

ACTS 12:1-5

Introduction: We saw the gathered money collection taken up for the poor saints of Jerusalem, those who had sold **all** and given to the apostles (Acts 2:44-45, 4:33-35). It is Saul and Barnabas who take these offerings to Jerusalem to be dispersed by the Apostles.

A. The Situation In Jerusalem -

Acts 12:1-2 - Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.
Acts 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

1. King Herod is a politician. He never takes responsibility and is good at **deflecting**. He is looking for someone to blame for all the problems that are besieging his dominion. So, he begins to vex/trouble **cert**ain ones of the Messianic Church.
2. In the Gospels and Acts, one **family** of rulers stands out in their battle against God and His people - the Herods.
 - a. The first one was Herod the Great, who was a **blood**thirsty ruler. Herod the Great ruled Judaea from 37B.C. until his death just after Christ's birth (Matt. 2:15). This Herod was a killer of many, but his **most** barbaric act was his slaughter of all the innocent young male children near and in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).
 - b. The Herod, who is king in these verses, is Herod Agrippa I. He reigned from 37A.D. to 44A.D. He is the **grand**son of Herod the Great.

Note: The Apostle **Paul** will one day stand before his son, Herod Agrippa II.

- c. Herod Agrippa I was on thin ice with Rome and their emperor Tiberius. It was important that Herod keep the Jews in loyalty to the Romans. One way to do this was to persecute the sect that the religious Jewish leaders **hated** - the Little Flock under the **12** apostles.

3. In Vs. 1-2, James, the brother of John, is the **first** apostle to suffer martyrdom. James' death broke up the famous **trio** of apostles who had been **close**st to Jesus during His earthly ministry.

*No doubt, James' death was a blow to the 12 and the Messianic Church. Remember, this James killed here was an apostle - one of the sons of thunder.

*There is another James, the Lord's brother and the leader of the Jerusalem Church in Acts 15. He is also the writer of the book of James.

- a. Isn't it strange that **68** verses were devoted to the martyrdom of Stephen, but here there is only **1** verse given for the martyrdom of the Apostle James?
- b. An important observation should be made by **us** concerning James' death. It gives us further information that shows the establishment of Israel's Kingdom was set aside. A change had and was taking place from Israel → **Body**.

- c. Matthew 19:28 - And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

*The Lord had **prom**ised the 12 apostles that they would occupy 12 thrones in the Kingdom and reign with Him over the 12 tribes of Israel.

4. Previously God had **super**naturally protected the 12, in spite of the growing persecution. The 12 had remained in Jerusalem, divinely protected! **But now**, one of the 12 is slain and there is **no** attempt to try and **re**place him, as they had before with Matthias (Acts 1:15-26, 2:4).
 - a. * This again is showing that the Kingdom is not ready to be established on earth at this time (after * the **Wrath**). But it is demonstrating that the change to the Body Church would be emerging.
 - b. Note: Remember, the book of Acts is an account of **why** God judged Israel. It is a book about the **fall** of Israel and how God righteously/rightly set aside His favored nation and is doing something else today.

B. Peter's Arrest -

1. The **de**pravity and hard-heartedness of Herod and the religious Jews is shown by their being pleased

Acts 12:3-5 - And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) Acts 12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

over James' murder.

* **Apost**asy of God's favored nation is openly displayed.

2. Herod, after seeing how slaying James encouraged the religious Jewish **lead**ers, goes all out and arrests Peter. Herod probably thought this would **en**dear him to the Jews (thus Rome!).

Note: We will now begin (after this event) to see more of the changing of dispensations. Soon Paul, with the new Mystery Dispensation will **dom**inate the scene completely. Peter will hardly be mentioned after this chapter. Peter will be used by God at the Jerusalem council to assist Paul and his new ministry, but Peter will be going **off** the scene quickly.

3. In Vs. 4, Herod has four squads (consisting of four soldiers each) who rotated the guarding of Peter. At any given time, there were **two** chained to Peter in his cell and **two** stationed just outside the cell door (Vs. 6).

*The reason for this maximum security in Agrippa's prison was probably because some had not forgotten about Peter's **pre**vious escape from prison (Acts 5:19-23).

4. Herod had been planning to show Peter **pub**lically before crowds of Jews, as a **spec**tacle before all the religious order to show his assistance to them. Peter being executed would no doubt gain Herod **much favor** with his subjects.
5. Luke mentions [Easter] here. **Many** when they come to the word "Easter" seize upon it, imagining that they have found proof that the Bible - and especially the **K.J.V.** - has errors and is not perfect. Fortunately, they are wrong!
 - a. Easter, as we understand it, comes from the ancient **pagan** festival of Astarte. It is also known as Ishtar (pronounced Easter). This festival has always been held **late** in the month of April. The center of attention was Astarte, a **fe**male deity. In the Bible she is known as the "queen of heaven".

Jeremiah 44:17, 19, 22 - But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for *then* had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. Jer. 44:19 And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men? Jer. 44:22 So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day.

- b. She is the mother of Tammuz, who was also her **husband**! These perverted rituals would take place at sunrise on Easter morning.

Ezekiel 8:13-16 - He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Ezek. 8:14 Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which *was* toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Ezek. 8:15 Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. Ezek. 8:16 And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

*As we can see, the true Easter never had any association with Jesus Christ.

- c. The confusion for many is that the Jewish Passover was held in mid-April (**14th**) and the pagan festival, Easter, was held later in the **same** month!

*If he was referring to the Passover, then Easter would be wrong. But if he was referring to the pagan holy day, Easter, then the K.J.V. must be right.

* The key that unlocks the puzzle (to some) is not Vs. 4, but in Vs. 3 - [Then were the days of * unleavened bread]. Peter was arrested **during** the "unleavened days".

- d. Answer:

- (1) Numbers 28:16-17 - And in the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the passover of the LORD. Num. 28:17 And in the fifteenth day of this month *is* the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.

Leviticus 23:4-6 - These *are* the feasts of the LORD, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. Lev. 23:5 In the fourteenth day of the first month *at even is* the LORD'S passover. Lev. 23:6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

- (2) We can see from the **Bible** in Exodus 12:13-18 that on the 14th of April, the lamb was killed. That is Passover. No event following the 14th is ever referred to as the Passover.
- (3) On the morning of the 15th **begins** the days of unleavened bread, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

- (4) Whenever Passover is mentioned in the N.T., the reference is always to the **meal**. It was to be eaten on the night of the 14th, not the entire week. The [days of unleavened bread] are never referred to as the Passover.

*Remember, the angel of the Lord passed over Egypt in **one** night, not **seven** nights. Pass-over and Unleavened Bread were separate from one another!

- (5) Peter was arrested during [the days of unleavened bread] - April 15-21. The Passover (April 14th) had come and **gone**. Herod then could not be referring to Passover when he stated Easter. The next Passover was a **year** away.

*But the pagan holiday of Easter was just a few days away!

- (6) Also remember, Herod was a Roman **pagan** who worshipped the "queen of heaven". He was not a Jew. He had **no** reason to keep Passover. Shortly after Easter's celebration, Herod would have Peter killed, thinking Peter's execution would be part of his political **pleasing** of the Jews.

* So we can see God's **pro**vidence/**pre**servation through the K.J.V. translators to correctly
* translate "pascha" here as Easter!

6. Peter, no doubt, was aware of Herod's intentions. But he had more than made up for his 3 denials prior. Peter is **now** strong in the Lord, in his faith, and even ready (**if** necessary) to give his **life** for the cause of Christ.
- a. It also could be that he actually was not worried about it because he had a **pro**mise from Christ: [John 21:18 - Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.]

*Peter knew, or believed, that his execution could not be possible **yet**!

- b. Also comforting, Peter knew he had a **praying** Church that would bombard heaven on his behalf. No doubt this persecuted Kingdom Church knew that only **God** had the power to release Peter. But also, they knew Peter might be killed like James had been earlier.

**Next Week - Peter's Angelic Release