

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Twelve – Death of the Apostle James and Herod

ACTS 12:11-25:

In our previous lesson, we were introduced to Herod's attack on the Lord's chosen ambassadors as he has James killed and has Peter imprisoned with the same intent (all of this to seek affection with the Jews for favor).

Through miraculous intervention, Peter was brought out of the prison in spite of the heavy guard around him. In this lesson, Peter is to return to the brethren who have been anxiously praying on his behalf (Vs. 5).

Text #1:

Acts 12:11-15 “And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from all the expectation of the Jewish people.*”

¹² So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. ¹³ And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵ But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!” Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, “It is his angel.””

Expectation of the Jewish People: This confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that the intent of Herod was to kill Peter to satisfy the people who had not given themselves to the Gospel of Christ; and in fact, became enemies of the Lord after the same fashion as Saul prior to his conversion (**Chap. 9:1**).

Mary: The mother of John Mark, the one who would be credited with the writing of the Gospel of Mark. She was the apparent aunt of Barnabas (**Colossians 4:10**). Barnabas was from Cyprus and this where he and John Mark would sail after the contention with Saul – **Chap. 15:39**. It is in her home that we find the Christians praying.

Rhoda: She was the servant of the house who came to answer the door at the gate. She recognized Peter's voice, and she was so happy that she ran to tell the others forgetting to let Peter in.

His Angel: The thought, before they saw him, was that it must be his angel, is based on the supposition that every man has one, and that the angel might sometimes assume the voice and personal appearance of the individual, which is purely superstition.

No - revelation of scripture, by which angels appear as men, ever give any indication that they were recognized as anyone known to those they appear to. The Lord: however, would actually make a statement that may give some explanation to the supposition, note:

Matthew 18:10 “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

There is no obvious intent of the Lord in this passage to instruct concerning heavenly hosts, their nature, or purpose. As far as to the true purpose of these heavenly beings, it is revealed that they are ministering servants on our behalf prior to the full revelation of the Gospel of Christ.

Hebrews 1:14 “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

Text #2:

Acts 12:16-19 “Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.” And he departed and went to another place.

¹⁸ Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.”

Tell James: The evidence points to this being James the brother of the Lord rather than James the son of Alphaeus (**Matthew 10:3**). James the brother of the Lord was the one that Paul came to, along with Peter, in Jerusalem and he was a pillar in the Body of Christ – **Galatians 1:18-19; 2:9**.

Guards Killed: This was the standard punishment for allowing a prisoner escape. It appears that Herod was willing to murder 16 innocent men rather than admit that a miracle had been performed concerning Peter. It would be very hard to believe that sixteen men conspired to release Peter knowing the penalty for their actions; this may explain why he left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea so quickly.

Text #3:

Acts 12:20-24 “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s *country*.

²¹ So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. ²² And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” ²³ Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴ But the word of God grew and multiplied.”

Note: There is a passage in the work of Josephus concerning the events recorded here by Luke (*Josephus, Book of Antiquities 19, and Chapter 8*). I will refer to this work in a limited way; however, it should be noted that the references in Josephus’ work and that of Luke are in no way connected, nor were they meant to harmonize, as they were very different in intent. We can, on the other hand, put facts from both accounts together and garner a more complete picture of the events.

Very Angry: We do not know the reason for Herod’s displeasure with the people of Tyre and Sidon, but at any rate, they wanted to regain his favor. This desire to gain favor has motivated them to cook up a political scheme to ensure they regain their foreign aid.

Blastus: The NKJV translates his role as a personal aide, while the KJV states he was Herod’s chamberlain; and is in fact the officer over Herod’s bedchamber (a most trusted position, particularly when considering the task of trust and security while one sleeps). These from Tyre and Sidon believe they regain Herod’s favor by enlisting this trusted servant to speak on their behalf.

The Voice of a god: Josephus does tell us that the occasion of the celebration was a series of festivals promoted by Herod himself, to bestow honor on his benefactor; Caesar. It was on the second day of these appointed festivals that Herod dawned a garment made solely of silver, and as he came in the morning to the theatre, the sun showed on the garment in such a resplendent fashion as it frightened the majority, and caused them to offer “*that he was a god*”; and they added, “*Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.*” He would go on to say that Herod “*neither rebuked them, nor rejected their impious flattery.*”

Luke records these events in a shortened fashion, and would include by omission that Herod did not refute the claims of the people. Luke establishes the source of Herod’s mysterious illness, and Josephus would give **verse 24** some depth of time, stating that it took five days for Herod to succumb to the illness.

Text #4:

Acts 12:25 “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.”

The account which we have just gone over, of the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and the miserable death of Herod, is thrown in between the arrival of Barnabas and Saul on their mission to the poor saints, and their return to Antioch of Syria.

They are going to return with John Mark in tow (the son of Mary – **Vs.12**, the cousin of Barnabas, and would later be to Peter as Timothy was to Paul; like a son in the Gospel – **1 Peter 5:13**).

This return to Antioch will set the stage for the next chapter's work.