**Acts of the Apostles
A Study of New Testament History**
**Lesson 12
Acts 12:1-25**

**Introduction:**

Persecution against the Lord's church had become relatively commonplace to the disciples of Christ in the first century. In fact, Jesus had repeatedly warned His disciples to expect it.

*"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Matthew 5:11-12)

*"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another."* (Matthew 10:22-23)

*"Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation."* (Luke 11:49-51)

*"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."* (John 15:18-20)

Stephen had been the first to die for the faith (Acts 7:57-60), and nameless others had suffered the same fate at the hands of Saul (Acts 8:1-3; 26:10). However, following Saul's conversion, persecution against the church ceased temporarily. The Sanhedrin no longer had the firebrand zealot they had enjoyed in Saul. He would do anything he could, and go to any extreme necessary, to stamp out what he believed was pure heresy and a disease that threatened his precious Jewish faith and heritage. However, while persecution by the Jewish religious leaders had been quelled, it would find new life at the hands of a man appointed by Caesar to serve as king of the Jews in Palestine. His name was Herod Agrippa.

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of the notorious Herod the Great. When Herod the Great died his kingdom was divided between his three surviving sons: Archelaus, Philip and Antipas, all of whom served Rome as tetrarchs over the region. Archelaus had been given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria; Antipas was awarded Galilee and Perea; and Philip was left with Iturea and Trachonitis. However, Archelaus, a violent man, was charged with cruelty in the manner in which he governed Judea and was subsequently banished by Caesar Augustus to Gaul. When Philip died, his region was granted by Emperor Caligula to the young up-and-coming Herod Agrippa. Soon after, Herod Antipas was likewise forced into exile for misdeeds and his tetrarchy was also awarded to Herod Agrippa.

As fate would have it, Herod Agrippa was visiting Rome at the time Caligula was assassinated. Herod's loyalty to Rome had won him many friends there, and had brought him to the attention of Claudius Caesar. To reward him for his loyalty, Claudius gave Herod the territories of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria, making the kingdom of Herod Agrippa nearly as large as the kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great.

Like his grandfather, Herod Aprippa was Idumean (Edomite) – a descendent of those who had been the enemies of the Israelites in the days of Joshua and the judges. However, also like his grandfather, Herod Agrippa had adopted the religion of the Jews, more for political purposes than out of a devotion to the God of Israel. History had shown that the Jews of Palestine resented being under the rule of someone who had no knowledge of, or respect for, their religious beliefs. Therefore, to keep the peace, Rome found it expedient to appoint rulers who were both loyal to Rome and who would be least objectionable to Jewish religious and political leaders. Rome found these leaders in Herod the Great and his family.

Herod the Great had not only sought to appease the Jews by adopting their religion, but also through building projects that included significantly enlarging and adorning the Temple in Jerusalem. However, it was an uneasy, fragile peace that was constantly being threatened by Jewish zealots who wanted a Jewish king like Saul, David and Solomon. Uprisings were common. Therefore, Herod and his sons after him, had to walk a delicate balance between aggressively quelling these uprisings, while not going so far as to incur the displeasure of Rome.

The rapid spread of Christianity throughout Judea and Samaria had become a real threat to Judaism, especially since Gentiles had also become disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. This created a unique opportunity for Herod Agrippa. Herod realized he could win the favor of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem by arresting and putting to death the leaders of the church. This act would also appease Jewish zealots and nationalists who were likewise troubled by the rapid growth of Christianity. By eliminating the leaders of the church, Herod could create for himself a real win-win situation. He would appease the Jews, maintain peace in Palestine, and ensure his kingdom by demonstrating his effective leadership to Rome.

However, the Lord had other plans for Herod. Gamaliel had once given his fellow rulers in the Sanhedrin sound advice concerning doing no harm to the apostles of Jesus. After detailing a long history of men who had claimed to be the Messiah, Gamaliel concluded:

*"And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God."* (Acts 5:38-39)

Gamaliel advised his fellow leaders to consider the consequences if this was indeed the work of God. If Jesus were somehow the Messiah, then to fight against His apostles would mean fighting against God. That would not only be futile, but it would bring down the wrath of Jehovah God Himself. While the members of the Sanhedrin were not convinced this movement was of God, they at least had the wisdom to refrain from putting the apostles to death.

Herod Agrippa didn't have a Gamaliel to advise him, and it is most likely that such advice would have done little good. Herod had the power of Rome behind him. What could the men who followed the crucified Jesus do to him? Unfortunately for Herod, he failed to realize Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. Herod became a friend of the Jews by executing the leaders of the Lord's church, but he also set himself up as an enemy of God – and for that, he would pay with his own life.

**Memorization:**

*But the word of God grew and multiplied.* (Acts 12:19)

Key Events of Acts 12:

* Herod kills James, the brother of John
* Peter is arrested and freed from prison
* Herod is stuck dead by God

**Link to Online Bible Study Tools:**

These websites contain numerous Bible Versions and Translations, Concordances, Dictionaries, Lexicons and many other useful tools: http://biblos.com/ and http://www.biblestudytools.com/ (Click on "Our Library" at the top of the home page)

**The Exposition:**

**I. Renewed persecution against the church (Acts 12:1-19)**

**A. Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-4)**

1. When did Herod Agrippa reign – during what Roman Emperor?

2. What did Herod do to the church?

3. What was the first thing Herod did that pleased the Jews? Why do you think he might have wanted to win their favor?

4. What was the next thing Herod did to please the Jews?

5. What time of year in the Jewish calendar was Peter arrested?

6. How many soldiers would be in "four squads?"

7. Why do you think Herod wanted to wait until after Passover to deliver Peter to the people?

**B. Peter freed from prison (Acts 12:5-19)**

1. What was the church doing while Peter was in prison?

2. To what extent did the prison guards go to ensure Peter would not escape?

3. Who appeared to Peter and what did he tell him to do?

4. What was Peter's reaction to all this?

5. In your opinion, how was Peter able to get past all the guards without being seen? Was there a miracle here?

6. After the angel brought Peter out of the prison and departed, what was Peter's reaction?

7. Where did Peter go, and who was there?

8. What did Peter do when he arrived, and who did he meet first?

9. What did she do? What was the reaction of those in the house?

10. What was Peter doing all this time?

11. What was their reaction when they saw Peter? Why would they have reacted this way?

12. What did Peter tell them to do?

13. What happened the next day? What was Herod's response?

14. Where did Herod go next?

**II. The word of God grew and multiplied (Acts 12:20-25)**

**A. Herod's violent death (Acts 12:20-24)**

1. Where are Tyre and Sidon, and why would Herod have been angry with the people there?

2. What did they do to restore peace between themselves and Herod? Why was this so important?

3. When Herod gave his oration, how did the people respond?

4. What happened to Herod, and why?

5. What was the result of Herod's death?

**B. Barnabas, Saul and John mark (Acts 12:25)**

1. Why had Barnabas and Saul gone to Jerusalem?

2. Where did they go when they left Jerusalem, and who did they take with them?

3. Who was John Mark and who was he related to? (Consult a Bible dictionary or commentary).

**Application:**Be prepared to discuss what lessons can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations.