

LESSON THIRTEEN

(12:1-25)

At Jerusalem, 12:1-24

12 *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword; 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. 5 So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*

6 The very night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison; 7 and behold an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your mantle around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and followed him; he did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its accord, and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel left him. 11 And Peter came to himself, and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. 13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14 Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are mad." But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel!" 16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell this to James and to the brethren." Then he departed and went to another place.

18 Now when the day came, there was no small stir among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him and could 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 remained there.

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and they came to him in a body, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. 21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them. 22 And the people shouted, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" 23

Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Herod the king - This is a grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2). He is Herod Agrippa I, whose father (Aristobulus) was murdered by his grandfather. He was educated in Rome, and was a friend of the Roman emperor of Caligula, and then of Claudius. At this time, A.D. 44, he was king over all of Palestine.

Agrippa I made every attempt to curry favor with the Jewish populace in Palestine - so it is no wonder that the events of our text happened.

V. 2 - James the brother of John - a political casualty, the first of many to follow. Josephus, the Jewish historian, makes mention of this event. Most of the persecution has heretofore been from religious people. Now religion and politics conspire. As far as James is concerned, his death because of his faith was like many others before his time (e.g., the Jews in the Maccabean period) and many Christians later. Perhaps he understood much better what it meant to follow Jesus. He said in an earlier context (Matt. 20) that "He was able." Indeed he was.

V. 3 - the days of Unleavened Bread - the Jewish Passover in the spring, the beginning of the Jewish religious year. A great many Jews would be in Jerusalem from all parts of the world. The rulers of Rome had gotten progressively worse, and there was much unrest among the Jews. Hence, the action doubtless was meant to alleviate some of the unrest.

V. 4 - Just why Herod did not go ahead and kill Peter is anybody's guess - perhaps it was because he thought it might disrupt the religious rites which he pretended to observe. The precaution of assigning 16 men to guard him probably was taken because of Peter's previous escape (5:19) as well as the importance of Peter.

V. 5 - The church reacted in prayer, because of the seriousness of the situation. It is possible that they may have anticipated a growing persecution, as that over Stephen. It may have been true that most of the apostles were gone from Jerusalem - thus leadership was at a premium. Because of these or other reasons, prayer was made earnestly in Peter's behalf. Just how they prayed is difficult to say; either they did not expect his release the way it happened or some thing else unknown to us.

V. 7 - Regardless of the situation, Peter could find rest! The angel suddenly appeared though, and his sleeping was interrupted, while the guards lost not a bit of sleep, which will cost them their lives. Thus is the will of God: just, but sometimes not fathomed by mortals.

V. 8 - mantle - the outer garment - and valuable. The soldiers gambled for Jesus' inner garment, John 19.

V. 9 - a vision - as he had in chapter 10.

V. 10 - The Greek word that describes the opening of the prison doors is our “automatic” (of their own accord). Evidently two men were with Peter, while two others guarded the doors leading to his cell.

V. 11 - Note that Peter does not identify himself with the “Jewish” people. He knew that they, as a group, were against him. Having realized that God had indeed delivered him again from jail, he went to a place where he could doubtless expect a friendly reception.

V. 12 - Mark was better known than his mother. The Biblical information about him is found in the following texts (assuming the same person is in mind each time): 13:5-13; 15:37-41; Colossians 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon v. 24; I Peter 5:13. Church traditions have spoken of Mark and Peter as friends, and Mark was probably the author of the Gospel which is sometimes said to be a reflection of the gospel Peter preached.

V. 14 - Peter knocked at the outside gate that led to the house.

V. 15 - **You are mad** - Festus used the same word to describe Paul, 26:24. Those whose words were spoken in languages not understood would be said to be mad, I Cor. 14:23. Some affirmed this of Jesus, John 10:20. Hence, it accuses one of asserting what is unbelievable, untrue. So much is the case with Rhoda that they assert it is not Peter, but his angel - somewhat of an absurd idea in view of their prayers!?! Yet, even most Christians pray in somewhat the same manner: believing while doubting. Perhaps this state of affairs exists because we know that God may choose, rightly, not to answer our prayer, because He knows best, and the best is to say no.

We should consider the fact that the angels had played important parts in past times as God dealt with his people. It is interesting, though, that they think an angel would look and sound like Peter.

V. 17 - James was a leader in the Jerusalem church, Acts 15; Gal. 2. Other than the glimpse in ch. 15 and Gal. 2, Peter disappeared from our history. His two epistles, however, indicate that he continued to serve the church, both as an apostle and an elder, unto an old age. Whether he remained in or about Jerusalem is unknown except for the above texts. There is some indication in I Cor. 9:5 that he went on preaching tours (perhaps Gal. 2 is one of those times).

V. 18 - Herod probably believed that God had intervened, but figured that such a story would not be acceptable to the Jews, and thus put the blame on the men.

V. 19 - As before noted, the official residence of the Roman governors was Caesarea - it was also true of the Jewish hierarchy, though Herod generally made his home in Jerusalem, in an effort to be acceptable to the Jews. Note the common (and accurate) description of the relationship of cities to Jerusalem: Caesarea was “down” in elevation from Judea (i.e., Jerusalem).

V. 20 - Blastus was Herod's personal valet. Herod had no authority over Tyre and Sidon. They were commercially oriented cities, and so in need of the economic advantages that could be obtained through Herod. Hence, they made efforts to end the embargo imposed upon them.

V. 21 - The occasion seems to have been a festival in honor of the Emperor Claudius, whose birthday was being observed. Josephus says Herod wore a robe of silver tissue.

V. 22 - The reaction of the people (they kept saying it) was what most heathen people do. The only thing that was evidently wrong was that Herod knew better than to accept such praise. Josephus recorded the death of Herod, but attributes it to something other than God's righteous judgment (which, of course, he would not know about).

V. 24 - This is the third time that Luke reported the church's progress (6:7; 9:31) in relationship to some significant event. Perhaps a part of the reason for the growth was that the people, in general, knew what had happened with James and Peter, and that knowledge motivated them to turn to the Lord.

Back to Antioch, 12:25

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.

V. 25 - Having been sent with material aid from the Antioch brethren to those in Jerusalem who were affected by the famine (11:27-30), the two men, Saul and Joseph/Barnabas, returned from this service unto Antioch. Certainly it is an evidence of the care of brethren, many Gentiles among them, for other brethren not so fortunate. It is a good example to follow, and often a matter of scripture injunction, both O.T. and N.T. (as in Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22; Ruth 2:2-16; Matt. 12:1-8; Luke 6:38; Gal. 2:10; etc.). Paul will later bring another offering to the same people, Acts 21; Romans 15:29-31; II Cor. 8,9.

QUESTIONS

137. Herod Agrippa I died in the year A.D. 44 - how long was it after the events in Acts 2?

138. What season of the year is the feast of unleavened bread?

139. How many soldiers (in total) were to guard Peter?

140. Was Peter much different in his initial reaction to the coming of the Lord's angel than was Rhoda or those in Mary's house to Peter's appearance?
141. What supposed relationship existed between Peter and John Mark in later years?
142. Which James does Peter have in mind in v. 17?
143. For what reason(s) do you think Herod had the 16 men killed? (What would you have done in his place?)
144. Locate Tyre and Sidon. Why were they somewhat dependent upon Herod's favor?
145. Was it an uncommon thing in that day for people to worship men as gods? Is it today?
146. Why did Barnabas and Saul go to Jerusalem?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

1. Which one of the twelve original apostles was the first to experience death? How and why was he put to death?
2. Describe what happened to Peter as recorded in Chapter 12.
3. Discuss the background of Herod the king.

4. Who was Josephus?
5. What event marked the beginning of the Jewish religious year?
6. Why would Herod assign sixteen men to guard Peter?
7. Discuss several reasons why the church was praying for Peter.
8. What did the angel say to Peter? What was a mantle?
9. The Greek word that describes the opening of the prison doors is the same as our word “_____”.
10. Discuss the background of John Mark.
11. What was the name of the maid who opened the door for Peter?
12. If the church was praying for Peter, why would they assert that it was Peter’s angel at the door? Does this suggest unbelief on behalf of those who prayed for peter? Explain.
13. Identify the James named in Acts 12:17.
14. Is Acts 12:19 an accurate description of the geographical relationships of Jerusalem and Caesarea? Explain.
15. Who was Blastus?
16. Why did the people of Tyre and Sidon appeal to Herod for peace if he had no authority over their cities?

17. Describe the death of Herod and his basic sin.
18. Discuss the three times Luke reports the church's progress in relationship to some significant event (6:7; 9:31; 12:24).
19. Thought question: What is the meaning of the verse: "But the Word of God grew and multiplied".
20. Discuss several passages from the Old and New Testaments which teach the need to help others who are less fortunate.