



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS- LESSON 12

Acts 12 is a chapter that gives us a glimpse of God's incredible power! No matter how impossible the situation, God has the power and ability to overcome it. No matter how hard the enemy tries to come against God's plans, God is still in control! He is truly the God of the Heavens and the earth. We agree with David when he says in Psalm 47:2, "For the Lord Most High is awesome, He is a great King over all the earth!" David also says that He is a God who "does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

We begin today's lesson in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa I enters the scene to add to the persecution of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

First Day

1. Read Acts 12:1-25 in one sitting. **What does the text say?** As you read, answer the questions who, what, where, when, why, and how. List any other facts or information that you find interesting in the text.
2. What do you think is the key verse in this chapter?
3. Who are the main characters?
4. Reread Acts 12:1-4. Who is doing the persecuting?

Who is Herod?

It's important to understand who this Herod is. Herod is not a personal name, but rather a family, or surname. It belonged to all the generations of the Herodian house. All the descendants of Herod the Great, down to the 4th generation who were identified with the government of Palestine and are mentioned in the New Testament, are known in history by the surname Herod. Listed below are the Herods in Chronological order:

- a. **Herod the Great:** He was the Herod of Matthew 2, who was in power when Jesus was born, and wanted to kill all the children born in Bethlehem. He married 10 times.
- b. **Herod Archelaus:** He is the eldest of Herod the Great's three sons. He is mentioned in Matthew 2:22. He was a ruler of Judaea, Samaria, and Idumaea. He was an extremely bad ruler.
- c. **Herod Antipas:** He was the ruler of Galilee and Paraea and was the second husband of Herodias. He was the one who consented to the death of John the Baptist. He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial (Luke 23:7).
- d. **Herod Philip I:** He was the first husband of Herodias who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He is mentioned under the name of Philip in Matthew 14:3, Mark 6:17, and Luke 3:19. He was excluded from all government rights on account of the supposed treachery on the part of his mother toward her husband. He is the father of Salome.
- e. **Herod Philip II:** In the New Testament, he is called Philip and is mentioned in Luke 3:1. He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi and was a ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis. He married Salome.
- f. **Herod Agrippa I:** This was the grandson of Herod the Great, and the Herod we read about in Acts 12. Agrippa was brought up and educated in Rome. He served under the emperor Caligula. Agrippa asked to leave the emperor and take possession of the kingdom in Palestine. He was the only Herod who had royalty bestowed upon him and governed all of Palestine, since the death of his grandfather.

Herod was very eager to please his Jewish subjects. Being considered a "half-Jew," he was constantly trying to win their approval. For this reason, he begins to persecute the Christian community, beginning with the death of James. Acts 12:1-3 tells us that Herod stretched out his hand to vex (maltreat or exasperate) the church. Seeing that the killing of James pleased the Jews, he then sought Peter.

g. Herod Agrippa II: This is the son of Agrippa I. In Scripture, his dad is usually referred to as Herod, or Herod the King, while the son is called either Agrippa, or King Agrippa (Acts 25:26, Acts 26:27,28). This is the Herod that Paul addressed in his memorable defense in Caesarea.

5. Why did it please the Jews to kill James? (Acts 12:3)

6. Who was the father of James and John, and what was their occupation before coming to Christ? (Matthew 4:21)

7. What did Jesus say about James and John in Mark 10:35-40?

James was the first of the Twelve Apostles to be martyred. His death is also the only one of the twelve recorded in the New Testament (excluding Judas Iscariot).

8. Why was Herod waiting to bring Peter before the people? (vs 4)

The Feast of Passover was followed immediately by the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. No leaven could be used all week. Sometimes both celebrations were grouped under the single name Passover. (Luke 22:1, for example. You can read Exodus 12:1-20 for more information on Passover.) According to Jewish law, no trial or execution could be carried out during this time.

Acts 12:4 says that four squads of soldiers were guarding Peter. In one squad, there were four soldiers.

9. Our math question for the day: How many soldiers total were guarding Peter? (Some think they guarded all at once; others think they took shifts.)

10. Why do you think they were being so careful? (Read Acts 5:17-25)

This ends our lesson for today. A lot of reading, but vital to understand our text. Tomorrow we will witness God's power in releasing Peter again from prison ... I can't wait!

Memory Verse of the Week: "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." Acts 12:5

Second Day

Review this week's memory verse.

Today we will be concentrating on one verse. It is the key verse, as well as our memory verse of the week.

1. Read Acts 12:1-5.
2. What was the church doing while Peter was in prison? Were they scheming or plotting how to get Peter out?

We find the word "**but**" in verse 5. "**Buts**" in the Bible are worth noting. They almost always denote some kind of change. It is a transitional word.

As believers, it's an exciting thing to know that no matter how desperate our situation, there's always a "**but**."

3. Read Luke 22:31-32. What "**but**" does Jesus give Peter?
4. Read Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25. Does Jesus give us the same "**but**"? According to these verses, what is Jesus doing for us? How does that comfort you?

When Peter was in trouble, his friends used the only weapon they had -- prayer. They could have tried to do something on their own, but they knew that God was their only hope. The faith that the early church had is evident from verses like this.

The word "**constant**" in verse 5 is from the word "ektenes" which means fervent, or earnest. It also suggests that the prayers were continuous. Peter was probably in prison for about one week, in which they literally "prayed without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Oftentimes prayer is on the bottom of our priority list, practiced as a last resort when we can't think of anything else to do. In reality, prayer should be our first response to any of our problems.

Let's ask the Lord to search our hearts as we respond to the next few questions. We need to be honest with ourselves and with God, who knows our hearts anyway.

5. How diligent are you to pray and intercede for your friends? Are you faithful to pray for others when they are in need, or do you forget?

6. Do you pray more for yourself or for others?

7. How much time do you spend praying for your friends? Notice this week the amount of time, and with what intensity, you pray for them.

8. Paul was constantly praying for the brethren. Read Philippians 1:1-11 and Colossians 1:9-14 for examples of his prayers. How do these verses encourage you in your prayers for your friends? What kinds of things does he pray for?

9. Does your prayer time include a time of **A**doration, **C**onfession and **T**hanksgiving, along with the **S**upplications? What changes do you need to make in your prayer life?

10. Are you in a "situation" right now? Have you prayed about it? Was prayer your first response, or your last? Have you been persistent (Luke 18:1)?

11. Read Hebrews 4:16. What can we find at the throne of God to live by each day?

A praying church is a powerful church. God responds to the prayers of His people. Tomorrow we will study that response and be reminded that the power of God can break through any prison we find ourselves in. For now, what is your "**Reason to Rejoice**"?

Third Day

What's your memory verse? Are you praying?

"Which will be the stronger," asks R.C.H. Lenski, "The dungeon and its guards, or the prayers of the church?" We find our answer in this next section.

1. Read Acts 12:1-11, concentrating on verses 5-11.
2. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What was Peter doing when the angel appeared?
 - b. How did the angel wake him up?
 - c. Did Peter fully realize what was happening?
 - d. When did the angel leave him?
 - e. Did anyone see them leave?

The night before his execution, we find Peter sleeping. How in the world could he be sleeping, knowing the next day he was scheduled to die?

This isn't the first time we find Peter sleeping. Peter slept while Jesus talked to Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32). Matthew tells us that while Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was also sleeping.

3. What was different about this time? What was he using for his blanket? Read Philippians 4:7.
4. Read Mark 4:35-41. What valuable lesson did Jesus teach Peter and the disciples?

Even when the storms of life are raging around us, God wants to give us peace.

5. Is there a storm raging around you? What are you using for your blanket?
Is it peace -- or worry, anxiousness, and despair? (Read Psalm 94:19)

6. Why could Peter have so much peace? What had Jesus told him in John 21:18-19?
Did this help?

7. Peter might also have remembered the promises in Scripture, like Isaiah 41:10 and Psalm 118:5-9. Read these verses. How do they bring you peace?

8. Do you believe that God is more powerful than any prison bars - real or internal?
If so, do you live your life accordingly? Does your life reflect what you say you believe?

9. What do you need to change in your life so that you can have that peace that passes understanding?

In Acts 12:11, Peter kind of pinches himself to make sure that this was really happening. Then he gives all the glory and honor to God! Peter says that the Lord "delivered" him. This is the same word that Stephen used when he spoke about the Jewish Exodus (Acts 7:34). It's exciting that Peter's deliverance occurred during the Passover season when the Jews celebrate their exodus from Egypt. Peter had an exodus of his own.

God wants to deliver you from your prison. He delivered Noah from the flood, David from the pursuits of Saul, Daniel from the lion, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, and Paul from stoning and snakebites! What can't He deliver YOU from? He is our Deliverer (Romans 11:26).

10. What prison have you been locked in? A job? A relationship? A financial difficulty? Again I ask, what can't He do? He's got the keys. Give the lock to Him and He will set you free!

You may ask yourself the question, why was James killed and Peter released? The answer to this question can only be found in the heart and mind of God. He is a sovereign God and His will is perfect. We may not always (or usually) understand His ways, but we can be assured that His will is best.

This ends our lesson for today. Are you living in peace or worry? His peace is really a **"Reason to Rejoice!"**

Fourth Day

Can you write out your memory verse without peeking?

Peter probably had about three hours at the most to get away before the next shift of guards came. He runs to the place where he knows people are praying!

1. Read Acts 12:11-19.
2. Where did Peter go?

The John Mark spoke of in verse 12 is the author of the Gospel of Mark. John was his Jewish name, while Mark was his Gentile name. He was generally recognized by the church as Mark. He was the nephew of Barnabas and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey.

3. Who answered the door when Peter knocked? (Acts 12:13) How did she respond?

4. According to verse 15, what was the reaction of the other disciples?

The statement, "It is his angel" may reflect a Jewish opinion that each person has a guardian angel who can assume the person's own bodily shape and voice. Maybe they thought that he had already been executed and that his "ghost" had appeared. (Homer A. Kent, Jerusalem to Rome)

5. What does this tell us about the faith of this girl named Rhoda?

The response of the participants of this prayer meeting is kind of comical. Here they are, fervently praying for Peter to be released, and then not believing it when he is! Sounds familiar, doesn't it? How often are we surprised when God answers a prayer that we have been fervently praying for! We forget that God is behind every event in our life. Do you believe that God can answer your prayers? Matthew 21:22 says that we should ask in prayer, believing, and we will receive.

6. How do you pray? Do you pray expectantly? Do you pray according to His will? Do you pray with the knowledge that He can do everything, or do you limit God and His abilities?

Peter continued to knock! (I wonder if he thought about using the window.) When they finally opened the door and saw him, it sounds like they all started talking at once. In verse 17, he tries to calm them all down.

7. After he tells his story, whom does he instruct them to go and tell?

There are many James in the New Testament. The one mentioned is the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55, Galatians 1:19). He was the author of the Book of James. At this time, James may have assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem church. He was one of the pillars of the early church (Galatians 2:9). History tells us that he was martyred in AD 61 by the high priest Annas.

8. Why would Peter want James to know?

9. When Herod couldn't find Peter, what did he do? (Acts 12:19)

According to Roman law, when a guard allowed a prisoner to escape, they were subject to the same sentence the prisoner was supposed to have.

We don't know for sure where Peter went from there. He could've remained there in Jerusalem in hiding, or maybe visited Antioch. We do know that he was back in Jerusalem a few years later at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:7).

10. Spend some time today in prayer, believing that God will answer you according to His will. Pray big! Remember that Ephesians 3:20 says that "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think!"

That's it for today! We won't hear any more about Peter for awhile. And tomorrow we also hear the last of Herod.

Fifth Day

Repeat your memory verse to someone else and explain why this is the key verse.

Herod now returns to Caesarea, the capital of the Roman province of Judea. Perhaps he's a little embarrassed that his prisoner was lost.

1. Read Acts 12:20-25.

Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities that depended on the Jews for food. (These cities are located in present day Lebanon.) There was some kind of dispute between them and King Agrippa. The reason is unclear.

2. Who was Blastus, and what did they want him to do?

3. Did Blastus convince Herod?

The chamberlain was the one in charge of the king's living quarters. This enabled him to have much access to the king's presence, where he could monitor his moods, and approach him when he seemed the most agreeable.

4. Using your own words, describe what happened as Herod gave his speech. Why did it happen?

The Jewish historian **Josephus** sheds more light on this event: "He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater 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 horror over those that looked intently upon him: and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another ... that he was a god."

As soon as Herod began to accept the worship and praise of man, the angel of the Lord struck him with worms. It seems that God's patience had run out with ol' King Agrippa. We witness a tragic, but appropriate death of the king.

5. Luke gives us a progress report of how the church was doing in Acts 12:24. What does he say?

One of Luke's purposes in writing this book is to trace the spread of the church throughout the Roman world. He's doing a great job.

6. Whom do Saul and Barnabas take with them on their first missionary journey? (Acts 12:25)

Next week we will look at Saul's journey, but let's end today with a story about prayer from **Charles Spurgeon**, and some applications from **Charles Swindoll**. Spurgeon imagined prayer this way:

"You see the men in the belfry sometimes down below with the ropes. They pull them, and if you have no ears that is all you know about it. But the bells are ringing up there. They are talking and discoursing sweet music up aloft in the tower. And our prayers do, as it were, ring the bells of Heaven."

How would you characterize the ringing of your prayers lately?

- ...Like clock-tower bells, regular and strong.
- ...Like church bells, heard only on Sundays.
- ...Like dinner bells, short and routine.
- ...Like doorbells, small and polite.
- ...Like service bells, loud and demanding.
- ...Like glass bells, hollow and showy.
- ...Like alarm bells, ear splitting and panicky.

7. Which bell most closely resembles your prayer life?

8. What did chapter 12 mean to you? What did you learn?

9. What did you learn about God this week?

See you ladies next week! Our prayer is that you take hold of all that God's Word has for you, that it sinks down deep into your heart, and then comes out in how you live your life. Is it happening? **Rejoice!**