

# Acts 12

# A GROWING MOVEMENT

## The Weapon of Prayer

Life Group Leaders should read through this material and choose a few questions to talk over in your group. Your group will not have time to cover all the material. The guide is for personal study and for choosing a few questions that you and your life group would like to discuss.

**Context of Acts Part 2: "A Growing Movement":** The book of Acts was written by Luke who accompanied the Apostle Paul in much of his missionary travel. This book was written towards the end of Paul's life around AD 62-64, which is around 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Acts gives us not only the inspired word of God but a detailed account of the beginnings of the church of Christ. It contains "descriptive" truth, simply meaning an event that occurred is described accurately, and also contains "prescriptive" truth, meaning it provides God's order and directives for the Church. It is important as we read the book of Acts to acknowledge that not everything that is "described" is "prescribed" for the church in every era. For example, God chose to send His Holy Spirit to the Apostles and to give them the sign of "tongues of fire" and empower them to speak in new languages in order to preach the Gospel. Just because this is described in Acts does not mean that it is prescribed to happen every time the Holy Spirit is given. We are excited to journey through Acts and grow in our understanding of God and His good news through Jesus Christ.

### Read Aloud Acts 12:1-19

Before we break down this section of Scripture, describe what is happening in your own words. (Being able to summarize Scripture is a great way to see if we are comprehending what we have just read.)

### Acts 12:1-4

**1** The Church had just experienced the birth of a new movement. In Acts 9-11, we saw that the Holy Spirit had been given to the believing Gentiles in the same way God had given Him to the believing Jews. This was both controversial and exciting to the early believers. However, as momentum mounted for the Church, so did resistance.

#### **A** The Herod Dynasty

- Herod the Great - From about 37 BC to about 4 AD. He is the Herod that we read about in Matthew 2 who would order the execution of babies under two years old. Herod was the king of Judea, however truly he was just a pawn of Rome to carry out their wishes to the Jewish people.
- Herod Antipas - The ruler during the time and ministry of John the Baptist
- Herod Agrippa I - This is the Herod spoken of in Acts 12

**A** Herod Agrippa had been educated in Rome and had developed close friendships there. He was loyal to the Roman government, and he began the persecution of the Church here in Acts Chapter 12.

Rulers being against God and against His people is nothing new.

- Pharaoh was against God
- Balak the king of Moab opposed God in his attempts to work with Balaam to curse Israel
- There are over 30 kings and rulers who opposed God in the conquest of the promised land that were killed by the armies of Israel under Moses and Joshua
- Even in Israel leaders and kings rebelled against God. All of the kings of the northern Tribes rebelled against God as well as most of the kings of the southern tribes.

**C** We see the main source or reason behind the persecution in verse 3, because it pleased the Jewish people. Rulers and kings that are not God fearing, will be people-fearing and people pleasing. However, for the believer, we have one King to fear, and that is Jesus Christ.

**2** This new wave of persecution targeted key leaders. Jesus had closely disciples Peter, James, and John. These were His three main leaders within the inner-circle of the disciples. During this persecution, James is killed and Peter is thrown in prison and is on his way to a death sentence.

Look at all the change in the midst of the early Church! A brand new movement that was established by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; what a change! Persecution scattered the Church; what a change! A new movement that makes the Gentiles one with the Jews; what a change! Persecution comes again and this time takes out two of the most prominent leaders of Christianity; what a change!

**P** **Question: We see that opposition to God's plan from earthly leaders is to be expected. Losing godly leaders to persecution or simply change due to their calling or the needs of the Church is also to be expected. What is your natural reaction to change? How can you view it through a Biblical lens?**

### **Acts 12:5-19**

Prayer - The early Church was fueled by prayer.

**A** Consistent - First, the early Church prayers were consistent. The early Church has been seen to not only pray, but to devote themselves to prayer. This can be seen in the parable Jesus gives on the persistent widow. Luke 18:1-8

**B** Opposition Is Evident - Peter's situation looked dire. He was in prison, surrounded by guards, with an eminent sentence. There was no physical help or practical steps that he could take to get out of his situation. This is often where God brings us to really understand the power of prayer and the power of the Gospel. 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

**C** Answered Prayers - Ultimately God answers the prayers of the early Church in delivering Peter from prison. This was so miraculous, Peter himself thought he was in a vision rather than reality. It is not merely saying words that brings this kind of power, but rather prayers offered to God in faith according to His will and Word. James 5:13-18

**P** **Question: What sticks out to you about prayer from this section of Acts and the above cross references? What is challenging or hard about prayer?**

## Read Aloud Acts 12:20-25

Describe what is happening in your own words.

### Acts 12:20-25

**1** Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician countries, they were north of Herod's jurisdiction in Syria. However, during this time of famine, they were needing aid from Herod for food and resources. It seems that there was a rift between these cities and Herod and this was causing Tyre and Sidon to be in crisis. In order to survive, these cities pleaded with Herod and seemed to bribe his personal attendant. This was someone who was close to Herod and could influence him.

There was a great festival during this time that is recorded by Josephus. Tyre and Sidon saw this as a good opportunity to make their appeal to Herod, and they did. They worshipped him as a god.

**2** Herod did not refuse the worship of men but rather embraced it. He had actively sought to kill the body of Christ and now was depriving men of food unless they worshipped him.

In this state of grave sin, God intervened and took Herod's life. Job 1:21 tells us that the Lord give and takes away. We must remember that life is a gift from God. The consequence of our sin is death, therefore our life is sustained by God's grace. This gives men time to repent. It may seem drastic for God to take a mans life; however, He has the right to do so. In fact, it would be fair of God to take every mans life the moment they sinned and rebelled against Him. However, due to God's love and grace, He gives us time to turn from our rebellion and embrace the Gospel by faith.

**3** Despite the persecution, the Church continued to grow. The Church did not simply grow by numbers, but it grew by spreading the Word of God and the truths of Scripture. Isaiah 66:1-2

**?** **Question: We may not have men worship us like Herod. However, we can fall into the trap of enjoying the praises of people. We can take glory for ourselves that is due to God. We may not kill the Church, but we may find ourselves treating people who are a part of the body of Christ poorly. What do you think is the key to a kind heart that seeks God to receive all of the glory?**

## Weekly Challenge

Prayer is difficult! All Christians talk about praying, but how often do we become serious about our prayer life? Throughout the first section of Acts we discussed personal devotion to God in prayer. How is that going for you? Have you seen yourself grow in your prayer life? The truth is we are either growing in our depth of prayer or becoming more shallow in our prayer backwards, we are never staying the same.

## Memory Verse

### Acts 14:21-23 ESV

*<sup>21</sup> When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*