

Acts 12:1-24, The End of the Acts of Peter
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Overview

1. From 11:19 through ch. 15, the structure of the book is dominated by Antioch.
 - a) 11:19-26, Founding of the Church
 - b) 12, a Loving church
 - c) 13-14, a Missionary church
 - d) 15, a Disciplined church

2. 12:1-24 is an external inclusio--marks secondary matter. (Contrast the inclusions in 13-14 and 15.) But why bring it in here?
 - a) To show the state of the church in Jerusalem, as the new faith begins to expand to Gentile regions. The spread of the gospel does not mean that the Jerusalem assembly fades away. God continues to sustain them and to show himself strong on their behalf.
 - b) To explain what has happened to Peter, the focal figure of the first part of the book, as Paul comes to dominate in the latter part;
 - c) To introduce John Mark, who enters the story at 12:25.

3. 12:1-24 is strongly chiasmic
 - a) Overall chiasm:
 - 12:1-3, Herod's offenses
 - 4, Herod's Guards

 - 5, Peter and the church
 - 6-10, Peter's delivery (center of Chiasm)
 - 11-17, Peter and the Church

 - 18-19, Herod and the guards
 - 20-24, Judgment of Herod

 - b) Herod at the outside (12:1-4, 18-24), Peter on the inside. Each of these in turn has an inner and outer portion, one dealing with the focal individual and God, the other with the focal individual and other people.
 - 1) First four vv. by themselves would leave us hopeless. But the following vv. resolve this issue by showing God's protection of Peter and dealings with Herod. Following the paradigm of 2 Thess. 1:6,7 and 2 Pet. 2:9, God is able not only to punish evildoers (Herod in 20-24), but also to preserve his own.

 - 2) The inner portion of Herod's sections (4, 18-19) show his vicious dealings with his guards, to be contrasted with Peter's gentle relation with the church in the outer parts

of his section (5, 12-17).

A. 1-4, Discouraging Conditions in Jerusalem

Several features conspire to make this persecution especially discouraging:

1. Its *Context*: We already know from 11:28 that there is a famine in Jerusalem, so the believers are under severe economic stress.
2. Its *Extent*: no longer just the Sadducean high priests (ch. 4) or the Pharisaic body in general (ch. 6-7), but now the king, who now sees opposition to the believers as a way to please the multitude.
3. Its *Focus*: the central core of the apostles, Peter, James, and John, the "two or three witnesses" (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) who were with Christ at the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); and the agony in the garden (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33) and to whom the early church looked for guidance.
4. Its *Timing*: right around passover, which the Jewish believers in Jerusalem would celebrate in the full light of Calvary. (Note Herod's hypocritical scruples: he will not hesitate to kill an innocent man, but must wait until the days of unleavened bread are over, so that he will not defile the holy days!)
5. Its *Hopelessness*: Peter is assigned to the care of four groups of four soldiers each. There were four watches in the night, and a fresh group would be available for each. During each watch, two were chained to the prisoner, and two watched at the door (vv. 6,10). Humanly speaking, there is no way for Peter to escape.

B. 5, The Church's Response

Herod has his sixteen soldiers with weapons of steel; Peter has his brethren with spiritual prayer. The verse emphasizes two characteristics of the prayer, both revealing the involvement and dedication of those who were praying. Two other characteristics emerge from vv. 14-16, 17.

1. It was continuous (expressed in the periphrasis *eimi ginomenos*, "was becoming"). They do this, not in a misguided hope that they will be heard for their much praying (Matt. 6:7), but because their concern is so great that there is nothing they can do except pray.
2. It was "fervent" (a better translation of *ektenws* than "without ceasing," cf. how we are to love one another (1 Pet. 1:22) and how the Savior prayed in the garden (Luke 22:44). Lit. "in a stretched manner." Intense, with all their faculties bent to the task. They were not mouthing casual formulas, but labored intently in prayer.
3. 17, It was spontaneous. James, the leader of the Jerusalem

assembly (ch. 15), was not there. This was not a meeting convened by the leaders, but a popular gathering of some of the saints to lay their great burden before the Lord. (NB: It's still called "the church," even though the "officers" aren't there. Two or three)

Application: How badly do we want the things for which we pray? How often are we driven to the Lord because there is nowhere else to turn? Is our prayer extended, intense, and spontaneous, or do we only pray when it's church time to pray, and then we spin out canned phrases? Lord, teach us to pray!

4. 14-16, It probably wasn't for Peter's release! This seems completely unexpected to them. They are probably crying out to the Lord for strength and grace for Peter, and for their own deliverance from persecution, but they do not at all expect the dramatic way in which the Lord will provide these. The answer that they receive is "exceeding abundantly above all that [they] ask or think," Eph. 3:20.

[Technical note: If the preposition in v.5 really is *peri* instead of *uper*, they may not be praying for Peter's welfare at all!]

Application: Thank God that the effectiveness of our prayers is not dependent upon asking for just the right things. Rom. 8:26f, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what [is] the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to [the will of] God." James 4:2,3 identifies two reasons that prayer is not answered: failure to pray, and the wrong motive. But if we do pray, and for the right reasons, God can fill in the gaps in the expression.

C. **6-10, Peter's Deliverance**

This is the focal point of the chiasm, and shows the first of two points about God's power. In spite of the potent opposition in 1-4, God is still able to deliver his people.

NOTE: The wealth of detail here marks this as peak.

Observe Peter's peace, the soldiers' helplessness, and the angel's approach.

1. Peter's peace. Even though it is the night before he is to be brought out to execution, he is sleeping soundly--so soundly that the angel must strike him forcibly (v.7; "smite" is what one does with a sword in war). The people's prayer for Peter's peace of mind is certainly being answered.
2. The soldiers' helplessness. Even though their lives are on the line, all four of them are powerless to stop. Perhaps, like the soldiers at the tomb (Matt. 28:4), they are paralyzed by fear.

3. The angel's approach: a series of commands, which Peter obeys without question. Obedience is essential if we are to enjoy God's deliverance.

D. 11-17, Peter and the Church

1. Their surprise at seeing him. We have already concluded that they were probably praying for his peace and courage and their own protection, but could not dare to hope for his deliverance.
2. Peter's love for them; seeks them out, even though remaining in the city might expose him to recapture. His visit is brief, but he wants them (and the leaders, who are not there at the moment) to know what has happened, as an encouragement in the midst of persecution, before he leaves for a safer hiding place (perhaps Antioch, Gal. 2).

Application: Even if it costs us some difficulty or risk, we should share with one another the triumphs God gives us as well as the trials we face, so that we may be encouraged.

E. 18-19, Herod and the Guards

1. Like the church, the soldiers are amazed at what has happened.
2. Where Peter comforts and reassures the church in their confusion, Herod (following standard Roman procedure) executes the soldiers who have failed in their duty.

F. 20-24, Judgment of Herod

Following the paradigm of 2 Thess. 1:6,7 and 2 Pet. 2:9, God not only delivers Peter, but brings appropriate judgment on Herod. Note two contrasts.

1. With v.23, cf. 7. In both cases the Angel of the Lord smites someone; in one case to awaken Peter to deliverance; in the other to initiate Herod's terminal illness.
2. 24 says that "the word of God grew and multiplied." The parallel use of these terms recalls Exod. 1:7, quoted in Acts 7:17, describing how the children of Israel flourished in Egypt, in the midst of persecution. Thus Herod now emerges as the new Pharaoh, seeking to oppress the Word of God. As there, so here, the destruction of the oppressor contrasts with the prosperity of God's work.

Summary:

1. 2 Thess. 1:6,7 and 2 Pet. 2:9, God is able not only to punish evildoers (Herod in 20-24), but also to preserve his own.
2. A pattern for prayer: continuous, intense, spontaneous, and relying on the Spirit to add what we don't know enough to ask for.

3. Our responsibility to one another, to uphold in prayer and to share triumphs and victories.

Hymn: In the Hour of Trial, Jesus, Pray for Me

Analysis

- A. 11:19-26, A Fledgling Church [earlier message]
- B. 11:27-12:25, A Loving Church
Sending relief to Jerusalem
Note chiastic structure of the story. B&S sections are clearly external; Peter story may be introduced to set up John Mark, v.12.
 1. 11:27-30, Barnabas and Saul go to Jerusalem [last message]
 2. 12:1-3, Herod's offenses
Generic-specific: cf. 8:4,5; 2:42ff with ch.3f; 11:19, 20f
a) Generic: 12:1 Kat' e)kei^non de\ to\n kairo\n e)pe/balen (Hrw/|dhs o(basileu\s ta\s xei^ras kakw^sai/ tinas tw^an a)po\ th^s e)kklhsi/as.
b) Specific:
 - 1) 2 a)nei^len de\)Ia/kwbon to\n a)delfo\n)Iwa/nnou maxai/rh|.
 - 2) 3 i)dw\n de\ o(/ti a)resto/n e)stin toi^s)Ioudai/ois prose/qeto sullabei^an kai\ Pe/tron
 - 3) [h]^san de\ [ai(] h(me/rai tw^an a)zu/mwn],
 3. 4, Herod's Guards
4 o(\n kai\ pia/sas e)/qeto ei)s fulakh/n,
a) paradou\s te/ssarsin tetradi/ois stratiwtw^an fula/ssein au)to/n,
b) boulo/menos meta\ to\ pa/sxa a)nagagei^an au)to\n tw^| law^|.
 4. 5, Peter and the church
Contrast:
 - a) 5 o(me\n ou)^an Pe/tros e)threi^to e)n th^| fulakh^|:
 - b) proseuxh\ de\ h)^an e)ktenw^s ginome/nh u(po\ th^s e)kklhsi/as pro\s to\n qeo\n peri\ au)tou^.
 - 1) The periphrasis *eimi ginomenos* appears elsewhere in the NT only in Heb. 7:20,23. Curious; does it indicate that prayer was continually starting up?
 - 2) If the reading is indeed *peri autou* "concerning him" rather than *uper autou* "for him," they are exercised about the persecution, though not specifically expecting Peter to be delivered, which is consistent with their reaction when he appears later in the story. But the mss are strongly divided, even in the majority tradition. Even with *uper*, they may be praying for his strength and courage, still not expecting deliverance.
 5. 6-10, Peter's delivery (center of Chiasm)
 - a) 6, Setting

- 1) time: 6 (/Ote de\ h)/mellen proagagei^n au)to\n o((Hrw/|dhs,
 - 2) text: th^| nukti\ e)kei/nh| h)^n o(Pe/tros koimw/menos metacu\ du/o stratiwtw^ⁿ dedeme/nos a(lu/sesin dusi/n,
 - 3) fu/lake/s te pro\ th^s qu/ras e)th/roun th\n fulakh/n.
- b) Coming of the Angel
- 1) 7 kai\ i)dou\ a)/ggelos kuri/ou e)pe/sth,
 - 2) kai\ fw^s e)/lamyen e)n tw^| oi)kh/mati:
- c) triple execution p
- 1) pata/cas de\ th\n pleura\n tou^ Pe/trou h)/geiren au)to\n le/gwn,
a>)Ana/sta e)n ta/xei.
Same verb (*patacas*) as v.23, what the angel did to Herod. Not a love tap; what one does with a sword.
 - 2) kai\ e)ce/pesan au)tou^ ai(a(lu/seis e)k tw^ⁿ xeirw^ⁿ.
 - 3) 8 ei)^pen de\ o(a)/ggelos pro\s au)to/n,
a> Zw^sai kai\
b> u(po/dhsai ta\ sanda/lia/ sou.
 - 4) e)poi/hsen de\ ou(/tws.
 - 5) kai\ le/gei au)tw^|, Peribalou^ to\ i(ma/tio/n sou kai\
a)kolou/qei moi.
 - 6) 9 kai\ e)celqw\n h)kolou/qei,
- d) Peter's state: Contrast p
- 1) kai\ ou)k h)/|dei o(/ti a)lhqe/s e)stin to\ gino/menon dia\ tou^ a)gge/lou,
 - 2) e)do/kei de\ o(/rama ble/pein.
- e) Final steps out
- 1) 10 dielqo/ntes de\ prw/thn fulakh\n kai\ deute/ran h)^lqan e)pi\ th\n pu/lhn th\n sidhra^ⁿ th\n fe/rousan ei)s th\n po/lin, h(/tis au)toma/th h)noi/gh au)toi^s,
 - 2) kai\ e)celqo/ntes proh^lqon r(u/mhn mi/an,
- f) Departure of the Angel
kai\ eu)qe/ws a)pe/sth o(a)/ggelos a)p' au)tou^.

6. 11-17, Peter and the Church

- a) Peter makes his way to the meeting place
- 1) 11, Summary of escape (link back to previous section; can't be part of it because of following *te*)
11 kai\ o(Pe/tros e)n e(autw^| geno/menos ei)^pen,
a> Nu^ⁿ oi)^da a)lhqw^s o(/ti
1> e)cape/steilen [o(] ku/rios to\n a)/ggelon au)tou^
2> kai\ e)cei/lato/ me e)k xeiro\s (Hrw/|dou kai\ pa/shs th^s prosdoki/as tou^ laou^ tw^ⁿ)Ioudai/wn.
 - 2) 12 sunidw/n te h)^lqen e)pi\ th\n oi)ki/an th^s Mari/as th^s mhtrou\s)Iwa/nnou tou^ e)pikaloume/nou Ma/rkou,
a> ou(^ h)^san i(kanoi\ sunhqroisme/noi kai\
proseuxo/menoi.
- b) Rhoda's joyful confusion
- 1) 13 krou/santos de\ au)tou^ th\n qu/ran tou^ pulw^^{nos} prosh^lqen paidi/skh u(pakou^sai o)no/mati (Ro/dh:
2) interchange p
a> contrast
1> 14 kai\ e)pignou^sa th\n fwnh\n tou^ Pe/trou a)po\
th^s xara^s ou)k h)/noicen to\n pulw^^{na},

- 2> ei)s dramou^sa de\ a)ph/ggeilen e(sta/nai to\n Pe/tron
 pro\ tou^ pulw^nos.
 b> 15 oi(de\ pro\s au)th\n ei)^pan, Mai/nh|.
 c> h(de\ dii+sxuri/zeto ou(/tws e)/xein.
 d> oi(de\ e)/legon, (O a)/ggelo/s e)stin au)tou^.
- c) Peter's farewell
- 1) 16 o(de\ Pe/tros e)pe/menen krou/wn:
 - 2) a)noi/cantes de\ ei)^dan au)to\n kai\ e)ce/sthsan.
 - 3) 17 katasei/sas de\ au)toi^s th^| xeiri\ siga^n dihgh/sato
 [au)toi^s] pw^s o(ku/rrios au)to\n e)ch/gagen e)k th^s
 fulakh^s,
 - 4) ei)^pe/n te,)Apagei/late)Iakw/bw| kai\ toi^s a)delfoi^s
 tau^ta.
 - 5) kai\ e)celqw\n e)poreu/qh ei)s e(/teron to/pon.
7. 18-19, Herod and the guards
- a) 18 Genome/nhs de\ h(me/ras h)^n ta/raxos ou)k o)li/gos e)n
 toi^s stratiw/tais, ti/ a)/ra o(Pe/tros e)ge/neto.
 - b) 19 (Hrw/|dhs de\ e)pizhth/sas au)to\n kai\ mh\ eu(rw\n
 a)nakri/nas tou\s fu/lakas e)ke/leusen a)paxqh^nai,
 - c) kai\ katelqw\n a)po\ th^s)Ioudai/as ei)s Kaisa/reian
 die/triben.
8. 20-24, Judgment of Herod
- a) 20)^Hn de\ o Hrawdhs qumomaxw^n Turi/ois kai\ Sidwni/ois:
 - b) o(moqumado\n de\ parh^san pro\s au)to/n,
 - c) kai\ pei/santes Bla/ston to\n e)pi\ tou^ koitw^nos tou^
 basile/ws h)|tou^nto ei)rh/nhn, dia\ to\ tre/fesqai au)tw^
 th\n xw/ran a)po\ th^s basilikh^s.
 - d) 21 takth^| de\ h(me/ra| o((Hrw/|dhs e)ndusa/menos e)sqh^ta
 basilikh\n [kai\] kaqi/sas e)pi\ tou^ bh/matos e)dhmhgo/rei
 pro\s au)tou/s:
 - e) 22 o(de\ dh^mos e)pefw/nei, Qeou^ fwnh\ kai\ ou)k
 a)nqrw/pou.
 - f) contrast p
- 1) reason-result p
 - a> text: 23 paraxrh^ma de\ e)pa/tacen au)to\n a)/ggelos
 kuri/ou
 - b> reason: a)nq' w(^n ou)k e)/dwken th\n do/can tw^| qew^|,
 - c> result: kai\ geno/menos skwlhko/brwtos e)ce/yucen.
 - 2) 24 (O de\ lo/gos tou^ qeou^
 - a> hu)/canen
 - b> kai\ e)plhqu/neto.
 Elsewhere, this describes the church (9:31) or the
 disciples (6:7a). How can it meaningfully be applied to
 the Word of God?
 Cf. 7:17, where both verbs are again applied in
 parallel, this time to the people. The ref. there is a
 quotation of Exod. 1:7, describing how the children of
 Israel flourished in Egypt, in the midst of persecution.
 Thus Herod now emerges as the new Pharaoh, seeking to
 oppress the Word of God, which similarly flourishes.
9. 25, Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch [last message]

C. 13-14, A Missionary Church [later message]

D. 15, A Disciplined Church [later message]