

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### BLOODSHED (ACTS 12:1-5)

#### THE NEW FACE OF PERSECUTION

The grandson of the man who wanted to kill baby Jesus was now waging war against the church. Herod Agrippa I was hated by the Jewish people, so he made special efforts to win the people's affection. Herod decided to elevate his reputation by persecuting the Christians in Israel.

#### HEROD ALSO ANSWERED TO CAESAR

Much like Pilate, this Jewish leader was expected to keep the Pax Romana by suppressing disruptive minority groups. Unlike Pilate, Herod should have known better because of his Jewish heritage.

- Herod would've not only known the prophecies, but would've heard many stories about Jesus through his family.

#### THE "SON OF THUNDER" IS KILLED

James, one of the original 12, inseparable from his brother John, was put to death "with the sword" for political reasons. Romans preferred crucifixion, but a sword through the body was a Jewish execution.

- Though historical records record the others', James' death is the only apostolic death mentioned in the Bible.

#### "WHEN HE SAW IT PLEASED THE JEWS..."

After Herod got praise for killing James, he then went after the leader of the disruptive movement, Peter. Herod did this during the Festival of Unleavened Bread, a perfect opportunity for a politician to get notoriety.

- Murdering someone during the feast would have been too much, so Herod imprisons Peter until the feast is over.

#### THE WORDS OF CHRIST COMING BACK

In Mark 10, James and John argued about who will sit closer to Jesus' throne in heaven. Jesus warned them that they had no idea how much suffering comes in the pursuit of being close to God's throne.

- **Being used by God to change lives and even societies takes tremendous sacrifice. Do we find it worth it?**

#### A HEAVILY GUARDED PRISONER

Herod assigned "four squads of four soldiers" to guard Peter as he was positioned between two more guards in his cell.

- As the leader of the church sat in jail, the congregation prayed intensely for him. **Prayer was their only weapon to combat the injustice and evil.**

#### TAKING PRAYER EXTREMELY SERIOUSLY

Calm and mature Christians know that prayer is the answer. The early church **didn't have money, power, or influence, but they had the favor of God and a direct connection to Him through the Spirit.**

- Though persecution was imminent, there weren't protests, sit-ins, marches, or demands; **God's people simply prayed.**

### THE ESCAPE (ACTS 12:6-10)

#### LIKE DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

Peter couldn't have been in a more dire situation, but he had experienced deliverance from prison once before. Peter knew what God was capable of, but if He chose not to act, Peter was not going to make a scene.

- **We are to act like Christ, even when we don't understand or agree with Him. Remember, the world is watching.**

#### "...AND A LIGHT SHONE IN THE CELL."

An angel shows up after a light touches Peter's side and wakes him up. The angel tells him to quickly "get up...get dressed," and the chains fell off his wrists.

- Peter thought he was dreaming or possibly just seeing a vision, but an angel leading him through the prison was real deliverance.

#### AUTOMATICALLY

Peter and the angel "passed the first and second guards" and came to an iron gate that "opened to them by itself." Luke uses the word **automate** for which we get our word **automatically**.

- Once outside, the angel departs and Peter "came to himself" and realized what had happened.

### KNOCK KNOCK (ACTS 12:11-19)

#### GOD DELIVERS, BUT WE MUST ALSO BE WISE

When one escapes from prison, they must stay on the move. Peter knew where to go, to Mark's mother's house. Mark's mom owned a home that hosted one of the many Jerusalem congregations of the church.

- **Supernatural deliverance doesn't preclude common sense.**

#### IT'S OK TO LAUGH SOMETIMES

As Peter gets to the house, he knocks on the outer gate door and the servant, Rhoda, comes to answer. In her excitement, she doesn't open the gate, but runs inside to tell the others.

- There are humorous parts of the Bible for good reason. **We see that these people were real; God has a sense of humor, and so should we.**

### THE OTHERS WERE PRAYING INSIDE

While Rhoda is freaking out over Peter, the others had been praying, possibly for days in the house. When Rhoda came in and told them what had happened, they called her crazy and said it must be "his angel."

- Guardian angels are ancient Jewish and modern Christian ideas that are not clearly supported in the Bible.

#### PETER JUST WANTS TO GET INSIDE

As the debate goes on inside, Peter is frantically looking over his shoulder to see if the soldiers were on his trail. When they opened the door, "they were amazed."

- After telling them the story, Peter wanted the word sent to James, Jesus' brother, who was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

#### 16 MEN ARE KILLED

Because Peter escaped, Herod had the 16 guards executed. Roman justice required guards whose prisoners had escaped to receive the prisoner's judgment.

- Herod wasn't Roman and could've had mercy, but **when we adopt the brutal culture of the world, our actions are selfish and often brutal.**

### WHEN WE BECOME GODS (ACTS 12:20-25)

#### HEROD HAD ANOTHER FIRE TO PUT OUT

The king didn't have time to focus on Peter because there were angry people in Tyre and Sidon because they depended on Judea for food during the famine.

- Herod won over a mediator named Blastus and smoothed over the situation. This earned him a public party and an address to the people.

#### THE ADDRESS WAS OVERTLY ROMAN

Again, we have a Jewish king acting like a Roman Caesar, and like the Romans would do, the people began to associate Herod with being a god.

- Herod had the opportunity to deny the claims of deity, but he chose not to. **The praise of people was too much to resist.**

#### "AT ONCE AN ANGEL OF THE LORD STRUCK HIM"

We have seen an angel strike twice: once with light to deliver a Christian and once to strike down an arrogant killer. **We learn that God is the God of salvation and of judgment, and He will "not be mocked."** (Galatians 6:7).

- Josephus reported that Herod lived in pain 5 days until he died at age 54.

#### "BUT THE WORD OF GOD FLOURISHED"

Though the corrupt king had been struck down in agony, the church steam rolls forward, even in Jerusalem. From here we will see Antioch become a launching pad into the "ends of the earth" that Jesus told His followers to minister to.

### PROTECTION FROM SATAN AND OURSELVES

- When we assume the role of a god, we cross a threshold into extreme evil. Believing we are in control is the foundation of Satanic thought.
- When we allow the gods of this world to dictate our lives, we become self-serving, enslaved by culture, and even brutal in behavior.

### PRINCIPLES OF SATANIC THOUGHT

- "Do as thou wilt is the whole of the law"
- Satan represents indulgence instead of abstinence!
- Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it instead of love wasted on ingrates!
- Satan represents vengeance instead of turning the other cheek!

### OUR PHILOSOPHY

- We need the Spirit of God to fill us because left to our own devices, we will not only self-destruct, but will eventually have to face the judgment of God.
- The question is, who do we look more like, Satan or Christ? What do we adhere to, the teachings of the Word, or the self-serving manifesto of the world?