SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Acts

Chapter Twelve, Verses 1–25

Prayer, a Prison and a Proud King — an apostle killed, an apostle asleep in chains, a church on its knees, and a king who took God's glory for himself

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Herod Agrippa kills James with the sword and locks Peter under sixteen guards to please the crowd. The church prays; an angel strikes Peter awake, his chains fall off and an iron gate opens by itself; the praying church cannot believe he is at the door. Then the angel strikes Herod, who took a god's praise, and the word keeps growing. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Luke's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Acts 12:1–25

James · the angel · the door · the worms

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Four movements from Herod's sword in Jerusalem to his death in Caesarea

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"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied." — Acts 12:24

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Acts 12:1–25

Prayer, a Prison and a Proud King — Herod lays hands on the church — and by the end of the chapter Herod is dead and the word of the Lord is growing

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Acts 12 in 4 movements, in Luke's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where Luke is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ACTS 12:5

"So Peter was kept in the prison, but
prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

† Before the Passage

Acts 11 ended with Barnabas and Saul carrying famine relief from Antioch to the elders in Judea (11:30), and Acts 12 ends with them going back (12:25). In between, Luke steps back to tell what was happening in Jerusalem "about that time" (v. 1). The church that had been spreading to Samaria, Caesarea and Antioch now faces a new enemy: not the high priest's council of chapters 4–5, but a king.

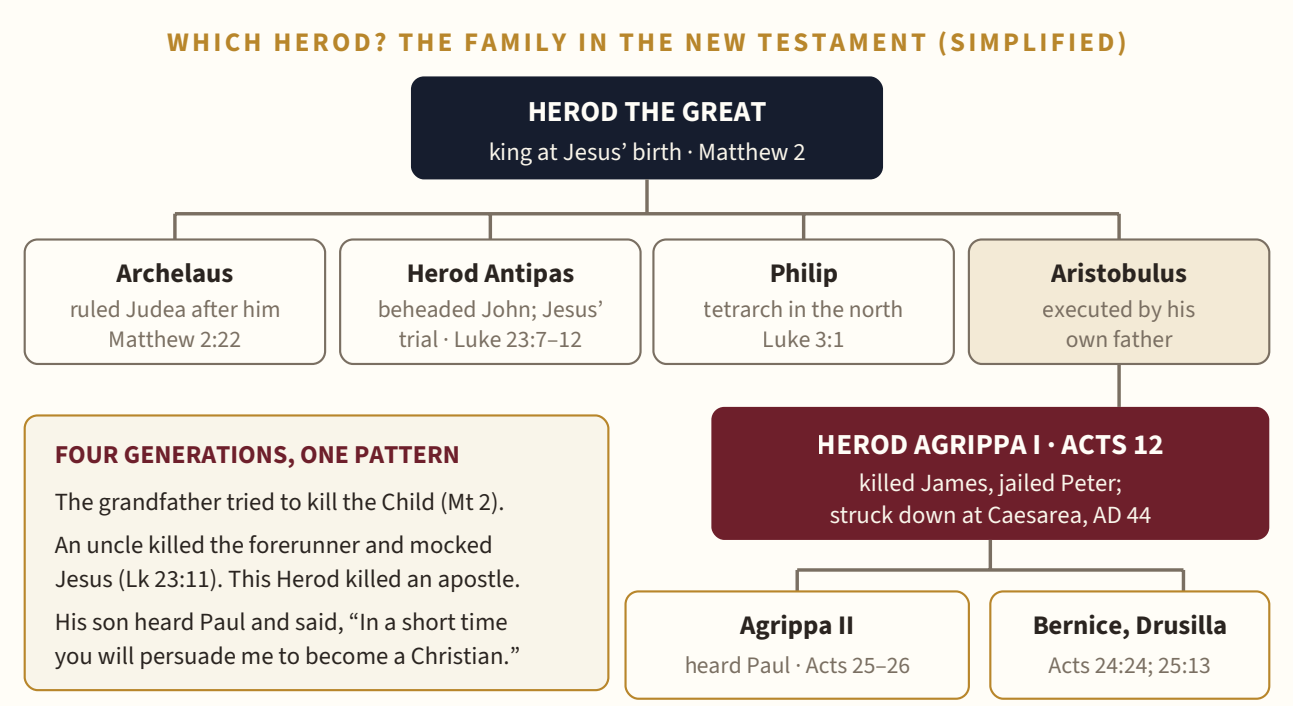
He is Herod Agrippa I. Guzik: "This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth." Sproul: "it is the grandson of Herod the Great, the first Herod Agrippa that we encounter in the book of Acts." Raised in Rome among the imperial family, he was given his grandfather's title of king and, by AD 41, nearly all his grandfather's lands. He worked hard to be popular with the Jewish people, and Luke says plainly why he moved against Peter: "he saw that it pleased the Jews" (v. 3).

The timing matters. It was "the days of Unleavened Bread" (v. 3), the Passover week, when Jerusalem filled with pilgrims — the same week, years before, when Jesus was arrested and Peter denied Him by a fire in the

high priest's courtyard (Luke 22). Herod meant to bring Peter out "after the Passover" (v. 4). Guzik thinks he waited, "fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims filled Jerusalem."

The chapter ends in Caesarea, Herod's seaside capital, where the Jewish historian Josephus also describes his death (*Antiquities* 19.8.2). Guzik quotes him: "He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful," and then "A severe pain also arose in his belly." Sproul: "At every point, he agrees with Luke's account, but he adds some fascinating details." Herod died in AD 44, which helps date the chapter. The whole story runs on one contrast: Herod "laid hands on" the church (v. 1), and at the end, "the word of the Lord continued to grow" (v. 24).

FIGURE · WHICH HEROD?



Trace the line down the right side: the Herod of Acts 12 is Agrippa I, grandson of the Herod who hunted the infant Jesus and father of the Agrippa who heard Paul.

I
MOVEMENT

ACTS 12:1–5

Herod Laid Hands on the Church

James is killed with the sword, Peter is jailed at Passover — and the church prays

[1] *Now about that time* ⚠ *Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.* [2] *And he had* ⚠ *James the brother of John put to death with a sword.* [3] *When he saw that* ⚠ *it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during* ◷ *the days of Unleavened Bread.* [4] *When he had seized*

> *him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.* [5] *So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.*
>
> ACTS 12:1–5

> *"They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."*
>
> MARK 10:39

> *"But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!""*
>
> LUKE 22:33

τετράδιον

TETRADION · "SQUAD OF FOUR" · G5069

A group of four soldiers; it occurs only here in the New Testament. Herod handed Peter to "four squads" (v. 4) — sixteen men. Sproul: "They had four squads because they had four watches during the day," one squad for each watch of the night. Stott, quoted by Guzik: "Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier." Two soldiers were chained to Peter and two kept the door (v. 6). It was the strongest guard Herod could set — and Luke lets us count it.

ἐκτενῶς

EKTENŌS · "FERVENTLY" · G1619

From *ekteinō*, to stretch out. MacArthur, quoted by Guzik: it is related to "a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits." Peter later uses the adverb for love — "fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22) — and Luke uses the comparative of Jesus in Gethsemane: "He was praying very fervently" (Luke 22:44). Some manuscripts read the adjective here, which the KJV rendered "without ceasing." Either way, this was prayer at full stretch, aimed "to God."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik identifies the king — "This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth" — and notes what James' death meant: "Of the twelve who followed Jesus, James was the first to be martyred," and it "shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection." Herod acted "Because he saw that it pleased the Jews," and held Peter until after the feast, "fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims filled Jerusalem." Against all that stood the church's prayer: "The word constant also has the idea of earnest."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's "Peter in Prison" (8 August 2004) begins with the king — "the grandson of Herod the Great, the first Herod Agrippa" — and his campaign: "the first thing he did in his harassment campaign was arrest James and have him beheaded by the sword." Then the hard question: why James and not Peter? Sproul refuses the idea that faith can demand a yes from God. God always answers prayer, sometimes with no: "But in God's providence, He was pleased to allow James to be martyred." And the church kept praying after James died: "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "The Deliverance of Peter" takes verse 5 as its text and begins with the hard fact that when enemies get hold of God's people they hold them fast — so believers should walk carefully. But Peter's case was now in God's hands, and that changes everything: "God never is before His time; nor is He ever too late." The church could not open a prison door, but it could pray, and Spurgeon sets that "but" of verse 5 against all Herod's power — the chains, the soldiers and the iron gate.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry sees Herod working up from the lesser members to the leaders: "Christ's suffering servants are thus trained up by less troubles for greater." James fell first, and "The apostle died a martyr, to show the rest of them what they must expect, that they might prepare accordingly." Henry notes that "Beheading was not ordinarily used among the Jews," and that "Herod would not condemn him till the passover was over." The church's answer: "The death of James alarmed them to a greater fervency in their prayer for Peter," for "Times of public distress and danger should be praying times with the church."

II
MOVEMENT

ACTS 12:6–11

The Chains Fell Off

A sleeping prisoner, an angel and a light, and an iron gate that opens by itself

6 *On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.* 7 *And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.* 8 *And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."* 9 *And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.* 10 *When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.* 11 *When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."*

ACTS 12:6–11

"'Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD'S Passover."

EXODUS 12:11

"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them."

PSALM 34:7

FIGURE · THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TRIAL

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TRIAL · ACTS 12:6–17

THE CELL v6–7	1ST GUARD v10	2ND GUARD v10	IRON GATE v10	ONE STREET vv10–11	MARY'S HOUSE vv12–17
asleep between two soldiers, two chains — chains fall off	walked past "he did not know … it was real" (v9)	walked past still thinking he was seeing a vision	"which opened for them by itself"	the angel departs; "Now I know for sure"	many praying; Rhoda at the gate; Peter keeps knocking

ALL NIGHT, ACROSS THE CITY

"prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (v5)

"many were gathered together and were praying" (v12)

Sixteen soldiers in four squads (v4) could not keep one sleeping man.

Read the boxes left to right — cell, two guards, the iron gate, one street, Mary's house — and remember the dark bar underneath: the church was praying the whole time.

αὐτομάτη

AUTOMATĒ · "BY ITSELF" · G844

Our word "automatic." The iron gate "opened for them by itself" (v. 10) — literally "self-moved." The only other New Testament use is Jesus' parable of the seed: "The soil produces crops by itself" (Mark 4:28). In both places the point is the same: the power is not man's. Sproul: "But the big gate of the city is the iron gate, and no one could get through that gate." Guzik: "For Peter, it opened of its own accord." Spurgeon applies it to every believer's last gate: "it will open of its own accord."

ἐξαιρέω

EXAIREŌ · "RESCUE" · G1807

"To take out, deliver." Peter's words in verse 11 — the Lord "rescued me from the hand of Herod" — use the verb Stephen had used of Joseph, whom God "rescued … from all his afflictions" in Egypt (7:10), and of God coming down to rescue Israel (7:34). Note the setting: Passover week, a deliverance by night, an angel, a command to dress and go — "Gird yourself and put on your sandals" (v. 8), like Israel eating the Passover with loins girded and sandals on (Exodus 12:11). The God of the exodus was still bringing His people out.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes Peter's calm: "Peter showed no signs of anxiety." Sleeping chained between two soldiers on the night before his trial, he was ready to live or die. The rescue was entirely God's: "The chains, the guards, the prison doors meant nothing to God and His appointed messengers." Peter's part was simple obedience — "Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening" — and at the great gate, "For Peter, it opened of its own accord." Why Peter and not James? "Simply, it wasn't time for Peter to go to his heavenly home yet."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul walks the escape step by step: the angel, the light, the chains, the two guard posts. He stresses that Peter was not acting on a plan: "Peter did not know that what the angel did was real." He thought he was dreaming until he stood in the street. The last obstacle was the worst: "But the big gate of the city is the iron gate, and no one could get through that gate." It opened, and Peter came to himself and knew the Lord had sent His angel. Sproul's point throughout is providence — God governing the hour, the guards and the gate for His own purposes.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon delights in the sleeper: "But see, there is Peter asleep! doing nothing!" "Sleep on, blessed slumberer!" Peter could rest because God was awake: "His watchful eyes do keep their ceaseless guard, and at the right time deliverance comes." Then the miracle in stages — "A light shone in the dungeon," and "The chains are gone, the warders are passed, but there is that iron gate." For Spurgeon, every obstacle only magnifies God's glory, and he turns the iron gate toward his hearers' own fears: "you will find that there is no iron gate there, or it will open of its own accord."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry admires Peter "Not terrified with his danger, though it was very imminent." "He did not keep awake, looking to the right hand, or to the left, for relief," and "God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved." Then the angel came: "He seemed as one abandoned by men, yet not forgotten of his God," and "A light shone in the prison." For Henry the iron gate is a picture of grace: "When God will work salvation for his people, no difficulties in their way are insuperable."

III
MOVEMENT

ACTS 12:12–19

It Is His Angel

A prayer meeting at Mary's house, a servant-girl too glad to open the gate, and a king who cannot find his prisoner

12 *And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.* 13 *When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.* 14 *When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.* 15 *They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."* 16 *But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.* 17 *But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.* 18 *Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.* 19 *When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.*

ACTS 12:12–19

> *"And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, "This man was with Him too.""*
>
> LUKE 22:56

> *"After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.""*
>
> LUKE 22:59

διϊσχυρίζομαι

DIISCHYRIZOMAI · "KEEP INSISTING" · G1340

"To affirm strongly, insist." Only twice in the New Testament, both from Luke, both about Peter. On the night of the denial, by a Passover fire, a servant-girl and then a man "began to insist" that Peter had been with Jesus (Luke 22:56–59). Now, at another Passover, another servant-girl "kept insisting" that Peter was at the gate (v. 15). The first insisting exposed a frightened man; the second announced a rescued one. The others told Rhoda, "You are out of your mind" (*mainē*, G3105) — what Festus would say to Paul (26:24).

ἄγγελος

ANGELOS · "ANGEL, MESSENGER" · G32

Seven times in this chapter (vv. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23). *Angelos* can mean any messenger, and in verse 15 the praying believers say, "It is his angel." Our teachers differ on what they meant. Guzik: "The Jews believed in the idea of guardian angels." Henry grants they may have spoken "the language of the Jews," but will not build a doctrine on it: "since no other scripture speaks of such a thing, this alone is too weak to bear the weight of such a doctrine."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik enjoys the scene: "Rhoda was so excited to hear from Peter that she left him out at the gate!" He is honest about the church: "Even while they prayed for Peter, they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer." He explains "his angel" — "The Jews believed in the idea of guardian angels" — and clarifies verse 17: "The James that Peter told others to report to was not the James who was just martyred," but the Lord's brother. Of the soldiers' "no small disturbance," he says, "This is one of the great understatements of the Bible," and of their execution, "if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul tells it warmly: "When Rhoda recognized Peter's voice, she was so excited, so happy, that she forgot to open the door." The others would not believe her. "So they said, "It is his angel."" For Sproul the irony is the lesson: "They could not believe that God had answered the very prayer they had prayed." Peter told them to report to James and the brethren and left for another place; Herod executed the guards and went down to Caesarea. Sproul closes by praying that believers would trust God's wisdom in His answers, whether yes or no.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "The Special Prayer Meeting" (Acts 12:12) sees in Mary's house the reason the church survived: it prayed together. "It was held at dead of night," and "Peter went to the house and they had not gone to bed, but many were met together praying." "They prayed and they were heard at once." "The answer came so speedily that they were themselves surprised." But Spurgeon will not scold them as unbelievers: "It has sometimes been said that they did not really expect Peter to be set free. … Perhaps so, but I doubt it." His application: "Better hold prayer meetings at midnight than not at all."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry values the house as much as the miracle: "A church in the house makes it a little sanctuary." Rhoda "opened not the gate for gladness," and the believers show a common weakness: "Sometimes that which we most earnestly wish for we are most backward to believe." On "his angel" he asks, "But why should they imagine that angel to assume the voice and shape of Peter" and declines to make a doctrine of it. Of Herod's fruitless search: "Who can find whom God hath hidden?" and of the guards, "With us, if but a prisoner for debt escape, the sheriff must answer for the debt."

IV
MOVEMENT

ACTS 12:20–25

Eaten by Worms — the Word Grew

A royal speech in Caesarea, the voice of a god, an angel's blow, and a gospel that keeps multiplying

20 Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. 21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people kept crying out, "⚠ The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 And immediately △ an angel of the Lord struck him because ⚠ he did not give God the glory, and he was ⚠ eaten by worms and died. 24 But ✩ the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

ACTS 12:20–25

"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."

ISAIAH 42:8

FIGURE · TWO STRIKES OF THE SAME ANGEL

TWO STRIKES OF THE SAME ANGEL · πατάσσω (G3960) · vv7, 23

“he struck Peter’s side” (v7)	“an angel of the Lord struck him” (v23)
in a prison cell, in chains	on the rostrum, in royal apparel
asleep the night before his trial	delivering an address to a crowd
a church praying for him	“The voice of a god” (v22)
“Get up quickly” — chains fall off	“he did not give God the glory”
“the Lord has … rescued me” (v11)	“eaten by worms and died”
struck — and set free	**struck — and brought down**

THE SHAPE OF THE CHAPTER

v1 “Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church”

v24 “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied”

Luke uses one verb for both strikes: the humble prisoner is struck awake and set free; the proud king is struck down. Then read the bottom box from v1 to v24.

πατάσσω · σκωληκόβρωτος

PATASSŌ · SKŌLĒKOBRŌTOS · “STRUCK · EATEN BY WORMS” · G3960, G4662

The same verb, *patassō*, describes the angel striking Peter’s side to wake him (v. 7) and striking Herod to kill him (v. 23). *Skōlēkobrōtos*, “worm-eaten,” appears only here in the New Testament. Guzik: “The manner of Herod’s death was appropriate to his spiritual state; he was corrupted from the inside out.” Sproul: “The worms did not eat the gospel; they ate the king—and the gospel flourished.” Josephus, quoted by Guzik, describes the pain: “A severe pain also arose in his belly.”

βῆμα

BĒMA · “ROSTRUM” · G968

A raised platform for speeches or judgment. Herod “took his seat on the rostrum” (v. 21) and accepted a god’s praise. The same word names Pilate’s judgment seat (Matthew 27:19) and the seat every man will face: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Herod sat on one *bēma*; within days he stood before Another.

ηὔξανεν καὶ ἐπληθύνετο

ĒUXANEN KAI EPLĒTHYNETO · “GREW AND MULTIPLIED” · G837, G4129

Both verbs are imperfect: the word kept growing and kept multiplying. They are the words of Israel in Egypt — Stephen said “the people increased and multiplied in Egypt” (7:17), echoing Exodus 1:7 — and Henry makes the link: “the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied, like Israel in Egypt.” Pharaoh could not stop Israel; Herod could not stop the word. Luke uses *auxanō* for the word again in 6:7 and 19:20.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik explains the quarrel: Tyre and Sidon "wanted to make peace with Herod (Herod Agrippa I), the grandson of Herod the Great," because their food came from his land. "Dressed in impressive clothes, Herod spoke before an audience eager to please him." The flattery — "The voice of a god and not of a man!" — was answered at once, and he quotes Josephus on the silver robe and the pain. His summary of the chapter: "He killed James but didn't defeat God's plan," and "Fighting against God just doesn't work." Then Barnabas and Saul, "Coming back from their relief effort to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30)," brought John Mark with them.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's "The Death of Herod" (15 August 2004) sets the scene: "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon," who "sent a delegation because they had a friend in the court." Drawing on Josephus, he notes, "The royal garment that he wore on this day was pure silver," and that the historian, "At every point, he agrees with Luke's account." Herod accepted the crowd's worship, and "immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God." Sproul says the primary cause of death was God's judgment, not disease, and compares Belshazzar. His great line: "The worms did not eat the gospel; they ate the king—and the gospel flourished."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry is unsparing about the king: "Some very small matter would serve such a proud imperious man as Herod was for a provocation." He is just as hard on the crowd — "Foolish people value men by their outward appearance" — and on flattery: "Thus great men are made an easy prey to flatterers if they lend an ear to them, and encourage them." Herod's fall shows "how God delights not only to bring down proud men." And then: "After the death of Herod the word of God gained ground," for "The courage and comfort of the martyrs, and God's owning them, did more to invite people to Christianity."

V
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the Passover night to the judgment seat of Christ

> *"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them."*
>
> PSALM 34:7

> *"He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death And broke their bands apart."*
>
> PSALM 107:14

> *"Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish."*
>
> PSALM 146:3–4

> *"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."*
>
> ISAIAH 42:8

> *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*
>
> LUKE 22:31–32

> *"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,"*
>
> ACTS 5:19

> *"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."*
>
> 1 PETER 5:5

> *"Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."*
>
> HEBREWS 13:3

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul sets Herod beside Belshazzar of Daniel 5 — another proud king judged by God at the height of his glory.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry sees the chapter in Israel's story: the church "the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied, like Israel in Egypt."

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the text and quotes Josephus; Sproul presses providence — why God let James die and freed Peter; Spurgeon preaches the iron gate and the prayer meeting; Henry turns every scene into counsel. They differ in places: Guzik and Sproul think the praying church did not expect an answer, Spurgeon doubts it; Guzik reads "his angel" as a guardian angel, Henry will not build a doctrine on it.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The sword and the prayer	James' death shattered the illusion of special protection; earnest prayer.	God answers prayer, sometimes no; He was pleased to allow James to die.	God is never before His time nor too late.	Less troubles train for greater; distress should be praying times.
II · The angel in the cell	No anxiety; chains and gates mean nothing to God; not Peter's time.	Peter didn't know it was real; no one could pass the iron gate.	Sleep on, blessed slumberer; the iron gate opens of its own accord.	Not forgotten of his God; no difficulty insuperable.
III · The knock at the gate	Rhoda left him at the gate; they found it hard to believe.	They could not believe God had answered the very prayer they prayed.	Surprised by a quick answer — but did they not expect it? He doubts it.	A church in the house; we are backward to believe what we wish for.
IV · The king and the word	Corrupted from the inside out; fighting God doesn't work.	The worms ate the king, not the gospel; judgment, not disease.	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Flatterers prey on proud men; the word gained ground.

ACTS 12:1–25 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **James died; Peter walked out.** Same church, same prayers, same king. Sproul: "in God's providence, He was pleased to allow James to be martyred." Guzik: it "wasn't time for Peter to go to his heavenly home yet." God is good in both stories. SPROUL
- **Jesus' word to James came true.** "The cup that I drink you shall drink" (Mark 10:39). James was the first of the Twelve to die (Guzik) — and the Lord had told him beforehand. THE TEXT
- **Sixteen soldiers, one sleeping man.** Four squads of four (*tetradion*, v4). Peter, chained between two of them, slept (v6). Henry: "God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved." THE GREEK
- **Prayer at full stretch.** *Ektenōs* (v5), the word for a muscle stretched to its limits (MacArthur, in Guzik) — the word for Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). THE GREEK
- **A second Passover rescue.** Passover week, night, an angel, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals" (v8; Exod 12:11), and "the Lord … rescued me" (v11). The God of the exodus still brings His people out. THE TEXT
- **The gate opened by itself.** *Automatē* (v10). Spurgeon: "there is no iron gate there, or it will open of its own accord." SPURGEON
- **Answered prayer can be hard to believe.** Guzik: "they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer." Spurgeon doubts they didn't expect it — but both agree they kept praying, and Peter kept knocking. GUZIK
- **A servant-girl again.** The only two uses of "insist" (*diischyrizomai*) are Luke 22:59 and Acts 12:15 — the night Peter denied Jesus, and the night a servant-girl announced him free. THE GREEK

- **One angel, two strikes.** *Patassō* wakes Peter (v7) and kills Herod (v23). Henry: God delights "to bring down proud men." Isaiah 42:8: "I will not give My glory to another." HENRY
- **The worms ate the king, not the gospel.** Sproul's line sums up the chapter: Herod "laid hands on" the church (v1); "the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (v24). SPROUL

† Questions for the Table

1 **God let James die and set Peter free, and the same church prayed for both. How do I keep trusting God when He answers one prayer with yes and another with no?**

He was pleased to allow James to be martyred (Sproul).

12:1–11; Mark 10:39

2 **Peter slept in chains the night before his trial. What is keeping me awake right now, and what would it look like to sleep like Peter?**

God gives him sleep, as he doth to his beloved (Henry).

12:6; Ps 4:8

3 **The church prayed "fervently" — stretched out — for Peter. What person or situation am I praying for that way, and what am I only mentioning to God?**

Times of public distress and danger should be praying times (Henry).

12:5, 12; Luke 22:44

4 **Peter obeyed one step at a time without knowing it was real. What is the next small step of obedience God has put in front of me?**

Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening (Guzik).

12:7–10

5 **The praying church told Rhoda she was out of her mind. When God answers my prayers, do I recognize it — or explain it away?**

They could not believe that God had answered the very prayer they had prayed (Sproul).

12:13–16

6 **Herod took praise that belonged to God. Where am I tempted to take credit, or to enjoy flattery, that belongs to Him?**

Great men are made an easy prey to flatterers (Henry).

12:21–23; Isa 42:8; 1 Pet 5:5

Acts 12 opens with a king's sword and ends with worms. In between, an apostle dies, another sleeps in chains, a church prays all night, an angel walks a man past sixteen soldiers and an iron gate, and the people who prayed for it cannot believe it when he knocks. Kings rise and fall; the word of the Lord keeps growing. Pray like that church, sleep like Peter, and give God the glory Herod kept for himself.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) completed his *Commentary* himself through the Gospels and Acts. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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