

Lesson 12
Acts 12:1-25
WAKE UP TO A MIRACLE!

Memory Verse: "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." (Acts 12:24 NIV)

The saints in Jerusalem not only suffered as a result of the famine, they also suffered because Jewish and Roman governmental opposition against them intensified as time passed. Luke recorded the events in this section to illustrate God's supernatural protection and blessing of the church, even though the Christians suffered increased persecution, and Israel's continued rejection of her Messiah. Looked at another way, this section confirms Israel's rejection of her Messiah. This is why the church advanced more dramatically in Gentile territory, as the rest of Acts shows.

"Herod the king" was Herod Agrippa I, whom the Roman emperor Gaius appointed king over Palestine in A.D. 37. When Claudius succeeded Gaius as emperor, he added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa's territories so that Agrippa governed all that his grandfather, Herod the Great, had ruled. Agrippa ruled Judea for three years, A.D. 41-44 (cf. v. 23), and moved his headquarters to Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa I had Jewish blood in his veins and consistently sought to maintain favour with and the support of the Jews over whom he ruled, which he did effectively. Josephus referred to Agrippa positively as "a person that deserved the greatest admiration." Herod Agrippa was the friend of Caligula, as Herod the Great had been the friend of Augustus.

As the Christian Jews became increasingly offensive to their racial brethren (cf. 11:18), Herod took advantage of an opportunity to please his subjects by mistreating some believers, and by executing (beheading) the Apostle "James," the "brother of John" (cf. Matt. 20:23). Josephus wrote that "Ananus" (Ananias), the high priest, was responsible for James' death, but this seems to be inaccurate. This is the only apostle's death that the New Testament recorded. James was the second Christian martyr whom Luke identified (cf. 7:54-60). Persecution of the Christians now swung from religious to include political motivation.

It is noteworthy that the Christians evidently did not seek to perpetuate the apostalate by selecting a replacement for James as they had for Judas (Chpt. 1). They probably believed that God would re-establish The Twelve in the resurrection.

Imagine waking up to a miracle and having an angel for your alarm clock! That's what happened to Peter when he was in prison for the third time, awaiting trial and certain death. Years later, when he wrote his first epistle, Peter may have had this miraculous experience in mind when he quoted Psalm 34:15-16: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). That quotation certainly summarizes what God did for Peter, and it reveals to us wonderful assurances to encourage us in the difficult days of life.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 12:1-25

Things to learn: 1) God sees our trials 2) God hears our prayers 3) God deals with our enemies.

Questions

Q1. The early Christians in verses 1 to 4 witnessed severe persecutions. What assurances did they have in the midst of such trials?

Q2. As we go through the scenes in verses 5 to 17, how would explain the actions of Peter and his friends?

Q3. What can we learn from the supernatural death of Herod and the growth of the church in spite of persecutions from verses 18 to 25?