

## HEROD GOES TOO FAR (vv. 19-24)

*Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. <sup>20</sup> He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.*

*<sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." <sup>23</sup> Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

*<sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*

1. Why are some things that might have contributed to Herod's exaggerated sense of pride and accomplishment?
2. What was the last straw for God?
3. What are some ways we are guilty of exalting ourselves rather than giving praise to God?
4. Why is this such a serious offense against a holy God?
5. How would you compare and contrast the fleeting glory of Herod's reign over Judea with the success of the gospel?
6. What does it mean for "the word of God... to spread and flourish?"
7. How can it flourish in our lives?



Whoever said following Christ was easy forgot to tell the early church!

When Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps to strengthen the churches they have planted, they remind them, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22)." That is the story of Acts so far. The church is not exempt from tragedy or setback, but the gospel is prevailing in spite of the difficulty.

Tragically, In Acts 12, we are introduced to our first martyr—James, the younger brother of John, the son of Zebedee, the cousin of Jesus. James was more than likely the youngest of the twelve, but the first to lose his life in the cause of Christ.

While James loses his life, Peter is miraculously delivered from the same fate? Why Peter and not James? Why are some miraculously delivered and others are not? Why does God even allow bad things to happen to those who put their confidence in him?

While Acts 12 will not answer all of our questions, it does point us in the right direction.

## **JAMES IS MARTYRED (vv 1-2)**

*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.*

1. While the church initially enjoyed the favor of all the people, it is now experiencing a widening circle of persecution. The persecution that began with the Jewish leadership has led to civil unrest, which in turn has come to the attention of Herod. Herod is the Jewish born Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria. He was granted the title “King of the Jews” by Rome.
  - a. How was the message of Jesus a threat to the Jewish leadership?
  - b. How was it a threat to Herod personally?
  - c. How was it a threat to Rome?
  - d. What are some things about the message of Jesus that can be threatening to us?
2. Why do you think God allowed James to suffer at the hand of Herod?
3. Why do you think God allows setbacks and tragedy in our lives?

## **PETER IS DELIVERED (vv. 5-17)**

*<sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.*

*<sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

*<sup>6</sup> The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.*

*<sup>8</sup> Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him.*

*<sup>9</sup> Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.*

*<sup>10</sup> They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.*

*<sup>11</sup> Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.”*

*<sup>12</sup> When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”*

*<sup>15</sup> “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”*

*<sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.*

*<sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.*

1. What do you make of the fact that Peter was sleeping soundly the night before he was to go on trial and be executed?
2. Make a list of everything that God does to deliver Peter from prison and the hand of Herod?
3. Which one of these do you think was most impressive to Luke? Why?
4. Which is most impressive to you? Why?
5. What did Peter initially think was happening to him?
6. Why do you think God delivered Peter while James lost his life?
7. How is God glorified in our deliverance?
8. How is God glorified in our suffering?
9. How should we respond when God allows us to suffer rather than miraculously delivering us?
10. What do you make of the fact that the church was earnestly praying for Peter’s delivery yet were unable to believe it was really happening?
11. What, if anything, do we learn about our own prayer life from this passage?