

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

C. Christ's Limited Allowance Of Opposition For The Church's Advancement

(Acts 12:1-25)

I. Introduction

- A. Opposition to the Christian faith is painful for believers, but it has repeatedly occurred in history.
- B. Actually, God *lets some* opposition occur to advance the Church's ministries as in Acts 12:1-25:

II. Christ's Limited Allowance Of Opposition For The Church's Advancement, Acts 12:1-25.

- A. We before learned that the persecution that erupted against Christians after Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 8:1 caused many Grecian Jewish Christians to scatter from Jerusalem and to evangelize as they went.
- B. However, we read in that same Acts 8:1 verse that the Hebraistic apostles remained in Jerusalem with doubtless many Hebraistic Jews, and this group needed edification in the midst of a hostile Hebrew city.
- C. Well, Acts 12:1-25 reveals how Christ sovereignly allowed a limited amount of persecution to afflict the Hebraistic Jewish believers in Jerusalem to lead to great discipling advances for them (as follows):
 1. The Herod of Acts 12:1 was Herod Agrippa I who outwardly zealously practiced Jewish rites to gain Jewish support for his reign, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to Acts 12:1.
 2. He chose to persecute the Church to gain approval from unsaved Jews, so he captured James the brother of John and executed him by death with a sword, Acts 12:2.
 3. As this execution pleased the Jews, Herod arrested Peter, intending to execute him as well, Acts 12:3a.
 4. However, Herod sought to honor the holy days of Passover and Unleavened Bread, so he planned to try Peter after these days had passed, Acts 12:3b-4; Bible Knowledge Commentary, N. T., p. 384.
 5. Well, the martyrdom of the first Apostle, James, followed by Peter's arrest for a time before his planned trial and execution led the Jerusalem believers to offer continual prayer for Peter's release, Acts 12:5.
 6. Thus, Christ marvelously answered their prayer, releasing Peter from prison once again, Acts 12:6-17:
 - a. The night before Herod planned to try Peter, he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while keepers guarded the prison door, Acts 12:6. Peter had "escaped" from prison before by God's angel (Acts 5:19-21), so Herod Antipas I was taking no chances of another "escape"!
 - b. [Peter was asleep in Acts 12:6 because he was sure God would deliver him since Christ had said he would be crucified in old age, not in middle age, cf. John 21:18; Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Acts 12:6.]
 - c. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord awakened Peter, directing him to dress himself and follow him, 12:7. When Peter obeyed, his chains fell off, and the angel led him out of prison past the guards where the iron gate that separated the prison from the city opened miraculously, Acts 12:9-10. Only after they had traveled for a city block did the angel vanish, showing Peter he was not seeing a vision, 12:11.
 - d. Peter then revealed himself to a stunned group of praying believers in the city, and he reported how God had delivered him from Herod and the expectation of their Hebrew foes, Acts 12:11, 12-17.
 7. After Peter's release, God then judged Herod Agrippa I for his martyrdom of James, Acts 12:18-23:
 - a. Upon learning of Peter's absence from the prison, Herod Antipas I executed the guards, 12:18-19a.
 - b. Herod left Jerusalem for Caesarea, the governing city of his dominion where the people of Tyre and Sidon who had angered him sought to appease him for the grain he sent them in trade, 12:19b-20.
 - c. This appeasement took the form of Herod's giving the people an oration, and their flattering reply of calling him a "god," so the Lord slew him for not honoring the true God, Acts 12:21-23.
 - d. This judgment also involved vengeance for the martyrdom of James, cf. Acts 12:1-2.
 8. Thus armed with greater motivation by these events, the Jerusalem Church's ministry advanced, 12:24.
 9. Also, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem with John Mark to continue their work in Antioch with a new sense of mission for God to use them in the Gospel's spread to the world, Acts 12:25.

Lesson: Christ allowed the Jerusalem Church to face a degree of opposition, and this in turn spurred the Church to prayer and greater motivation to serve God's interests, and only advanced its ministry!

Application: If opposed for the faith, since God ALLOWS it to occur to foster a godly response in His people so they will FOCUS on DOING His WILL, if facing opposition, may we thus STAY FOCUSED!