

# OVERCOMING EVIL

## Acts 12:1-17

Rivalries exist everywhere. In politics it's Democrats versus Republicans. In computers it's Mac versus PC. In sports it's Mississippi State versus Ole Miss. In superhero movies it's Superman versus Lex Luthor. And in the spiritual realm, it's the kingdom of darkness versus the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Colossians 1:13–14**... For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We are living in a spiritual war zone. Satan and his demonic allies have secured the devotion of numerous leaders in the political realm, the entertainment realm, the athletic realm, the corporate realm, and even in the religious realm. That's why you are seeing such a rise in. . .

- **moral perversion**
- **anti-Christian rhetoric**
- **persecution against believers**
- **family breakdown**
- **rebellion against authority**
- **unhinged violence**

In the book of Acts, the conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of Light is prominently displayed. . .

- **The apostles were arrested and beaten (Acts 5).**
- **Stephen was stoned to death for speaking truth (Acts 7).**
- **The Church was persecuted severely by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:2, 9:4-5).**
- **James was put to death by Herod (Acts 12:1-2)**

Despite the presence of evil, thousands were saved on the Day of Pentecost and afterwards there in Jerusalem. Then, the gospel was

preached in Samaria and many of them were saved. The Ethiopian Eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius and the rest of the Gentiles in his home were converted to Jesus. The enemy was being crushed through the power of the resurrected Christ and the preaching of the gospel and the explosive growth of the church.

**According to Open Doors' World Watch List, 310 million Christians face very high or extreme levels of persecution.**

**1 in 7 Christians are persecuted worldwide**

**1 in 5 Christians are persecuted in Africa**

**2 in 5 Christians are persecuted in Asia**

In today's text, we are introduced to the evil power of Herod Agrippa I. Could the powers of darkness stop the gospel cold in its tracks?

**Acts 12:1–5... Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. 2 And he had**

**James the brother of John put to death with a sword. 3 When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. 5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.**

Herod answered to Rome, so he did everything he could to stay in the good graces of the Jewish leaders. What better way to do that than by launching a wave of persecution against the hated followers of Jesus the Nazarene—*the Christians*. He rounded up some who belonged to the church and began to torment them.

These events occurred about twelve years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Herod the king took James the brother of John beheaded him with the sword. He was the first apostle to be martyred.

Imagine the devastating effect this had on the church. When Peter was arrested, their concern metastasized. This was all a part of the Lord's sovereign plan. **HE** permitted Herod to arrest Peter and put him under heavy guard in prison. Sixteen soldiers, four for each watch, kept guard over the apostle. Two soldiers were chained to the prisoner and two kept watch at the doors. Since it was Passover season, Peter's execution was not immediate.

On one side of this spiritual skirmish is the wicked ruler Herod and the Jewish religious leaders. Keep in mind that Herod was backed by the powerful Roman Empire. On the other side of this battle was the church which seemed to be powerless.

The phrase "but prayer" is the turning point in the story. Never underestimate the power of a praying church. Notice how they prayed. They prayed persistently and fervently and specifically. The word *fervently* carries the meaning of stretching a muscle to its limit and in the case of

their praying it means *total effort*. They were in a spiritual battle and they knew it!

**Acts 12:6–10...** 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. **7** And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. **8** And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." **9** And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. **10** 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.

If you were chained to two Roman soldiers and facing the possibility of being executed the next

day, would you sleep soundly? Probably not, but Peter did. In fact, Peter was sleeping so soundly that the angel had to strike him on the side to wake him up.

What gave Peter such confidence and peace? To begin with, the church was engaged in an extended prayer meeting and they were crying out to God for his deliverance. But the main cause of Peter's peace was **the knowledge that Herod could not kill him**. Jesus had promised Peter that he would live to be an old man and end his life crucified on a Roman cross (**John 21:18–19**). Peter simply laid hold of that promise and committed the entire situation to the Lord.

Here we see the ministry of angels (**Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3,7**) on behalf of God's children (**Ps. 34:7**). God sent his angel to show Herod that he couldn't imprison or execute the one God decided to set free, not even with four squads of soldiers. Jesus allowed Herod to kill James, but He kept him from harming Peter. It was the throne in heaven that was in control, not the throne on earth!

**Acts 12:12–17...** 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. **13** When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. **14** 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. **15** They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." **16** But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. **17** But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

Peter immediately headed to the church! Keep in mind that they had been praying fervently for Peter's boldness and deliverance. The answer to their prayers was standing at the door and they didn't have the faith to open the door and let him

in. I guess you could say that their faith was about the size of a mustard seed, but Jesus said that even small faith can accomplish great things.

The “James” Peter refers to here was the half-brother of Jesus who became the recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem and who wrote the epistle that carries his name.

## CONCLUSION

Here’s the challenge I sense the Holy Spirit wants to drop in our hearts today based on this thrilling story...

### LIVE LIKE AN OVERCOMER!

(Overcomers: Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21)

There are some clear principles in this story that can help you live like an overcomer. These include. . .

## 1. BELIEVE IN THE LORD'S POWER

This story confirms Jesus' sovereign authority and power over the Roman Empire, Herod the king, and all who wanted Peter dead and the church cancelled.

**Psalms 103:19...** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

**Matthew 28:18...** And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Just look at what He did in this situation that looked absolutely hopeless. **Peter was delivered and Herod was eaten by worms and died!** When you're in a jam, you must understand that Jesus has optimum power and sovereign authority.

**LIVE LIKE AN OVERCOMER!**

First, believe in the Lord's power. Second. . .

## 2. CONNECT WITH THE LORD'S CHURCH

What's the first thing Peter did when the angel of the Lord delivered him from prison and from a death sentence? **HE WENT TO THE CHURCH THAT HAD PRAYED FOR HIM.**

Listen, as we engage in spiritual warfare, we need to realize that spiritual isolation leads to spiritual desolation. Hear the Word of the Lord. . .

**Hebrews 10:23–25**... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; **24** and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **25** not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

**LIVE LIKE AN OVERCOMER!**

First, believe in the Lord's power. Second, connect with the Lord's church. Finally. . .

### 3. STAND ON THE LORD'S WORD

Many believers remain in shock over the death of Charley Kirk and over the evil responses of people on the left. Dean Dwyer wrote. . .

**Speaking truth, particularly Biblical truth, is inherently dangerous in a world where truth sounds like hate to those who hate the truth.**

This is the time to be relentless and fearless as you stand up for the Lord and for His Word. That's what Peter did. That's what Paul challenged us to do in the face of evil. . .

**1 Corinthians 15:58...** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

I love what John Piper had to say about this chapter...

**Luke put this chapter together to make this plain for the early church: you may feel small and insignificant in the Roman Empire; you may think that you are overpowered when some of your best leaders are killed on a political whim. But the truth is: if you stay with Jesus, you win, and if you oppose him, you lose. So be encouraged. Be bold and courageous to spread the Word of truth and leave the outcome to God.**

Here's our challenge. . .

## **LIVE LIKE AN OVERCOMER!**

First, believe in the Lord's power. Second, connect with the Lord's church. Third, stand on the Lord's Word.

Are you on the winning side this morning?  
Receive Jesus as Savior and Lord and live like an overcomer!