

THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED

Acts 12:1-24 (ESV) / Spring 44A.D.

Sometime between 41AD and 44AD, Emperor Claudius installed a new king over Judea and Jerusalem. This new king observed the animosity of the Jews towards the leaders of the Way and saw in it an opportunity to score political points with his newly acquired subjects.

Acts 12:1–5 James Killed, Peter Imprisoned by Herod Agrippa I

(12:1-5) Herod Agrippa I, saw an opportunity to score political points with his Jewish subjects. He arrested the apostle James, brother of John and had him executed. It pleased the Jews and emboldened Herod to go after Peter whom he arrested and put in jail until after the Passover crowds went home. Perhaps Herod was aware of Peter's previous escape (Acts 5:17-21) because he put Peter under heavy guard with four-man squads guarding him. The day came for Peter to be tried, but when Herod sent to the prison for Peter, but Peter was no where to be found!

(12:6-11) Peter Miraculously Delivered from Herod Agrippa I

(12:6-11) Peter basically slept-walked through his rescue. When he finally came to his senses, he found himself standing on the street outside the prison!

Here we are faced with a challenging observation: God allowed James to die, but Peter He delivered. Undoubtedly the church prayed for both men.

Why did God allow James to die and Peter to live?

God is sovereign. As our Creator He has the right and authority to do with our lives as He sees fit. God made us. God sustains us and holds together the very atoms that form our bodies. Preserving our lives in this life is not the most important thing because life continues beyond the grave. The most important thing in this life is to fulfill the purpose for which God created us. It reminds me of the Apostle Paul's description of King David in Acts 13:36: *For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers...* This may be the answer to the case in front of us: James had fulfilled his purpose and God took him home. Whatever the case may be, God has the right and authority to do with James as it served God's purposes and to do with Peter as it served God's purposes. The comfort and confidence for us is God's character. In Exodus 34:6-7, God revealed His name and His essence to Moses: *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...."*

It is important we willingly embrace God's sovereignty over our lives. There is freedom and peace when we release control of our lives to Him and accept His sovereign right to do with us what serves His purposes. We do this knowing our God is loving and merciful and gracious and righteous in all His ways.

God spared Peter's life because Peter had more to do in God's plan. Peter found himself in the middle of the night on the street in front of the prison and realized it wasn't a dream, but that he had just been rescued....

Acts 12:12-17 Peter Reports His Rescue

(12:12-17) The whole incident of Rhoda leaving Peter standing at the door is meant to bring a chuckle. The church in Jerusalem would have been too large to meet in one place so evidently its members met in a

number of large homes for fellowship and worship. Perhaps Peter was attached to this group that met in Mary's house. As he does throughout Acts, Luke introduces us to Mary's son, John Mark, who will play a significant role later in the story of Acts. Once brought in, Peter told the story of his rescue and then asked that it be told to "James and to the brothers." This would have been James, the half-brother of Jesus, and it indicates that by 44AD James was recognized as the leader of the church of Jerusalem. This James wrote the letter that bears his name (between 44-47A.D.).

Having reported his deliverance, Peter left Mary's house and went into hiding. Come morning, Peter's escape was discovered and an investigation ensued.

Acts 12:18-19 Peter's Escape Discovered

(12:18-19) Herod Agrippa I was not required to execute Peter's guards. But he wasn't going to believe a miraculous rescue. The only explanation left was some kind of inside job involving the guards. In the end, it's Peter's guards who are executed by Agrippa, not Peter. To our grief, the evil schemes of evil men often times destroy the lives of the innocent. King Herod then left Jerusalem for Caesarea, on the north coast of Israel.

Acts 12:20-23 God Executed Herod Agrippa I

(12:20-24) Verse 24 really sums up the entire chapter. God supernaturally protected Peter and supernaturally removed Herod Agrippa I. The word of Agrippa came to an abrupt end while the Word of God increased and multiplied.

That is the point of this episode: God once again rescued Peter so that Peter might continue to fulfill his role in spreading God's Word among both Jews and Gentiles. This episode also reminds us God is sovereign. He is sovereign over us, His people. He is sovereign over the kings of the earth. Finally, this episode reflects the invincibility of the Bible. The word of King Herod in all his royal finery and lauded by his subjects as a god came to an abrupt end. But the Word of God increased and multiplied and continues to transform lives to this day!

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for October: Foam nerf ball / chapstick.

Womens' Worship Night, Sunday, October 9th, 6PM in Sanctuary (bring a snack to share).

Brenda Shirley Memorial Service, Saturday, October 15th, 11AM here at Grace.