

# Bible study

*IDOP seeks to provide churches with the opportunity to join their brothers and sisters in Christ that are being persecuted on account of their faith.*

## Acts 12:1-19 • United Prayer: *Mission Possible*

### Religious persecution in Canada

- The case here involves a radio program broadcast in Alberta by the conservative U.S.-based ministry “Focus on the Family.” The program, “Homosexuality: Fact and Fiction,” aroused the ire of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). CBSC chairman Ron Cohen stated the program was “homophobic” and included “gross generalizations” about homosexuals. The CBSC ordered the station to issue an apology during prime-time hours.
- In 1985 Trinity Western University applied to the British Columbia College of Teachers to offer the required certification year in its own right. Ignoring the recommendation of its own committee, the BCCT denied in June 1996 the application based on TWU community standards requiring students to refrain from extramarital sex, including homosexual behavior. Finally on May 17, 2001 The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of TWU, ordering the BCCT to approve the University’s program.

### The context

- The book of Acts could rightly be called “The Acts of Prayer.” Time and time again in the book of Acts prayer is intimately connected to the decision-making process of the church and to God’s intervention and revelation.
- Acts 11. By revelation the believers become aware of a severe impending famine. Aware of the great need, the believers in the region of Antioch demonstrated their solidarity by providing help for the believers living in Judea.
- Acts 12 marks the turning point in the book of Acts. The first eleven chapters highlight the ministry of Peter and the gospel to the Jews. However, with the conversion of Cornelius in chapter 10, the way is prepared for the ministry of Paul and the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, beginning at the end of chapter twelve and all the way to the end of the book.
- Acts 13 The Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul for the ministry and they are commissioned by the church in Antioch and sent off on their mission to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.
- King Herod the first was the grandson of Herod the Great. After the execution of his father Aristobulus, Herod was sent to Rome with his mother Bernice, where he grew up on intimate terms with the imperial family. Herod was a very two-faced individual. Whenever he was in Rome, he was a cosmopolitan Roman and when in Jerusalem, he acted the part of an observant Jew. In fact, people used to say, “The king is guided by the queen, and the queen is guided by Gamaliel. Herod won the people’s favor when he persuaded Caligula not to carry out his insane plan of building a statue of himself as god in the Jerusalem temple. The Jews were delighted when he moved the seat of government from Caesarea to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the city’s northern wall. They supported his policy to maintain peace through the preservation of the status quo. Herod viewed Jewish Christian as divisive and felt their activities could only disturb the people and inflame antagonism.

- I. **Persecution (12:1-4)**
  - A. King Herod was seeking to strengthen his own political position
    - i. He arrested Christians (v. 1)
    - ii. He had James, the brother of John put to death (v. 2)
    - iii. The Jews responded favorably (v.3)
    - iv. King Herod had Peter arrested as well (v. 3)
    - v. The public trial was set after Passover (v. 4)
  
- II. **Prayer (12:5)**
  - A. The church recognized their responsibility
    - i. They knew what they were called to do
  - B. The church realized their resources
    - i. They knew God had the ability and power to intervene
  - C. The church refused to be reluctant
    - i. "Earnestly" Same word used of Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44)
  
- III. **Peter's Response (12:6)**
  - A. Peter was sound asleep
  - B. He was certain of God's timing (John 21:18)
  - C. He remembered God's promise (John 14:1-6)
  - D. He was conscious of his testimony (Acts 7:54-60)
  
- IV. **God's Intervention (12:7-8)**
  - A. The angel's appearance (v. 7)
    - i. Sudden and shining
  - B. The angel's authority (v.7)
    - i. The angel had a specific assignment
  - C. The angel's activity (v. 8)
    - i. He freed Peter
    - ii. He led Peter
  
- V. **Peter's Compliance (12:9-10)**
  - A. The expression of obedience (v. 9)
    - i. Immediate and complete
    - ii. In spite of a lack of understanding
  - B. The effect of obedience (v. 10)
  - C. It removed all barriers
  - D. It released him from bondage
  
- VI. **Peter's Personal and Public Celebration (12:11-17)**
  - A. Peter's affirmation of faith (v. 11)
  - B. Peter's presence astounds and encourages the church (v. 13-16)
  - C. God had answered prayer
  - D. In the midst of praying the answer was knocking at the door
  - E. Peter describes the events and ask them to pass on the good news (v. 17)
  
- VII. **God's divine intervention affirmed (12:18-19)**
  - A. Peter's absence was discovered in the morning (v. 18)
  - B. A search was conducted (v. 19)
  - C. The guards were cross-examined (v. 19)
  - D. The guards were executed (v. 19)

**VIII. Persecution is still happening and God still intervenes:**

Pastor Jitro ministered in the village of Sasana (North Moluccans), until January 20th, 1999, when the following events took place.

**Escape to the jungle**

Right from when I first woke up, my mind was recalling the terrible reports I had received the previous day. Muslim militia had beheaded several Christians in the city of Ambon. Even as I still pondered these things, I heard shouting outside. As I watched, Muslim militia began to pour into our area. I quickly locked the door and hid inside. Within minutes our house was surrounded and attackers began to break down our door. I had just enough time to hide my wife and two children under our bed when the door was broken down and the mob rushed in. There was no way for me to defend myself. They beat me down with sticks and kept on beating me until they were exhausted. I pretended to be dead. Suddenly someone shouted, "Get your swords and kill the Christians." As quickly as they had entered, they then left our house, looking for more Christians to kill.

As soon as they were gone, my wife and I, together with our two children, escaped through the back door and sought refuge in the jungle. Seeing that my body was not where they had left me for dead, the Muslims soon realized that I had escaped and began to pursue us. We moved steadily further into the jungle. There was no food... but thousands of mosquitoes!! We cried out for God to rescue us and suddenly wild pigs surrounded us. These pigs are known to attack people and we became very afraid. We prayed for God's protection and deliverance. Amazingly, the pigs never attacked, but kept us surrounded. When the Muslim militia also saw the pigs, they were so afraid they left the area and returned to our village. We stayed in the jungle for nine days before we felt it was safe to leave. I am certain that God used these wild pigs to save us from being murdered. Thank God for wild pigs!

**Attacked again**

Eventually we made our way to a police post and asked for protection. We were evacuated to the city of Ambon, where we lived as refugees for half a year. We then moved to the island of Ceram in order to pastor a church there. At first, it appeared to us like the Promised Land, filled with milk and honey. However, trouble also visited this island. On November 25th, 2000 our village was attacked by "Holy War Commandos" (Laskar jihad), who were equipped with standard military weapons, such as AK 47 rifles made in China and M16 rifles from the USA. In contrast, the Christians had only traditional weapons such as bows, arrows and spears.

The Christians in the area were no match for these thousands of fighters, some coming from East Java and others from far off Arab countries such as Pakistan. Several thousand Christians, including my family, and me again fled into the jungle where we hid for another three days. Eventually several hundred Indonesian Special Forces and Marines from Jakarta drove the Muslim commandos away from our area. Many Muslims were killed in the ensuing battles. We were able to return to our villages but there was nothing left to return to. Our attackers had completely destroyed all our houses.

According to recent reports, jihad warriors continue attacking and destroying Christian homes. But lately, army troops are doing a better job at defending the victims. Nevertheless, the fear remains. Pastor Jitro asks, "What happens when the troops return to Jakarta?" He goes on to say, "Oh God, please help us. We don't want to die at the hands of the Muslim Commandos. We want to live and serve you and develop your Church. In Jesus' Name."

## IX. Ultimate deliverance

- A. Not every prayer is answered immediately and dramatically
  - i. Peter was rescued but James was put to death with the sword
  - ii. Yet in the Bible's perspective, even James had a victory (Matthew 10:28)
  
- B. We have a responsibility towards the persecuted (Heb 13:3)
  - i. Pray for unity among persecuted Christians in restricted areas. 1 Peter 4:7-11
  - ii. Pray for Christians who are beaten and tortured, that they may be healed and forgive their tormentors. Acts 7:60
  - iii. Pray for the Holy Spirit's comfort on those imprisoned (Phil. 4:6-7) and pray for the publication and distribution of bibles. Psalm 119:105
  - iv. Pray for Christians whose homes or land was confiscated to remember that God will meet their every need and ease their anxiety. Matthew 6:25-34
  - v. Pray that God would raise up leaders in the Persecuted Church, that they may be courageous, wise and faithful to their God-given responsibilities. 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Timothy 3:1-10

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

*With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

— EPHESIANS 6:18-20

## How will you respond?

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