

Peter Arrested

Acts 12

1. James is Killed, Peter is Arrested (12:1-5)

A. Herod Agrippa begins to persecute the church in Jerusalem (verse 1)

1. The king Herod of Acts 12 is Agrippa I. Later in Acts we meet Agrippa, he is Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25-26).
2. We are not told why he persecuted the church in Jerusalem, although it may be that Agrippa was in some respects interested in his Jewish roots.

“He loved to live continually at Jerusalem, and was exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country. He therefore kept himself entirely pure; nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice.” Josephus, *Antiq.* 19.7.3

3. That James would be the first of the disciples to be martyred was anticipated even during Jesus’ ministry.
4. James’ death is about eleven years after the martyrdom of Stephen. It therefore appears that the people of Jerusalem are no longer supportive of the Jewish Christians. Agrippa is therefore demonstrating his piousness by pursuing the leaders of the Christian community.

B. James has already been executed when Peter is arrested (verse 2)

1. James was executed “by the sword” at some point.
2. While there is not much to go on for the details of the preaching of James, it is likely this preaching would have been the same announcement of Pentecost.

C. Peter is imprisoned until after Passover (verses 3-5)

1. Herod seems to want to make a point by executing Peter after a public trial “before the people.”
2. While Peter is in prison, he is guarded by four Roman soldiers.
3. Herod has therefore placed Peter in the most secure prison in Jerusalem and placed guards over him that are well trained and unlikely to allow their prisoner to slip out in the night. There is simply no earthly way for Peter to escape.

D. While Peter is in prison, the church was “earnestly praying for him.”

1. The word used by Luke for this prayer is rare in the New Testament, used here and in Luke 22:44 for the prayer of Jesus in the garden prior to his arrest. (It is also used in 1 Peter 1:22.)
2. It is probable that the gather church was praying that Peter would be martyred well – that he would not recant his faith or deny Christ as he has in the past.

2. Peter is Miraculously Freed from Prison (12:6-11)

- A. An angel of the Lord appears in Peter's cell, freeing him (verses 6-8)
- B. Peter must be led out of the cell, thinking he was having a vision (verses 9-11).
 - 1. He passes through several gates and into the city streets before "he came to himself" and realized he had seen an angel of the Lord.
 - 2. There is a bit of irony in the story since Peter is able to walk freely through the gates of the prison and through the city streets, but is stopped at the door to the house in which the church is praying for him!

3. The Church Prays for Peter (12:12-19a)

- A. When Peter comes to his senses, he goes to the home of John Mark (verses 12-15)
- B. When Peter comes to the door, the believers think he is a ghost (verse 15).
 - 1. This odd (and somewhat comical) scene gives us a hint at what the believers were praying for.
 - 2. Rhoda is thought to have lost her mind – they do not believe her until she insists that Peter is at the door.
 - 3. What do the believers mean that it is "Peter's angel?"
- C. Peter reports to this group what has happened (verses 16-17)
 - 1. The scene inside the house is of chaos...
 - 2. What is fascinating is that Peter tells this group to report to James what has happened.
 - 3. Many scholars have seen this passage as an indication that there is a shift in leadership in the Jerusalem community from Peter to James.
 - 4. It is significant that there is no effort to replace James the son of Zebedee after he is killed.
- D. Herod executes the guards responsible for Peter's escape (verses 18-19a)
- E. As we have observed before, when a preacher of the gospel is imprisoned, the Gospel continues to go forth; the gospel cannot be put in chains and usually putting the witnesses in prison leads to a period of growth for the church.

4. The Death of Herod (12:19b-24)

- A. Herod returns to Caesarea to deal with a political issue (verses 19b-20)
- B. Herod accepts worship as a god, and is struck dead (verses 21-24) This event is recorded in Josephus, *Antiq.*, 19.343-352. The two accounts are remarkably similar.
- C. What is the point of the death of Herod? The story indicates that the gospel has gone to the Jews in every imaginable variation, from Temple worshipers to Gentile Godfearers, to Herod, the king of the Jews himself. The good news that Jesus is the Messiah has been rejected, therefore God is going to begin a new work among the Gentiles, using Saul of Tarsus as the "light to the Gentiles."