

ACTS: POWERED FOR PURPOSE

Week 6 • Deeper Study Guide

Acts 12:6–17, 24 | "God Still Delivers"

THE ACTS PROGRESSION — THE LITERARY ARCHITECTURE OF ACTS

One of the most remarkable things about the Book of Acts is that Luke isn't just writing history — he is writing theology through structure. He is deliberately echoing the shape of the Old Testament story:

- **Acts 1–7** Acts 1–7 parallels Genesis: God creates a new covenant people, the Spirit brings life, the Church multiplies and faces its early tests
- **Acts 10–17** Acts 10–17 parallels Exodus: God delivers His people, a new Passover moment unfolds, a new leader emerges, and the people are sent out into the nations

The implication: Luke wants his readers — especially Jewish readers — to recognize that Jesus is not departing from Israel's story. He is fulfilling and retelling it on a cosmic scale. The God who delivered Israel from Egypt is delivering humanity from sin and death through the risen Christ.

THE DEEPER THEOLOGICAL QUESTION

Acts 12 forces one of the most uncomfortable questions in the entire book. James is killed. Peter is rescued. Same church. Same persecution. Same God. Different outcomes. If deliverance means "the prison opens," then what do we do with James?

Luke refuses to resolve this tension cheaply. He doesn't explain why James died and Peter lived. What he does instead is something more theologically profound — he reframes the entire definition of deliverance. The primary Exodus of Scripture is no longer Israel leaving Egypt. It is humanity being rescued from sin and death through the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

That means every other act of deliverance — every opened prison, every healed body, every restored relationship — is a signpost pointing to the greater Exodus already accomplished. James was not forgotten. Peter was not more favored. Both belonged fully to the Deliverer. The question Acts 12 presses is not "Why didn't God deliver me?" but rather "Do I understand what the greatest deliverance already is?"

GOING DEEPER: THE EXODUS PARALLELS IN ACTS 12

Luke's retelling of the Exodus in Acts 12 is not accidental — it is architectural. Every detail is chosen to trigger recognition in a Jewish reader's mind:

Herod = New Pharaoh: Pharaoh enslaved and killed God's people. Herod imprisons and kills James. Different ruler, same rebellion against God — and neither is actually in control.

Passover timing: Acts 12:4 tells us Herod planned to bring Peter out "after the Passover." Every Jewish reader hearing this immediately thinks: Exodus. The first great deliverance happened at Passover. Luke is signaling — pay attention, God is doing it again.

Angel, light, chains falling: An angel of the Lord appears. Light fills the darkness. Chains fall away. These are unmistakable Exodus echoes — the same divine pattern that operated at the Red Sea now operates in a Roman prison.

"Put on your sandals": Israel left Egypt with sandals on, ready to follow God into freedom (Exodus 12:11). Peter walks out of prison dressed the same way. Luke isn't describing a prison escape. He is

announcing that the God of the Exodus is still leading His people — only now the Deliverer is the risen Jesus.

SCRIPTURE THREAD

Read these in sequence — trace the Exodus thread from Moses to Jesus:

- Exodus 12:1–14 — The first Passover and the original deliverance
- Exodus 12:11 — "Eat it with your cloak tucked in, sandals on" — ready to follow
- Exodus 14:21–31 — The Red Sea: God opens the way when there is no way
- Isaiah 43:16–19 — "Forget the former things... I am doing a new thing"
- Acts 12:1–17 — Peter's deliverance: the new Exodus in miniature
- Acts 12:24 — "The word of God continued to spread" — Herod falls, the gospel advances
- Romans 8:35–39 — Nothing can separate us from the love of God — the theology behind James AND Peter
- Revelation 15:3 — The saints sing "the song of Moses and the Lamb" — the two Exoduses become one

Key verse to sit with:

Acts 12:24 — "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." Luke doesn't end the chapter celebrating Peter. He ends it celebrating the unstoppable gospel. The Kingdom cannot be imprisoned.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- James dies. Peter lives. How do you reconcile that with a God who delivers? What does Acts 12 suggest about why Luke refuses to explain the difference?
- Luke tells us the prison church was praying for Peter — and when he showed up at the door, they didn't believe it was him. What does that tell us about the gap between our theology of prayer and our actual expectation when we pray?
- The servant girl Rhoda recognized Peter's voice and ran to tell others — leaving him still knocking at the gate. Have you ever been so overwhelmed by an answered prayer that you forgot to actually receive it? What does that moment reveal?
- Luke frames Acts 12 as a new Exodus. What does it mean for your daily life that the greatest deliverance — from sin and death — has already happened? How should that change the way you face the trials that haven't resolved yet?
- The chapter ends with Herod's death and the gospel's advance. What does the contrast between Herod's end and the gospel's momentum say about who is actually writing history?

THREE KINDS OF DELIVERANCE — A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the most pastorally important insights in Acts 12 is that deliverance is not one-dimensional. Scripture presents at least three expressions of God's delivering work — and all three are real:

1. Deliverance FROM the trial: God opens the prison door. The chains fall. Peter walks out. This is real, and we should pray for it boldly.

2. Deliverance THROUGH the trial: The prison door stays shut, but God's presence and peace sustain the believer through it. Paul and Silas singing at midnight. The three Hebrew men in the furnace — joined by a fourth.

3. Deliverance INTO His presence: The final and complete deliverance — what James experienced. Not failure, not abandonment. The fullest expression of the Exodus, arriving home.

The anchor: In all three expressions, the Deliverer is the same. Neither James nor Peter was forgotten. Neither was abandoned. Both belonged fully to the God who still delivers.

RESOURCES FOR DEEPER STUDY

BOOKS

- The Drama of Scripture — Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen | The best accessible treatment of how the whole Bible tells one unified story — essential backdrop for understanding Luke's Exodus parallels in Acts.
- God of Deliverance — Exodus commentary by Iain Duguid | Deep theological treatment of the Exodus theme that feeds directly into Acts 12's imagery.
- Acts: An Exegetical Commentary (Vol. 4) — Craig Keener | Scholarly treatment of Acts 12 including the Herod-as-Pharaoh typology and the historical context of Peter's imprisonment.
- Walking with God through Pain and Suffering — Timothy Keller | Addresses the James/Peter tension directly — why God delivers some and not others, and how the gospel reframes suffering.
- When God Doesn't Fix It — Laura Story | Personal and pastoral treatment of unanswered prayer and what it means to trust the Deliverer when the prison door stays shut.

PODCASTS & SERMONS

- "Acts 12" — The Bible Project podcast | Excellent treatment of the Exodus typology running through Acts 12 and why Luke structures the book the way he does.
- "God Still Delivers" — AG Sermon Resources (ag.org) | Pentecostal treatment of divine deliverance rooted in both Old Testament precedent and Acts fulfillment.
- "The Exodus" — The Bible Project YouTube series | Visual and theological overview of the Exodus theme from Genesis through Revelation — essential background for Acts 12.
- "Why Does God Heal Some and Not Others?" — Joni Eareckson Tada (YouTube) | One of the most theologically careful and personally costly treatments of this question available.
- "Unstoppable" — Craig Groeschel / Life.Church (open.life.church) | Addresses Acts 12:24 and what it means that the gospel cannot be imprisoned, no matter who opposes it.

ARTICLES & ONLINE RESOURCES

- "Typology: How the Old Testament Points to the New" — The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org) | Explains the literary technique Luke uses to connect Acts 12 to Exodus — accessible and theologically rich.
- "What Is Divine Deliverance?" — Assemblies of God position paper (ag.org) | AG-grounded theological framework for understanding healing and deliverance in the life of the Spirit-filled church.
- "Acts 12 and the Exodus Narrative" — Bible Study Tools (biblestudytools.com) | Traces the specific parallels between Acts 12 and Exodus 1–14 in detail.
- "Why Did God Let James Die but Save Peter?" — Christianity.com | Pastoral treatment of one of Acts' most difficult questions, grounded in the sovereignty and goodness of God.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Acts 12 calls us to expand our definition of deliverance and deepen our declaration of the Deliverer:

- Read Acts 12 in full, then read Exodus 12:1–14 and 14:21–31 back to back. Let the parallels surface. Write down what you notice.
- Memorize Acts 12:24: "But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." When you face opposition this week — personally, professionally, spiritually — let that verse be your anchor.
- Identify the area of your life where you most need deliverance right now. Bring it to God in prayer — and then ask Him to show you whether He is delivering you FROM it, THROUGH it, or preparing something you cannot yet see.
- The church in Acts 12 prayed without expecting results — and was amazed when God answered. Ask God this week to increase your actual expectation when you pray, not just your theological belief in prayer.

"The God who opened the Red Sea, the God who walked Peter out of prison, the God who

raised Jesus from the dead — is still the God who delivers."