

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 24TH, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

### MARTYRDOM (ACTS 12:1-5) SUCCESS IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

Luke told us about the success of the early church in Chapter 11: the first Jewish Christians praised God for extending salvation to the Gentiles, the gospel spread throughout the region, a church was planted in Antioch, and the church sent relief to Judea during a famine.

- Yet in Chapter 12, Luke tells us, **"About that time King Herod violently attacked...the church."**

#### KING HEROD

There are several men referred to as "Herod" in the NT. The "Herods" were Jewish kings placed over Israel during the days of the Roman Empire.

- **Herod the Great** sought to kill Jesus by slaughtering all infant boys (Mt. 2). His son, **Herod Antipas**, was involved in Jesus' and John the Baptizer's deaths. His grandson, **Herod Agrippa I**, is the one mentioned here.

#### THE FIRST MARTYRED APOSTLE

King Herod **"violently attacked some who belonged to the church, and he executed James, John's brother, with the sword."**

- James was the first of the 12 who followed Jesus to be martyred, and though church history and traditions account for the deaths of the other apostles, James' death is the only one recorded in Scripture.

#### PART OF JESUS' INNER CIRCLE

James wasn't just one of the 12 apostles; he was often mentioned with Peter and his brother John as Jesus' closest disciples.

- James and John asked to be closest to Jesus in His glory. Jesus confirmed **they would drink of the same cup and be baptized with the same baptism (Mark 10:35-40), and the promise made then was fulfilled here with James' death.**

#### HEROD SOUGHT TO GAIN PUBLIC APPROVAL

Seeing the popularity gained from the killing of James, **Herod had Peter arrested.** He was unwilling to allow another prison break (Acts 5:17-21), so he **"assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him."**

- It's possible that Peter remembered Jesus' words (John 21:18) as the prison doors closed and thought this was it for Him.

#### "THE CHURCH WAS PRAYING FERVENTLY"

It seemed that every door had closed with the death of one apostle and the looming death of another, but there was a door that remained open: the door to the throne room of grace.

- The word used to describe the church's fervent prayer for Peter is a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits. **They didn't plan marches or protests—they prayed!**

#### FREEDOM (ACTS 12:6-19)

##### "WHEN HEROD WAS ABOUT TO BRING HIM OUT"

On the night before Peter's probable execution, he was sound asleep until an angel of the Lord woke him up and instantly set him free.

- The chains, guards, and prison doors were unable to stop God's plans. Though Peter didn't completely understand what was happening, he obeyed. **Does our faith move us forward even without having full understanding?**

##### "HE THOUGHT HE WAS SEEING A VISION"

Peter made his way to the iron gate that led into the city and watched as it opened automatically in front of Him.

- Many of us worry about the "iron gate" in our path, forgetting all God has done for us along the path. **We must trust His faithfulness to take care of the obstacles when we come to them, just as He has time and time again.**

#### PETER WAS RESCUED AND JAMES WAS NOT

For reasons unknown to us, Peter was rescued and James was martyred.

- It may not make sense to us that Peter was spared while James, one of the 12 and an important part of the early church, was not. **There is nothing that happens that is outside of God's purview. He is sovereign over all, and He knows what He's doing.**

#### THEY ARE SO MUCH LIKE US

Throughout this passage, we see the relatable reactions of the disciples.

- Rhoda, in her excitement, left Peter standing at the gate. The disciples had a hard time believing God had answered their prayers and **attributed what had happened to superstition and tradition**, believing it was Peter's guardian angel.

##### "HE LEFT AND WENT TO ANOTHER PLACE"

Peter, not wanting to draw attention to himself after being miraculously set free from prison again, calmed the celebration and instructed them to go to Jerusalem and tell James, the brother of Jesus, about all that had happened.

- Peter will only be seen one more time in the book of Acts, with the Counsel of Jerusalem in Chapter 15.

#### "THERE WAS A GREAT COMMOTION"

Starting in verse 18, Luke tells of Herod's reaction the next morning, **when he discovered that Peter had escaped.**

- In his anger, a Jewish king chose to enforce Roman justice, which said that if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard would receive the prisoner's punishment. In this case, **Herod ordered the execution of 16 men.**

#### BLASPHEMY (ACTS 12:20-25)

##### IT DOES NOT PAY TO FIGHT AGAINST GOD.

About a year had passed since Peter's release, but Luke connects these two events **to show the futility of Herod's continued fight against God and his ultimate demise.**

- He killed James, but it didn't stop God's plan. He sought to gain popularity by arresting Peter, but the apostle was rescued and his work continued.

#### HEROD RECEIVES THE PRAISE OF THE PEOPLE

The people of Tyre and Sidon seem to have been in a worse famine than Judea. They were dependent on Herod to supply them with food, so they put aside their differences and asked for peace after securing the support of Blastus.

- Herod delivered a speech to them, and they began to shout, **"It's the voice of a god and not of a man!"**

#### JUDGMENT FROM THE GOD HE FAILED TO GIVE GLORY

It was wrong of the people of Tyre and Sidon to deify Herod, but Herod was judged publicly because he failed to refuse it.

- Luke says, **"At once an angel of the Lord struck him...and he was eaten by worms and died."** Josephus' words tell that Herod immediately had severe stomach pain which lasted for five days until **he died by the hand of God.**

#### THE WORK OF GOD CONTINUES

Luke picks back up with the narrative from Ch.11. The church was successful in assisting others during a famine, and the word of God spread and multiplied in the face of intense persecution.

- With the closing of Ch. 12, Luke is showing how the gospel was proclaimed in Judea and Samaria, and the rest of Acts will show it spread to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

#### THE WORK CONTINUES

- In the absence of James, other Believers stepped up to spread the gospel.
- We honor God in His work of spreading the gospel with whatever time He has given us and trust that His work will continue after us.
- **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things"** (Matthew 25:23).

#### THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES

- When Saul converted, Herod stepped up as persecutor of the church. Inevitably, when he died, another stepped into his place.
- We can expect opposition against the work of God.
- Fighting against God is futile, and God will judge those who oppose His work and workers.

#### THE PATTERN OF PRAYER

- At least 16 times in the book of Acts, Luke shows how seriously the early church took their privilege and responsibility to pray.
- Do we see the great privilege we have in petitioning the God of the universe?
- Do we see the responsibility we have, as children of God, to communicate to the Father through prayer?
- **"The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds"**(2 Corinthians 10:4).