

Acts 12

The Enemy Within

Acts is an explosion in the spirit realm. The Holy Spirit is doing a fantastic work in the world, setting men free from their bondage to sin, and healing them as they meet the real God. This chapter illustrates the clash of the forces of good and evil in the lives of men. It seems like the greater the blessing, the higher the resistance.

Read Acts 12:1-4: Peter was in jail which was guarded by 4 squads of Roman soldiers. Each squad had eight soldiers. The Romans had a different term for these small sub-groups. The *contubernium* (Latin for 'tenting-together') was the smallest sub-subunit organized unit of soldiers in the Roman Army and was composed of eight legionaries. It was likely used to maintain morale and group solidarity by keeping soldiers in close contact with each other. They were roommates. The guard shifts usually lasted 4-6 hours; so the guards on duty with Peter should not have been asleep. Likewise, the guards at both other stations. Guards would be at least flogged if they ever fell asleep on their shift. If a prisoner escaped, they would pay for it with their own life; and these actually did. Two soldiers who were chained directly to Peter!

Peter is likely scheduled to be killed the next day. There is a sinister reality that opposes us. There have been dark forces doing whatever they can to keep men from God since the beginning.

Why in particular did Herod Agrippa 1 mistreat and kill Christians? There is always a story behind the story. To understand this, we need to understand who Herod was. Herod what is referred to as a *client-king*. He was like a non-Roman (Edomite) sub-contractor who managed territory for Rome and was subordinate to the Roman Empire. They were given autonomy to rule as long as they kept Rome's essentials in place. Client kings, like Herod, had to provide their own armies to respond to all of Rome's interests in the area. This was different than someone sent directly from Rome to oversee a territory, like a *Roman Procurator or Governor*.

Procurators and Governors were less like independent contractors and more like employees held to a stricter code. A Roman Governor sought promotion to larger territories and worked their way up the ladder towards Rome. A client King only wanted to make money and keep some distance from Rome's oversight.

The benefit to Rome of using a client-king like Herod Agrippa 1 was that they had more understanding of the locals and the situation at ground level. They were generally more effective than the more rigid Roman Procurators. Additionally, there was no added cost to Rome for the overhead. Herod collected taxes for Rome (his tribute) and he kept the extra. The downside was the likelihood of shared loyalties to other competing empires. They were more inconsistent in their methods than Rome's own leaders. They were more likely to *color outside of the lines* behind Rome's back.

In this case, Pontus Pilate was a more rigid and aloof Roman governor, while Herod was a very political supporter of Jewish customs. Herod could boast to Rome that he had far less crowd control issues than Pontus Pilate; because he had *a connection* with the locals. That is why his grandfather, *Herod the Great* built the temple and studied Jewish religious observances.

Pontus Pilate was a directly-Roman ruler, who probably did not associate with or even like the Jews. To him, it was an undesirable outpost of hard-to-control people. In both cases the religious Jewish leadership used the *threat of insurrection against Rome* to exert influence on both of Rome's overseers. Any insurrection or uprising would be just cause to get a local leader replaced. In both cases, local legions of Roman soldiers stood ready to put down any rebellion.

The religious Jews were the ones manipulating the Jewish people as well as the Roman overseers according to their own agenda. The religious Jews were the instigators who kept trying to frame the Christians as *non-conformists* and *insurrectionists*. The only capital punishment crime that the Jews could use was insurrection against Rome. The Jews had lost their right to self-rule or directly administer capital punishment. That is why the Jews hauled Jesus to Pontus Pilate. They could not kill him.

You have to look at who was in charge of Jerusalem and Judea to see what was really driving Christian martyrdom. Rome changed its management structure over Jerusalem after Jesus crucifixion. You can see the invisible hand of religious leaders' politics here. The High Priests were totally fraudulent and on the take. Likewise, others knew how to get their overlords to respond to their interests. The Herods took a lot of bribes; and there were back-channel avenues to get things done. Pontus Pilate wanted clean hands, so he did not last. The book of Acts had a different ruling group over Jerusalem and Judea. During the time of Christ, Herod Antipas and Pontus Pilate were in charge. That has all changed. Herod Antipas fell victim to political moves and Herod Agrippa 1 stepped in. Pontus Pilate was recalled to Rome, possibly due to staged insurrection issues. Claudius Lysias was the ranking Roman military officer stationed in Jerusalem. He was not really managing Jerusalem as much as he was on call for uprisings. In other words, the Herod's and the High Priests Jews successfully maneuvered their chess pieces in place.

The crafty religious leaders found a way to kill Christians. The Christians were exposing the truth that it was far better for the common people to connect directly with God. Bypassing the corrupt priesthood and Pharisees and Rabbis infuriated them. The Christians were also exposing that the religious leaders had all of the facts about God all wrong. That was a big blow to someone holding themselves out to be a *religious expert*.

For this reason, the religious Jews manipulated their Roman overlords to kill Christians for insurrection...because that was the only death-penalty crime that they could charge them with.

This chapter was written at a time of staged witnesses and mock insurrection trials with inevitable death penalties. In reality, the Christians were not making claims against Rome. They

could care less about such things. The Jews were twisting the Christian's commitments to God as being loyal to another king than Cesar (exactly like Daniel was set up centuries before).

Herod did various things to boost his popularity among the Jewish religious leaders; including intimidating and killing Christians. You could say that the religious Jews were the worst antisemites.

²⁹ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? ³⁴ “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, ³⁵ so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Matthew 23)

It is an abstract concept, but today there are still a few Jews who are among the worst antisemites. They seem to hate what is right. George Soros has funded organizations that create resistance to US laws and Christian ideals. His funding of chaos and demonstrations against capitalism and American and Jewish wholesome societies effectually produces antisemitism. There are students and many young unemployed white women who sympathize with the notion that the Palestinians are somehow victims and Israel is somehow to blame. Chaos and unrest have always been the calling card of corrupt Jewish religious leaders back then...and likewise with antisemites today. Ultimately, our battle is not with people. It is the unseen winds of demonic influence orchestrating all of their *puppets*.

Strategy in This Spiritual War Zone

Once we know a little bit about the enemy of our souls, we can stay focused on our purposes on earth. God assures us that we really only have to deal with Satan. In fact, all of our problems individually or nationally have more to do with our relationship with God than the issues at hand. Our national uprisings, communism, drug abuse, human trafficking, trade wars, military conflicts, etc... are all effects, not causes for us to chase and focus on.

¹³ When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7)

Our enemies are effectively only painful tools that bring us back into the right relationship with God. God is in control over the seen and unseen evil in this world. Hostility towards believers

may be intent on their destruction, but God is far above all things, and he controls the outcomes. We can seem to be losing; but God is always winning. Always.

You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you. ¹⁰ 'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. ¹¹ "Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored; Those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish. ¹² "You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them, Those who war with you will be as nothing and non-existent. ¹³ "For I am the LORD your God, who upholds your right hand, Who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.' (Isaiah 41)

A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you. ⁸ You will only look on with your eyes And see the recompense of the wicked. ⁹ For you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. ¹⁰ No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. (Psalm 91)

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8)

Does this truth of God's protections mean that we will not be attacked or martyred? No. But our team will win. If these attacks come for sin, it is on us. If the attacks come because we are loving God and men, then it will result in a *first down* for the Kingdom, one way or another.

¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” ¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered ¹⁹by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹ Then these men were tied up in their ¹⁹trousers, their ¹⁹coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. ²² For this reason, because the king’s ¹⁹command was ¹⁹urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. ²³ But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up. ²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.” ²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire ¹⁹without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!” ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. (Daniel 3)

Looking Past the Headlines

It seems like things are falling apart in America. People are rioting in the streets. There are very polarized views. Does this mean that things are getting worse; or are we exposing hidden fraud, insurrection and confusion? ICE is capturing all kinds of criminals daily; but they are meeting so much public resistance.

I have prayed that God would break down the strongholds of evil that we have invited. Things seem to have gone crazier...but have they? I think that we should actually be encouraged that the healing of our nation is happening amidst total chaos. Spiritual healing has always been this way. What happened when Jesus went around casting demons out of people? Did it seem in the moment like a calming and comforting transition? No. We have to be faithful and keep doing what is right; knowing that this always, always brings demonic resistance. Don't lose track of the fact that evil doers are being taken out of the picture to the left and to the right. All of these

guarding soldiers were killed when Peter escaped. We will also read about how God killed Herod too.

*They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. ² When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, ³ and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. ⁶ Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; ⁷ and shouting with a loud voice, he *said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” ⁸ For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” ⁹ And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he *said to Him, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” ¹⁰ And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹ Now there was a large herd of swine feeding [Ⓜ]nearby on the mountain. ¹² The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” ¹³ Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea. ¹⁴ Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ They *came to Jesus and *observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the “legion”; and they became frightened. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. ¹⁷ And they began to implore Him to leave their region.* (Mark 5)

Read Acts 12:5-10: The real battle is unheard and unseen. These verses start with prayer. Prayer wins battles. The battles challenge our senses. Faith is about believing and continuing in what we know to be true despite seeing and hearing things to the contrary. People all over the world are blown around in unison like leaves in the wind. In what world do the Muslims and LGBTs, fraudsters and drug cartels all agree? They cannot, unless they are simultaneously demonically influenced.

²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. (John 2)

Satan wants to rewrite history and erase Christianity. He wants to convince boys that they can be girls. He wants to destroy the Jews too. Today, Islamic extremists characterize Israel as the Little Satan, and the USA as the Big Satan. Should that hatred for us be gripping and create anxiousness? No.

Peter was somehow sound asleep in jail the night before his martyrdom. How? He knew who was with him amidst all of this damage. I have seen how Satan stands in doorways more than

hallways. In other words, he wants to keep you from taking a step over a new faith threshold. Once you step out and take a venture of faith, resistance is not that disturbing. You come to expect it. Sailing into added resistance and headwinds means that you are going in the right direction. Peter became unchained to two soldiers, and he walked past two interior post soldiers and then two more soldiers at the front gate without being noticed.

People want to see angels and marvel over apparitions, but that is less likely if you are not involved in *Kingdom business*. Angels are extremely powerful; and yet they are tasked with helping us; not entertaining us. Angels can look like people if they need to. They can pass through walls and instantaneously move like lightning. They are not bound with physical limitations like we are.

Read Acts 12:11-19: Observing a miracle in our lives requires reflection. One problem with *grocery-list* or *911* prayers is that they bypass thanksgiving and reflection. Prayers can be just about what we are anxious about. When you think about it, the Psalms include reflections of the good things God has done for you. Peter just realizes how God blessed and delivered him once again. At the time, it seemed more like a pipe dream. God is a master of disguising

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; But the glory of kings is to search out a matter. (Proverbs 25)

Once again, we see the connection between Peter and Mark. Peter considered Mark his spiritual son. Mark included more details about Peter than the other gospels. Mark's theme of Jesus, the suffering servant matches Peter's emphasis on spiritual hardships.

13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. (1 Peter 5:13).

The saints were gathered and Mary's house (John Mark's mother). They were praying for Peter while he was knocking on the door. They did not believe the maid when she told them Peter was at the door. Peter told them to let James and the brethren know that he was out of prison. The James who was martyred in this chapter was *James, The Greater*, son of Zebedee, and brother of the Apostle John. *James The Less*, Son of Alphaeus was the leader referenced here as head of the church in Jerusalem. These are not to be confused with *James the Just*, half brother to Jesus.

Read Acts 12:20-25: It might be easier to read the Bible in reverse order. We won. In this case, the soldiers were killed and Herod was killed for trying to accept glory due to God. The church grew like wildfire. Does all of this incarceration and fraud seem all that significant now? Not really.