

Believe It
Acts 12:1-19
Pierre Cannings

I. God Is Not Done vs. 1-11

a. Pleas'd the Enemy 1-5

i. Herod

1. Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great. His father, Aristobulus, had been executed in 7 B.C. by his grandfather for fear that he might usurp his throne. After his father's death, while still a child, Agrippa was sent to Rome with his mother, where he was reared and educated along with the children of the Roman aristocracy. These childhood friendships eventually led to his ruling over a Jewish kingdom nearly the extent of that of his grandfather. In A.D. 37 the emperor Caligula gave him the title of king and made him ruler over the territories formerly ruled by his uncle Philip, lands in the Transjordan and the Ten Cities (Decapolis) north of Galilee. In A.D. 39 Caligula extended Agrippa's rule by giving him Galilee and Perea, the territory of his uncle Antipas, who had been sent into exile. Finally, when his former schoolmate Claudius became emperor in A.D. 41, he was given rule of Judea and Samaria, which had been under Roman procurators for thirty-five years. He was truly "king of the Jews" now, ruling over all of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, the Transjordan, and the Decapolis.
2. Though king, Agrippa was hardly secure. Much of his good fortune was due to his friendship with Caligula, and Caligula had not been a popular emperor with the Romans. In fact, Agrippa could not count on always being in the good graces of Rome. It became all the more important for him to win the loyalty of his Jewish subjects in order to give him at least a firm footing at home. Everything Josephus said about Agrippa would indicate that he made every attempt to please the Jews, particularly currying the favor of the influential Pharisees. His "Jewishness," however, seems to have been largely a face he put on when at home. When away, he lived in a thoroughly Roman fashion.
3. His actions in regard to James and Peter may be regarded as part of his role as the 'good Jew' who would naturally be concerned to put down a heretical sect.=

ii. Mistreating the church

1. Examples of Herod's attack follow in the stories of James and Peter; Herod (to judge from this account) thought it best to attack the Christian society through its leaders. This is reinforced by the use of *τινας*—not the whole church but some of its members
 2. The remainder of Acts however represents action against the Christians, in Jerusalem as well as elsewhere, as arising from Jewish religious rather than from Roman or other civil authorities.
- iii. James killed by the sword
1. son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee, brother of John, member of the Twelve, executed by Herod Agrippa I not later than
 2. If Herod executed James in the Roman fashion "with the sword," he was beheaded. If he used the Jewish mode of execution, which forbade beheading as a desecration to the body, he had "the edge of the sword" thrust through his body. The martyrdom of James is told with the utmost brevity. Luke did not want to dwell on it but used the incident to set the stage for his main emphasis—God's deliverance of Peter.
- iv. Pleas to the Jews - **to being satisfying**
1. If it is asked why this attack on the apostles should have proved "acceptable to the Jews," the answer may be found in the wider phase of apostolic activity which had recently set in with Peter's visit to the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea. Those members of the Jerusalem church who, under the leadership of James the Just and his fellow-elders (cf. v. 17), maintained a more rigorous resistance to the weakening of the bonds of Jewish particularism, continued to enjoy general toleration for some two decades more.
- v. Arrested Peter for death
1. Unleavened Bread
 - a. Herod would not risk his favor with the Jews by executing Peter during this time, since that would be considered a desecration. The Passover was eaten on the eve of Nisan 14 and was followed by seven days of eating unleavened bread, ending on Nisan 21. Luke used the term "Passover" for the entire period. It would have been after the holy days had ended that Agrippa would have brought Peter forth for public trial and surely also for execution (v. 4).
 2. Seized
 3. Squads of soldiers guarding
 - a. Squad - as a military *a detachment/squad of four soldiers*
 - b. Four relays of soldiers took it in turn to guard him: four guards at a time, one on either side of him (to whom he was chained) and two at his cell door
 4. Bring him out at the Passover

- b. Prayer
 - i. Fervent - **to being persevering, eagerly, fervently, constantly**
 - 1. Meanwhile, continuous prayer was being offered for Peter by the church of Jerusalem—the supplication of righteous people which “has great power in its effects” (Jas. 5:16). And while they were persevering in fervent prayer during what, in Agrippa’s intention, was to be Peter’s last night on earth, their prayer, unknown to themselves, was receiving an effective answer
 - ii. By the Church
- c. Impossible Escape
 - i. Setting
 - 1. Sleeping between soldiers
 - 2. Bound
 - 3. Guards by the door
 - ii. Angel of the Lord Directions
 - 1. Angel of the Lord
 - 2. Light shone
 - 3. Struck Peter’s side
 - 4. Get up Quickly
 - 5. Gird and cloak
 - iii. Peter Followed
 - 1. Did not know where they were going

II. **Better Believe It - Answered Prayers vs. 12-17**

- a. Mary’s house
 - i. John Mark would soon play a significant role in the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas (12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39).
 - ii. Praying
- b. Rhoda – Servant girl recognized voice
 - i. Her joy she ran - It is clear that, notwithstanding the church’s prayer, Rhoda did not expect the arrival of Peter. She recognized his voice and was so delighted (so that, if she was a slave, she was probably a Christian too) that she did not stop to admit him
 - ii. They didn’t believe
 - 1. Such a reply is remarkable coming from a group that had been totally occupied in prayer for Peter’s deliverance. They found it easier to believe that Peter had died and gone to heaven than that their prayers had been answered. In any event, who could trust a hysterical servant girl? “You’re crazy,” they said. Some things are just too good to be true (cf. Luke 24:11). But it was true, and Peter’s persistent knocking finally got a response (v. 16).
- c. Peter Described

- i. Lord had led
 1. The first thing for Peter to do was to acquaint his fellow-believers in Jerusalem with his escape; the next was to go into hiding, lest Agrippa's police should find him again. So he first made his way to one of the chief Christian meeting places in Jerusalem, the house of Mary.
- ii. Report it James and Brethren
 1. The James who was to be informed of Peter's deliverance was James the oldest of Jesus' brothers, who from this point on assumed the leadership of the church in Jerusalem (cf. 15:13–21; 21:18). It is interesting that "the brothers" are to be informed along with James. Perhaps this refers to the elders, who were assuming an increasing role in the governance of the Jerusalem church (cf. 11:30).
- iii. Left and Went to another place

III. They Can't Explain It vs. 18-19

- a. Disturbance among the soldiers
- b. Herod examined
 - i. Guards led away to execution
 1. After interrogating the guards and failing to locate Peter, Agrippa had the guards executed. This was in accordance with Roman law, which specified that a guard who allowed the escape of a prisoner was to bear the same penalty the escapee would have suffered. Agrippa had every intention of subjecting Peter to the same fate as James