ACTS 12

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

> *"So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."*
> ACTS 12:5

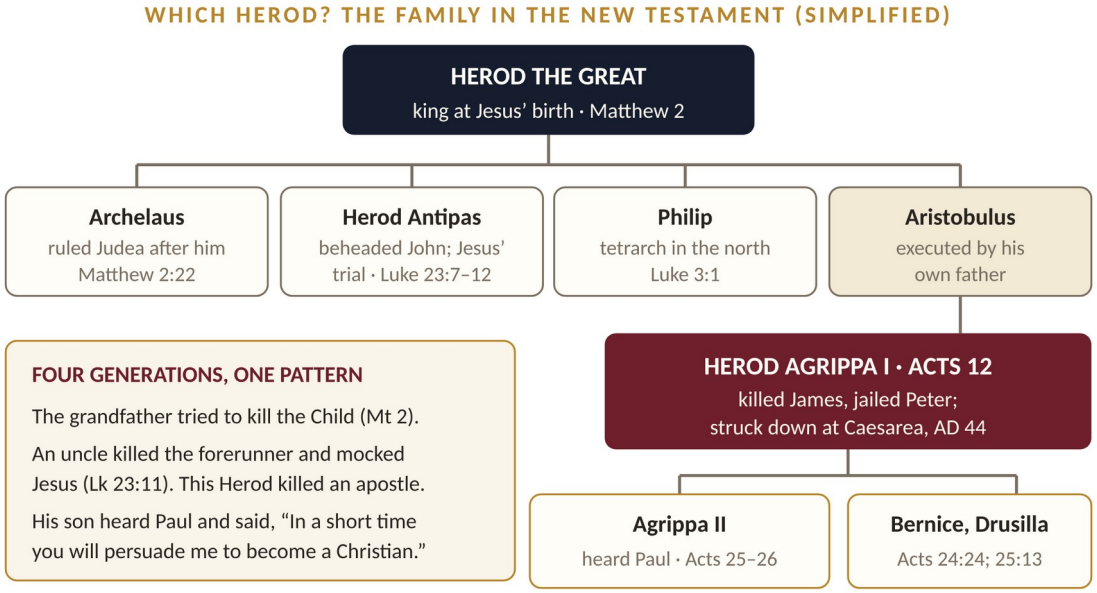
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where Luke has brought us

1. 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).

2. 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.”

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…



Herod Laid Hands on the Church

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

ACTS 12:3

When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

DAVID GUZIK

James' death shattered the illusion of special protection; earnest prayer.

R.C. SPROUL

God answers prayer, sometimes no; He was pleased to allow James to die.

C.H. SPURGEON

God is never before His time nor too late.

MATTHEW HENRY

Less troubles train for greater; distress should be praying times.

τετράδιον

TETRADION · "SQUAD OF FOUR"

A group of four soldiers; it occurs only here in the New Testament.

The Chains Fell Off

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

ACTS 12:7

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.

DAVID GUZIK

No anxiety; chains and gates mean nothing to God; not Peter's time.

R.C. SPROUL

Peter didn't know it was real; no one could pass the iron gate.

C.H. SPURGEON

Sleep on, blessed slumberer; the iron gate opens of its own accord.

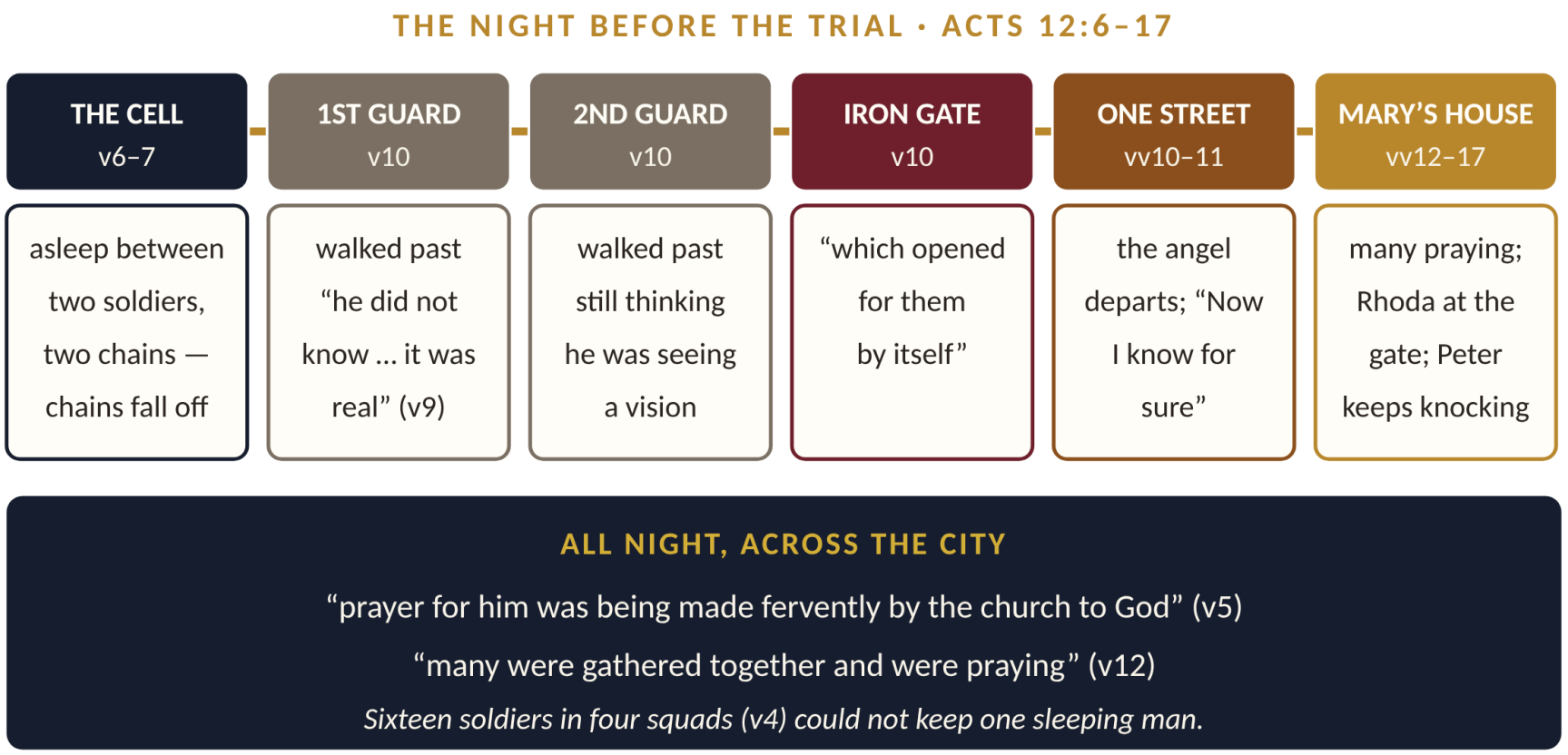
MATTHEW HENRY

Not forgotten of his God; no difficulty insuperable.

αὐτομάτη
AUTOMATĒ · "BY ITSELF"

Our word "automatic." The iron gate "opened for them by itself" (v. 10) — literally "self-moved."

The night before the trial



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.

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

ACTS 12:17

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.

DAVID GUZIK

Rhoda left him at the gate; they found it hard to believe.

R.C. SPROUL

They could not believe God had answered the very prayer they prayed.

C.H. SPURGEON

Surprised by a quick answer — but did they not expect it? He doubts it.

MATTHEW HENRY

A church in the house; we are backward to believe what we wish for.

διϊσχυρίζομαι
DIISCHYRIZOMAI · "KEEP INSISTING"

"To affirm strongly, insist."

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

ACTS 12:23

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.

DAVID GUZIK

Corrupted from the inside out; fighting God doesn't work.

R.C. SPROUL

The worms ate the king, not the gospel; judgment, not disease.

MATTHEW HENRY

Flatterers prey on proud men; the word gained ground.

πατάσσω · σκωληκόβρωτος

PATASSŌ · SKŌLĒKOBRŌTOS

The same verb, patassō, describes the angel striking Peter's side to wake him (v. 7) and striking Herod to kill him (v. 23).

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.

What to carry from this chapter

1

James died; Peter walked out.

Same church, same prayers, same king.

2

Jesus' word to James came true.

"The cup that I drink you shall drink" (Mark 10:39).

3

Sixteen soldiers, one sleeping man.

Four squads of four (tetradion, v4).

4

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).

More to carry

5

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).

6

The gate opened by itself.

Automatē (v10). Spurgeon: “there is no iron gate there, or it will open of its own accord.”

7

Answered prayer can be hard to believe.

Guzik: “they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.”

8

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.

Talk it through

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

CLOSING

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

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the Acts study page.