

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 12 — God Delivers, But Herod Falls

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 12 presents one of the strongest contrasts in the book of Acts.

On one side stands:

Herod.

A powerful king.

A man with political authority.

A man able to imprison believers.

A man able to order executions.

A man praised publicly as though he were divine.

On the other side stands:

The church.

Persecuted.

Grieving.

Praying.

Humanly powerless.

Yet Acts 12 reveals who truly possesses authority.

Herod kills James.

He arrests Peter.

He places Peter under heavy guard.

He plans to put Peter on public trial.

But while Peter sits in prison:

The church prays.

Then God acts.

An angel enters the prison.

Light fills the cell.

Peter's chains fall off.

The guards do not stop him.

The iron gate opens by itself.

Peter walks out free.

Meanwhile, the praying believers are so astonished by Peter's deliverance that they initially struggle to believe Rhoda when she announces:

"Peter is at the door!"

Acts 12 reminds us that sincere believers may pray faithfully while still being surprised by God's answer.

The chapter then turns back to Herod.

The man who could not keep Peter imprisoned later accepts praise from a crowd declaring:

"This is the voice of a god, not a man!"

Herod refuses to give glory to God.

Judgment comes immediately.

He dies.

Then Luke gives one of the most powerful contrasts in Acts:

Herod falls.

But:

"The word of God continued to grow and spread."

The king who opposed the church disappears.

The gospel keeps moving.

Acts 12 therefore teaches:

Human power is temporary, God's power is supreme, prayer matters, pride destroys, and no earthly ruler can stop the Word of God from advancing.

I. HEROD ATTACKS THE CHURCH

Acts 12:1

“About this time King Herod violently attacked some who belonged to the church.”

The persecution becomes political.

Herod uses government authority against believers.

Cross References

Acts 8:1

After Stephen was killed, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, scattering believers throughout Judea and Samaria.

Luke 21:12

Jesus warned, “People will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to religious authorities and prisons because of My name.”

John 15:20

Jesus said, “Remember what I told you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.”

Spiritual Principle

The church should not be surprised when faithfulness to Christ brings opposition.

Jesus had already warned His followers.

II. JAMES IS KILLED

Acts 12:2

“He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.”

James becomes the first of the Twelve apostles recorded in Acts to die as a martyr.

This is the same James who followed Jesus with his brother John.

Cross References

Mark 10:39

Jesus told James and John that they would indeed share in the cup of suffering associated with following Him.

Matthew 20:23

Jesus told them that they would drink from His cup of suffering, though positions of honor belonged to the Father's sovereign decision.

Matthew 4:21

Jesus called James and John while they were working with their father Zebedee.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness does not guarantee physical deliverance from every danger.

James is killed.

Peter will be delivered.

Both belong to God.

This is an important truth.

God's sovereignty does not always look the same in every believer's life.

III. HEROD ARRESTS PETER

Acts 12:3

“When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.”

Herod notices that James' execution gains political approval.

So he continues.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been arrested and placed in the public jail.

Luke 22:1

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called Passover, was approaching.

John 11:53

Religious leaders had previously decided that Jesus should be killed.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When leaders value popularity more than righteousness, injustice can become politically useful.

Herod's motive was not justice.

It was approval.

IV. PETER IS HEAVILY GUARDED

Acts 12:4

“After arresting him, he put him in prison, guarded by four squads of soldiers. He intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.”

Herod takes extraordinary precautions.

Peter had already escaped prison once in Acts 5.

Herod apparently intends to make sure it does not happen again.

Cross References

Acts 5:18

The apostles had previously been placed in jail for preaching Jesus.

Matthew 27:66

The authorities secured Jesus’ tomb by sealing the stone and posting a guard.

Acts 16:24

Paul and Silas were later placed in the inner prison with their feet secured.

Spiritual Principle

Human beings may increase security, but they cannot make God powerless.

More guards do not create a problem for God.

More chains do not create a problem for God.

More gates do not create a problem for God.

V. THE CHURCH PRAYS EARNESTLY

Acts 12:5

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

This verse gives us the earthly situation and the spiritual response.

Peter Was in Prison

But:

The Church Was Praying

Herod had soldiers.

The church had prayer.

Cross References

James 5:16

The earnest prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Acts 4:31

After the believers prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke God's Word boldly.

Matthew 18:19

Jesus taught about the power of believers agreeing together in prayer according to God's will.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When the church cannot reach the prisoner, prayer can still reach the throne of God.

VI. PETER SLEEPS BEFORE HIS TRIAL

Acts 12:6

“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards stood at the entrance.”

The scene is extraordinary.

Peter knows James has been killed.

Peter knows Herod intends to bring him out.

Yet:

Peter is sleeping.

Cross References

Acts 16:25

Paul and Silas later prayed and sang hymns to God while imprisoned.

Psalms 4:8

I will lie down and sleep in peace because You alone, Lord, make me dwell securely.

Psalms 3:5

I lie down and sleep; I wake again because the Lord sustains me.

Spiritual Principle

Peace is not always the absence of danger; sometimes peace is confidence in God while danger remains.

VII. AN ANGEL ENTERS THE CELL

Acts 12:7

“Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly!’ And the chains fell off his wrists.”

God intervenes suddenly.

Cross References

Acts 5:19

An angel of the Lord previously opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out.

Acts 16:26

A violent earthquake later opened prison doors and loosened chains around Paul and Silas.

Isaiah 61:1

God’s Anointed One announces freedom to captives and release for prisoners.

Key Truth

The chains did not have to be:

Picked.

Broken by Peter.

Unlocked by guards.

They simply:

Fell off.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

What is impossible for the prisoner is effortless for God.

VIII. PETER IS TOLD TO GET READY

Acts 12:8

“The angel said, ‘Put on your clothes and sandals.’ Peter did so. Then the angel said, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’”

Peter receives practical instructions.

Cross References

Exodus 12:11

Israel was told to eat the Passover prepared for immediate departure, with clothing and sandals ready.

Ephesians 6:15

Believers are told to have their feet prepared with readiness connected to the gospel of peace.

2 Kings 4:29

Elisha’s servant was told to prepare himself quickly and go on his mission without delay.

Spiritual Principle

God’s miraculous activity does not eliminate human obedience.

God removes the chains.

Peter still has to get dressed and walk.

IX. PETER THINKS HE IS SEEING A VISION

Acts 12:9

“Peter followed him out, but he didn’t realize it was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.”

The deliverance is so extraordinary Peter initially cannot process it.

Cross References

Acts 10:17

Peter had previously been puzzled while trying to understand the meaning of a vision.

Genesis 45:26

Jacob initially could not believe the astonishing report that Joseph was still alive.

Luke 24:11

The apostles initially struggled to believe the women's report concerning Jesus' resurrection.

Spiritual Principle

God can answer prayer in ways that exceed our immediate ability to understand what He is doing.

X. THE IRON GATE OPENS

Acts 12:10

“They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. They walked down one street, and then the angel left him.”

Obstacle after obstacle disappears.

First Guard

Passed.

Second Guard

Passed.

Iron Gate

Opened.

Cross References

Isaiah 45:2

God says, “I will go before you, level the rough places, break down bronze gates, and cut through iron bars.”

Psalms 107:14

God brought prisoners out of darkness and broke their chains.

Acts 16:26

God later opened prison doors through an earthquake.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When God opens the way, locked gates cannot overrule Him.

XI. PETER REALIZES GOD HAS DELIVERED HIM

Acts 12:11

“When Peter realized what had happened, he said, ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s hand and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.’”

Peter now understands.

Cross References

Psalm 34:7

The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear Him and delivers them.

Daniel 6:22

Daniel said, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths so they could not harm me.”

2 Timothy 4:17

Paul said the Lord stood beside him, strengthened him, and rescued him from deadly danger.

Spiritual Principle

Deliverance should produce recognition of the Deliverer.

Peter does not say:

“I escaped.”

He says:

“The Lord rescued me.”

XII. PETER GOES TO THE PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 12:12

“When this dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered and praying.”

Peter knew where believers would be.

Praying.

Cross References

Acts 4:31

The early church had repeatedly gathered for powerful united prayer.

Colossians 4:10

John Mark was connected with Barnabas and later became important in Christian ministry.

Acts 1:14

The early believers devoted themselves continually to prayer.

Spiritual Principle

A praying church becomes a natural place to go when God has answered prayer.

XIII. RHODA COMES TO THE DOOR

Acts 12:13

“Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.”

Rhoda becomes part of the story because she is the first believer inside to recognize Peter.

Cross References

Revelation 3:20

Jesus pictures Himself standing at the door and knocking.

Luke 12:36

Jesus described servants ready to open the door when their master returns.

Matthew 25:11

Jesus used the image of people arriving and calling at a closed door.

Spiritual Principle

God often includes ordinary people in extraordinary moments.

Rhoda was not an apostle.

Not a church leader.

Yet her testimony becomes part of Scripture.

XIV. RHODA FORGETS TO OPEN THE DOOR

Acts 12:14

“When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’”

This is one of the most human moments in Acts.

Rhoda is so excited that she forgets Peter is still standing outside.

Cross References

John 20:20

The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the risen Lord.

Luke 24:41

The disciples were so filled with joy and amazement that they struggled to process what they were seeing.

Genesis 45:26

Jacob’s heart was stunned when he first heard that Joseph was alive.

Spiritual Principle

Great joy can sometimes arrive so suddenly that it temporarily overwhelms us.

XV. THE PRAYING CHURCH DOES NOT BELIEVE RHODA

Acts 12:15

“They told her, ‘You’re out of your mind.’ But she kept insisting that it was true. They said, ‘It must be his angel.’”

This is almost humorous.

They are praying for Peter.

Peter is at the door.

Rhoda tells them.

They do not believe her.

Cross References

Luke 24:11

The apostles thought the women's report about Jesus' resurrection sounded like nonsense and did not believe them.

Mark 16:11

When the disciples heard Jesus was alive, they initially refused to believe.

Matthew 18:10

Jesus taught that angels have a special ministry connected with God's care for His people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sometimes believers pray with more faith than they realize and are still surprised when God answers.

XVI. PETER KEEPS KNOCKING

Acts 12:16

“But Peter kept knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.”

Prayer was being answered outside while debate continued inside.

Cross References

Luke 24:37

The disciples were startled and frightened by what they saw after Jesus' resurrection.

Matthew 7:7

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened.”

John 20:20

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Spiritual Principle

God's answer does not depend upon our ability to imagine exactly how He will answer.

XVII. PETER TELLS THEM WHAT GOD DID

Acts 12:17

“Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. ‘Tell James and the other brothers about this,’ he said, and then he left for another place.”

Peter gives the credit to God.

Cross References

Acts 21:18

James later appears as a major leader among the Jerusalem believers.

James 1:1

James identifies himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:13

James later speaks prominently during the Jerusalem Council.

Spiritual Principle

Answered prayer should become testimony.

Do not merely receive God’s help.

Tell others what God has done.

XVIII. THE SOLDIERS ARE CONFUSED

Acts 12:18

“In the morning there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter.”

The soldiers wake to an impossible situation.

Peter is gone.

Cross References

Matthew 28:4

The guards at Jesus’ tomb trembled with fear because of the angelic appearance.

Acts 16:27

The Philippian jailer later panicked when he saw prison doors open.

Matthew 28:11

Guards from Jesus' tomb reported what had happened.

Spiritual Principle

God's intervention can leave human systems unable to explain what occurred.

XIX. HEROD EXECUTES THE GUARDS

Acts 12:19

"After Herod searched for him and didn't find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then he went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there."

Herod's cruelty continues.

Cross References

Matthew 28:12

Religious leaders bribed guards to give a false explanation concerning Jesus' empty tomb.

Acts 27:42

Roman soldiers later considered killing prisoners to prevent escape.

Daniel 6:24

Under ancient royal law, those connected with false accusations against Daniel eventually faced severe judgment.

Spiritual Principle

Unchecked pride often produces cruelty because human lives become less important than preserving power.

XX. HEROD'S CONFLICT WITH TYRE AND SIDON

Acts 12:20

"Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, but they united and sought peace with him, since their region depended on the king's country for food. They won over Blastus, the king's personal servant, to make peace."

Herod possessed political and economic influence.

Cross References

1 Kings 5:9

The people of Tyre supplied timber and depended upon trade arrangements with Israel.

Ezekiel 27:17

Tyre traded extensively with Judah and Israel, including agricultural products.

1 Kings 5:11

Solomon provided food supplies to Hiram's household in connection with their trade agreement.

Spiritual Principle

Political power may influence economies and nations, but it does not make a ruler divine.

XXI. HEROD APPEARS IN ROYAL SPLENDOR

Acts 12:21

“On the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to them.”

Everything about the scene communicates human greatness.

Royal clothing.

Throne.

Public audience.

Political authority.

Cross References

Ezekiel 28:2

The ruler of Tyre became proud and claimed godlike status even though he was only a man.

Daniel 5:20

When a king's heart became proud and hardened, he was brought down from his royal throne.

Isaiah 14:13

Pride speaks as though it can rise above rightful human limits and take a position belonging to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The higher a person rises in human honor, the more dangerous pride becomes if he forgets who gave him life.

XXII. THE PEOPLE CALL HEROD A GOD

Acts 12:22

“The people shouted, ‘This is the voice of a god, not a man!’”

The crowd flatters Herod.

Cross References

Acts 14:11

A crowd later tried to treat Paul and Barnabas as gods after witnessing a miracle.

Ezekiel 28:2

God rebuked a ruler who claimed the place of a god.

Daniel 4:30

Nebuchadnezzar proudly credited himself for the greatness of Babylon.

Spiritual Principle

Praise becomes spiritually dangerous when a person receives what belongs to God.

XXIII. HEROD IS JUDGED

Acts 12:23

“Immediately, an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give glory to God. He was eaten by worms and died.”

The reason is explicitly stated:

“He did not give glory to God.”

Cross References

Isaiah 42:8

The Lord declares, “I am the Lord; that is My name. I will not give My glory to another.”

2 Chronicles 26:19

King Uzziah’s pride led him to violate God’s order, and judgment came upon him.

Daniel 4:33

Nebuchadnezzar experienced immediate humiliation after boasting in his own greatness.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may allow human pride for a season, but no person can permanently steal the glory that belongs to Him.

XXIV. HEROD FALLS, BUT THE WORD GROWS

Acts 12:24

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.”

This may be the most important verse in the chapter.

Notice the contrast.

Herod attacked.

Herod killed James.

Herod imprisoned Peter.

Herod accepted divine praise.

Then:

Herod died.

But:

The Word grew.

Cross References

Acts 6:7

The Word of God continued spreading, and the number of disciples increased greatly.

Acts 19:20

In a powerful way, the Word of the Lord continued growing and prevailing.

Colossians 1:6

The gospel was bearing fruit and increasing throughout the world.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Kings die. Governments change. Persecutors disappear. But God’s Word continues.

XXV. BARNABAS AND SAUL RETURN

Acts 12:25

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission in Jerusalem, they returned, taking John Mark with them.”

The chapter closes by preparing for the next stage of mission.

Cross References

Acts 11:30

Barnabas and Saul had carried relief from Antioch to the believers in Judea.

Acts 13:5

John Mark later accompanied Barnabas and Saul during missionary work.

Colossians 4:10

Mark later became recognized as a ministry coworker associated with Barnabas.

Spiritual Principle

While one chapter of ministry ends, God is often preparing the people who will serve in the next one.

XXVI. JAMES AND PETER — TWO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Acts 12 presents a difficult but necessary truth.

James

Killed.

Peter

Delivered.

Both were apostles.

Both followed Jesus.

Both were loved by the church.

Both belonged to God.

Why was one delivered and one not?

The text does not give us a full explanation.

Spiritual Principle

Faith in God is not faith that He must produce the same earthly outcome for every believer.

God's sovereignty includes:

Deliverance.

And sometimes suffering.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's faithfulness cannot be measured only by whether He removes the trial.

James was not less loved because he died.

Peter was not more spiritual because he escaped.

XXVII. THE PRAYING CHURCH

Acts 12:5 should be remembered by every congregation.

"The church was earnestly praying to God for him."

They did not possess political influence equal to Herod.

They did not command soldiers.

They could not break Peter out.

But they could pray.

Spiritual Principle

Prayer is not what the church does when nothing else works; prayer is one of the central works of the church.

XXVIII. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT PRAYER

The church prayed.

God delivered Peter.

Yet the believers were shocked by the answer.

This teaches us several things.

Prayer Does Not Require Perfect Emotional Confidence

They prayed even while struggling to imagine the answer.

Prayer Is Directed to God

Their hope ultimately rested in Him.

Prayer Can Be Persistent

Many were gathered and praying through the night.

Prayer Does Not Control God

James had died.

Peter was delivered.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Prayer is trusting God enough to ask without pretending we control how He must answer.

XXIX. WHAT PETER'S SLEEP TEACHES US

Peter sleeps between soldiers the night before his expected trial.

That is remarkable.

He Could Not Control Herod

He Could Not Unlock His Chains

He Could Not Escape the Guards

But He Could Rest in God

Spiritual Principle

Peace comes when we recognize that God remains awake even when we sleep.

XXX. WHAT RHODA TEACHES US

Rhoda is sometimes remembered humorously because she forgot to open the door.

But notice something else.

She recognized Peter.

She believed it was Peter.

She kept insisting even when everyone disagreed with her.

Spiritual Principle

Do not dismiss a truthful witness merely because the report sounds astonishing.

XXXI. WHAT HEROD TEACHES ABOUT PRIDE

Herod's story develops in stages.

He attacks believers.

He kills James.

He imprisons Peter.

He seeks public approval.

He sits in royal splendor.

The crowd calls him a god.

He accepts the praise.

Then judgment comes.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Pride grows when human applause becomes more important than divine approval.

XXXII. HEROD COULD NOT STOP THE WORD

Herod had:

Authority.

Soldiers.

Prisons.

Execution power.

Political influence.

Yet verse 24 says:

“The word of God continued to grow and spread.”

Spiritual Principle

The gospel does not depend upon political permission to remain powerful.

Governments may:

Restrict.

Threaten.

Imprison.

Punish.

But God's truth remains God's truth.

XXXIII. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEROD AND THE CHURCH

Herod Trusted Power

The church trusted God.

Herod Used Violence

The church used prayer.

Herod Wanted Glory

The church gave glory to God.

Herod's Rule Ended

The Word continued.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Earthly power looks impressive for a moment; divine truth lasts beyond the moment.

XXXIV. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 12

1. Persecution Does Not Mean God Has Lost Control

James dies.

Peter is imprisoned.

God remains sovereign.

Principle:

Difficult circumstances never remove God from His throne.

2. The Church Must Pray Earnestly

The believers prayed for Peter.

Principle:

Prayer should be the church's immediate response to crisis.

3. God Can Deliver from Impossible Situations

Chains fell.

Guards were passed.

Gates opened.

Principle:

No earthly obstacle is beyond God's ability.

4. God Does Not Always Give the Same Outcome

James died.

Peter escaped.

Principle:

Faith trusts God in both deliverance and suffering.

5. God Can Surprise the People Who Are Praying

The believers could hardly believe Peter was at the door.

Principle:

God's answer may exceed our expectations.

6. Pride Leads Toward Destruction

Herod accepted glory belonging to God.

Principle:

Human greatness becomes dangerous when it forgets the Creator.

7. God's Word Cannot Be Stopped

Herod died.

The Word multiplied.

Principle:

Human opposition is temporary; God's mission continues.

XXXV. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT ANGELS

Angels appear repeatedly in Acts.

In Acts 12 an angel:

Enters Peter's cell.

Wakes him.

Causes his chains to fall.

Leads him through the prison.

Then leaves.

Spiritual Principle

Angels are servants of God carrying out His purposes, not beings believers are instructed to worship.

The focus remains:

The Lord delivered Peter.

XXXVI. WHAT ACTS 12 TEACHES ABOUT HUMAN POWER

Herod appears powerful.

But Acts 12 systematically demonstrates the limits of his power.

He Can Kill James

But cannot kill the church.

He Can Imprison Peter

But cannot keep him imprisoned.

He Can Order Guards

But cannot stop God's angel.

He Can Receive Praise

But cannot escape God's judgment.

He Can Rule Temporarily

But cannot stop God's Word.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

All human authority is borrowed authority and remains accountable to God.

XXXVII. THE IRON GATE PRINCIPLE

Peter reached an iron gate.

He could not open it.

But as he followed God's direction:

It opened.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes believers become anxious about gates they have not even reached yet.

Peter did not need to open the prison gate while still lying in chains.

God dealt with each obstacle at the proper moment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not spend today worrying about tomorrow's gate; obey God through the step directly in front of you.

XXXVIII. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE REAL VICTOR

At the beginning of Acts 12:

Herod appears to be winning.

James is dead.

Peter is imprisoned.

The church is under attack.

At the end:

Peter is free.

Herod is dead.

Barnabas and Saul are moving forward in ministry.

John Mark is joining them.

And:

The Word of God continues growing.

Key Truth

The chapter is not ultimately about Peter defeating Herod. It is about God's mission outlasting Herod.

XXXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who was the Herod mentioned in Acts 12?

He was the ruler who persecuted members of the early church, killed James, and imprisoned Peter.

His actions reveal political persecution driven partly by the desire for public approval.

Question 2

Which apostle was killed?

James, the brother of John, was executed with the sword.

He was one of the sons of Zebedee whom Jesus had called early in His ministry.

Question 3

Why did Herod arrest Peter?

Acts says Herod noticed that killing James pleased certain Jewish leaders or people.
Seeking further approval, he arrested Peter as well.

Question 4

What did the church do while Peter was imprisoned?

The church prayed earnestly to God for him.

Their response to humanly impossible circumstances was united prayer.

Question 5

How heavily guarded was Peter?

Peter was guarded by four squads of soldiers.

On the night of his deliverance he was chained between two soldiers while additional guards watched the entrance.

Question 6

How did Peter escape?

An angel of the Lord entered the prison.

Peter's chains fell off.

The angel led him past the guards.

The iron gate opened by itself.

Peter was then led outside before the angel departed.

Question 7

Why is Peter sleeping significant?

Peter faced serious danger and possible execution, yet he was able to sleep.

His rest demonstrates remarkable peace and trust in God.

Question 8

Why did the believers not believe Rhoda?

Peter's deliverance was so unexpected that even the people praying for him struggled to believe that he was actually standing at their door.

This shows that God can answer prayers beyond our expectations.

Question 9

What happened to Herod's guards?

Herod questioned them after Peter escaped and ordered their execution.

This further demonstrates his harshness and abuse of power.

Question 10

Why did God judge Herod?

Acts specifically says Herod was struck because:

"He did not give glory to God."

He accepted praise that treated him as divine.

Question 11

What happened to the gospel after Herod died?

The Word of God continued growing and spreading.

Political persecution failed to stop the mission.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 12?

God remains sovereign during persecution, prayer matters, He can deliver in impossible circumstances, pride eventually falls under His judgment, and His Word cannot be stopped.

XL. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 12 asks several important questions.

Do I Pray When Circumstances Look Impossible?

The church did.

Can I Trust God When He Answers Differently Than I Want?

James died.

Peter was delivered.

Can I Rest While God Is in Control?

Peter slept.

Do I Give God the Glory for Deliverance?

Peter did.

Am I Surprised When God Answers Prayer?

The believers were.

Am I Seeking Human Praise?

Herod did.

Do I Remember That All Human Power Is Temporary?

Herod's was.

Do I Believe God's Word Will Continue?

Acts 12 says it will.

XLI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Church's Greatest Weapon in a Locked-Room Crisis May Be Prayer”

The church could not enter Peter's prison.

They could not overpower Herod.

They could not command the guards.

They could not remove the chains.

But they could pray.

And they did.

Principle

Never confuse inability to control the situation with inability to do anything spiritually meaningful.

Prayer places the impossible situation before the God of the impossible.

XLII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Measure God’s Faithfulness Only by Deliverance”

James died.

Peter lived.

Both events occur in the same chapter.

That keeps us from reducing faith to a formula.

Principle

Sometimes God is glorified by delivering His servant from suffering; sometimes He is glorified by sustaining His servant through suffering.

His faithfulness remains.

XLIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Human Glory Fades, But God’s Word Multiplies”

Herod sat on a throne.

Wore royal robes.

Received public applause.

Was called a god.

Then he died.

The next verse says:

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.”

Principle

Never envy temporary greatness when you belong to an eternal kingdom.

XLIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 12 begins with:

Violence.

Death.

Arrest.

Chains.

Guards.

Fear.

It ends with:

Deliverance.

Judgment.

Mission.

The Word spreading.

At first glance, Herod appears to control the chapter.

He kills James.

He arrests Peter.

He commands soldiers.

He determines trial dates.

He exercises political power.

But as the chapter unfolds, the illusion disappears.

Herod could imprison Peter.

He could not imprison God.

Herod could order chains.

He could not stop an angel.

Herod could command guards.

He could not keep an iron gate closed.

Herod could kill one servant.

He could not kill the gospel.

Herod could receive applause.

He could not keep his breath when God called him to account.

That is the great contrast of Acts 12.

Human power appears large when viewed from the prison cell.

But human power becomes very small when viewed from the throne of God.

The church therefore does what believers should always do:

It prays.

The believers may not have understood what God would do.

They may not have expected Peter to appear at the door.

But they prayed.

And God answered.

Acts 12 also gives us a necessary warning against simplistic thinking.

James was not delivered.

Peter was.

Faithfulness cannot be measured merely by earthly survival.

Sometimes God opens the prison.

Sometimes He opens heaven.

Either way:

He remains God.

Acts 12 therefore calls us to:

Pray earnestly.

Trust deeply.

Walk obediently.

Rest peacefully.

Reject pride.

Give God glory.

And remain confident that no human authority can stop His ultimate purposes.

Kings rise.

Kings fall.

Empires change.

Governments disappear.

Persecutors die.

But:

The Word of God continues to grow and spread.

That is the victory of Acts 12.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You remain sovereign even when Your people face persecution.

Thank You that no prison is beyond Your power.

No chain is too strong.

No guard can prevent Your will.

No gate can remain closed when You determine to open it.

Teach us to pray like the early church.

When circumstances look impossible, keep us from despair.

Help us pray earnestly.

Give us peace like Peter.

When we cannot control what tomorrow holds, remind us that You already hold tomorrow.

Help us trust You even when Your answers are different from what we expect.

We remember James.

We remember Peter.

Teach us that Your faithfulness is not determined merely by whether You deliver us from suffering.

Keep us faithful whether You deliver us from the trial or carry us through it.

Guard us from Herod's pride.

Keep us from seeking praise that belongs to You.

When people honor us, help us immediately return the glory to You.

Remind us that every gift, opportunity, position, ministry, ability, and breath comes from You.

Thank You that Your Word cannot be stopped.

When rulers oppose it:

Let it spread.

When persecution rises:

Let it spread.

When believers suffer:

Let it spread.

When circumstances change:

Let it spread.

Use our lives for Your mission.

Make us people of prayer.

Make us people of courage.

Make us people of humility.

And may our confidence rest in this truth:

Your Word will continue to grow and spread.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But the word of God continued to grow and spread.” — Acts 12:24

Central Truth

Human rulers may persecute, imprison, and even kill God's servants, but prayer remains powerful, God remains sovereign, pride ultimately falls under His judgment, and His Word continues advancing beyond every earthly attempt to stop it.

Acts 12 in One Sentence

Herod kills James and imprisons Peter, but while the church prays God miraculously delivers Peter through an angel, later judges Herod for accepting divine glory, and demonstrates that earthly power cannot stop the Word of God from continuing to grow and spread.