



Persecution of the new believers heightens under the cruel hand of King Herod. The believers unite together in prayer and see God do a mighty work by releasing Peter from prison and certain death. King Herod pays the ultimate price for trying to steal praise from God.

Day #1: Peter's Arrest

The King Herod we read about in Acts 12 is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of the Herod who wanted to kill Jesus when Jesus was a baby. Like his grandfather, Herod Agrippa I, was a cruel man. He was made ruler over the Jews. Because Herod wanted to be popular with people, he began to persecute the new followers of Jesus.

+ *About this time, King Herod arrested some people who belonged to the church. He planned to make them suffer greatly. He had James killed with a sword. James was John's brother. Herod saw that the death of James pleased the Jews. So he arrested Peter also. - Acts 12:1-3a*

Herod had James killed. James was one of the original twelve disciples (Matthew 10:2). We first read about James when he and his brother, John, were fishing with their father. Jesus called them, and immediately they left everything they knew and followed Jesus (Matthew 4:21-22). James was one of the three disciples that were closest to Jesus. Jesus invited James, John, and Peter to stay at His side during some of His best and worst times (Matthew 17:1-2; Mark 14:33). James was one of Jesus' closest friends. Sadly, killing James made the Jews who did not believe in Jesus very happy.

Herod decided to continue harming the believers, and he had Peter arrested. Herod intended to put Peter on trial. Surely Herod wanted to kill Peter also. Because Peter's arrest came during the Passover celebration, Herod had to wait. Trials were never allowed to be held on religious holidays.

After Herod arrested Peter, he put him in prison. Peter was placed under guard. He was watched by four groups of four soldiers each. - Acts 12:4a

Herod ordered four groups of four soldiers to guard Peter. That is 16 soldiers to guard one man! Was Peter a violent man? Had he hurt anyone? No, Peter was simply preaching the Good News of Jesus. Herod was being cruel just to gain favor with the Jews who hated the believers. The rest of the believers were very worried about Peter.

While Peter was being kept in jail, the church never stopped praying to God for him. - Acts 12:5 CEV

Praying was the BEST thing to do! Notice, the believers did not plan a prison break, or start to spread rumors about Herod. They took their

Day #1 continued:

concerns to the all-powerful One who can do more than we can could ever even imagine (Ephesians 3:20).



When trouble comes your way, or you are concerned for a friend, what do you do first? Do you devise a plan to spring into action to solve the problem? Like these believers, we must go to God in prayer **first!** Only act after you have clear direction from God about a situation. Sometimes, God may even instruct us to keep our hands off (Psalm 46:10).

Day #2: Peter's Rescue

Do you know what your name means? Ask your parents why they chose your name. When you place your faith in Jesus, you become known by another name. You are a "Christian." We hear this word so often that we don't think about a time when it did not exist. The word means follower of Christ. We are told that the believers were first called "Christians" after great numbers of people in the city of Antioch were taught about Jesus and put their trust in Him.



It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. - Acts 11:26 NLT

It was just about this time when Peter was arrested. So, during the Passover, the "Christians" were praying non-stop for their dear Peter.

The night before Peter was to be put on trial, he was asleep and bound by two chains. A soldier was guarding him on each side, and two other soldiers were guarding the entrance to the jail. - Acts 12:6 CEV

Peter was going to go to trial the next day, yet he was able to sleep. Remember, Peter had been arrested twice before, and both times God had delivered him (Acts 4:7, 21; 5:18-20). Was Peter confident that God would deliver him again? Or perhaps he simply trusted God enough to know that no matter what happened, God would use it for good (Romans 8:28).

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared. A light shone in the prison cell. The angel struck Peter on his side. Peter woke up. "Quick!" the angel said. "Get up!" The chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." Peter did so. "Put on your coat," the angel told him. "Follow me." Peter followed him out of the prison. But he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards. Then they came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself. They went through it. They walked the length of one street. Suddenly the angel left Peter. - Acts 12:7-10



God sent an angel to free Peter again! Look at Acts 12:6 and 12:7-10 above. Underline how many ways Herod tried to keep Peter locked up. None of these safeguards gave God's angel a moment's hesitation. There is nothing that is too hard for our all-powerful God! When you are in a difficult situation, seek God. Find Scripture that tells of God's might, and pray it back to the Lord. (Psalm 66:3, Psalm 68, 2 Chronicles 14:11)

Lord, You are the God of our people. You are the God who is in heaven. You rule over all of the kingdoms of the nations. Your hands are strong and powerful. No one can fight against You and win. - 2 Chronicles 20:6

Day #3: Peter's Praise

God sent an angel to rescue Peter from Herod's evil intentions. The escape was so amazing that at first, Peter thought he must be dreaming.



Then Peter realized what had happened. He said, "Now I know for sure that **the Lord** sent His angel. **He set me free** from Herod's power. **He saved me** from everything the Jewish people were hoping for." - Acts 12:11

When Peter realized he wasn't dreaming, he immediately acknowledged that God was the One who saved him. Peter went to the home of one of the believers, where many people had been praying.

When Peter understood what had happened, he went to Mary's house. Mary was the mother of John Mark. Many people had gathered in her home. They were praying there. Peter knocked at the outer entrance. A servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. She recognized Peter's voice. She was so excited that she ran back without opening the door. "Peter is at the door!" she exclaimed.

"You're out of your mind," they said to her. But she kept telling them it was true. So they said, "It must be his angel." - Acts 12:12-15

The very people who had been praying for Peter's release did not believe that he was free! Peter kept knocking and finally, they let him in. The believers were amazed. Notice what Peter does:

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet. **He explained how the Lord had brought him out of prison.** - Acts 12:17a

Peter gave God all the credit for his remarkable escape. When Peter was **powerless**, God showed *Himself* to be **powerful!**



Just as Peter did, always be sure to give God the credit for the mighty things He does. We will see tomorrow, it is a sin to take praise that God deserves (Acts 12:23). It is a wonderful idea to keep a prayer journal. Write down things that you are praying about. A journal will remind you to pray *first*. Then, when God answers your prayer, you will remember to **praise Him** for it!

Day #4: Herod's Demise

Do you remember how many guards were put in charge of holding Peter in prison? There were sixteen soldiers guarding him. No doubt, Herod had heard that Peter had escaped from prison once before. Herod did not want anything to go wrong this time. However, when God sent the angel to rescue Peter, the guards did nothing to stop him. Somehow, God took away the guards' ability to see or hear anything. Perhaps God caused the guards to be in a deep sleep.



In the morning the soldiers were bewildered. They couldn't figure out what had happened to Peter. So Herod had them look everywhere for Peter. But they didn't find him. Then Herod questioned the guards closely. He ordered that they be put to death. - Acts 12:18-19

In his anger, the ruthless Herod ordered the death of sixteen men because Peter had escaped. Surely, Herod was embarrassed and upset that he would not be even more popular with the Jews by harming Peter. Herod left Judea and went north to Caesarea. Still seeking popularity, he made a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon in Caesarea. These people depended on Herod's country for food, so they flattered Herod with their words.

When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. The people gave him a great ovation, shouting, "It's the voice of a god, not of a man!" Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, **because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God.** So he was consumed with worms and died. - Acts 12:21-23 NLT

Day #4 continued:

Herod enjoyed the praise of the people. When they said he sounded like a god, he did not correct them. He accepted praise that belonged to God. God is very serious about His praise and glory. He is the only One who deserves glory.

I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols. - Isaiah 42:8 NLT



Read the verse below. Why did God create us?

Bring back everyone who belongs to Me. **I created them to bring glory to Me.** I formed them and made them. - Isaiah 43:7

Now, insert your name: **I created _____ to bring glory to Me.**

Bringing glory to God is making the greatness of God known. It is your purpose. You should measure your success in everything you do by whether you are bringing glory to God.

Day #5: Crucial Ingredients

Ask your mom or dad to show you a recipe book or recipe card. If possible, find the recipe for one of your favorite foods. At the top of the recipe, you will find a list of ingredients. When you combine these ingredients, and follow the directions, you will end up with something delicious to eat. If you leave out some of the ingredients, the food may be ruined, or at the very least, the final dish won't be at its best. In Acts, we can see "ingredients" for spreading the Good News about Jesus.

Let's look at the next verse in the Bible, immediately after the account of Herod's death:



But God's word continued to increase and spread. - Acts 12:24

It had been twelve years from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection to the death of Herod. Yet, God's word continued to grow and spread. Even though Herod and other evil men had plotted, schemed, and even lied to stop people from speaking the Gospel, God's truth went forth. Let's review some of the "ingredients" that Luke, the writer of Acts, shares with us.

First, we see that God's **Holy Spirit** filled the believers (Acts 2:4). This is by far the *most important* ingredient. Without the Holy Spirit, no one would be able to believe in Jesus (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit gave each of the believers the words to speak and the power to speak boldly (1 Corinthians 2:13, Acts 1:8). The new Christians LISTENED to the Spirit inside them. They followed the Spirit's leading in everything they did.

We see that Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, and James **obeyed** the command of Jesus when He told His followers to go and tell the Good News (Acts 1:8). They chose to obey God, rather than men who told them to stop preaching in Jesus' name (Acts 4:19, 20), even if it would cost them their lives (Acts 7:59-60, Acts 12: 12:2).

Throughout the book of Acts, we see God's people in **prayer**. The apostles made prayer a priority (Acts 6:4). The Christian body prayed to encourage each other, to praise God, and for the power to speak even more boldly (Acts 4:24-30). They remained in constant prayer for the deliverance of Peter (Acts 12:5).

And we see that the disciples **gave God the credit** He deserved. Peter and John gave God credit for healing the beggar at the temple Acts 3:13). Stephen spoke of God's amazing work throughout history (Acts 7). And Peter gladly gave God all the credit for his incredible escape.



Do not be mistaken, the actions of man cannot stop the will of God (Psalm 33:11)! Even if we choose not to pray, or choose not to be obedient, God's plan to spread His truth will not be stopped. But when we do follow the Holy Spirit, pray, obey God's word, and give God all the credit for who He is and what He does, we will be a part of God's plan. We will be blessed and the outcome will be the best possible - God's word will spread farther, wider, and faster.