
The Acts of the Apostles I
The Power of God in Persecution
Acts 12:1-25

I. PERSECUTION FROM HEROD (Acts 12:1-5)

A. The Death of James (Acts 12:1-2; see v. 17; Galatians 1:19) – James, the first of the twelve to die a martyr’s death.

i. Herod the king...

1. This Herod is the grandson of Herod the Great who attempted to murder Jesus while still a child (Matthew 2:16)
2. He is the son of the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14, 29)
3. He is the father of Agrippa whom Paul will testify to in Acts chapters 25 and 26.

ii. Killed James the brother of John...

1. James was not martyred while delivering a glorious message, as was Stephen.
2. He was put to death in cold blood, because Herod chose to kill him.

B. The Taking of Peter (Acts 12:3-4)

i. At the time of unleavened bread (Exodus 12:14-20; 13:3-7)

1. Followed the Jewish Passover
2. Continued for seven days
3. Began on the 14th day of the month (the first month)
4. Lasted until the 21st day of the month

ii. Intending to bring him to the people after Easter

C. The Feast of *Easter* (Acts 12:4b)

i. The right word?

1. The Greek word which is translated here *Easter* is the word *pascha*. This word appears twenty-nine times in the New Testament. Twenty-eight of those times it is translated “*Passover*” in reference to the night when the Lord passed over Egypt and killed all the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12:12), thus setting Israel free from 400 yrs. of bondage.

2. Once here (Acts 12:4) it appears as the word *Easter*.
- ii. The King James Bible is often criticized here for using the word *Easter* in this passage.
 1. *Easter* at the time of King James was often used as a synonym for *Passover*. In fact, *Passover* was first used as a word by William Tyndale about 1530.
 2. *Easter* had been used in reference to the Jewish Passover as early as 971 and was used even in Old Testament passages in other English translations (Coverdale – 1535)
 3. Therefore, the translators had a reason to make sure to use the word *Easter* here. To make a distinction between “*Passover*” and “*Easter*.”
- iii. A pagan holiday
 1. Named for Ashtaroth, the goddess of fertility (also called Ishtar, Astarte, etc.)
 2. Often mentioned with Baal (Judges 2:13; Judges 10:6; 1 Samuel 7:3, 4)
 3. The Philistines built a house to Ashtaroth (1 Samuel 31:10)
 4. She is also called the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:17, 18, 19, 25)
– Note: Mary is called the “Queen of Heaven” by the Roman Catholic Church
- iv. *Pascha*: “*Easter*” or “*Passover*”?
 1. Even though the Jewish Passover was held in mid-month (the fourteenth) and the pagan festival Easter was held later the same month, how do we know that Herod was referring to Easter in Acts 12:4 and not the Jewish passover?
 2. If he was referring to the passover, the translation of “*pascha*” to “*Easter*” is incorrect, however, if he was indeed referring to the pagan holiday, then the King James Bible is correct, and superior in that it gives you the correct interpretation of what Herod was intending.
 3. To unravel the confusion concerning “*Easter*” we must look back to verse 3, and to history.
 - a) In verse 3 the Bible says: “**Then** were the days of unleavened bread...”

- b) The Passover comes before the “days of unleavened bread”, this we’ve already established in our above notes.
- c) Peter was arrested **during** the “days of unleavened bread.” (Acts 12:3)
- d) Our investigation should look back to the first Passover (the only time that the angel **passed over**) and smote the first born (Exodus 12:4, 5)
 - i. The Passover received its name from where the Lord promised to “pass over” all of the houses which the blood was applied. (Exodus 12:13)
 - ii. It is **after** the Passover (Exodus 12:13, 14), we find that seven days would be fulfilled in which the Jews were to eat unleavened bread. **These are the days of unleavened bread.**
 - iii. In verse 18 of Exodus 12 we see that the dates of observing these days are the 14th through the 21st.
 - iv. This observance is given more clearly in Numbers 28:16-18. (Numbers 28:16-18) (Deuteronomy 16:1-8)
 - i. The 14th day of the first month is the Passover of the LORD.
 - ii. The 15th day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.
 - iii. In verse 16 one sees that the Passover is only considered to be the 14th day of the month. The next day (the 15th day), begins the “days of unleavened bread.”
 - v. Whenever the Passover was kept, it **always** preceded the feast of unleavened bread. (2 Chronicles 30:15, 21; Ezra 6:19, 22)
 - i. It had already come and gone when Peter was placed in prison. (see Acts 12:3, 4)
 - ii. Verse 3 shows that Peter was arrested during the days of unleavened bread.

- iii. Herod could not possibly be referring to the Passover in his statement concerning Easter. The next Passover was a whole year away!
- iv. The pagan holiday of **Easter was just a few days away.**
- v. The right word
 - 1. Thus we see from our study that it was God's providence which led the translators of our Bible to correctly translate the word "*pascha*" as "*Easter*."
 - 2. It did not refer to the Jewish Passover, but to the pagan holiday that the Romans would keep.

D. The Prayer of the Church (Acts 12:5)

- i. Continual prayer (Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- ii. Combined prayer (Acts 12:12; Acts 4:31-32)
- iii. Contact prayer (Acts 4:24; Romans 8:26-27)
- iv. Concrete prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-2; Philippians 4:6)

II. PROVISION FROM THE LORD (Acts 12:6-17)

A. The Sleeping Prisoner (Acts 12:6; John 21:18-19)

- i. Peter knew he would live
- ii. Peter had been made aware that he would live to an old age

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. **19** This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, **Follow me.**

B. The Delivering Angel (Acts 12:7-11)

C. The Surprised Church (Acts 12:12-17; Jeremiah 33:3)

Jeremiah 33:3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

III. PUNISHMENT ON HEROD (Acts 12:18-25)

- A. The Death of the Keepers (Acts 12:18-19, 4)
- B. The Pride of Herod (Acts 12:20-22; Isaiah 14:12-15; Romans 1:21, 25, 32; 1 Corinthians 1:31; 3:21) – Notice the middle of the word *Pride*. The letter “i”

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! **13** For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: **14** I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. **15** Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Romans 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Romans 1:25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Romans 1:32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore **let no man glory in men**. For all things are yours;

- C. The Death of Herod (Acts 12:23)
- D. The Word of God (Acts 12:24-25; Acts 6:7; Acts 19:20; 2 Timothy 2:9)

2 Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds; but **the word of God is not bound**.