

Acts 12:1-25

October 12, 2025



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

In Acts chapter 12, we read about the apostle James's (brother of John) death, Peter's miraculous escape from prison, and the death of Herod Agrippa I. Through it all, "the word of God spread and multiplied" (v.24).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are you learning so far in our study of Acts? Any big takeaways you want to share?

What have we seen the disciples of Jesus doing since His resurrection?

How have we seen prayer play a part in the early church?

In our study of Acts so far, we have seen the disciples of Jesus make their way out of several arrests. Today we will read about another one of Peter's close calls (and how



God miraculously rescued him) but also about the first martyr from Jesus's original disciples.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 12:1-19.

How do you see God at work in this passage?

How do you reconcile the idea that God rescued Peter so miraculously but allowed James to be killed?

How did both instances serve to glorify God?

Our passage opens with an important piece of information: violent persecution of the church continued through Herod Agrippa 1 (grandson of Herod the Great, son of Herod Agrippa, who had arrested Jesus).¹ The victim Luke specifically mentioned here is James (the brother of John, son of Zebedee). How tragic that James's death pleased the Jews. This was yet another indicator that their hearts were completely in the wrong place.

Peter, too, was arrested (to please the Jews [v.3] keeping the peace would have been an important part of Herod's job, and often, that meant catering to the majority), and placed under heavy guard. Peter, though, had a very different outcome from James.

Peter was under heavy guard ("four squads of four soldiers each" v.4), sleeping between two soldiers, with more standing guard when the angel showed up. God can work under any circumstances, and no amount of human interference can derail His plan.

The angel appeared, Peter's chains fell off, and the angel gave Peter specific instructions that led him out of prison and past the gate that led into the city (even the gate opened itself in front of them). Luke recorded a similar event in Acts 5:19-20. Note Peter's first response: He gave glory to God for his rescue. Sometimes God allows us to get into situations that seem impossible because He wants to make sure we know He alone is responsible for our rescue.

Thus, rescued by the hand of God from the grip of Herod and the Jews, Peter headed to find the community of believers. The servant Rhoda was so excited to see Peter that she left him locked outside the gate to tell everyone he was there! Peter instructed those in the house to tell the other believers what God had done ("James" here is the brother of Jesus, v.17). What a beautiful gift God had given not only Peter but also the



entire body of believers. This would no doubt encourage the downtrodden, mourning community.

Soldiers responsible for letting a captive escape would, by Roman law, have been subject to whatever punishment their charge was meant to undergo. Through their execution we learn that the fate Peter was rescued from was death.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 12:20-25.

What do you think the Lord wants us to learn from Herod's story?

After everything that happened in chapter 12, what result did Luke report regarding the church? Why was this significant?

How is this a reminder that God's purposes never fail, no matter what it seems?

These events took place about one year after Peter's miraculous escape.

When we started chapter 12, Herod was, politically, doing well. He had found a way to please the Jews, and this passage records another victory for Herod, peace with the people of Tyre and Sidon (the note on food supply here is relevant because of the severe famine we learned about at the end of chapter 11).

Herod met his end after accepting glory that belonged only to God. The historian Josephus recorded that Herod was in pain for five days after this before ultimately dying (many scholars speculate that the cause of death may have been round worms).

We end this chapter with confirmation that in all the good, difficult, and miraculous events recorded in chapter 12, God's plans had not been derailed: "But the word of God spread and multiplied" (v.24). Verse 25 bridges us back to the church at Antioch, where chapter 13 picks back up.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When has God answered your prayers in a surprising way?

Have you ever seen God work in difficult circumstances? What happened? Why is it important to have Christian community for these seasons?

How can you use whatever circumstances you face to tell others about Jesus, like the church did in Acts 12?



PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Thank God for taking care of us even when rescue seems unlikely. Praise Him for listening to and answering our prayers. Ask for Him to continue to reveal Himself to your group as you continue your study in Acts.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead as we continue the series on Acts next week.

October 19, 2025 --- Acts 13:1-12

COMMENTARY

Acts 12

Chapter 12 is the last chapter in Acts that deals with the Jewish-Christian congregation in Jerusalem apart from Paul. It is a model of Luke's dramatic style. It falls into four segments.

1. Herod Agrippa's Persecution of the Apostles (12:1–5).

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great. He ruled over Judea between A.D. 41 and 44. Reared in Rome, one of the major concerns of his reign was to win the favor of the Jews. He must have ordered the execution of James in an attempt to please the Jewish leaders who opposed the Christians. He would have done the same to Peter had not the Passover season intervened when executions were not considered proper. He held Peter in jail until the feast days were past. Herod had clearly become the archenemy of the Christians.

2. Peter's Miraculous Deliverance from Prison (12:6–19a).

Herod's plans for Peter were not to be. Peter was delivered from prison by an angel of the Lord. Luke tells the story in a delightful way. Peter was to come to trial on the next day, but he was sound asleep, as if he had not a worry in the world. His trust was in God. Peter's escape was certainly none of his own doing. The angel had to rouse him, direct him how to dress himself, and lead him each step of the way until safely outside. Only then did Peter fully awaken.

The scene shifts to the house of John Mark's mother, where the Christians were gathered together to pray for Peter. Rhoda ("Rosie"), the little servant girl, was so excited to see Peter that she left him at the gate. The Christians inside could not believe



her good news. They found it easier to believe that Peter had been executed and his ghost returned to earth than that their prayer for his release had been answered. Peter gave them a message for James, Jesus' brother, who from then on became the leader of the Jerusalem church, as Peter hastened off to a safer place.

3. Herod's Self-destructive Arrogance (12:19b–23).

The soldiers paid for Peter's escape with their lives, but Herod got his as well. On a formal occasion in the theater at Caesarea, Herod appeared in especially fine regalia. The Jewish historian Josephus also records the event and says that Herod wore a garment of silver plates which glistened brilliantly in the rays of the sun. The people hailed him as a god. Josephus stated that Herod neither affirmed nor denied their acclamation. He was immediately struck down, "eaten by worms" in Luke's words. He died for his blasphemous arrogance.

4. Peace for the Church (12:24–25).

Chapter 12 has come full circle. The murderer of James now lay in his own grave. The church was at peace. Its witness could continue. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, and the stage was set for the next step in the advancing Christian mission.

