

**Text:** Acts 12:1-24

**Title:** Persecution, Round 4 (ch 4, 5, 8 are the earlier rounds)

**Truth:** If you don't like worms, don't kill God's servants, and don't be arrogant!

**Date/Location:** 3/27/2023 and 4/3/2013 at FBC; also 3/13, 20/2024

## I. The Murder of James and Imprisonment of Peter, v. 1-4

- A. This all happened around Passover, which is usually late March to early April, and the days of unleavened bread which follow.
- B. Persecution. Herod Agrippa I (37-44 AD) killed James the son of Zebedee, probably by beheading him. That's like how a previous Herod killed John the Baptist. If you are like me, you easily get confused about which Herod is which. Here's a little help:
  - 1. **Herod the Great** was the first one, king of Judea when Jesus was born, who killed many children in Bethlehem.
  - 2. He had several children, one of whom was **Archelaus**. He reigned in Judea after his father (Matthew 2:22)
  - 3. Another of Herod the Great's sons was **Herod Antipas**. He was the one who killed John the Baptist.
  - 4. Another of Herod the Great's sons was **Aristobulus**. In turn, he had a son named **Agrippa**, who is the one we are talking about here.
- C. This murder pleased the Jews!? What kind of true believing person is pleased by the death of someone for believing differently than they do? Here is substantial evidence of their rejection of God.
- D. Do you remember who the other son of Zebedee was? His name was John, the one we know who wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters with his name, and the book of Revelation. He lived 40 to 50 years after his brother James was killed. It seems reasonable to think that John had *that* family loss heavy on his mind for the remainder of his life. Not that he had vengeance in mind, for Herod Agrippa died soon after murdering James. John certainly must have trusted God about this as he lived and labored

on for Christ. He is someone we can look to for encouragement when we face long-term trials.

E. Peter is jailed about the time of the anniversary of when Jesus was arrested and crucified. This around 43 or 44, the year that Agrippa died, so we are talking about a decade or so after the crucifixion of Jesus.

## II. The Miraculous Deliverance of Peter, v. 5-19

### A. Constant Prayer, 5

Why would the disciples believe as they did about prayer? Why wouldn't they argue about God's sovereignty and foreordained plan and how it renders all future events certain, thus destroying the impetus to prayer? Could it be:

1. Because they saw and knew Jesus prayed? Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35, 6:46, John 17, Matthew 26:36-44; Mark 14:32-39; Luke 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18
2. Because Jesus told them to pray? Matthew 5:44, 9:38; Luke 6:28
3. Because Jesus taught them to pray? Matthew 6:5-13, Mark 11:25
4. Because Jesus promised them amazing results when they prayed? John 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-26; Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24.

### B. Miracle answer to prayer, 6-10

1. Peter had to be thinking that he was going to experience what Jesus said in John 21:18-19 about being crucified. But no so— Peter would be able to continue his God-ordained ministry for some time longer.
2. Peter thought he was dreaming. Who wouldn't?
3. We may read over "the gate opened of its own accord" and not think much of it, since we have automatic doors all over the place. But remember, before electricity and light sensors and motors and hydraulics and all the rest, how did this happen? God has not only a large amount of power, but He has power of such a *kind* that we do not possess or understand.

- C. Back to normal reality, Peter walks to Mary’s house, v. 11-12. This Mary was the mother of John Mark. The angel left Peter when the miraculous part was over. Now normal means (secondary causation, not direct miracle) kicked back in. Peter realized what had happened.
- D. At Mary’s home, v. 13-17. News of answered prayer like this spreads quickly, but sometimes it takes a few minutes for the answer to sink in and for us to realize what God has done. We are like Rhoda too!
- E. Verses 18-19 tell us that the soldiers did not fare well. Their punishment was the punishment expected for their prisoner, which was death. This does raise a question—for what crime was Peter imprisoned? What did he do that was so wrong as to deserve death? It was only injustice that put him there—Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, and he had a desire for political support from the Jews. This is what gets me regarding those stories of Christians imprisoned for their faith. But we ought to expect the world to hate us, because it hated the Lord first. And, we ought to expect them to attack the person rather than the preaching, because they have nothing that can justify their wicked behavior.
- F. Peter went away for a while. He could not go back to Judea, at least for the time being, for obvious reasons.

### **III. The Death of Herod, v. 20-24**

- A. 12:23 says that Herod was eaten by worms and died. It is not the reverse, that he died and then was eaten by worms. Uggh!
- B. History/Tradition: Herod Agrippa I possibly had an infection of intestinal round worms. Wikipedia reports that he died suddenly—that is true—but it speculates that he was poisoned. That is not impossible and could fit with what Scripture says.

“Agrippa died unexpectedly in the year 44, after only three years of reign over Judea, during the Games of Caesarea in honor of the emperor. Patronizing the games, he appeared there in dazzling silver finery in front of the crowd who acclaimed him and compared him to a god, a blasphemous remark for a Jew against which the king did not then protest. Some of his contemporaries

read as a divine punishment for this blasphemy the cause of his death which occurred shortly after: According to the Acts of the Apostles which appears in the New Testament, it would be an angel, come at the time of the declarations of the people who therefore compared him to a God, who would have struck him, then had him devoured by worms (Acts 12:20–23). Two days later, he was seized with violent abdominal pains and died after five days of agony, at the age of fifty-three years. Before he died he scolded his friends for flattering him, and accepted his imminent death in a state of Teshuva [repentance]. The precise causes of his death are unknown, but from that time on rumors of poisoning circulated. Several researchers believe that the poisoning by the Romans worried about his excessive political ambitions is likely...”  
[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod\\_Agrippa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Agrippa)]

- C. This worm-death was an immediate judgment by God for Herod not giving God the glory, but rather taking it all for himself. But I see it also as the culmination of God’s “time” for Herod, like in our world which has done so many evils. There will come a time when the hammer will drop with no remedy and sinners will be destroyed. See Revelation 6-19, 20.
- D. It is interesting to think of the politics of people and trade and how it formed the backdrop of this situation.
- E. It is also very interesting to see how a terrible enemy of the gospel was killed by God. Then, v. 24 says, the word of God grew and multiplied (as in 11:21, 24). The word of our God stands forever. Even after many centuries, and hundreds of ungodly leaders, God’s word goes on.

## Conclusion

Emphasize in your minds the early church’s example of prayer. It is amazing. Think on what they learned from Jesus. Let us ask the Father to help us do likewise.

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