

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

21. PETER DELIVERED IN ANSWER TO PRAYER

(Acts 12:1-25)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 5

We can look at the chapter from different standpoints.

We could treat it historically:

1. Herod persecuting.
2. James martyred.
3. Peter delivered.

We could make the church the center:

1. The church persecuted.
2. The church praying.
3. The church victorious.
4. The church growing.
5. The enemies of the church perish.

We could consider the outstanding doctrines. This is the outline followed in this discussion.

1. The danger of pride.
2. The certainty of divine retribution.
3. The mystery of God's providential government.
4. The power of Christ the King.
5. The comfort of hope.
6. The power of prayer.
7. The victory of faith.
8. The triumph of truth.

The last chapter, which tells of a contention in the church, may not seem so practical as some.

But if Christians would always settle their contentions in the way in which the apostles did they would reach an amicable settlement and would conclude that this was one of the greatest lessons which they had ever learned. Moreover, that lesson is closely linked with the outstanding one in this chapter, for the man who is to have power in prayer as the disciples did here, must not live in contention with his brethren. Jesus tells us that when we go to worship if we remember that our brother has something against us we should first go and be reconciled and then come and worship.

DIFFERENT ANALYSIS

There are several different ways in which one might outline a chapter such as this. If we were to treat it historically we might consider, first, Herod Persecuting, then James Martyred, third, Peter Delivered. We could also consider the passing of Jerusalem as the center of action and the exit of Peter as the leading character.

If we were to center our discussion about the church, we might consider, first, the church persecuted, next, the church praying, then, the church victorious, fourth, the church growing, and lastly, the enemies of the church perish.

If we were to center our study about the outstanding doctrines we might study the following: the mystery of God's providential government, James was taken and Peter was saved; the curse of pride; the comfort of hope; the power of prayer; the victory of faith; the certainly of divine retribution; and the triumph of the truth.

HEROD

While the church at Antioch was growing and the church at Jerusalem was suffering from famine Herod began to exercise his natural cruelty in afflicting her. Cruelty was a marked characteristic of the family to which Herod belonged. Four members of this family are well known in New Testament history. The one who is spoken of in this chapter was Herod Agrippa I. His grandfather, Herod the Great, ordered the execution of the little children in Bethlehem in the effort to kill Jesus. His uncle, Herod Antipas, imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. His son, Herod Agrippa II, was the king before whom Paul made his defense at Caesarea.

The career of Herod, as of any prodigal, was not all pleasant. He fled from home when a boy to escape the ire of his grandfather. His early life was spent, partly in poverty, partly in prison. A part of this time he was in Rome, and during a part of it in Judaea. The Emperor, Caligula, gave him liberty and honors. He gave him the title of king together with two tetrarchies of Palestine. He held these until after the murder of Caligula, in which he was supposed to have had a part, when Claudius came to the throne. He gained the favor of Claudius who added to the territory over which he ruled the provinces of Judaea and Samaria. Thus he was made governor over all the territory over which his grandfather, Herod the Great, had ruled. Herod was an astute politician. Like Queen Elizabeth who was voluptuous and cruel, but yet was called good Queen Bess, so Herod though cruel by nature and practice, sought to please the Jews.

To win the favor of the people he made his home at Jerusalem, offered sacrifices daily and gave large gifts to the people. It was as a part of his policy to please the people that he attempted to destroy and drive out the Christian.

JAMES

The first prominent victim of the persecution instigated by Herod was James, the brother of John. He was one of the three apostles who had been closest to Jesus. Nothing is said of his character here and but little elsewhere. He was, with John, so distinguished for energy in the cause of Christ that they were called Boanerges, or, sons of thunder. He was evidently prominent in the work of the Lord, among the Christians at Jerusalem, and thus drew upon himself the enmity of his opponents.

PETER

No sooner had Herod witnessed the effect of his action, in killing James, than he arrested Peter also with the intention of executing him and thus gaining greater popularity with the Jews. A few lives were nothing to him if his own pride might be gratified. Herod, however, did not realize that history is made of of two factors, God and man. He had not yet learned that God is the chief factor in history. Man proposes but God disposes. Herod, powerful and violent as he was, was subject to God. Herod no doubt knew that Peter had escaped, on another occasion, from the prison and prison guards. He would see that this did not occur again. He therefore set over Peter, a special guard of sixteen soldiers, to guard in turns, four at a time.

HYPOCRITICAL SUPERSTITION

The Jews would not put anyone to death during the feast of the Passover. It is identified by its pagan name in our Bible - Easter. Herod may not have shared the superstition of the Jews, but in order to please them he knew that he should wait until after the Passover before executing Peter. Many a man has refrained from executing a diabolical plot owing to religious superstition. He would not hesitate to commit murder but he would not break some portion of his ritual in order to complete his plot. The delay on the part of Herod was not the fear of God, because a little later, he was ready to place himself on an equality with God.

PETER DELIVERED

Herod felt sure, by reason of his special effort to guard Peter, that his prisoner would be there the next morning and he would be led out to execution. But Herod had not taken into account the prayers of the church and the power of Almighty God. He did not know that doors and locks meant nothing to the angel of God. The next day the prisoner was not within the prison. Herod did not know why. The whole story is made clear to us, how the angel went in, lighted up the prison, loosened the chains, opened one prison door after another, told Peter to dress and follow him out into another street and set him free.

REPORTING TO THE DISCIPLES

Peter did not realize until it was all over that his release was more than a vision. When he knew that it was a reality, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, and knocked. The little girl who answered the knock at the porch knew that it was Peter, but was so overjoyed that she neglected to open it. She ran into the house and told the assembled disciples, who were at prayer, that Peter was at the door. They would not believe her at first, but when they opened the door they found that it was indeed Peter, safe and free. Peter told them how the Lord had brought him forth from the prison, asked them to tell James and the brethren, and departed to another place, possibly to remain in seclusion until Herod's wrath had abated, when he should find that his prisoner had escaped. Herod did seek for Peter but found him not, and after he had examined the guards commanded that they should be put to death.

HEROD'S END

Herod then went to Caesarea for the purpose, according to Josephus, of engaging in a festival in honor of the Emperor Claudius. During the games of the festival he received publicly representatives from Tyre and Sidon against whom he had been highly displeased. These men wanted to regain the favor of Herod because they depended for their food supplies upon Palestine and it would be disastrous for them to go to war with him. Though Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they arranged terms of peace. Upon a set day Herod appeared, arrayed in royal apparel, and made an oration unto them. Josephus says that he had put on a garment of silver tissue and when he came into the theatre in the morning, the reflection of the sun's rays was so resplendent as to spread horror those who looked at him. Presently his flatterers cried out that he was a god. He did not rebuke them nor reject their impious flattery. He was smitten with a violent pain in his bowels, was carried into his palace and when he was quite worn out with the pain in five days, departed this life. The Scripture tells us: **"the people gave a shout, saying, it is the voice of a god, and not of a man. 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"** (12:22-23).

THE DANGER OF PRIDE

Pride, or the love of popularity and power, spurred Herod on in the persecution of the church. Because he saw it pleased the people, when he killed an apostle, he was about to kill another. Not all will go to the extreme to which Herod would go, but thousands since the days of Herod have tried to reach the popular ear with some slogan which will attract the crowd. There are always politicians who are ready to become the mouthpieces of the liquor interests and various grasping trusts for the sake of place and power. There are men who for gain and notoriety will do all within their power to set a guilty criminal free. There are others who, for selfish interests, will do all they are able to besmirch the names of honest men so that the public may condemn them and restore their party to power. **"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"** (Proverbs 16:18).

According to the legend, “Bellerophon might have ended his days in happiness and prosperity if he had not irritated the gods with his pride. He conceived the project of mounting to heaven on his winged steed, Pegasus. Jupiter was indignant and sent a gad-fly which stung the horse, and caused him to throw the presumptuous rider. Bellerophon, lame and blind from his fall, wandered in lonely places until his death came to relieve him of his misery.” Pride is like a building raised several stories higher than the strength of the foundations will allow. It always has its fall. Solomon says: **“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility”** (Proverbs 18:12), and Jesus say: **“whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”** (Matthew 23:12).

THE CERTAINTY OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION

Herod caused others to suffer. He himself suffered a terrible death. When he died, according to Josephus, he admitted to the people that he had been smitten because he had allowed himself to receive divine honors. God is a God of justice. He always judges men. His method of punishing is not always visible to us as in the case of Herod. Nevertheless men have often been permitted to see his workings and they have proof that he will bring into judgment every deed done in the flesh.

When Judah captured Adoni-bezek and cut off his thumbs and great toes, he said: **“But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died”** (Judges 1:6-7).

The sight of Haman hanging upon the gallows which he had made for Mordecai, convinced the people of Shushan, and it ought to convince us, that divine retribution is a reality.

Elijah said to Ahab, after he had been partner in the murder of Naboth, **“In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine”** (I Kings 21:19).

Retributive justice is in perfect harmony with the love of God.

If the criminal is not punished all the righteous suffer. Love to them demands punishment of the offender. It deters men from sin. When they know that if they sow the wind they will reap the whirlwind, they hesitate to go on in sin. When they see the murderer hang, they say, we must beware. When they see the man who drinks end his course in delirium tremens they say, it is not safe to begin the habit. Herod, like a warning light that is hung up as a danger signal, stands as a beacon in history to warn us of the danger of continuing to flaunt our wickedness in the face of God and attempting to find a way to glory apart from the mercy of Jesus Christ.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT

Why was James allowed to suffer martyrdom while Peter was delivered from prison and set free?

Why was Stephen stoned in the beginning of his ministry and John permitted to live and preach to an advanced age? Why was Patrick Hamilton burned at the stake and John Knox delivered from the galleys and allowed to die a natural death? Why did Archibald Campbell, Donald Cargill and James Renwick die as martyrs, while Melville and Henderson and Peden were permitted to live.

To answer all the questions which may be asked in this connection is impossible. The providences of God are too mysterious for us to understand. To say that prayer was made for Peter is scarcely an answer because it is morally certain that prayer was made for James also. Peter was delivered from prison on another occasion when there is no record that prayer was made for him. We can scarcely doubt, however, that Peter and others were praying at that time. In that great chapter on faith in the book of Hebrews there are recorded some who lived to die a natural death, and some who died as martyrs, but all who are mentioned lived and died in faith. The faith of those who died is not placed below those who lived.

God sees not as man seeth. We cannot always tell when our work is done. Without doubt, God could have delivered James. James had evidently finished his work on earth. Peter had yet a work to do. All of those who have died in faith, from Abel down, being dead are yet speaking. James was hastened into glory, but he did not cease to speak to the church. Sometimes, as in the case of James and John the Baptist and Patrick Hamilton, the saints of God speak more loudly by their death than by their life.

This record is not, The Acts of the Apostles, it is a record of The Acts of Jesus, of all that Jesus continued to do and teach. When we take this view, the correct view, of this Book it helps us to solve this problem. The important thing is not whether James should die soon and Peter live long, the all important lesson is, by what means can the Lord Jesus carry out his plan best? Sometimes Jesus is honored more by men's death than by their life. Men need to be constantly reminded that they know not when they shall be called. Men need to be reminded that the power and progress of the church does not depend upon any one man or group of men. We should leave the matter of our living or our dying with the Lord. Whether we live or whether we die we should be the Lord's. If we live in the faith of the Son of God who died for us and who gave Himself for our sins, whether our call may come in youth or old age, we shall be called home to dwell forever with the Lord.

THE POWER OF Christ AS KING

Herod thought that he held in his hands, at least the human destiny of Peter, and of other of the saints of God. God said to Herod as he said to the mighty waves of the sea, hitherto shalt thou go and no farther.

God virtually said to Herod, thou shalt not lay violent hands upon my servant Peter. The rulers had tried to bind Peter and other of the apostles at another time when the angel of God had set them free. The Roman authorities tried to bind Paul and Silas in prison at Philippi but were defeated in their effort.

Both Jewish and Roman rulers tried to lock Christ within the tomb, but failed. Herod claimed for himself divine honors, and went down to a miserable and shameful death, as a striking testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of Lords. All rulers should rule in submission to Him. No nation or ruler can set up against Him and successfully defy His authority. **“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing . . . All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity”** (Isaiah 40:15, 17).

THE COMFORT OF HOPE

Peter was sleeping between two soldiers. This was on the night before Herod was about to put him to death. It is possible that Peter did not know this. He at least knew what Herod had done to James. He knew what Herod was likely to do to him, and whether he had been told or not, he could guess at the time. Peter must have known what that heavy guard that was placed over him meant. He probably knew the time that had been set for his execution. And yet with all this before him PETER SLEPT! The discomfort of being chained to two soldiers and the surroundings of the prison would have kept many men awake. We read of criminals becoming hysterical when they are told that the time of their execution is near. But it was not so with Peter. HE SLEPT!

Peter's sleep on the night has been likened to the “Last Sleep of Argyle” which has been portrayed both by painter and historian. Such a quiet sleep, when near the hour of death by violence, shows that there is hope within a soul that is calm and fearless because of the assurance that it has been forgiven. It is an evidence of a clear conscience and implicit trust in God. The strongest chains which might be locked to Peter's hands and feet could not bind his soul. His hands might be linked with iron fetters to seasoned soldiers, but the hand of faith could reach out beyond the confines of stone walls and iron doors up to the throne of Almighty God. His sight might be cut off by the darkness of the dismal dungeon, but his eye of faith could see far beyond the dark doors of the dungeon and the walls of Jerusalem up to the beautiful gates of Heaven and his ears could hear the angels' voices ready to welcome him to share the glory of its mansions. So though in the dark damp dungeon, with the prospect of the executioner's axe falling upon his head with the rise of the morrow's sun, PETER SLEPT! His heart knew greater peace than that of king Herod, though Herod slept in the palace and Peter in the prison.

The comfort which Peter had is possible for every child of God. **“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”** (I Corinthians 15:19). The blessed thing about hope is that it reaches beyond this life[u]. **“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord”** (Psalm 31:24). **“The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death”** (Psalm 14:32). **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”** (Romans 5:1-5).

THE POWER OF PRAYER

“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (12:5). The words, “without ceasing,” is a strong word. It carries the thought of earnestness, fervency, or even, in agony. Fervent, agonizing prayer was made for Peter.

There were many praying. The church was praying. That does not necessarily mean that every member of the church was praying, but it means that many members of the church were praying. It was a united prayer to which the Lord has given a special promise.

If Herod had seen both sides of the situation he would probably have laughed. It appeared to be a ridiculous contrast to the worldly man. On the one hand there was the great Roman prison with its iron doors, gates and locks. Peter was bound to the soldiers with chains. There were the usual guards in and about the prison. Then in addition to that there were the four special soldiers set to guard Peter. There was evidently a soldier on either side of him and one at each of two of the doors through which he passed, possibly one at the third gate which opened out to the street. What possible chance had one man to break away from such a prison and such a guard? These men would watch with extreme care, for the penalty of allowing a prisoner to escape meant death to a Roman soldier. They would not sleep when so much was at stake.

On the other hand there was a little band of unarmed men and women gathered in the home of one of their number on their knees. What could this innocent little group do to bring Peter from the confines of that great carefully guarded prison? Could they break down those walls? could they overpower the guard? Surely, it would seem, that if they intended to do so they had best arise from their knees and arm themselves for the conflict. but they do not do so. They remain in the house. They seek no arms. They form no plot. They only pray.

To whom do they pray? They cannot see Him. They cannot feel Him. But they know Him to whom they pray. They pray to the omnipotent God! They know that Herod must melt away when He puts forth his power! They know that even Caesar with all his armed legions is but as the dust of the balance when He rises in his might! They know, and they believe His promise, that if they have faith as a grain of mustard seed they can say to this mountain, be thou removed, and it shall be done. They recall the mighty acts of God as recorded in their own history. They recall that memorable scene on the top of the mountain when Moses knelt with uplifted hands before God while the army of Israel struggled in the valley below. They remembered how when he continued to pray Israel was marching forward driving back the foe, but when his arms grew weak and he ceased to pray Amalek prevailed. They remembered that, with his two assistants to hold up his hands, he prayed on until Israel won.

They remembered how their great prophet Elijah had stood alone before God over against the four hundred prophets of Baal, and how he had lifted up his voice in the midst of that agonizing multitude calling upon God to display His might and presence by sending fire from Heaven. They remembered how that fire had actually fallen and had licked up not only the sacrifice but the stones and water as well. They remembered how the people, at last convinced, fell down on their faces and cried out, **“The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God”** (I Kings 18:39).

They remembered how Elijah had prayed again that the heavens should give forth no rain and for a space of more than three years there was no rain, then how he prayed again and the rain fell in torrents.

They remembered how the youthful, inexperienced David, breathing a prayer to God, had gone out to fight the great, trained, armed giant who had defied the whole army of Israel. And they knew how that mighty warrior had fallen before the young hero of faith.

They remembered how a more powerful king than Herod, the great Sennacherib, with his trained Assyrian host, had marched against Jerusalem and had almost disdained to lay siege against it, it seemed so weak in comparison with the forces of Assyria. But they remembered how in that crisis Hezekiah had prayed and Isaiah had prayed and in one night the flower of the Assyrian host lay dead, stricken by the hand of the angel of God.

They remembered how Nebuchadnezzar had been cast down and Belshazzar had trembled in the presence of their God and the God of Daniel. Their God had enabled Daniel to unlock the secrets of the future; He had saved Jonah from the turbulent sea; he had placed his seal of approval upon the Lord Jesus whom they served and who had done mighty works too numerous to mention; He had given power to Peter to heal the sick and raise the dead; He had enabled Philip to cast out devils and work wonders; He had poured out His Spirit upon them in that very city and manifested His presence and power in a manner that they could not forget, and with an assurance which precluded any possibility of a mistaken faith in Him. They knew that God had urged them to give Him no rest until He should make His church a praise in the earth. They knew that Jesus had told them that men ought always to pray and not to faint. And so they prayed on! And they did not pray in vain!

They prayed until God on His throne heard and answered. They prayed until the angel came from heaven, took Peter by the hand, led him out of prison and set him free. They prayed until Peter appeared at their very door as a proof that God had bowed down from His throne and had heard the cry of the needy. True, there were those who would not believe that it was really Peter when at first he knocked at the door. There are different factors which enter into the explanation. There were no doubt many among them who did not look for Peter's release, but who asked that God would sustain him and give him grace to suffer if it should not be Herod's will to release him.

They had seen miracles, but God did not usually answer, even in that day, by a miracle. Perhaps some hoped for a providential release of Peter without a miracle. But in all probability there were those among the disciples who confidently believed that God would release Peter and who were not surprised, as were the rest, when Peter stood before their door.

Even among true disciples there are usually few who pray with an undoubting faith. Those few, though but two or three, are permitted to win great victories through their prayers of faith. And it is remarkable how God in His love and mercy will hear the cry of weak halting children and grant them an answer above that which they had really hoped to receive. The Lord Jesus as our intercessor perfects our weak and imperfect prayers and makes them acceptable at the throne of God.

Child of God pray on! He sustained the mother of Augustine and encouraged her in her prayers which followed a profligate son until he was transformed into the image of God and made an earnest, devout and diligent servant of Christ.

Child of God pray on! He heard the prayers of John Knox in an age of formality and idolatry and vice, and gave him an answer as he cried with all his soul, "Give me Scotland or I die."

Child of God pray on! The first mission to India originated in the heart of a praying mother. Her prayers, without much instruction for she died when her children were young, led Bartholomew Ziegenbalg to give himself as a missionary to India in 1705, over a century before the American Board of Foreign Missions was organized.

Child of God pray on! It was God who sustained David Livingstone in his long and lonely journeys through the wilds of Africa in his efforts to heal the open sore of the world. It was God who heard his prayers when alone and unsupported by human hand his life went out in the heart of Africa on his knees in prayer for that great dark continent. God is answering that prayer today and multitudes are serving Christ, even in dark Africa.

Child of God pray on! The prayers of God's people have been heard and answered around the world and today in China and India and in the very heart of Africa in South America and in the Islands of the sea, there are many of his servants who have gone to tell the Good News of the Gospel who are being sustained in answer to prayer and prayer alone.

The wonderful blessings that have gone out from that little band of praying Christians in the house of Mary cannot be computed as they have taught men to pray with agonizing fervency throughout all the centuries.

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

We cannot always explain the extremes to which God allows men to go before He defeats their plans. He seemed to allow Herod to nearly win in the effort to take the life of Peter. The hour of execution was only a few hours away. God could have intervened sooner. He had a wise and beneficent plan in doing as He did. He tested His people's faith and manifested His power to a greater degree by waiting. Peter's faith, as well as that of those who were interested in him, would afterward be confirmed. Their patience and faith was severely tried. But it is likely that if one had asked Peter in after years if he would have had it otherwise, if he would have desired that God had released him a few days sooner he would have replied that he was entirely satisfied, that he would not for all that money could purchase be without the wonderful experience which henceforth taught him that God's plans were wisest and best. He would never doubt the wisdom of God again.

There was a similar lesson which the Lord Himself taught to some of His disciples while He was still upon earth. When Lazarus was sick they sent the message to Jesus: "**he whom thou lovest is sick**" (John 11:3). They no doubt hoped that Jesus would come immediately, but in place of coming at once Jesus purposely delayed. He remained in the same place where He was for two days longer. While He delayed Lazarus died.

It was a wonderful test of the faith of the sisters in Christ. Their faith did not wholly stand the test. But their faith would be stronger after their brother had been recalled from the grave and they had further evidence that Jesus was the resurrection and the life. They would be glad as they would think back over it all that Jesus had delayed. They would have unfaltering faith in Jesus as the Son of God. True faith is always sure of the victory. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Why shall not we be certain of the victory through Christ? We have more evidence today than was given to Martha and Mary or to Peter. We have reason to place absolute trust in Christ and none to cause us to doubt.

THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH

There are some striking contrasts in this chapter. Peter was kept in prison - but prayer was made. Herod was eaten of worms - but the Word of God grew and multiplied. The angel smote Peter. The angel smote Herod. When the angel smote Peter he was aroused to life. When the angel smote Herod he was stricken to the death.

If some one had asked another who were the important men of that day, he would probably have replied, Herod and Caesar. But their names are known today mainly because they are connected with the story of Peter and the early church. Peter and the little band of praying Christians would not have been mentioned among those whose names would likely last and be spoken of in after years. But Herod passed away and the world did not miss him, except to rejoice that it was free from his cruelty. The Word of God would grow whether Herod lived or whether he died. During the life of Herod the Word had spread to Cyprus and Antioch and to many other centers of importance. Now that he is dead and another hindrance taken out of the way the Word of God grows more rapidly. God will not allow any obstacle to stand permanently in the way of the growth of the Word.

At the close of this chapter Barnabas, Saul and Mark are returning from Jerusalem to Antioch and are about to make their first foreign missionary journey. With this chapter Jerusalem fades from view as the center of the future center of missionary effort. With this chapter, also, Peter passes from the scene of action. We hear of him but once again in this book, in the fifteenth chapter. Paul is about to become the central figure in the growing church.

Herod tried to crush the truth. He failed ignominiously, and all others have failed and will fail who try to stamp out the truth of the Word of God. We have witnessed a noble life in that of Peter who has formed the central figure of the early church up to this time. We have seen in him an earnest, bold, unswerving, energetic preacher of the Gospel. We have seen the church grow from a little band who were left after the ascension of Christ, to a strong church which has spread eastward into Asia, southward into Africa, and westward into Europe. We have seen the church planted in several of the large and influential cities of the world such as Damascus, Samaria, Caesarea and Antioch.

But when Peter has ceased to be the energizer of the missionary church it shall not cease to flourish and spread. Under the leadership of the great missionary, Paul, it shall spread, not with less, but with greater rapidity than ever before. It matters now what man or men may be the

central figures in the church of Christ, the Spirit of God will not allow His Word to fall to the ground, and where the Spirit is, there will be growth, there will be life, and there will be power.

The Spirit uses men through whom He works and therefore He still calls for men who will give themselves soul and body into His hands, that through them as instruments of His, the church may continue to grow and her numbers be multiplied.

QUESTIONS (Acts 12:1-25)

1. What do we find Herod doing at the opening of this chapter?
2. What do we find him doing at the end of the chapter?
3. In what condition do we find the church at the opening of the chapter?
4. In what condition at the end?
5. What on the part of man gave such victory amidst persecution?
6. Why did Herod want to kill Peter?
7. How did Herod guard Peter?
8. What stronger guard did Peter have?
9. Did Herod take into account the prayers of the church and the power of God? How do wicked men usually do in this regard?
10. Was Herod proud? How does God deal with such?
11. Give examples of Divine retribution?
12. Can we always explain God's providential government, who one is permitted to live, another is allowed to die?
13. What authority had Christ over Herod? What over other kings?
14. How does trust in God and a clear conscience affect one's rest?
15. Tell something of the power of prayer?
16. Where did Peter want to go when he found himself free?
17. Why did Peter ask that these things be told to James and the brethren?
18. Is true faith always sure of victory? How do you know?
19. When the angel smote Peter and smote Herod what was the difference and why?
20. What new place now becomes the center and what new man the leader of missionary activity?

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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