Acts 12 notes

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King Herod

- King Herod Agrippa I (11 B.C.E.- 44 C.E.), ruler of all Israel, 41- 44 C.E.¹
 - o grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1) through a son (Aristobulus) not mentioned in the New Testament
 - o father of Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13-26:32).
- Acts 12 might have been before Herod Agrippa's death, in which case this event could have been in A.D. 44.
 - However, the account of Herod's run-in with the people of Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:20-25) could have been a long while after Peter prison break.
 - O Josephus has a quite similar account of Herod's blasphemy and death at age 53 (Ant. of the Jews 19:8:2).

"had [Ya'akov] the brother of [Yochanan] put to death with a sword" (Acts 12:2)

• Adam Clarke suspects that the note of the death penalty by sword for Ya'akov son of Zebedee and brother of Yochanan highlights the charge against him of corrupting the people²:

By killing with the sword we are to understand beheading. Among the Jews there were four kinds of deaths: Stoning; burning; killing with the sword, or beheading; and, strangling.

The third was a Roman as well as a Jewish mode of punishment. Killing with the sword was the punishment which, according to the *Talmud*, was inflicted on those who drew away the people to any strange worship, *Sanhedr*. fol. iii. James was probably accused of this, and hence the punishment mentioned in the text.

"it was during the days of Unleavened Bread" (Acts 12:3)

- These leaders couldn't wait a few days until the festival was over to act. What was so urgent?
- Israel's leaders should have purged the malice and wickedness out of their hearts before Passover.
 - O Just as the lesson of the Lamb of God being led to slaughter (Isaiah 53) coincided with God's lamb-centric appointed time of Passover, so too the "puffing up" lessons of unleavened bread are emphasized in the treatment of the Lamb's apostles.
 - Removal of leaven has been part of Passover since God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt.
 - Those observing the Passover had to remove leaven from within their homes (Ex. 12:15-20) and the borders of Israel (Ex. 13:3-7).
 - חמץ chamets, Strong's 2557 It literally means "soured," i.e., "fermented."3
 - שאר se'or, Strong's 7603 Often translated "leavened" as is *chamets*, the Easton dictionary says se'or connotes, "the remnant of dough from the preceding baking which had fermented and become acid."⁴
 - Seen as "fermented wine" in the Nazarite rules:
 - "When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar [אָבוֹר chomets], whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes." (Num. 6:2-3)
 - The Septuagint uses the word ὄξος *oxos* (Strong's 3690) to translate *chomets* here as "sour wine" and in Ruth 2:14 as "vinegar."
 - Oxos also is used for the sour wine described in what the Roman soldiers gave Yeshua during the crucifixion (Matt. 27:34,48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29).
 - *Chomets* is used in prophecy of sour wine at the stake (Psa. 69:22).
 - Interestingly, instead of oxos for rendering chomets as "vinegar" in Prov.
 10:26, the Septuagint uses ὅμφαξ *omphax*, which means "unripe grapes."

¹ Stern, David H. "Acts 12." Jewish New Testament Commentary. Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc. 1996.

² Clarke, Adam. Commentary on the Whole Bible. Christian Classics Ethereal Library http://www.ccel.org. 1831.

³ Brown, Francis; S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Scribe, Inc.

⁴ Easton, M.G. "Leaven." *Easton's Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*. Thomas Nelson, 1897. *Bible Foundation e-Text Library*. http://www.bf.org/bfetexts.htm.

- Omphax and its Hebrew equivalent בסר boser (1154, 1155) show up in key verses talking metaphorically about something rashness, like picking grapes before they're ripe leading to a sour experience (Isa. 18:5; Jer. 31:29-30 (each will die for his own inquity); Ezek. 18:2; Job. 15:33).
- In a restating of the command for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, chamets could be translated as "fermented" and se'or could be rendered as "bread or dough left to ferment." "Unleavened bread [מצות] matsot] shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened [מצות] chamets] shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven [שאר] be seen among you in all your borders." (Ex. 13:7)
- Removal of leaven was part of remembering how God removed Israel hastily from Egypt (Deut. 16:3).
- ▶ God called for offerings to be unleavened (Lev. 2:4-11), yet He called for:
 - leavened cakes with unleavened cakes in peace offerings out of thankfulness (Lev. 7:12-13)
 - two leavened loaves on Shavu'ot (Pentecost) (Lev. 23:17)
- ▶ Prophets and sages had connected fermenting with corruption long before the first century.
 - "After reciting the 'Amidah Rabbi Alexandri used to add the following: 'Sovereign of the Universe, you are well aware that our will is to perform your will. What keeps us from doing it? The yeast in the dough....' "(Talmud, B'rakhot 17a)
- Yeshua warned against the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:6-12; Luke 12:1) and another Herod (Mark 8:15; Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great).
 - Leaven of pride in self versus the power of God, so not being able to discern God at work (Mt. 16:1-12).
 - Leaven of hypocrisy, which is convincing yourself and others that the good things you do overpowers God's perception of one's real thoughts and intentions (Luke 12:1).
- Paul warned about the leaven in one's life being malice and wickedness, opposed to sincerity and truth.
 "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1st Cor. 5:6-8)
 - Paul also uses the illustration of leaven in his letter to Galatia to emphasize that circumcision as a prerequisite for salvation is "leaven" that will puff up, or sour, the whole "lump" of the Body of Messiah, i.e. the Commonwealth of Israel (Gal. 5:7-15).

"four squads of soldiers to guard him" (Acts 12:4)

- Sixteen soldiers were guarding Petros (Peter), and all were executed because of his escape.
 - Was this an example of the power of God "blowing" among the seemingly powerless having more power than 16 soldiers holding a chained man inside a jail?
- Later, Paul and Silas were freed from a jail, after being arrested for destroying fortune-telling profits in Phillipi by casting a demon out of a slave girl in Phillipi (Acts 16).
 - Instead of spiriting Paul and Silas out of the jail after the earthquake, God had them and the other prisoners stay put so that the chief of the jail wouldn't commit suicide ahead of his own execution for letting such well-guarded prisoners escape.
 - Did God know that the jailer would repent and thus left Paul and Silas there, or was he testing to see what the jailer would do?

"prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God" (Acts 12:5)

• Stern sees this as a five-point teaching on prayer:

Prayer must be:

- 1. intense, not casual:
- 2. ongoing ("was being made"; the Greek verb tense implies continuing activity);
- 3. to God
 - a. in genuine contact with the living God (possible only through Yeshua, Jn. 14:6)
 - b. not with empty repetition (Mt. 6:7)
 - c. not in unbelief (Heb. 11:6);
- 4. specific, not vague (on his behalf); "you don't receive because you don't ask" (James 4:2-3); and
- 5. communal (by the Messianic community) the believer is not called to an isolated life; even his private prayers should be not self-centered but reflective of his membership in the Body of the Messiah.

"the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting" (Acts 12:11)

• This should have put the people and Herod on notice that they were battling with the power of God.

"after Easter" (Acts 12:4 KJV)

- This is the only use of the word *Easter* for $\pi \acute{a}o\chi \alpha$ (pascha; Strong's Greek No. 3957) in the KJV.
- It's interesting that Petros was to be tried after Passover/Unleavened Bread, while Yeshua was tried before the festival.