

Acts 12:1-25

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John [son of Zebedee, not James brother of Jesus] with the sword. 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 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 Passover to bring him forth to the people. 5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. 7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands. 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. 11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews. 12 And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14 And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace,

declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James [the brother of Jesus], and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. 18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and *there* abode. 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*. 21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people gave a shout, *saying*, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."

Introduction

[Audio version: <http://resources.ccphilly.org/SPM608>]

"Acts chapter 12, we are coming into an interesting chapter, Herod Agrippa the 1st, the grandson of Herod the Great, ruling in Jerusalem, grown up in Rome. Was a small boy when Caligula and Claudius were young, and they were friends as they grew up. At this time he is back in Jerusalem, he is the son of a Hasmonaean woman, so he keeps the Law, and the Jews appreciate that about him, he has curried a certain amount of favour with the religious Jews in the Sanhedrin. And taking the throne in this area allowed the title of king by Caligula, Caligula passes off the scene and Claudius then will be on the throne, Herod Agrippa born I believe in 10BC, dies in 44AD, we're going to see when he dies, 54 years old, and is three years into the reign of Claudius. I know, thanks Joe, we really appreciate that, it'll put us to sleep in history...it's only important

because it says back in **chapter 11, verse 28, “And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth”** a drought, famine **“throughout the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.”** And it gives us that note as a backdrop, that famine will be used of God in a wondrous way to tie together the Gentile churches with the church in Jerusalem. But this fledgling church, this young church in Jerusalem is experiencing things now that they hadn't anticipated. It had started out in a remarkable way with 3,000 saved as Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, the church growing numerically, 5,000 coming to faith at other times, thousands in this church, they seem to have had great favour with the Lord, certainly the apostles at this point were threatened. Even Peter and John when they preached, and people were saved, after the lame man was healed at the Gate Beautiful, Peter and John had been put in prison. And when they're put in into the prison, it says there, the angel of the Lord, not “the” angel, “an” angel came and set them loose and told them to go back into the Temple and proclaim the words of life. And in that scene, the Sanhedrin, religious leadership of Israel, sends to have them brought before them, the guards come back and say ***‘They're not there, we found the guards at the door, guarding, but when we opened the door no one was in the cell, and the guys you're looking for, they're out in the middle of the Temple, they're preaching again.’*** So there had been great favour. Now in this chapter, we have the beginning of an interesting change, in that, it tells us as the chapter begins, that Herod Agrippa takes James, the brother of John, and it's the last time John is mentioned in the Book of Acts, and that he puts him to death with the sword, the law of the sword, showing that he had that Roman authority, no doubt, he beheaded him. And as we look at the beginning of the chapter, it tells us that Agrippa is vexing the Church, that he puts James to death, and as he sees that that pleases the Jews, he then takes Peter into custody and puts him in the prison. And for all intensive purposes, as we look at the scene, here it seems like the throne, the political throne holds the power, it seems like Herod Agrippa is holding all of the cards, that the church now is being depleted of its leadership, the church itself being vexed, it says, we're not sure all of exactly what that meant. James has been beheaded, Peter is in prison, and we find the church on their knees, praying. Besides these difficulties, shortly after this, if not at this time, this famine will begin, and there's difficulty. So very different from the early days in the church, and this church is

beginning to face difficulties, and has to take those things. And where do you file those things? God loves us, God's Son died for us. We've seen people healed in Jerusalem, miraculous things. Where does this all fall out now? How do we deal with this? And it gives us a very interesting challenge. It's very, very human, as we go through the chapter, there's incredibly humorous things to me as we go through this chapter. And yet there's God's sovereignty, so clearly put before us. So those of you who spend a lot of time in your relationship with the Lord, saying 'Why?' This would be the kind of circumstance that would drive you up the wall, 'Why God? why did you do this? why did you do that? Why did you let James die, why did you let Peter out? Why'd you do this and why did you do that? Why are you doing this?' this is a great chapter in some ways for those of us that are 'Why-ers,' I'm not, but I have a wealth of other problems, but I'm not a "Why-er."

Herod Executes James, Brother of John

It says here **"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John"** [one of the sons of Zebedee] **"with the sword."** **(verses 1-2)** Now this is, by the way, John, Peter, and James in the Book of John, you know, you look at this right away, and how do you process this? Peter, James and John were taken alone into the house of Jairus, with the other disciples left outside, and they were eyewitness to Jesus' saying **'Talitha cumi,'** and this little girl being raised from the dead. Peter, James and John were taken to the mount of transfiguration, the inner circle, and they saw Moses and Elijah, imagine that, they saw Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus, they saw him transfigured. Peter, James and John, and Andrew, were the ones who initiate the question in regards to the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). Peter, James and John are taken further than the other disciples in Gethsemane, evidently those are the ones who hear him cry **'Abba, Father, if there's any way, let this cup pass.'** And yet, so early on in the Church now James is beheaded. So there's a huge question, 'Why, Lord, invest so much into these three? Why Lord, James included early, in that inner circle, learning lessons that the other disciples in some way had not learned, some particular things, and then he's so early, you know the first martyr of the apostles?' Interesting

problem, now some feel the Peter, James and John would be the guys who would always be in trouble, you may have kids like that, you can let certain of them play outside, but there's certain others you have to keep close to you all the time, or they'll end up dead. I heard some author say, Peter, James and John, the Lord kept them close for a particular reason, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven and burn people up, and Peter was always getting involved in something he shouldn't have gotten involved in, they were much safer close to Jesus, that may be true. But here, James is beheaded, the brother of John, with the sword.

*Herod Puts Peter In Prison, Intending To Execute Him After
The Holy Days*

“And because he” Herod **“saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)” (verse 3)** So, James dead, Peter in prison, the church being vexed, and the hypocrisy, the remarkable thing is here you have the Jews in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, the religious Jews are going through their houses, looking for all the leaven that's there, removing the leaven to celebrate, which leaven is a picture of sin, to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and at the same time they're trying to get Jesus Christ and his apostles and their influence out of Jerusalem at the same time they're trying to get the leaven out of their homes. What an interesting, interesting picture. He sees that what he had done to James pleased the Jews, typical political attitude, seeing that, then he wants to carry the favour, particularly no doubt, of the religious Jews, he takes Peter and he puts him also in prison. **“And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Passover to bring him forth to the people.” (verse 4)** Notice, King James says “after Easter” the Greek is “after the Passover.” So, he puts him in prison, he's in now for at least 8 days, he's in through the Feast of Unleavened Bread, he's in through the Passover, and it doesn't tell us, but we're going to see him sleeping. You know, Peter's probably the only Jew in Jerusalem sleeping in these days. He's put to four quaternions of soldiers. Now what that meant was, evidently Herod Agrippa is very familiar with the fact that when Peter and John had been in prison earlier that the angel of the Lord came and had set them free,

and sent them back out into the Temple precincts preaching. This time he wants to make sure he's got the whole situation nailed down, so four quaternions work like this, you had four squads of four soldiers each. The way you would be guarded is on three hour shifts, because they didn't want to give them the opportunity [the guards that is] to get tired, so four groups of four would each do a three-hour shift, that would give you twelve hours, and then they would start over, so in a 24-hour period you had two three-hour shifts. And what they would do is take Peter in the cell, and to each one of his arms a Roman soldier would be chained, shackled to the arm of one soldier, shackled to the arm of another soldier, then the two other soldiers, part of the four would stand outside the door guarding the door. It was Roman, it was very secure, and it was usually for very high profile prisoners, and he wants to make sure there isn't anything like that that goes on with Peter, so he puts him into the prison, probably the Antonio Fortress, and he puts him to four quaternions of soldiers, and he has him there for 8 days. He had him there for the whole week, wanting after the Passover to bring him out, and the population swelled to over a million during this Feast, most of the folks would leave afterwards. He wants to bring him out so that the local Jews, whose favour he wants to curry, would approve of what he's doing. So he was going to bring him forth after the Feast. [What Pastor Joe is indicating is Herod wants to bring him out after the whole 8-day Feast, Passover being the first day observed by the Jews, and then another seven days of Unleavened Bread, with a Holy Day at each end of these seven days of unleavened bread.] And **“Peter therefore was kept in prison:”** and the chapter kind of hinges here, **“but prayer”** that's at the center of this chapter **“was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (verse 5) “without ceasing”** now that's for a week, by the way, praying for an entire week. Now I don't know at this point whether they're praying *‘Lord, your will be done, we prayed for James last week and he's dead, so maybe we shouldn't pray for Peter. You know, when we pray it's not usually good.’* [i.e. you ever have that *‘Why bother?’* attitude to your prayers? I have, we all have, let's be honest with ourselves.] They're praying for Peter, James is gone, no doubt they're praying *‘Your will be done,’* but they're interceding. No doubt the Christians in the area of Judea had heard too, in the larger area, so the Church is praying for Peter, he's in the inner prison, he's there for an entire week. And I wonder it wasn't that many years before this that his Saviour had been taken into the Antonio Fortress, and there he had been scourged

and beaten at this Passover Feast, and we wonder what thoughts Peter must have in his mind.

God Sends An Angel To Free Peter Out Of Prison

And it says in **verse 6**, **“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers”** the other two soldiers **“before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel [the Greek is “an angel”] of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.” (verses 6-7)** So that night it says, isn't it interesting, the Lord's going to deliver Peter miraculously, James, the Lord allowed him to be beheaded. There's only one throne in this chapter that is in authority over everything that's happening, and it isn't Agrippa's throne. And you think *‘Lord, if you're going to deliver me, why don't you deliver me on the first or second night, do you have to wait all the way to the night before my head's gonna be cut off and you deliver me?’* And even then, Peter it says is sleeping in the prison. Just, some people, I can do that sometimes, no matter what's going on, sleep. And some people would be up worrying, getting ulcers, other people just *‘I'm gonna die anyhow, just let me get some sleep.’* Either that, or Peter no doubt remembers in the end of John's Gospel Jesus said **‘Verily, verily I saw unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest wither thou wouldst, but when thou shalt be old,’** and Peter was not yet that old, **‘thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee where thou wouldest not, this spake Jesus signifying by what death he should glorify God,’** he would be crucified, and he would say **‘I'm not worthy to be crucified like my Lord,’** so they crucified Peter upside down. James is beheaded, if I had my choice between crucifixion and being beheaded, I'd rather be beheaded, be-beheaded, I don't know about you. Again, the question I always have in my mind is when you're beheaded do you continue to you see...or right away is everything off, I always wondered that. Is there a little bit of recognition of what's happening, bouncing around for a second there? Look, perhaps James would have broken, perhaps James was not of the nature where he could have taken the crucifixion. Peter is the kind

of man, God no doubt extending his grace to him, that endures his crucifixion for the sake of Christ. James is taken in a different way. Peter's sleeping. Maybe Peter thinks *'Hey, Lord, you told me I'm gonna be led somewhere and be crucified, this guy thinks he's gonna cut my head off, he don't know how this is going to happen. And Lord you said it was going to happen when I'm old,'* and like all of us, he was in denial, and probably thought *'I'm not old,'* like me, I'm not old, I'm only 58, I'm not old. So he's sleeping there in prison, the night before he would have been beheaded, you have to give it to him, between two soldiers, bound by two chains, one on each end, and the keepers are before the door of the prison, standing outside [the prison cell]. **“And, behold, an angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison:”** so Peter's sleeping, an angel appears in the prison, an angelic light, a heavenly light fills the cell, and the angel appears, and Peter's cutting zzz's, and the angel's going *'Oy Vey,'* I'm light sensitive, I don't know about you guys, before I go to bed I put our shade all the way up, because in the morning once the light's shining in I'm up, I can't go back to sleep, the only thing that happens is my wife, she tiptoes over and she pulls them all the way down again...Here's Peter, he's in the prison, and an angel appears, the light fills the cell, and it doesn't budge him, he's still sawing zzz's, and the angel came, **“and he smote Peter on the side,”** now that's the same word we're going to have at the end of the chapter where the angel smites Herod Agrippa and kills him, smites him with worms. It's the Greek word *kataso* and it means to strike forcefully. He appears in the prison, Peter doesn't wake up. He has to walk over to Peter and go **smack!** *'Come on!'* He actually strikes him, imagine that. An angel is allowed to manifest enough material in his hand to hit Peter, to actually smite Peter on the side, and raised him up. He said **‘Come on! Quick, wake up!’** I hate to get up that way, by the way. **“And his chains fell off from his hands.” (verse 7)** what an interesting picture, when the Lord wants to set us free. Look, there's a lot of people that are incarcerated by a lot a different things, who are not in prison, but they're in bondage to one thing or another, sadly. And if the Lord can cause somebody to be physically set free in a miraculous way, know in your heart that he can do the same thing in your life, whatever chains emotionally, mentally, he can cause those to fall off, the day he wants to. He waits until the night before the Feast is over to do this, but the chains fall off of Peter's hands. Let's read down, **“And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy**

garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist [knew] not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.” (verses 8-9) he thought *‘This is a dream, this dream is far out,’* is what he’s thinking, *‘This is really cool.’* Now the angel is the only one who knows this is really happening. He comes in, appears in the cell, bright light, Pete’s not waking up, he has to hit Peter, says **‘Come on! Get up!’** and Peter kind of rouses himself, he says **‘Get dressed!’** I don’t know what he’s got on, he said **‘Your shoes, put your shoes on! Now get your coat and wrap it around you,’** imagine this angel. It reminds me again, when the kids were little, and some of you are in that phase now, you would get them up early in the morning to go somewhere, you remember that, they got their foot pajamas on, and you get them up and stand them next to their bed, and they’re going like this, they’re not really conscious, and you say *‘Come on, take’* ziiip, you take their arm out, you take the other arm out, and they’re doing ok, *‘now lift your foot, get your foot up,’* and they’re doing everything unconscious, their eyes closed, you know. The angel’s doing this, *‘time to get up, put your clothes on, put your shoes on,’* he’s getting Peter dressed. **‘Now put your coat on!’** **“And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.” (verse 9)** the door opens up. He didn’t know it was really happening, which was done by the angel. He thought it was a vision, he thought it was a dream. **“When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.” (verse 10)** Peter thought *‘This was really cool, he’s walking past the guards wondering why they weren’t looking at him,’* **‘and he came to the iron gate that led to the city, which opened to them of its own accord,’** imagine that, they come to this iron gate, as they walk to this iron gate it squeaks open, just opens up by itself. What a cool dream. **“and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.” (verses 10c-11)** He says literally **‘The Lord has plucked me.’** Isn’t it interesting, the angel walks away and leaves him, Peter’s standing out there, alone, expecting to wake up back in the prison cell, and he looks around

and thinks ‘*Wait a minute, somebody pinch me here, this really happened, it really happened.*’ You know, sometimes we think we need to be delivered from our circumstances to rest, whatever Peter had with the Lord was real enough that when he was in prison, bound, and even at the sake of his life, he found that he could rest. It wasn’t being delivered from the circumstances that produced rest, it was what the substance of his faith was, between him and Christ that allowed him to sleep the night before. He was supposed to be executed, and now he’s standing out in the street looking around saying **‘Wait, I’ve been delivered, I’ve been plucked out of the hand of Herod,’**

Guess Who Came Knocking At The Door?

“And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname is Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.” (verses 12-13) which is Greek for Rosy, was her name, Rose, common name of the day. They’re praying, she hears someone pounding at the door, probably with a bit of anticipation, she may think it’s Herod sent soldiers, that knows the prayer-meeting is going on. You know, there’s a certain amount of anxiety here. Look, we can just go through the study tonight, it may not mean a whole lot to us, but I would just keep in mind, one *terrorist* to another, that we have to start thinking about how our culture sees us [i.e. we believers in God’s Word are now viewed as being *terrorists*, even though we don’t believe in killing]. You know, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in marriage, I believe that it’s good to be moral, and all of a sudden I’ve become *a terrorist* [in this alt-Liberal culture, not in reality]. I thought it was good for the country to be an individual who doesn’t get drunk and doesn’t take drugs and doesn’t believe in violence and has moral character and wants to raise my family and pay my taxes, and now I’m a *terrorist* [for being this way and believing this]. I’m trying to figure it out, you can help me. But it hasn’t come to this point yet, but here is this Church, under political pressure to a degree it’s hard for us to imagine, they’re gathered together and they’re praying, and all of a sudden there’s a pounding at the door, and no doubt there’s a bit of anticipation, they think it’s the cops, Herod, it’s the Romans, it’s the Temple police, whatever.

And Rhoda, Rosy goes to answer the door. It says **“And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.” (verse 14)** She was so happy, she forgot to open the door. You know people like that...and Peter thought ‘Rosy,’ and she said ‘Ya?’ she said ‘Who is it?’ and he said ‘It’s Peter,’ and she went ‘Oooh,’ and Peter probably heard her run, ‘Oh Rosy, why did they send Rosy.’ **“when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told” the prayer-meeting “how Peter stood before the gate.”** Their response **“And they said unto her, Thou art mad.” ‘what do you mean Peter’s at the gate? Peter’s in prison, why do you think we’re praying? We’re praying, that’s what Christians do, we pray, but I wouldn’t go overboard, expecting, I don’t know why you’re taking all this stuff literally, Peter’s in prison, we’re praying for Peter now, we’re amazed he’s still alive, what do you mean he’s at the door?’** And then they say to her, **“It’s his angel.” (verse 15)** There was a Jewish tradition that your guardian angel could actually take your form, they believed in guardian angels, they believed that in a crisis or difficult circumstance, your guardian angel could actually take your form and speak with your voice. So, someone says **‘You’re mad,’** and then she continued **‘I’m not crazy, I’m telling you, it’s Peter! he’s there at the door.’** I’m wondering if the angel’s watching, thinking *‘You know, it was a cinch to get him out of prison, getting him into this prayer-meeting is really tough. God should have sent me back with help.’* And they said **“It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.” (verse 16)** he’s still out there, ‘Oy Vey,’ knocking at the door, trying to get into the prayer-meeting. Now look, this prayer-meeting is not perfect prayer. It’s not filled with faith, because they’re telling the girl she’s out of her mind. But it is prayer that overcomes the political throne, and opens the prison doors. The angel summoned Peter, but prayer summoned the angel. And it was miraculous, and the response to this prayer. Peter stands out there and continues knocking. Look, it says in **verse 16, “when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.”** you see the whole group tiptoeing back now. They’re saying *‘are you sure, maybe it’s his angel, maybe it’s somebody trying to imitate Peter trying to get into the prayer-meeting,’* so you see the whole group tiptoeing back now, **‘Is that you, Peter?’ ‘Yes, let me in.’ “Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.” (verse 16) ‘I can’t**

believe it, we prayed, and he got out, that's amazing,' they couldn't believe it. Now they're probably jumping up and down, got all excited, he tells them *'just hold your peace,'* he settles them down, **"But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place."** (verse 17) *'The Lord came, sent his angel and delivered me out of prison.'* I'm sure he didn't say *'I was sleeping, angel appeared, bright light, didn't phase me, he had to whack me, then he had to dress me, and took me out, I thought I was dreaming, he left, I didn't know where I was or what the heck was going on,'* I'm sure he doesn't tell them the whole story. He said ***'the Lord had brought me out of the prison, and he said, Go show these things to James'*** now this is the half-brother of the Lord, James, his younger brother. Tertullian tells us he was the uterine sibling of Christ, the next son born to Joseph and Mary. **"Go shew these things to James, and to the brethren. And he [Peter] departed, and went into another place."** (verse 17c) it doesn't tell us where. It's not the point of Luke at this point, and Peter just passes out of the scene. [Comment: Also, Peter very wisely, went into hiding, knowing Herod's goons would be out looking for him, and he was going to give God time to work things out. At the end of verse 17 this has Acts 12 shifting gears as the Lord takes over, in direct response to Herod's killing of one of his apostles and the threatening of another.] Now we see him again in Acts chapter 15, at the counsel in Jerusalem, but for all intensive purposes we're done with Peter at this point in time. [Peter and James continued to rule over the Jewish branch of the Body of Christ, in Jerusalem, up to Peter and James' death, and 70AD when the Romans conquered Judea and Jerusalem. Paul in Galatians shows this, whilst showing that he himself was the leader of the Jewish-Gentile churches of God, what has been labeled as the Gentile branch of the Body of Christ, up in Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. After 70AD and 135AD the Jewish branch of the Body of Christ migrated, for the most part, up into Asia Minor and the Ephesus church of God where the apostle John was residing with Mary, the mother of Jesus (estimated migration of John & Mary, no later than 66AD).]

*Wrestling With Secondary Causes: When We Get The
"What-if's"*

And look, there's some huge questions here as we look at this. Why James dead, why Peter alive? And those kinds of things can be very torturous to us, depending on the way we process, and I'm not saying anyone is any better than anyone else, but you get in the circumstance where you think *'If we had prayed harder for James, you think if we'd have done this, you think if we'd made an appeal, have fun storming the castle.'* You know, they didn't storm the castle, they didn't do any political protesting, they prayed. Are they thinking *'What if we'd have done this,'* or *'maybe we should have gotten James out of the city when we saw hostility growing,'* is there a lot of second guessing that goes on? Because what happens in a circumstance like this, there is that wrestling with secondary causes. And I watch people in the church go through that, where a child dies, and I can't imagine how difficult that is. I know that you live with that every day for the rest of your life. But then there's the thinking *'Well what if we'd have done this? What if the hospital would have done this? What if we'd have gotten to a better doctor sooner? What if we'd have done this?'* All of that is the epic struggle of secondary causes, *'What if we'd have done this, what if this would have happened, why did this?'* You know, in our church, we have lost people that have been murdered. And you watch somebody tortured with anger and bitterness for the rest their lives, you know *'I'll always hate them, they took my son, they took my daughter, they had no right to do that.'* [We have a wonderful pastor in the local United Church of God in my area, who lost a daughter to a murder, and wonderfully he came to forgive the man, and actually reconcile with him – there most certainly is the Holy Spirit operating within him, that's for sure.] But in all of those things, ultimately, there's the coming to the primary cause. Somewhere in the process, you have to say, *'Lord, you love this man, your Word says the day that we're born, you know the length of our life and the day that we go home to Glory. It wasn't human will, Lord, you're sovereign. You allowed James to be beheaded, you miraculously plucked Peter from the prison. Lord, I don't understand, and I'm angry, and if I can't be angry with a human Lord, I'm angry with you, I don't understand.'* That's the place we need to be, so we can be perfectly honest with him, and we can do business with him and say *'Lord, this hurts tremendously, why did you allow this?'* and to get rid of all the secondary causes, and in some way, somehow we come to a place where we're at peace with him. I don't know all of the reasons, certainly, we see things that are very hard, very difficult, and you

wonder ‘*Lord, why would you allow this? Lord, why did this happen? Or why did that happen?*’ and I look at it and I don’t pretend to understand. But sometimes it’s very painful. Job says that the righteous person dies and no one takes it to heart, **‘The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart, merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil that is to come.’** That sometimes the Lord takes people away because there is a greater measure of suffering that is ahead of them that they would have to endure. Sometimes in God’s wisdom, the way he does that is merciful. And I don’t think that it is easy, and I think it still hurts. But there has to be that place where we sit back and say ‘*Lord, you’re sovereign,*’ we see it in this chapter, God’s deliverance over to the Kingdom, James comes home to glory. We see God’s deliverance of Peter from the prison, Peter would go on for over 30 more years after this, with a very important ministry. Here it just says **‘he went to another place,’** he passes off the scene. This church in Jerusalem is starting to deal with some difficult circumstances. Let’s move on here, let’s see. Peter departed, he went to another place, now it says...

God Takes Care Of Herod

“Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.” (verse 18) Now there’s no small stir among the soldiers because there is the code of Justinian, the code of Justinian coded into Roman Law was this. If you’re guarding, as a Roman soldier, the cell of a man whose going to be put to death, and you let that prisoner escape, you then served the sentence of the man you let escape. [comment: now, Justinian lived in the 500AD’s, so this code was well before him, don’t know why Pastor Joe is referring it to have come from him. It was a Roman code long before Justinian was born. Justinian was the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, who re-united the Eastern Roman Empire with Italy, marking the beginning of the series of empires called “The Holy Roman Empires,” in 554AD.] So there’s no small stir, because you got four guards, quaternions, looking at each other saying ‘*Where is he!?*’ Two of them are saying ‘*I don’t know, we’re standing here chained to each arm and all of a sudden we look up, and the chain’s empty,*’ the other two guards are saying ‘*I don’t know, we were outside the door with our swords drawn, nobody*

came out of here.’ There’s two other sets of guards, they’re wondering how he got out. And of course the gate’s saying *‘I opened all by myself, I didn’t know what was going on.’* It says that **“there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.” (verse 18b)** because we’re going to see clearly in fact he was under the death sentence. **“And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and there abode.” (verse 19)** Now he went down, he actually goes north, but whenever you leave Jerusalem, spiritually, you go down, Jerusalem is 2,500 foot above sea level, but in that culture you go down from Jerusalem. And it says, **“And Herod was highly displeased”** we’re not given details, evidently, **“with them of Tyre and Sidon:”** the rulers of that area up on the coast of what was called Phoenicia then, **“but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king’s chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king’s country.” (verse 20)** no doubt with some type of bribe, politics is always the same, they found their way into someone in the king’s palace, **“they desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king’s country.”** Tyre and Sidon are dependent on Galilee and the areas of Judea for their grain, for their food. This dearth has set in, we heard about it, the rulers of Tyre and Sidon come down to talk to Herod, he has some type of aggravation, some type of hostility between him and these leaders, [and he’s also in a very bad mood for having mysteriously lost the apostle Peter out of prison, most embarrassing and disconcerting to him], they find his servant Blastus, paying him off, make peace, so that they can make an appeal to Herod, and talk to him about their problems. And it says **“And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.” (verse 21)** Now Josephus tells us that his apparel, his royal apparel was woven of silver thread, that he made this oration early in the morning so the sun was coming up in the east, he was sitting at his throne place in front of the amphitheater, and the sun glistening on this actually silver outfit he had on, make it even hard to look at him, the sun was glistening off of his apparel, and the people gave a shout, as they listened to him, they were amazed by his appearance, he made an oration to them, **“And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” (verse 22)** **“And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the**

ghost.” (verse 23) “an angel” and I’m assuming at this point it’s the same one that let Peter out of prison, “smote” him, that’s the same word he “smote” Peter, but this is a different smiting. He was eaten of worms, that’s smiting, isn’t it? That’s what I call “smitten.” Now he gave up the ghost four days after this. History tells us, he fell down in his oration, all the people were saying *‘this is God,’* and he was glistening there, and he, evidently enjoying that instead of yielding up the glory to God, all of a sudden *‘Aghh,’* he’s in agony, he falls down, they carry him to his shelter, and it became apparent that he was dying, something was wrong, the worms before the four days were up had burst through his skin (this is free information about worms, you can enjoy the word-picture here), he was eaten alive of worms, and he died. Here’s some other free information, just for you, it’s an interesting picture. Antiochus Epiphanes, who took over the area of Judea, came to Jerusalem, and violated the alter there, sacrificed a pig on the alter in Jerusalem. He took men and women and fried them alive on a huge skillet in the Temple precinct, he tortured and slaughtered thousands of Jews. And when he was in the middle of cursing the God of the Jews and started to choke and fell down, and burst open, and was eaten alive of worms. Herod the Great, the grandfather of Herod Agrippa, who slaughtered the innocents in Bethlehem, who was cruel to the Jews, who killed his own sons, became a madman, persecuted the Jews terribly, fell down, incredible pain, taken to the hot springs in Tiberius, and again, worms burst through his skin, he died, eaten alive of worms. Pharaoh, queen of Cyrene, a persecutor of the Church, extremely cruel, falls down, eaten alive of worms. Hermeneaus, Roman governor, persecuting the Christians, falls down, burst open, eaten alive of worms. Galerius [see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galerius>], Roman emperor, great persecutor of the Church, falls down, eaten alive, of worms. Philipp II of Spain, a persecutor of genuine Christians and believers, falls down, eaten alive of worms. What am I trying to say? All these guys were eaten alive of worms. Jesus had said, ***‘if your hand offend thee, cut it off, it is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched.’*** I don’t know, several times he says that about hell, it’s a place where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. You look at these persecutors of the Lord, persecutors of his people, it’s just interesting to me they all fall down and, some of you are saying *‘Stop, please,’* it’s just amazing to me that they fall

down and are eaten of worms, is it a foretaste, it seems to me to be a foreshadowing of the other world that they're slipping into for sure, gone, fallen down, eaten of worms, the threat is gone. [Comment: the greater body of Christ has differing definitions about hell and the "unsaved dead." To see some of these, log onto: <https://unityinchrist.com/plaintruth/battle.htm>. Also, in the Old Testament this promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he, that God would bless those who bless Abraham (and by extrapolation his descendants), and curse those who curse him (or his descendants), seen in Genesis 12:3. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul said in Galatians 3:29 that those that are Christ's are the children of Abraham, so this promise of blessing or retribution applies to all believers as well as Israelites, Jews, and their persecutors. When Herod killed the apostle James and tried to kill Peter, that was it, God had to act, and it was according to one of the oldest promises made in the Bible, made by God to Abraham and by extrapolation, all his descendants, including Christians. You hurt a Jew or Christian, beware, God-promised karma is headed your way.] Look, in the beginning of the chapter, James is dead, Peter is in prison, Herod's on the throne. At the end of the chapter, James is in heaven, Peter is free, Herod is dead, and the Word of God is alive. Look, it says **"And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied."** (verse 24) the Word of God grew and multiplied. Paul tells us this, he says, ***'Wherein I suffer, troubled as an evil doer, living in bonds, put in prison,'*** he says, ***'but the Word of God is not down.'*** He writes this in Thessalonians, he says ***'the Word of God sounded out from among you through the whole region, so that when we came we didn't have to tell anyone, everyone heard.'*** Interesting picture. Politics, the civil authority has all the power, what are we gonna do? They pound us into the ground, they can overcome us, we're called *terrorists* now, we're the trouble-makers, they're taking away our freedoms, this and that. Well, you look at that, and it looked like Herod held all the cards, vexing the Church, James dead, Peter in prison. The end of the chapter, James in heaven, Peter's free, Herod's dead, God's throne's established, and the Word of God is flourishing, moving out through the territories that were there.

In Closing: What About This Day & Age? Pray, Be In Prayer

Prayer, you know, it's interesting, as we go through the Book of Acts, it ends by saying **"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry,"** where they had been to bring relief, **"and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."** (verse 25) this is really the beginning of chapter 13, if the Lord tarries we'll be there next week, read ahead. But, look, interesting thing is, as we go through these scenes in the Book of Acts, is this, they had genuine spiritual experience. That's not what we build everything on, Peter says **'We have now a more sure word of prophecy,'** but the truth is they had great reality in their prayers, they saw miraculous things happen. There are places around the world in the mission field where they've seen miraculous things happen. K.P. [Yohannan] told me last year they saw several people raised from the dead, one guy was dead ten days, and they saw him raised from the dead. And this early Church, we see genuine spiritual experience, we see great fervency in prayer, we see that the filling of the Holy Ghost was a reality to them, and they knew the voice of the Holy Spirit and they are building all of their doctrine using nothing but the Word of God, and it is establishing the doctrine of the Church. It seems like today, we have all of our doctrine established, to the point where the Church separates and argues, but in many ways we have little spiritual experience, little power of the Holy Ghost, little passion in prayer. And what do we do, the days that we live in? I'm thankful for the letter to the Church at Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation. By the way that's just a coincidence, it's not written to us, in case you're new. But he says **'I've given unto you the key of David, set before you an open door.'** And it's interesting, to look at the life of David in one respect, there were miracles in the sense he killed a bear, he killed a lion when he was a kid. It was a miracle on the battle field he killed a giant with a sling. But I mean when you take into account David's life, there's not a lot of miraculous things going on. But David, over 40 times in the Psalms talks about how important the Word of God was to him, **'LORD your Word,'** and over and over and over, he's not a man like Elijah and Elisha, where he has an abundance of supernatural things happening in his life, he changes the course of a nation, he expands their boundaries further than they ever had been expanded, and yet he is genuinely a man of the Word. But he

is a man who pours out his heart and his life passionately before God. ***'And this church, you know, you have the key of David, you have that, and I've set before you an open door that no man can shut. Because you have a little strength,'*** and look, there's no rebuke to that church, so that's a commendation, ***'you actually have a little strength,'*** it says. ***'You've kept my Word, you've not denied my name.'*** I think that's important to us, I think that's important to us in the days we live. And because to that church, he says ***'you have a little strength, you've kept my Word, you've not denied my name, I'm going to keep you out of the hour of trial that's coming to try all of them who dwell on the face of the earth.'*** (cf. Revelation 3:10) We do have that hope, don't we? we do have that hope. [Comment: to see just who this letter to the church at Philadelphia was really sent to, see: <https://unityinchrist.com/revelation/revelation3-1-22.html> and scroll to the Philadelphia era section, just below the Sardis era.] You know, I think it's a great time for us to be praying, it's a great time for you, brothers, for the men here, to think more about fasting and prayer than you ever have. You know, I understand, some have hypoglycemia, you can fast from television for a week, after the Sixters I know. But my point is, private discipline, time alone with the Lord, we live in important times. I look at a scene like this, and I know God is the same, he's still sovereign. He collects one, he delivers another, he puts down political power, he raises up others, it's the same God. For you and I the struggle sometimes is *'Why God? Why this? and this person? And this person?'* and sometimes being angry at a human being, now look, put away secondary causes, and just do the equation alone with God. I'm not saying it's easy, it isn't. You know, I've done some of those, *'Why, Lord?'* it wasn't the doctor's fault, it wasn't that the person was negligent, *'Why Lord? you took the person, why, Lord? they were just getting on their feet, they were just showing so much potential, they were just, they could have done so much, Lord, it doesn't make sense, why? It's so painful, there's so many hurting.'* Instead of being mad individuals, to grind those things out, you know that he's faithful, he speaks to us, he'll help us understand. But this is the way he is, in his wisdom, he collects James, plucks him, it says. As Isaiah says, no one lays it to heart, God will sometimes take the righteous to save him from greater pain and agony to come, from evil things. He takes James, Peter he delivers, not because of Peter's faith, the angel's got to smack him around and wake him up and get him dressed. Not because of the prayers of the saints, because when

Peter gets there they tell Rosy she's out of her mind, we're praying for him, not the prayer of faith. But look, the encouragement for us to pray, their prayer was obviously unperfect, their prayer obviously didn't have all the faith it should have, they didn't say *'We knew it! we knew it! We prayed for him, we knew God would send an angel and set him free.'* They said to Rosy *'You're crazy, somebody's imitating him.'* And yet their prayer, the prayer of God's children, imperfect, lacking faith, was more powerful than the civil government in the area. It should be an encouragement to us to pray. And at the end, God deals with the man, God deals with the man that touches his glory, God deals with the man who thinks his throne can be exalted above God or against God. He does that. Pray. Pray for one another, pray for your kids, pray for your family, pray for your friends, a great time for us to be doing that in the world that we live in. Let's stand, let's pray...[connective expository sermon on Acts 12:1-25, given by Pastor Joe Focht, Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, 13500 Philmont Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19116]

related links:

Audio version: <http://resources.ccphilly.org/SPM608>

Where are we now? To read a letter Jesus wrote to us see <https://unityinchrist.com/revelation/revelation3-1-22.html> (and scroll to "Jesus Christ's Letter To The Church At Philadelphia")

Where are we now in Bible prophecy? See https://unityinchrist.com/prophecies/2ndcoming_4.htm