

THE DEATH OF AN APOSTLE

Acts 12

Introduction:

- 1. Jesus warned His apostles they would be persecuted (John 15:20).**
- 2. Peter and John were arrested, tried, and released (Acts 4).**
- 3. All the apostles were arrested, beaten, and charged not to teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:17-41).**
- 4. Stephen was stoned by an angry mob (Acts 7).**
- 5. The church in Jerusalem was scattered by persecution (Acts 8:1-4).**
- 6. In this chapter, we have an account of the murder of the first of the apostles.**
- 7. Tradition says all the apostles except John were killed for their faith.**

Discussion:

- I. HEROD (AGRIPPA I) BEGAN TO HARASS THE CHURCH (12:1,2).**
 - A. Up to this point, the persecutions had come from the religious leaders of the Jews.**
 - 1. This is the first instance of civil rulers persecuting Christians.**
 - 2. The most severe persecutions will be carried out by the Roman Empire beginning with Nero.**
 - B. Agrippa came from a notable family of evil rulers.**
 - 1. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who was ruling when Jesus was born (Matt. 2).**
 - 2. Herod Agrippa I was the “black sheep” of a family known for its pride, ambition, cruelty, and lust.**
 - 3. He lived extravagantly in Rome and incurred great debt.**
 - 4. He was imprisoned for criticizing the emperor, Tiberias.**
 - 5. Caligula released him and made him ruler over Northern Israel.**
 - 6. Agrippa brought accusations against his uncle, Antipas, and was given his territory of Galilee.**
 - 7. For supporting Claudius, Agrippa was given rule over Judea and Samaria.**
 - 8. He now had all the territory that had once been ruled by his grandfather, Herod the Great.**
 - C. Agrippa had James, the apostle, killed to please the Jews.**
 - 1. Luke does not give us the details of James’ arrest or death.**

2. We do not know why God permitted an apostle to be killed so early.

II. BECAUSE JAMES' DEATH PLEASED THE JEWS, AGRIPPA ALSO ARRESTED PETER (12:3-19).

A. Agrippa intended to kill Peter following Passover.

1. Peter was kept under heavy guard.
 - a. Sixteen soldiers were assigned to guard him with four on duty at all times.
 - b. He was chained between two soldiers.
 - c. Perhaps Agrippa was aware of the time when an angel had released the apostles (Acts 5:19-26)?
2. Continual prayers were offered by the church on Peter's behalf.
 - a. The Lord's church is a praying church (Acts 2:42).
 - b. J.W. McGarvey suggested they were not praying for Peter's release, but for his strength to face death.
 - c. Prayer is powerful: "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees."
 - d. Paul wrote: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

B. An angel released Peter the night before he was to be executed.

1. Peter was sound asleep, chained between two guards.
2. The angel struck Peter and raised him up to awaken him.
3. The fact that he was sleeping so soundly shows Peter was confident in his Christian hope:

"God is my Helper; I will not fear what man can do to me."
(Heb. 13:6).
4. Peter's chains fell off; the prison door opened by itself.
5. Peter thought he was seeing a vision.

C. Peter went to Mary's house where the saints were assembled.

1. The church at Jerusalem was much smaller since the scattering (Acts 8:4).
2. Mary was the mother of John Mark and a relative of Barnabas (Acts 12:12; Col. 4:10).
3. Rhoda answered the door, but was so excited she forgot to let Peter in.
 - a. Some of the Christians thought she had seen Peter's angel (Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14).
 - b. Peter kept on knocking until he was admitted.
 - c. He assured the Christians and departed to an

- unknown place.
 - d. Agrippa executed Peter's guard for letting him escape.

III. AGRIPPA PAID THE PRICE FOR HIS PRIDE (12:20-25).

- A. Herod Agrippa was very angry with Tyre and Sidon.
 - 1. They were dependent upon his territory for their food.
 - 2. They had sent a large delegation to see the king.
- B. On a set day, Agrippa sat on his throne to address them.
 - 1. Josephus says it was on a holiday to honor the emperor.
 - 2. He says Agrippa was wearing a garment made of silver which gleamed in the sun.
- C. The people flattered Agrippa by saying, "The voice of a god, and not of a man."
 - 1. An angel struck him because he did not give glory to God.
 - 2. He was eaten by worms and died.
 - 3. Josephus says Agrippa was stricken by terrible pain and died in agony after five days of suffering.

Conclusion:

- 1. The result of these events was that "the Word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).
 - a. People could see God's hand in the escape of Peter.
 - b. They could also see His justice in the death of Agrippa.
- 2. Paul and Barnabas had been sent from Antioch to Jerusalem with relief for the needy (11:29,30).
- 3. When they returned to Antioch, John Mark accompanied them.
- 4. The remainder of the book of Acts will deal primarily with the work of Saul who will become Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles.
- 5. The Word "grows and is multiplied" when men and women obey what it says in order to be saved.
 - a. We must believe in Jesus Christ (John 8:24; Acts 8:12).
 - b. We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38).
 - c. We must confess our faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32,33; Acts 8:37).
 - d. We must be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).
- 6. Are you willing to take your stand with Jesus?

