

PRAYER,
THE POWER THE POWERLESS POSSESS!
ACTS CH12:1-19

INTRODUCTION

According to an article published this year in January (2023) by “Open Doors World Watch List” - “More than 5,600 Christians were killed for their faith last year (2022). More than 2,100 churches were attacked or closed. More than 124,000 Christians were forcibly displaced from their homes because of their faith, and almost 15,000 became refugees.”

DEATH OF A SAINT! V1-5

The Christian, for being followers of Christ, this side of eternity, will always face a powerful and relentless opposition, in the form of suffering, persecution and the world's hostility! This suffering and opposition will sometimes result in the death of the Christian, as we see here for James, Johns' brother, who were both the sons of Zebedee and Salome (Mark Ch10:35, Ch16:1 mother of James and John Matthew Ch27:56)! In the Gospel of Mark, Ch10:35-40 the two brothers approach Jesus, requesting that they would be able to sit “one at the right hand and one at the left, in your glory.” Jesus asks them if they are able to drink the cup (that is, a cup of suffering) and because they both say “yes” Jesus prophecies about their deaths. Here we see the prophecy concerning James, coming true!

V2 - Herod Agrippa 1st, has James beheaded! He not only lays violent hands on the Christians, he also arrests Peter and has him placed in Prison, but because it is the time of both the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, Herod has to wait before he can execute Peter! Peter up to this point has two previous prison experiences Ch4:3 + Ch5:18, albeit, at the hands of the Sanhedrin!

V4 – They knew Peter had “previous” for escaping Ch5:18-20! So, this time its 4 squads of 4 soldiers to guard him night and day, two soldiers always chained to him and two acting as sentries! As if he can escape this time!

V5 - Meanwhile, we are told that the Saints were praying “earnestly” – Luke uses the adverb “ektenos” - unremittingly/fervently, the same phrase that he uses for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane – Luke Ch22:44! ***So, what's going to happen?***

DELIVERANCE OF A SAINT! 6-17

“When the Church prays, the cause of God will go forward, and his enemies will come to naught, even if this does not exempt the Church from suffering and martyrdom” (Cited in Howard Marshall, Commentary on Acts, page 206). Luke presents prayer as the “natural atmosphere” of God's people and the “normal” context for divine activity! Acts Ch1:14, 24; Ch2:42; Ch4:24-31; Ch6:4, 6; Ch9:40; Ch10:2, 4, 9, 31; Ch11:5.

V6 – In light of the Saints praying, the night before Peter's planned execution an angel of the Lord (v7) appears, perhaps Peter's ***Guardian Angel*** - Matthew Ch18:10! He strikes Peter on the side (look at v1 + v23), wakes him, commands him to “Get up quickly” and Peter's chains fall off!

Despite there being four soldiers, two of which are chained to Peter, two others acting as sentries, they along with Peter see no light (v7) and don't see the angel! Peter needed to be woken by the angel! No doubt there were other prison guards also on duty that night watching over other prisoners! Nobody sees nothing! The

angel helps Peter with instructions to get dressed (v8) and leads him out of the prison and back into the safety of the City, through the city gate which just opens by itself (10)! Now that Peter is safe, the angel disappears as quickly as he had appeared.

The next set of verses 11-16 are like a scene from a comedy film!

John Mark's mum, must have had a significant size house (Is it the same house as the Upper Room used by Jesus and the disciples? Mark Ch14:15; Luke Ch22:12; John Ch20:19; Acts Ch1:13 + Ch2:1-4?) as there were many gathered there (v12) and it had a vestibule (Lobby/ Hallway – v13)!

Rhoda (Rose) is so excited in hearing Peter's voice, she completely forgets to let him in, the Church don't initially believe Rhoda, what does that say about their prayers! **V15 suggests that the Church may have thought Peter was already dead! Through Rhoda's persistence and Peter's knocking, the Church eventually let Peter in, only to see him motioning to “be silent.”**

He then, before leaving gives the Church a message for James (Jesus' half brother) and to the brothers, to tell them exactly what had happened!

John Mark – Presumably the author of the Gospel of Mark, the man who ran away naked in Mark Ch14:51-52, who later joined Paul and Barnabas in Acts Ch12:25, went on mission with them in Acts Ch13:5, abandoned the same mission in Acts Ch13:13 and was the root cause of a huge “bust up” between Paul and Barnabas in Acts Ch15:37-40. Being reinstated in Colossians Ch4:10, identified as the cousin of Barnabas, he is also mentioned in Philemon 24 as a fellow worker and 1 Peter Ch5:13 as Paul's spiritual son! The apostle Paul in his last letter, asks Luke to “get Mark” in 2nd Timothy Ch4:11!

DISTURBED SOLDIERS! V18-19

Remember the 4 squads of 4 soldiers v4? They are disturbed! There is a reason that the soldiers are disturbed! Firstly, Herod has sanctioned a thorough search for Peter, but he is nowhere to be found (v17 + v19). Secondly, as was the custom, when soldiers lost their prisoners who were due for execution, the execution would still go ahead, but with the soldiers as the ones who would be executed!

You could say that this passage symbolises something of Exodus 12 and the Passover! There is a sacrifice with the lambs (James), the people of Israel are delivered from slavery by God (Peter) and there is judgement by God, as Pharaoh and his soldiers die (The Guards)!

APPENDIX

1. **Herod the Great (ruled 37-4 B.C.)** He's the guy in the Christmas story. Super powerful client king answerable to Rome. Tried to trick the wise men. Killed the babies in Bethlehem (not to mention some of his own sons and wives) - Matt Ch2:1, 3, Ch2:7, 12-13, 15-16, 19. Luke Ch1:5
2. **Herod Archelaus (ruled 4 B.C.-A.D. 6)** He was one of Herod the Great's three sons mentioned in the Bible. He received one-half of his father's territory, the area surrounding and near Jerusalem (Judea and Samaria). Joseph was unwilling to move Mary and toddler Jesus to Bethlehem after fleeing to Egypt because Bethlehem was in this

Herod's territory and, like his father "the Great," Herod Archelaus wasn't known to be very cuddly either. He got replaced by a Roman procurator less than ten years into his reign; that's why Pontius Pilate is the man in charge at Jesus' crucifixion rather than one of the "Herod's" - Matt Ch2:22,

3. **Herod Antipas (ruled 4 B.C.-A.D. 39)** Jesus called him "the Fox" (Luke 13:32). Received a quarter of his father's territory (Galilee and Perea). Divorced his first wife and married Herodias, the wife of his brother (who was yet a different "Herod"). Killed John the Baptist. Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to see this Herod as part of Jesus' trial since this Herod was visiting Jerusalem at the time Jesus was sentenced to death. Did you know that Pilate and Herod Antipas became friends that day (Luke 23:12)? - Matt Ch14:1, 3, 6. Mark Ch6:14, 16-18, 20-22. Mark Ch8:15. Luke Ch3:1, 19. Luke Ch8:3. Luke Ch9:7, 9. Luke Ch13:31. Luke Ch23:7, 8, 11-12, 15. Acts Ch4:27. Acts Ch13:1.

4. **Herod Philip the Tetrarch (ruled 4 B.C.-A.D. 34)** Got the remaining quarter of his father's territory (north and east of Galilee—mostly ruled over Syrians and Greeks). Married his niece, Salome, the daughter of Herodias (Herod Antipas's wife-of-sin) -

5. **Herod Agrippa I (ruled A.D. 37-44 [41-44 in Judea])** Grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herodias, Herod Antipas's wife. Eventually ended up ruling over even more territory than his grandfather, Herod the Great. In the book of Acts, he is known as the one who put Peter in prison (Acts 12:1-5) ...although he couldn't keep him there (12:6-19)! Also... "He did not give God the glory" when referred to as a god by the people of Tyre and Sidon and was thus struck by an angel and "eaten by worms" (Acts 12:20-23).

6. **Herod Agrippa II (ruled A.D. 50s; died around A.D. 93)** Like his father Herod Agrippa I and great-grandfather Herod the Great, he ruled over a large territory. He's the one who interviewed Paul along with the Roman procurator Festus when Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, after Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 25 - 26). Agrippa exclaimed to Paul (literal translation): "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

After this last Herod, we don't hear anything more of the dynasty of the family called "Herod."

Chiastic Pattern! A structure where words are repeated in reverse!

- a. Barnabas and Saul Ch11:27-30
- b. Herod Ch12:1-5
- c. Peter Ch12:6-17
- b. Herod Ch12:18-23
- a. Barnabas and Saul Ch12:24-25

A chiasm describes a structure in which the first and last parts parallel each other, the second and penultimate parts parallel each other and so on into a central point. For example: a-b-b-a or a-b-c-d-c-b-a. Chiasm is named after 'chi' — the Greek letter for 'x'. English stories come to a climax with a punchline at the end. Hebrew stories often have the climax or punchline in the middle. Nearly all the Old Testament is written in Hebrew.

The one exception is Daniel Ch2 – Ch7 which is written in Aramaic. And this block of teaching has a chiastic structure:

- A. A vision of four kingdoms and God's kingdom (chapter 2).
- B. God saves his people from death by fire (chapter 3).
- C. God deposes a king (Nebuchadnezzar) (chapter 4).
- C. God deposes a king (Belshazzar) (chapter 5).
- B. God saves his people from death by lion (chapter 6).
- A. A vision of four kingdoms and God's kingdom (chapter 7). (Cited in Crosslands Training)

1st century Caesars

- Augustus_(31 BC–14 AD)
- Tiberius_(14–37 AD)
- Caligula_(37–41 AD)
- Claudius_(41–54 AD)
- Nero_(54–68 AD)
- Galba_(68–69 AD)
- Otho_(January–April 69 AD)
- Aulus Vitellius_(July–December 69 AD)
- Vespasian_(69–79 AD)