

# Book of Acts: the ripple effect

Pastor Sam Nicholson  
Acts 12:1-24

## MESSAGE NOTES

Thursday, Feb 5  
Sunday, Feb 8

### Introduction

notes

### Where do you turn when you're in a crisis?

Is the church going or growing?

- John Lennon, "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink... We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first -- rock 'n' roll or Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

- Cary Nieuwhof trends from 2025;<sup>2</sup>
  - "The Gen Z revival is real." - Gen Z church attendance quadrupled in 2025 from 4% to 16%
  - "A sense of closeness doubles when a young adult attends a local church."

### People are looking for somewhere to turn.

**Acts 12:24, "The word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."**

### Act I: 12:1-5 (Herod Agrippa & Persecution)

<sup>1</sup>Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, to do them harm. <sup>2</sup>And he had James the brother of John executed with a sword. <sup>3</sup>When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter as well. (Now these were the days of Unleavened Bread.) <sup>4</sup>When he had arrested him, he put him in prison, turning him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending only after the Passover to bring him before the people. <sup>5</sup>So Peter was kept in prison, **but prayer for him was being made to God intensely by the church.**

<sup>1</sup>Google "John Lennon Maureen Cleave Interview" and you'll find hundreds of articles.

<sup>2</sup><https://careynieuwhof.com/episode742/>, Carey Nieuwhof, Episode 742: 2025 Church Trends UPDATE: The Gen Z Revival is Real (New Data) + The Mental Health Crisis is Shifting to a Whole New Front.

- Herod Agrippa<sup>3</sup> is;
  - Hoping to become popular with the Jewish people<sup>4</sup>
  - A political chameleon<sup>5</sup>
- The churches FIRST reaction to Herod's evil is prayer.

notes

**A prideful church is Satan's playground. A praying church is Satan's graveyard.**

**A church that doesn't pray, doesn't survive.  
(Prayer IS taking action)**

**Act II: 12:6-12 (God rescues Peter)**

<sup>6</sup>On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. <sup>7</sup>And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near Peter, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. <sup>8</sup>And the angel said to him, "Put on your belt and strap 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 continued to follow, and yet he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup>Now when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. <sup>11</sup>When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting" <sup>12</sup>And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was also called Mark, where **many were gathered together and were praying.**

- Is this the same Peter we know?
  - Peter in Matthew 14:22-23 vs. Acts 12:6-12.
  - Strategies for a rhythm in your prayer life:
    - Understand the purpose of prayer - To be with God<sup>6</sup>
    - Come to God as often as you please<sup>7</sup>
    - Pray small, often<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Josephus has a unique historical account which gives a bit more background on Herod Agrippa. He's reported as a "kind of benevolent king," yet he publicly executes Christians? Josephus, The Antiquities of the Jews, Ch. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Herod Agrippa is given his kingdom by Emperor Claudius, as they are childhood friends. He's looking to make an impression as a King. N.T. Wright, The Challenge of Acts, 55

<sup>5</sup>F.F. Bruce, New Testament History, 258-264

- Why was James not saved?

notes

**When we pray, God gets the glory, no matter the outcome.**

**Act III:** 12:13-17 ( The Church is Shocked by Peter's Rescue)

<sup>13</sup>When he knocked at the door of the gate, a slave woman named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup>When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. <sup>15</sup>They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." <sup>16</sup>But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, **they saw him and were amazed.** <sup>17</sup>But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out out of the prison. And he said, "**Report** these things to James and the brothers." **Then he left and went to another place.**

**Why are you shocked when God answers prayer?**

**Epilogue:** 12:18-24 (Herod Agrippa is Judged)

<sup>24</sup>But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.

**No evil can stop the Word of the Lord. Jesus is victorious forever.**

<sup>6</sup>The Cloud of Unknowing, Anonymous.

<sup>7</sup>Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, 6-7.

<sup>8</sup>My favorite prayer as a dad with young kids at the moment; Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God."

<sup>9</sup>The church likely thought it was Peter's angel or his "spirit," like they were seeing a vision of him. It's possible they were expecting the same outcome as James, not a divine jailbreak. Imagine their wonder at God's sovereignty! N.T. Wright, The Challenge of Acts, 65.

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## GROUP DISCUSSION

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The Book of Acts: The Ripple Effect  
GateWay Church of Visalia, Pastor Sam Nicholson  
Acts 2:1-24  
February 5th & 8th, 2026

### **Prayer Requests:**

### **Read Acts 12:1-17 aloud.**

- 1) How do you suppose Peter felt, after seeing what happened to James?
- 2) What reactions do you see the church have throughout the narrative (They pray, they testify, they go out to evangelize)? How can we respond more like the early church in our world today?
- 3) What rhythms of prayer do I have, so that when something big happens, I keep my eyes on the Lord?