

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 23RD–24TH, 2026 // THE BOOK OF ACTS

### MORE PERSECUTION (ACTS 12:1–5) CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND A LARGE FAMINE

“About that time” (44 A.D.), the Jewish King Herod “violently attacked some who belonged in the church, and he executed James, John’s brother.” James’ death is the only apostolic death described in the NT.

- James was one of the original 12 and the first of the original disciples to be martyred.

### NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS (MATTHEW 6:24)

The Jews hated the Herodian family, and Agrippa lived in fear of Rome. So, to appease both, Herod began to persecute Christians.

- **“If possible,”** we are to “live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18), **but compromising biblical truth for human approval destroys integrity and separates us from Jesus.**

### HEROD SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

Herod would have been well aware of the messianic prophecies and truths of the OT, but he still caved to societal pressure.

- Do we hear and have access to truth but suppress it because it may cost us friends or influence? **What is the greater cost of such suppression** (Matthew 10:33)?

### HARD TIMES

An execution during the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have been extreme, even for Herod. So, he imprisoned Peter until it ended.

- Jesus told His disciples that following Him would come at a high price. Now they were experiencing the “baptism” He was baptized with (Mark 10:38).

### THEIR ONLY WEAPON WAS PRAYER

The Christians only had one weapon during hard times. Prayer is something the early church took very seriously, and so should we.

- **Prayer should be consistent, done with a pure heart, at times formal, at times casual, with faith,** and with **the intent of our hearts and minds conforming to His.**

### ANOTHER ESCAPE (ACTS 12:6–19)

#### CHAINS AND SOLDIERS

Peter had already been miraculously delivered (Acts 5), but now he finds himself being heavily guarded by teams of guards.

- As he was “sleeping between two soldiers, while the sentries...guarded the prison,” an angel woke him up, told him to get up, and the chains fell off.

#### IN A DAZE

Peter was abruptly awakened and given clear instructions from the angel that led him out of the prison and a couple of blocks away.

- God wants to intervene in our lives, **but we must be humble and listen to His instructions if we want to be set free or for our circumstances to change.**

#### EFFORT AND COMMON SENSE

**Supernatural intervention does not mean we do not have responsibilities.** Once Peter “came to himself,” he went to Mary’s house to reconvene with his fellow Christians.

- Christianity is a relationship in which both parties actively engage. **God’s goodness is never an excuse for apathy.**

#### “IT’S HIS ANGEL”

The woman who answered the gate for Peter recognized his voice but believed it was his guardian angel. Ancient Jews and many Christians believe in guardian angels, but this isn’t supported with much evidence in the NT.

- Angels aid in God’s work, but we must ensure our theology is accurate.

#### SIXTEEN LIVES LOST

After Peter “described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison,” he left. The next day, Herod had the 16 men who had guarded Peter executed because he had escaped.

- Roman justice required guards to receive the punishment of escaped prisoners. Herod was a Jew and didn’t have to do this.

### LIFE OR DEATH (ACTS 12:20–25)

#### “HEROD WENT DOWN FROM JUDEA TO CAESAREA”

Herod had to move on from the Peter incident and deal with a political upheaval in Tyre and Sidon that arose over a famine. This took place roughly a year after Peter’s release.

- Blastus was a chamberlain and mediator who helped Herod with foreign affairs.

#### HEROD LONGED TO BE LIKE THE WORLD

Herod often imitated the actions of Rome. Here, he took the issue with Tyre and Sidon as an opportunity to present himself like a Caesar.

- It is tempting to want to blend in and please culture/society, but **we must remember that the ways of the world lead to chaos** (Romans 8:6; Proverbs 16:25).

#### “IT’S THE VOICE OF A GOD AND NOT OF A MAN”

We do not know if the people’s response is sincere, but they ascribe a god-like status to this evil man. Herod could have rejected this praise, but Luke implies he reveled in it.

- **Public affirmation can be dangerous and addictive because the short-term high can make us compromise our morals.**

#### THE COST OF MAN’S APPROVAL

Herod knew of God but acted in **hubris and opposition** and **“did not give the glory to God.”** So, He struck him down via an angel.

- Though it often appears like selfish people are successful, **everyone will be held into account for the choices they make in his life** (Matthew 12; Romans 14; 2 Corinthians 5).

#### “EATEN BY WORMS AND DIED”

Josephus recorded that Herod lived in pain for five days before dying at the age of 44. Scholars believe this was from round worms.

- Some argue Herod’s death was natural and coincidental, but God knows when we will die (Job 14:5). This should humble us to trust Him with what time we have.

#### “BUT THE WORD OF GOD SPREAD...”

Even after all the persecution and evil of Herod, the Christians persevered, “completed their relief mission,” and continued to flourish in the expansion of the gospel.

- **The opposition just strengthened and inspired the Christians to continue spreading the good news of Jesus.**

#### THE TRUTH ALWAYS WINS IN THE END

As the world around us implodes upon itself, **the truth perseveres and changes the lives of willing recipients.**

- Though we have hardships on our journey to our inevitable deaths, **the truth of God’s Kingdom is eternal, and we will experience it forever if we choose to live by His Word.**

#### WE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS

- Culture’s message is to elevate self above everything else. This is contrary to the message of Christ (Matthew 6:33).
- We’re also to, **“If possible, live at peace with everyone,”** but we must aim to please Jesus first. Most of the time, we cannot simultaneously please culture and Jesus.

#### PRAYER KEEPS US FOCUSED

- Living for Jesus is not always easy and does not insulate us from pressure or hardships. **To remain faithful and focused, we must have a consistent prayer life.**
- Prayer is effective when we are living right (James 5:16) and when it is done with intentionality (Matthew 6:9–13; **P.R.A.Y.**).

#### THINK LONG-TERM, NOT QUICK FIX

- **Our culture is quick fixes, blasts of pleasure, and letting emotions steer decisions.** This lifestyle will inevitably result in pain, chaos, brokenness, and confusion—not to mention the eternal consequences for sin.
- **How are our ways working on macro and micro levels?**
- **Christianity is often difficult, requires effort, and teaches us to seek Him first.** It is also the only path to understanding our existence and experiencing Heaven.
- In Jesus, we are fulfilled, at peace, and find love and security because **we’re set free of the consequences of self, society, and sin.**