

PART 16: OPPOSITION AND ADVANCEMENT

ACTS 12:1-24

Mike Taylor

www.TaylorNotes.Info/monday



MAIN IDEA

King Herod launches a public assault on the church leaders in Jerusalem, killing James and imprisoning Peter, but he ultimately cannot stop the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

I. BACKGROUND

A. Events

1. Passover: A single day that commemorates the Biblical story of Exodus, where God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Occurs in our April.
2. Festival of Unleavened Bread: This feast followed the day after Passover and lasted one week (Lev. 25:5-8). During that time, the Israelites ate no bread with yeast in remembrance of their haste in preparing for their Exodus from Egypt.

B. Characters

1. Herod Agrippa I: The Roman king of Judea and Samaria from AD 37 to 44. He was a grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas.
2. James: The half-brother of Jesus and early leader of the Jerusalem Church of the Apostolic Age.
3. Peter: (Simon) the most prominent of the 12 apostles and a fisherman along with his brother, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, James, and John.
4. Mary: The mother of John Mark who lived in Jerusalem where she had a house in which Christians met for prayer. It was to her house that Peter immediately went when he was miraculously released from prison by an angel (12:1-6).
5. Rhoda: the girl who answered the door in Acts 12:13. She was a servant, probably a slave of Mary, John Mark's mother.
6. Blastus: A household manager (chamberlain) of King Agrippa (12:20) who apparently was easily bribed. The men of Tyre and Sidon used him in approaching the king.

II. SUMMARY

A. James Killed and Peter Imprisoned (12:1-5)

1. As a hedge against his shaky relationship with Rome, Herod gained favor with the Jews by persecuting Christians.
2. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred (12:2). The manner of his execution indicates James was accused of leading people to follow false gods (cf. Deut. 13:12-15).
3. Four squads. Each squad contained four soldiers and rotated the watch on Peter. At all times, two guards were chained to him in his cell, while the other two stood guard outside the cell door (12:4).
4. The entire church prayed for Peter (12:5)

B. Peter is Rescued (12:6-19)

1. Peter shows no signs of anxiety (12:6). He is able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution; "for he grants sleep to those he loves" (Psa. 127:2 NIV)
2. Peter obeyed the angel without really knowing what was happening (12:8). He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.
3. The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gate - are all nothing when God is with us and prayer is behind us (12:6-11). Many of us are worrying about the "iron gates" before we ever get to them. Remember, "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken" (Psa. 55:22).

C. The Death of Herod (12:20-24)

1. Herod gives a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon, who are anxious to please him (12:20-21).
2. Herod receives the overstated praise of the people of Tyre and Sidon, then he receives the judgment of the God he refused to glorify (12:22-23).
3. The contrast between Herod and the church is clear. Herod believed he had the upper hand against God's people, but God showed who was really in charge... Herod is judged, the church is blessed (12:23-24)!
4. The word of God continued without hindrance (12:24)
5. Herod fought against God; but the church submitted to God and got in line with His plan through prayer. God is eternally Sovereign!

III. APPLICATION

A. Spread the gospel and let _____ (12:1).

B. Rely on the power of _____ (12:5).

C. Give continual praise to God for _____ and _____
_____ (12:17, 23).

Sources Used in This Lesson

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