

Acts 12 – The Church's Reaction To Persecution

I. Praying Through Trial and Persecution (1-5)

A. Persecution Erupts From Herod Agrippa I(1-4)

1. This is Herod Agrippa I – Grandson of Herod the Great
 - a. Herod is a family title
 - b. There are several family members named Herod in Scripture
 - c. Herod Antipas was the Herod of Jesus' trial
2. Herod Persecutes Members of the Church (1)
3. Herod Executes the Apostle James (2)
 - a. Herod saw that the Jews were pleased by the persecution
 - b. Herod saw an opportunity to further his reputation
4. Herod Plans for Peter's Execution (3-4)
 - a. Herod Arrests Peter During Passover Week (3)
 - b. Herod Holds Peter Securely in Prison (4a)
 - i. He has surely heard of the Apostles' miraculous escape from the prison of the Sanhedrin
 - ii. Herod takes special precautions to assure this doesn't happen again
 - c. Herod Intends to Kill Peter After Passover (4b)

B. The Church Prays Fervently (5)

1. The Church fights for Peter the correct way
2. While Herod holds Peter in Jail, the church goes to God for Peter

II. Experiencing Answered Prayers (6-16)

A. Peter Is Astonished By His Divine Rescue (6-11)

1. An Angel Frees Peter From Prison (6-8)
 - a. On the night before Peter was to be executed
 - i. God rescues Peter the night before
 - b. Peter slept while being guarded securely (6-7a)
 - i. Peter was in perfect peace and sleeping soundly
 - ii. Peter was shackled and sleeping by two guys but still slept, knowing the next morning he would die
 - iii. Peter still sleeps as the Angel appears in bright light (7a)
 - iv. Peter sleeps so soundly that the Angel has to nudge him to wake him up
 - c. The Angel Wakes Peter and commands him to get up (7b)
 - i. The Angel Causes Peter's chains to fall off (7c)
 - ii. The Angel Commands Peter to prepare to leave (8a)
 - iii. Gird yourself means get yourself ready

- iv. Put on your sandals
 - d. The Angel commands Peter to Follow (8b)
 - 2. Peter Doesn't Initially Realize What is Happening (9-11)
 - a. Peter Wasn't Sure if This Was Real Or A Vision (9)
 - i. Maybe Peter was still so sleepy, he didn't know if it was real
 - ii. Peter probably thought many times of escaping
 - b. Peter is Led to Freedom and the Angel Departs (10)
 - c. Peter Realizes He has Been Saved From Execution (11)
 - i. Peter comes to himself out in the road
 - ii. God really did release me from prison!
 - iii. He was surely looking around thinking the guards would soon be coming for him
 - B. The Church is Astonished By Peter's Divine Rescue (12-16)
 - 1. Peter's Arrival Stupefies a Servant Girl (12-14)
 - a. Peter heads to the house where the church is praying (12)
 - b. Rhoda, a servant girl, comes to answer Peter's knock (13)
 - c. Rhoda leaves Peter outside and returns to tell the church (14)
 - i. She recognizes Peter's voice
 - ii. She runs back to tell the church who is praying for Peter – leaving Peter outside
 - 2. Peter's Arrival is Doubted By the Believers (15-16)
 - a. The believers don't believe Rhoda's report (15)
 - i. They think she is crazy
 - Rather than just going and letting Peter in, she argues the truth of her claim
 - She continues insisting that Peter is at the gate
 - ii. They think it is his "guardian angel"
 - They come up with an explanation rather than simply believing God answered their prayer
 - We are still slow of heart to believe
 - b. The believers are amazed when they actually see Peter (16)
 - i. Peter continues knocking – even though he is worried that people are looking for him
 - ii. Peter is probably still calling out also
 - C. The Church's Prayers Have Been Answered
- III. Testifying to Encourage the Brethren (17)
 - A. Peter Tells the Believers About His Escape (17a)
 - 1. Peter has to quiet them down

2. They were probably getting loud in rejoicing and Rhoda was running around saying "I told you so!"
3. Peter tells them the story
- B. Peter Commands them to Tell James and the Others (17b)
 1. This James is Jesus' half brother who is now a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church
 2. Peter does not want to leave without the church knowing he is safe and delivered from prison
 - a. Peter leaves and the book of Acts will now focus on Saul of Tarsus
 - b. Peter makes sure the people know that he has not been executed but has been delivered
- IV. Allowing God to Deal With His Enemies (18-23)
 - A. Herod is Enraged at Peter's Escape (18-19)
 1. Herod's Soldiers are Upset by Peter's Escape (18)
 - a. They knew that they were in trouble
 - b. This is the second time an Apostle has simply disappeared from prison without explanation
 2. Herod sentences the Soldiers to Execution (19a)
 - a. Herod probably thought the soldiers were bribed or let them go
 - b. Herod no doubt feels embarrassed by the mishap
 3. Herod Leaves for Caesarea (19b)
 - B. Herod Manifests His Extravagant Pride (20-23)
 1. Herod is Lobbied for Peace By Tyre and Sidon (20)
 - a. Tyre and Sidon were dependent on food (grain) from Herod
 - b. Something happened and Herod cut off the supply
 - c. They came through Herod's servant Blastus to get a hearing and fix the situation
 - d. Evidently the situation was fixed and Herod comes to give a speech
 2. Herod Speaks to the People with Great Pomp (21)
 - a. Herod puts on his royal robes to address the people
 - b. The historian Josephus says that Herod appeared in glimmering silver robes
 - c. Herod may have been feeding his ego after losing the Apostle Peter
 3. Herod is Glorified as a god by the people (22)
 - a. The people flattered Herod because they needed the food from his country
 - b. They said his voice was "as the voice of a god"
 - C. Herod is Executed By God (23)
 1. An Angel of the Lord strikes Herod
 2. Herod stole glory from God by refusing to give it to Him
 3. He was eaten by worms

4. Herod executes James, tries to execute Peter and is executed by God
- V. Being Faithful to The Commission of Christ (24-25)
 - A. The Kingdom of God Continues to Grow (24)
 1. The word grows despite the death and persecution of the Apostles
 2. The word grows despite the schemes of Kings
 3. The gospel triumphs over all
 - B. Saul and Barnabas Return to Antioch
 1. Saul and Barnabas leave Jerusalem having fulfilled their mission of bringing alms from Antioch
 2. Saul and Barnabas bring John Mark back to Antioch with them
 3. God's servants still serve through the midst of all the chaos

Notice the point of the chapter. One Apostle is killed, another is delivered through the prayers of the church. Regardless of whether a single believer is delivered or sent to be with the Lord, God's enemies will surely be judged and His gospel will always be victorious. You may be called to give your life, or you may be miraculously delivered, but through it all God is working to grow His kingdom.