

Acts Chapter 12 Continued

Verses 12-16: Though the prayer of the church was fervent due to Peter's situation (verse 5), there was a deficiency in faith (verses 15-16). Evidently they did not believe God would answer in this miraculous way, or so soon.

Acts 12:12 "And when he had considered [the thing], he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."

"Mary": Mark is called the cousin of Barnabas (in Col. 4:10), she is his aunt.

"John ... Mark": Acquaintance of Peter in his youth (Peter 5:13), he accompanied Barnabas and Paul to Antioch (verse 25), and later to Cyprus (13:4-5). He deserted them at Perga (13:13), and Paul refused to take him on his second missionary journey because of that desertion (15:36-41). He accompanied Barnabas to Cyprus (15:39).

"John Mark" was apparently a Jew and a native of Jerusalem. His mother Mary, was a woman of means, since her home was large enough to house church meetings and since she possessed at least one maidservant (verses 12-13). Mark went with him on Paul's first missionary journey. But he abandoned that mission (Acts 13:5, 13).

He disappeared until he was seen with Paul at Rome as an accepted companion and coworker. After Mark matures, he is found again with Paul during the apostle's Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Philemon verse 24).

Several years later when Paul's imprisoned again, the apostle speaks words of high praise about Mark, charging Timothy to "take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark had close ties with Peter also (1 Peter 5:13), and this association made Mark a well-informed author for the second gospel. (Acts 12:12, Acts 15).

Mark wrote the second gospel that bears his name, being enriched in his task by the aid of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13).

In the last lesson, we saw Peter imprisoned for no reason at all, except Herod wanting to please the Jews. We saw also that the Lord intervened on Peter's behalf and sent an angel to release him. Peter, at first thought he was dreaming, but quickly discovered that the Lord had, indeed, released him.

Now we pick up when Peter goes to the home where the Christians had been praying for him. This prayer meeting was at John Mark's mother Mary's house.

Acts 12:13 "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda."

We see that Rhoda had been assigned to watch and listen at the door. This was a very dangerous time for the Christians, and they were very cautious. This was in the middle of the night, and she was afraid.

Acts 12:14 "And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate."

She was so excited that she ran to tell the others, even before she opened the gate. She was really excited, and we do unusual things many times when we get that excited. Peter was well known by this family, and Rhoda was probably a member of it. He had stayed with them many times before. It would be a natural thing for her to recognize Peter's voice.

Verses 15-16 "His angel": According to Jewish superstition, each person had his own guardian angel who could assume that person's form.

Acts 12:15 "And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel."

We see that even though they had been praying for his safe release, they did not believe it. This was probably because they knew Herod to be an evil ruler. They also remembered that he had James killed with the sword.

Even though she kept telling them that Peter was at the door, they believed the worst. They thought Herod had him killed and this was his angel at the door. This is just like today. We pray for a miracle and when it comes, we just can't believe it. Possibly the prayers of these people have doubt and unbelief in them.

Acts 12:16 "But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened [the door], and saw him, they were astonished."

Peter had been standing at the door knocking all this time. They were amazed when they saw him, because they were expecting him to die.

Even though they were praying for a miracle, they did not expect it to happen.

Acts 12:17 "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place."

"James": The Lord's brother, now head of the Jerusalem church (see note on 15:13).

"He departed": Except for a brief appearance (in chapter 15), Peter fades from the scene as the rest of Acts revolves around Paul and his ministry.

Peter was trying to keep quiet, so that the authorities would not find out where he had gone to hide. He relates the story to them, how the Lord had released his chains and opened the gate to let him out. This James here, that Peter is speaking to, is the half-brother of Jesus. This James and Peter were leaders of the church at this time.

The reason it was so important to tell the brethren of this miracle was to encourage them that God would be with them if the authorities arrested them. They were perhaps frightened by James, the son of Zebedee, being killed for the Word of God.

Acts 12:18 "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter."

You remember that these soldiers who had been chained to Peter were not even awakened when Peter's chains fell off. They were in a deep sleep and did not wake until the next morning. They could not explain what happened, because they slept through the whole thing.

Acts 12:19 "And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that [they] should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and [there] abode."

“Herod” (see note on verse 1).

“Commanded that they should be put to death”: According to Justinian’s Code (ix. 4:4), a guard who allowed a prisoner to escape would suffer the same fatal penalty that awaited the prisoner.

“Caesarea” (see note on 9:30).

We see here, the intolerance of Herod. He did not accept the excuses of the soldiers. He just had them killed. Herod's fear is showing in that he moved. He felt these Christians had more power than he had realized, so he moved to Caesarea by the sea.

Acts 12:20 "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's [country]."

“Tyre and Sidon”: Two port cities north of Caesarea, in a region call Phoenicia. Mutual interdependence existed between these cities and Galilee, although Tyre and Sidon were more dependent on Galilee (see note on Mark 3:8).

“Blastus”: The king’s chamberlain,” or treasurer, acted as an intermediary between Herod and the representatives of Tyre and Sidon.

Tyre was an ancient city in the center of Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast and was a major trade and shipping center during the Old Testament era. It remained autonomous most of the time and successfully resisted both the Assyrians and Babylonians. It was however, destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.

The city was rebuilt on an adjacent site and possessed some of its former importance during New Testament times. It is mentioned in the Gospels and Acts: Christ had a brief ministry in the region (Mark 7:24-30), and Paul ministered briefly in a church there (21:3-7).

There was commerce going on between Tyre, Sidon, and Herod's country in those days. Herod's country sent food stuff to them in exchange for other goods needed. It seems that there was a limited peace with them, similar to the cold war we have known in the late 1900's.

This Blastus was a personal servant to Herod. He was inside Herod's home, even taking care of Herod's clothing etc. This friendship Blastus had with these people, at the least, strained the relationship he had with Herod.

Acts 12:21 "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them."

“Upon a set day”: A feast in honor of Herod’s patron, the Roman emperor Claudius.

“Arrayed in royal apparel”: According to Josephus, he wore a garment made of silver.

Herod was dressed in the finest he had. He was speaking to the people. His dress was so superior to the people around him, that they thought of Herod as someone very special.

Acts 12:22 "And the people gave a shout, [saying, It is] the voice of a god, and not of a man."

Many rulers, then and now have been treated as if they were a god, because of the control they have over the people and the extravagant way they live. The people have elevated Herod far above what he should be.

Acts 12:23 "And 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."

“He gave not God the glory”: The crime for which Herod was executed by God (A.D. 44), who will eventually condemn and execute all who are guilty of this crime (Rom. 1:18-23).

“Eaten of worms”: According to Josephus, Herod endured terrible pain for 5 days before he died.

Many ministers today need to take heed of this Scripture. We must all remember that the power that works in us is not our own, but His. Kings are kings because God made them kings. Great orators are good speakers, because God gave them ability.

We see here, the danger of thinking that the great and wonderful things in our life are by our own ability. God will not tolerate this type of arrogance, whether it is from one of His ministers or whether from a king.

Notice the process of Herod's death. He was eaten of worms and then he died. All praise and honor goes to God. We are only the container for His power and glory. It is not our power or glory, it is His.

Acts 12:24 "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

We find that in the very worst of times, the gospel seems to grow the most. Persecution seems to drive us on to bigger and better things.

Acts 12:25 "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled [their] ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."

“Had fulfilled their ministry”: After Herod’s death, they delivered the famine relief to the Jerusalem church (11:30).

“John ... Mark” (see note on verse 12).

We see here, that Saul and Barnabas had returned, and were probably here when they were praying for Peter to be released. This John Mark is not the same as John the beloved. He was son of this Mary whose home was used when they prayed for Peter's release.

I believe what happened to Herod, is just reward for him killing James, the brother of John of Zebedee. This John Mark was a young disciple and could learn from these seasoned ministers, so they took him with them.

Acts Chapter 12 Continued Questions

1. When Peter escaped from prison, where did he go?
2. Who heard him knocking?
3. What was her reaction?
4. Why was it necessary to assign someone to watch the door?
5. What time of day was this?
6. Why does verse 14 say, "...she opened not the gate..."?
7. What did she do instead?
8. In verse 15, the disciples said what to her when she told them Peter was at the door?
9. What explanation did they give that this was not actually Peter?

10. Did Peter go away? Explain.
11. When they did open the door, what did Peter caution them to do?
12. Who did Peter say had brought him out of prison?
13. Who did Peter tell them to go and tell?
14. Who were the two leaders of the church at this time?
15. When did the soldiers realize Peter was gone?
16. What did Herod do to the soldiers who guarded Peter?
17. Where did Herod move to?
18. What two was Herod highly displeased with?
19. What was the name of the king's chamberlain?
20. What was his duty toward Herod?
21. What did Herod do on a set day?
22. Who did the people say Herod was?
23. What did the angel of the Lord do to Herod?
24. Why did the angel of the Lord do this?
25. Was he eaten of worms before he died or after?
26. In spite of all this, what happened to the Word of God?
27. When Saul and Barnabas went out to minister, who did they take with them?