



An Amazing Jail Break! Acts 12:1-25 (Lesson #18)



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Outline Acts Chapter 12:

- 1) Herod begins to persecute the church and has James killed with the sword (12:1-2).
- 2) Herod sees that killing James pleased many Jews, so he has Peter arrested and plans to publicly execute him following the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:3-45).
- 3) Although Peter is in jail, the church is earnestly praying for him (12:5).
- 4) On the final evening when Herod planned to bring Peter out the next morning, God sent an angel to break Peter out of jail (12:6-10).
- 5) Once on the streets of Jerusalem, the angel left, Peter came to himself, and proceeded to Mary's home (12:11-12).
- 6) Peter knocked on the gate at Mary's home and Rhoda realized it was him but failed to let him in, instead going to tell the others who had been praying that Peter was at the gate (12:13-14).
- 7) Those in the house accused Rhoda of being "out of her mind" but when she kept insisting, they told her it was likely Peter's angel (12:15).
- 8) Peter kept knocking on the gate and finally they open the gate, saw him, and they were all amazed (12:16).
- 9) Peter then walked them through all that had happened at the jail and directed them to tell James and the other brothers (12:17).
- 10) At day break the whole jail was disturbed over what had happened with Peter (12:18).
- 11) Herod ordered a search, interrogated the soldiers, ultimately had them executed, and then departed for Caesarea (12:19).
- 12) Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; the people were able to secure a meeting with Herod and during the meeting they shouted the "the voice of a god and not a man" (12:20-22).
- 13) Immediately an angel of the Lord struck Herod down, because he did not give God the glory (12:23).
- 14) But, the word of God continued to multiply and Barnabas and Saul completed their trip to bring aid to the residents of Judea and brought back with the John Mark (12:24-25).

Vs 1 - About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

About the time that the church in Antioch purposed in its heart to send aid to Jerusalem, about one year after Saul and Barnabas had been preaching in Antioch and Agabus came up from Jerusalem. About that time, Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

When we read "Herod" it requires a little explanation.

The first Herod that we come in contact with in the Scriptures is Herod the Great. Herod the Great ruled from Judea from 47BC – 37BC. Then having been dubbed "king of the Jews" by Antony Octavious and the Roman Senate, he ruled over Palestine **from 37 BC until his death shortly after the birth of the Messiah (Mat 2:15).**

He is the Herod, who order the slaughter of all the infants around Bethlehem in 2BC (Matt 2:16-18).

The next Herod we run into in the Scriptures is Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas reigned following his father (Herod the Great's death) until 39 AD. He is the Herod who married his brother Phillip's wife, he is the Herod who when Herodias danced before him, he gave a pledge of anything she wanted and she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter, He is the Herod who Pilate sent Jesus to during his mock trial and ultimate crucifixion. That was Herod Antipas.

The Herod we are reading about here is Herod Agrippa I, he was the grandson of Herod the Great and one of the sons of **Aristobolus**. So, this is **Herod Agrippa I**.

Agrippa I was always on shaky ground with the Jews and the Romans. He was ultimately the ruled over northern Palestine (Luke 3:1) which included Judea and Samaria. Because of his very tenuous relationship with Rome, he labored very hard to stay on good ground with the Jews which he ruled over.

To continue to win favor with the Jews, Herod Agrippa I, began to persecute the church.

Vs 2-3 - 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.

What started as persecution against the church shifted to persecution against the apostles and Herod Agrippa I, killed James the brother of John (one of the sons of thunder).

History indicates that Herod Agrippa killed James in AD 44. This means he likely died right around the time that Saul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch, and it may have been the exact time they carried the financial gift to Judea. Herod, killed James with the sword.

Three things:

- 1) As Stephen was the first recorded martyr of the church, James, the brother of John, one of the sons of thunder becomes the **first recorded apostle to be martyred**.
- 2) History tells us that all of the apostles were martyred with the exception of John (James' brother) who was exiled on Patmos and died of natural causes.
- 3) It is also noteworthy that the only apostle whose death is recorded in the Scriptures is James.

Then the insecure Herod Agrippa I, saw that killing the apostle James pleased many of the Jews he arrested Peter also.

So, for purely political reasons, this wicked king killed James. Peter, James and John were the inner circle. They were the closest of the twelve and here Agrippa I, kills one of the apostles, and in fact one of the inner three.

Now we saw the first recorded martyr was Stephen the Deacon, but here we see recorded that Herod kills the one of the apostles, the first one to be martyred, James.

We can only imagine how this impacted the believers in Jerusalem. At this point we are told that this occurred the **days of Unleavened Bread**.

Vs 4 - And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

Herod, seeing how this pleased the Jews. Herod had Peter arrested, and he put him in prison, turning him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him. A squad of soldiers contains four soldiers, So Herod turned Peter over to 16 soldiers as if he were a notorious criminal.

As best we can tell the soldiers were in a four-person rotation. Two were chained to Peter and two were outside the door, creating this four-person rotation. But Herod assigned 16 soldiers in all to guard and keep Peter.

Herod was treating Peter like he was a dangerous criminal or a dangerous terrorist. Why in the world so much security for a preacher of the gospel? We cannot be sure, but I do wonder if Herod heard about what had happened the last time Peter was arrested (Acts 5:17-20). We are not sure why, put Peter was in a "maximum security" prison.

And then Luke tells us that Herod intended to bring Peter out to the people after the Passover.

When Luke mentions the Passover here he is referring to the entire festival that begins with the Passover and includes the week-long celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

But the implication is that Herod intended to execute Peter in a very public fashion.

Vs 5 - So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Peter was kept, locked up in prison. The Greek verb translated “kept” is in the imperfect tense. It means Peter was continuously kept; he was continually guarded.

BUT... It is times like this when I love the conjunction **but**, for it means God is about to do something. Peter is locked up, under four squads of soldiers, **BUT**.

But **earnest prayer** was made for him. The Greek word employed here is **ἐκτενής (ektenes)**. It literally means “**stretched out**” to the greatest extent. This word is used twice in the New Testament. Here and (I Pet 4:8).

Herod had Peter locked up, but the church was stretched out in prayer for Peter.

APPLICATION: Thank you, for your stretched out prayers for me. I had a little surprising super serious medical issue occur, and thank you for your stretched out prayers on my behalf.

Pastor David Guzik said this: **“Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness.”**

My brothers and sisters, may we be men and women with a stretched-out prayer life.

Vs 6 - Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

On the very evening, the final day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which ended at sunset, when it appears Herod planned to bring Peter out the next morning, **on that very night**, Peter was locked up in prison, sleeping between two soldiers who it appears were also sleeping, he was bound by two chains to these two soldiers, and there were sentries guarding the door.

PAUSE: This is shocking the amount of security forces Herod has tied up with Peter. But with awake guards outside the cell Peter was chained to two guards in the cell and he is sleeping.

APPLICATION: It is only knowing the Lord that can allow a man to sleep the night before his execution. It is only knowing the Lord that helps us be relaxed when our world is crumbling around us, Peter is hours away from being killed and he is sleeping.

If you are not there, you can be there. First, by placing faith in the Lord Jesus. If you have never done that, I would encourage you to do that now. Secondly, if you are a believer I would remind you of words from Peter, recorded in (I Peter 5:17) where Peter tells us **to cast all our care upon the Lord, for He cares for us!**

That is good advice from a man who no doubt practiced it!

Vs 7 - And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Behold... An angel of the Lord, stood next to him. And a light shone in the cell. We would imagine that this is the Shekinah glory of God in the cell, but notice please, **even the bright light does not wake our brother!**

This angel of the Lord, struck Peter, on this side and woke him. Peter was sleeping so soundly that it took the angel to poke and to prod him to wake up. Then the angel said to him: **“Get up quickly.”** As Peter rose, it appears that the chains fell off his hands!

APPLICATION: Did I tell you that God can change things on a dime? Peter was hours away from a mock trial and certain death and God sends an angel to spring him from prison. **You situation may be dire, but remember, nothing is impossible with God!**

Vs 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 cloak around you and follow me."

Then the angel without waking the two guards who were chained to Peter (this is likely supernatural too) tells Peter: **"Dress yourself and put on your sandals."** Peter was likely stripped to his undergarments. The angel directs him to get dressed and put on his shoes.

Peter did so, then the angel said **"wrap yourself in your cloak and follow me."**

I would have imagined the angle would tell Peter - grab you junk and let's run. Here the angle methodically directs Peter. Although this is a jail break it looks like a slow-motion jail break.

Notice the final directions, wrap yourself in your cloak and follow me. It is imperfect in the Greek, the angel said follow, and keep following me.

Vs 9 - And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

Peter began to follow the angel, but he imagined this was **some type of dream** or he was **seeing a vision**. Peter was essentially sleep walking through the whole event.

The word vision here is the same Greek word we have seen a number of times here in the book of Acts (Ananias, Saul, Cornelius and Peter on the rooftop). Here, that same Peter believes he is having another vision.

OBSERVATION: Clearly these visions that people have been having were very life like!

Vs 10 - When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

When they had passed the first and second guard... It appears they walked through the door of the cell (first guard). It then appears they walked through the door of the prison (Second guard).

Then they came to an iron gate that leads into the city of Jerusalem. It was the iron gate, this was likely a well-known gate, but then they came to the iron gate...

Here is yet another impossible obstacle. The iron gate, who will open the iron gate? But then we are told that the gate opened on its own accord. The Greek word here is **αὐτόματος (utomatos)** it is where we get the English word automatic. The iron gate opened automatically. **I wonder if the angle had like a garage door clicker!** ☺

They went out, Peter following the angel, and they went along the street, and once there on a street in Jerusalem, **IMMEDIATELY** the angel left Peter. The angel having sprung Peter out of prison (supernaturally) the angel having passed through multiple doors to get Peter out of prison, the angel gets Peter on a street in Jerusalem and immediately vanishes.

CONSIDER WITH ME HOW DIRE THE SITUATION: Peter was locked in Prison and scheduled to die the next day, not a problem, chained between two soldiers, not a problem, with additional guards standing outside the door, not a problem, and do not forget the iron gate, not a problem for God! Do we get it, these seemingly impossible obstacles are nothing for the Sovereign God of the Universe!

Vs 11 - When Peter came to himself, he 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."

Then Peter came to himself, he realized this was not a dream and it was not a vision. It was real and he was standing on a street in Jerusalem, having been led here by the hand by an angel.

When he came to himself, he said: I am sure that the Lord Jesus, has sent his angel to rescue me from the hand of Herod, and from what many Jews intended to do with me.

I wonder if Peter was amazed that he was delivered while James was executed. Is Peter asking... Why me?

OK, the text has been pretty heavy! It is going to lighten up some!

Vs 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.

So once Peter realizes that he has been sprung he proceeds to the house of Mary, who is the mother of John who is also called Mark. There are many women named Mary or Mariam in the New Testament, this is Mary the mother of John, who is also called Mark.

SO YOU KNOW: John Mark was also the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10). We will talk more about John Mark in the coming weeks. He is a minor player in the book of Acts, but a major player in Church history as he is the author of the Gospel according to Mark.

Scholars believe he was a follower and associate of the apostle Peter. As this story unfolds you will see how their lives were likely intertwined. In I Peter 5:13, Peter refers to John Mark as his son, which most believe means that Peter was the one who lead John Mark to the Lord.

We meet John Mark today, but he will come back around to him on both the first and second missionary journeys.

At Mary's home, **many** were gathered praying. Now there is likely some backstory here that would explain, why when Peter is broken out of jail, he goes to Mary's house and why there are many people there praying.

Some scholars believe this was a house church and possibly Peter was the Pastor or Sheppard of this house church. This makes sense considering what we know about John Mark.

We do not know everything for sure, but we know That when Peter was busted out of jail he went to Mary's house, who was the mother of John Mark, and we also know that at Mary's house there were **many** people there praying for Peter.

At Mary's home, many believers were gathered there and were having a **late-night prayer meeting** for Peter.

Did I tell you God still answers prayer? **Even amazing prayers!**

Vs 13 - And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.

Peter, recently sprang from prison goes to Mary's house, where a prayer meeting is going on. He arrives at the gate and begins to knock on the gate and a servant girl named Rhoda comes to answer. **Her name means Rose.**

Rose arrived at the gate where Peter is knocking. He is knocking on the iron gate that likely leads to the courtyard at Mary's home.

Vs 14 - Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.

Upon arrival at the gate, we can imagine Peter says something like, hey Rhoda, please let me in.

She recognizes Peter's voice, and she is filled with **great joy!** Of course, she is, they have likely been praying for Peter, who is locked up in prison, and **here he is!**

You will love this part, **filled with joy, she does not open the gate, but instead runs back into the house, declaring that Peter is standing at the gate.**

This makes me laugh. I picture her as a teenager, let's say 13 or so and she is overcome with joy and surprise, and rather than open the door, she runs back to the house and tells everyone in the prayer meeting, **you are not going to believe this but Peter is here at the gate!**

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

Then the group of **amazing, faith filled, prayer warriors** that has likely been praying specifically for Peter, this group of amazing prayer warriors, upon hearing that God had stepped into their world and with amazing power delivered Peter from the maximum-security prison said: **"Rhoda, we love you girl, but you are out of your mind."**

Isn't it funny how our **weak faith** can **expose itself**? I suspect they have been **praying for Peter**, for the entire week, remember (Acts 12:5). These prayer warriors looked at Rhoda and said girl, you are out of your mind. But she kept insisting that it was Peter at the gate.

Then they, the prayer warriors shifted to OK, it must be his angel. Some scholars say at this time many Jews believed that guardian angels the form of the person whom they served as guardian.

So, these prayer warriors have accepted that someone is at the gate, but it must be his angel!

Now I have no idea what they meant here, that Peter's angel would be knocking on the door and that would be their response to Rhoda's continued insistence that Peter was at the door.

Although they were praying, they were not ready for the answer.

Vs 16 - But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.

While the debate is going on in the house as to who is actually at the door, Peter keeps knocking on the door.

You can imagine, he is likely now knocking with a **fevered pitch** wondering what in the world is going on!

Let's be honest, Peter was just broken out of a maximum-security prison and standing on the streets of Jerusalem banging on a gate to a house, is probably a somewhat dangerous position to be in.

Finally, they open the door and low and behold it is Peter and Luke tells us that they were **amazed**, they were **astounded**, they were **astonished**, they were **beside themselves**. The last time we saw this word was in reference to Cornelius when the Holy Spirit fell (Acts 10:45).

APPLICATION: There are so many relevant points of application here. But here is what I pray, I pray that **God amazes some of us this week with answered prayers!**

Vs 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 these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

Once inside, you can imagine the joy, excitement, chaos, back slapping, praising God, worshipping God, just simple hallelujah celebration that breaks out. But Peter motions with his hand to be silent.

He then describes to them, how the **Lord had brought him out**. He walked them through the whole story starting with him in prison and asleep, all the way to now.

OK, so that you see it. We read clearly it was an angel of the Lord, but here Peter says the Lord brought him out. Does Peter mean that angel was the Lord Himself or does Peter mean that angel was directed by the Lord to spring Peter?

We are certain, at a minimum, that the Lord is the one who at least, sent his angel and brought Peter out of prison. And we should be certain of this additional fact, that the church was praying for this and the God who answers prayers, answered an impossible one here!

Then Peter said: *"Tell these things to James and to the brothers."* This cannot be James the apostle the brother of John, for he has been martyred. This is **James, the Lord's half-brother** who had become **the leading elder, or leading pastor of the church in Jerusalem**. We will see him again in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem council. James (the Lord's half-brother) is also **the author of the book of James**.

Then Peter departed and went to another place. Much has been speculated about this other place.

SO YOU KNOW: We will only see Peter once more in the book of Acts, when he shows up again at the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). It appears he spent some time in Corinth (I Cor 1:10-12) and some time in Antioch (Gal 2), it appears some time in Asia Minor (I Pet 1:1) and some time in Babylon (I Pet 5:13). But he will only show up in Acts one additional time.

Vs 18 - Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.

Morning broke, and according to Luke, **there was no little disturbance!** That is code for there was a big disturbance down at the jail!

You can imagine the guards launched a major search in an attempt to locate Peter. We can imagine the entire jail is in a tizzy over what happened to the preacher!

Vs 19 - And after Herod searched for him and did 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 spent time there.

Once word made it to Herod, Herod ordered a search for Peter, I would love to have been there to see what that looked like. They searched, but they did not find him.

Then Herod examined the sentries (the guards). The Greek word translated "examined" means to sift up and down, Herod thoroughly questioned the soldiers.

We can imagine that Herod interviewed the guards who were in the cell with Peter, he interviewed the guards that were outside the cell. The first and second guards that the Angel of the Lord led Peter by.

Upon examining them, upon interrogating them, Herod ordered that they be put to death. From Herod's perspective at best these guards were totally incompetent, and at worst they had colluded with this Galilean fisherman and his friends to spring Peter from jail.

This is sad, but it reminds us that madmen can and often do turn against those helping them. That is what happened here.

The Herod went down to Caesarea and spent some time there. We are not told why, but as we have discussed it was the political capital and the Roman headquarters of Judea.

Vs 20 - Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Here Luke provides us with some additional details about other things that are going on with Herod. Herod had become angry with people from Tyre and Sidon.

Now Tyre and Sidon were cities on the Phoenician coasts, they belonged to Syria and were free cities under Roman control. Thus, they were not part of Herod Agrippa's territory. They were outside Herod's control.

Obviously having Herod angry with you can be detrimental to your well-being, especially if your country depends on his country to food as the case (mainly grain).

So, the people persuaded Blastus (likely through a bribe) who was the king's chamberlain, for an audience with King Herod Agrippa I. They were given the audience with Herod.

Vs 21 - On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.

They appointed day came, and Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on his throne and delivered an oration.

Vs 22 - And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

The people were shouting Herod you are a god, we bow to you, from you we hear not the voice of a man, but the voice of a god. They are lathering up Herod, they are courting his favor, they are kissing up to the king. After all they need his support, their ultimate livelihood depends on it.

Josephus, the captured Jewish General who really became a Roman Historian, wrote a great deal from this timeframe.

Vs 23 - Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

Immediately, instantly an angel of the Lord struck him down. We do not know how Luke knows that an angel of the Lord did it, but that is what he tells us.

Because rather than giving glory to God, he allowed the people to declare that he was a god. He reveled in being glorified as a god and God, the true and living God struck him down for he did not give glory to God.

Then we are told how the angel of the Lord did it. He was eaten by worms... YIKES!

The word translated worms is **σκωληκόβρωτος (skolekobrotos)** is a hapax legomenon in that it is only used here in the entire New Testament. **Robertson** notes this was an intestinal worm and Herodotus describes these worms as living in the intestinal in swarms. Agrippa died of **swarming intestinal worms**.

Vs 24 - But the word of God increased and multiplied.

The Luke tells us the word of God increased and it multiplied.

Herod had a prison, he had swords, he had soldiers, he had some amazing weapons. But he could not fight against God and win. No one can. In fact, history is littered with men who thought they would fight against God and come out victorious. All suffered the same fate. Fighting against God is a fool's errand, fighting against God will ultimately end in destruction.

Herod had all the weapons of the world were easily overthrown by God. Meanwhile the word of God, like the church increased and multiplied. All of this is going on and the church is growing larger and stronger through every event!

Vs 25 - And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Saul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem having completed carrying the gift that the Gentile church in Antioch put together, and they brought with them a young man named Mark.