

## Episode #1207 Acts 12 Part 3-Herod's Horrific Death

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. In chapter 12 of Acts, we saw Peter imprisoned by the evil King Herod, who intended to murder him after the Passover feast concluded. The Lord, however, send an angel who miraculously delivered him. Peter, realizing he was free, went to the home of John Mark's mother Mary, where many were gathered praying. The girl Rhoda keeping the door was so excited when she heard Peter at the door that she rushed to tell everyone, rather than letting him in! At last he is allowed inside, and speaks to the believers there.

III. Peter's Miraculous Deliverance. Acts 12:3-19.

A. Verse 17. There was no doubt much joyful talk!

1. Peter shushes them, the oriental sign with the palm out to indicate they should be quiet and listen to him, knowing he needs to give them instructions and then go into hiding. It would not be right to presume that the Lord would rescue him again if he tarried and was again caught.
2. He tells the story, giving the Lord, not the angel, credit.
3. This James obviously not the James Herod murdered in verse 2. That James was the brother of John, one of the twelve. This James was the Lord's half-brother. Acts 15 and Acts 21. He wrote the letter called James in the Bible. He probably had the gift of administrations or governments—I Corinthians 12:28.
4. Peter leaves to hide, we aren't told where. He trusts the Lord to take care of Herod.

B. Verse 18. The soldiers probably couldn't believe it. They must have searched ward after ward: no Peter. The Bible speaks of it rather humorously here in a typical expression for Luke. They must have been horrified. They had been so careful to keep Peter knowing if he escaped it could and probably would cost them their lives. They had done all humanly possible, but who can stop God?

C. Verse 19. Herod finds his plan to gain favor from the Jews stymied!

1. He tries to account for this. In doing so Herod came face-to-face with many facts and much truth. He could have seen in this the hand of God and learned much from it.
2. The guards' testimony must have demonstrated that they were not derelict in their duty. They were doubtless conscientious men, but a great miracle had taken place. This was a stupendous thing, with the noisy chains, the prison made of three different jails, and everything else involved in this deliverance.
3. Yet Herod was not ready to admit this. He puts them to death so they could not say any more about it or spread their story simply in order to save face, truly a miscarriage of justice.
4. These guards could have given a marvelous testimony to the deliverance of Peter simply by reporting what had happened. Herod has silenced the guards' testimony, yet God will not have the truth silenced. Herod silenced their testimony, so God makes him into a testimony.

5. Herod goes back down to Caesarea humiliated. Often people think if they can get out of town they can get away from their troubles. But the Lord's eyes are upon him now, and he will not escape justice merely by changing his location.

#### IV. Herod's Grim Death. Acts 12:20-23.

- A. Verse 20. Tyre (meaning A Rock) and Sidon (meaning Hunting) were cities in Pheonicia north-west of Israel by Galilee, where Herod had his jurisdiction. We do not know how they angered him, but Herod was petty and quarrelsome. They were supplied with food by Herod's country, so this was bad for them. They were suffering financially and commercially by this argument with Herod. With perhaps their very lives on the line, they must make up to Herod. They get Blastus (meaning Sprout) the king's aide as their friend, and ask for peace.
- B. Verse 21. Herod was open to this. When the day comes, Herod comes out in royal apparel. Josephus says his clothes were made of silver tissue, so that they sparkled and flashed in the sun, making him look otherworldly. "Throne" is the Greek *bema*, usually translated *judgment seat*. Throne literally means a seat of government, but here it is centered down to a chair. Herod starts an oration. Perhaps he wants to scold them, and get them to grovel before him a bit before he forgives them.
- C. Verse 22. Their chant ascribes to Herod deity, probably suggested by his flashing clothes. Kings were often equated with gods in that day, though not in Israel. Herod probably was not trying to look like a god, but he likes this praise, and is filled with pride in his heart. They were giving him a place that should belong to God alone.
- D. Verse 23. The evil line of usurper kings the Herods had done many wicked things, but maybe not anything this blasphemous.
  1. Herod drew the Lord's attention by murdering His friend James. It is a fearful thing for a man like Herod to have the eyes of the righteous Judge trained upon him! Now a tragic thing happens to him, and he is struck down.
  2. His punishment was immediate, right in front of those foolish chanters. First Herod is smitten, then he is eaten of worms. The striking down was immediate, but did the worms eat him right away, or over days? Either way, a horrible way to die.
  3. That he died = Greek *exepsuxen*, meaning he gave up the soul. That is how a Hebrew would describe it. Now he is no longer a living soul, but a dead soul.
  4. Herod was not a god, but very much a man! He ended the testimony of the prison guards, so now his own death becomes a testimony.
  5. What would it be like today if we were still living in conditions like the Acts period and God would deal with people so severely if they failed to give Him the glory He deserves, or if they would take to themselves glory that belongs to God? This fits the character of the time as part of God's government. It does not fit the time when God acts only and exclusively in grace.
  6. Herod was a renegade Jew. He had light and he was responsible as an Israelite under God. His sin was grievous, and this is how God dealt with him. This is how severely God will deal with every ruler when He governs the earth. Here, the kingdom was present in part.

#### V. The Mission of Barnabas Ends. Acts 12:24-25.

- A. Verse 24. For the word of God to grow, it had to be the people who received the Word who grew. These are still Jews who believe. There are no Gentiles in the

picture, and there will be no Gentiles in the picture until the next chapter. Then they will come in very definitely, but never to the exclusion of the people of Israel, as we will see. Just like when Saul was removed as a persecutor (by conversion, Acts 9:31), now when Herod is removed by death, the result is the word of God grows and multiplies. God's word triumphs in spite of all the enemies that rally against it. That is the way things are when God's government is in the world.

B. Verse 25. This returns us to the story of Acts 11:30, so chapter 12 was a parenthesis.

1. Barnabas and Saul fulfill their mission and return to Antioch.
2. They bring John Mark, Acts 12:12. He probably wanted to join them.  
Colossians 4:10. Mark was Barnabas' relative. He will appear several times again, and it is here he is brought before us as a part of the ministry.

C. This ends the second great portion of the book of Acts. The first: the great unity in Jerusalem, ended with Saul's persecution after the death of Stephen. The second: the great scattering ends with Herod's persecution after the death of James. Now, the third section: the ministry of the great apostle Paul. We will begin this portion in the following chapter.

VI. Conclusion: Peter did not presume on God's deliverance, but went into hiding from Herod's persecution. Meanwhile Herod discovered his escape, and wrongfully blamed the guards, though they had done all that was humanly possible. Herod drew God's attention, and when he appeared before the people of Tyre and Sidon and they flattered him by proclaiming him a god, an angel of the Lord struck him down for failing to give God the glory. Thus the word of the Lord is free to grow once again without hindrance. When God acts in government, He will see to it that nothing can stand in His way. Yet today, He acts not in government, but only and exclusively in grace. May the day His government again works in this world come soon.