

Acts of the Apostles – 12

I. The Inspired History

- A. Herod Kills James the Brother of John (1-2)
- B. Herod Tries to Kill Peter (3-19).
 - 1. He Imprisons Peter (3-6).
 - 2. The Lord Delivers Peter (7-11).
 - 3. The Church Receives Peter (12-17).
 - 4. Herod Punishes the Soldiers (18-19).
- C. Herod Receives Divine Worship (20-23).
 - 1. He Is Called a God By the People (20-22).
 - 2. God Kills Him for Taking the Glory (23).
- D. The Church Continued to Grow (24-25).
 - 1. The Persecution Is Cut Short (24).
 - 2. Barnabas and Saul Return from Jerusalem (25).

II. The Sense and Meaning

- A. Herod takes action to slow down the church's growth by killing James, John's brother (1-2).
 - 1. The church was growing very rapidly with many Jews and now Gentiles converted.
 - a. Surely he had heard about Cornelius and the Gentile converts in other places.
 - b. Jealous for his own position and wealth, he purposed to stunt its growth.
 - c. Since peace with Rome was crucial, he could not afford trouble in his territory.
 - d. We are told only about James, but we may presume others were vexed also.
 - 2. There are numerous Herods in the Bible that both Scripture and Josephus identify.
 - a. The political and domestic intrigues (murderous and adulterous treacheries) by this family are horribly evil and cruel.
 - b. They had regional authority as vassals of Caesar, who ruled them as he chose.
 - c. Herod the Great, King of Judea, (ruling 37-4 B.C.) killed the children of Bethlehem to eliminate Jesus and died shortly thereafter (Matthew 2:12-23).
 - d. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, (ruling 4 B.C. – 39 A.D.) killed John the Baptist to please his evil wife Herodias, whom he stole from his brother Philip.
 - e. Herod here is Agrippa I, King of Judea, (ruling 41-44 A.D.), the father of Agrippa II, King of Chalcis, (ruling 50-53 A.D.) whom we shall meet (25:13).
 - 3. James here is the brother of John and a son of Zebedee, two of the first disciples.
 - a. James had been told by the Lord that he would drink of His cup (Matt 20:23).
 - b. The choice of James being killed early was God's and perfectly wise and holy.
 - c. James becomes the first apostolic martyr. What cup did you drink for Christ?
 - 4. Government actions like this are under the sovereign control of the Mighty God.
 - a. Satan's princes are involved in government action against saints (10:3,20).
 - b. The powers that be are ordained of God and but servants (Ro 13:1-7; Je 27:6).
 - c. Both hardening Pharaoh and Europe's kings, He is Lord (Ex 4:21; Rev 17:17).
 - d. He directs their hearts whithersoever He will as the rivers of water (Pr 21:1).
 - e. Don't be so simple and read the newspaper without this "inside knowledge."
 - f. True Christians never despair or resort to unscriptural rebellions against them.

- B. He imprisons Peter, intending to kill him also, when he sees the Jewish response (3-6).
 1. Political expediency is doing anything to keep the people happy who support you.
 2. Of course, the Jewish leadership would have been thrilled with James's death.
 3. We have an important parenthetical element identifying the Passover Feast.
 - a. The Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are totally identical.
 - b. The Passover Supper began seven days of unleavened bread (Ex 12:12-20).
 4. Four quaternions (four grouped) are sixteen soldiers. He had escaped before (5:17-20).
 5. Easter here is merely the Jewish Passover, as a good English dictionary will confirm.
 - a. The second meaning for the English "Easter" is simply the Jewish Passover.
 - b. Observe the note from the previous verse: it is the feast of unleavened bread.
 - c. Why is it in parentheses? For discriminating Bible readers to know the truth.
 - d. To honor the Jews (which was his ambition here), he honored their great feast.
 - e. Herod was not waiting for their sunrise service and Easter egg hunts to end.
 - f. This "Easter" was only kept by the enemies of Jesus Christ, not the church.
 - g. Luke, nor the Holy Ghost, was not endorsing the pagan spring sex rituals.
 6. The church responded to this crisis with prayer rather than rebellion or despair.
 - a. There was no justice or righteousness in this act. Yet they are God's rulers.
 - b. It is discouraging to see Christians today try to fight the sword with a sword.
 - c. It is discouraging to see Christians today belittle the political power of prayer.
 - d. Wise men will remember the spiritual warfare going on behind the scene.
 - e. We admit de facto governments as ours today, and we pay Caesar (Mk 12:17).
 - f. We use the government for its protection and benefit, as did Paul (25:11).
 - g. We obey God in any conflict of authority (5:29); we avoid any technical offence (Matt 17:24-27); and we prudently run and hide if necessary (9:23-25).
 - h. We are not moved by political injustice, for Christ is King (Ec 5:8; I Ti 6:15).
 - i. They did not merely pray; they did not vaguely pray; they prayed without ceasing for Peter. Effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much (Jas 5:16).
 7. The Lord rescued Peter the night before he was to be killed. Trust in the Lord always.
 8. Peter slept between two soldiers bound with two chains with guards at the door.
- C. The Lord delivered Peter the night before his planned execution by His holy angel (7-11).
 1. The Lord can work for righteous men like they could never do themselves (Is 37:36).
 2. The angel turned on a light, smote Peter on the side, picked him up, and told him to get up quickly, told him to get dressed for traveling, and told him to follow.
 3. The chains fell from his hands by God's power, without soldiers waking to pursue.
 4. Peter believes he is having a vision rather than actually walking out of the prison.
 5. Passing through two wards, the gate to the city opened by itself by God's power.
 6. Taking him a block from the prison, the angel leaves Peter, who then fully awakes.
- D. Peter visits the church to inform them of his miraculous deliverance from prison (12-17).
 1. Many were praying that night at Mary's house, mother of John Mark and sister of Barnabas (Col 4:10). Are not the family relations in the New Testament comforting?
 2. Confusion reigns as Peter attempts to convince Rhoda and them of his escape.
 3. Though they sought the Lord for His deliverance, they could not believe the answer.
- E. Herod blindly and cruelly kills the guards for dereliction of duty in Peter's escape (18-19).
 1. We can clearly understand "no small stir among the soldiers" for his escape, yet observe their ordinary senses of sight and hearing and touch had been overridden.
 2. With the great security, the guards must have slept soundly until morning without him.
 3. Herod should have considered the work of God in light of all the apostolic miracles and signs and wonders and previous escapes.
 4. As in many places, we read that Herod went **down** to Caesarea (down in altitude).

- F. Herod is flattered by his political enemies at a public address in a royal setting (20-22).
 - 1. Luke gives us historical background in a single verse of the nature of this assembly.
 - 2. At a planned event, Herod presents himself royally by clothing, throne, and speech.
 - 3. The people, intoxicated with their need for his approval, call him a god and not a man.
 - 4. Josephus confirms the nature of this assembly and Herod's glorious appearance.
- G. God immediately strikes him for his arrogant presumption, and he dies shortly thereafter (23).
 - 1. When Herod did not reject their blasphemy correctly, God immediately smites him.
 - 2. The apostles showed how to give God the glory in such cases (10:25-26; 14:11-18).
 - 3. Even the angels will not accept worship intended for God (Revelation 22:8-9).
 - 4. He was eaten with worms internally and died painfully five days later (Josephus).
 - 5. How many times do we have the opportunity of taking credit or giving God glory?
- H. Though Herod thought he could vex the church and stunt its growth in Judea, he failed (24).
 - 1. In spite of the death of James and enemies in high places like Herod, the church grew.
 - 2. Not only did it grow arithmetically, it multiplied geometrically. Multi-level! Amen!
- I. Barnabas and Saul returning from Jerusalem to Antioch, bring with them John Mark (25).
 - 1. In Jerusalem they delivered the financial gift from Antioch to the brethren (11:27-30).
 - 2. John Mark was the son of Mary (prayer meeting) and nephew of Barnabas (Col 4:10).