

A Dark Storm

As Chapter 12 of Acts opens storm clouds seem to have gathered over Jerusalem. King Herod Agrippa I has been installed as ruler over most of Palestine by the Romans¹. His rule was felt over Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Herod Agrippa himself was part Jewish and to curry favor with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, he persecuted Christians, both Jewish and non-Jewish. His reign brought terror to the Christians in Jerusalem, but was mercifully short. Divine judgment came against him as he stood in direct opposition to God, daring to put to the sword James, the son of Zebedee and imprisoning Peter, no doubt with the same intended end as James².



Read Acts 12:1-19 and answer the following questions.

When was it that Herod arrested Peter? For what political reason might he choose this timing?

What night is it?


What was the church doing?

How was Peter confined?

What happened in that cell that night? (v. 7-10)

From what did God, by sending the angel, deliver Peter?

Where did Peter go?

 Why did those gathered at the home have trouble believing it was truly Peter? For what purpose had they been gathered? Why do you think they had such difficulty believing the answer to their prayers?

¹ Herod Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who demanded the death of John the Baptist. He ruled Palestine from AD 41-44.

² It is traditionally held that James the Apostle was martyred in 44 AD.

At the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the Christians are gathered to pray for Peter. We see that even though they pray earnestly for him, they don't expect him to be released. They have already conceded his fate into the hands of Herod Agrippa to be the same as that of the apostle James. In their shock and disbelief of finding Peter on their doorstep, he is left outside in the dark of night knocking on the door! Peter enters into the house, quiets the gathering and tells them of the miraculous escape from prison led by the angel of the Lord. He instructs those gathered to tell "*James and the brothers about this*" and then leaves for "*another place*". The James of whom Peter speaks is James the brother of Jesus who becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church³. It is not known if he has already been selected as leader of the church, or if Peter's instructions here make it clear that the church is now left to the leadership of James because Peter must depart. He also directs them to instruct the "brothers" (v.17), likely the elders of the church. The other apostles are not mentioned; possibly they had already left Jerusalem seeking refuge from the persecutions ravaging the city. Finally we are told that Peter departs for "another place". Luke doesn't tell us where he goes, the destination maybe not of importance, but significant is the fact that he can no longer remain in Jerusalem for the time being. After Agrippa's death Peter does return to Jerusalem (Acts 15:7).



Now read Acts 12:19-23.

How would you describe Herod Agrippa?

🔥 Read 1 Samuel 15:23; Proverbs 8:13; Isaiah 13:11. How does God view the following attitudes and behaviors?

Arrogance:

Pride:

Evil deeds:

Defiance:

³ See Acts 15:13-21 and 21:18

This short passage starts with the brief background story of some delegates from Tyre and Sidon seeking a royal audience before King Herod Agrippa to settle a dispute. The historian Josephus also records the death of Agrippa in very similar terms to Luke's record⁴. According to Josephus, the "appointed day" was a festival day in honor of Caesar, and the gathered crowd hailed Agrippa as a god and "more than mortal". Luke tells us Herod sat on the throne in royal splendor; neither denying nor affirming the divinity ascribed him in the words of the crowd in verse 22: *"This is the voice of a god, not of a man."* Herod Agrippa persecuted the Christians, killing the apostle James and imprisoning Peter all for political gain. Religion to him was to be used for political gain. Appeasing the Jews gained him political favor. He had no reverence for God and received the accolades and praises of men for himself that should have been given to God. The angel of the Lord struck down Agrippa for his arrogance in giving neither praise to God, nor denying the words of those assembled. In his violent stance against God's people, Agrippa himself fighting God and accepted the accolades of divinity for himself. Luke tells us that an angel of the Lord struck him down. Josephus tells us he died of acute pain in the abdomen. Either way, he suffered the consequences of opposing God. Agrippa refused to share glory with God and instead exalted himself. His soul was consumed with self-glorification and pride just as his body was consumed from the inside out by worms. Being consumed by worms was considered one of the most disgraceful ways to die.

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.343-52