

ACTS CHAPTER TWELVE

Read vs. 1 - 19

1. Herod had _____, the brother of _____ killed with a sword.

James was the first apostle to be martyred and the only one recorded in scripture. His death is a fulfillment of Mark 10:35-39 where Jesus said that he would drink of the same cup as Jesus himself.

Herod Agrippa I ruled from 41-44 A.D. He was a student of Judaism and part Jewish himself. He was always eager to please the Jewish leaders. He was also the first political figure to persecute Christians. The Herod family was treacherous and well known for their murderous actions even within their own family. In this chapter we see once again the folly of fighting against God. Unbelievers sometimes seem to thrive and prosper, but God will always have the final victory.

2. Look up 2 of the following passages and tell what you learn about James.

Matt. 4:21-22

Matt. 10:2

Mark 3:17

Mark 10:35-40

He is also referred to as one of those that was closest to Jesus along with Peter & John.

3. Why did Herod decide to kill Peter also? (vs. 3)

Herod was pleased to find a way to endear himself with the Jews. Jerusalem was packed with visitors during this season because of the feast of unleavened bread. Herod reasoned that he would let the Jews have their celebration, but then, while they were still in the city, he would bring Peter out for a showy trial. He would get the maximum coverage out of this event at Peter's expense.

4. A quaternion is a squad of 4 men. How many people were guarding Peter? (vs. 4)

Peter had escaped before (see 5:19) Herod was taking no chances this time! He had 16 men assigned to guard Peterprobably 4 at a time.

5. *The church reacted to Peter's arrest by: _____ (vs. 5)*

Do you think that they had also prayed for James? Why did God react differently in each case? Only God knows what will best glorify His name and advance His kingdom. It is never wrong to pray for someone's deliverance, but we should also realize that God may have a bigger plan for a person's life.

Hebrews chapter 11 is sometimes called the faith chapter. In it God records the lives of many of his saints. They achieved great things because of their faith and obedience. God choose to use their lives in many spectacular ways and records them as examples for us. Please read through this chapter and be reminded of those wonderful events, but continue on through to the end of the chapter. Beginning in verse 35, we see illustrations of a different type. Saints were also tortured, stoned and martyred. Notice God's description of them in Hebrews 11:38 where He says that "the world was not worthy of them." God didn't love these sufferers any less. He was so pleased with them and had great rewards planned for them. But His plan for them included suffering at the hands of men. God is always in control. When we pray for fellow believers, we should be willing to realize that God's plan for them may not be what we would desire. In eternity we will see all that was accomplished through their lives and recognize God's wisdom in the results. We can pray for deliverance and we should praise God for His perfect answer even when it isn't the one that we would chose.

6. *Describe Peter's sleeping arrangement. (vs. 6)*

7. *Look up John 21:18. Could this have been a comfort to Peter at this time? Why?*

Peter could rest in this promise of Jesus that he would live to be an old man. He had also been rescued by an angel previously (5:19). His faith and his peace had good foundations! He wasn't an old man yet and he knew that God was well able to rescue him. He was sound asleep.

8. *Who said "Arise quickly"? (vs. 7)*

Consider Hebrews 1:14. God has assigned angels to be watching over believers. They are sent to serve believers. Have you ever sensed angelic intervention in your life?

9. *What were Peter's thoughts during the escape? (vs. 9)*

Apparently God kept Peter in a sort of trance state. He was functioning and moving on his own. He was able to respond to directions, but he wasn't fully aware of what was going on. It seemed like a dream to him. Would he have tried to carry on conversation with the angel if it had been otherwise?

10. *How far did the angel accompany Peter? (vs. 10)*

The angel accompanied Peter through the gates and down one street and then suddenly

disappeared. He took him as far as was necessary. God never does for us what we can do for ourselves. It wasn't until the angel disappeared that Peter was fully awake.

11. Peter decided to go first to _____ . (vs. 12)

He knew that's where the believers would be. It must have been a regular meeting place for them. Mary apparently had above average wealth. Her home was large enough to accommodate a meeting and she had servants.

12. Describe the comical scene when Peter knocked at the gate. (verses 13-17)

This passage is rather amusing. The believers were all inside praying for Peter's safety, but then they are totally surprised when they get an answer. Have you reacted this way in your life? Does God sometimes answer your prayers and then you quickly rationalize that it was just a coincidence? Give God the glory and praise immediately when you see an answer to prayer. Your faith will be strengthened in the future and you recall God's faithfulness to you in the past.

Note...the Jews believe that everyone has a guardian angel who can assume the form of that person. This is NOT teaching that we become angels after we die. Humans and angels are two different species, both created by God, but for different purposes.

13. What happened to Peter's guards?

This was the standard punishment for letting a prisoner escape. The idea was that if your prisoner escaped, you had to take their punishment. This made for diligent guards and very few escapes. After this incident Peter goes to another place. He certainly realized that he would be pursued. He didn't want to endanger the other believers with his presence. Notice in verse 17 how Peter tries to quiet the other disciples. Even though God had delivered him, he wasn't anxious to be caught and imprisoned again. He is not mentioned again until Acts 15, about 6 years later. His work no doubt continued, but in a less public way.

What happened to Herod? Verses 18 & 19

His plans to have a large public display with Peter's trial were suddenly ruined. What an embarrassment! Leaving town for awhile probably seemed like the best option.

Read vs. 20-25

14. Why did God punish Herod with death? (vs. 22 & 23)

Historians say that he was in great agony for 5 days before he died around AD 44. The description of his ailment is consistent with a person infected by tapeworms. There is a tapeworm common in areas where sheep are raised. It causes the growth of cysts on the liver. When the cyst eventually ruptures, death is often the result. It is interesting that he

wasn't killed because he had killed James and arrested Peter, but because of stealing God's glory. How do unbelievers steal God's glory today? One of the most obvious ways is by refusing to acknowledge His acts of creation and, by failing to worship Him.

The power of God is powerfully demonstrated in the lives of two men in this chapter....Peter and Herod. The outcome is a result of their relationships to God. This is what will happen on the judgment day also. Those who have put their trust in Christ will be delivered and live with Christ in eternity. Those who have refused to give God glory in their lives will suffer eternal punishment. Compare Revelation 20:4-6 & 20:11-14

15. *Notice the first word of vs. 24 - "But". Contrast the end of vs. 23 with vs. 24.*

Compare Matt. 16:18. The church has suffered every kind of assault. Many world leaders have tried to abolish it, but Christ said that His church would grow....and so it has. The gates of hell sometimes seem to be winning the battle, but they have already lost the war. Many ungodly people have arrogantly denounced God, but their lives have ended in tragedy while the kingdom of God continues to advance.

16. *What missionary team is first mentioned in vs. 25?*

They returned from Jerusalem where they had delivered the offering. From this point on in the book of Acts, the focus is on the ministry of Paul. Once again we see the transition happening. Peter had a ministry to the Jews. Peter's history is no longer the focus because the Jewish nation is no longer the focus. Paul was given the ministry of reaching the Gentiles and the Gentiles are now coming to the forefront. The book of Acts is the bridge and the march continues just as God ordained that it would.