

## Acts 12

1 This chapter returns again to the Peter story. The following chapter will pick back up with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch. The phrase "about this time", reminds us that this was when there was a great deal of persecution of Jews at the end of Caligula's reign. Herod Agrippa 1 used the turmoil of the time to lash out against the Christians. He was the son of a Hasmonean woman. His father Aristobulus was murdered by his own father Herod the Great. Agrippa grew up in Rome and because of his friendship with men that became emperor (Claudius and Caligula), he was granted the status of king. For three years (A.D. 41-44) he reigned over Judea, Galilee and Perea. He was an observant Jew. Josephus wrote that "He... kept himself entirely pure: nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice." Apparently he sided with the religious leaders in their animosity toward Jesus' followers. He thought he could squelch the movement by persecuting the leaders.

2 He first put to death James the son of Zebedee, who is usually mentioned second in the list of the Apostles. He was the first Apostle to be martyred. "With the sword" more than likely means beheaded. (Mark 10:35-39) Jesus words to James were fulfilled.

This is the last mention of John the Beloved in Acts. Tradition says that he went to Ephesus (capital of Asia Minor) where he stayed and wrote his letters and gospel, with the exception of his exile to the isle of Patmos.

3 The response he got from the Jews encouraged Agrippa to go a step further and arrest Peter. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was one of the most attended feasts and included Passover. Jerusalem would swell in population to almost a million people, ten times normal. The day after the Passover meal, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began and lasted for a week.

4 Agrippa must have known about the earlier jail break and so assigned tight security. Four squads of four soldiers each would watch the prisoner for three hours each. Water clocks marked off the hours so that no shift had to stay awake too long. Agrippa planned to bring Peter out after the feast ended and either have a mock trial or just execute him. It was about ten years earlier that the same had happened to Jesus.

5 Peter was securely held, BUT the church was praying. He was probably held in the Fortress of Antonia adjacent the Temple grounds. The fortress was impenetrable to man, but prayer doesn't rely on man.

6 -7 Why does God often do things at the last second? Peter was looking at James fate in just a few hours. Chained to two soldiers with two more at the

door, it's an angelic jailbreak deux. (Acts 5:18-20) The light of the angel fills the cell and he struck Peter on the side. The chains just drop off. Sounds like Peter was asleep. That's pretty peaceful for the night before you're about to lose your head! No wonder he could write 1Peter 5:7.

8-10 The angel escorted Peter passed the guards and down the street and vanished. How cool is that! One old manuscript mentions going down seven steps. We can't tell if this refers to the fortress of Antonia because it was completely leveled in 70AD. Why did the Lord spare Peter but not James? Should we be surprised or disappointed when God answers prayer other than the way we hope?

11 It took Peter awhile to realize it wasn't a dream. This time he isn't told to go preach. There's a time to stand and a time to flee. In 2:47 the people were favorable, but now people have been drawn into sides and many oppose the new movement.

12 This Mary, the mother of John Mark, is only mentioned here. She apparently had a large house where people had gathered to pray through the night for Peter. Peter must have received word that they were praying there. John Mark will be seen later in Acts. Luke tells us he is a cousin of Barnabas. (Colossians 4:10) He wrote the Gospel of Mark from the teaching of Peter.

13-14 Rhoda (rose) – the word for servant here can also mean a young woman. She's so shocked she runs back without opening the door.

15 Not a very believing prayer meeting! Were they praying for his release or for strength in his final hours? Jews believed an angel is assigned to each person and that that angel could take on the person's looks and speak in their voice. There is such a story in the apocryphal book of Tobit.

16-17 Peter keeps knocking until they finally let him in. He tells them to tell James, the brother of Jesus, who became a leader in the early church. We'll see him in the role of spokesman for the elders and apostles later in Acts. At first James did not believe his half brother was Messiah. (Mark 3:21) Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. (1Corinthians 15:7) and that is probably when he was convinced. The brothers of Jesus were in the upper room at Pentecost. (Acts 1:4) Peter is now on the run.

18 Imagine the guards waking up and seeing empty chains. There would still be an execution in the morning, but not Peter's.