

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 12:11-25 | Session 32 | The Powerlessness of Kings

Peter had miraculously been sprung from the prison cell. James the apostle had just been *killed with the sword* by Herod, and seeing how much it pleased the people, Herod had Peter arrested and planned to put him to death after the *days of unleavened bread*, or the Passover. But God was not through with Peter yet.

Verse 11—

Led by the *angel of the Lord*, now outside the prison gate, Peter, thinking he was seeing a vision, **was come to himself**; we might use the phrase *he came to his senses*. He knew for certain it was the Lord's doing that he be **delivered...out of the hand of Herod, and from all expectation of the...Jews**. The **expectation** was he would be killed just as James had been.

Verse 12—

When he had considered, the Greek word carries the idea that he comprehended, or understood. In other words, he analyzed the situation and considered all the facts (something one must do who wants to *rightly divide the word of truth*). Even in the dark he finds his way **to the house of Mary**. It is late at night, or early morning and yet Peter knows that many people would be **gathered together praying**. Often people will say this is a *house church* and it may well have been (see vs 5), but for all we know, they just gathered there for this particular purpose. Nevertheless, house churches are more of the pattern we see in the New Testament (See Acts 20:20 for example). Mega-churches, or mega-assemblies appear to be broken up or split apart by God via persecution. This John is John Mark who is the cousin of Barnabas and whom we will read more about later in Acts.

Verses 13-16—

Have you ever prayed and then didn't recognize when the prayer was answered? God's grace often surprises us (Acts 9:26; 10:44; 11:18). **Peter knocked, Rhoda...opened not the gate...but** went and told those praying **how Peter stood before the gate**, and they responded **Thou art mad**. Only women are mentioned, but there are masculine plurals used, so men were most likely present. **Then said they, it is his angel**. What is meant by this is not clear. The word **angel** in Greek is *angelos* which really just means *messenger*, for example John the Baptist in Mark 1:2 is referred to as God's *messenger* (angelos). And maybe that is what they are thinking here; that a messenger has come to tell of Peter's fate. Although, there are a couple of references to *guardian angels* (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14). Peter is an escaped fugitive and he is left on the doorstep **knocking**.

Verse 17—

Homes in Jerusalem were in close proximity to each other. They may have had some privacy, but certainly the neighbors would notice people coming and going, or hear sounds coming from a large gathering. Many people would have been asleep, or since it was the last night of the festival, perhaps many homes were filled with people. But once the door was opened Peter, **beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace** (hand gestures are seen in other passages for one who is about to speak; Acts 13:16; 19:33; 21:40) began to tell them what had happened. It appears he didn't stay long as he gave them instructions to **shew** (report) **James and the brethren**. This James is the *Lord's brother* who is also called an apostle in Galatians 1:19. **The Brethren** may be the other apostles? Why Peter doesn't go himself is open for speculation, rather **he departed, and went into another place**.

Verse 18—

Morning has broken, the soldiers are awake and **there was no small stir, what was become of Peter!** It is clear that God had kept them asleep during the entire night leaving plenty of time for Peter to go to Mary's house and to go to *another place*. It is doubtful he is hiding out since we will see Peter again in chapter 15 with the

other apostles at the so-called Jerusalem Council. Additionally, he will live to write two epistles, 1st and 2nd Peter (usually dated around A.D. 60-66), sixteen years later.

Verse 19—

After the escape, **Herod sought for him, found him not, examined the keepers, and commanded they be put to death**, and apparently lost interest but instead went to the sea coast city of Caesarea. Herod, although a people pleaser, is filled with anger and arrogance. Throughout Scripture we read of God *bringing down the arrogance of kings*. Luke records Mary's announcement in his gospel (Luke 1:52) "*God hath put down the mighty from their seats...*" And as we will see in this passage, he is about to do the same with Herod Agrippa.

Verse 20—

Luke doesn't tell us, but for some reason Tyre and Sidon who were under Herod's dominion incurred his wrath. We remember there is a famine in the world and maybe they were dependent on Galilee for grain? Perhaps a delegation from these countries bribed Herod's personal servant in some fashion. Luke may have added this little bit of information to demonstrate how Herod's pompous attitude will be short lived.

Verse 21-23—

Herod arrayed in royal apparel...made an oration unto them. Herod's downfall was so extraordinary that the first century historian, Josephus (Antiquities 19.8.2) wrote about it.

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.

Verse 24—

But the word of God grew and multiplied. Even through the death of James, and the imprisonment and near death of Peter, the message of Jesus as Messiah continued. Again, there is still no mention of salvation by grace through faith.

Verse 25—

This section began with Barnabas and Saul taking money from Antioch to Jerusalem and it concludes with them returning to Antioch, but with another companion, **John, whose surname was Mark** (see verse 12).

The word of the Lord is about to spread from Judea, Samaria, and Antioch to Asia Minor, and we are about to see a transitional change in chapter 13, from the gospel of the kingdom to the individual gospel of grace.