

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS 12

Ver. 1. *Now about that time*, etc.] That the famine was in Judea, and Saul and Barnabas were sent thither with what the church at Antioch had collected.

Herod the king; not Herod the great that slew the infants at Bethlehem, nor Herod Antipas that beheaded John, but Herod Agrippa; and so the Syriac version adds here, “who is surnamed Agrippa”; he was a grandson of Herod the great, and the son of Aristobulus: this prince

stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church; Beza’s ancient copy adds, “in Judea”: it seems to be the church at Jerusalem; perhaps some of the principal members of them; and so the Ethiopic version renders it, the rulers of the house of God. It is scarcely credible that he should lay hands on any of them himself in person; but it is very likely he encouraged his soldiers, or his servants, to abuse them, reproach them, strike and buffet them, as they met with them in the streets; or when at worship, might disturb them, and break them up.

Ver. 2. *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*] This was James, the son of Zebedee, whom our Lord told, that he should be baptized with the baptism he was baptized with, (~~and~~ Matthew 20:22) meaning the baptism of martyrdom; and he was the first martyr among the apostles: the death he was put to was one of the four capital punishments among the Jews, and was reckoned by them the most disgraceful of them all, and was inflicted upon deceivers of the people; and such an one James was thought to be ^{f581}.

Ver. 3. *And because he saw it pleased the Jews*, etc.] That is, as Beza’s ancient copy adds, “his stretching out his hands upon the faithful”; this pleased the Jews, a bloodthirsty generation of men, who had killed the prophets, and the Lord Jesus, and who were now greedy after the death of the apostles: it may easily be seen from what principle and spirit Herod

acted; it was not out of regard to the Jewish religion, rites, and ceremonies, but to ingratiate himself into the affections of the people:

he proceeded further to take Peter also; a principal apostle, and who was well known, and against whom the Jews had doubtless a particular antipathy, and would have been glad to have been rid of him; this Herod was, sensible of, and therefore to please them, ordered him to be taken up:

then were the days of unleavened bread; or the feast of the passover.

Ver. 4. *When he had apprehended him*, etc.] When his officers he sent to take him had brought him:

he put him in prison; in the common prison, very likely where he had been once before, (⁴⁵⁸Acts 5:18)

and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; each quaternion consisted of four soldiers, so that they were in all sixteen; and so the Syriac version renders it, “and delivered him to sixteen soldiers”: how the Ethiopic version should make “seventeen” of them is pretty strange: these perhaps might take their turns to watch him by four at a time, two to whom he was chained, and two others to keep the doors; or all the sixteen together, being posted in one place or another for greater security: and it may be, that the reason of all this caution, and strong guard, might be, because it was remembered that he, and the rest of the apostles, when committed to the same prison some years ago, were delivered out of it:

intending after Easter, or the passover,

to bring him forth to the people; to insult and abuse him, and to put him to what death they should desire.

Ver. 5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison*, etc.] Till the feast of the passover was at an end:

but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him; this was not done by them as a body together, but either by them in several bands at different places, or by some of the principal of the church at some one certain place, and where they might frequently change companies, and keep on a continual incessant prayer for days together; and whereas it is very likely it might be at the beginning of the passover, when Peter was taken up, and it was now at the close of it, when he was delivered, the

church might be engaged by companies alternately, a whole week together, in prayer, on this occasion.

Ver. 6. *And when Herod would have brought him forth*, etc.] The next morning; so he had determined not to dismiss him, but to expose him to the people, and to put him to such a death they should choose:

the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers; fearless of death, being in a good cause, and having nothing to ruffle and disturb his mind; and though he was in a prison, and in such company, God gave him, his beloved, sleep:

bound with two chains; one on one hand, and one on the other, each of which were fastened to the soldiers; that on his right hand was fastened to the left hand of the soldier, that was on that side; and that on his left hand to the right hand of the soldier, on the other side him; such security was made, that he might not get away from them; to which is added,

and the keepers before the door kept the prison; or watched it, that nobody went in, or came out.

Ver. 7. *And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him*, etc.] Suddenly and at once, and stood by him; this was one of the ministering spirits sent forth by Christ, to minister to a servant of his:

and a light shined in the prison; the Syriac version renders it, “in the whole house”; and the word that is used does signify an habitation, or a dwelling house properly, but is used also by the Greek writers^{f582} for a prison: this was an uncommon light produced by the angel, partly as an emblem of the presence, majesty, and power of God, who was present, to work a great deliverance; and partly for the use of Peter, that when being awaked he might see to rise and walk by:

and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up; he touched him on that side which lay uppermost, or punched him on it, in order to awake him, and raise him out of his sleep:

saying arise up quickly; without delay, make haste:

and his chains fell off from his hands; from both his hands, and were left with the soldiers, between whom he slept; which must be ascribed to an almighty power, which caused them to drop off.

Ver. 8. *And the angel said unto him, gird thyself,* etc.] He slept in his inner garment loose about him; wherefore the angel bids him gird it up with his girdle, and prepare to walk out after him:

and bind on thy sandals; which were a sort of shoes that covered only the soles of the feet, and were fastened to the leg, with strings:

and so he did; he did not ask any question, or the reason of these orders; he did not dispute the matter, but at once obeyed:

and he saith unto him, cast thy garment about thee; meaning his upper garment, or cloak, which lay by him:

and follow me; suggesting hereby, that he should take care of him, and show him his way, and bring him safe out of the prison.

Ver. 9. *And he went out and followed him,* etc.] He came out from between the two soldiers, and out of that apartment in the prison, in which he was, and followed the angel where he led him:

and wist not that it was true that was done by the angel; not that he thought the angel was a mere apparition, and all this that was done was a delusion; but he did not know whether this was matter of fact, or whether it was, not represented to him in a visionary way, as what could be, or would be done:

but thought he saw a vision; imagined he was in a dream or a trance, and only saw these things in a vision, and that they were not really done, the whole was so amazing and astonishing.

Ver. 10. *When they were past the first and the second ward,* etc.] Or watch, which were set within the prison, and might be some of the quaternions of soldiers to whom Peter was delivered; two of them were with him, and others might be placed at these two wards for further security; and these circumstances make the deliverance the more wonderful and remarkable; the watch must either be asleep, or their eyes were holden, or the angel and Peter passed by so swiftly that they were unobserved:

they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city: which was not one of the gates of the city, as if the prison was without the walls of it; but was the great and strong gate of the prison, which for the security of the prisoners was made of iron, and this gate led directly into the city of Jerusalem:

which opened to them of his own accord; as the gates of the temple are said to do ^{f583}, forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem: this was done by a divine power; and because no human creature had any hand in it, it is said to be done of its own accord:

and they went out. The Cambridge copy of Beza's adds, "they went down seven steps"; that is, from the prison into the city:

and passed on through one street; what street this was is not certain; there were several streets in Jerusalem: (See Gill on "~~491~~Acts 9:11") and forthwith the angel departed from him: he being now safe and out of danger, he left him to himself, to betake himself to what house he should think fit.

Ver. 11. *And when Peter was come to himself* etc.] For upon his being awaked out of sleep, what with the uncommon light, which shone around him, and with the appearance of the angel, and the chains dropping from his hands, and his surprising escape through the several wards, together with the iron gate opening of itself, he was so filled with amazement, that he was not himself; he could scarcely tell whether he was in the body or not, and whether he was in a dream or a trance, or whether he saw a vision or not; but upon the angel's leaving him he came to himself, the amazement wore off, and he found himself thoroughly awake, and perfectly in his senses, and that the deliverance was real: and then,

he said, now know I of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel; this was a thanksgiving to God, and an acknowledgment, that the deliverance, though it was by the ministry an angel, yet was owing to the goodness and power of God; it was God that sent his angel, and the salvation was of the Lord's doing, and it was marvellous in the eyes of Peter, and gratefully owned by him:

and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod; who intended that morning to have brought him forth, and sacrificed him to the will of the people:

and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews; not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but the body of the Jewish nation, who were now at Jerusalem, on account of the passover; and who before they departed into their several cities and towns, expected to have had Peter brought forth, and put to death before them; but now both Herod and they were disappointed.

Ver. 12. *And when he had considered the thing*, etc.] The whole of the salvation wrought for him; or rather, where he should go, to what house he should betake himself; ere he was aware,

he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. This good woman seems to be a widow, no mention being made of her husband, and was sister to Barnabas, (^{<51040>}Colossians 4:10). She is described by a son she had, whose name was John Mark, because of the frequent mention made of him hereafter; her house being large, and her heart as large as her house, the saints met here, and were welcome, and where they were at this time, though so late:

where many were gathered together, praying; the Ethiopic version adds, “for him”; and there were some in other places, for one place could not hold them all; (see ^{<44217>}Acts 12:17) they held out to the end in prayer; this was their last effort in this way, and in this they were no doubt exceeding vehement and importunate, and they succeeded; so true is that observation in (^{<30516>}James 5:16).

Ver. 13. *And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate*, etc. The lesser door in the great gate, or the door of the porch through which they entered into the house. So the Jews distinguish between **j tp**, “the door”, and **r[ç**, “the gate”; (see ^{<07816>}Judges 18:16,17) (^{<23011>}Ezekiel 40:11) where the Septuagint use the same words as here. Kimchi^{f584} says,

“**j tp**, “the door” is what is of the gate, without the folding doors; for all is called **r[ç**, “the gate”, whether within or without, with the folding doors, and the outward threshold, as that is joined to the side posts and lintel.”

The door was kept shut, for fear of the Jews, lest they should be disturbed: here Peter stood and knocked:

a damsel came to hearken; hearing a knocking, she came out to the door, and listened, to try if she could know who it was, a friend or a foe, before she opened; or she came “to answer”, as the Syriac version renders it, to know who was there, and what he or she wanted, and to give an answer. And the damsel was

named Rhoda, which signifies a rose in the Greek language: so the Jewish women often had their names, in the Hebrew tongue, from flowers and

trees, as Susanna from a lily, or rose: and which, perhaps, was the Hebrew name of this damsel; and Esther was called Hadassah, from the myrtle tree.

Ver. 14. *And when she knew Peter's voice*, etc.] often heard him preach and converse in the family:

she opened not the gate for gladness, filled with joy to hear his voice, and that he was delivered from prison, and in haste to carry the welcome news to the company within, stayed not to open the gate, and let Peter in:

but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate: she went into the house in a great hurry, and related to them within, that Peter was at the door without.

Ver. 15. *And they said unto her, thou art mad*, etc. “Or art thou not mad?” as the Ethiopic version, and two of Beza’s exemplars read, and some others: they thought the girl must be out of her senses; they looked upon the thing impossible; for though they were praying for him, and praying in faith, yet they might have no expectation of a deliverance; but were praying that they might be supported under such a trial, and that it might be sanctified to them; and for Peter, that he might be strengthened and made steadfast, and kept faithful to the last; and bear, by his sufferings and death, a glorious and honourable testimony for Christ:

but she constantly affirmed that it was even so; she asserted it over and over, and was positive in it; nothing they could say could put her off of it; she was sure of it; which when they observed, they could not tell what to say to it, but as follows: then said they,

it is his angel; not his tutelar or guardian angel, everyone having, as some think, a particular angel to attend him; whereas sometimes one angel attends many persons, and sometimes many angels encamp about, and are a guard to a single saint; nor did they think it was an angel sent to give notice of his death, as some persons, by one means or another, have had previous notices of the death of their friends; but rather, that it was an angel in Peter’s shape, who had something to communicate: and this agrees with the notions of the Jews, who think that angels do assume the shapes of men on certain occasions: so they say ^{f585}, when Moses was in danger in Pharaoh’s court, God sent Michael, the prince of the host of heaven, “in the shape of an executioner”; who brought him at once out of Egypt, and set him at the border of it, the distance of three days journey: Bar Kaphra

says ^{f586}, an angel descended **hçm twmdb**, “in the likeness of Moses”, and caused him to flee, and they thought the angel had been Moses: and so it is elsewhere said ^{f587}, that an angel descended “in the likeness of Solomon”, sitting upon his throne: there are some who think, that the sense of the brethren praying for Peter, was not that it was an angel, a celestial spirit, but a messenger sent by Peter from the prison on some errand: who represented him, or mentioning his name, the damsel took him for Peter himself. Beza’s ancient copy reads, “then said they unto her, perhaps it is his angel”, and so the Syriac version.

Ver. 16. *But Peter continued knocking*, etc.] That they might come to him, and let him in; beginning to be impatient, and being very desirous of seeing his friends, as well as being in danger of being taken up, and had to prison again, should any of his enemies come by, who knew him:

and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished: they could hardly believe their own eyes; it was amazing to them, how it should be, that he should be delivered out of prison, when they knew there was such a strong guard about him.

Ver. 17. *But he beckoning unto them with the hand*, etc.] This is what the Jews call **hzymr**, “an hint” ^{f588}, which is a beckoning, or making signs, either with the head or hand: and this was now made, to hold their peace; to be silent, and not clamorous in their expressions of joy and wonder, lest it should alarm the neighbourhood, and the consequence be bad both to him and them; as also that he might have an opportunity of relating the whole affair to them; which he did, after he had entered into the house; which though not expressed is understood, and is added in Beza’s ancient copy, and in the Syriac version:

and he went in; that is, into the house: and declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of prison: how he had sent his angel to him in prison, what a light shone about him, how his chains fell from his hands, and how the angel conducted him through the several wards, till they came to the iron gate, which opened of itself; and how when he had brought him into the public streets, he left him; he ascribes this wonderful deliverance not to the angel, but to the Lord himself:

and he said, go show these things to James; the son of Alphaeus, sometimes called the brother of our Lord; for James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, Herod had lately killed with the sword, (~~412~~ Acts 12:2)

and this other James very likely succeeded him as pastor of the church at Jerusalem, or at least had the superintendency of affairs there:

and to the brethren; the rest of the apostles, and even all the members; whom he would have acquainted with these things, which he knew would be matter of joy unto them, and a means of strengthening them in the ways of the Lord:

and he departed, and went into another place; to Rome, say the Papists, but without any foundation; if he went out of the city, and to any distant place for more safety, very likely he went to Antioch; but the words do not necessarily oblige us to conclude, that he went out of the city at that time, only that he went from Mary's house; "and went", as the Ethiopic version reads, "to another house": where another company of saints might be assembled, and where he might be more private and secure.

Ver. 18. *Now as soon as it was day*, etc.] When it was morning; as soon as there was any light in the prison, by which the guards could discern one another and their prisoners:

there was no small stir among the soldiers: the two between whom Peter slept, and the rest of the quaternions that were employed in the wards to keep watch; who were now all in an uproar, and in the utmost concern and fright:

what was become of Peter; whether he was in any other part of the prison, by what means he could escape, and whither he was gone.

Ver. 19. *And when Herod had sought for him and found him not*, etc.] Neither in the prison, nor in any part of the city:

he examined the keepers; of the prison, and those that were upon the watch, whether they had not been accessory to his escape:

and commanded that they should be put to death: or brought forth, not before a judge to be tried and judged, because they had been examined by Herod already; but either that they should be carried and laid in bonds, or be led forth to suffer punishment; and so our version directs, and which is confirmed by the Syriac; and the Greeks say^{f589}, that *απαγωγή* is a kind of punishment:

and he went down from Judea to Caesarea; not Peter, but Herod:

and there abode; of this journey of Agrippa's to Caesarea, Josephus makes mention ^{f590}; this place was distant from Jerusalem six hundred furlongs, or seventy five miles ^{f591}.

Ver. 20. *And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon,* etc.] Two cities on the sea coast, in the land of Phoenicia; with the inhabitants of which Herod was so enraged, that though he had not declared war against them, yet he had meditated it in his mind, and intended to do it at a proper time: what gave him this offence is not certain; that it should be for entertaining and concealing of Peter, when he made his escape, is without any foundation; and nothing but this following on that account, could ever occasion such a thought:

but they came with one accord to him; the ambassadors from both cities united in an address to him, and joined in ways and means to reconcile him to them:

and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend; not merely by arguments, entreaties, and good works, but very likely by gifts, by making presents to him: persons in such an office had usually very great interest in the princes they served ^{f592}, as Blastus doubtless had with Herod; Commodus the emperor did every thing at the instances of his chamberlains, and so other princes; for these officers had access when others could not, the king's bedchamber next to sacred; and therefore the Tyrians and Sidonians privately applied to him first:

desired peace; either of Herod himself, to whom, by the means of Blastus, they were introduced; and in their address to him, entreated he would forgive the offence, and be at peace with them; or else of Blastus, whom by some means or another they made their friend; and therefore entreated of him, that he would use his interest with the king, and procure peace for them: and this sense the Arabic version inclines to, which renders the words thus, "and they prayed him that he would take care of reconciliation and peace"; though the former seems to be the true sense: "because their country was nourished by the king's country". These cities were seaports, and the inhabitants of them were much concerned in sending ships to sea, and in merchandise; and it was in Judea and Galilee, which were under Herod's jurisdiction, where they vented the goods they imported, and from whence they were supplied with wheat, honey, and oil, both for their own use, and perhaps to export abroad; (see ^{<100>}1 Kings 5:1,11) (^{<27>}Ezekiel

27:3,17), etc. And it looks as if Herod had forbid all commerce with them, which if it had been continued, would have been the ruin of them.

Ver. 21. *And upon a set day*, etc.] Either on some feast day of divine appointment, as a feast day was by the Jews called *d[wm*, “a stated day”; or on some day appointed by Herod, for the receiving of the ambassadors of Tyre and Sidon, and of hearing their petitions; or as Josephus ^{f593} says, it was on the second day of the sports and plays, instituted by him in honour of Caesar:

Herod, arrayed in royal apparel; the same Jewish historian in the same place says, that this his apparel was all of silver, and of a wonderful contexture; and that going in this very early in the morning into the theatre, the silver shone so with the rays of the rising sun, that it struck the spectators with terror and admiration:

sat upon his throne; and very likely with the other ensigns of royalty, as a crown on his head, and a sceptre in his hand:

and made an oration unto them; either unto the ambassadors from Tyre and Sidon, or rather unto the common people, the multitude that were gathered together in the theatre, where the above historian says he was.

Ver. 22. *And the people gave a shout*, etc.] At the end of the oration; these were flatterers, as Josephus says in the place before referred to, who cried out one from another, saluting him as God; saying, be merciful to us, hitherto we have revered thee as a man, henceforward we confess thee somewhat more excellent than mortal nature: and so it follows here,

saying it is the voice of a God, and not of a man; the Vulgate Latin version reads, “the voices of God and not men”; and the Ethiopic version, “the city shouted in, or with the voice of God”, with the voice of man; as if this referred to the acclamation of the people, and not the speech of the king; very wrongly.

Ver. 23. *And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him*, etc.] With a disease after mentioned; this angel, according to Josephus, appeared in the form of an owl; for he says, that a little after (the shout of the people) the king looked up, and saw an owl sitting upon a rope over his head; whom he immediately understood to be an angel, or messenger of evil things to him, as it had been before of good things; for it seems by the same historian ^{f594}, that when he was bound by the order of Caligula, he saw an owl sitting

on that tree, on which he leaned; when a certain German predicted, that things would in a short time be changed with him, and he should be advanced to great honour; but remember, says he, whenever you see that bird again, you will die within five days. Eusebius ^{f595}, out of Josephus, makes no mention of the owl, but relates it thus; that a little after (the oration and the salutation of the people) the king looked up, and saw an angel sitting over his head, whom he immediately understood to be the cause of evil things to him, as he had formerly been of good: the reason of the angel's smiting him was,

because he gave not glory to God; or as the Jewish historian says, because he reprov'd not the flatterers, nor rejected their impious flattery, but tacitly took that to himself, which belonged to God:

and he was eaten of worms: Beza's most ancient copy adds, "while he was alive"; Josephus only makes mention of pains in his belly, but these were occasioned by the gnawing of the worms: this was accounted by the Jews a very accursed death; they say ^{f596}, that the spies which brought an ill report on the good land, died this death: their account is this, that

"their tongues swelled and fell upon their navels, and worms came out of their tongues and went into their navels, and out of their navels they went into their tongues,"

and Herod the great, the grandfather of this, according to Josephus ^{f597}; and Maximianus Galerius, according to Eusebius ^{f598}, and many of this death died many tyrants, oppressors, and persecutors! as Antiochus,

"So that the worms rose up out of the body of this wicked man, and while he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell away, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army." (2 Maccabees 9:9)

others:

and gave up the ghost: not directly, but five days after, as Josephus relates, in the fifty fourth year of his age, and when he had reigned seven years; but before he died, and as soon as he was smitten, he turned to his friends and said, I your God am obliged to depart this life, and now fate reproves the lying words you have just now spoke of me; and I who was called immortal by you, am led away to die, with more, as related by Josephus: by

such a token as this, a man was discovered to be a murderer with the Jews; for so they say ^{f599}, that

“out of the beheaded heifer went a vast number of worms, and went to the place where the murderer was, and ascended upon him, and then the sanhedrim laid hold on him and condemned him.”

Ver. 24. *But the word of God grew and multiplied.*] The number of those who were converted by it, and embraced and professed it, increased; otherwise the word is the same, whether the professors of it be more or fewer; and this it did, notwithstanding the persecution raised against it by Herod whilst he was living; and after his death, it still gained more ground, met with less opposition, and was more freely professed.

Ver. 25. *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem,* etc.] Two of Beza’s exemplars, the Complutensian edition and the Syriac version, add, “unto Antioch”; and certain it is, that from thence they were sent, and thither they returned, for we find them there in the beginning of the next chapter:

when they had fulfilled their ministry; which was the carrying the relief, or the money collected by the Christians at Antioch, for the brethren in Judea, on account of the famine that was there:

and took with them John, whose surname was Mark: the son of Mary, at whose house the disciples were met together, and praying; and where Peter first went, after he was delivered from prison, (^{<44212>}Acts 12:12) him they brought with them from Jerusalem to Antioch, being a kinsman of Barnabas; and a man of promising gifts and usefulness, and judged to be a fit companion with them in their travels, for the spread of the Gospel.