

## THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 37 | ACTS 12:1-5

### ACTS 12:1-2 | THE DEATH OF JAMES

- Verse 1 –
  - All of chapter 12 takes place in 44AD, a date which can be fixed in the book of Acts, based on the death of Herod at the end of the chapter.
  - **Herod the king** is Herod Agrippa I, son of Aristobulus, grandson of Herod the Great.
    - The life of Herod Agrippa I is detailed in Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 19, Chapters 4-8.
    - This Herod had the entire kingdom of his grandfather. After the death of Herod the Great, the kingdom had been divided, and now had been restored.
    - Agrippa I was a king who closely guarded the safety and wellbeing of the Jews. Josephus says, “(328) Now, this king was by nature very beneficent, and liberal in his gifts, and very ambitious to oblige people with such large donations; and he made himself very illustrious by the many chargeable presents he made them. He took delight in giving, and rejoiced in living with good reputation. He was not at all like that Herod who reigned before him; (329) for that Herod was ill-natured, and severe in his punishments, and had no mercy on them that he hated; and everyone perceived that he was more friendly to the Greeks than to the Jews; for he adorned foreign cities with large presents in money; with building them baths and theatres besides: nay, in some of those places, he erected temples, and porticoes in others; but he did not vouchsafe to raise one of the least edifices in any Jewish city, or make them any donation that was worth mentioning. (330) But Agrippa’s temper was mild, and equally liberal to all men. He was humane to foreigners, and made them sensible of his liberality. He was in like manner rather of a gentle and compassionate temper. (331) Accordingly, he loved to live continually at Jerusalem, and was exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country. He therefore kept himself entirely pure: nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice.” (*Antiquities*, 19:7:328-331).
  - Since Herod was such a benevolent king, why would he desire to **vex certain of the church**?
    - The answer lies by knowing the background given by Josephus and the testimony of Luke in verse 3: **because he saw it pleased the Jews.**
    - Herod was so desirous to be in right-standing with Jewish authorities that the Jewish assemblies, which were persecuted by the Jewish authorities, became “ripe fruit” that Herod could use to display his Jewish loyalty.

- Verse 2 –
  - This very simple, short verse is all that is given for the first death of an Apostle (outside of Judas).
  - From this point, all references to James will be to that of the half-brother of Jesus.
  - This verse also contains the last historical reference to John the Apostle.

## ACTS 12:3-17 | PETER IMPRISONED AND MIRACULOUSLY RELEASED

- Verses 3-4 –
  - In order to further his standing with Jewish leaders, Herod **proceeded further to take Peter** and had him imprisoned.
  - Peter was guarded with **four quaternions of soldiers**, that is, four groups of four soldiers, 16 in total.
  - This took place during **the days of unleavened bread**, that is, Passover.
    - Officially, this is seven-day period, the whole of which was often called Passover.
    - The word translated **Easter** is *πάσχα* [pascha], which means *passover*.
    - Note: unlike many attest, the word Easter is not derived from paganism, but from the German *oester*, meaning “east” and used as a picture of the rising sun of resurrection day.
      - In English, the word was used for Passover, a word which itself was non-existent in the English language until William Tyndale coined it for his translation of the Bible.
      - In 1611, Easter and Passover were used interchangeably.
      - See sermon: Should Easter be in the King James Bible - <https://randywhiteministries.org/episodes/should-easter-be-in-the-king-james-bible/>
- Verse 5 –
  - At one time (before rightly dividing and preaching exegetically), I preached a sermon on prayer from this verse. The points were along these lines:
    - You must pray fervently.
    - You must pray congregationally.
    - You must pray specifically.
  - My thinking: If this prayer worked in Acts 12, it should work in our lives. The problem with my premise was that it created a formula out of that which was a one-time historic event.