, necessarily (such

as an angel releasing us from prison). They do give us an idea of his attitude, though.

First off, we see through the incident with Peter the idea of God's sovereignty. While evil King Herod had Peter imprisoned, God used it as a means to further the proclamation of the Gospel. This is often the case throughout scripture, and is typified by Joseph's quote to his brothers in the book of Genesis; "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." God does not let his followers suffer in vain, but uses the suffering caused by others for the good of the kingdom, as well as the ultimate good of the individual.

Notice verse five. It says that the Church of God "Prayed without ceasing" for Peter. This leads us to ask the question, "How often do I pray like this?" Certainly we can see the results of their prayer in this situation, and this can lead us to a deeper question; would God have released him anyway? It is an intriguing question to ponder, and the answer isn't clear. It is evident that Peter's miraculous release was a part of God's plan, though he does not make his reasoning apparent to us. But regardless of this, scripture is clear that prayer is an important part of a Christian's walk, and should be done as an act of obedience, regardless of the result.

Also within this text, we see the danger of pride, illustrated by the wicked King Herod. Not only does Herod imprison Peter, and murder James, but he also allows the subjects of Tyre and Sidon to place him as an equal with God. This is a perfect illustration of both God's patience (he did not strike Herod down with his first evil act—the killing of James) and his ultimate judgment (Herod was struck down by an angel and eaten by worms). This should serve as both a warning to the Christian, as to his own pride, and a reminder to us all that God's judgment may be delayed, but its conclusion is inevitable outside of the shed blood of Christ.