

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 12 part 2

Verse 11- This is the point where Peter finally believed that the angel was real. “And when Peter was come to himself...” or once Peter felt like himself again, or when he felt normal again, Peter realized with certainty that God had delivered him from Herod’s plot and from the bad intentions of the Jews. Notice that in this verse Peter no longer identified himself spiritually with the Jews. He speaks about them as his enemies who hoped that harm would come to him. This is evidence that at this point the two identities, Jew and Christian are completely separate, not because of ethnicity but because of faith in Jesus. (Romans 9:30-33, p 1047)

Verse 12- Once he realized how God had spared him he went to the house of John Mark’s mother where he knew many people were praying. He went to tell them that their prayers had been answered. Mark was one of the twelve apostles, so it makes sense that they would gather to pray in his mother’s house. Also, he was the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10, p 1088). It was the logical place for Peter to go.

Verse 13-15- These verses are indicative of how we can pray for something and not really believe that it can happen. They also show that no matter how mature we may believe we are spiritually, we can still have doubts or lapses in our faith. First, the servant, Rhoda, heard Peter’s voice, but she was so excited by just the possibility that he could be alive that she forgot to open the door and let him in. She failed to act on the evidence she had of the truth. Next, when she told the people who had been praying for Peter that he was alive, they told her she was crazy, so they were putting limits on what they thought God could or would do. And when she kept insisting that it really was Peter who she heard, they told her it must be his “angel.” As we learned previously, the Greek word for angel is “angelos” which means messenger or herald. So, they thought that either God had sent an angel to tell them Peter’s fate or that Peter himself sent someone to tell them of his status. In any case, it is curious that they all chose to debate the possibility of his rescue rather than just going to the door to open it and see. Perhaps they were like us sometimes, so distraught by circumstances that we cannot see God’s possibilities. Remember in verse 5 we were told how their faith had been stretched to the limit due to the murder of James. The bible gives us ways to deal with our unbelief, but Satan uses our circumstances to distract us from God’s word. (Psalm 77:2-12, p 541), (Mark 4:18-19, p 930), (Colossians 3:2, p 1088)

Verse 16- Perhaps Peter knew that this was too hard for them to believe. At first, he had not believed it himself. So, he kept knocking until they opened the door. He had to tell them what the Lord had done. (Psalm 105:1, p 559), (Acts 20:24, p 1030)

Verse 17- Peter was there for one purpose to make sure that they knew that he was alive and what God had done for him. Notice it doesn't say that he even stepped inside. He instructs them to pass on the good news. Then, he left for another place. He even tells them to tell James, indicating that he had not even had time to hear about James' death. Obviously, Peter was in a hurry, fleeing for his life, but he needed to fulfill God's purpose to proclaim His name and show His power first. (2 Timothy 4:5, p 1099), (2 Corinthians 5:20, p 1069)

Verse 18- Now we come to discuss the soldiers. The words are, "there was no small stir (or commotion) among the soldiers." That means there was a big disturbance among the soldiers. When they woke up that morning, Peter had simply disappeared. They had no idea what had happened to him, how he had escaped or where he could have gone. They also had no idea what had happened to them. How had they not heard, felt or seen him get out of his chains? The only thing that they knew for certain was that he was gone and their consequences for not holding him would be severe. Under Roman law at that time, any guard who allowed a prisoner to escape must suffer the same penalty that had been assigned to that prisoner. Since Herod had planned a public execution for Peter, they knew that this was now their fate, if Peter was not found. The truth is that under God's law they sealed their fate when they took up with Herod's plan of persecution. (Ephesians 5:11, p1081), (Psalm 141:4-6, p 581)

Verse 19- So, Herod searched for Peter but couldn't find him. He questioned the guards extensively but came up with no answers that made sense to him. He obviously refused to acknowledge the only explanation that could make sense, that Peter's God had rescued him. Then, in keeping with Roman law and probably also out of revenge, he had all the guards executed. Clearly, he had no loyalty to them for the service that they had provided for him. (2 Timothy 3:13, p 1098) Then, he left town and went to Caesarea, his original home, defeated. At this point, he had no Christian leader to persecute, no way to appease the Jewish leaders that supported him, so he could not increase his popularity or his power as he had originally planned. (Psalm 37:12-17, p 515)

Verse 20- But Herod wasn't finished yet. He decided to move on to other business outside of Jerusalem in another territory over which he ruled, Tyre (pronounced "tire") and Sidon (pronounced "Sigh'-dun"). Although these two cities were rich ports of trade, they did not grow their own food, but depended on other agricultural cities that Herod ruled. These cities apparently had some disagreement with Herod in the past and he had withheld food from them as a result. Since Herod's other cities were their main source of food, they requested that he come visit them so that they could win his favor and restore their food supply. They conveyed this message through his chief servant or manager of his household

affairs, Blastus. In turn, Blastus set up a special day when they would honor Herod. In other words, they wanted to feed his ego so he would stop starving their people.

Verse 21- On that day He came dressed in his finest royal attire, sat on his throne, then delivered a speech. One historical document describes his garments that day as “made wholly of silver” and of a “truly wonderful” fabric that when the sun’s rays reflected on it “shone out after a surprising manner.” There is no doubt that this ceremony was intentionally all about him (Herod). (Exodus 20:3-5, p 68), (Romans 1:22-25, p 1040), (Matthew 23:8-10, p 918)

Verse 22- This one verse is so powerful that it stands alone as one sentence. While Herod was giving his speech, these desperate people shouted that his was not the voice of a man, but of a god. They fed his ego but unknowingly sealed his fate and assured his demise. The Bible repeatedly warns that we are to worship no other god. (Deuteronomy 4:39, p 166), (Romans 1:25, p 1040), (Isaiah 44:6, p 674), (1 Timothy 2:5, p 1094)

Verse 23- This passage leaves no room for debate about why Herod was stricken. He never stopped them or corrected them about setting him up as a god. One history book says, “Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious (irreverent, ungodly) flattery.” Herod’s ego was stroked. His pride in himself was probably at an all-time high.” (Proverbs 16:18, p 600), (Philippians 2:3, p 1084), (Isaiah 2:12, p 632) But God was not pleased. Immediately, an angel was sent to strike him. At first glance, it seems that he died quickly, but that is not the case. Think about it. He was eaten by worms and died. To be eaten by worms would likely take a long painful time. And according to history it did. The historical account of Herod’s demise says that as he accepted the accolades of the people he developed a severe pain in his belly that began “in a most violent manner.” He had to be carried into the palace, where he was worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, after which he “departed this life.” (Isaiah 13:11, p 642), (Luke 14:11, p 968)

Verse 24- Again, a short but fitting conclusion to the story of Herod Agrippa and his persecution of the church. The word of God continued to spread and flourish. (Isaiah 55:10-11, p 686), (Luke 1:37, p 948), (Isaiah 46:10-11, p 677)

Verse 25- This continuance of God’s word happens through his vessels, those who carry his word from one place to another, one mission to another. This is what Barnabas and Saul were doing throughout this time. Along the way they recruited others. This verse introduced John Mark, one of their recruits. He accompanied them back to Antioch. You may remember that he was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10, p 1088) and his mother hosted the prayer vigil that was held for Peter. (Acts 12:12p 1020) Even while God was working out a problem, He was grooming new people to help build his kingdom.