

## **Acts 12**

### **V1-5**

Up to Acts 12, the church had been on a streak of success, experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the highly successful work among Gentiles (and Jews) in Antioch. But in Acts 12, persecution from Jews turned into state sponsored persecution.

**King Herod** - This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1-16). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:7-12). Historical records show that Herod Agrippa ruled over Judea from AD 41-44.

**James, the brother of John** put to the sword – an apostle within Jesus's inner circle.

Stephen was first among the Christians to be martyred. James was the first among the apostles to be martyred.

Even when persecution was rising there might have been a feeling that the apostles enjoyed a special divine protection. It shattered the illusion that the apostles had any protection greater than the rest of Christians. Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution (Matthew 10:16-26).

In Mark 10:35-40, John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be given special places. Jesus replied to them,

You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they could. Jesus promised them, You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized. This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

**Because he saw it pleased the Jews** – Herod turns into a murderer to gain approval.

There was a significant difference between the persecution from Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1-3) and from Herod. Saul, wrong as he was, persecuted out of sincere (though misguided) religious conviction; Herod persecuted out of purely political motives.

**Intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover** – alludes to Jesus's imprisonment and death during the same feast.

**Four squads of soldiers** – Peter seemed to have become a high value prisoner because Herod had a lot to gain from him and he had escaped from prison before.

**the church prayed fervently to God for him** – at the moment of crisis, this is all we can do, and that is all that is needed.

**Illus** – prayer requests during covid.

**V6-11**

Peter's miraculous release from prison

**V12-17**

Arrival at the home of Mary the mother of Mark. This is the house where they would always gather for prayer. An unbelievable happy surprise.

**Go tell it to James-** James, the brother of Jesus, who later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem

**V18-19**

Execution of the guards – that would be the punishment given to soldiers who failed in their duty to guard prisoners.

**V20-23**

The death of Herod – the megalomaniac. Herod and rulers of his ilk would often do things to please the Jews so that they would be in control of the people. Jews were often given to rebellion. To keep them loyal to the ruler, the ruler would often make displays of favors. Similarly, Pilate used to release a prisoner to please the Jews during his rule.

**V24-25**

Word of God continues to advance and gets more followers. Tyrants would come and go, but the Word of God advances and endures forever.

**Emphases**

1. God can enter into “closed spaces” and take people out of their “closed spaces.”  
We see that repeatedly, starting from the beginning post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to today.
2. Megalomania  
Herod can be seen as a megalomaniac. Today it is classified as a mental disorder. Think that oneself is more important than one really is. That is what drives them. They make life difficult for people around them. People prone to flattery can be manipulated by it.
3. God's sovereign ways  
James died whereas Peter was released. We don't know why. We cannot question why.
4. The powerful tyrant is destroyed whereas the persecuted Church thrives.  
Song of Mary - He has scattered those who are proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has exalted the humble.  
Luke 1:51,52

**Question:**

1. Why is the church persecuted today?