

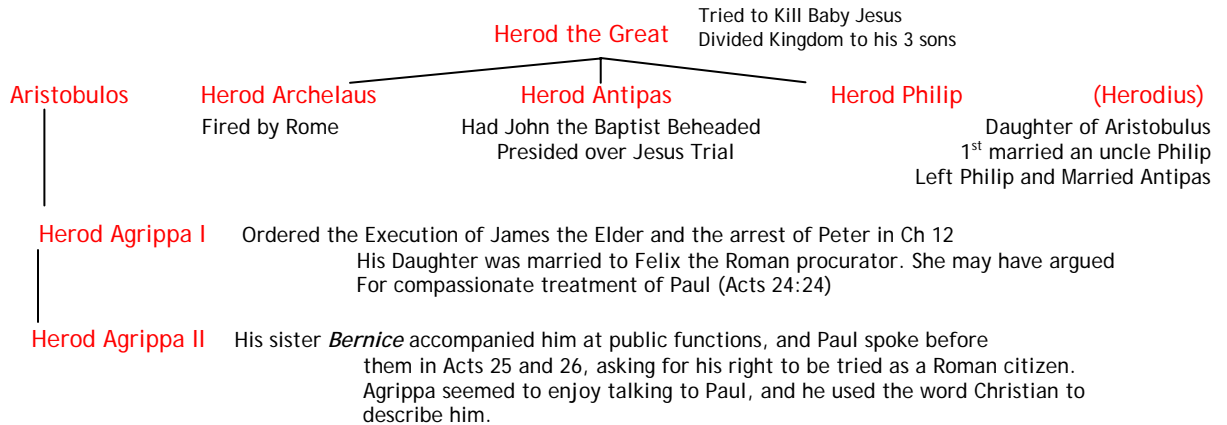
Persecution and a Praying Church

Acts Chapter 12

Act 12:1 1) An Execution and An Arrest vs 1 - 5

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

- Herod - This is Herod Agrippa I (family line from Abraham, Isaac and Esau [Idumeans / Edomites])



- Herod Agrippa I to steady the volatile area he decides to show his rule and govern this area by showing favor towards the Jews. Thus he persecutes the Christians.
 - He had James the Brother of John killed.
 - He had Peter arrested. Probably to suffer the same outcome.

Act 12:2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Act 12:3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

James was put to death. (James was one of the inner circle. The big 3. Peter, James and John)

- Matthew 20:20-23 "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping [him], and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but [it shall be given to them] for whom it is prepared of my Father."
- This doesn't make sense to human thinking. Why would this guy die young? Surely God could have used him in a great way with all his special personal experiences with the Lord.
- Isaiah 55:8+9 "For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
- Psalm 115:3 "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased"
- Romans 9:21 "does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"
- Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who says that the soldier who guarded James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was willingly executed for Jesus along side of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

Peter's arrest was political. To please the Jews.

Up to this time the persecution against the church was from religious leaders. Now it has changed and is from the political or governmental leaders.

Act 12:4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

- Normally one guard is enough but Peter had previously escaped from prison (Acts 5:17)
- A squad is four soldiers. Herod put in charge over him 4 sets of 4 that rotate throughout 24 hours.
- There may have been a delay until after the Passover for fear of a riot from all the Jews who have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Possibly, Herod also wanted full attention on Peter's execution. Not distracted by the Passover so Herod can please the Jews again.

Act 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

- Notice the contrast - Herod has killed James, arrested Peter & has authority and power, soldiers, prisons and swords.
The Christians have prayer
- Prayer was fervently (KJV=constant) GK = *ektenos* "stretched out"
- "The verb *ektenos* is related to *ektenes*, a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits." (MacArthur)
- James 5:16 "pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
- Luke 22:44 "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Same word earnestly = *ektenes*

• What Pray is and isn't

ISN'T	IS
Magical Incantation	Thanksgiving, Petition, Intercession
Like Communication between 2 people	Unique Communication with God
Briefing for God to become aware of our needs	Making our requests known (Phil 4:6)
Demands from Covenant Enforcers	Approached Humbly knowing Prayer is a Grace
The source of Power	Speaking to the Power Source Himself
Rote Formula or a Repetition	From the Heart or the Spirit
Always Heard (Prov 28:9; Is 1:15)	Commanded (Ps 32:6; 1 Thes 5:17; 1 Tim 2:1)

God has ordained prayer as a means by which He accomplishes His eternal purposes.

Act 12:6 2) A Miraculous Deliverance vs 6 - 11

On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

- Sleeping in Prison What contentment in his troubled circumstances
- Notice that there are guards here. Two at the door and two chained to Peter. And yet what God does isn't delayed, deterred or derailed by the strength of the obstacle. It is as if the guards were not even there. In fact, the guards do not even see, hear or feel the miracle taking place right beside them.
- John 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."
- John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."
- Mark 4:37+38 "And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still?"
- Phil 4:7 "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
- Psalm 23 "The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [art] with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."
- The very night - God is never late, never early He is right on time.

- Act 12:7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.
- Act 12:8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he *said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."
- Four guards were guarding this Christian. Four guards to prevent him from the plan of God.
 - Herod = Satan / World
 - Four Guards
 1. Handcuffed to Fear
 2. Handcuffed to Discouragement
 3. At the Gate Habit
 4. At the Gate Aimlessness
 - An angel of the Lord appears (This again is a picture of our need for responsiveness. If Peter wasn't responsive he would probably have stayed in prison and executed the next day.)
 - The Angel Lightens Up the room and nudges Peter awake
 - Peter needed to Get up (no matter how groggy or unsure he was)
 - The Angel loosens chains and tells Peter to get dressed
 - Peter Puts his shoes on (the gospel of peace) and his coat (righteousness)
 - The Angel leads Peter out
 - Peter Follows
- Act 12:9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.
- Peter seems to not be in total awareness. The angel needs to help him with simple things such as getting dressed.
 - Peter thinks this is one cool vision. Perhaps it is from God that tomorrow this may happen.
- Act 12:10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.
- Act 12:11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."
- The angel leads him past the guards out the gate down the street and when Peter can handle the rest the angel departs.
 - Matthew Henry said "*Miracles are not to be expected when ordinary means are to be used.*"
 - "Peter came to himself" - What ever daze was over him was lifted and he glorified in what God had done.
 - The Lord rescued Peter, Yet the same Lord allowed the same King to kill James.
 - "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" 2 Corinthians 5:8
 - James is not complaining
 - Peter should complain. But no. He still has things to do.
 - You and I, each morning when we open our eyes and take a breath and realize the Lord has kept us here one more day, should realize also that He still has something for us to do.

Act 12:12 **3) An Unbelievable Prayer Meeting** vs 12 - 17

And when he realized {this,} he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

- Many of the believers were gathered together and praying. While "MANY WERE GATHERED" at a prayer meeting is not quite the results our modern churches experience this isn't why this was an Unbelievable Prayer Meeting.
- Matt 18:19-20 "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."
- 2 Chron 20:4 When Moab and Ammon came against Jehosaphat "And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask [help] of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD."
- Esther 4:16-17 Esther asked Mordecai to: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in

Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which [is] not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him."

- It is true that during troubling times in the church prayer becomes a higher priority and prayer meetings have better attendance.

Act 12:13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Act 12:14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

Act 12:15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

- The Jews believed in guardian angels and that they could take on characteristics of the person they were assigned to. Therefore they said that it was Peter's angel at the gate.
- Two things make this Prayer Meeting Unbelievable
 - **Their Unbelief** - They came to pray for Peter. James was killed. Peter also now facing the same end. They came to petition deliverance. But when the answer is right before them they do not believe it or rejoice in answered prayer.
 - **Their Squabbling** - Those inside argued with Rhoda that Peter couldn't have been delivered. They finally settled in their unbelief that it was his angel.

Act 12:16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened {the door,} they saw him and were amazed.

- Peter keeps knocking and they finally all together go and see who it is.
- Amazing -- God Answers Prayer Even when the prayERS are not perfect.

Act 12:17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

- Peter tells the account, Tells them to tell James and the brethren and he (Peter) took off.
- Peter is only mentioned one more time in the book of Acts but not again as a major character in the account. Acts 15 during the Jerusalem Council where Paul and Barnabas had to explain and receive clarification concerning circumstances and the Gentiles, Peter stood up and said "Why test God by putting a yoke on the gentiles that we and our fathers couldn't bear."

Act 12:18 **4) A King Deposed** vs 18 - 25

Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers {as to} what could have become of Peter.

- The soldiers are now in trouble. After an interrogation Herod had the soldiers put to death.
- This was the responsibility of the soldiers and paying the penalty of the prisoner was their penalty for not fulfilling their duty.

Act 12:19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away {to execution.} Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

- Herod heard of Jesus from the people: Heard that Peter had escaped from prison before supposedly from the Hand of God; He places Peter under guard; Hears again of a miraculous deliverance again; He does not believe in Jesus Christ.
- Many people say if I could only see a miracle I would believe. This doesn't really happen.
- Herod enjoyed his role as ruler and can not give ground to any other.

Act 12:20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country.

- Politics
 - Herod angered with people of Tyre & Sidon
 - The people befriend one of Herod's officials Blastus
 - The people through Blastus requested an audience with Herod
 - They wanted peace because they wanted food.

Act 12:21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and {began} delivering an address to them.

Act 12:22 The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"

- Herod dresses up, Takes his throne and speaks.
- The people pander to him and call him a god.
- Ezek 28:2-10 " *Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because your heart is lifted up And you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods In the heart of the seas'; Yet you are a man and not God, Although you make your heart like the heart of God-- Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; There is no secret that is a match for you. "By your wisdom and understanding You have acquired riches for yourself And have acquired gold and silver for your treasuries. "By your great wisdom, by your trade You have increased your riches And your heart is lifted up because of your riches-- Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have made your heart Like the heart of God, Therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you, The most ruthless of the nations. And they will draw their swords Against the beauty of your wisdom And defile your splendor. 'They will bring you down to the pit, And you will die the death of those who are slain In the heart of the seas. 'Will you still say, "I am a god," In the presence of your slayer, Though you are a man and not God, In the hands of those who wound you? 'You will die the death of the uncircumcised By the hand of strangers, For I have spoken!' declares the Lord GOD!'"*

Act 12:23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.

- The angel of the Lord Struck him. Not like he struck Peter. But struck him dead.
- Herod was eaten by worms. WHY?
Because he did not give God the Glory. It was the WORM OF PRIDE
- Job 40:12 " *Look on everyone who is proud, {and} humble him, And tread down the wicked where they stand.*"
- Mark 9:43-48 " *If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED."*
- Fighting against God - History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done.
 - Friedrich Nietzsche was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition.
 - Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel prize for literature, and fought against God in his book *Elmer Gantry*. The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome.
 - Writer Ernest Hemingway lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences - until he blew his head off with a shotgun.
 - Fighting against God just doesn't work. (Guzik)

Act 12:24 But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

- BUT - the Word of the Lord grew and multiplied.

Act 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with {them} John, who was also called Mark.

- A segue for the next chapter.

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