

Acts 12 Bible Study

1. Sometimes Christians fall away in their faith due to troubles in their life (see Mark 4:16-19)? What would you say to someone who looked like turning away from Jesus because of difficulties?

2. Read Acts 12:1-4. NB "Herod" is Herod Agrippa 1, grandson of Herod the Great (Matt 2) and appointed by Rome as ruler over Palestine. James is the first Apostle to be martyred. How had Jesus prepared him for this?

Several different passages might be suggested. Also read Mark 10:35-40.

3. Read Acts 12:5-19a. Why do Peter and the church seem so surprised that God rescued him "from Herod's clutches"? Does that mean that they did not trust God?

*This is not the usual way that God works – he certainly can (eg Dan 3, 6) but it seems they were expecting Peter to have the same fate as James. It's not that they didn't trust the Lord, they were working with the usual assumptions of how God works and not **demanding** anything of him, least of all Peter's miraculous release! Prayer is bringing our requests to God and allowing him to answer them according to his will and purposes.*

4. What is the 'guidance' that the angel offers Peter? How is this different to the guidance given by the Spirit and other angels so far in Acts?

The angel 'guides' Peter out of prison, and then leaves. He offers no specific instructions (like go preach in the temple). Peter is left to work out what is best for him to do. And he decides to hide! (v17) There doesn't seem to be any clear formula for how God guides in Acts – sometimes he gives specific instructions, but not always. In fact, the specific instructions stand out as unusual whereas the time when his people have to use their wisdom and the already spoken words of the Lord (eg Acts 1:8) seem to be more usual. Perhaps this is a helpful reminder for those who seem to have God 'speaking' to them all the time guiding them with specific instructions for each day.

5. Read Acts 12:19b-25. Why do you think God strikes Herod down and not all the people who called him a god?

We can only guess such things - but it is important to realise God doesn't usually strike such tyrants down like this. Herod's death was a warning, to all other leaders, as well as the people of Tyre & Sidon, and we who are reading Acts 12! See Psalm 2:8-12 – God's Son has now come and it is time to take refuge in him or a worse fate than Herod's awaits!

6. Verse 25 picks up where Acts 11:19-30 left off. It regards the work of the gospel in Antioch, and is part of the background to the first missionary journey into the Gentile world. Chapter 12 is almost an 'aside' to this. Why might Luke have recorded it like this? (Hint: Think of verse 24.)

The work of God is unstoppable. The Herod's of the world are like those of Psalm 2:1-5 – they try to throw off God's rule and try to oppose his king, but God scoffs at them! Paul and Barnabas are doing their work – Herod causes grief and trouble, but only for a time, then he is gone – and the gospel continues to spread and Paul and Barnabas carry on with their work.

7. Why do you think only one verse is given to describe James' fate and more than a chapter is given to Stephen's?

Luke is recording the work of Christ and the spread of the gospel (v24). James had finished his work and his (tragic) death did not cause the gospel to advance further. However, Stephen's death led to the mission to the spread of the gospel into Judea, Samaria and eventually to the Gentiles. However, see Psalm 116:15 for God's attitude towards James. Charles Spurgeon wrote: "They shall not die prematurely, they shall be immortal till the work is done; and when their time comes to die then their deaths shall be precious. The Lord watches over their dying beds, smoothes their pillows, sustains their hearts, receives their soul."

8. Consider your answer to Q1. Would you answer any differently as a result of studying Acts 12?

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