

# Acts 12 Commentary

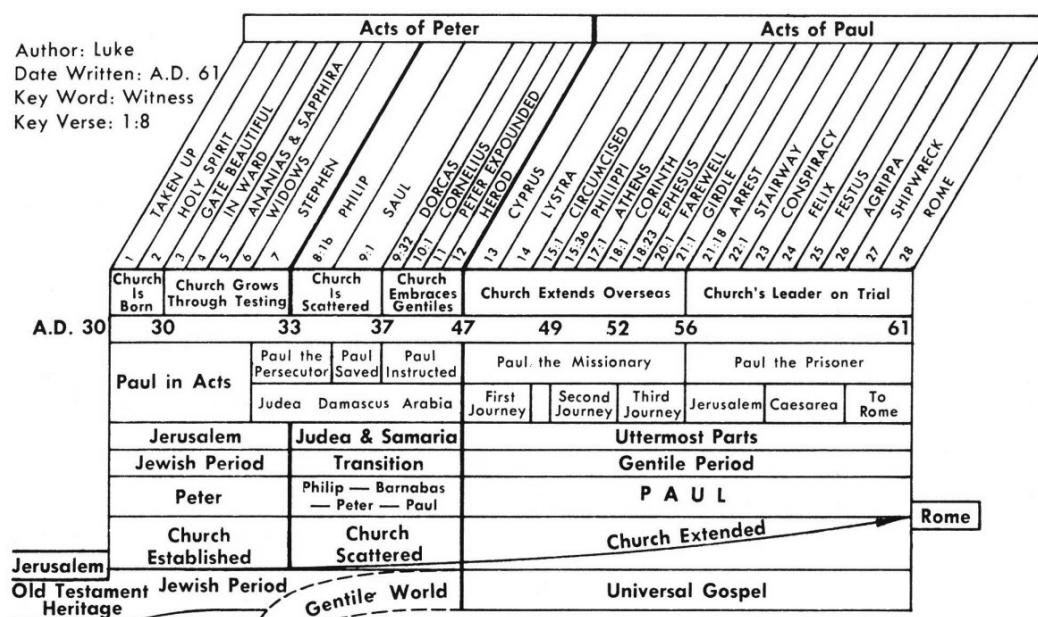
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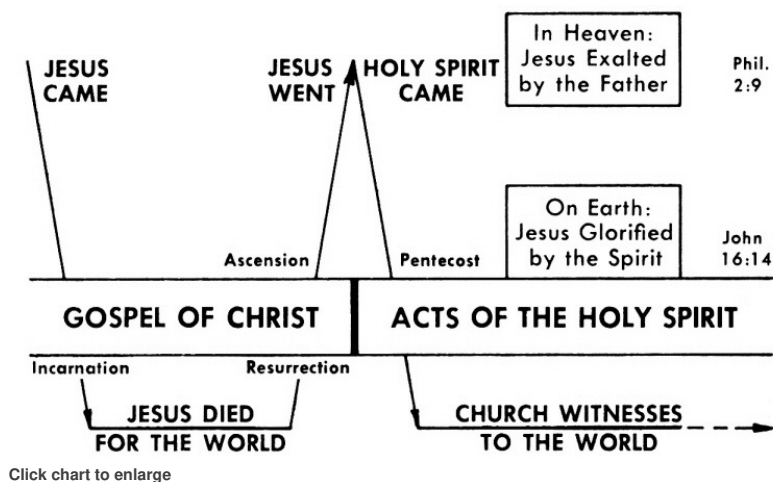
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Chart from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

THE EXPANDING WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED CHURCH



**Acts 12:1** Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

KJV Acts 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

- **When did the events in Acts 12 occur?** Circa A.D. 44. (This is only an approximation -- **see several Timelines** at beginning of commentary on Acts 11).
- **laid hands on some.** Acts 4:30; 9:31; Luke 22:53
- **to mistreat them** Matthew 10:17,18; 24:9; John 15:20; 16:2

## PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH PART TWO

If Acts 8:1-4 was "part 1" of the persecution, Acts 12 describes "part 2."

**Set the context** - Notice that Luke is switching from events centered in **Antioch** to events which occurred in **Jerusalem**. This chapter breaks into 4 sections (from POSB Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible : New Testament](#)..

- Acts 12:1-4 First Political Attack Against the Church
- Acts 12:5-17 God's Pattern for Deliverance
- Acts 12:18-23 God's sovereign wrath, His vindication of the church
- Acts 12:24-25 The church's triumphant march

Here is **Warren Wiersbe's** outline for Acts 12 which he entitles **'WAKE UP TO A MIRACLE!'**

**God Sees Our Trials** (Acts 12:1–4)

**God Hears Our Prayers** (Acts 12:5–17)

- Peter sleeping (Acts 12:5–6).
- Peter obeying (Acts 12:7–11)
- Peter knocking (Acts 12:12–16)
- Peter declaring (Acts 12:17).

**God Deals with Our Enemies** (Acts 12:18–25) ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

As the **POSB** says "God always delivers His people either through or from the trials of this life, including persecution and martyrdom. This passage gives a picture of God's pattern for deliverance through persecution." (Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible : New Testament](#) page 182)

**Steven Ger** writes that "Around the time that the church in Antioch was first initiating its charitable collection in preparation for the coming famine, the Jerusalem church was once again pummeled by persecution. Some nine years after Saul's initial persecution of the church in A.D. 35, opposition now came not from its previous source, the religious hierarchy, but rather from a new source, the recently appointed Jewish king, Herod Agrippa I." (Acts-Twenty-First Century Commentary)

**Stanley Toussaint** points out that "The purpose of this section of Acts is to confirm Israel's rejection of the Messiah. Luke has skillfully woven this theme throughout the entire book and it can be seen up to this point in Acts 4:1–30 (esp. Acts 4:29); Acts 5:17–40; 6:11–8:3; 9:1–2, 29. This animosity of Israel set the stage for the first missionary journey. Artfully, Luke contrasted the love of the church at Antioch for the saints at Jerusalem (end of Acts 11:29, 30) with the cold-hearted enmity of Herod and the Jews for the church." (SEE [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#)).

**John Stott** writes that in Acts 12 we see that "the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God are contrasted. Indeed, throughout church history the pendulum has swung between expansion and opposition, growth and shrinkage, advance and retreat, although with the assurance that even the powers of death and hell will never prevail against Christ's church, since it is built securely on the rock." (borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 206](#))

**Longnecker** suggests that "Luke seems to have wanted to close his portrayals of the Christian mission within the Jewish world (2:42–12:24) with two vignettes having to do with God's continued activity on behalf of the Jerusalem church." (BORROW [Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Now about that time** - When did the events in Acts 12 occur? Circa **A.D. 43-44** because we know that was the date of Herod's death. (see also several **Timelines** at beginning of commentary on Acts 11). Why would persecution occur at this time? Acts 11 gives us the answer - Acts 11:21 says "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord." Acts 11:24 says "And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord." Acts 11:26 says that "for an entire year they (Barnabas and Saul) met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

**So why did persecution occur about that time?** The Church was growing in numbers and growing in grace and Christ-likeness (2 Pe 3:18+), for it was being discipled (cf 2 Ti 2:2+)! When the Lord's work prospers, you can be sure that the Adversary, the Devil, is prowling nearby and will not stand still but will attack viciously. This happened to the Church in Jerusalem and the same principle is true today -- the Adversary will attack **churches** as well as **individuals** who are taking ground for the Lord. Beware! Be aware! (Read 1 Peter 5:8-9+). **"Be on the alert, stand firm** in the faith, **act** like men, **be strong**." (1 Cor 16:13 - note every verb in **red** is a present imperative - calling for continual attitude/action, only possible as one is yielded to and empowered by the Holy Spirit!)

**Stott** comments on **about that time** - Luke is deliberately vague, and scholars dispute the exact order of the events he chronicles in Acts 10 to 12 (Stott - borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 206](#))

While Luke does not go into detail, it is clearly implied that there had been a growing animosity and rift between the orthodox Jews and the Jewish Christians, which is only natural as the orthodox Jews served the Old Covenant and the disciples of Jesus the New Covenant. As Hebrews 8:13+ says "When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." Although [Herod's Temple](#) was still intact, the day was fast approaching when it would be [demolished by the Romans \(AD 70\)](#). The orthodox Jews could not understand the evangelistic fervor of the Jewish converts to Christianity and would have been especially incensed now these Jewish Christians were actually allowing Gentiles into the Church without first becoming proselytes of Judaism ([note](#))! As Messianic believer **Steven Ger** quipped that "*The church's new cocktail of mixed Jews and Gentiles was not going down smoothly in Jerusalem, and the city was both shaken and stirred.*" (Ibid) This was simply unheard of and pushed the orthodox Jews to their fleshly limit. And so it was in this cauldron of rising animosity between the Old and the New, that Herod sought to curry favor with the Law-keeping, Temple-sacrificing Jews in Jerusalem. Indeed, Herod was the "*Devil's point man*" in Jerusalem!

[A T Robertson](#) proposes that "Barnabas and Saul came down from Antioch to Jerusalem **after** the persecution by Herod at the end of 44 or the beginning of A D 45." We know that their arrival was during this time because Acts 12:25 says "Barnabas and Saul returned (TO ANTIOCH) from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."

- See [Excellent Map of the Kingdom of Herod, aka King Agrippa I](#)

**Herod the king** = Herod Agrippa I, king over Palestine at this time was the grandson of the [Herod the Great](#) who ruled at the time of the birth of Jesus and was the cruel king who sought to kill the infant Jesus by slaughtering all the male babies "two years old and under" at Bethlehem (Mt 2:1,16+). Herod Agrippa I was the only Herod to have royalty bestowed upon him and to govern all of Palestine since the death of his grandfather, Herod the Great. So we see, **"like grandfather like son!"** This Herod was the nephew of [Herod Antipas](#), aka "**Herod the Tetrarch**," who had John the Baptist killed (Mt. 14:1-14). Herod Agrippa I was the father of Herod Agrippa II, who later tried Paul (Acts 25:13-26:32+), so once again we see, like father, like son, like grandson! This is not not a generational "curse" but a generational evil!

**Wikipedia** - [Herod Agrippa I](#) - (11 BC – 44 AD), was a [King of Judea](#) from 41 to 44 AD. He was the last ruler with the royal title reigning over [Judea](#) and the father of [Herod Agrippa II](#), the last King from the [Herodian](#)

[dynasty](#). The grandson of [Herod the Great](#) and son of [Aristobulus IV](#) and [Berenice](#).<sup>[1]</sup> He is the king named Herod in the [Acts of the Apostles](#) 12:1 ([Acts 12:1](#)): "Herod (Agrippa)" ( ῥώδης γρίππας). Agrippa's territory comprised most of modern Israel, including [Judea](#), [Galilee](#), [Batanaea](#) and [Perea](#). From Galilee his territory extended east to [Trachonitis](#).

[Bob Utley](#) on Herod - He was raised in Rome and became friends with Gaius, who followed Emperor Tiberius and who later became the Emperor Caligula. The Jews readily accepted Herod as a leader because his grandmother (Mariamne) was a Hasmonean/Maccabean (i.e. Jewish patriot) princess. He was a strict follower of Judaism (but possibly for political reasons).

[Matthew Henry](#) on Herod Agrippa I - Josephus says he was zealous for the Mosaic rites, a bigot for the ceremonies. He was not only (as Herod Antipas was) tetrarch of Galilee, but had also the government of Judea committed to him by Claudius the emperor, and resided most at Jerusalem, where he was at this time.

**Steven Ger** gives an excellent review of Herod's life - Herod Agrippa I. Jewish history fondly remembers Herod Agrippa I as a real "crowd pleaser." Born in 10 B.C., grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa achieved a great level of popularity with his Jewish subjects during his seven-year reign. Severely insecure over his Idumean ancestry through his grandfather Herod, Agrippa went to great lengths both to please and appease his Jewish subjects, bending over backwards to generate their good will. He was especially beloved for moving the capital back to Jerusalem from Caesarea. Agrippa was not yet four years old when his paranoid and bloodthirsty grandfather, Herod the Great, suspecting betrayal, had his own son, Agrippa's father, Aristobulus, executed in 7 B.C.. Thereafter, the young Agrippa was sent away from the royal household in Judea, shipped off to receive an education in Rome. Growing up as a member of the Roman Imperial court, the free-spirited Agrippa became close friends with Gaius, the man who would later become the Roman Emperor, Caligula. Caligula appointed Agrippa king of great portions of greater Israel, excluding Judea and Samaria. He proved such an excellent politician, charmer and smooth operator that Caligula's successor, Claudius, granted Agrippa sovereignty over the territories of Judea and Samaria as well. This consolidated Agrippa's complete dominion over all Israel, restoring to him control of the entirety of the territory over which his grandfather, Herod the Great, had once ruled. Agrippa's reign was one of the few periods when there was no Roman prefect or procurator looking over the shoulder of a Herodian king. Agrippa's untimely death, at fifty-four, occurred in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:23). Three of Agrippa's offspring make cameo appearances in Acts: his daughters, Drusilla (Acts 24:24) and Bernice (Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30) and his son, Agrippa II (Acts 25:13-26:32). (Ibid)

#### **Related Resources -**

- [Who was Herod Agrippa I? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who are the various Herods mentioned in the Bible?](#)

**Laid hands on some who belonged to the church** - **ESV** has "laid violent hands on." **KJV** = "stretched forth his hands." Luke used same idiom "laid hands" in Acts 4:3 and Acts 5:18. "This death ended a short period of peace noted in Acts 9:31 after the persecution mentioned in 8:1-3." ([NET Note](#)) **Hands** is a figure of speech representing power, good or evil. Note the striking contrast of the **good hand of the Lord** on those **preaching the Lord Jesus** in Acts 11:20, 21+ and the evil **hands** of Herod on the church in Jerusalem. In this way we see that "the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God are contrasted." (Stott - borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 206](#))

[Matthew Henry](#) - His stretching forth his hands intimates that his hands had been tied up by the restraints which perhaps his own conscience held him under in this matter; but now he broke through them, and stretched forth his hands deliberately, and of malice [premeditation](#). He began with vexing them only, or afflicting them, imprisoning them, fining them, spoiling their houses and goods, and other ways molesting them; but afterwards he proceeded to greater instances of cruelty. Christ's suffering servants are thus trained up by less troubles for greater, that tribulation may work patience, and patience experience.

**Spurgeon**: Troubles seldom come alone; first the famine, then persecution; the church can endure all things.

Why did persecution of the disciples occur now, which is about 8-10 years after the persecution described in Acts 8:1-4?

[A T Robertson](#) comments "It had been eight years or more since the persecution over the death of Stephen ceased with the conversion of Saul. But the disciples were not popular in Jerusalem with either Sadducees or Pharisees. The overtures to the Gentiles in Caesarea and Antioch may have stirred up the Pharisees afresh (cf. Acts 6:14). Herod Agrippa I was an [Idumean](#) through his grandfather Herod the Great and a grandson of Mariamne the Maccabean princess. He...was anxious to placate his Jewish subjects while retaining the favor

of the Romans. So he built theatres and held games for the Romans and Greeks and slew the Christians to please the Jews. Josephus ([Ant. XIX. chapter 7, note 3](#)) calls him a pleasant vain man scrupulously observing Jewish rites. Here we have for the first time political power (after Pilate) used against the disciples.

**Laid...upon** (1911) (**epiballo** from **epi** = upon + **ballo** = throw) means to cast over or throw upon (coats on donkey Mk 11:7). Epiballo as in this passage was frequently used of attempt to lay upon another person one's hands. They laid (hands) on Jesus (Mt 26:50, Mk 14:46, cf Lk 20:19, Jn 7:30, 44, Lk 21:12) and on they laid hands on the apostles in Acts (Acts 4:3, Acts 5:18, Acts 12:1, Acts 21:27). Is not this what Jesus had predicted? See Mt 10:17-19, 22, Lk 21:12, 16.

All uses of **epiballo** - Matt. 9:16; Matt. 26:50; Mk. 4:37; Mk. 11:7; Mk. 14:46; Lk. 5:36; Lk. 9:62; Lk. 15:12; Lk. 20:19; Lk. 21:12; Jn. 7:30; Jn. 7:44; Acts 4:3; Acts 5:18; Acts 12:1; Acts 21:27; 1 Co. 7:35

**in order to** - Term of purpose or result. Here the purpose is clear isn't it? Clearly the wicked King Herod sought to persecute the Church.

The [ESV Timeline](#) has Herod the king ruling Palestine in AD 41–44 and says that Herod killed James the brother of John and imprisons Peter which would have been around AD 44. If one approximates the date of Stephen's martyrdom in about AD 34, it means that this is the first persecution of the Christian Church since Acts 8:1-4+. So for about 10 years (the range is probably 8-10 years), the Church had enjoyed relative peace. As Luke recorded in Acts 9:31+ "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." So we see the effect of persecution - Persecution fanned the flames of evangelism for the early Church in AD 34 and now in AD 44 we see the second wave of persecution again "fanning the flames" of evangelism, for Luke records that "the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied." ( Acts 12 24+)

**William Arnot** comments that "From **Antioch** we are conducted back to **Jerusalem** again. After intimating that the door was opened among the Greeks, the historian proceeds to show that it was shut among the Jews. Indeed, it was the shutting of the door at Jerusalem that opened it at Antioch. When one channel was closed, the pent-up waters escaped by another. It was the persecution at home that drove the preachers abroad. But now another stage of the process is exhibited. Closer and closer was the door shut at Jerusalem ; wider and wider it opened toward the Greeks. By his apostles, as well as in his own personal ministry, Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not."

**Steven Cole** points out that "There is a marked contrast between the love of the racially mixed church in Antioch for the famine-afflicted Jewish church in Judea (Acts 11:27-30) and the hatred of Herod and the Jews in Jerusalem for the church there (Acts 12:1-3)....So we see mingled together the wickedness of an evil tyrant and the sovereignty of God who allowed this tyrant to operate on a leash. We would be greatly in error if we thought that somehow God could not prevent Herod from his evil deeds. (Read Ps 2:1-4) No wicked act, not even the slaughter of the righteous, takes place apart from the sovereign will of God. God did not lose control when Herod Antipas got drunk and gave the head of John the Baptist on a platter to the sensuous Salome. Even the terrible deeds of the Antichrist in the end times are under God's control: He will remove him when it is His time, but before then many godly people will suffer and die (Rev. 6:9-11)." ([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

**Mistreat** (KJV = "**vex**") (2559) (**kakoo** from **kakos** = bad, evil) means to do harm or do evil to someone - physically to mistreat (Acts 7:6) or morally to embitter or poison one's mind causing them to think badly about another (Acts 14:2). Here of course the context shows that the sense of kakoo is Herod's desire to physically harm the church. This same verb is used in the Septuagint of Ex 1:11 which describes Israel's mistreatment in Egypt. In Nu 20:15 Moses records "the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly (Lxx = kakoo)." This verb **kakoo** is used outside of Acts only by Peter asking "Who is there to **harm** you if you prove zealous for what is good?" (1 Peter 3:13+). Luke does not give us details of how the Church in Jerusalem was mistreated, but it would not take much imagination to see them being physically beaten and their homes attacked and/or destroyed. The crescendo of the physical mistreatment of the Church was reached when Herod murdered one of the main leaders in Acts 12:2.

**THOUGHT** - Clearly these early believers were being forced to count the cost of following Jesus (cf Lk 14:28+ - [sermon by Mike Andrus: What does it mean to "count the cost"?](#)). Although believers today are not (yet) physically mistreated (at least not in America, but they are in [many areas of the world](#)), they are often verbally mistreated, ostracized, and generally denigrated, put down, vilified, impugned and even slandered and satirized on television and in many movies (cf Mt 5:11,12+ - cf [Religion on the Simpsons](#)). Yes, the Gospel does teach that "God has a wonderful plan for your life," but that truth needs to be balanced with the truth that every true disciple of Jesus (and EVERY believer is a disciple!) will be persecuted in one way or another (cf "God's Promise" book = 2 Ti 3:12+ = "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus", Php 1:29+ where "granted"



~ "a gift of grace!"). New converts need to be taught this fact. I was not taught this truth and when a major wave of persecution came suddenly against me for focusing on teaching of the Word of God ("*You are teaching the Bible too much*" was the accusation of the church leaders - believe it or not!), I was totally caught off guard and came close to "throwing in the towel" regarding the gift of teaching God had graciously given me. Forewarned is forearmed!

**ILLUSTRATION** - When the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1519 he was intent on conquest. To assure the devotion of his men, Cortez set fire to his fleet of eleven ships! With no means of retreat Cortez's army had only one direction to move, into the Mexican interior. Cortez understood the price of commitment—and he paid it.

All NT uses of **kakoo** - Acts 7:6; Acts 7:19; Acts 12:1; Acts 14:2; Acts 18:10; 1 Pet. 3:13

**Church** (1577) (**ekklesia** from **ek** = out + **klesis** = a calling, verb = **kaleo** = to call) literally means called out (but Louw-Nida does not agree - see discussion of **ekklesia**) and as commonly used in the Greco-Roman vernacular referred to citizens who were *called out* from their homes to be publicly assembled or gathered to discuss or carry out affairs of state. **Wuest** writes that "The word **assembly** is a good one-word translation of **ekklesia**." As with all Greek word studies, the meaning of the word in a specific passage is dependent upon the **context**. **Smith's Bible Dictionary** notes that "The day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian **Church**. Before they had been individual followers Jesus; now they became His mystical Body, animated by His Spirit." A key identifying characteristic of the Church is Holy Spirit baptism (1 Cor. 12:13) which is the event that forms the **Body of Christ** which is actually a better designation for the world-wide body of believers than the term **church**.'

**Toussaint** points out that "This incident clearly indicates that the church was an identifiable group which had become hated and despised by the Jews." (SEE [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#)).

#### Related Resources:

- [What was the first / original church? Is the original / first church the true church?](#)
- [What is the church?](#)
- [What is the purpose of the church?](#)
- [When did the church begin/start?](#)
- [What should I be looking for in a church?](#)
- [Why do some churches thrive while others die?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about church growth?](#)
- [Are seeker sensitive churches biblical?](#) - A "must read" article!
- [Should churches be seeker-friendly?](#)

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**Jack Arnold** has an interesting analysis of Acts 12 focusing on **Supernaturalism and the Church** - The concept of supernaturalism is rapidly disappearing in our modern, scientific and technological society. When the average person hears of miracles, or God working, he scoffs or secretly to himself says, "Those poor, ignorant people who believe in the supernatural are at least two hundred years behind time." The whole spirit of our age is against any concept of the supernatural. If the supernatural gets any attention at all it is by those who are in the occult. The phenomenon of Satan worship, demonism and contacting the dead are dabbling in the supernatural, but these practices are evil and not from God. The tragedy is that the spirit of the Enlightenment, rationalism and humanism have deeply infiltrated the professing church of Jesus Christ, so much so, that to speak of a supernatural working God in the twentieth century brings a puzzled look by those who claim to be Christian. The church today is in deep trouble because it has lost the concept of a sovereign, supernatural working God. As long as people who claim to be Christian think that God cannot, or will not, work supernaturally and that God is dependent upon man's schemes, intelligence, programs and ingenuity, then they will never see God work mightily. But when men stop depending upon themselves, and turn to God in simple faith, believing He is able to do the impossible, then they will begin to see and experience the mysterious workings of a sovereign God. The church today must develop a supernaturalistic mind and must resist and fight with all its might the anti-supernaturalistic spirit of this godless age. It was the concept of a supernatural working God that gave the first century church such confidence and power. They knew God through Christ and they lived like supernaturalists. In Acts 12, there are three major events, the murder of James, the deliverance of Peter and the destruction of Herod, which show us the sovereign and mystical workings of God. Just because we are two thousand years away from the first century does not mean that we, too, cannot also see the sovereign, mystical supernatural workings of God in our age. ([Acts 12:1-25 Supernaturalism and the Church](#))

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#### Josephus 19:7.3 gives us background on Herod's desire to please the Jews...

Now, this king was by nature very beneficent, and liberal in his gifts, and very ambitious to oblige people with

such large donations; and he made himself very illustrious by the many chargeable presents he made them. He took delight in giving, and rejoiced in living with good reputation. He was not at all like that Herod who reigned before him; (329) for that Herod was ill-natured, and severe in his punishments, and had no mercy on them that he hated; and everyone perceived that he was more friendly to the Greeks than to the Jews; for he adorned foreign cities with large presents in money; with building them baths and theatres besides: nay, in some of those places, he erected temples, and porticoes in others; but he did not vouchsafe to raise one of the least edifices in any Jewish city, or make them any donation that was worth mentioning. (330) But Agrippa's temper was mild, and equally liberal to all men. He was humane to foreigners, and made them sensible of his liberality. He was in like manner rather of a gentle and compassionate temper. **(ED: BUT SEE LUKE'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS TEMPER IN Acts 12:19, 20) (331)** Accordingly, 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.

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**William Barclay** - Let us see briefly the various branches of the family of the Herods in their New Testament connections.

The first of the New Testament Herods is **Herod the Great**, who reigned from about 41 BC to 1 BC. He is the Herod of Matthew 2, who was in power when Jesus was born, who received the wise men from the east and who massacred the children. Herod the Great was married ten times. Those of his family who cross the pages of the New Testament are as follows.

**(1) Herod Philip I.** He was the first husband of the Herodias who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He is mentioned, under the name of Philip, in Matthew 14:3, Mark 6:17 and Luke 3:19. He had no official office. He was the father of Salome.

**(2) Herod Antipas.** He was the ruler of Galilee and Peraea. He was the second husband of Herodias and consented to the death of John the Baptist. He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial (Luke 23:7ff.).

**(3) Archelaus.** He was the ruler of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea. He was a thoroughly bad ruler and was deposed and banished. He is mentioned in Matthew 2:22.

**(4) Herod Philip II.** He was the ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis. He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi, which was named after him. In the New Testament, he is called Philip and is mentioned in Luke 3:1.

**(5) Herod the Great** had another son called **Aristobulus**; his mother was Mariamne, a princess who was descended from the great Maccabaeen heroes. He was murdered by his own father, but he had a son called Herod Agrippa. This is the Herod of our present passage in Acts 12.

**(6)** To complete the list, we may note that **Herod Agrippa** was the father of: **(a) Agrippa II**, before whom Paul was examined and before whom he made his famous speech (Acts 25–6); **(b) Bernice**, who appeared with him when Paul was under examination; and **(c) Drusilla**, who was the wife of Felix, the governor before whom Paul was tried (Acts 24:24).

**SEE ALSO** [Who are the various Herods mentioned in the Bible? | GotQuestions](#)

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**QUESTION -** [Who was Herod the Great? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**ANSWER** - The name Herod comes up again and again in the New Testament from Matthew 2 to Acts 26. A casual reader might think that Herod had tremendous longevity as a ruler. However, Herod is the family name of a ruling dynasty in Palestine. There are four different Herods in the New Testament as well as Herod Philip II, who is referred to as Philip the tetrarch in the New Testament.

Herod I came to be known as Herod the Great and was also called King of the Jews. He ruled from 37 or 36 BC to 4 BC. He is mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 2. Magi from the East came to Jerusalem looking for the one who had been born [King of the Jews](#). Of course, this would arrest Herod's attention, as this was his title. Herod called the scribes and determined that, according to prophecy, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. As the [magi](#) left for Bethlehem to find the Messiah, Herod asked them to report back to him with the location of the newborn King "so that I too may go and worship him" (Matthew 2:8).

Of course, Herod had no such intentions. The magi find Jesus and worship Him, presenting their gifts to Him, but they are then warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod. When Herod realizes that the magi have not reported back to him, he is furious and calls for the slaughter of all the boys up to two years old in Bethlehem and the surrounding area, hoping to end the life of any potential rival. God warns Joseph that he needs to flee to Egypt with Jesus and Mary. Jesus is not harmed; however, there is a great [slaughter of the innocents](#) in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16–18). Such is Herod the Great's biblical legacy.

Herod the Great was the son of a high-ranking official in the Hasmonean dynasty, which was ruling Palestine as an independent kingdom. He was an Idumean or [Edomite](#) (a descendant of Esau), but there had been intermarriage between Jews and Edomites, and Herod publicly identified himself as a Jew, although he was not faithful to observe Jewish Law. In 41 BC Herod the Great was named governor of Galilee. However, the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty was in conflict with Rome, and Herod supported Rome in the conflict. He was given the title King of the Jews by the Roman Senate and then charged with the responsibility of conquering [Judea](#) so that he could rule as a client king. After about three years of fighting, Herod was victorious in 37 or 36 BC.

As king of Judea, Herod the Great's primary directive was to carry out the wishes of Rome. As always, Rome wanted to maintain peace and foster good will among the local inhabitants who had been conquered. (If that didn't work, Rome would eventually respond with overwhelming force.) Herod tried to foster good will by reducing taxes, enacting policies that helped bring about economic prosperity, and building public works including the incredible artificial port city of Caesarea, the fortress of Masada, and fortifications around Jerusalem. Herod also built a magnificent palace for himself atop a man-made mountain. The palace was called the Herodium.

In order to gain favor with the Jews, Herod the Great greatly enlarged and updated the temple in Jerusalem to a size and magnificence it had never enjoyed before, not even under Solomon. This renovated structure became known as Herod's temple. He also married Mariamne, a Hasmonean princess, and appointed her brother as high priest.

Despite his brilliant and ambitious building projects, Herod the Great had a dark side that showed itself in the events of Matthew 2 and in other historical events. He always feared potential rivals. He had his wife's brother Aristobulus, the high priest, drowned in the swimming pool in his palace. He put to death 46 members of the Sanhedrin. He killed his mother-in-law. He also had his wife Mariamne murdered along with two of their sons, as he considered them potential rivals with legitimate claim to the throne because of their Hasmonean lineage. (Herod had ten wives in all and many other children who did not have Hasmonean blood.) Augustus Caesar is reported to have said, "It is better to be Herod's dog than one of his children." When placed in this context, the incident in Matthew 2 does not seem out of character.

In BC 4, after a long and excruciating illness, Herod the Great died. This news was reported to Joseph by an angel of the Lord in a dream in Matthew 2:19, so Joseph knew it was safe to return to Israel with Jesus.

Of course, our dating system will cause some consternation. We know that Herod died in 4 BC, which means that Jesus must have been born before 4 BC. It is normally assumed that Jesus was born in 1 BC (or perhaps 0 BC or AD 1), but these dates were assigned at least nine centuries later, and there were some errors in the calculations. So Jesus was born some time before 4 BC, and we do not know how much time passed between Joseph's taking his family to safety in Egypt and Herod's death.

Upon Herod the Great's death, his sons were appointed rulers in his place. Archelaus was appointed ethnarch (ruler of an ethnic group, but not a king) of Samaria, Judea, and Idumea. He is mentioned once in Scripture: when Joseph heard that Archelaus was ruling in Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph took his family to Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:22–23). Philip (Herod Philip II) was appointed tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis. Philip is mentioned later in the New Testament as the one who lost his wife to his half-brother, Herod Antipas, the Herod who was then rebuked by John the Baptist for taking his brother Philip's wife (Matthew 14:3–4).

Herod the Great was an ambitious and ruthless ruler who set himself in opposition to the [King of kings and Lord of lords](#). Throughout history and the scriptural record, we see the Herod family following in the footsteps of their father in opposing Christ.

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## FAMILY TREE FOR HEROD

**Acts 12:2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.**

KJV Acts 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

- **James** Matthew 4:21,22; 20:23; Mark 10:35,38
- **With a sword.** 1 Kings 19:1,10; Jeremiah 26:23; Hebrews 11:37



## THE APOSTLE JAMES BEHEADED

**And** - Many versions do not translate the Greek conjunction (**de**) which can be translated by several English words - most commonly "but" which clearly does not fit the context in this section, but it is also translated "now," "then," "and" and one of these latter words fits the context better as it serves to couple the mistreatment of the Church in general in Acts 12:1 with specific mistreatment (martyrdom) of one of the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. You may be asking why did God allow James to die and rescue Peter? Good question but there is no way to answer except that it reflects the sovereign will of Jehovah. I like the way Pastor Jack Arnold answers this question...

The final answer to this is found in the sovereign wisdom of God. The issues of life and death rest in the hands of a sovereign God and we will not get the full answer to this question of James's death until we get to glory. James's death, while **executed by Herod**, was **appointed by God** (ED: and allowed by God) and what may seem to us as a life cut short was for God a saint come home. Surely, this tells us that in the mind of God death is not as horrible as we think it is. It is not the bitter experience the human mind imagines it to be. (ED: WATCH OUT FOR THIS NEXT STATEMENT MAY SHOCK YOU!) **For a Christian, death should be an anticipated event for it means entrance into heaven.** We Christians have the promise, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15). From the human perspective, James's death was a tragedy, but from the perspective of a sovereign, supernatural working God, it was a fantastic blessing. **God delivered James as much or more than He delivered Peter.** (ED: PONDER THAT THOUGHT) He delivered James **through** death and Peter **from** death. God reserves the right to do as He pleases, but in the case of James, he was better off than Peter because he was in heaven. ([Acts 12:1-25 Supernaturalism and the Church](#))

**THOUGHT** - What a difference in perspective (and our reaction/response when a fellow saint passes from earth to Heaven) if saints truly understood death as God's "*rescue*" from life, with all its trials, turmoil and sorrow! Ask God to give you His perspective that death of one of His children is "**precious**." (Hebrew word yaqar = valuable, prized, weighty, splendid, highly valued, describes costly stones - 2 Sa 12:30, 1 Ki 10:2, 11; Lxx = [timios](#) = of great worth or value, held in honor) (Ps 116:5). That may be why death of God's children is often described as them simply falling asleep (e.g., Acts 7:60 of Stephen as he was being stoned, Lazarus in Jn 11:11, saints in 1 Th 4:13, 15 -- never used of an unbeliever!).

**Warren Wiersbe** adds "God allowed Herod to kill James, but He kept him from harming Peter. It was the throne in heaven that was in control, not the throne on earth....It is good to know that, no matter how difficult the trials or how disappointing the news, God is still on the throne and has everything under control. We may not always understand His ways, but we know His sovereign will is best." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**He had [James the brother of John](#) put to death** - Herod had picked up the same evil spirit that permeated the entire Herodian clan. This illustrates the truth of God's Word in Exodus 20:5 that God would visit "the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me." The point is that that ungodly parents tend to produce ungodly children and grandchildren. In this way, God's judgment was exercised upon the descendants of the Herodian dynasty, clearly among those "that hate Me." (See [Are children punished for the sins of their parents?](#); [What does the Bible say about generational "curses"?](#))

Note that this is not [James the brother of Jesus](#) who was the human author of the book of **James**. As best we can discern from Luke's record this was the second Christian martyrdom (after Stephen in Acts 7:58-60+) **James** and his brother John at one point wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who didn't receive the Lord Jesus. (Luke 9:51-56)

**[James - Brother of John](#)** (cf. Luke 5:10; 6:14; 8:51; 9:28, 54), a member of the inner circle of disciples (cf. Mt. 17:1; 26:37; Mk 5:37; 9:2; 14:33; Lk 9:28). This is the only record of **James** in the entire book of Acts, that he was murdered! This would not have been a surprise or shock to him or the other apostles, for Jesus had predicted this would be their fate. Recall that the mother of the **sons of Zebedee** (John and James) had come to Jesus to ask Him to give them a place of prominence (Mt 20:20,21) to which "Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." He said to them, "My cup (OF SUFFERING AND DEATH) you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." (Mt 20:22-23) And as noted above God makes a promise to all disciples of Jesus that they will suffer but He also promises that "we suffer with Him (IN THE PASSING PRESENT) so that we may also be glorified with Him (IN THE FOREVER FUTURE)." (Ro 8:17+, cf Mt 19:28, 29). And Paul adds "If we endure (KJV = "suffer with"), we will also reign with Him." (2 Ti 2:12) And later Luke would add "'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'" (Acts 14:22+)

## Related Resource:

- [What can we learn from what the Bible says about James the apostle?](#)

**John Stott** notes that "it belongs to the mystery of God's providence why this was to mean execution for James and exile for John (Rev 1:9+)." (Borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 208](#))

**Matthew Henry** on James - This who was here crowned with martyrdom was one of the first three of Christ's disciples, one of those that were the witnesses of his transfiguration (Mt 17:1, cf Mk 13:3) and agony (in the Garden of Gethsemane - Mk 14:33-35), whereby he was prepared for martyrdom; he was one of those whom Christ called [Boanerges](#)-Sons of thunder; and perhaps by his powerful awakening preaching he had provoked Herod, or those about him, as John Baptist did the other Herod, and that was the occasion of his coming into this trouble.

**Bob Utley** - Why James should die and Peter be spared is a mystery of God. It is interesting that at this time the early church did not sense the need to replace James as they had Judas (cf. 1:15–20). The reasons are unclear, but possibly it was Judas' treachery, not death, that caused the replacement (Acts 1:15–26). Some may assert that Paul calling James, the half brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, an apostle (cf. Gal. 1:19) constitutes a replacement. The question relates to the official position of the original Twelve versus the ongoing gift of apostleship (cf. Eph. 4:11).

**A T Robertson** notes that **James the brother of John** "had been called by Jesus a son of thunder along with his brother John (Mk 3:17). Jesus had predicted a bloody death for both of them (Mark 10:38ff.= Mt. 20:23). James is the first of the apostles to die and John probably the last. He is not James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19). We do not know why Luke tells so little about the death of James and so much about the death of Stephen nor do we know why Herod selected him as a victim. Eusebius (H.E. ii. 9) quotes Clement of Alexandria as saying that a Jew made accusations against James and was converted and beheaded at the same time with him."

**Put to death** (get rid of by execution)([337](#))([anaireo](#) from **ana** = up + **haireo** = to take) literally means to take up or lift up (from the ground), which is used literally to describe Pharaoh's daughter when she **"took** him (Moses) **away** and nurtured him as her own son." (Acts 7:21). In the figurative sense in Heb 10:9 the writer of Hebrews says "He **takes away** (in sense of to abolish, invalidate) the first (the OT sacrificial system described in Heb 10:8) in order to establish the second (the new, once for all time sacrifice of Christ)." Most of the uses of **anaireo** are used in an active sense to refer to literal killing or putting to death (Mt. 2:16; Acts 5:36; 7:28; 9:23, 24, 29; 16:27; 23:15, 21, 27; 25:3). **Anaireo** speaks of public execution (Luke 23:32; Acts 2:23; 10:39; 12:2; 13:28; 22:20; 26:10). Two outstanding figurative uses of **machaira** are in Eph 6:17 ("the **sword** of the Spirit which is the Word of God") and Heb 4:12 ("the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged **sword**").

All of Luke's uses of **anaireo** - Lk. 22:2; Lk. 23:32; Acts 2:23; Acts 5:33; Acts 5:36; Acts 7:21; Acts 7:28; Acts 9:23; Acts 9:24; Acts 9:29; Acts 10:39; Acts 12:2; Acts 13:28; Acts 16:27; Acts 22:20; Acts 23:15; Acts 23:21; Acts 23:27; Acts 25:3; Acts 26:10;

**Sword** ([3162](#))([machaira](#) from **mache** = a knife, sword) refers to a relatively short sword (even dagger) for cutting and stabbing. It was extremely difficult to approach a soldier well trained in the use of the **machaira** for it was short and could be moved rapidly. The fact that it was two-edged made it possible to strike on either side without changing its position in the hand, and its razor-sharp point could pierce armor. Peter used the machaira in John 18:10 when he "struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus." According to the Jewish writing the Mishnah, in Sanhedrin 9:1; the sword had to be used for murderers and apostates, so presumably James was being "sentenced" as an apostate from the Jewish faith.

**A T Robertson** points out that "The Jews considered beheading a shameful death as in the case of the Baptist (Matt. 14:10)."

**Steven Ger** comments that "Decapitation, arguably the most merciful form of approved Jewish capital punishment (the alternatives being stoning, burning and strangulation), indicates that he had been charged according to Jewish law with apostasy."

**Steven Cole** on the **death of James** - As difficult as it is, we need to view death from God's eternal perspective, not from our temporal perspective. It seems remarkable that the death of this great man, James, is passed over in a brief sentence. Stephen, the first martyr, got a long chapter on his death, and he wasn't even one of the apostles! James, one of the inner circle and the first apostle to die, doesn't even get a decent obituary! It doesn't seem right! But the seeming wrongfulness of it stems from our temporal perspective. James was welcomed into heaven by Jesus with the victor's crown and the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the eternal joy of your Master!" He went instantly from this life of pain, sorrow, and trials into the place of eternal

joy. John, of course, had to remain for another 50 years on earth, and I'm sure that he missed his brother often. But as soon as John passed over into glory, he realized how short even his relatively long life was in light of eternity. He knew that all of his suffering and grief was worth the eternal joy of being with Christ. So the death of James at the hand of Herod teaches us that although God is almighty, He does not prevent the untimely deaths of some of His choicest servants. ([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

**THOUGHT** - It is reported that Jonathan Edwards once said "O Lord *stamp eternity* on my eyeballs." Dear Father, please grant all reading these notes an eternal perspective for the few remaining days of our life. For Jesus' sake. Amen. See [Vertical Vision](#) and [Redeem the Time](#).

[Matthew Henry](#) notes that beheading with a sword "was looked upon by the Romans to be a more disgraceful way of being beheaded than with an axe.... It is strange that we have not a more full and particular account of the martyrdom of this great apostle, as we had of Stephen. But even this short mention of the thing is sufficient to let us know that the first preachers of the gospel were so well assured of the truth of it that they sealed it with their blood, and thereby have encouraged us, if at any time we are called to it, to resist unto blood too. The Old-Testament martyrs were slain with the sword (Heb. 11:37), and Christ came not to send peace, but a sword (Mt. 10:34), in preparation for which we must arm ourselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17), and then we need not fear what the sword of men can do unto us."

[David Guzik](#) - [Eusebius](#) relates a story from [Clement of Alexandria](#), who said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was also willingly executed for Jesus along side of James (Eusebius, Church History 2.9.2-3).

[Here is Eusebius account](#) - 2. And concerning this James, Clement, in the seventh book of his Hypotyposes, relates a story which is worthy of mention; telling it as he received it from those who had lived before him. He says that the one who led James to the judgment-seat, when he saw him bearing his testimony, was moved, and confessed that he was himself also a Christian.

3. They were both therefore, he says, led away together; and on the way he begged James to forgive him. And he, after considering a little, said, Peace be with you, and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded at the same time.

4. And then, as the divine Scripture says, Acts 12:3 sqq. Herod, upon the death of James, seeing that the deed pleased the Jews, attacked Peter also and committed him to prison, and would have slain him if he had not, by the divine appearance of an angel who came to him by night, been wonderfully released from his bonds, and thus liberated for the service of the Gospel. Such was the providence of God in respect to Peter.

**Herschel Ford** wrote, "James lived a short time; his brother John lived over one hundred years. But both of them lived for Jesus and this is the thing that counts. It does not matter whether you live fifty years or a hundred years. The thing that matters is this: are you filling your life with service to God?"

**THOUGHT** - Are you living for Jesus today? Or are you saying "I'll wait until I'm older and successful in my occupation. Then I will live for Him." If the latter, then pay heed to the wise words of James - "the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away....Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." (James 1:10, 4:14) cf God's assessment of the brevity of our lives in light of eternity = Job 7:6, 7 Job 9:25, 26 Job 14:1, 2 Ps 37:2 Ps 39:5, 6. Ps 144:4, Isa 40:6,7).

#### Related Resource:

- [Does the Bible record the death of the apostles?](#) The only apostle whose death the Bible records is James (Acts 12:2). King Herod had James "put to death with the sword," likely a reference to beheading. The circumstances of the deaths of the other apostles are related through church tradition, so we should not put too much weight on any of the other accounts. The most commonly accepted church tradition in regard to the death of an apostle is that the apostle Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (John 21:18).

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**Steven Cole's** introduction to his sermon on Acts 12 paints a vivid picture of the scene -

"Have you heard the news? Herod beheaded James!"

"No way! Not James! He was one of the inner circle with Jesus! Peter, James, and John. I thought for sure that God would protect James!"

"But that's not all. The latest polls show that Herod's approval rating went up after he killed James. So now he also has Peter in custody. Word has it that after the feast is over, he is going to execute him! There's a prayer

meeting tonight at Mary's house."

"I'll see you there."

There are times when evil seems to be winning the day. Wicked men get away with murder and their popularity goes up, not down. The righteous suffer terribly. Their loved ones are bereaved. It's easy at such times to wonder, "Where is God in all of this? Why did He allow this to happen? How can any good come out of such awful wickedness?"

James and John had been close. They had worked together in their father's fishing business. They had spent three years in close contact with Jesus. They had hopes and dreams of how God would use them in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. But now, James was suddenly gone. John was left wondering, "Why?"

([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

**Acts 12:3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.**

KJV Acts 12:3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

- **When he saw that it pleased the Jews** Acts 24:27; 25:9; John 12:43; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4
- he proceeded Acts 2:14; 4:13; Psalms 76:10; John 19:11; 21:18
- Then Exodus 12:14-20; 13:3-7; 23:15; Leviticus 23:6-14; Matthew 26:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7,8

## PEOPLE PLEASER PUTS PETER IN PRISON

**When he saw that it pleased the Jews** - Herod's approval rating sky rocketed! Herod was a "people pleaser," not a God pleaser! And eventually this sin of pride and self-glorification would result in his inglorious death (see Acts 12:21,22,23+)! Herod sought the approval of men, not of God, Whom he defied (or at least so he thought). In short, there was no fear of God before his eyes. (Ps 36:1, cf Ro 3:18+).

**THOUGHT** - Who are you seeking to approve dear disciple? God grant us the will and the way during our short stay on earth to seek to please only one Lord, King Jesus. Amen. One other thought to remember is that those who are living in rebellion will encourage your rebellion (Read 1 Peter 4:4+)

**John Phillips on pleased the Jews** - This is a commentary on the Jews as much as on Herod. The Jews were now well embarked on that course of Christ-rejection that was to bring their nation to shipwreck in less than three decades. As for Herod, he trimmed his sails to catch the favorable breeze and set out to further damage the Body of Christ. Accordingly he arrested Peter, the acknowledged leader of the apostles. (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Matthew Henry on it pleased the Jews** - The Jews made themselves guilty of the blood of James by showing themselves well pleased with it afterwards, though they had not excited Herod to it. There are accessories ex post facto-after the fact; and those will be reckoned with as persecutors who take pleasure in others' persecuting, who delight to see good men ill used, and cry, Aha, so would we have it, or at least secretly approve of it. For bloody persecutors (LIKE HEROD), when they perceive themselves applauded for that which everyone ought to cry shame upon them for, are encouraged to go on, and have their hands strengthened and their hearts hardened, and the checks of their own consciences smothered.

**Herod Agrippa I** "sought the popularity of the Jewish people by pretending to be a Jewish convert. He publicly kept the Jewish law and feasts, seeking the support and loyalty of the people. It was this that caused him to turn against the church. He was seeking the favor of the people, their approval and loyalty (see Acts 12:3). Herod was a shrewd politician, able to maneuver and manipulate people to his advantage." ((Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible : New Testament](#) page 182))

**Pleased** (701)([arestos](#) from [aresko](#)) is an adjective which describes that which is acceptable, pleasing, satisfying, agreeable, that which elicits an agreeable response, gratifying. The first use in the Septuagint is Ge 3:6+ where Eve says the tree was good for food and that it was a **delight** (Hebrew = taavah from avah - to incline or desire = a desire; Lxx = arestos) to the eyes."

**Matthew Henry** on Herod arresting Peter - Blood to the blood-thirsty does but make them more so, and the way of persecution, as of other sins, is downhill; when men are in it, they cannot easily stop themselves; when they are in they find they must on. One evil deed is covered with another, so that there is no passage through them. Those that take one bold step in a sinful way give Satan

advantage against them to tempt them to take another, and provoke God to leave them to themselves, to go from bad to worse. It is therefore our wisdom to take heed of the beginnings of sin (**ED: AMEN AND AMEN! QUICKLY CONFESS AND REPENT WHEN YOU FALL INTO A SIN, LEST IT BE A DOORWAY TO MANY AND MUCH GREATER SINS!**).

**He proceeded to arrest Peter also** - This was Peter's third arrest (Acts 4:3; 5:18). Notice the words **"Peter also"** which indicates that part of the mistreatment of the Church in Acts 12:1 was to arrest some of the disciples.

**Proceeded** (4369)(**prostithemi** from from **prós** = to or besides + **tithēmi** = to put) means to set, add, put, lay unto or with something. It can mean adding to what is already present. In this case, what was **"already present"** was the fact that the Jews were pleased with Herod's murder of James, so that that sin Herod sought to **"add"** the sin of killing Peter in order to **"add to"** the favor he had already achieved with the Jewish populace! In a very real sense Herod was adding to his sins, piling them up, not caring that he would one day have to repay (soon) God, and then spend eternity *"repaying"* his sin debt. (Herod's *"payday someday"* reminds me of the classic sermon preached over 1000 times by Robert G. Lee [1886-1974] - read **"Payday, Someday"** or watch the [Video Version](#))

**Arrest** (4815)(**sullambano** from **sun/syn** = together with + **lambáno** = to take, to seize) means literally to seize or take together and conveys the picture of claspings. To bring together. To enclose. To seize. To trap or capture as one would a **"catch of fish"** (Lk 5:9). **Sullambano** has several meanings depending on the context, the most common meaning being to arrest someone (7/16 uses) or take them into custody.

All of **Luke's** uses of **sullambano** - Lk. 1:24; Lk. 1:31; Lk. 1:36; Lk. 2:21; Lk. 5:7; Lk. 5:9; Lk. 22:54; Acts 1:16; Acts 12:3; Acts 23:27; Acts 26:21

**Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread** - This is a parenthetical note by Dr Luke. Why would Luke give us this detail? Undoubtedly Herod did not just want to put Peter in prison, but he wanted to put him to death (see Acts 12:4+). However, wanting to please the Jews, he knew he would have to wait until after the Passover because Jewish law did not allow executions during the Passover.

**Feast of Unleavened Bread** is another name for the **Passover** Feast (Dt 16:1-16+, Lev. 23:5-8; Lk 22:1+ = "Now the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, which is **called the Passover**, was approaching." The whole 8 day period would begin with the actual Passover meal on day one [see Lev 23:3+] then followed by seven days of unleavened bread [see Lev 23:5-8+] which would mark **the days** as sometime in March or April (**Nisan** 14 to **Nisan** 21, Nisan 14 being Passover Eve) the time of the annual **Passover** (cf Acts 12:4) and a time when fervent religious Jewish crowds would be thronging to Jerusalem. **Herod** being a shrewd, sinister sinner reasoned that this would be a perfect time to seize one of the most prominent leaders of the Christian church and enhance even to a greater degree his reputation among the Jews. Herod misunderstood the difference between reputation and character! **Reputation** is what others think about you while **character** is what God knows to be true about you (see God's assessment of Herod's character in Acts 12:22, 23+!)

**Passover and Unleavened Bread** was one of the 3 feasts all Jewish males were required to attend annually...

"Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (includes Passover) and at the **Feast of Weeks** (Pentecost) and at the **Feast of Booths** (Tabernacles), and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. (Deut 16:16+)

**John Phillips** quips that on this **feast** "The Jews were required to scour their houses to make sure no corrupting leaven remained. Thus, while the Jews were ridding their houses of leaven in accordance with their ritual law, their hearts were fermenting with the hidden leaven of malice and wickedness." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

Peter being arrested on **the days of Unleavened Bread, the Passover** is a bit ironic in that this was the time Jews celebrated their deliverance from bondage to an evil ruler in Egypt. As the present story unfolds it will also result in Peter's deliverance from bondage by an evil ruler, as we see Peter not "pass over" but "pass by" guards standing watch over his cell!

**THOUGHT** - The deliverance of Peter from bondage reminds me of Rich Mullins great song **"My Deliverer."** Is Jesus your Deliverer? If He is rejoice as you listen to **"My Deliverer."** If Jesus is not yet your Deliverer, I still encourage you to listen to what could be yours if you repent and place your faith wholly in the Holy Jesus. God alone is able to deliver you out of the Kingdom of darkness and transfer you to the Kingdom of light, the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:13,14+, cf Acts 26:18+). Jesus Alone can deliver you from your otherwise certain horrible fate of eternal punishment for you innumerable sins against the Holy God (see Jesus' warnings in Jn 8:24, Mt 25:41).

**Related Resources:**



- [Why do I need to be saved?](#)
- [How can I be saved?](#)
- [Who can be saved?](#)
- [Can a person believe in some sense but not be saved?](#)
- [What does it mean to be saved by grace?](#)
- [What if I don't feel saved?](#)

**A T Robertson** - Luke locates the time of the year when Peter was arrested, the Passover. It was a fine occasion for Agrippa to increase his favor among the crowds of Jews there by extra zeal against the Christians.

**Steven Ger** makes an interesting observation that "Clearly, the tide of the Jewish population's favorable attitude toward the church has turned. The "bloom was off the rose," no matter how many people Peter and company healed or exorcised (Acts 5:15-16). These events occurred during Passover week, A.D. 44, exactly eleven years following the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. The way Luke has fashioned Acts 12:3 is an unmistakable allusion to these gospel events, firmly establishing Peter as following in the footsteps of his mentor and Lord." (Ibid)

**Acts 12:4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.**

KJV Acts 12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

- **he put him in prison** Acts 4:3; 5:18; 8:3; Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:12; 22:33; John 13:36-38; 21:18
- **delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him** Acts 16:23,24; Matthew 27:64-66
- **intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people** Acts 4:28; Esther 3:6,7,13; Proverbs 19:21; 27:1; Lam 3:37; Matthew 26:5

## HEROD "GRANDSTANDS": PETER PLACED IN PRISON ON PASSOVER

In English **grandstand** is a noun but can function as verb which means "to perform ostentatiously to impress the audience and with an eye to the applause." This is a perfect description of Herod's seizure of Peter!

**When he had seized him, he put him in prison** - Herod had Peter arrested and imprisoned. Most commentators feel that the imprisonment was very probably in the **Fortress Antonia** ([picture](#)), rebuilt by Herod the Great and located at the northwest corner of the Temple

**Seized** (caught)([4084](#))(**piazo** related to **piezo** = to press) originally meant to press or squeeze, and then to take hold of with a firm grasp. More often as in the present context **piazo** speaks of seizing someone with a hostile intent so as to overpower them or to gain control. This verb is used repeatedly to describe attempts to seize Jesus (Jn. 7:30; Jn. 7:32; Jn. 7:44; Jn. 8:20; Jn. 10:39; Jn. 11:57) In 2 Cor 11:32 **piazo** is used of the attempt "to **seize**" Paul at "the city of the Damascenes." Lukes only other use of **piazo** is in Acts 3:7 describing the healing of the lame man - "And **seizing** (**piazo**) him by the right hand, he (PETER) raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened."

**Prison** ([5438](#))(**phulake** from **phulasso** = to guard, watch) means a guarding (the act of guarding or keeping watch - Lk 2:8, Nu 1:53, 3:7, 28) or guard (the person doing the watching - Acts 12:10) , a prison as a place where someone is guarded (Mt 5:25, 14:3, 10, 18:30, 25:36, 39, 43, etc). **Phulake** can refer to the period during which a watch is kept (Mt 14:25, 24:43, Mk 6:48, Lk 12:38 - a watch of the night = Ancient Jews had **3 divisions of 4 hours each** but under the Romans changed to **4 watches of 3 hours each**, the 4th watch being between 3-6 in the morning). **Phulake** has the root meaning of being kept under guard or on hold and is distinct from **desmoterion**, a place of bondage. **Phulake** in Acts 12:4 is used to describe the holding cell pending Peter's public confrontation ("trial").

**Delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him** - Each squad was a detachment of four soldiers, so that Peter was guarded by sixteen different soldiers. Four soldiers at a time served two separate three-hour watches within a twenty-four hour stretch. One wrist of the prisoner was usually chained to the wrist of a guard, but in Peter's case he appears to be chained to two

guards! (see Acts 12:6). Do you think any of these soldiers heard the Gospel? We will find out in Heaven!

**A T Robertson** - Four soldiers in each quaternion (tetradiad from tetras, four), two on the inside with the prisoner (chained to him) and two on the outside, in shifts of six hours each, sixteen soldiers in all, the usual Roman custom. Probably Agrippa had heard of Peter's previous escape (5:19) and so took no chances for connivance of the jailors.

**Ger** - In light of Peter and his cohorts' notorious escape from his previous imprisonment a decade earlier (Acts 5:17–21+), Agrippa allocates an absurd amount of security for Peter, a quantity usually only reserved for the most dangerous of prisoners. The king was taking no chances with what he hoped would prove the crowning spectacle of the holiday season and the deathblow to the Nazarene movement.

**Delivering** (3860)(**paradidomi** from **para** = alongside, beside, to the side of, over to + **didomi** = to give) conveys the basic meaning of to give over from one's hand to someone or something, especially to give over to the power of another which is precisely the picture in this passage. **Paradidomi** is the same verb used to describe Jesus being delivered, Luke for example recording "the chief priests and our rulers **delivered** Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him." (Lk. 24:20)

Luke's uses of **paradidomi** -Lk. 1:2; Lk. 4:6; Lk. 9:44; Lk. 10:22; Lk. 12:58; Lk. 18:32; Lk. 20:20; Lk. 21:12; Lk. 21:16; Lk. 22:4; Lk. 22:6; Lk. 22:21; Lk. 22:22; Lk. 22:48; Lk. 23:25; Lk. 24:7; Lk. 24:20; Acts 3:13; Acts 6:14; Acts 7:42; Acts 8:3; Acts 12:4; Acts 14:26; Acts 15:26; Acts 15:40; Acts 16:4; Acts 21:11; Acts 22:4; Acts 27:1; Acts 28:17;

**Guard** (5442)(**phulasso** related to noun **phulax** = sentinel, watchman, and indicates activity of a watchman) means to watch, to carry out the function as a military guard or sentinel (cp Acts 23:35, 28:16), to keep watch, to have one's eye upon lest one escape, to guard a person that he might remain safe (from violence, from another person or thing, from being snatched away, from being lost). One interesting use in the Septuagint is God's "job" to Adam when God "put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and **keep** (Lxx = **phulasso** - HE DID NOT DO A VERY GOOD JOB!) it." (Ge 2:15)

**Intending** (wishing, desiring)(1014)(**boulomai**) refers to a settled desire, one born of or springing from **reason** and not from **emotion**. To will, to wish, to will deliberately, to intend, to have a purpose, to be minded. The present tense pictures this attitude as Herod's continual, ongoing desire.

**After the Passover - KJV** = "after Easter." Passover describes the eight days of the entire feast. Herod would have to be patient. Then Herod could have him murdered. Recall the godless Jewish leaders who used similar sick logic as they plotted to murder Jesus "saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people." (Mt 26:5) As an aside one cannot help but wonder if Peter thought that this might be the fulfillment of His Lord's prophetic words when he declared to Peter "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." (Jn 21:18)

**Jack Andrews on after the Passover** - Herod was playing by the letter of the law, but not by the spirit of the law. Herod put on a front during the days of Unleavened Bread. Many people come to church and act religious on the Lord's day, but they go back to their sinful living and evil ways on Monday!

**A T Robertson** - The stricter Jews regarded it as a profanation to put a person to death during a religious festival" (Hackett). So Agrippa is more scrupulous than the Sanhedrin was about Jesus.

**To bring him out before the people** - In effect as a "**show trial**" not a trial seeking justice and truth! The NIV has "*Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.*" Herod of course hoped the angry Jewish crowd would call for Peter's death just as they had done some 10 years earlier when they called for Jesus' death (cf Mk 15:12,13, 14). Notice the parallel between **Pilate** and **Herod** -- Pilate was a "people pleaser" just like Herod, Mark recording that

"**Wishing to satisfy** (PLEASE) the crowd, **Pilate** released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified." (Mk 15:15)

**NET Note** - "to bring him out to the people," but in this context a public trial (with certain condemnation as the result) is doubtless what Herod planned. L&N 15.176 translates this phrase "planning to bring him up for a public trial after the Passover."

**Steven Cole** points out that "Those who teach that it is always God's will to deliver us from sickness, tragedy, and death are false teachers. The so-called "**Word of Faith**" teachers say that deliverance from any trial is ours if we simply claim it by faith. They brazenly state that God must obey us when we speak a word of faith! If you are not healed, then obviously the problem is your lack of faith. I cannot understand why these arrogant charlatans get such a large following. None of them are able to avoid disease and death! ([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

## Related Resources:

- [Is the Word of Faith movement biblical?](#)
- [Are faith healers for real? Does a faith healer heal with the same power as Jesus?](#)
- [What does the Bible say about the prosperity gospel?](#)
- [What is seed faith? What is a seed faith offering?](#)
- [What is the Trinity Broadcasting Network \(TBN\)?](#)
- [Are all prosperity preachers charlatans and/or false teachers?](#) - excellent, balanced summary

**Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.**

KJV Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

- **prayer for him** Acts 12:12; Isa 62:6,7; Mt 18:19; Lk 18:1; 1 Cor 12:26; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:18-20; 1 Th 5:17; Heb 13:3; Jas 5:16

## PETER WAS BOUND BUT PRAYER WAS "LOOSED!"

**So (oun)** - A term of conclusion. Because of what Luke had just recorded about the urgency of the situation. The church took advantage of the 8 days of the Passover feast to pray, fully aware that after this time it might be too little, too late to save Peter from the grips of Herod! This was indeed a crisis for the Church in Jerusalem as they knew that Peter's head might soon be on the chopping block just as had happened to James. When you are in a situation or circumstance where you realize that your only hope is God, you are in a good place. And so they did the only thing they could do - they prayed. They did the BEST thing they could do! Prayer was not their *last resort*, but prayer was their *first response*! There was a desperate *situation* that led the church to desperate *supplication*. The situation looked *hopeless*, but the church was not *helpless*! (Play "[My Help](#)") (Read Php 1:19+, Philemon 1:22)

J. Edgar Hoover once said, "The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-made or man-controlled powers because prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the infinite resources of God."

**John Stott** observes that 'Here then were two communities, the world and the church, arrayed against one another, each wielding an appropriate weapon. On the one side was the authority of Herod, the power of the sword and the security of the prison. On the other side, the church turned to prayer, which is the only power which the powerless possess.' (Borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 208](#))

**Brian Bell** introduces his sermon on this chapter with these observations - Man has only 2 opportunities in this life: Self-Exaltation or God-Exaltation! Ps:1:6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish. We'll meet one Living a Self-Exalting Life (**Herod**); & another Living a God-Exalting Life (**Peter**). Faith is fundamentally God-Exalting; Glory seeking is fundamentally Self-Exalting...and the 2 can't fit into one person!

**Peter was kept in the prison** - Luke uses a second verb **kept** (tereo) in addition to **guard** (phulasso Acts 12:4), to paint a picture of the (futile) human efforts to make sure Peter remained in prison. Humanly speaking Herod had Peter held fast and secure, but he did not take into account the power of God, for he did not know God. Such is the deceptive reasoning of all unregenerate men be they rich or poor, wise or not. One day they too like Herod will realize the vanity of their deceptive security and power. Ask Adolph Hitler! It is ever the Throne in heaven that is in control, not the throne on earth!

**Kept** is in the imperfect tense and in the passive voice (indicating action from outside source) in the Greek language and means that he was continuously guarded.

**Kept** (5083) (**tereo** from **teros** - a guard or warden) means to keep an eye on, to observe attentively, to keep watch over so as to retain in custody.. **Tereo** speaks here of of guarding Peter watching attentively so he does not escape or be rescued! Perhaps Herod had heard the story of Peter and the other apostles' escape in Acts 5:18,19+. Luke used **tereo** to describe Paul and Silas imprisonment in Philippi where the officials commanded "the jailer to **guard** (tereo) them securely." (Acts 16:23). **Tereo** is used by Luke to describe Paul's imprisonment prior to his transfer to Rome (Acts 24:23; Acts 25:4; Acts 25:21). **Tereo** was used figuratively of observing the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5).

**THOUGHT** - The Church was facing a crisis. The question arises when we are facing a crisis of faith how do we respond? What do we do when things happen to us or our loved one or a brother and sister that we do not understand? What is your "knee jerk" response (pun intended!)?

**But** - Term of contrast. What is contrasted? Prison and prayer. God's men may be in prison but prayer by God's men for God's men can never be imprisoned. [A T Robertson](#) thinks this is not marking a contrast but should simply be translated as "and."

[Ray Stedman](#) says that **but** "is always a crisis word. It indicates a change in direction." It behooves the diligent student to develop the discipline to pause and ponder "hinge words" like "**but**" for in so doing in dependence on the Spirit, He may open the "door" of our understanding to aspects of the text we would have never grasped had we "rushed" over the word "**but**." (See Term of Contrast)

**John Phillips** on this **but** - That "**but**" spelled Herod's doom. The "**buts**" of the Bible are remarkable and well worth noting. They usually denote a change." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

The Church had **no** hope but **all** prayer! They were likely familiar with the Words of God in Psalm 50:15

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

**Prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God - Being made** (lemma = ginomai = to cause to be, come into being, "*gen*"-erate) is present tense indicating persistent, unceasing prayer for Peter (cf **were praying** in Acts 12:12+). "Prisons are no match for prayers" (Constable) It is notable that Luke makes no mention of fervent prayer for James, but since Scripture is silent it is difficult to understand why there was no mention.

In English **fervent** means ardent, intensely passionate; boiling, burning, or glowing; exhibiting or marked by great intensity of feeling; zealous; having or displaying a passionate intensity.

The etymology of the word **fervent** helps paint a picture of this prayer meeting - **Fervent** is from Old French *fervent* "fervent, ardent" (12c.), from Latin *ferventem* (nominative fervens) "boiling, hot, glowing," figuratively "violent, impetuous, furious," present participle of *fervere* "to boil, glow," from PIE root \*bhreu- "to boil, bubble, effervesce, burn." **The figurative sense of "impassioned" is first attested c. 1400** ([Online Etymology Dictionary](#))

[David Guzik](#) observes "In this contest, Herod had his soldiers and his prisons; but the church had the power of prayer. The outcome would soon be seen, and easily decided. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but the church was free to pray. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. We take advantage of that open gate through prayer."

This was a focused prayer meeting with one goal - liberation of Peter. Notice how persecution prompts prayer (individually and corporately). While Luke does not mention the Holy Spirit, there is little question that this intense, persistent praying by the Body was energized by the Spirit in the Spirit filled believers! Furthermore, their prayer was with one mind, all together, in one accord, like that in Acts 1:14+ where the Church needed to find a replacement for Judas and so the first Church **all with one mind** ([homothumadon](#) = also Acts 4:24, Acts 15:25, Ro 15:6) were continually (present tense) devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Crises have a way of stirring fervent, focused prayer. Remember what we saw after "911" attack in America - focused prayer was at an all time high in the nation!

This prayer is a perfect illustration of Paul's instruction to the church at Ephesus (notice the repetition of "all" and remember this prayer is in the context of "spiritual warfare" - Eph 6:10-17)...

With **all** prayer and petition pray **at all** times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with **all** perseverance and petition for **all** the saints (Eph 6:18+)

Their prayer is also an illustration of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount

**"Ask** (present imperative - keep at it), and it will be given to you; **seek** (present imperative - keep at it), and you will find; **knock** (present imperative - keep at it), and it will be opened to you. "For (term of explanation) everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Literally the door was opened and Peter walked into the prayer meeting - Acts 12:16!). (Mt 7:7-8+)

**Jack Andrews** applies this passage - There are multitudes around us that are spiritually in prison; lost and undone and facing eternal death in the lake of fire. We are to be praying for those who need our prayers! We always have a purpose to pray!

[David Guzik](#) rites that "Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness (FERVENTLY). Too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about. Earnest prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you

(John 15:7)."

## Related Resource

- [Praying in the Spirit](#)

**By the church** - Was the whole church praying? Luke does not specifically say "all", and in Acts 12:12 he says "many were gathered together and were praying." Note a few points - many were at the prayer meeting, prayer was offered with unity, prayer was not general but for a very specific need, prayer was passionate (fervent with a sense of urgency), prayer was persistent, prayer was in faith that God would hear and act according to His good will. This is a good pattern of prayer, and especially when the church has a crisis. They were not just "going through the motions" as we often say when someone does something mechanically or by rote. How long did they pray? Luke does not say but recall that the Passover feast lasted 8 days, so it is very possible that they prayed "24/7" for 8 days! And notice that they did not give up but they prayed on and on - in fact **Rhoda** had to interrupt their prayer meeting! (Acts 12:13-15, 16) O, to be in such a prayer meeting that the answer to your prayers needs to interrupt the meeting!

**Jack Andrews** gives two **illustrations** - When it comes to praying many in the church is like the little girl I heard about. This little girl went fishing with her dad. They began to fish and the little girl waited a little while. Then after getting no nibbles, she said, "I quit." Her dad said, "Why?" The little girl said, "Dad, I can't seem to get waited on." Too often we give up and quit before God sends the answer! When we do that we show a lack of faith!

A woman once left her diamond brooch in a hotel. After her trip and when she arrived at home she found out that she had left her brooch. She immediately called the hotel. She told the manager what had happened, what her name was, what room she stayed in, and desperately asked the manager to try to find her brooch. The manager went to look for it. After searching for the woman's brooch the manager found it, put it in the safe, and returned to the phone to tell the lady the good news, but she had hung up. So many of us are like this. We aren't willing to wait on the Lord.

**Prayer** (4335) (**proseuche** from **pros** = toward or immediately before + **euchomai** = to pray or vow) is the more general word for prayer and is used only of prayer to God. The prefix **pros** would convey the sense of being immediately before Him and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion, and worship. The basic idea is to bring something, and in prayer this pertains to bringing up prayer requests. In early Greek culture an offering was brought with a prayer that it be accepted. Later the idea was changed slightly, so that the thing brought to God was a prayer. In later Greek, prayers appealed to God for His presence.

**Proseuche** is used 37 times in the NT Matt. 17:21; Matt. 21:13; Matt. 21:22; Mk. 9:29; Mk. 11:17; Lk. 6:12; Lk. 19:46; Lk. 22:45; Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Acts 3:1; Acts 6:4; Acts 10:4; Acts 10:31; Acts 12:5; Acts 16:13; Acts 16:16; Rom. 1:10; Rom. 12:12; Rom. 15:30; 1 Co. 7:5; Eph. 1:16; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:5; Phlm. 1:4; Phlm. 1:22; Jas. 5:17; 1 Pet. 3:7; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8:3; Rev. 8:4

**THOUGHT** - Note the concentration of prayer in the early church in Acts. What has happened to us as a church in America? How might this relate to how infrequently we see the power of the Lord at work in our midst? What will have to happen in America to send the Church to her knees?

**Fervently** (a very "intense" word) (1619) (**ektenos** from **ek** = out + **teino** = to stretch; English = tension) literally pictures one "stretching out" and pictures "an intense strain" and unceasing activity which normally involving a degree of intensity and perseverance. **Ektenos** is a medical term which describes the stretching of a muscle to its limits -- here the idea is that their "prayer muscles" were being stretched to the limit! The word combines the ideas of perseverance ("without letting up") and intensity ("w. fervor, urgently"). The fundamental idea is earnestness, zealously -- not doing something lightly and perfunctorily but straining as it were to do it! **Cranfield** suggests the figure of "the taut muscle of strenuous and sustained effort, as of an athlete." Jowett suggests the picture of the tension and energy of a stringed instrument, "as when the string of a violin has been stretched to a tighter pitch that it might yield a little higher note." **Ektenos** was an athletic term conveying the meaning of "striving with all of one's energy" and was used to describe a runner who was moving at maximum output with taut muscles straining and stretching to the limit. One can picture many (if not all) those praying prostrate, on their faces before the Lord, earnestly crying out, pleading for God's sovereign deliverance of Peter! What a prayer meeting this must have been!!!

**Ektenos** is used to describe Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke recording that Jesus "being in



agony He was praying **very fervently**, and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." (Lk 22:44+) This gives us a graphic picture of the intensity of the corporate prayer by the Jerusalem church!

**Brian Bell** comments that although they were praying "none of them really thought Peter would be released. Ever been guilty of expecting less than a complete answer to prayer? (ED: GULP!) Pray believing! Like the church prayer meeting for rain, & only 1 member brought an umbrella! God is not wanting great men, but He is wanting men that will dare to prove the greatness of their God! Key in Ps.5:3 – [Prayer: I will direct it to You(Direction); I will look up (Expectation)] ([Sermon Notes](#))

It is also worth noting that from the phrase "**it was during the days of Unleavened Bread**" (Acts 12:3) suggests Peter was seized several days before the end of the 8 day celebration (some think actually before the feast began). Here is the point - this means that the Church prayed for several days with no answer, for Peter was not rescued miraculously until the last day of the feast ("On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward" Acts 12:6). That is an example of persevering prayer (cf "all perseverance" in Eph 6:18). Heaven was silent for several days, but the church kept stoking the fires of fervent prayer, which reflects their faith and trust in God. Even though it had not yet been written, the writer of Hebrews "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need ("[in the nick of time](#)" = at the last possible moment)." (AND THE CHURCH NEED HELP "IN THE NICK OF TIME!" AND GOD ANSWERED AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT!) (Heb 4:16+). Recall the words of James 5:16NLT = "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces (Greek = [energeo](#) in present tense) wonderful results."

**John Phillips** writes on **ektenos** - That kind of praying bombarded the throne of God during the week Peter lay in prison. It was the kind of prayer that makes iron gates yield. (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Brian Bell** - A five-point teaching on prayer:

1. Prayer must be constant/intense/fervent/earnest, not casual.
2. Prayer must be ongoing, was offered. [verb tense implies continuing activity]
3. Prayer must be to God. [In genuine contact with the living God] Not with empty repetition, and not in unbelief.
4. Prayer must be specific, not vague...for him (Peter).
5. Prayer must be communal by the church. The believer is not called to an isolated life.

**Bell** adds "I'm sure they (THE CHURCH) thought, "why bring our petitions to the wolf (Herod) to request he release the lamb" (Peter). So they bring their petitions to God instead! 16 guards or 16,000 guards, these men & women would have still prayed him out! Did you know that if you are a believer you must be concerned for prisoners? Matthew 25 defines "*those who inherit the kingdom*" (Mt 25:34) are those who: help the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; take in strangers; cloth those who need clothes; visit the sick; & visit the prisoners. (Mt 25:35-40)

**Jack Arnold** has a convicting comment - Prayer is essential, necessary and vital to the furtherance of Christ and His spiritual kingdom in this world. Did you know that the Lord Jesus Christ never left us any instruction on how to preach, but he did tell us how to pray. Why is it that in our seminaries and Bible schools and even churches no courses in prayer are taught? There are courses in theology, Bible, Christian Education, preaching and so forth, but there are usually no courses on prayer. Why is it that the vast majority of major theological works never deal with prayer when prayer is a basic doctrine of the Bible? Prayer is doctrine and we all need to become experts in this aspect of systematic and practical theology. ([Acts 12:1-25 Supernaturalism and the Church](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [What is intercessory prayer?](#)
- [Utley's Topic - Intercessory Prayer](#)
- [Is it acceptable to repeatedly pray for the same thing?](#)
- [Who are we to pray to, the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?](#)
- Prayer Quotes
- Prayer Illustrations and Devotionals

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**Ray Stedman** comments - let us never forget what James (not this James, but Jesus' brother, who wrote The Epistle of James) says: "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2). You see, in his wisdom God has designed that his people shall participate in what he does. Though he did set all the apostles free without any prayer, as recorded in Chapter 5, and could have done so with James, nevertheless he is impressing upon his people here that when danger threatens the program of God, or the people of God, it is a call to prayer. God will hear that prayer and answer it and set people free, when he would not have done so otherwise. **This is the great lesson of this chapter to the church.** We are not to take the events of our day for granted, as though there were nothing

we could do about them. Prayer becomes a mighty, powerful thrust on the part of the people of God, to change events. That, above all else, is what this message is shouting at us. Basically, prayer is the most natural and normal response of a heart that is dependent upon God. If you are really counting upon God to do something, then you will pray about it. You will trust him; you will communicate with him. If you are not counting on him, you will not pray. If you are really counting on something else, or on someone else -- if you think that by your own clever maneuvering you can get out of a situation, or if you are trusting other human beings to come through -- you will not pray. Or if you do, your prayer is but a ritual, an empty form, a perfunctory utterance that means nothing. **The basic motive of prayer is a sense of dependence.** If you really think that God, and God alone, can work, and that there are elements of a situation in which only he can change things -- then you pray. This is what happened to this early church. When they realized that James had been put to death, and that this vicious attack of the enemy could be successful, it suddenly crystallized in their minds that they had a part to play in God's program. They were to go to God in earnest prayer that Peter might be delivered. And God set him free in a wonderful way. ([Acts 12:1-25 When Prison Doors Open](#))

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**A. B. Simpson** - Prayer is the link that connects us with God. It is the bridge that spans every gulf and bears us over every abyss of danger or of need. How significant is this picture of the New Testament church: Peter in prison, the Jews triumphant, Herod supreme, the arena of martyrdom awaiting the dawning of the morning. "But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

And what is the sequel? The prison open, the apostle free, the Jews baffled, the wicked king divinely smitten, and the Word of God rolling on in greater victory. Do we know the power of our supernatural weapon? Do we dare to use it with the authority of a faith that commands as well as asks? God grant us holy audacity and divine confidence. He is not wanting great men, but He is wanting men that will dare to prove the greatness of their God.

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**Hiebert on intercessory prayer** (in [Working With God Through Prayer](#) comments on Jesus' call to pray for laborers Mt 9:38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.") -

1 The words reveal the inducement for intercessory prayer. "Pray ye therefore"—because of the vastness of the harvest and the scarcity of the laborers. A vital apprehension of these two facts inevitably leads to a heartfelt concern that finds expression in earnest intercession. As long as our hearts remain cold and indifferent to these conditions, we will remain prayerless. A major reason for the lack of intercessory prayer is the prevailing lack of a compelling realization of the lostness of the unsaved.

2 When seen in their context, these words reveal the primacy of intercessory prayer in Christian service. Jesus points to intercessory prayer as the resource available to meet the desperate need for workers. Following this call for prayer, the Lord Jesus carefully instructed, empowered, and sent forth the Twelve. But before they were ready to be sent as His messengers, they needed to be trained in the school of prayer. His order is first prayer, then service; nay rather, prayer is the first and primary form of service.

It is essential that we retain this order of prayer followed by service. This order was vital in the thought of our Lord, for in connection with His sending out the seventy, we again have the same order (Luke 10:1–3). Likewise the apostles observed this order in the early church (Acts 6:4). With our modern emphasis on Christian service, we are in danger of leading young believers to launch out into active service before they have learned to know the place and importance of prayer in the Lord's work. We need to urge all believers to engage in Christian service, but such service is often ineffectual because we have neglected to emphasize the primacy of prayer in a life of Christian service. Ryle urgently pleads, "Never, never may we forget that if we would do good to the world, our first duty is to pray!" When prayer is given first place in our lives, our service will not thereby be minimized or neglected, but it will rather be made truly effective.

3. Intercessory prayer is to be directed to "the Lord of the harvest." The Lord is the owner of the harvest and He is concerned about it. He uses men to do the harvesting, but the work is His. The worker must submit to the sovereignty of God in the selection of the laborers and their appointment to their appropriate sphere of service. He must send forth and direct the work of the harvesters if it is to be fruitful for God. Self-appointed workers in self-selected fields with self-chosen methods and self-determined aims do more harm than good. Jesus did not ask the disciples to go out and find the needed laborers, but He did ask them to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth the needed workers.

4. The request to be made is that God will "send forth labourers." The great need for workers must elicit the specific prayer request that God will provide the workers. The word used in the original is very expressive, "that he may thrust forth laborers." It is the same term rendered "put forth" in Matthew 9:25 and "cast out" in verses 33–34. Broadus observes that the term "always implies urgency, haste, constraint," while the aorist tense used here means "that the laborers should be sent out promptly, pushed into their work." Violence is not implied here, but the term denotes the divine compulsion upon human lives that makes them willing to leave the comforts of home and go into the darkness of heathendom with the message of salvation. Only the power of God can push out the needed workers into the harvest field.

James H. McConkey gives an illustration from the life of P. Cameron Scott, founder of the African Inland Mission, of this power of God in thrusting forth a worker. For several years this young man drifted along upon the listless tide of a shallow Christian life, seemingly without a thought of God's claim upon him. Then there came a time when the Holy Spirit began to work mightily in his heart to induce him to surrender his life. Again and again the Spirit moved and troubled him with the words of the text "Ye are not your own ... for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19–20). He could not get away from those words; they so troubled his resisting heart that in desperation he sought to erase the text from his Bible, but that did not help. Finally he yielded himself to the call of the Spirit, and his life of surrender to God left untold blessings in its train.

This work of thrusting forth laborers into the harvest must not be limited to the calling of ministers and missionaries. God has a place for every member of His Church in the reaping of the whitened fields. God likewise takes lay members of His Church, engaged in the common tasks of life, and "sets them on fire" for Him, mightily using them in the bringing in of the harvest. Every believer, humbly faithful as a witness for God in his daily life, can have a share in the gathering of the sheaves for the Lord.

5 The words of our Lord indicate **the duty of intercessory prayer**. "Pray ye therefore" (Luke 10:2+) is a command from our Lord Himself and carries the same binding obligation of any other command. God's people are under solemn obligation to pray for the needed workers. How often this need for workers is publicly discussed and lamented; committees are appointed to investigate and report; yet how little believing prayer there is for the needed workers. The Church must grasp—and practice—the solemn truth that her Lord holds her responsible to pray for the needed laborers.

A chapter out of the history of the early Moravian church offers a clear testimony to the power of intercessory prayer in meeting the needs for laborers. In 1727 at Herrnhut there was begun a continuing prayer vigil which went on for one hundred years.

It was known as the 'Hourly Intercession,' and it meant that by relays of brethren and sisters prayer without ceasing was made to God for all the work and wants of His Church. In this case it kindled a burning desire to make Christ's salvation known to the heathen. It led to the beginning of modern foreign missions. From that one small village community more than one hundred missionaries went out in twenty-five years.

In view of the fact that our Master has commanded such an intercessory prayer ministry and that history demonstrates the results of faithful obedience to the command, how tragic that believers as a whole have not more fully entered into this ministry. One of the major sins of the Christian Church today is its prayerlessness.

6 The words of our Lord in the original also convey the thought of **urgency in intercessory prayer**. The command "Pray ye" in the aorist tense has in it a sense of urgency, setting forth a duty that must be obeyed at once. A realization of the desperate need for such prayer will create an urgency in our praying. Effective prayer arises out of a burden for a need to be met, be that need our own or that of others. Whenever this consciousness of a pressing need is lacking, prayer tends to become formal and powerless. Prayer arises spontaneously from a burdened heart. Whenever the Holy Spirit places in our hearts the urge to pray, how important it is that we obey! Such Spirit-prompted prayer is in accordance with the will of God. To quench such a call to prayer will have an adverse impact upon our own spiritual life. Watchman Nee testifies:

If you do not pray, you will feel suffocated within as if there is something left undone. In the event you still do not pray, you will feel even more weighed down. Finally, if you do not pray at all, the spirit of prayer as well as the burden of prayer will be so dulled that it will be difficult for you to regain such feeling and to pray the prayer according to God's will afterwards.

7 These words also contain an intimation of the marvelous privilege of prayer. We are asked to pray for workers in order that God may meet the need by sending out the needed laborers. The eternal God could send forth workers without our prayers, but He has chosen to relate His working with our asking. In furthering the work of His kingdom, God desires not to work independently but to have His people cooperate with Him. He works to communicate His will to His people and then delights to answer their prayer for its fulfillment. He has thus provided for each of His children the glorious opportunity of working with Him in the fulfillment of His purposes. Each may have a share in the work of gathering in the harvest through the hidden ministry of intercession. "Prayer is indeed a power on which the ingathering of the harvest and the coming of the kingdom do in very truth depend." In view of the explicit command of our Lord to pray for laborers and the realization that God assuredly works in response to such prayers, we must humbly confess that we have not adequately entered into this glorious privilege of working by prayer. Acknowledging and confessing our sin, let us resolve to be obedient to this urgent call to pray for the needed laborers to gather in the whitened harvest for our Lord and Saviour. May we too hear in our hearts the call of the Spirit and say with the poet:

A call to prayer! I cannot sleep!  
A midnight vigil I must keep!  
For God doth call; I hear Him speak:  
"To prayer! To prayer! (I but repeat)  
To prayer! To prayer! Prevailing prayer!"

The need of such is everywhere;  
It covers earth—it fills the air—  
This urgent need of urgent prayer!

To bended knee! To bended knee!  
God's call to you—God's call to me;  
Because what is, and what's to be  
Shall reach throughout eternity.  
Like Christ our Lord—like unto Him  
In whom was found no guile—no sin,  
Who “prayed all night.” And we His kin  
Should pray—yes pray, like unto Him.

O friends, I say—again I say,  
This truth has gripped my heart this day:  
The Need of Prayer! Let come what may,  
We will prevail! Oh, “Watch and pray”!  
Awake! Awake! Ye saints awake!  
Stand in the breach for Jesus' sake—  
Our God the powers of hell shall break!  
—Author Unknown

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**Hymn Story:** The Hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer” first appeared in “The New York Observer” on September 13, 1845 and was accompanied by a note written by Rev. Thomas Salmon, a British Preacher, who had immigrated to America. The note accompanying the Hymn was as follows: “At Coleshill, Warwickshire, England, I became acquainted with W. W Walford, the blind preacher, a man of obscure birth and connections and no education, but of strong mind and most retentive memory. In the pulpit he never failed to select a lesson well adapted to his subject, giving chapter and verse with unerring precision and scarcely ever misplacing a word in his repetition of the Psalms, every part of the New Testament, the prophecies, and some of the histories, so as to have the reputation of “knowing the whole Bible by heart.” He actually sat in the chimney corner, employing his mind in composing a sermon or two for Sabbath delivery... On one occasion, paying him a visit, he repeated two or three pieces he had composed, and having no friend at home to commit them to paper, he had laid them up in the storehouse within. “How will this do?” asked he, as he repeated the following lines...?” I rapidly copied the lines with my pencil as he uttered them, and sent them for insertion in the Observer. This hymn is attributed to William W. Walford, but nothing else is known about him. From the words of this hymn we can gather that he was a man of prayer. The second stanza says, “Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear to Him whose truth and faithfulness engage the waiting soul to bless; and since He bids me seek His face, believe His word, and trust His grace, I'll cast on Him my every care, and wait for Thee, sweet hour of prayer.” This hymn story appears in “Then Sings My Soul” book 2 written by Robert J. Morgan. Robert J. Morgan gives some challenging questions to the church that we must consider. He wrote, “If an hour spent with the Lord is so sweet, why do we race through our day prayerless, then squeeze all our requests into a two-minute segment at bedtime? If prayer is so powerful, why do we neglect it so consistently?”

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**Jack Andrews** asks “How important is prayer to you? How often do you practice praying? Do you talk more about praying than you actually pray? FACTS: The early church was used by God to reach their world for Jesus. They saw the power of God save souls, rescue His children, release those bound up by Satan, cities turned to Christ and the whole world turned upside down! The early church understood the importance and significance of prayer. They spent much time together in prayer, many hours laboring in prayer, and fervent dedication to prayer! The early church talked to God, pleaded with God, wrestled in prayer to God, warred against the powers of darkness in prayer to God. The church must get back to fervent and faithful praying! If we are going to be used by God we must daily seek Him in prayer! Prayer was important to the early church! Is it important to you? Acts 3:1 says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”

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### **Living Beyond The Odds By David C. McCasland**

Constant prayer was offered to God for [Peter] by the church. —Acts 12:5

Many of us make daily decisions based on the odds. If there's a 20 percent chance of rain, we may ignore it. If there's a 90 percent chance, we'll take an umbrella. The greater the odds, the more our behavior is affected because we want to choose wisely and be successful.

Acts 12:1-6 describes a situation in which Peter's odds of survival were very low. He was in prison, “bound with two chains between

two soldiers” while others guarded the door (Acts 12:6). Herod had already executed James, one of Jesus’ closest followers, and he had the same fate in mind for Peter (Acts 12:1-3). A gambler would not have put any money on Peter getting out of this alive.

Yet God’s plan for Peter included a miraculous deliverance that even those who were interceding for him found hard to believe (Acts 12:13-16). They were astonished when he showed up at their prayer meeting.

God can operate outside the odds because He is all-powerful. Nothing is too hard for Him. The One who loves us and gave Himself for us is in charge of our lives. In ordinary circumstances and impossible situations, God can reveal His power. Whether we are showered with success or sustained in sorrow, He is with us.

Dear God, we’re so thankful that nothing is too difficult for You. You can do amazing things! Help us to trust that You are always with us and always in control. We love You, Lord. ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**God is always in control behind the scenes.**

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#### **Acts 12:1-19 The Only Way To Help** By Dave Branon

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. —Acts 12:5

I looked at my watch. To my dismay, it was 1:45 in the afternoon. I had promised my daughter Lisa, who was playing the piano in a competition for college scholarships at 1:30, that I would pray for her. I got busy, though, and forgot all about it. By 1:45 I knew she had already finished.

I sat at my desk with a feeling of lingering emptiness. I felt as if I had failed her. I knew that the only possible way I could have assisted Lisa during her competition was to ask God to calm her and help her recall the music she had practiced so long and hard to master.

As I contemplated this situation, I was reminded of how important prayer is as a link with those we cannot reach. By talking to the Lord about a friend or loved one’s needs, we have a unique opportunity to make a difference in their lives— even though we can’t be with them in person. What an amazing concept!

No matter what the circumstances of our friends or family members who are away from us, prayer is always an effective way we can support them and be of help. It worked for the people who prayed for Peter (Acts 12), and it can work for us. ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

No greater help and care is given  
To others in their need  
Than when we bear them up in prayer  
And for them intercede. —DJD

When you can’t be there, you can help through prayer.

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#### **Acts 12:1-16 You Can Always Pray** By Dave Branon

I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me. —Psalm 118:5

The young mother called out to the missionary, “Come quick! My baby is going to die.” Gale Fields was in Irian Jaya helping her husband Phil translate the Bible into Orya, a tribal language. But they also provided medical help whenever possible. Gale looked at the malaria-stricken child and realized she didn’t have the right medicine to help the infant.

“I’m sorry,” she told the mother, “I don’t have any medicine for babies this small.” Gale paused, then said, “I could pray for her though.”

“Yes, anything to help my baby,” answered the mother.

Gale prayed for the baby and then went home feeling helpless. After a little while, she again heard the mother cry out, “Gale, come quick and see my baby!”

Expecting the worst, Gale went to the baby’s side. This time, though, she noticed improvement. The dangerous fever was gone. Later, Gale would say, “No wonder the Orya Christians learned to pray. They know God answers.”

The early Christians prayed for Peter to be released from prison and then were “astonished” when God answered them (Acts 12:16).



We respond that way too, but we shouldn't be surprised when God answers our prayers. Remember, His power is great and His resources are endless. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Forgive us, Lord, when we're surprised  
By answers to our prayer;  
Increase our faith and teach us how  
To trust Your loving care.  
—Sper

The most powerful position on earth is kneeling before the Lord of the universe.

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## UNBELIEVING PRAYER

... when they ... saw him [Peter], they were astonished. Acts 12:16

The story is told about a church in a small town which seemed to have everything going its way. There were no gambling casinos, no liquor stores, and no "beer joints" in the entire area. After several years, however, a night club was built right on Main Street. The congregation was very much disturbed and held several all-night prayer meetings in which some members specifically asked God to burn the tavern down. Well, a few days later, during a tremendous thunderstorm, lightning did strike the drinking establishment and fire completely demolished it. The owner, knowing how the church had prayed, sued them for damages. His lawyer claimed that it was their prayers which caused the loss. The church, however, hired their own lawyer and fought the charges. After many hearings and much deliberation, the judge declared: "It is the opinion of this court that wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern owner is the one who really believes in prayer, while the church members do not!" Doesn't this suggest how faithless we often are? Even those in the early church were guilty of such unbelieving prayer. Acts 12 tells us that Peter, having escaped from prison, went to the house of Mary the mother of John where many Christians were gathered together praying for his release. He knocked, and Rhoda went to the door; but, hearing his voice, she was so thrilled that, without opening it, she ran to the "prayer meeting crowd" and told them that Peter was outside. "Thou art mad!" they said. As she insisted that it was really Peter, they concluded, "It is his angel." As the apostle continued knocking, they finally opened the door. Seeing him, they "were astonished." How often we are like that: surprised at the way God answers prayer. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When we pray, let us be confident that God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3: 20).

God answers prayer; shouldst thou complain?  
"Be not afraid, thou canst not ask in vain.  
He only waits thy faith in Him to prove,  
Doubt not His power e'en mountains to remove!  
—Anon.

**Have faith to believe that where prayer focuses, power falls!**

**Acts 12:6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison**

KJV Acts 12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

- **On the very night** Genesis 22:14; Deuteronomy 32:26; 1 Samuel 23:26,27; Psalms 3:5,6; 4:8; Isaiah 26:3,4; Philippians 4:6,7; Hebrews 13:6
- **bound with two chains** Acts 21:33; 28:20; Jeremiah 40:4; Ephesians 6:20; \*marg.; 2 Timothy 1:16
- and the Acts 5:23; Matthew 28:4

## AN ANSWER TO FERVENT PRAYER

**On the very night** - This would have been on the 8th and final day of the Passover Festival, the very evening prior to Peter's almost certain execution most likely the very next day! God is never late! God's timing is always perfect. He answered the prayers of the

saints in His timing, when the situation looked most dire!

**Jack Arnold** comments that "God waited until the last moment to intervene. God delayed to teach the saints the lesson of persevering prayer and to teach Peter to rest in the Lord. We must never mistake a delay in answered prayer for a denial of our prayer."

**G. Campbell Morgan** comments, "That force of earnest, halting prayer was mightier than Herod, and mightier than hell."

**When Herod was about to bring him forward** - Which signifies that this must have been the last day of the Passover feast and now he would not be defiled by getting innocent blood on his hands! The hour is late! But mark it down - God is never too late!

The verb **bring forward** (prosago) reflects the language of the law court, to bring before.

**Peter was sleeping** - This is the third time Scripture describes Peter as **sleeping** - (1) The Mount of Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-36,32+) (2) The Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:45, 46+) and (3) In a Jerusalem prison chained to two guards! What is the difference between Peter's three times of somnolence? Only in the third sleeping episode was Peter a Spirit filled man and as such He was experiencing the peace "which surpasses all comprehension, (that) will guard (phroureo = Military term for soldiers standing on guard duty) your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. " (Php 4:7)

**William MacDonald** suggests that Peter was so peaceful because "He probably remembered the Lord's promise that he would live to be an old man (John 21:18), and so he knew that Herod could not kill him prematurely."

Solomon's description of the gift of God to His children well describes Peter's serenity in such serious surroundings...

It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors;  
For **He gives to His beloved even in his sleep**  
Ps 127:2

Psalms 121 (see commentary) is a beautiful description of the scene, the psalmist writing

1 I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;  
From where shall my help come?  
2 My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.  
3 He will not allow your foot to slip;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
4 Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.  
5 The LORD is your keeper;  
The LORD is your shade on your right hand.  
6 The sun will not smite you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
7 The LORD will protect you from all evil;  
He will keep your soul.  
8 The LORD will **guard** your going out and your coming in  
From this time forth and forever.

As **Brian Bell** says Peter must have known and fully trusted the words of this great Psalm for he manifested a "quiet conscience, perfect security, patient hope." O, for grace to imitate Peter's example when (not if) our next trial comes (cf 1 Peter 1:6-7+).

**Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains** - Not one soldier, but **two soldiers...two chains**! Normally a prisoner would be handcuffed to one soldier but not **two soldiers...two chains**! God was allowing the enemy to stack the odds, so that the subsequent liberation would have to be viewed as nothing other than a miracle wrought by the Omnipotent God. One would also think this might have been a "witness" to Herod and all the other Jews that God was NOT on their side! One wonders if we will see some orthodox Jews in Heaven because of having witnessed the greatness of this miracle?

Note that Peter is about to meet His Maker if Herod has his way. And yet Peter is not **worrying** but **resting**! Not was not frantically fretting, but soundly somnolent! He was no doubt in "[Stages 3: the deep sleep stage](#)" (Had to toss that in since I am a physician - [another source](#)). No anxiety! No alarm! He did not fret in spirit, but fell asleep in his cell. Don't forget that this was the man who some 11 years earlier had thrice denied the Lord Jesus, but such was not to be the case this time because Peter was a transformed man. He was a Spirit filled man, a man comforted by the Comforter, a man resting in a Spirit enabled response (to not be anxious) and

resting on God's Word of Truths in a number of OT passages - "The steadfast of mind Thou will keep in **perfect peace** (Hebrew literally is "[shalom, shalom](#)"), Because he trusts in Thee." (Isaiah 26:3, cf Isa 41:10) And Psalm 46:10 ""Cease (desist, relax) striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Clearly Peter knew the principle later propounded by Paul in Philippians - Read Php 4:11, 12, 13+!

Peter was sleeping and the church was praying. Clearly these are to some degree cause and effect related. But remember that Peter did not know the church was interceding for him (he may have hoped it was happening, but he had no way of knowing with certainty)! His trust ultimately was in God. Peter was not only conqueror, he was more than conqueror (Ro 8:37KJV+). At this moment he would gladly have affirmed Paul's later challenge to the last enemy "Death" -- "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

**John Polhill** wrote, "That Peter could sleep so soundly the night before his trial is perhaps indicative of his calm assurance that he was in God's hands (**ED: NOT IN HEROD'S HANDS!**). (See [Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture](#))

**John MacArthur** on Peter's peaceful sleep - Our sleeping pill and tranquilizer saturated society could take a lesson from Peter on how to trust God. First, he trusted in the Lord Jesus's promise to him that he would die later, when he was old (John 21:18). Since he was not yet an old man, he had nothing to fear. Further, each time he had been in jail before, he had been released. God had a perfect track record. All this enabled Peter to advise believers to cast "all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Believers who learn, like Peter, to trust God's promises and past performance, usually sleep soundly. (See [Acts 1-28 MacArthur New Testament Commentary Two Volume Set](#))

**Steven Ger** suggests that Peter was able to sleep because he was "trusting in Jesus' promise that he would not be executed until after reaching old age (John 21:18-19). Peter had about twenty more years still coming to him."

**John Stott** - Later Paul, in a similar situation in Philippi, was to pray and sing to God (Acts 16:25+). This leads [Chrysostom](#) to comment: 'It is beautiful that Paul sings hymns, whilst here Peter sleeps.' Both Luke's heroes, Peter and Paul, showed themselves to be equally defiant of death." (Borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 208](#))

**Jack Andrews** - Years ago the American Baptist Publication Society had on its seal the picture of an ox standing between the altar and the plow. This picture tells us that the ox was ready to serve by pulling the plow and he was ready to die on the altar. Peter was there as a servant of God! He was ready to live for God's glory, but he was also ready to die for God's glory!

Peter would have agreed with the affirmation of Paul (also in prison waiting to die)

"For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for **I know Whom I have believed** and **I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.**" (2 Ti 1:12+).

Peter was willing to live for Jesus and he was also willing to die for Jesus! Church history tells us that the Apostle Peter was martyred by the Romans under Nero. He was crucified upside down!

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, we are not really ready to live for Jesus until we are ready to die for Jesus! We need to imitate Paul (1 Cor 11:1+) who said "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Php 1:21+) We should live in a state of constant readiness to live or die, to spend or be spent. **Ready** to die and therefore **ready** to live. **Ready** to live and therefore **ready** to die. Paul had only two days on his calendar, "*Today*" and "*That day*." (cf 2 Ti 1:12b) The Christian who is right and rich and radiant is **ready**, come what may! We need to be like Jonathan Edwards who wrote "**Resolved, To live with all my might, while I do live**" (Edwards resolved to read his resolutions over once a week!) This begs the question - What about you dear reader - are you ready to die that you might truly live?

**And guards in front of the door were watching over the prison- Watching** is the same verb **tereo** translated "**kept**" in Acts 12:5 (see [note](#)). **Watching** is in the imperfect tense picture them as repeatedly watching, suggesting that they did not fall asleep at their post.

**Guards** (5441) ([phulax](#) from [phulasso](#) = to guard) means a guard, prison keeper, sentinel. Three uses - Acts 5:23, 12:6, 19. In Acts 5:23 notice the irony of guards guarding a cell without prisoners! And soon two guards chained to Peter would awake from sleep with no prisoner! God has a wonderful sense of humor.

**Prison** (5438) see note on [phulake](#)

**POSB** - God's providence saved Peter but not James. Why? Very simply, it was time for James to join his Lord and receive the fruit of his labor for work done here on earth. Peter's work was not yet done. Believers must always remember, the day when they are to go to their Lord does come. God's will may be for the believer to suffer and bear martyrdom for His name's sake. God's plan may be to use the persecuted believer's faithfulness as a testimony to reach others. (Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible : New](#)

**Acts 12:7 And **behold**, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.**

KJV Acts 12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

- **an angel of the Lord** Acts 12:23; 5:19; 10:30; 27:23,24; 1 Kings 19:5,7; Psalms 34:7; 37:32,33; Isaiah 37:30; Daniel 6:22; Hebrews 1:14
- **and a light shone in the cell** Acts 9:3; 2 Samuel 22:29; Ezekiel 43:2; Micah 7:9; Habakkuk 3:4,11; Revelation 18:1
- **Get up quickly** Genesis 19:15,16; Isaiah 60:1; Ephesians 5:14
- **And his chains fell off his hands** Acts 12:6; 2:24; 16:26; Psalms 105:18-20; 107:14; 116:16; 142:6,7; 146:7; Da 3:24,25

### **TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL! LIGHT AND LIBERTY!**

There was a television show entitled "[Touched by an Angel](#)," an American supernatural drama television series that premiered on CBS on September 21, 1994, and ran for 211 episodes and nine seasons until its conclusion on April 27, 2003. None of the episodes however were as dramatic as that in which Peter played the lead role (along with the angel of course and the intercessors behind the scenes!)

**THOUGHT** - Chapter 12 presents as dramatic a contrast as one could find in all of Scripture, for here we see an **angel of the Lord** rescue Peter from certain death and in Acts 12:23 we see another **angel of the Lord** strike Herod resulting in a gruesome death! One man was living for God's glory and the other was living for his own glory. The moral of the story is clear to all who claim to follow Christ as Lord -- We have but one life to live, so enabled by His Spirit may we live our life for God's glory. If you reviewed your life over the past year, for whom did your attitudes and actions testify that you were living - Self or Savior? There is no middle ground beloved. As Jesus' taught "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Mt 6:24+).

**Behold** (2400) (**idou**) is the second person singular aorist middle imperative of eidon which means to see, perceive, look at. In the NT **idou** is used as a demonstrative particle that draws attention to what follows. **Idou** in the **middle voice** means "you yourself look, see, perceive!" The **aorist imperative** is a command emphasizing "Do it now! Don't delay!" **Spurgeon** reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

**An angel of the Lord** - Not THE "[Angel of the LORD](#)" which is a theophany or pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament (a "Christophany"). ([What is a theophany? What is a Christophany?](#)) This angel was a "messenger" sent from the Lord.

The psalmist David wrote a passage that in some ways relates to the events in Acts 12

"The **angel of the LORD** encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues (Lxx = [rhuomai](#)) them. (Psalm 34:7)

**Comment** - Many including C H Spurgeon interpret this "**Angel**" as the Lord Jesus in pre-incarnate form ([see commentary](#)).

**Angel** (32)([aggelos/angelos](#) from **ago** = to bring) literally means a messenger (one who bears a message - Lk 1:11, 2:9, etc or does an errand). Most of the NT uses refer to heavenly **angels** (messengers) who are supernatural, transcendent beings with power to carry out various tasks, in this case power to unlock chains on Peter's risk and lead him out of the heavily guarded prison. Presumably the guards were placed in a stance of some sort and thus totally unaware of the "great escape!" Note that all uses of **aggelos** that refer to angels are masculine gender (the feminine form of aggelos does not occur.)

Hebrews 1:14 is an apt description of this angel the writer of Hebrews rhetorically asking about angels...

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

**John Phillips on angel of the Lord** - Jacob had an angel who protected him from Laban (Gen. 48:16). Daniel had an angel who protected him from the lions (Dan. 6:27). Little children have their angels who report to God's throne any mistreatment they receive (Matt. 18:10). Paul had an angel who strengthened him when on board the sinking ship (Acts 27:23). The Holy Spirit tells us that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14+). (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Do we have guardian angels?](#)
- [Who is the angel of the Lord?](#)

**Suddenly appeared** (2186)(**ephistemi** from **epi** = upon, by, near + **histemi** = stand) means literally to stand by, upon or over and conveys the sense of to be at hand, be present. As in this context ephistemi refers to a sudden unexpected appearance (cf Luke 2:9 = "And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened."; Lk 24:4; Acts 4:1; 12:7). In the same way the angel came, he left Luke recording "immediately the angel departed from him." (Act 12:10).

**And a light shone in the cell** - The soldiers were "out like a light" so to speak and unaware of the light. Even Peter seems to be sound asleep. **Cell** is oikema used only here in NT and literally describing a dwelling place (from **oikeo** = to dwell) and thus used euphemistically here for a prison cell. Apparently the light shone only in Peter's cell.

**John Phillips on the cell** - Luke uses an interesting word for prison. It is **oikēma**, a word that occurs only here in the New Testament. It literally means dwelling. The Lord's continuing presence in that prison had converted Peter's cell into a home. Peter had quietly made himself at home in those uncongenial surroundings. If it was the Lord's will for him to be committed to prison, he would be contented in prison. (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Bob Utley** - It is unusual that the supernatural interventions of the angel of the Lord (cf. 5:19; 7:30, 35, 38, 53; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22) and the Holy Spirit (cf. 8:29, 39; 10:19) are interchanged throughout the book of Acts. Apparently the Spirit speaks intuitively, but the angel is an outward physical manifestation. It is interesting to see the combination of the natural and the supernatural in this account (similar to the plagues of the Exodus).

## PETER POKED IN THE SIDE!

**And he struck Peter's side** - Even Peter seems to be sound asleep which is why the angel had to poke him in order to awaken him from slumber. Now that is what I call a "deep sleep," when even a supernatural light did not awaken him! [A T Robertson](#) suggests "It was probably between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M., hours when changes in the guards were made."

**Struck** (3960)(**patasso**) can mean to strike as inflicting a heavy or fatal blow (Mt 26.31), but in this verse speaks of giving a light or gentle touch (Acts 12.7).

**Brian Bell** - It was the fervent prayer of the church that led to Peter's release! This was similar to Joshua's famous victory over the Amalekites in Rephidim. It was won by God's power released through intercession, not by Joshua's intercession, because he was focused on fighting not on praying. It was Moses' intercession, aided by Aaron and Hur, that moved the hand of God and gave Joshua the victory (Exodus 17:8-14-commentary) (tiresome intercession) The angel **fetches Peter** out of prison, but it was prayer that **fetches the angel!** ([Sermon Notes](#))

**And woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly"** - **Get up** (anistemi) is a command in aorist imperative signifying urgency. This is the same command Jesus had given Ananias in Acts 9:11+. **Quickly** is tachos (which gives us "Tachometer") and means to do this with haste, speed, swiftness. It is not apparent why the angel is in such a hurry. Clearly he is in control of the circumstances!

The angel's command to **get up** reminds me of Paul's command in Ephesians (where **arise** is also anistemi) and perhaps it might be just the word you need to hear today dear reader, especially if you have begun to "**doze**" off (doze = a light fitful sleep) because you have become "intoxicated" by the **soporific** temptations of the anti-God world system ruled by Satan (cf 1 Jn 5:19+).

"**Awake**, sleeper,  
And **arise** from the dead,  
And Christ will shine on you."



(Eph 5:14+)

**And his chains fell off his hands** - So actually the angel did not even have to unlock the chains binding Peter to the soldiers. Notice that the **and** (kai) suggests that **his chains** did not fall off until Peter obeyed the command. Interesting! Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey! Obedience brought blessing, and in this case the blessing was freedom and a fate of certain death.

**Barton** - The term for “**falling off**” comes from the Greek word ekpipto, meaning to “drop away.” Evidently, neither the angel nor Peter touched the chains—they came off because God was setting Peter free. (Life Application Commentary)

A believer can't read Luke's words without thinking of the chains that fell off the day Christ came into our heart by grace through faith. Thank You Jesus. Amen

Paul describes that day when our chains fell off when we place our faith in Christ...Romans 6:6-7ESV

We know that our old self was crucified with him  
in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing,  
so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.  
For one who has died has been set free from sin.

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Here are Charles Wesley's words from [And Can It Be](#)

[Long my imprisoned spirit lay](#)

Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

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Here is [Chris Tomlin's version](#)

Amazing grace  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
And grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone  
I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love, amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures

My chains are gone  
I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love, amazing grace

My chains are gone  
I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love, amazing grace

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow  
The sun forbear to shine  
But God, who called me here below  
Will be forever mine  
Will be forever mine  
You are forever mine

**Acts 12:8** And the angel said to him, "**Gird** yourself and **put on** your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "**Wrap** your cloak around you and **follow** me."

KJV Acts 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

NET Acts 12:8 The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your cloak and follow me."

- Acts 5:19,20

## SUPERNATURAL "SLEEP WALKING"

**And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals."** - These are the first of four angelic commands which Peter obeys. Peter was apparently so groggy, half asleep and dazed that the angel had to remind him to get dressed to leave!

**Gird yourself** (aorist imperative = do it now!)([2224](#))(**zonnumi**) means to bind with something round or circular. It describes the act of putting on a girdle (belt, sash) or to gird around the loins for either conflict or service. During the night the long-flowing undergarment was loosened, then fastened up by day, so as not to impede movements

There are only 2 uses of **zonnumi** in the NT - (1) In the active voice it means to gird on, put on, as a belt or piece of armor - Jesus uses **zonnumi** twice in prophesying of Peter's death declaring "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used **to gird** yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will **gird** you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." (Jn 21:18). (2) In the middle voice **zonnumi** speaks of fastening up a loose garment for working or walking and is the sense here in Acts 12:8. The angel is preparing Peter to walk out of the prison! How interesting that this verb **zonnumi** on one hand describes Peter's certain future martyrdom and on the other hand speaks in this context of Peter being set free from almost certain martyrdom at the hands of Herod.

**Liddell-Scott** adds that **zonnumi** was used to gird round the loins for a pugilistic conflict or to gird oneself, gird up one's loins, of wrestlers and pugilists, who in early times wore a linen cloth. Generally, to gird up one's loins, prepare for battle, to gird on one's sword.

**NET Note** on **gird yourself** - While **zōnnumi** sometimes means "to dress," referring to the fastening of the belt or sash as the final act of getting dressed, in this context it probably does mean "put on your belt" since in the conditions of a prison Peter had probably not changed into a different set of clothes to sleep. More likely he had merely removed his belt or sash, which the angel now told him to replace

**Put on** (aorist imperative = do it now!)([5265](#))(**hupodeo** from **hupó** = under + **déo** = to bind) means literally to bind under and thus means to bind under one's feet and so put on shoes or sandals. **Hupodeo** is used only three times in the NT - Mark 6:9; Acts 12:8; Eph. 6:15+ = "having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE."

**A T Robertson** on **sandals** - **Sandals** (sandalia). Persian word common from Herodotus on, a sole made of wood or leather covering the bottom of the foot and bound on with thongs. In the N. T. only here and Mark 6:9.

**And he did so** - Unhesitating obedience. Delayed obedience is disobedience. Although this was supernatural, Peter still had to perform natural tasks.

**And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me"** - [Bob Utley](#) quips "The angel was really in a hurry to perform this task! This was one nervous angel!"

**Cloak** (2440)([himation](#)) describes a garment of any sort, but especially an outer garment. In Acts 7:58 it is used at Stephen's martyrdom where the "witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

**Luke's uses of himation** -

Lk. 5:36; Lk. 6:29; Lk. 7:25; Lk. 8:27; Lk. 8:44; Lk. 19:35; Lk. 19:36; Lk. 22:36; Lk. 23:34; Acts 7:58; Acts 9:39; Acts 12:8; Acts 14:14; Acts 16:22; Acts 18:6; Acts 22:20; Acts 22:23

**Wrap** (aorist imperative = do it now!)(4016)([periballo](#) from **peri** = around, about + **ballo** = throw) means literally to cast or throw around, to throw up a rampart around, to encompass by erecting something around, to build an embankment around as in Lk 19:43 ("your enemies will throw up a barricade against you") (Lxx of Ezek 4:2). In the active voice it means to put (throw) a garment around or upon someone, to clothe (Luke 23:11; John 19:2). Most of the NT uses mean to clothe (be clothed) and 12 times in Revelation it refers to supernatural clothing! In the middle voice (AS IN ACTS 12:8) it means to put on one's own garments, to clothe oneself, to be clothed (Mt. 6:29; Lk 12:27; Rev. 3:18; 19:8).

**BDAG** describes a figurative use in the Apocrypha - to envelop someone in torture, thereby involving the person in misfortune (3 Macc 6:26).

**Gilbrant** - In classical Greek **periballō** is used in a variety of ways. In a literal sense it is used of embracing, of surrounding with defenses (such as with a city wall), and of putting on garments. Figuratively, the word can denote investing a person with authority, involving in evil or calamity, encompassing, or understanding (cf. Liddell-Scott). In the papyri the common use "to clothe" occurs, as well as "to construct" an enclosing wall around a vineyard. The meaning "afflict" is also found (cf. Moulton-Milligan). In the **Septuagint** **periballō** usually means "clothe." However, other uses such as "cover" (Judges 4:18; 2 Kings 8:15 [LXX 3 Kings 8:15]; Psalm 147:8 [146:8]), "encompass" (Job 23:9), "cling to" (Job 24:8), and "throw" a net "over" (Ezekiel 32:3) do appear as well. In two instances the word is used in connection with a city wall. Proverbs 28:4 in the Septuagint uses it figuratively: "Those who love the Law put a city wall (that is, a wall of protection) around themselves." Ezekiel 4:2 uses it of throwing up a mound around a walled city to besiege it. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

Put on clothing (Mt 6:31; Mk 14:51; Lk 12:27; Jn 19:2; Acts 12:8; Rev 19:8).

**Periballo** - 22x in 22v - clothe(4), clothed(13), dressed(1), wear for clothing(1), wearing(2), wrap...around(1). Matt. 6:29; Matt. 6:31; Matt. 25:36; Matt. 25:38; Matt. 25:43; Mk. 14:51; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 12:27; Lk. 23:11; Acts 12:8; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:18; Rev. 4:4; Rev. 7:9; Rev. 7:13; Rev. 10:1; Rev. 11:3; Rev. 12:1; Rev. 17:4; Rev. 18:16; Rev. 19:8; Rev. 19:13

**Periballo** in the **Septuagint** - Gen. 24:65; Gen. 28:20; Gen. 38:14; Lev. 13:45; Deut. 22:12; Jdg. 4:18; Jdg. 4:19; Ruth 3:9; 1 Sam. 28:8; 1 Ki. 1:1; 1 Ki. 11:29; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Ki. 21:16; 1 Ki. 21:27; 2 Ki. 8:15; 2 Ki. 19:1; 2 Ki. 19:2; 1 Chr. 21:16; 2 Chr. 28:15; Est. 5:1; Est. 6:8; Est. 8:12; Job 23:9; Job 24:8; Ps. 45:9; Ps. 45:13; Ps. 71:13; Ps. 73:6; Ps. 109:19; Ps. 109:29; Ps. 147:8; Prov. 28:4; Prov. 29:5; Cant. 1:7; Isa. 4:1; Isa. 37:1; Isa. 37:2; Isa. 58:7; Isa. 59:6; Isa. 59:17; Jer. 4:30; Lam. 4:5; Ezek. 4:2; Ezek. 16:10; Ezek. 16:18; Ezek. 18:7; Ezek. 18:16; Ezek. 27:7; Ezek. 32:3; Ezek. 34:3; Dan. 12:6; Dan. 12:7; Jon. 3:6; Jon. 3:8; Mic. 7:10; Hag. 1:6; Zech. 3:5

**Follow** (present imperative = keep on following me)(190)([akoloutheo](#) from **a** = expresses union with, likeness + **keleuthos** = a road, way) means to walk the same road (Ponder that simple definition dear believer - Am I willing to walk the same road as Jesus?) Luke uses it 4x in Acts - Acts 12:8; Acts 12:9; Acts 13:43; Acts 21:36.

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**Steven Cole notes 3 applications** of the supernatural liberation of Peter...

**(1) God is most glorified when we are most helpless and totally dependent on Him.**

If Peter had engineered his own escape, he would have been praised for his ingenuity and daring exploits. But what could he say about his part in this escape? He wasn't even thinking about escaping—he was sleeping! Can you imagine him boasting, "Yeah, I had to gird myself and put on my own sandals and coat. The angel

didn't fly me out! I had to walk out of there on my own two legs." Peter had nothing in himself that he could boast about! His testimony was, "The Lord led me out of prison" (Acts 12:17). Peter's deliverance is a picture of how God saves sinners. Before God saves us, we are like Peter, sleeping in the darkness, insensitive to our sin, and not able to see the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ. Our sins chained us so that we could not escape, even if we had wanted to. We were under God's sentence of death. While we were in this desperate and helpless condition, God broke in with the light of His glory, woke us out of our spiritual slumber, and caused our chains to fall off so that we could willingly and joyfully follow Him out of this prison of death. Since our salvation was totally from the Lord in His great mercy, He gets all the glory. We can only praise Him because He saved us. We had nothing to do with it.

**(2) God often waits until the eleventh hour to deliver us so that we will be motivated to pray.**

The text does not say whether the church was praying for James, but I assume that they were. There is no hint that they were somehow at fault for his death because of their lack of prayer. But the camera zooms in on the church at the eleventh hour with Peter. It was the very night before Herod was planning to execute him that we see the church gathered in this all-night prayer meeting, praying fervently (Acts 12:5). Fervently is an athletic term that pictures an athlete straining every muscle as he puts everything into a race. Luke 22:44 uses the same word to describe Jesus' fervent prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is nothing like an eleventh hour crisis to get us praying as we should be praying the rest of the time! If we only could see it, we're always on the brink of disaster and death, because our adversary, the devil, is prowling about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. So at all times we should be a praying people! But the Lord often delays the answers to our problems or crises so that we will recognize how much we really do need Him.

**(3) God is not limited by the prayers of His people, but He works through our prayers to teach us to depend totally on Him.**

I say that God is not limited by our prayers because clearly, although the church was praying, they were not praying in faith. If they had been expecting God to work, they wouldn't have been so surprised when He answered! They would have been jubilant, as Rhoda was when she recognized Peter's voice on the other side of the door. But they would not have said, "You're out of your mind! It couldn't be Peter. It must be his angel!" Prayer is a mystery. Why do we need to pray when God already knows our needs? A major part of the answer is, so that we will recognize that we are totally dependent on Him. And yet, He can work even if my prayers fall short in their form or in their faith. Sure, I should believe in Him with a strong faith. But even if my faith is weak, He is able to do far more than I can ask or even think (Eph. 3:20). His answers do not depend on any merit in my prayers, but only on His sovereign grace and mercy. We've seen that although God is almighty, He does not prevent the untimely deaths of some of His choicest servants. And, since God is almighty, He can easily deliver us from humanly impossible situations. ([Acts 12:1-25 The Unstoppable Gospel](#))

**Acts 12:9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.**

KJV Acts 12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

NET Acts 12:9 Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

- **And he went out and continued to follow** Acts 26:19; Genesis 6:22; John 2:5; Hebrews 11:8
- **he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real** Acts 10:3,17; 11:5; Genesis 45:26; Ps 126:1; 2 Corinthians 12:1-3

## **FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD EVEN WHEN UNSURE**

**And he went out and continued to follow and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real-** It is interesting that this is Peter's second angelic deliverance but this time he does not initially grasp what is actually transpiring. Nevertheless, he following the God's messenger.

**Follow** ([note](#) above) is a verb of motion describing the maze-like journey that followed which is why the angel commanded Peter to

"keep behind me."

**But** - Term of contrast - It was really happening but Peter thought it was a vision.

**Thought he was seeing (blepo) a vision** - **Thought** is dokeo which means seem or suppose. The imperfect tense indicates he kept on thinking for he was puzzled. It seemed like a vision to Peter.

**Vision** (3705) (**horama** from **horāō** = to see, behold; English - **panorama**) describes literally that which is seen, as opposed to a figment of one's imagination (Mt 17:9; Ac 7:31; 10:3, 17, 19; 18:9). It is something that is viewed with one's eye. Here Peter supposes he is having supernatural vision. Horama is communication distinct from a dream. Uses of Jesus appearing to Ananias in a vision and told to go to Saul who had seen Ananias in a vision (Acts 9:10, 12). Of the vision of Cornelius at God begins to open the Gentiles to the Gospel (Acts 10:3) by showing Peter a vision (Acts 10:17, 11:5).

**Horama** in Acts - Acts 7:31; Acts 9:10; Acts 9:12; Acts 10:3; Acts 10:17; Acts 10:19; Acts 11:5; Acts 12:9; Acts 16:9; Acts 16:10; Acts 18:9

**A T Robertson** - Peter had had a vision in Joppa (Acts 10:10) which Luke describes as an "ecstasy," but here is objective fact, at least Luke thought so and makes that distinction. Peter will soon know whether he is still in the cell or not as we find out that a dream is only a dream when we wake up.

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**F.F. Bruce** relates the story of **Sundar Singh**, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover set over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in there. On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one. When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key—and found it on the official's own belt. God is still writing the Book of Acts!

**Acts 12:10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.**

KJV Acts 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

- **When they had passed the first and second guard** Acts 12:4; Genesis 40:3; 42:17; Numbers 15:34; Isaiah 21:8
- **which opened for them by itself** Acts 5:19; 16:26; Isaiah 45:1,2; John 20:19,26; Revelation 3:7

### **ANGEL LEADS PETER THROUGH "AUTOMATIC" GATE**

**When they had passed the first and second guard** - Why the guards did not respond is not stated, but clearly they were supernaturally affected and unable to act. Notice this miraculous rescue is actually a series of several miracles occurring one after another.

**A T Robertson** on **first and second guard** - Some take it to mean single soldiers, using phulakēn in the sense of a guard (one before the door, one at the iron gate). But it seems hardly likely that the two soldiers with whom Peter had been stationed are meant. Probably the "first ward" means the two soldiers of the quaternion stationed by the door and the second ward some other soldiers, not part of the sixteen, further on in the prison by the iron gate. However understood, the difficulties of escape are made plain.

**Passed** (gone through) (1330) (**dierchomai** from **dia** = through + **erchomai** = come, go) means to go through, to pass through, to move through an area ("When they had **gone through** the whole island" = Acts 13:6; etc)

**They came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself** The door opened supernaturally. "Automatically." "God-o-matically!"



**NET Note** on **iron gate** - The iron gate shows how important security was here. This door was more secure than one made of wood (which would be usual).

**Gate** (4439) (**pule** derivative is **pulon** = magnificent gate) is a leaf or wing of a folding entrance and here describes a door or gate and is used in Jesus sobering description of fate of every person in Mt 7:13, 14+ for there are only 2 gates and every person will enter one or the other. To not choose to enter the narrow gate is in fact a choice to enter the wide gate and subsequent destruction.

**Opened** (455) (**anoigo** from **ana** = again + **oigo** = to open) means to open, to open up, to open again, to give access to. Anoigo is used in Acts 12:14 where Rhoda "did not **open** the gate" but then did as Peter continued knocking "they had **opened** the door, they saw him and were amazed." (Acts 12:16). In describing another supernatural "great escape" Luke recorded that "during the night an angel of the Lord **opened** (anoigo) the gates of the prison, and taking them out...." (Acts 5:19+) Luke described a third "great escape" in Acts 16:26 recording that "suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were **opened** (anoigo) and everyone's chains were unfastened." **Anoigo** is used figuratively to describe how God "had **opened** a door of faith to the Gentiles." (Acts 14:27) and in Acts 26:18 how the Gospel was able to **open** (anoigo) their (SPIRITUAL) eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

**Luke's** uses of **anoigo** in Acts -

Acts 5:19; Acts 5:23; Acts 8:32; Acts 8:35; Acts 9:8; Acts 9:40; Acts 10:11; Acts 10:34; Acts 12:10; Acts 12:14;  
Acts 12:16; Acts 14:27; Acts 16:26; Acts 16:27; Acts 18:14; Acts 26:18;

**By itself** (844) (**automatos** from **autós** = himself + **máō** = to be excited, eager, ready) means of oneself, spontaneous, of its own accord, acting of one's own will, of its own accord. The only other NT use is Mk. 4:28 "The soil produces crops **by itself**; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head."

**Gilbrant** - The heart of the definition of **automatos** is in its **auto-** prefix. It thus means "acting of one's own will" or even "accidental, without apparent cause." According to Liddell-Scott it can even imply mere "chance" (cf. the English word automatic). In one context it refers to the growth of a plant. The Septuagint reflects the idea of self-induced action in reference to the growth or death (cf. Job 24:24, no Hebrew equivalent) of plants. Implied in the Hebrew counterpart to **automatos**, **sāphîach**, is the idea of "accidental" dispersion of seeds as well as the self-growth of plants (Leviticus 25:5,11; 2 Kings 19:29 [LXX 4 Kings 19:29]). The Septuagint (no Hebrew parallel) also tells of the walls of Jericho which would "fall down by themselves" at the shout of the people (Joshua 6:5). In one case it represents a miracle which in our age seems almost commonplace: a door opened up "automatically" (Acts 12:10) allowing Peter to walk out of the prison. The second case is not less common but is nevertheless a wonder of nature which fascinates men of the Twentieth Century as much as it did men of the First Century. Mark 4:28 describes how plants grow and develop from seeds placed in soil. Here the word **automatos** stands for the vital power in nature which produces fruit. **In Mark, this is a picture of the spiritual life which "by itself" brings forth the fruit of the kingdom of God.** (Ibid)

**Automatos** in the **Septuagint** - Lev. 25:5; Lev. 25:11; Jos. 6:5 (Lxx = "the walls of the city shall fall of themselves"); 2 Ki. 19:29; Job 24:24;

**David Guzik** writes "Many of us worry about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month beforehand, and we are anxious about the **iron gate**! But God will take care of it when we come to it. For Peter, it opened of its own accord. That phrase uses the ancient Greek word, *automate*. One could say that the gates opened automatically for Peter.

**And they went out and went along one street** - Peter had come a long way from his days in the Gospels where he had difficulty following.

**And immediately the angel departed from him** - "The angel **did** for Peter only what he could **not do** for himself, then departed" (Brian Bell) The supernatural work still necessitated a natural response (no "Let go, let God," but more like "Let God and let's go" so to speak). The miraculous was no longer necessary. As he came to his senses, Peter knew where to go and what to do.

**Immediately** (2112) (**eutheos** from euthus = straight, immediate) is an adverb which generally means at once, right away, forthwith, straightaway, without an interval of time or a point of time subsequent to a previous point of time.

**Departed** (868) (**aphistemi** from **apo** = separation of one thing from another + **histemi** = stand and is the root of our English = apostasy) literally means to stand off from means to withdraw, to stand off, to forsake, to depart from or to remove oneself from, as John Mark "deserted (Paul and Barnabas) in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. In the present context the meaning is simply to describe the angel withdrawing from the scene.

All of Luke's uses of **aphistemi** - Lk. 2:37; Lk. 4:13; Lk. 8:13; Lk. 13:27; Acts 5:37; Acts 5:38; Acts 12:10; Acts 15:38; Acts 19:9; Acts 22:29

**Acts 12:11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."**

KJV Acts 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

NLT Acts 12:11 Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

- **When Peter came to himself** Luke 15:17
- **I know for sure** Genesis 15:13; 18:13; 26:9
- **that the Lord has sent forth His angel** Acts 12:7; 5:19; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalms 34:7; Daniel 3:25,28; 6:22; Hebrews 1:14
- **rescued me from the hand of Herod** 2 Samuel 22:1; Job 5:19; Psalms 33:18; 34:22; 41:2; 97:10; 109:31; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 2 Peter 2:9
- **from all that the Jewish people were expecting."** Acts 23:12-30; 24:27; 25:3-5,9; Job 31:31

**When Peter came to himself** - "came to his senses" (NLT). Luke uses a similar expression to describe the prodigal son's reaction to his dismal condition in Lk 15:17+. The reality of the angelic encounter and its implications dawned on Peter. He realized that he was not dreaming, but was in fact really free!

**He said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel-** "It's really true!" (NLT) Peter readily recognized that this whole event was the supernatural work of His sovereign God.

**Know** (1492)([eido](#)) means to know beyond a shadow of a doubt.

**Sent** (1821)([exapostello](#) from **ek** = out, forth + **apostello** = to send away) means to send away or send forth. Luke has most of the uses this verb in the NT - Lk. 1:53; Lk. 20:10; Lk. 20:11; Lk. 24:49; Acts 7:12; Acts 9:30; Acts 11:22; Acts 12:11; Acts 13:26; Acts 17:14; Acts 22:21; Gal. 4:4; Gal. 4:6. Luke uses this same verb in Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit declaring to the apostles "'And behold, I am **sending forth** the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Paul uses it in a great passage "But when the fullness of the time came, God **sent forth** His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law." And so **exapostello** is used of the sending forth of His angel, of His Holy Spirit and of His Holy Son, Jesus Christ.

**And rescued me from the hand of Herod** - "Hand" speaks of the power of Herod. God's hand (via His angel) is more powerful than any human "hand."

**Rescued** (delivered) (1807)([exaireo](#) from **ek** = out + **aireo** = to take, remove, seize) literally means to take out and here in the middle voice means to set free or deliver. **xaireo** is the same verb Stephen had used when he quoted God's charge to Moses "I HAVE COME DOWN TO **RESCUE** ([exaireo](#)) THEM; COME NOW (EVEN AS PETER HAD TO DO HIS PART, MOSES ALSO HAD TO DO HIS PART - GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY/MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY ARE BALANCED), AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT." (Acts 7:34+). Even as God brought about Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage, so too He brought about Peter's "exodus" from Herodian bondage. And in an even greater sense, God has rescued all believers from bondage to sin and this godless world Paul writing that the Lord Jesus Christ "gave Himself for (= SUBSTITUTION = IN OUR PLACE) our sins, so that (PURPOSE) He **might rescue** ([exaireo](#)) us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." (Galatians 1:4+). So believers too have had a spiritual "**exodus**" from the dominion of sin and Satan, and are eagerly awaiting our final "**exodus**" forever free from the pollution and power of this present evil age and our present evil flesh! (cf our future "exodus" in when our Deliverer comes in 1 John 3:2+ and notice how it motivates in 1 John 3:3+).

All 8 uses of **exaireo** in the NT - Matt. 5:29; Matt. 18:9; Acts 7:10; Acts 7:34; Acts 12:11; Acts 23:27; Acts 26:17; Gal. 1:4

**And from all that the Jewish people were expecting** - Like "hungry wolves!" Note that the rescue was not just from Herod's power but from the Jews. The NLT paraphrases the deliverance as "from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me," but it is not just the leaders but the people (Greek *laos* which gives us English *laity*) who obviously were antagonistic toward Christianity.

**Were expecting** (4329)([prosdokia](#) from **pros** = to, toward + **dokao** = to look for) is literally a looking for and refers to an eager looking, an expectation of something that is to happen, whether in hope. Here in Acts 12:11 it is a "morbid hope" (hope so) for the

Jews eagerly anticipated that Peter would be executed when the days of Unleavened Bread were over. However as John Phillips says "Peter's deliverance was God's deliberate answer to Herod's defiance and to the Jews' malicious delight." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#)) The only other NT use is by Luke quoting Jesus' description of the watchfulness of people in the coming apocalyptic age as they see, with growing apprehension, end-time events approaching, Jesus declaring "men fainting from fear and the **expectation** (prosodokia) of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Lk 21:26+).

**Jack Arnold** observes that "The prayers of these saints somehow moved upon God to deliver Peter from prison. Prayer did not change God's secret plan, but God ordained these prayers as a means to bring about the ultimate end of the deliverance of Peter. From our human perspective, prayer does cause God to work for us. When the saints pray, God intervenes. This shows the tremendous power of prayer which God has placed at the disposal of His people. Prayer somehow causes God to bring about His sovereign plans and purposes. Prayer is the major weapon, tool, instrument God has given His church to overcome its enemies and to further the cause of Christ in this world. Oh, if we could only understand how effective the prayers of a righteous man who prays perseveringly can be!"

Many have asked why did God allow Herod to kill James but Peter was set free?

**J Vernon McGee** writes "The answer is that this is the sovereign will of God. He still moves like this in the contemporary church. I have been in the ministry for many years, and I have seen the Lord reach in and take certain wonderful members out of the church by death. And then there are others whom He has left. Why would He do that? If He had asked me, from my viewpoint as the pastor, I would say that He took the wrong one and He left the wrong one! But life and death are in the hands of a sovereign God... This is His universe, not ours. It is God's church, not ours. The hand of a sovereign God moves in the church."

**Acts 12:12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.**

KJV 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.

- **he went to the house of Mary** Acts 4:23; 16:40
- **John** Acts 12:25; 13:5,13; 15:37-39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24
- **where many were gathered together** Acts 12:5; Isaiah 65:24; Matthew 18:19,20; 1 John 5:14,15

## **PETER COMES TO HIS SENSES**

**And when he realized this** - **Realized** is **suneidon** ([4894](#))(**sun** = with + **eido** = to see) which means to see together, to grasp as a whole, to see clearly, to perceive, to become aware of, to gain a mental perception of something (only other use Acts 14:6+ = "**they became aware**" that plans were being made to stone them - cf Acts 14:5). The verb strictly means to see together, or at the same time and so means to see in one view, to take in at a glance. Peter now realized that God had in effect "**checkmated**" the evil intentions of Herod and the Jews. The only uses in Septuagint is Da 3:14. **Suneidon** is the word from which [suneidesis](#) or conscience derives.

[A T Robertson](#) notes that "he was in peril for the soldiers would soon learn of his escape, when the change of guards came at 6 A.M."

[Marvin Vincent](#) on **realized (suneidon)** - Peter's mental condition is described by two expressions: First, he came to himself (Acts 12:12), or, lit., when he had become present in himself; denoting his awaking from the dazed condition produced by his being suddenly roused from sleep and confronted with a supernatural appearance (see Acts 12:9). Secondly, when he had become aware (suneidon); denoting his taking in the situation, according to the popular phrase. I do not think that any of the commentators have sufficiently emphasized the force of **sun/syn**, together, as indicating his comprehensive perception of all the elements of the case. They all refer the word to his recognition of his deliverance from prison, which, however, has already been noted in Acts 12:11. While it may include this, it refers also to all the circumstances of the case present at that moment. He had been freed; he was there in the street alone; he must go somewhere; there was the house of Mary, where he was sure to find friends. Having taken in all this, perceived it all, he went to the house of Mary.\*

**He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark- John** (Jewish name) **who was also called Mark**

(Greek name) is the same **John Mark** who would later go with Barnabas and Saul on the First Missionary Journey and eventually write the Gospel of Mark (See Acts 12:25+ below - cf Acts 13:5, 13; "Barnabas was desirous of taking John called Mark along with them" on the Second Missionary Journey - Acts 15:37–39+). This is the only mention of this specific **'Mary'** in the New Testament, so we don't know that much about her.

**Mary the mother of John** - Mary, was the mother of [John Mark](#) and one of many Jewish women named for [Miriam, the sister of Moses](#). Mary must have been a woman of some means as she was the owner of a house in Jerusalem which was large enough for followers of Jesus to meet. Her son, John Mark, was the cousin of Barnabas, so Mary must have been Barnabas' aunt (Col 4:10). ([How many Marys are in the Bible?](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Who was John Mark in the Bible?](#)
- [Hastings Bible Dictionary](#)

**John Phillips** - Mary was the sister of Barnabas (ISBE says "she was also, in all probability, the aunt of Barnabas"). As Barnabas had put his property at the disposal of the church, so (Mary) put her house. Peter seems to have had a measure of intimacy with the family, for he affectionately calls Mark "my son" (1 Pet. 5:13). It was to that house Peter decided to go and report his release before going into hiding from Herod's police. (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Bob Utley** notes that - Mary was a very common name. There are several Marys mentioned in the Gospels.

1. the mother of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:27)
2. Mary of Magdala, a disciple from Galilee (cf. Luke 8:2; 24:10)
3. mother of James and John (cf. Luke 24:10)
4. sister of Martha and Lazarus (cf. Luke 10:39, 42)
5. wife of Cleophas (cf. John 19:25)
6. mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12)

**Where many were gathered together** - **Many** but not the entire church. Alternatively, this may have been just one of a number of homes in which the church was meeting to pray for Peter (for one house could hardly hold the entire congregation). **Gathered together** is in the perfect tense which indicates the church intended to remain in prayer.

**A T Robertso** -The praying apparently had been going on all night and a large number (many, [hikanos](#)) of the disciples were there. One recalls the time when they had gathered to pray (Acts 4:31) after Peter had told the disciples of the threats of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:23). God had rescued Peter then. Would he let him be put to death now as James had been?

**Were praying** (4336) ([proseuchomai](#) from **pros** = toward, facing, before [emphasizing the direct approach of the one who prays in seeking God's face] + **euchomai** = originally to speak out, utter aloud, express a wish, then to pray or to vow. Greek technical term for invoking a deity) in the NT is always used of prayer addressed to God. **Praying** is in the present tense indicating this was a continual prayer meeting.

**Eusebius'** Eccl. His. 3:39:12 gives us an interesting account of John Mark's relation to Peter.

"In his own book Papias gives us accounts of the Lord's sayings obtained from Aristion or learnt direct from the presbyter John. Having brought these to the attention of scholars, I must now follow up the statements already quoted from him with a piece of information which he sets out regarding Mark, the writer of the gospel: This, too, the presbyter used to say. 'Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of His followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teaching to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only—to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it' " (p. 152).

**Acts 12:13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.**

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

- **knocked** Acts 12:16; Luke 13:25

## WHEN THE ANSWER TO PRAYER IS STANDING AT THE DOOR!

**When he knocked at the door of the gate**- For context note that typical larger homes in Jerusalem were encircled by a wall. The gate entrance was separated from the living quarters by a courtyard. Remember also that it is apparently in the evening (possibly very late), and so a knock at this time might be somewhat alarming given the fact that Herod was mistreating the Church (Acts 12:1+). Swindoll adds that "The outer **"gate"** was a solid **door**, large enough to allow carts drawn by animals to enter the courtyard. This large gate also had a smaller **door** cut into it to allow easier access to individuals. Like a phone call at three o'clock in the morning, a nighttime knock at this smaller **"door of the gate"** rarely brought good news....Unlike today, people wouldn't normally have opened the door to a nighttime knock—not without great risk of robbery. One opened the door only after confirming the identity of a friend." (See [Insights on Acts](#))

**Gate** (4440) ([pulon](#) from [pule](#) = gate as in the narrow gate in Mt 7:13-[note](#)) is not just any gate but means a gate (or door) marked by impressive construction and stature.

**Knocked** (2925) ([krouo](#)) means seeking entrance by knock (at a door or gate. Figuratively, krouo speaks of seeking spiritual access and so to ask to be accepted (Rev 3:20+) **BDAG** - "to deliver a blow against something, strike, knock."

The English word "knock" comes from German word meaning to press! "Knock" means to stand at a door and repeatedly rap with your knuckles. You knock and wait, then you knock again, then you say, "I know you're in there," then you knock again and say, "I can hear your voice. Come on, open the door." Then you knock again. If you're on the other side, you know how annoying it can be to listen as someone knocks and knocks and keeps on knocking. Thankfully as Luke goes on to say Peter kept on knocking!

**TDNT** - "to knock" in various contexts, e.g., driving in nails, or knocking at doors. In Mt. 7:7-8+ and Lk. 11:9-10+ knocking signifies the seeking of entry by believers. Seeking and knocking stress the material content of asking. The point is not the general one that prayer may count on an answer, or that action is the presupposition of fulfillment, but the specific one that God's promise of salvation gives us the assurance in faith that when we knock the door will be opened and access made possible. In contrast, there is a useless knocking in Lk. 13:25+. This knocking is a tardy attempt to gain entry after an earlier refusal to knock in faith (cf. Lk 13:24+) when the door would have been readily opened. Those who engage in this futile knocking do not trust in Him who opens and shuts (Rev. 3:7). Refusing to knock and enter when they should, they have shut themselves out. In Lk 12:36+ and Rev. 3:20 the Lord Himself knocks. Lk. 12:35-36+ is an exhortation to watchfulness, so that there may be an instant readiness to receive Christ at His coming. In Rev. 3:20+ it is the risen Lord who speaks. On the basis of Song 5:2, 6 this is often taken to refer to personal union with Christ, but in context it carries a serious admonition and promise to the church of Laodicea. The saying transcends both eschatology and mysticism and proclaims the gospel of the coming of Christ, both present and future, with the decision that this demands and the life that it brings for those who receive Him.

**Liddell-Scott** - to strike, smite: to strike one against another, to clap hands, in dancing, to tap an earthen vessel, to try whether it rings sound: hence to examine, prove, to strike a lyre with the plectron, to knock at the door on the outside, as a nautical term, to back a ship

All uses of krouo - Matt. 7:7+; Matt. 7:8+; Lk. 11:9+; Lk. 11:10+; Lk. 12:36+; Lk. 13:25+; Acts 12:13; Acts 12:16; Rev. 3:20+. In Lxx only in Jdg 19:22 and Song 5:2.

**Wiersbe** adds that "Of course, the knock at the door might have been that of Herod's soldiers, coming to arrest more believers. It took courage for the maid Rhoda ("rose") to go to the door; but imagine her surprise when she recognized Peter's voice! " ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**David Guzik** - Their prayer was earnest (Acts 12:5+), but their faith was not overwhelming. Little faith can accomplish great things if it is placed in the great God.

**A servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer** - Rhoda's name means "Rose." Women can have such beautiful names like Dorcas (Gazelle), Euodia (Sweet Aroma), Syntyche (Good Luck). **Vincent** writes that "The Jews frequently gave their female children the names of plants and flowers: as Susannah (lily); Esther (myrtle); Tamar (palm-tree). "God, who leaves in oblivion names of mighty conquerors, treasures up that of a poor girl, for his church in all ages" (Quesnel)."

**Rhoda** (whose name means "Rose" in Greek) is only mentioned one time in the Bible, in Acts 12, but she played an important role and gave modern believers a powerful example. In the days of the early church, both the Jews and the Romans were hostile toward Christians, so they often met secretly in houses for prayer and worship. One such house in Jerusalem belonged to Mary, the mother of Mark. Certain tradition states that



Mary's was the same house where the disciples celebrated the Last Supper with Christ. Rhoda was a servant girl in this house, which was a hub for the growing church. One night, the Christians had gathered in Mary's house and were "earnestly praying to God" (Acts 12:5) for the life of Peter, who had been arrested by Herod (Acts 12:3–4). Their pleas would have been desperately fervent because James, the brother of John, had just been martyred (Acts 12:2), and Peter was slated for execution. While the church prayed, God answered. He miraculously delivered Peter from prison: an angel led him out of his cell and through the prison gate, which opened for them to pass (Acts 12:6–10). Upon realizing that he was not dreaming, Peter made his way to a place he knew was safe, Mary's house (Acts 12:11–12). When Peter arrived and knocked on the door, the servant girl Rhoda came to answer. She heard Peter's voice and knew it was he, but in her excitement and joy she forgot to actually open the door. Leaving Peter standing in the night, she rushed to tell everyone else about the miracle outside (Acts 12:14). They did not believe her, though, thinking she was out of her mind (Acts 12:15). When Rhoda was insistent, the believers decided it must be Peter's "angel"—his guardian angel, perhaps, or his ghost—rather than the answer to their prayers! All this time, Peter continued knocking on the door, until, finally, they answered it and were amazed to see Peter there. Rhoda had been telling the truth, never doubting that God had literally answered their prayers. Then Peter told them of his wondrous escape from jail (Acts 12:17).

It's interesting that the church was praying earnestly, yet they did not believe the answer to their prayers when it came. They forgot an important part of prayer, which is looking for an answer. Rhoda was the first one to know of Peter's deliverance, and she carried the joyful message to others. She did not let their doubts stop her from sharing what she knew was true: God had done the impossible. Even in the face of their unbelief, she was unrelenting in her joy. Believers today can take a cue from Rhoda and share the news of what God accomplishes with those around us, remaining joyful in what we know is true.

**Servant-girl** (3814) (**paidiske** from diminutive of **pais** = a girl) describes a female servant, a maid, servant girl, slave girl. "The word was used of a young female slave, as well as of a young girl or maiden generally. The narrative implies that she was more than a mere menial, if a servant at all. Her prompt recognition of Peter's voice, and her joyful haste, as well as the record of her name, indicate that she was one of the disciples gathered for prayer." (Vincent)

**Gilbrant** - In classical Greek **paidiskē** is a flexible term. It often denotes a "female slave" or "servant girl." In addition, it is also used to refer to a prostitute. However, it can mean "young girl" with no reference to social position (*Liddell-Scott*). In later periods **paidiskē** refers only to female slaves or servants (Bauer). An example is found in a papyrus from the Third Century A.D. containing a letter from a man to his sister. He encourages her to "make my slave-girl (**paidiskē**) be properly industrious" (*Moulton-Milligan*). The Septuagint uses **paidiskē**, with rare exception (e.g., Ruth 4:12 uses **na'ārāh** "girl"), to translate two Hebrew words **shiphcāh** and **'āmāh**. Both terms refer to a female slave or servant. These terms often carry the added meaning of concubine or mistress. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Paidiske** - 14x in 12v in the NT - bondwoman(5), servant-girl(4), servant-girls(1), slave-girl(2), slaves\*(1), women(1). Matt. 26:69; Mk. 14:66; Mk. 14:69; Lk. 12:45; Lk. 22:56; Jn. 18:17; Acts 12:13; Acts 16:16; Gal. 4:22; Gal. 4:23; Gal. 4:30; Gal. 4:31

**Paidiske** in the **Septuagint** - Gen. 12:16; Gen. 16:1; Gen. 16:2; Gen. 16:3; Gen. 16:5; Gen. 16:6; Gen. 16:8; Gen. 20:14; Gen. 20:17; Gen. 21:10; Gen. 21:12; Gen. 21:13; Gen. 24:35; Gen. 25:12; Gen. 29:24; Gen. 29:29; Gen. 30:3; Gen. 30:4; Gen. 30:5; Gen. 30:7; Gen. 30:9; Gen. 30:10; Gen. 30:12; Gen. 30:18; Gen. 30:43; Gen. 31:33; Gen. 32:6; Gen. 32:23; Gen. 33:1; Gen. 33:2; Gen. 33:6; Gen. 34:4; Gen. 35:25; Gen. 35:26; Exod. 20:10; Exod. 20:17; Exod. 21:20; Exod. 21:32; Exod. 23:12; Lev. 25:6; Lev. 25:44; Deut. 5:14; Deut. 5:21; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 12:18; Deut. 15:17; Deut. 16:11; Deut. 16:14; Deut. 28:68; Jda. 9:18; Jdg. 9:18; Jdg. 19:19; Ruth 2:13; Ruth 4:12; 1 Sam. 25:41; 2 Sam. 6:20; 2 Sam. 6:22; 2 Sam. 17:17; 2 Ki. 5:26; Ezr. 2:65; Neh. 7:67; Est. 7:4; Ps. 86:16; Ps. 116:7; Ps. 123:2; Eccl. 2:7; Amos 2:7; Jer. 34:9; Jer. 34:10; Jer. 34:11; Jer. 34:16;

**Answer** (5219) (**hupakouo** from **hupó** = under + **akoúo** hearing) literally means to listen under with attentiveness (common verb to obey, to hearken) and to respond positively to what is heard. Used technically of the doorkeeper, whose duty it is to listen for the signals of those who wish to enter, and to admit them if they are entitled to do so. To listen under before opening. Luke had used this verb figuratively earlier to describe "a great many of the priests were **becoming obedient** (**hupakouo**) to the faith." (Acts 6:7+) Luke has only three uses of **hupakouo** - Lk. 8:25; Lk. 17:6; Acts 6:7; Acts 12:13

**Acts 12:14** When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced

that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

KJV 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 did not open the gate** Matthew 28:8; Luke 24:41

## RHODA'S RECOGNITION

**When she recognized Peter's voice** - She heard his voice but did not see his face because she had still not opened the door. Peter must have been well known and have frequently been to Mary's house in order for Rhoda to recognize his voice.

**Recognized** (1921)([epiginosko](#)) (to know + epi = in addition = to know fully) speaks of knowing (from experience) for certain or know exactly.

**Because of her joy she did not open** ([anoigo](#)) **the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate** - Overjoyed, she forgot about the answer to prayer to run tell everyone God had answered their prayers.

**Joy** (5479) ([chara](#)) is a feeling of great pleasure, of inner gladness, or of delight. **Joy** is an emotion evoked by a sense of well-being. It is a deep feeling of happiness and contentment. **Joy** in the NT is virtually always used to signify a feeling of "happiness" that is based on spiritual realities (independent of what "happens"). **Joy** is a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It is a cheerful heart that leads to cheerful behavior. **Joy** is not necessarily an experience that comes from favorable circumstances, but is God's gift from His Spirit to believers.

**Announced** (518)([apaggello](#)) from **apó** = from + **aggéllo** = tell, declare from **aggelos** = messenger, one who speaks in place of one who has sent him) means to bring a message from any person or place. To bring tidings from a person or thing.

Acts 12:15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

KJV 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.

- **You are out of your mind** Acts 26:24; Job 9:16; Mark 16:11,14; Luke 24:11
- **It is his angel** Genesis 48:16; Matthew 18:10; Luke 24:37,38

## THE DISCIPLE'S DISMAL OF RHODA'S REVELATION

**They said to her, "You are out of your mind!"** - "You've lost your mind!" (NET) "Rhoda, you're crazy! You've popped your cork! You're not playing with a full deck!" "You're out of touch with reality." "Come on, Rosie, you've gone mad!"

**Out of your mind** (3105)([mainomai](#)) gives us our English "maniac") to rage, rave, be mad. This verb pictures a person speaking and acting in such a way that they appear to others that they are "out of their mind" or "lost their senses." In fact each occurrence of **mainomai** in the New Testament uses the term as [hyperbole](#): "You must be stark raving mad!" Many of the Jews said about Jesus He has "a demon and is **insane**." (Jn 10:20) When Paul confronted Festus with Truth, he responded with a loud voice saying, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you **mad**." (Acts 26:24) Paul denied the charge saying "I am not **out of my mind**, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth." Have you ever been accused of being "out of your mind" because of your "fanatical" belief in Jesus as the only way to eternal life? If so, you are in good company! If not, then perhaps you need to be a bit more bold in your witness (with boldness enabled by the Spirit)! The last NT use relates to speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:23).

**Mainomai** - 5x in 5v - am(1), insane(1), mad(1), mind(3).

Jn. 10:20; Acts 12:15; Acts 26:24; Acts 26:25; 1 Co. 14:23.

Two uses in the Septuagint - Jer 25:16 ("**go mad**" or "**act insane**" when they drink of the "cup of the wine of wrath from God's hand" - Jer 25:15), Jer 29:26 = "He has put you in charge in the LORD's temple of controlling

any **lunatic** who pretends to be a prophet" (NET)

**NET Note** on **out of your mind** - "You've lost your mind!" Such a response to the miraculous is not unusual in Luke-Acts. See Luke 24:11; Acts 26:25. The term *μολομαι* (*mainomai*) can have the idea of being "raving mad" or "totally irrational" (BDAG 610 s.v.). It is a strong expression.

**They kept saying, "It is his angel."** - **Kept saying** is in the imperfect tense indicating that over and over they were denying that it was actually Peter.

**THOUGHT** - Have you ever prayed for God to act, and then was surprised when He did?

**NET Note** - The assumption made by those inside, "**It is his angel**," seems to allude to the idea of an attending angel (cf. Gen 48:16 LXX; Matt 18:10; Test. Jacob 1:10).

**Brian Bell** - God is real, and he answers prayer! Many of us can grasp this concept **intellectually**, but when the **evidence** is knocking at the door we find it hard to believe. What seemingly impossible door are **you** knocking at right now? Might this change how you knock/pray?

**Warren Wiersbe** - The exclamation, "It is his angel!" (Acts 12:15) reveals their belief in "guardian angels" (Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14). Of course, the logical question is, "Why would an angel bother to knock?" All he had to do was simply walk right in! Sad to say, good theology plus unbelief often leads to fear and confusion. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Jack Arnold** comments that "Their first doubt was that of a [rationalist](#) for they said Rhoda was mad. Their second doubt was that of a mind of superstition, for they were ready to believe it was Peter's angel but not his person. These Christians were **praying in belief**, but they were not **praying with expectancy**. Believing prayer says **God can**; expectant prayer says **God will**. Jesus Himself taught, "And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Mt. 21:22). Real prayer always expects God to work in a supernatural way. **Surely this event in Acts merely illustrates how very human we all are and how much we do doubt when we are praying**. But God honors what faith He does find in any of His children (PRAISE GOD!)."

**Swindoll** on "**It is his angel**" - The statement "It is his angel" is troublesome for modern interpreters. Expositors suggest the following possible meanings: (1) "It is his ghost." Jewish superstition held that a person's spirit lurks around for a couple of days after death. This interpretation isn't likely for two reasons. First, they didn't expect Peter to be executed before the end of the festival week. Second, the term is *angelos*, which never means "spirit" or "ghost." (2) "It is his guardian angel." Based on Psalm 91:11 and Daniel 10:21 (along with Tobit 5:4-22 in the Apocrypha), the Talmud teaches that a guardian angel assumes the appearance of the person he protects and can act on his or her behalf. If some of these Christians accepted this extra-biblical tradition, they may have jumped to this conclusion. This is possible, reflecting the state of denial they were in. (3) "It is his (human) messenger." The term *angelos* literally means "messenger" or "envoy." The congregation may have insisted that Rhoda had heard Peter's assistant coming to them with a communiqué, perhaps conveying his dying wishes or last-minute instructions. While either of the last two options is possible, I favor the last. It seems unlikely to me that these believers would hold such poor theology, given the quality of teaching they had received from the apostles and the intense activity of the Holy Spirit. Regardless, two things are clear. First, they couldn't believe that Peter was standing safe and sound at the doorstep. The two verbs translated "**she kept insisting**" and "**they kept saying**" are in the imperfect tense, which describes ongoing or repetitive action, thus depicting Rhoda and the congregation in an ongoing, back-and-forth argument. Second, no one behaved rationally. Rhoda left Peter outside rather than let him in, the congregation suggested nothing helpful, and no one hurried to do the obvious thing: go to the door and find out! (See [Insights on Acts](#))

**Bob Utley** - Angels play a prominent role in Luke's writings. Apparently the Jews believed that one's guardian angel could take their physical shape (for a good discussion of Jewish sources and beliefs about guardian angels, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, p. 963). There is no scriptural basis for this belief. This development of angeology may have come from the concept of *fravashi* in Zoroastrianism. Much of rabbinical angeology can be traced to this Persian influence. There is some scriptural evidence for guardian angels for new believers (cf. Matt. 18:10).

**But she kept insisting that it was so** - Rhoda was emphatic, resolute and refused to budge! She kept saying very firmly that it was true, even when others would not.

**Jack Arnold** - They argue about the situation. Peter continues to knock. The whole affair is like a three ring circus all because these disciples refused to believe that their prayers had been answered. They finally went to the door and they were amazed. They were surprised that God had worked supernaturally. Aren't all Christians like these dear disciples? When we have an obvious answer to prayer, we rejoice and talk about it as if we are really surprised. Are we surprised, or were we really not expecting an answer? Perhaps we believe but we do not pray with expectancy. Those who pray with expectancy get answers to prayer. Remember, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2).

**NET Note** - The two imperfect tense verbs, (kept insisting - *diischurizeto*) and (kept saying - *elegon*), are both taken iteratively. The picture is thus virtually a shouting match between Rhoda and the rest of the believers.

**Kept insisting** (1340)(*diischurizomai* from *dia* = intensifies + *ischurizomai* = to corroborate, confirm, affirm from *ischurós* = firm, strong) means to affirm or assert strongly or vehemently. Rhoda was insisting, the imperfect tense picturing her over and over saying something like "*It is him! It is Peter! It really is him!*" Used in a papyrus text of a dispute between two parties, one of which affirms a matter confidently. A T Robertso says this is "an old word of vigorous and confident assertion, originally to lean upon."

The only other NT use of *diischurizomai* is when **Peter was denying Christ** and "After about an hour had passed, another man **began to insist**, (imperfect tense = over and over - you can just picture Peter squirming and wanting this man to keep quiet!) saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too." (Lk 22:59)

**Acts 12:16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.**

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

### THE ANSWER TO PRAYER IS KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

**But Peter continued knocking** (*krouo*) - Peter is persistent, even while the prayers were resistant!

**Swindoll** quips "Poor Peter, miraculously released from prison and having escaped certain death, couldn't wait to see his friends, but he was left standing out in the cold—literally—knocking repeatedly at the front door. He had supernaturally walked out of a high-security prison but couldn't get past the gate of his friend's house. He had casually walked past the king's guards to escape execution, but he couldn't get a little servant girl to let him in to join the prayer meeting held on his behalf. (See Insights on Acts)

**Continued** (1961)(*epimeno* from *epí* = upon, in or at + *meno* = abide, endure, continue, stay or remain > *epí* intensifies the meaning and so this word is a strengthened form of *meno* and gives the force of adherence to and persistence in what is referred to) means literally to tarry, to stay at or with, to abide in, to continue in. The imperfect tense pictures Peter repeatedly knocking, again and again!

**Epimeno** in NT -Jn. 8:7; Acts 10:48; Acts 12:16; Acts 15:34; Acts 21:4; Acts 21:10; Acts 28:12; Acts 28:14; Rom. 6:1; Rom. 11:22; Rom. 11:23; 1 Co. 16:7; 1 Co. 16:8; Gal. 1:18; Phil. 1:24; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16

A T Robertso - The whole group rushed out to the courtyard this time to make sure.

**And when they had opened** (*anoigo*) *the door* - They finally had the courage to open the door! Note that the words "the door" are not in the Greek text, but are implied (Acts 12:13).

**They saw him and were amazed** - "they were greatly astonished" (NET) **Amazed** is a common and appropriate response to God's work (see uses in Lk 8:56; Acts 2:7, 12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45).

**Amazed** (astonished, besides themselves) (1839)(*existemi* from *ek* = out + *hístemi* = to stand) literally means to stand out from or to stand outside oneself (and thus to be beside oneself). To put out of position, to displace or to change. To remove from its place. For example Aristotle writes "you won't budge (*existemi*) me from my position on these matters."

All of **Luke's** uses of *existemi* - Lk. 2:47; Lk. 8:56; Lk. 24:22; Acts 2:7; Acts 2:12; Acts 8:9; Acts 8:11; Acts 8:13; Acts 9:21; Acts 10:45; Acts 12:16

**Acts 12:17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.**

KJV 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.

- **beckoning** Acts 13:16; 19:33; 21:40; Luke 1:22; John 13:24
- **he described to them** Ps 66:16; 102:20,21; 107:21,22; 116:14,15; 146:7
- **James** Acts 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9,12; Jas 1:1
- **he left and went to another place** Acts 16:40; Matthew 10:23; John 7:1; 8:59; 10:40; 11:54

## PETER EXPLAINS GOD'S MIRACULOUS RESCUE

**But** - Term of contrast. The noise from their exuberance needed to be silenced lest they arouse the neighbors!

**Motioning to them with his hand to be silent** ("Gave them a signal") - Luke records a similar gesture several times (Acts 13:16; 19:33; 21:40). You can imagine the saints all trying to speak at once, full of wonder, full of questions, so Peter had to first quieten their exuberant spirits, not to mention the noise they were making.

**A T Robertson** - The speaker indicates by a downward movement of the hand his desire for silence (to hold their peace, σιγῇ [sigāin], present active infinitive, to keep silent). Peter was anxious for every precaution and he wanted their instant attention.

**Motioning** (2678) (**Kataseio** from kata = down + seio = to move, shake) means to signal (with the hand), to make a sign or gesture, to motion, to signal. To make a sign by shaking (i. e. rapidly waving) the hand, where Alexander "beckoned" to the mob at Ephesus in his attempt to restore order. (Acts 19:33). **Zodhiates** - shake violently to and fro, move backward and forward, wave the hand, beckon as a signal for silence and attention. **BDAG** - to make rapid motions, shake, wave (rapidly) (Acts 19:33). No uses in the Septuagint.

**Liddell-Scott** - to shake down, throw down, to shake or make a motion of the hand; so, by way of signal, but also, to beckon with the hand, N.T.: to beckon to another, as a sign for him to be silent

**Kataseio** - 4x in 4v - Acts 12:17; Acts 13:16 ("Paul stood up, and **motioning** with his hand" - to address synagogue); Acts 19:33; Acts 21:40

**To be silent** (4601) (**sigao** from **sige** = silence) mean to be silent, to "hold one's peace", to keep in silence or keep secret. The idea is to say nothing, keep still, keep silent (eg, Lk 9:36) or to stop speaking (eg, Lk 18:39).

**He described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison** - Even though it was an angel who directly was involved in Peter's release, note that Peter rightly and fully attributes the miracle to the **Lord**. God is sovereign over all supernatural events regardless of what instruments He chooses to use to effect those events. Peter understood the truth Paul would later declare that "in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28+) and "from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Ro 11:36+) And we should continually manifest the same acknowledgement of our daily dependence on God whether we experience the miraculous or the mundane. Does this describe your (my) daily prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our great and gracious Heavenly Father?

Notice also the fact the Peter was able to describe the supernatural events that he had just experienced which indicates that God had given him some memory of how the "great escape" had transpired. Imagine the effect this entire event must have had on the Church regarding their trust in God and His ability and willingness to answer prayer. Do you think that the church in Jerusalem would have scrapped the weekly prayer meeting after this miraculous answer? (Rhetorically speaking).

**Described** (1334) (**diegeomai** from **diá** = through + **hêgéomai** = to lead) means to conduct a narration through to the end. Too carry (a narrative) through from beginning to end recounting in full. To give a detailed account in words. As noted that Peter could recall the "full story" indicates God had restored his memory of the events during which he was "dazed and confused."

**And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren."** - **James** (See Utley's Topic below), the half brother of Jesus, appears to have become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. We see James in the forefront in Acts 15:13-21.

**Related Resource:**

- [What can we learn from the life of James, the brother of Jesus?](#)

**Report** (518) see note on **apaggello**

**These things** - What things? His imprisonment and his rescue by the angel. Implicit was that the church should expect more persecution because of his deliverance.

**A T Robertson** on **James** - It is plain that this James the Lord's brother, is now the leading presbyter or elder in Jerusalem though



there were a number (Acts 11:30; 21:18). Paul even terms him apostle (Gal. 1:19), though certainly not one of the twelve. The twelve apostles probably were engaged elsewhere in mission work save James now dead (Acts 12:2) and Peter. The leadership of James is here recognized by Peter and is due, partly to the absence of the twelve, but mainly to his own force of character. He will preside over the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:13).

**Then he left and went to another place** - Luke does not tell us where he went, but this is the last mention until one final mention several years later at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:7. Peter passes off the scene as the "baton" now passes over to Paul. Some have conjectured that Peter went to Rome, but that is highly unlikely given his last appearance at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

**Constable** - Earlier Peter had returned from prison to the temple to resume preaching at the Lord's command (Acts 5:19–21). Now the Jews were much more hostile to the Christians. Saul had previously left Jerusalem for his own safety (Acts 9:29–30), and this time Peter followed his example. Peter had become infamous among the Jews in Jerusalem for associating with Samaritans and Gentiles as well as for being the leader of the Christians.

**Arnold** has an interesting comment on Peter going to **another place** - Peter was a marked and hunted man. Thinking of his personal safety, he departed into hiding in an unnamed place. Why did Peter go into hiding when he had just been delivered from prison? Was he a coward? No, he was a wise and prudent man. He was not foolhardy, but filled with common sense. He was ready to die for Christ, but he was not going to put himself into a situation which would lead to his death. He was not going to die unnecessarily. Unfortunately, there are many Christians who have died fool-hardedly when the logical course of events could have led them out of martyrdom. Only the grace and leading of God can tell a person when to stay and die and when to flee to serve Christ another day.

**Wiersbe** - Peter walks off the pages of the Book of Acts to make room for Paul and the story of his ministry among the Gentiles. First Corinthians 9:5 tells us that Peter traveled in ministry with his wife, and 1 Corinthians 1:12 suggests that he visited Corinth. There is no evidence in Scripture that Peter ever visited Rome. In fact, if Peter had founded the church in Rome, it is unlikely that Paul would have gone there, for his policy was to work where other Apostles had not labored (Rom. 15:18–22). Also, he certainly would have said something to or about Peter when he wrote his letter to the Romans. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

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#### **Utley's** SPECIAL TOPIC: JAMES, THE HALF BROTHER OF JESUS

1. He was called "[James the Just](#)" and later nicknamed "**camel knees**" because he constantly prayed on his knees (from Hegesippus, quoted by Eusebius). (**Ed**: O, if all God's people had callused knees! Amen!)
2. James did not become a believer until after the resurrection (cf. Mark 3:21; John 7:5). Jesus appeared to him personally after the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:7).
3. He was present in the upper room with the disciples (cf. Acts 1:14) and was possibly also there when the Spirit came on Pentecost.
4. He was married (cf. 1 Cor. 9:5).
5. Paul refers to him as a pillar (possibly an apostle, cf. Gal. 1:19) but was not one of the Twelve (cf. Gal. 2:9; Acts 12:17; 15:13ff).
6. In Antiquities of the Jews, 20:9:1, Josephus says that he was stoned in A.D. 62 by orders from the Sadducees of the Sanhedrin, while another tradition (the second century writers, Clement of Alexandria or Hegesippus) says he was pushed off the wall of the Temple.
7. For many generations after Jesus' death a relative of Jesus was appointed leader of the church in Jerusalem.
8. He wrote the NT book of James.

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**Charles Swindoll** gives two applications of this story focused on prayer -

**First, ask God for what you want—and be bold!** Too often we temper our requests—even good, godly requests like the healing of a friend or the restoration of a failing marriage—perhaps to protect ourselves from disappointment, or to pray responsibly, or to avoid presuming upon God, or to pray within the bounds of what we imagine the Lord's will might be: "Lord, if it be Your will, restore this failing marriage." "If it be Your will . . . ?" Really? Pray boldly for what is good. Don't hold back. Don't qualify your requests. God's sovereignty isn't threatened and His goodness isn't compromised if you plead earnestly—supplicate shamelessly—for good to prevail. He may not choose to alter the circumstances. He may allow a Stephen to suffer unjustly. He may allow a wicked authority to deprive the church of a godly leader. Nevertheless, He will honor your earnest desires, if not in the manner you hope, then in some unexpected way you cannot foresee.

**Second, trust the sovereignty and goodness of God to prevail.** The people in the home of Mary gathered to pray for Peter. We don't know the content of their prayers, but some must have asked God for a miraculous

release, just like the earlier release. Clearly, however, no one really expected to see Peter alive again, or they wouldn't have been so dubious when he knocked. Still, they trusted God.

We can't expect the Lord always to do as we ask or to give us exactly what we want. (In my own prayers, I stopped telling God how to fulfill my requests a long time ago.) Even so, we can be sure He will always do what is right and will always act in the long-term best interests of everyone involved. No matter how your circumstances turn out after earnest prayer, assure yourself with these words—repeat them as often as necessary: **The Lord is right in all His ways** (see Deut. 32:4 and Da 4:37+). (See [Insights on Acts](#))

**Acts 12:18 Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.**

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

- **there** Acts 5:22-25; 16:27; 19:23

## PANDEMONIUM IN THE PRISON

**Pandemonium** is a state of extreme confusion and disorder. It describes a situation in which there is a lot of noise and confusion because people are excited, angry or frightened. A closely related word is **consternation** which is a feeling of anxiety, dismay, dread, or confusion. It describes amazement that hinders or throws into confusion and typically is a response to something unexpected. This passage describes something very unexpected - How could a doubly chained prisoner escape when there were four guards present (albeit two of them may have been asleep) and the doors were locked tight?

**Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter**- "At daybreak there was great consternation" (NET) "At dawn there was a great commotion" (NLT) The fact that it was "daybreak" substantiates the premise that the "great escape" had occurred the previous night. This was to be the day of Peter's execution. What was to be Herod's crowning achievement before the Jews, turned out to be his greatest embarrassment!

**Disturbance** ("consternation" = NET)([5017](#))(**tarachos** from **tarássō** = to stir or agitate) means a state of acute distress, dismay, mental agitation, confusion, **consternation**, commotion, tumult and in Acts 12:18 it means trepidation resulting from fear. In the only other NT use it describes civic unrest, public excitement, commotion, tumult (Acts 19:23 = "About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way [DISCIPLES OF CHRIST]." Note that Luke uses the same figure of speech **litotes** of as in Acts 12:18). Three uses in the Septuagint - Jdg. 11:35; 1 Sa 5:9; Est. 1:1

**Bob Utley** on Luke's **understatement** **no small disturbance** -This phrase is characteristic of Luke's writing (cf. Acts 14:28; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:23, 24; 27:20). The **understatement** accentuates the event (**ED**: See the figure of speech known as **litotes**).

**A T Robertson** - **Litotes** ([ouk = "no" + oligos = "little, small"]), occurs eight times in the Acts as in 15:2, and nowhere else in the N. T. (See Acts 12:18; Acts 14:28 ("a long time" = literally no little time); Acts 15:2 ("great dissension" = no little dissension); Acts 17:4 ("large number"); Acts 17:12 ("a number of prominent Greek women"); Acts 19:23 ("no small disturbance"); Acts 19:24 ("no little business"); Acts 27:20 ("no small storm")).

**NET Note** on **disturbance** - The situation indicated by the Greek word is described in L&N 25.243 as "a state of acute distress and great anxiety, with the additional possible implications of dismay and confusion—'great distress, extreme anxiety.'" The English word "consternation" is preferred here because it conveys precisely such a situation of anxiety mixed with fear. The reason for this anxiety is explained in the following verse.

**A T Robertson** - Probably all sixteen soldiers were agitated over this remarkable escape. They were responsible for the prisoner with their lives (cf. Acts 16:27; 27:42).

Here is a comment by **William Barclay** which might help you understand why you need to consult his commentary with a **healthy Berean mindset** (Acts 17:11+). Regarding Peter's miraculous escape, **Barclay** quips "In this story, we do not necessarily see a miracle." O really? It certainly looks like a miraculous rescue to me!

Sadly **Barclay's** remark is somewhat like the response of Herod, **Jack Arnold** commenting that "Herod was cold-blooded as well as stiff-necked and hardhearted. Sixteen innocent soldiers died because of this man's stubborn unbelief. He would not believe that

Peter's deliverance was a supernatural act of God. Herod, as an antisupernaturalist and humanist, had no respect for the value of human life. Anti-supernaturalists (**ED**: AKA "[METAPHYSICAL NATURALISTS](#)") and [humanists](#) often claim to be the protectors of man and his right, but these same people are often the first to put people into prison and to death who do not agree with them. "

**Acts 12:19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.**

KJV 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 Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.

NLT Acts 12:19 Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

ESV Acts 12:19 And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

- **When Herod had searched for him** 1 Samuel 23:14; Psalms 37:32,33; Jeremiah 36:26; Matthew 2:13
- **he examined** Acts 12:4,6; Matthew 28:11-15
- **ordered that they be led away to execution** Daniel 2:11-13; Matthew 2:16; John 12:10,11
- **he went down** Acts 21:8; 25:13; 1 Kings 20:43; Esther 6:12

## HEROD'S MURDER OF INNOCENT GUARDS

**When Herod had searched for him and had not found him** - [NET Note](#) says "Herod would have ordered the search rather than conducting it himself".

**Searched for** (1934)([epizeteo](#) from **epi** = intensifies meaning + **zeteo** = try to learn location of something, searching for) means to search or look for (people [Jesus] Lk 4:42).

Herod of course was not about to accept a **supernatural** solution for Peter's escape, so he sought a natural **answer**.

**He examined the guards** - The verb **examined** is [anakrino](#) (to sift up and down, question thoroughly) a forensic or judicial term which means Herod engaged in a formal investigation, carrying out a careful study to answer the question, the "64 dollar" question of course being "How in the world could Peter have escaped given the extra guards Herod had ordered." He examined them closely, interrogating them as to what had transpired. Of course the guards would have had to reply that they had no idea how Peter had escaped, for they were somehow supernaturally impeded from seeing (or remembering) what had transpired. As the next phrase suggests, their ignorance of these matters did not gain their acquittal but their condemnation and execution for their supposed incompetence and/or [complicity](#) with the prisoner.

**And ordered that they be led away to execution** - The words "to execution" are added by the translators. When a guard, jailer or soldier lost a prisoner the penalty was death. Prison guards would sooner kill all the prisoners—or themselves—than let any get away! In Acts 16:27+ "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped." (cf Acts 27:42) He knew what the punishment would be and wanted to cut his misery short by taking his own life!

Some think all 16 guards were held responsible and that all 16 were executed! Whether 4 or 16, Herod was only adding to his [blood guilt](#).

BLOODGUILT, liability for punishment for shedding blood. The biblical concept of bloodguilt derives from the belief that deeds generate consequences and that sin, in particular, is a danger to the sinner. The most vivid examples of this belief appear in connection with unlawful homicide, where innocent blood (dam naki (naqi); Jonah 1:14) cries out for vengeance (Gen. 4:10), is rejected by the earth (Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7), and pollutes it (Num. 35:33–34). **Bloodguilt** attaches to the slayer and his family (II Sam. 3:28ff.) for generations (2 Kings 9:26), and even to his city (Jer. 26:5), nation (Deut. 21:8), and land (Deut. 24:4). The technical term (Hebrew) for bearing bloodguilt damo bo, or damo bero'sho, meant originally "his blood [remains] in him/in his head" (Josh. 2:19; Ezek. 33:5), and the legal formula mot yumat damav bo (Lev. 20:9–16) means that in the case of lawful execution, the blood of the guilty victim remains on his own person and does not attach itself to his

executioners. (See also [Holman Bible Dictionary](#))

**Led away** (520)(**apago** from **apó** = from + **ágō** = to carry, lead) means to carry or lead away, leading from one place to another. **Apago** was used as a **legal term** meaning to lead one from one point to another in legal proceedings (to trial, punishment, prison or execution). For example apago was used to describe Jesus being "**led...away** to Caiaphas, the high priest." (Mt 26:57), "**led...away...to** Pilate" (Mt 27:2) and finally they "led Him away to crucify Him" (Mt 27:31). In short, apago meant to lead away a prisoner or condemned man (Mk 14:44; 15:16; Rev 13:10). **Apago** is the verb used by Jesus in the "ultimate trial" of every man or woman where the broad way "**leads** to destruction, and there are many who enter through it" and the narrow way "that **leads** to life." (Mt 7:13-14+). Dear reader, which way will you be led when you take your final breath?

**Barclay** - When Peter escaped, the soldiers were led away to execution because it was the law that, if a criminal escaped, the guard should suffer the penalty the prisoner would have suffered.

**Wiersbe** adds that "This law did not strictly apply in Herod's jurisdiction, so the king was not forced to kill the guards; but, being a Herod, he did it anyway. Instead of killing one man to please the Jews, he killed four and perhaps hoped it would please them more." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea** - **He** refers to Herod Agrippa I. Recall that Jerusalem is elevated so the descriptions of leaving the city are described as going down (**went down**). **Judea** is the old Jewish name for the area around Jerusalem.

**Caesarea** - Caesarea was a predominantly Roman city on the coast of Palestine south of Mount Carmel (and was distinct from Caesarea Philippi) and was the nominal capital of the Roman province of Judea. It was also known as "Caesarea by the Sea" "**Caesarea Maritima**" ([see map showing Caesarea on coast in relation to Joppa](#)) For discussion of Caesarea see commentary on Acts 10.

**And was spending time there** - Luke does not explain why Herod made this trip from Jerusalem. Later Peter was at Antioch of Syria (Gal. 2:11). Paul referred to Peter's itinerant ministry (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5).

**Spending** (1304)(**diatribo** from **dia** = through or intensifier + **tribo** = to wear, to spend; English **diatribe** = an abusive speech) literally means to rub away, to rub through, to wear away, to consume by rubbing. In the NT spoken only of TIME meaning to spend or pass time in a place, to stay, remain, tarry (Jn 3:22+ = Jesus "was spending time with" His disciples, Acts 15:35 = "Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch"). Two uses in the Septuagint - Lev. 14:8; Jer. 35:7.

**Gilbrant** - Septuagint Usage - The more common classical meaning is found in the Septuagint at Leviticus 14:8; the unclean individual must "spend" 7 days outside his or her own residence. Tobit, one of the apocryphal writings of the Septuagint, used diatribō in its rare sense of "rub" (Tobit 11:8,12). Sometimes diatribō is in reference to a locality rather than time. "Nicanor stayed on in Jerusalem" (2 Maccabees 14:23; cf. Judith 10:2; the RSV translates diatribō "lived"). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Liddell-Scott** - to rub between, rub hard, rub away, consume, waste, to perish utterly, Hdt. II. to spend time, to waste time, pass it away, make no more delay, to pass all one's time there, to go on talking, Id.:—hence, to employ oneself on or in a thing, to lose time, delay, II., to lose time on the way, to put off by delay, to thwart, hinder a thing, put them off in the matter of her wedding,

**Diatribo** - 9x in 9v - spending(1), spending time(2), spent(3), stayed(2), staying(1). Jn. 3:22+; Acts 12:19+; Acts 14:3+ (they spent a long time); Acts 14:28+ (they spent a long time with the disciple); Acts 15:35+; Acts 16:12+ (we were staying in this city for some days); Acts 20:6+ (there we stayed seven days); Acts 25:6+ (After he had spent not more than eight or ten days); Acts 25:14+ (While they were spending many days there)

**Acts 12:20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.**

KJV 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.

NET Acts 12:20 Now Herod was having an angry quarrel with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they joined together and presented themselves before him. And after convincing Blastus, the king's personal assistant, to help them, they asked for peace, because their country's food supply was provided by the king's country.

NLT Acts 12:20 Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to

make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon Herod's country for food. The delegates won the support of Blastus, Herod's personal assistant,

- **he was very angry with the people** Tyre. Genesis 10:15,19; Joshua 19:29; Isaiah 23:1-4; Matthew 11:21,22
- **and with one accord** Proverbs 17:14; 20:18; 25:8; Ecclesiastes 10:4; Isaiah 27:4,5; Luke 14:31,32
- **because.** 1 Kings 5:9-11; 2 Chronicles 2:10,15; Ezra 3:7; Ezekiel 27:17; Hosea 2:8,9; Amos 4:6-9; Haggai 1:8-11; 2:16,17; Luke 16:8

## THE ANGER OF A WICKED RULER

Proverbs 28:15NET says "Like a roaring lion or a roving bear, so is a wicked ruler over a poor people." The comparison uses animals that are powerful, terrifying, insensitive, and in search of prey which is an apt description of a political tyrant like Herod. Pr 29:2 adds that "when a wicked man rules, people groan."

**Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon** - **Very angry** is **thumomacheo** (2371) (from **thumós** = wrath, indignation, passionate heat + **máchomai** = to fight) which is found only here in the Bible and means literally "to carry on war with great animosity" (to fight fiercely), to have a hot quarrel, to be greatly offended, to be furious, to be enraged against, to be exasperated, very angry. "Highly displeased" is too mild. **Louw-Nida** says "be angry and quarrel, quarrel angrily" or "to be violently angry, to be furious." The present tense describes this as Herod's continual attitude. Luke does not explain what event or circumstance incited such a vitriolic response from Herod.

**Tyre** was a city and seaport on the coast of **Phoenicia** and had become one of the chief commercial cities of the world by reason of the Phoenician ships. **Sidon** was an ancient Phoenician royal city on the coast between Berytus (Beirut) and Tyre. These were both in the area of modern day Lebanon. Tyre was approximately 103 miles north of Jerusalem and Sidon approximately 124 miles from Jerusalem. [Click this map of the Kingdom of Agrippa I](#) and locate the coastal land of Phoenicia and the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon.

**A T Robertson** - Phoenicia belonged to Syria and Herod Agrippa had no authority there (ED: But he did hold sway because he provided the food). Tyre and Sidon as large commercial cities on the coast received large supplies of grain and fruits from Palestine. Herod had cut off the supplies and that brought the two cities to action.

**MacArthur** notes that **Tyre and Sidon** "were outside Herod's jurisdiction, but since Old Testament times their country had been fed by the region ruled by Herod (cf. 1 Kings 5:11; Ezra 3:7; Ezek. 27:17).

**And with one accord they came to him** - As crises generally do to people, even those as heterogeneous as the populace was in Caesarea, the food crisis united the citizens to be of one mind on this necessity lest they starve.

**One accord** (3661) (**homothumadon/homothymadon** from a combination of **homos** = same + **thumos/thymos** = temperament or mind) means with one mind, unity of mind, with one purpose, with unanimous consent, of one accord. In a word it means together (Webster says "**together**" means "in company, in union, in the same place, in the same time, in concert, as the allies made war upon France together.") One lexicon says **homothumadon** means "to be of one soul." It speaks of an action agreed upon unanimously (with one impulse) or by common consent. Homothumadon was frequently used in secular settings to describe the unanimity of a synod, of creditors, of a husband and wife, of brother (TLNT, Moulton and Milligan)

Luke's uses of **homothumadon** - Acts 1:14; Acts 2:46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12; Acts 7:57; Acts 8:6; Acts 12:20; Acts 15:25; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:29

**And having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain** - **Won over** is the verb **peitho** which means that in some way they persuaded or convinced Blastus. **A T Robertson** says "probably with bribes as in Matt. 28:14" which is possible but one cannot be dogmatic.

**NET Note** on **chamberlain** - the one in charge of the bed-chamber, the chamberlain." This individual was not just a domestic servant or butler, but a highly respected person who had considerable responsibility for the king's living quarters and personal affairs. The English word "chamberlain" corresponds very closely to this meaning but is not in common use today. The term "personal assistant," while it might convey more business associations than management of personal affairs, nevertheless communicates the concept well in contemporary English.

**They were asking** (**aiteo** in imperfect tense kept on asking) **for peace** (**eirene**), **because their country was fed by the king's country** - Herod's food squeeze caused them to cry for peace.



[NET Note](#) on **peace** - Or "for a reconciliation." There were grave political risks in having Herod angry at them. The detail shows the ruler's power.

**Rackham** - The Phoenician cities depended largely on the grain fields of Galilee for their food, and Herod had cut off their supply.

**Acts 12:21** On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.

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

- **Herod Agrippa I.** Mk 6:14

## AN APPOINTMENT HEROD SHOULD HAVE MISSED!

**On an appointed day Herod** - [NET Note](#) picks up the idea more clearly "On a day determined in advance." According to the Jewish historian Josephus the **appointed day** was a feast in honor of Herod's patron, the Roman Emperor Claudius.

[A T Robertson](#) - The two accounts of Luke and Josephus supplement each other with no contradiction.

**Having put on (enduo) his royal apparel** - Non-biblical descriptions (Josephus - see note [344](#) below) say Herod was arrayed in a silver garment which reflected radiantly when hit by the rays of the sun, and it was this appearance that caused the people to acclaim Herod a "god."

As **John Phillips** says "When the sun's rays fell upon that robe it glittered and shone with a resplendence that dazzled the crowds packed into the theatre." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Steven Cole** says "To seek glory for ourselves is to declare war against God. God will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; 46:11). If we seek to exalt ourselves, the Lord will surely humble us. We must all beware of the temptation of pride, of taking credit for ourselves when it is God alone in His mercy who deserves the praise. To declare war against God is to commit eternal suicide, because God always wins. Herod's glory was short-lived, and his misery is eternal. Even the Antichrist and the false prophet will only enjoy three and a half years of glory before God casts them into the lake of fire, where Satan himself will end up. All who never submitted to God will be thrown into that cauldron, to be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 15). ([Acts 12:1-25 The Unstoppable Gospel](#))

**John Piper** adds "In John 5:44 Jesus said to the glory-seeking Pharisees, "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" In other words, you can't believe in Jesus and be devoted to glory-seeking among men. Faith is God-exalting. Glory-seeking is self-exalting. They can't go together. If you are seeking the praise of men, you are on a collision course with God. That's exactly what Herod was seeking and that's just what happened....The point of this is to make clear to everyone who will listen that God and not Herod is to be honored and glorified. If a man lifts himself up against God, he becomes weaker than a worm. It is insane to commit treason against the Creator of the universe. You can't win. Daniel gave the same message about kings. In 2:21 he said, "God changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings." And when Nebuchadnezzar boasted, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" a voice came from God and said, "You will eat grass like an ox . . . until you have learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he wills" (Da 4:30, 32). ([Sermon](#))

**Took his seat on the rostrum** - Herod ascended the steps to the Bema or the Judgment Seat ([see picture of ancient bema](#)) where he would be elevated above the Jewish crowd, a position he clearly continually craved. Herod was almost certainly seated in the amphitheater (built by his grandfather) and still existing today on the sea coast ([see picture](#)).

**Rostrum (Judgment seat)** ([968](#)) ([bema](#) from bainō, "to step, ascend"; see also [Wikipedia](#)) (see also [Judgment by the Saints](#)) in its most common NT use refers to a raised platform on which an official is seated when rendering judgment on certain legal cases or athletic events. It is a platform before which someone would walk up to receive judgment; (figuratively) the administration of justice, given from "a tribunal-chair" (throne) at which there is a meting out rewards and punishments. Pilate sat on a judgment seat (bēma) in Christ's trial (Mt 27:19; Jn 19:13). Gallio sat on a judgment seat (Acts 18:12-17). All believers must stand before the judgment seat of God/Christ (Ro 14:10<sup>±</sup>; 2 Cor 5:10<sup>+</sup>). This divine judgment will reward our works –

not judge our sins, for that judgment occurred 2000 years ago on the mighty Cross when the humble Lamb bore ALL our sins, His temporal death giving us eternal life! However, it is a mistake to assume God "doesn't care" about the small matters (decisions) of life. Far from it! Each and every scene of life is a "partnership invitation" from God to live with Him – not just for Him! (Cp Lk 16:10 with Eccl 12:14, 1Cor 4:5)

**NET Note** on **rostrum** - The judgment seat (βῆμα, bēma) was a raised platform mounted by steps and sometimes furnished with a seat, used by officials in addressing an assembly or making pronouncements, often on judicial matters. The judgment seat was a familiar item in Greco-Roman culture, often located in the agora, the public square or marketplace in the center of a city.

**And began delivering an address to them** - One can almost imagine his proud, pompous proclamation. We do not know the content of his speech, but we do know the intent of it -- to impress the crowds that they might praise him, which they did to his demise!

**Delivering an address** is one word in Greek - **demegoreo** (1215) (**demos** = people + **agoreuo** = to speak in the market place from **agora** = market place) means simply to make a speech and is in the imperfect tense picturing the speech as going on and on (Typical politician!!!)

**A T Robertson** on **demegoreo** - old verb from [dēmēgoros] (haranguer of the people), and that from dēmos (people) and agoreuō, to harangue or address the people. Only here in the N. T. He kept it up.

#### Acts 12:22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

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

- Acts 14:10-13; Ps 12:2; Daniel 6:7; Jude 1:16; Revelation 13:4

### THE ULTIMATE FALSE FLATTERY!

**Flattery** is excessive or insincere praise. **Flattery** describes giving excessive compliments, generally for the purpose of ingratiating oneself with the subject. Historically, flattery has been used as a standard form of discourse when addressing a king or queen. Flattery is bad enough, but when it steals from the glory of God, it has crossed the line, as the consequences to Herod would soon demonstrate!

**The people kept crying out** - **Crying out** is in the imperfect tense which pictures them crying out over and over "Voice of a god, voice of a god, etc." From Acts 12:20 we get a clue as to why they heaped such flattery on Herod. They were attempting to pacify his outrage and prevent serious consequences for their city. They were also motivated by their stomachs for Herod's kingdom provided the food for their tables. And so undoubtedly they were mouthing flattering words, but only to make sure their stomachs would be filled!

**Josephus** adds an additional extra-Biblical description the crowd apparently cried out "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."

**Kept crying out** (imperfect tense = they kept on shouting) (2019) (**epiphoneo** from **epi** - intensifies + **phoneo** = to cry) means cry out (loudly) against (Lk. 23:21; Acts 21:34; Acts 22:24) or to someone (Acts 12:22). To shout or **clamor** (loud and persistent outcry from many people). Luke used this same verb of the Jewish crowd that "kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" (Lk 23:21).

Only 4 uses and all by Luke - calling(1), crying(1), shouting(2). - Lk. 23:21; Acts 12:22; Acts 21:34; Acts 22:24.  
No uses in Septuagint.

**The voice of a god and not of a man** - This was God's final test for Herod. Would he gladly receive or would he quickly refuse such false flattery and blasphemous adoration?

**A T Robertson** - In the pagan sense of emperor worship, not as the Supreme Being. But it was pleasing to Herod Agrippa's vanity. (Compare [Emperor Worship](#))

**THOUGHT** - While you may never be called "**a god and not a man**" you can rest assured that lesser praises which you (and I) receive (in whatever venue) will **always test our heart**. -- will we have a "Herod-like" response or a humble response? A proverb that always begins to sound off in my ear the moment someone

says "Good job" is...

**"The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold,  
and a man (or woman) is tested by the praise accorded him (her)."**  
(Pr 27:21).

So true! Too true! Father, for the glory of Jesus, keep us ever mindful of and ever enabled by Thy Spirit to obey your command in James to "**Humble** ([tapeinoo](#) in the aorist imperative - Do this now! Do it effectively! Passive voice = allow yourself to be humbled!) yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (James 4:10+). As someone has well said "The only way we can prevent the **nectar of praise** from becoming the **poison of pride** is by following the Lord with a humble heart." As Charles Bridges says "**Praise** is a sharper trial of the strength of principle than **reproach**....But see a man humbled by praise, in the consciousness how little he deserves it...See him made more careful and diligent, bearing his honor meekly, and the same man as before; here the furnace proves the real metal, and brings out "a vessel of honor, meet for the Master's use (2 Ti 2:21+)....Two rules strongly present themselves—**Be careful in giving praise**. Is it merciful to expose a weak fellow-sinner to the frown of a jealous God? or to stir up the innate corruption of his heart? For put even the finest gold into the furnace—how humbling is the spectacle of the dross, that yet cleaves to it! (Isa 39:2, 2 Chr 32:31) **Be not less careful in receiving praise**. While our taste revolts from extravagant flattery, yet we are apt to think it kindly meant, and it is very rare not to take unconsciously a drop of the poison (**ED**: O MY HOW CONVICTING!). But the **praise** of the church is by far the most insidious **poison**—so refined, so luscious. Specially when we feel it to be lawfully obtained, how hard to receive it with self-renouncing consecration to God! 'Christian! thou knowest thou earnest **gunpowder** about thee. Desire those that carry **fire** (of praise) to keep at a distance. It is a dangerous crisis, when a proud heart meets with flattering lips....Ever think of the love of human praise as the most deadly bane of a Christian profession, to be resisted with intense energy and perseverance. A steady look into **eternity** shows its vanity; a glance at the **Cross** its sinfulness." (AMEN) ([See Bridges' full comment](#) on Pr 27:21).

Humility's a slippery prize  
That seldom can be won;  
We're only humble in God's eyes  
When serving like His Son.  
—Gustafson

Peter's response in Acts 10 is the one Herod should have had when Cornelius bowed down before him. Luke records

"When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and **fell at his feet and worshiped** him.  
**But Peter** raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man." (Acts 10:26+).

Contrast also the response of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:12–15+ with that of Herod....

And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.

**Acts 12:23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.**

KJV 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.

- **the angel** Exodus 12:12,23,29; 1 Samuel 25:38; 2 Samuel 24:17; 1 Chronicles 21:14-18; 2 Chronicles 32:21
- **because** Acts 10:25,26; 14:14,15; Exodus 9:17; 10:3; Psalms 115:1; Isaiah 37:23; Ezekiel 28:2,9; Daniel 4:30-37; 5:18-24; Luke 12:47,48; 2 Thessalonians 2:4
- **and he** 2 Chronicles 21:18,19; Job 7:5; 19:26; Isaiah 14:11; 51:8; 66:24; Mark 9:44-48

## GOD IS JEALOUS FOR HIS GLORY

God is the only One Who has the complete right to be **jealous**! Moses explains why Herod was struck down "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a **jealous** God." (Dt 4:24). "God's jealousy is the other side of His love. It is the zeal with which He seeks to maintain His relationship with those He loves. God's jealousy has been called "the basic element in the whole O.T. idea of God." Because God loves Israel, He will not tolerate losing their loyalty to another, for this would break the covenant and keep Israel from blessing and prosperity." (Criswell)

The Scriptures clearly teach (and warn) of the grave danger of pride;

- "Your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23NLT);
- "Pride goes before destruction." (Proverbs 16:18NLT);
- "You will always reap what you sow!" (Galatians 6:7NLT).

### Related Resources:

- [Divine jealousy](#)
- [Why is God a jealous God?](#)

In Proverbs 11:8 Solomon gives us an apt description of the diametrically divergent outcomes in the lives of Peter and Herod...

The righteous is delivered from trouble,  
But the wicked takes his place.

Indeed, Peter was delivered **FROM** trouble, while Herod was delivered **TO** trouble!

**Charles Bridges comment on Proverbs 11:8** - Thus do these two classes change places in the dispensation of God. The same providence often marks Divine faithfulness and retributive justice. The Israelites were delivered out of the trouble of the Red Sea; the Egyptians came in their stead. (Ex. 14:21–28) Mordecai was delivered from the gallows; Haman was hanged upon it. (Esther 5:14, 7:10.) The noble confessors in Babylon were saved from the fire; their executioners were "slain" by it; Daniel was preserved from the lions; his accusers were devoured by them (Da 3:22–26). Peter was snatched from death; his jailers and persecutors were condemned. (Acts 12:6, 19, 23) Thus "precious in the sight of the Lord is" the life, no less than "the death, of his saints." (Ps 116:15) ([Proverbs Commentary](#))

As someone has quipped "God pickles the proud and preserves the foolish."

One wonders if these events in Acts 12 and the fate of evil Herod cause (under the inspiration of the Spirit of course) to quote these words (especially those in **bold font** below) in his first epistle

"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS (cf Peter praying),  
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER (cf Church praying)  
**BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL**" (1 Peter 3:12+).

Someone aptly described Herod Agrippa I writing "None are so empty as those who are full of themselves!"

[Brian Bell](#) - God let Herod's pride and self-centeredness and self-exaltation go all the way to the end so that we can see where all our pride is going and why we should crucify it as soon as we see it rear its ugly head!

**John Phillips** comments "Herod had gone too far. He had exhausted the patience of God. He had crossed the hidden boundary between God's mercy and His wrath. Well may we all beware." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Josephus** notes that Herod "did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery" (Antiquities XIX, vii, 2).

**And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him** - The verdict and sentence were executed simultaneously. One angel of the Lord sets a God fearing man free, while another angel of the Lord strikes down a self-glorifying man who would pretend to be a god! And it was the latter (Herod) that even imprisoned the former (Peter) with the goal to kill him. What a bitter irony is interwoven in Acts 12.

**Swindoll** explains that "The expression translated **"to strike,"** when used in this fashion, is known as a [Hebraism](#). Luke intends for the reader to recall the Old Testament manner of describing divine wrath falling upon the wicked to protect the righteous (Ex. 9:15;

12:12-13; 2 Sa 24:16-17; 2 Ki 19:35). Such a divinely sent "strike" is always a fatal blow." (See [Insights on Acts](#))

**Struck** (3960) (**patasso**) means to strike or hit whether violently (HEROD'S ARROGANCE) or lightly (PETER ASLEEP) - (1) It speaks of a violent blow intended to wound, slay or kill (Acts 7:24, Mt 26:31, Mk 14:27, Acts 12:23 Ex. 21:12, 18; Ex 12:23 = smite the Egyptians on Passover). Of Peter striking the slave of the high priest and cutting off his ear (Mt 26:51, cf Lk 22:49, 50) The most dramatic use in the Bible describes the return of Jesus when "from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may **strike down** the nations." (Rev 19:15+) (2) In contrast **potasso** in can refer to giving a light or gentle blow (Acts 12:7). It is interesting that **potasso** describes Moses striking down and killing the Egyptian, is used in the Septuagint to describe Moses striking the Nile (Ex 7:20, 25) and it turned to blood. Potasso is used in a more figuratively sense in describing striking or smiting with disease, evil, judgment, etc (Rev. 11:6 = strike the earth with plague; Ge 19:11 = angels struck the men with blindness; Nu 14:12 = smite them with pestilence ; Mal. 4:6 = smite the land with a curse).

**Immediately** (at once) (3916) (**parachrema** from **pará** = at, and **chréma** = something useful or needed) means suddenly, immediately, at the very moment, on the spot, forthwith, directly after something else has taken place. It sometimes has the implication of unexpectedness in certain context as the withering of the fig tree (Mt 21:19, 20). Note how most of the uses are in the context of a miraculous event and emphasize the absence of delay in the performance of the miracle.

**Luke's** frequently uses of **parachrema** - Lk. 1:64; Lk. 4:39; Lk. 8:44; Lk. 8:47; Lk. 8:55; Lk. 13:13; Lk. 18:43; Lk. 19:11; Lk. 22:60; Acts 3:7; Acts 5:10; Acts 12:23; Acts 13:11; Acts 16:26; Acts 16:33

#### Related Resources:

- [Who is the destroying angel?](#)
- [Is there an angel of death?](#)

**NET Note** - On being struck ... down by an angel, see Acts 23:3 ("God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!"); 1 Sa 25:28; 2 Sa 12:15 ("Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David,"); 2 Kgs 19:35 ("the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians"); 2 Chr 13:20; ("Jeroboam did not again recover strength in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him and he died. ") 2 Macc 9:5

**Because** - Term of explanation. This one is easy to decipher! As Barclay said "The pride of man had ended in the wrath of God."

**He did not give God the glory** - The act that resulted in the divine verdict that brought Herod's sentence of condemnation.

Clearly Herod had never read the Westminster Shorter Catechism...

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the glory of God?](#)
- [What does it mean to glorify God?](#)
- [How can I glorify God in everything I do?](#)

There is an old country and western song that describes King Herod's problem...

Oh Lord it's hard to be humble  
When you're perfect in every way  
I can't wait to look in the mirror  
Cause I get better looking each day  
To know me is to love me  
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble,  
But I'm doing the best that I can

**Brian Bell** applies these truths asking - Are we stealing Glory from God? Are we attributing to Him every good thing in our life? Every good gift that we have? Every ability or talent that we possess? Every good deed that we do? Do you make much of Jesus or much of yourself? Do you work to honor Christ? Does your marriage exalt Christ? Does your temper honor Christ? Does your home glorify Christ?

[David Guzik](#) - The manner of Herod's death was appropriate to his spiritual state; he corrupted from the inside out.

**Constable** - One writer suggested Herod suffered from appendicitis that led to peritonitis complicated by roundworms. Another diagnosed him as having a cyst caused by a tapeworm.<sup>512</sup> More important than the effect was the cause, namely Herod's pride (cf. Isa. 42:8).

John Stott adds that "Dr A. Rendle Short, who was professor of surgery at Bristol University and wrote a book entitled [The Bible and Modern Medicine](#), (review) stated that a great many people in Asia 'harbour intestinal worms', which can form a tight ball and cause 'acute intestinal obstruction'. This may have been the cause of Herod's death." (borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 212](#))

**And he was eaten by worms and died** - Josephus says Herod died five days (AD 44) after being struck with this malicious malady! Commentators get quite imaginative given this gory description, but suffice it to say (as a pathologist), the precise pathology is difficult to deduce. Normally, one does not see worms unless something is decaying. One could also postulate these worms were parasitic worms which do have a predilection for the intestinal tract. Luke is a physician and he does not say was eaten by something LIKE worms but by worms, suggesting these were worms of some type. Clearly the intent of this description is to strike horror in any reader and give a warning shot (so to speak) that God will not tolerate someone sharing or stealing the glory that rightfully belongs to Him Alone! Herod pretended to be pious and to act like a Jew but unfortunately clearly stopped short of becoming a student of the Hebrew Scriptures, for otherwise he would have heard God's warning in Isaiah 42:8..

"I am the LORD, that is My name;  
I will not give My glory to another,  
Nor My praise to graven images.

And again God declares...

For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act;  
For how can My name be profaned?  
And My glory I will not give to another.  
(Isaiah 48:11)

Indeed God acted for His Own sake when Herod attempt to steal God's glory! Is it not ironic that instead of Herod killing Peter, it was Herod who was slain by Peter's God! And it was possibly even the same angel who freed Peter, who then struck Herod!

**Eaten by worms** ([4662](#))(**skolekobrotos** from **skolex** = a worm + **bibrosko** = to eat) in classical Greek is an adjective which means "worm-eaten" and can be found in reference to both trees and men that have been eaten by worms. The word is used of diseased grain. It is not used in the Septuagint. So as a literalist and a physician, I do not take this as figurative language, but interpret Dr Luke as meaning exactly what he says -- Herod's death was the result of being eaten by worms. The root word skolex is used in Mark 9:48 in Jesus' description of eternal punishment "where THEIR WORM (skolex) DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED." (Skolex is found in the Septuagint in Ex. 16:20; Ex. 16:24; Dt. 28:39; Job 2:9; Job 7:5; Job 25:6; Ps. 22:6 = see comments on "I am a worm"; Pr 12:4; Pr 25:20; Isa. 14:11; Isa. 66:24; Jon. 4:7) In Mark 9 Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24 = "Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their **worm** will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind." (Related Resource - Read this one - [What is the worm that will not die in Mark 9:48?](#))

The question is what kind of worms was Herod eaten by? My sub-specialty is infectious diseases and thus the word root word "**skolex**" in **skolekobrotos** attracted my attention for this word is transliterated into English as "**scolex**" ([see picture](#)) which is the head part of intestinal tapeworms (see [Cestodes](#)) ([See life cycle of a tapeworm](#)) and their normal human habitat is the intestinal tract. Therefore one candidate "**worm**" would be [Diphyllobothrium](#) (eating raw fish). Although it is not common, **gastrointestinal obstruction** is a known consequence, especially when numerous worms are present and form a substantial bulk in the GI tract. Now, keep in mind that Herod's death parallels Peter's liberation because both involve angels "*striking*" their "victim" and thus both involve a supernatural component but in addition, both involve a natural component mixed with the supernatural component. That said, it would be reasonable to postulate (and that is all it is, an educated guess based on my infectious disease background) that Herod had a pre-existent, generally asymptomatic infestation with a tapeworm like [Diphyllobothrium](#) (parasites by nature do not kill their hosts for if they did they too would die), but that infestation was supernaturally transformed into a "hyper-infection" which would have caused **acute intestinal obstruction, severe colicky abdominal cramping pains** and could have led to death of part of the intestine (bowel infarction), with secondary perforation, overwhelming bacterial sepsis and death. It is interesting that Josephus reports that Herod lay acutely ill for 5 days prior to this death, which would make the preceding postulated events a reasonable consideration.



After writing the preceding comment, I came across a note from Dr. Jean Sloat Morton who has a somewhat similar description of the pathogenesis of Herod's fatal disorder...

The phrase "eaten of worms," in Greek is skolekobrotos. The root word scolex means "a specific head structure of a tapeworm." Since the word scolex (Plural scolices) is applied to the head of tapeworms, Herod's death was almost certainly due to the rupture of a cyst formed by a tapeworm. There are several kinds of tapeworms, but one of the most common ones found in sheep growing countries is the dog tape, [Echinococcus granulosus](#). The heaviest infections come from areas where sheep and cattle are raised. Sheep and cattle serve as intermediate hosts for the parasite. The dog eats the infected meat, then man gets the eggs from the dog, usually by fecal contamination of hair. The disease is characterized by the formation of cysts, generally on the right lobe of the liver; these may extend down into the abdominal cavity. The rupture of such a cyst may release as many as two million scolices. The developing worms inside of the cysts are called scolices, because the anterior (head) region constitutes the major part of development at this stage. When the cyst ruptures, the entrance of cellular debris along with the scolices may cause sudden death. The use of the word scolex is not limited to this reference about Herod; the term also appears in Mark 9:44. A literal translation of the phrase in Mark 9:44 would read, "where their scolex dieth not." This usage is very interesting because the tapeworm keeps propagating itself. Each section of the worm is a self-contained unit which has both male and female parts. The posterior part matures and forms hundreds of worm eggs. The word scolex in this text portrays a biological description of permanence which the text demands for the comparison. (Science in the Bible [Chicago: Moody, 1978], 261–62)

**Robertson** - Herod was carried out of the theatre a dying man and lingered only five days.

**Died** (breathed last; KJV = "[gave up the ghost](#)") (1634)([ekpsucho](#) from **ek** = out + **psuche** = the soul or **psucho** = to breathe) means to expire, to breathe out and so to die. **Vine** says "to breathe out the soul (or life), to give up the ghost." It was a medical term in [Hippocrates](#). As a physician I have been around people who "breathed out" their last breath and it was always a strange feeling for me as I realized I was in the present of a created being whose soul was leaving their body with that last exhalation, and to go immediately into their eternal home, either Heaven or Hell. [Eerie!](#)

**Warren Wiersbe** comments "I cannot help but see in King Herod an illustration of the future "man of sin" who will one day rule the world and persecute God's people (2 Th 2:3-4+; Rev. 13:4-6, 15-17+). This "man of sin" (or Antichrist) will make himself god and will command the worship of the whole world. But Jesus Christ will return and judge him and those who follow him (Rev. 19:11–21+)." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Jack Arnold** has a poignant comment - Whenever men begin to believe that they can substitute for God, judgment is imminent. When man puts man on the throne, the axe of God is about to fall. This is what is happening in our society today. Men, because of the spirit of rationalism and a salvation like trust in sciences has said man can solve his own problems, for man is his own god. They believe that man has the right to take life in abortion; that through genetic engineering man can be altered; that through cloning man can be reproduced; that defective children and useless old people can be destroyed because they are a hindrance to society. Today's men are making decisions that belong to God alone. Man is making himself like God; therefore, judgment is imminent! Perhaps we are at the precipice of disaster in our society. **Perhaps we have passed the point of no return because of our anti-supernaturalistic tendencies.** (ED: MAY THE BODY OF CHRIST IN AMERICA HEAR THE WARNING CRIES FROM GODLY MEN LIKE JACK ARNOLD AND REPENT AND RETURN LEST OUR LAMPSTAND BE REMOVED! Read Revelation 2:1-5+) But perhaps, if God's people pray, God will hold back His judgment and allow another generation to grow up in liberty, freedom and relative peace so the gospel can be preached before the great and terrible judgment at the second advent of Christ (READ 2 Chr 7:14, Ps 119:25). **"But prayer" is our only hope as our great nation teeters on the brink of disaster.** Does not the death of Herod teach us the certainty of divine retribution? Herod killed James, God's man, and God killed Herod, the devil's man! The Scripture is clear, "What a man sows he shall reap" (Gal. 6:7) and "Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19)! Herod got away with nothing and, in time, the sovereign God brought a supernatural death to this vain, conceited, pompous king. The Bible says of Herod and all like him, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17KJV). God keeps a score book and always evens the score with those who forget God!

**Vincent on eaten by worms** - Only here in New Testament. Of Pheretima, queen of Cyrene, distinguished for her cruelties, Herodotus says: "Nor did Pheretima herself end her days happily. For on her return to Egypt from Libya, directly after taking vengeance on the people of Barca, she was overtaken by a most horrid death. Her body swarmed with worms, which ate her flesh while she was still alive" (iv., 205). The term, as applied to disease in the human body, does not occur in any of the medical writers extant. Theophrastus, however, uses it of a disease in plants. The word σκώληξ is used by medical writers of intestinal worms. Compare the account of the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, the great persecutor of the Jews. "So that the worms rose up out of the

body of this wicked man, and whiles he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell away, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army" (2 Macc. 9:9). Sylla, the Roman dictator, is also said to have suffered from a similar disease.

**NET Note** - He was eaten by worms and died. Josephus, Ant. 19.8.2 (19.343–352), states that Herod Agrippa I died at Caesarea in A.D. 44. The account by Josephus, while not identical to Luke's account, is similar in many respects: On the second day of a festival, Herod Agrippa appeared in the theater with a robe made of silver. When it sparkled in the sun, the people cried out flatteries and declared him to be a god. The king, carried away by the flattery, saw an owl (an omen of death) sitting on a nearby rope, and immediately was struck with severe stomach pains. He was carried off to his house and died five days later. The two accounts can be reconciled without difficulty, since while Luke states that Herod was immediately struck down by an angel, his death could have come several days later. The mention of worms with death adds a humiliating note to the scene. The formerly powerful ruler had been thoroughly reduced to nothing (cf. Jdt 16:17; 2 Macc 9:9; cf. also Josephus, Ant. 17.6.5 [17.168–170], which details the sickness which led to Herod the Great's death).

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### Irreverence By Herbert Vander Lugt

The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him. —Acts 12:22-23

King Herod, dressed in his royal apparel, delivered an oration to an audience eager to win his favor. He reveled in their flattering response. "[This is] the voice of a god and not of a man!" shouted the crowd (Acts 12:22). Fear and awe of the one true God should have led him to protest, but he didn't. For his failure to "give glory to God," he was immediately struck by an angel of the Lord. He suffered an excruciating death because of his lack of reverence for God.

Paul and Barnabas, on the other hand, had such a great reverence for God that they nearly panicked at the thought of being worshiped (Acts 14:14-15). Upon seeing the apostle Paul miraculously heal a man who had been crippled from birth, the onlookers shouted, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Then they prepared to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas (vv.11-13). When the apostles heard this, they "tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out, ... 'Why are you doing these things?'" (vv.14-15).

In these contrasting biblical accounts, we see a solemn call to give God reverence in our irreverent world. He is the only one who is worthy of glory, praise, and honor. He is the only one who merits our worship. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

To fear the Lord means giving Him  
Our reverence, trust, and awe,  
Acknowledging His sovereignty,  
Submitting to His law.  
—Hess

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory. —Psalm 115:1

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**ILLUSTRATION** - During the Battle of the Wilderness in the Civil War, Union general John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops. At one point he came to a parapet, over which he gazed out in the direction of the enemy. His officers suggested that this was unwise and perhaps he ought to duck while passing the parapet. "Nonsense," snapped the general. "They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance." A moment later Sedgwick fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

**ILLUSTRATION** - Former heavy-weight boxer James (Quick) Tillis is a cowboy from Oklahoma who fought out of Chicago in the early 1980s. He still remembers his first day in the Windy City after his arrival from Tulsa. "I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down, and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, 'I'm going to conquer Chicago.' "When I looked down, the suitcases were gone."

Pride is the dandelion of the soul. Its root goes deep; only a little left behind sprouts again. Its seeds lodge in the tiniest encouraging cracks. And it flourishes in good soil: The danger of pride is that it feeds on goodness.

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Herod died in A.D. 44. Josephus' Antiquities 19.8.2 records greater detail of the dreadful demise of Herod...

Now, when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Cesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival, a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. (344) **On the second day**

of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; (345) and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), **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."** (346) Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But, as he presently afterwards looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. (347) He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner." (348) When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace; and the rumor went abroad everywhere, that he would certainly die in a little time. (349) But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. (350) **And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign;** (351) for he reigned four years under Caius Caesar, three of them were over Philip's tetrarchy only, and on the fourth he had that of Herod added to it; and he reigned besides those, three years under the reign of Claudius Caesar: in which time he reigned over the forementioned countries, and also had Judea added to them, as also Samaria and Cesarea. (352) The revenues that he received out of them were very great, no less than twelve millions of drachmae. Yet did he borrow great sums from others; for he was so very liberal, that his expenses exceeded his incomes; and his generosity was boundless.

#### Josephus describes Herod's illness in Antiquities 17:6:5.

5. (168) But now Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon him for his sins: for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly as it augmented his pains inwardly; (169) for it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also ex-ulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, farther, his privy member (penis) was putrified, and produced worms; and when he sat upright he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree. (170) It was said by those who pretended to divine, and who were endowed with wisdom to foretell such things, that God inflicted this punishment on the king on account of his great impiety; (171) yet was he still in hopes of recovering, though his afflictions seemed greater than anyone could bear. He also sent for physicians, and did not refuse to follow what they prescribed for his assistance; and went beyond the river Jordan, and bathed himself in warm baths that were at Calirrhoe, which, besides their other general virtues, were also fit to drink; which water runs into the lake called Asphaltitis. (172) And when the physicians once thought fit to have him bathed in a vessel full of oil, it was supposed that he was just dying; but, upon the lamentable cries of his domestics, he revived; and having no longer the least hopes of recovering, he gave order that every soldier should be paid fifty drachmae; (173) and he also gave a great deal to their commanders, and to his friends, and came again to Jericho, where he grew so choleric, that it brought him to do all things like a madman; and though he were near his death, he contrived the following wicked designs. (174) He commanded that all the principal men of the entire Jewish nation wheresoever they lived, should be called to him. Accordingly, there were a great number that came, because the whole nation was called, and all men heard of this call, and death was the penalty of such as should despise the epistles that were sent to call them. And now the king was in a wild rage against them all, the innocent as well as those that had afforded him ground for accusations; (175) and when they were come, he ordered them all to be shut up in the hippodrome, and sent for his sister Salome, and her husband Alexas, and spoke thus to them:—"I shall die in a little time, so great are my pains; which death ought to be cheerfully borne, and to be welcomed by all men; but what principally troubles me is this, that I shall die without being

lamented, and without such mourning as men usually expect at a king's death." (176) For that he was not unacquainted with the temper of the Jews, that his death would be a thing very desirable, and exceedingly acceptable to them; because during his lifetime they were ready to revolt from him, and to abuse the donations he had dedicated to God: (177) that it therefore was their business to resolve to afford him some alleviation of his great sorrows on this occasion; for that, if they do not refuse him their consent in what he desires, he shall have a great mourning at his funeral, and such as never any king had before him; for then the whole nation would mourn from their very soul, which otherwise would be done in sport and mockery only. (178) He desired therefore that as soon as they see he hath given up the ghost, they shall place soldiers round the hippodrome, while they do not know that he is dead; and that they shall not declare his death to the multitude till this is done, but that they shall give orders to have those that are in custody shot with their darts; and that this slaughter of them all will cause that he shall not miss to rejoice on a double account; that as he is dying, they will make him secure that his will shall be executed in what he charges them to do; and that he shall have the honor of a memorable mourning at his funeral. (179) So he deplored his condition, with tears in his eyes, and obtested them by the kindness due from them, as of his kindred, and by the faith they owed to God, and begged of them that they would not hinder him of this honorable mourning at his funeral. So they promised him not to transgress his commands.

**Acts 12:24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.**

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

- Acts 5:39; 6:7; 11:21; 19:20; Proverbs 28:28; Isaiah 41:10-13; 54:14-17; 55:10; Daniel 2:24,44; Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:1

## THE GOSPEL GOES FORTH

**But** - Term of contrast and O, what a contrast! Herod was eaten by worms and died, while the living (Heb 4:12+), life giving Word of the Lord was growing and multiplying! Can we not see the vanity and end of the pursuit of earthly glory in stark contrast of the passionate pursuit of God's glory! Herod was living for the moment, but would spend eternity in Hell paying for the brief moment of glory! Oh, to learn from the mistakes of this distorted, deceived man. God grant that we might live for Thy glory with our eyes firmly fixed on eternity. Amen

**Swindoll** writes "Since then, the word of the Lord has continued to grow and multiply for two thousand years. Agrippa's pathetic, three-year reign is a piece of lint on the scroll of church history. Tragically, this (Herod's death) also marked the nation of Israel's last hope of participation in God's redemptive plan—at least for now. He's not finished with His covenant people. He will fulfill all His Old Testament promises literally and completely in the future (Romans 9–11). After the death of Agrippa (AD 44), however, the nation grew even more estranged from the new covenant and increasingly hostile to the church. Then calamity destroyed the temple (AD 70) and scattered the people....Stage two of the plan, "Judea and Samaria," will now give way to stage three, "the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). (See [Insights on Acts](#))

**ED COMMENT:** As these concluding verses demonstrate the "baton is passed" from Jerusalem to Antioch and from the Jews to the Gentiles who would become the main constituents of the Church from that time onward to the present day. See [Does God still have a plan for Israel?](#)

**Phillips** comments that "The Holy Spirit sets down this progress report here in evident contrast with the ignominious death of Herod. The worms are set in contrast with the Word. Both are God's instruments. Herod might want to destroy the church, but the Word of God, inspired, infallible, inerrant, invincible, marched gloriously on. The armed might of government may be mobilized against it, but the Word of God knows no boundaries to its empire, no barriers to its progress." (See [Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary - Page 225](#))

**Steven Cole** - At the beginning of Acts 12, we have James dead, Peter in prison, and the tyrant Herod basking in his popularity and power. At the end of the chapter, we have Peter free, Herod eaten by worms and dead, and the Word of God growing and multiplying. Luke is showing us that the gospel is unstoppable. If you oppose the gospel, you may temporarily win, but you will finally lose and lose big. If you stand for the gospel, you may temporarily lose, but you will finally win and win big....Since God is almighty, no force can stop the spread of His gospel according to His purpose. ([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

**The Word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied** - What is the Word of the Lord? This is surely the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation available in Him to all who repent and believe.

One is reminded of the glorious description of God's Word in Isaiah

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

**NET Note** on the word of God - A [metonymy](#) for the number of adherents to God's word.

**The Word of the Lord** in Acts - Acts 8:25; Acts 11:16; Acts 12:24; Acts 13:44; Acts 13:48; Acts 13:49; Acts 15:35; Acts 15:36; Acts 16:32; Acts 19:10; Acts 19:20;

In Acts 19:20 we read a parallel description - "So **the Word of the Lord** was growing mightily and prevailing."

**Warren Wiersbe** - This is another of Luke's summaries, or "progress reports," that started with Acts 6:7 (see 9:31; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). Luke is accomplishing the purpose of his book and showing us how the church spread throughout the Roman world from its small beginnings in Jerusalem. What an encouragement to us today! ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Continued to grow** (837) (**auxano** means to cause to grow or cause to become greater in extent, size, state, or quality and in the current verse pictures the Word of the Lord continuing to grow (imperfect tense, active voice). This growth is manifest in the effects of the Word of the Lord to save and sanctify sinners transforming them into saints of the Most High God.

All of Luke's uses of **auxano** - Lk. 1:80; 2:40; 12:27; 13:19; Acts 6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20;

[David Guzik](#) writes that " Herod fought against God. He killed James but didn't defeat God's plan. He arrested Peter, but the earnestly praying church saw God rescue Peter and the apostle's work continue. History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done. [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition. [Sinclair Lewis](#) won the Nobel Prize for literature, and fought against God in his book [Elmer Gantry](#). The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. **Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome.** Writer [Ernest Hemingway](#) lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences—until he shot himself in the head with a shotgun. Fighting against God just doesn't work." (AND THIS LIST COULD GO ON AND ON AND ON!)

**MacArthur** cites other Biblical examples of men who thought they could fight God - One of the first in the long line of rulers who fought God was the pharaoh who ruled Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Fighting God cost him and his people dearly as horrible plagues, culminating in the death of every firstborn Egyptian male, lashed their land. Still Pharaoh fought on, until his army drowned in the Red Sea. The Canaanite king of Arad's part in the war against God resulted in the destruction of his people and their cities (Num. 21:1–3). Sihon of the Amorites (Num. 21:21–31) and Og of Bashan (Num. 21:33–35) suffered similar fates. Balak, king of Moab, was clever enough to avoid a direct frontal assault. Instead he used that prophet for hire Balaam in an attempt to curse Israel (Num. 22–24). Balak's strategy backfired, however, as God intervened and had Balaam bless Israel instead. The king of Ai fought God and was hanged for his trouble (Josh. 8:29). The thirtyone Canaanite kings listed in Joshua 12:7–24 suffered similar defeats. Sennacherib, proud leader of the feared and powerful Assyrian army, saw that army decimated in battle against God (2 Kings 19:35). Soon afterward, he himself was dead, murdered by two of his own sons (Isa. 37:38).

## DIVINE MATHEMATICS

**Continued to...be multiplied** (also imperfect tense) (4129) ([plethuno](#) from **plethos** = fullness from **pletho** = to fill) means to be made full, grow, increase or be multiplied in number. Other figurative uses of **plethuno** describe an increase in **lawlessness** in the last of the last days (Mt 24:12), an increase in a harvest of **righteousness** (2 Co 9:10), and prayers for increased **grace and peace** (2 Pe 1:2, Jude 1:2)

I love the way **John Stott** sums up Acts 12 -

It is in striking contrast to the death of the tyrant, that Luke adds one of his summary verses: But the word of God continued to increase and spread (Acts 12:24, cf. Acts 6:7; 9:31). Indeed, one cannot fail to admire the

artistry with which Luke depicts the complete reversal of the church's situation. At the beginning of the chapter Herod is on the rampage—arresting and persecuting church leaders; at the end he is himself struck down and dies. **The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the word of God triumphing.** Such is the power of God to overthrow hostile human plans and to establish His own in their place. Tyrants may be permitted for a time to boast and bluster, oppressing the church and hindering the spread of the Gospel, but they will not last. In the end, their empire will be broken and their pride abased (**ED**: SEE HYMN BELOW). (borrow [The message of Acts : the Spirit, the church & the world page 212](#))

**Wiersbe** writes "Missionary [Isobel Kuhn](#) used to pray when in trouble, "If this obstacle is from Thee, Lord, I accept it; but if it is from Satan, I refuse him and all his works in the name of Calvary!" And Dr. Alan Redpath has often said, "Let's keep our chins up and our knees down—we're on the victory side!" God works when churches pray, and Satan still trembles "when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Constable** - Nothing seemed capable of stopping the expansion of the church. Corruption and contention in its ranks did not kill it (Acts 5:1–11; 6:1–7). Its religious enemies could not contain it (Acts 4:1; 8:1, 3; 11:19). Even Roman officials could not control it (vv. 1–23). In the next section we see that it broke out into Asia Minor. Jesus' prediction that even the **gates of Hades** could not overpower it was proving true (Matt. 16:18; Acts 1:8). God's purposes will prevail!

**Jack Arnold** - Nothing could stop the onward march of the gospel and the advance of the church, for "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18b). The sovereign, supernatural working God is behind the spreading of the gospel and the word of the Lord "shall accomplish that which He pleases and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sends it" (Isa. 55:11). Kings and kingdoms have fallen, republics and democracies have bit the dust, dictators and great nations have come and gone, but the word of the Lord supernaturally grows and multiplies. Nothing can stop God from accomplishing His purposes in this world through the preaching of the gospel. Hymn:

#### [O Where Are Kings and Empires Now](#)

([Play this sobering hymn](#))

"O where are kings and empires now  
Of old that went and came?  
But, Lord Thy Church is praying yet,  
A thousand years the same.

Unshaken as eternal hills,  
Immovable she stands,  
A mountain that shall fill the earth,  
A house not made with hands."

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**Steven Cole** concludes his sermon on Acts 12 with an illustration -

So the bottom line is, whether the Almighty God delivers us from persecution or whether we die for our faith, we must commit ourselves wholly to the furtherance of His gospel.

John Paton was born in Scotland in 1824. As a young Christian, he labored as a city missionary in the slums of Glasgow. But he felt God's call to take the gospel to the fierce cannibals of the New Hebrides islands in the South Pacific. John Williams and James Harris made the first attempt to take the gospel there in 1839. They were clubbed to death and eaten within a few minutes of their landing. Paton and his new wife landed there on November 5, 1858. On February 12, 1859, she gave birth to a son, but on March 3rd, she died from complications after childbirth. On March 20th, the baby died. Of course Paton struggled with his grief and loneliness. Just before his wife died, she expressed her wish that her mother could be there with her. Then she added,

"You must not think that I regret coming here, and leaving my mother. If I had the same thing to do over again, I would do it with far more pleasure, yes, with all my heart. Oh, no! I do not regret leaving home and friends, though at the time I felt it keenly.

Her dying words were, "Not lost, only gone before to be for ever with the Lord." Paton lived into his seventies, devoting himself to the cause of the gospel among these cannibals, experiencing many divine deliverances. At the end of his life he exclaimed, "Oh that I had my life to begin again! I would consecrate it anew to Jesus in



seeking the conversion of the remaining Cannibals on the New Hebrides" (John G. Paton Autobiography [Banner of Truth], pp. 84-85, 496). **Whatever the cost, may we all commit ourselves to the cause of the unstoppable gospel of Jesus Christ!** ([The Unstoppable Gospel \(Acts 12:1-25\)](#))

**Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.**

KJV 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.

- **Barnabas** Acts 11:29,30; 13:1-3
- **ministry** Acts 13:5,13; 15:37
- **John** Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13

## THE INCEPTION OF THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

**And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem** - That is they are making the 300 mile return trip to Antioch.

**When they had fulfilled their mission** - They had brought the relief from Antioch for the disciples suffering from the famine in Jerusalem. This supports the premise that Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem when the events in Acts 12 transpired.

**Mission** (1248)(**diakonia** probably from **dioko** = to pursue, "to be a follower of a person, to attach one's self to him" - note on origin from Vincent) means the rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature serve, including such mundane activities as waiting on tables or caring for household needs—activities without apparent dignity. Diakonia is related to diakonos, a servant, not in his relation (like doulos) but more in regard to his activity. The term covers both slaves and hired servants."The basic idea...always had to do with humble, submissive, personal service, not simply with an office or a particular function." (MacArthur)

**Taking along with them John, who was also called Mark** - Recall the prayer meeting was at Mary's house, the mother of John Mark. Were Barnabas and Saul in that prayer meeting interceding for Peter? From the text it certainly seems possible.

**Jack Arnold** sums up this last verse - Barnabas, Paul and John Mark, who were to become great missionaries to the Gentile world, were allowed to be in Jerusalem during these events mentioned in Acts 12. They were observers, but they would remember what happened to James, Peter and Herod, and when in difficult circumstances themselves, they would cling to a sovereign, supernatural working God to deliver them miraculously

**Maps of the Three Missionary Journeys:**

- [Paul's First Missionary Journey](#) - Acts 13:4-14:28
- [Paul's Second Missionary Journey](#) - Acts 15:36-18:32
- [Paul's Third Missionary Journey](#) - Acts 18:23-21:26

As **J Vernon McGee** said "We have come now to the end of the second period of the Book of Acts. The gospel has gone into Judea and Samaria. Beginning with the next chapter we will see the movement of the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth. We are still in that movement today. I hope that you and I are both involved in it."

**And so we come to end of the First half of Acts (Peter's half)!**

- Chapters 1-12: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
- Chapters 13-28: Uttermost part of the earth.

Similarities:	Peter	Paul
First Sermon	2	13
Lame man healed	3	14
The Sorcerer	Simon, 8	Elymas, 13

Influence	shadow, 5	handkerchief, 19
Laying on hands	8	19
Worshiped	10	14
Raised	Tabitha, 10	Eutychus, 20
Imprisoned	12	28