

# FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

## A LOOK AT THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### Acts 12: 1 – 24

#### **Opposition – the church in Jerusalem.**

Up until this point, the story of Acts has been one of dynamic growth, as the church has grown and spread outwards in concentric circles. But now, there is a major setback – the death of James, murdered by Herod Agrippa, and the imprisonment of Peter. Opposition to the church intensifies.

Herod Agrippa is the grandson of Herod the Great. We note the contrast between the destructive power of Herod and the saving power of God. Even the powers of death and hell cannot prevail against Christ's church. It seems like a major setback, but yet, at the end of the chapter we learn that the work goes on, and continues to grow. In fact, it seems that even in adversity, perhaps even because of adversity, the Lord is able to use opposition to strengthen the believers, and ensure that the word spreads out, rather like a fire that is fanned by wind.

Herod seeks to ingratiate himself with the Jews by stamping on Christian activity, having James executed and Peter arrested. Yet we see a remarkable reaction in Peter. He was asleep – totally unconcerned. Luke seems to emphasise the intervention of God and the passivity of Peter. Peter's escape is God's initiative.

But the wonderful scene in this chapter concerns the young servant girl, Rhoda. There's a prayer meeting going on. The prayers of the believers are answered, in a miraculous way, as Peter himself comes knocking at the door, yet no-one believes it! Only Rhoda, the young servant girl, insists that it's true. When we pray, the answer may be unexpected.

It is ironic that the group who are praying for Peter should regard as mad the person who informed them that their prayers had been answered. Rhoda's simple joy shines out against the background of the church's incredulity.

So, 'The chapter begins with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free and the word of God triumphing.' (John Stott)

Nothing can put the church down.

V.24: The word of God continued to increase and spread. Another link verse. The story is now to leave Jerusalem and move on to a much broader canvas.