

## Fact Sheet for “Earnest Prayer”

### Acts 12:1-19

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ESV <sup>1</sup> ¶ **About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.**

This is Herod Agrippa I. He was partly Jewish, being of Hasmonean descent. His grandfather was Herod the Great. He was known for doing everything possible to curry the favor of the Jews. He was king over Judea and Samaria until A.D. 44. His son, Herod Agrippa II, was king of Judea from A.D. 50-70, and would later have Paul on trial before him.

<sup>2</sup> **He killed James the brother of John with the sword,**

This is James, the son of Zebedee, brother to John (author of John; I, II, III John; Revelation), and one of the 12 apostles. (See Matt. 4:18-22; 20:20-23). “Arrests, beatings, and intimidation had become common. A group of believers were randomly rounded up and carted off to Herod’s dungeon. Among them happened to be one of the apostles—James. The event seemed little more than the unusual inconvenient harassment that the Roman leaders felt obligated to perform at the insistence of certain Jewish leaders, who seemed obsessed with the followers of Jesus. But things took a sudden turn when James was hauled out without fanfare and summarily executed by the sword. The church in Jerusalem was stunned; their opponents were elated (Acts 12:1-2).”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>3</sup> **and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.**

“Knowing how profoundly the masses hated his family, Herod Agrippa I took every opportunity during his administration in Palestine to win their affection. When in Rome, he was a cosmopolitan Roman. But when in Jerusalem, he acted the part of an observant Jew.”<sup>2</sup> During the Feast of Firstfruits, King Agrippa took part. “When they reached the Temple Mount even Agrippa the king would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court.”<sup>3</sup> And at the Feast of Sukkoth... “After what manner was the paragraph of the king? At the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast [of Tabernacles], in the eighth year, after the going forth of the Seventh Year, they used to prepare for him in the Temple Court a wooden platform on which he sat, for it is written, *At the end of every seven years in the set time...*”<sup>4</sup> The minister of the synagogue used to take a scroll of the Law and give it to the chief of the synagogue, and the chief of the synagogue gave it to the Prefect, and the Prefect gave it to the High Priest, and the High Priest gave it to the king, and the king received it standing and read it sitting. King Agrippa received it standing, and read it standing, and for this the Sages praised him. And when he reached *Thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee which is not thy brother*,<sup>5</sup> his eyes flowed with tears; but they called to him, ‘Our brother art thou! Our brother art thou! Our brother art thou!’<sup>6</sup> This was a grateful response of the Jews to Herod for benefits they received from him. “He supported the majority within the land and ruthlessly suppressed minorities when they became disruptive.”<sup>7</sup>

What is a “squad” of soldiers? [*τετράδιον te-tra'-di-on*, a group of four, a quaternion (a guard of four soldiers)] “Four” squads may indicate that each squad was on guard for 6 hours. Evidently they remembered Peter’s earlier escape (5:19-24).

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<sup>1</sup> Foxe, *Voices of the Martyrs*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> Mishnah, Bikkurim, 3.4.

<sup>4</sup> Deut 31:10.

<sup>5</sup> Deut 17:15, Agrippa was of Edomite descent.

<sup>6</sup> Mishnah, Sotah, 7.8.

<sup>7</sup> *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 408.

<sup>5</sup> **So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.**  
Most commentators speculate that Peter was imprisoned in the Antonio Fortress.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> ¶ **Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.**  
“Usually a prisoner was chained to only one guard (cf. Seneca *Epistulae* 5.7); but in view of Agrippa’s intentions, the guard was doubled.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7a</sup> **And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell.**  
Think about light (1<sup>st</sup> day of creation) being created before the sun (4<sup>th</sup> day of creation).

<sup>7b</sup> **He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.** <sup>8</sup> **And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."** <sup>9</sup> **And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.** <sup>10</sup> **When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.** <sup>11</sup> **When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."**

<sup>12</sup> ¶ **When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.**  
Who was John Mark? (See Acts 15:36) He is also considered to be the author of the gospel of Mark.

<sup>13</sup> **And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.**  
<sup>14</sup> **Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.**  
Why did she only recognize his voice? Think about it. This was Passover. There was a wane moon. It was dark! Think about the humor in this... In her joy she left the gate locked!

<sup>15a</sup> **They said to her, "You are out of your mind."**  
Did they really believe what they were praying for would happen? Which do we trust in... our prayer... or the God who can answer prayer?

<sup>15b</sup> **But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"**  
What does “his angel” mean? (See Matthew 18:10)

<sup>16</sup> **But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.** <sup>17a</sup> **But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.**  
This James is Jesus’ half-brother, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21; 21:18).

<sup>18</sup> ¶ **Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.** <sup>19</sup> **And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.**

“In Roman law, a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered (cf. *Code of Justinian* 9.4.4).”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9, p. 408.

<sup>9</sup> Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9, p. 409.

<sup>10</sup> Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9, p. 411.