

## Herod Vexes the Church

### Lesson Scope: Acts 12

*References in brackets refer to Acts 12 unless otherwise specified*

### Lesson Focus

As seen in the previous lessons, the church was growing rapidly. Jews and Gentiles alike experienced salvation. The Gospel message had born fruit at home in Jerusalem and in faraway places like Antioch.

The growth of the church did not go unnoticed by Satan. Opposition became strong as Herod determined to kill her leaders. By God's grace, the church was not defeated and "the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

The growth of the church provokes increased opposition from the enemy. Through fervent prayer; however; God's people can face this opposition victoriously.

We have the perspective of hindsight, knowing that Peter was delivered from prison. We should remember that the praying saints had no such foresight. Even if Peter had not been delivered God's work would still have been victorious.

We do not know what the saints were praying for. We do know that they were praying for Peter (12:5). Were they actually praying for his escape, or were they praying for his faithfulness? Either way, they apparently did not expect Peter to escape from prison.

Be sure to emphasize the value of prayer. How would a given situation have turned out differently if we had started praying sooner? How may a lack of prayer be limiting God's work in my life or in the church?

**Lesson Aim:** To portray the effectiveness of prayer in overcoming the enemy.

**Theme Verse:** James 5:16. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

## Lesson Text

### “Prayer Was Made Without Ceasing”

#### Acts 12:1-11

<sup>1</sup> (KJV) Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church. <sup>2</sup> And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. <sup>3</sup> And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) <sup>4</sup> And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. <sup>5</sup> Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. <sup>6</sup> And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. <sup>7</sup> And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands. <sup>8</sup> And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. <sup>9</sup> And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. <sup>10</sup> When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. <sup>11</sup> And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

### “They Were Astonished”

#### Acts 12:12-17

<sup>12</sup> (KJV) And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. <sup>13</sup> And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. <sup>14</sup> And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. <sup>15</sup> And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened

*the door*, and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

### **“The Word of God Grew and Multiplied”**

**Acts 12:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> (KJV) Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and *there* abode. <sup>20</sup> And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*. <sup>21</sup> And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. <sup>22</sup> And the people gave a shout, *saying*, *It is the voice of a god, and not of a man*. <sup>23</sup> And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. <sup>24</sup> But the word of God grew and multiplied. <sup>25</sup> And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **“Prayer Was Made Without Ceasing”**

1. Why did Herod have Peter put in prison?
2. Enumerate the miracles in this passage.
3. Why is united prayer important?

#### **“They Were Astonished”**

4. Why is it significant that God answered their prayers while they were praying?
5. Why should we give God the credit for answered prayer?

#### **“The Word of God Grew and Multiplied”**

6. What was the reason for Herod's death?
7. How should we pray in relation to the enemies of God?
8. What needs should the church be in prayer about today?

## **Analysing the Passage**

“James the brother of John” (12:2) was the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19) and Salome (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40). He had been one of Peter’s partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10). He was one of Jesus’ twelve disciples and an apostle in the early church. This was not the same James who wrote the Epistle of James.

“Herod the king” (12:1) was Herod Agrippa I. He was the grandson of Herod the Great. He sought to vex the church and please the Jews. “The days of unleavened bread” were the seven days immediately following the Passover. Herod planned to keep Peter in prison until this feast was past (12:14). ’

Many were gathered at the house of John Mark’s mother to pray. Obviously this did not include the whole congregation or even all the leaders, because “James, and . . . the brethren” were not there (12:17). (This James was likely the half-brother of Jesus, writer of the Book of James, and a bishop at Jerusalem.)

The place of angels is outstanding in this account. The angel of the Lord awoke Peter and led him out of the prison (12:7-8). The angel of the Lord smote Herod (12:23).

Peter’s deliverance was a miracle. The chains fell off (12:17), and the iron gate opened automatically (12:10). Peter thought it was a vision (12:19), and the praying saints thought it did not make sense (12:15). Only a miracle could have gotten Peter out of prison.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **“Prayer Was Made Without Ceasing”**

1. The prayers of God’s people limit the work of the enemy (12:1-5).

Prayer is powerful. Prayer, along with the Word of God, is the best defense God’s people possess. Would the enemy make less inroads among the brotherhood if we would pray more?

2. Unceasing prayer moves the heart of God (12:5). God responds to a situation based in part on the prayers of the saints. Jesus told His disciples, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). Prayer allows God to work through us and for us. The challenge is to pray patiently and without ceasing. How easily do we give up praying?

3. United collective prayer is effective (12:5). God takes special notice of united prayer. “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

4. Prayer enables one to rest in the midst of opposition (12:6). Fear does not consume the Christian. He commits all his worries to his heavenly Father. Because of this, God’s people can be at peace and can rest in spite of the strongest opposition they may face.

### **“They Were Astonished”**

5. God answers prayer while His people are praying (12:12). Sometimes we may tend to pray and then step back and wait for God to act. But God wants us to continue praying until He works. This shows how earnest and sincere we are in prayer.

6. God can answer prayer above our expectations (12:13-16). God’s ways are much higher than our ways. Our prayers are limited by our human understanding. God often answers our prayers in unexpected ways. We should not assume we know how God will answer.

7. God deserves the praise for answered prayer (12:17). God must receive all the credit. When prayers are answered, we should pray again to offer thanksgiving to the One who heard us. We should not take answered prayer for granted.

### **“The Word of God Grew and Multiplied”**

8. God’s work leaves the enemy frustrated and defeated (12:18-23). At times the enemy appears to be gaining the upper hand. But we can rest assured that because of prayer, God’s enemies will suffer the very defeat they seek to bring upon His people. This does not mean we rejoice at God’s judgment. We rather desire the salvation of all men.

9. Prayer enables God’s work to prosper (12:24). We stand in need of God’s blessing for the church to prosper. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1). We plead for God’s blessing through the avenue of prayer.

### **Important Teachings**

1. The prayers of God’s people limit the work of the enemy (12:1-5).
2. Unceasing prayer moves the heart of God (12:5).
3. United collective prayer is effective (12:5).
4. Prayer enables one to rest in the midst of opposition (12:6).

5. God answers prayer while His people are praying (12:12).
6. God can answer prayer above our expectations (12:13-16).
7. God deserves the praise for answered prayer (12:17).
8. God's work leaves the enemy frustrated and defeated (12:18-23).
9. Prayer enables God's work to prosper (12:24).
10. Prayer delivers one from the control of the enemy (12:17, 10-11).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why did Herod have Peter put in prison?

Herod put Peter in prison because he saw that it would please the Jews. He intended to keep Peter in prison until the Feast of Unleavened Bread was past.

2. Enumerate the miracles in this passage.

The chains fell off (12:7) and the iron gate opened automatically (12:10). The prison guards did not detect Peter's departure. Herod was smitten by the angel of the Lord (12:23).

3. Why is united prayer important?

God takes special notice of collective prayer. United prayer also helps to bind the brotherhood together.

4. Why is it significant that God answered their prayers while they were praying?

God answered prayer that was unceasing and persistent. God desires us to continue praying while we wait for His answer.

5. Why should we give God the credit for answered prayer?

God deserves all glory and praise. It is grossly inconsistent to express our helplessness to God in prayer and then to take the credit to ourselves after our prayers are answered.

6. What was the reason for Herod's death?

Herod died because the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms. The angel did this because Herod had made himself as a god to the people. He sought the praise that he should have given to God.

7. How should we pray in relation to the enemies of God?

We should pray for the salvation of the souls of God's enemies and also pray that God's kingdom would be victorious over the forces of evil.

8. What needs should the church be in prayer about today?

The needs are innumerable. Pray for the salvation and faithfulness of others. Pray that the church would not succumb to the pressures of

worldliness and materialism. Pray that brethren would live together in peace and harmony.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

“Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt” (Psalm 70:1-2).

### **Research Guide**

1. Gain inspiration from the many psalms that contain prayers for deliverance from the enemy: Psalms 25, 27, 28, 35, and 54 through 60.
2. Make a study of collective prayer in the Scriptures.