



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Politician Fights With God

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Acts 12:1-11 *“Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. 2) And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. 3) And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4) And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. 5) So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. 6) And on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. 7) And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter’s side and roused him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And his chains fell off his hands. 8) And the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ 9) And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10) And when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel departed from him. 11) And when Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’”*

“THE APOSTLES THEN BECAME THE SPECIFIC TARGET OF THE KING’S EFFORTS TO SUPPRESS THE CHRISTIANS. JAMES WAS BEHEADED, AND PETER WAS PUT IN PRISON IN ANTICIPATION OF THE SAME FATE. BUT NOT EVEN THE KING WAS ABLE TO STEM THE TIDE WHEN GOD WAS BEHIND IT. INDEED, THE KING FOUND HIMSELF FIGHTING AGAINST GOD AND SUFFERED THE CONSEQUENCES.”
JOHN B. POLHILL

Was there a history of bloodthirsty politicians in the Herod family? How did Herod choose to disregard the advice of the famous Pharisee, Gamaliel? Who is the first and only Apostle to receive the martyr’s crown in the New Testament? What word is used for prayer here that parallels Jesus’ prayer in the garden before He is crucified? From which word in this passage do we get our word “automatic?” Who won the fight?

FOCUS ON FUTURE BIBLE STUDIES:

- MARCH 3: ACTS 12:12-19 *IMPOSSIBLE PRAYER ANSWERED WITH LITTLE FAITH*
- MAY 11-13: ACTS 12:20-24 *THE FOOLISH LEADER WHO FOUGHT AGAINST GOD*

“Herod the king” of our passage is Herod Agrippa I (born in 10 B.C.), the grandson of whom was modestly called “Herod the Great,” and the Jewish princess, Mariamne. Herod Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus who had been murdered by his own father, Herod the Great, who had murdered two other sons, his wife, Mariamne, and her mother. Herod the Great’s most famous wholesale legal murder was brutally aborting the babies of Bethlehem (Mt. 2:16) in order to kill Jesus while he was still a baby. Another son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, had married Herodias who was responsible for the murder of John the Baptist. After his father’s murder, Herod Agrippa I and his mother, Bernice, were sent to Rome where he grew up in good relationship with the imperial family. After fleeing his debtors, he was given a

BIBLE STUDIES

THURSDAY @ 6:30 AM –PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3RD FLOOR EAST CONFERENCE ROOM

THURSDAY @ 7:00 AM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3RD FLOOR EAST CONFERENCE ROOM

Virginia

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pension by his uncle, Herod Antipas, but soon returned to Rome, only to be imprisoned by the Emperor Tiberius for offending him. When Tiberius died, his childhood friend, Emperor Caligula, released him and gave him the kingdom of one of his uncles, Philip, as well as Lysanias (Lk. 3:1). When Herod Antipas was banished in A.D. 39, Herod Agrippa also received his tetrarchy. And finally, in A.D. 41, he received Judea and Samaria, thus his territory included all the kingdom of Herod the Great. He became so desirous to please the Jews that he was known to be guided by his Queen, Cypros, who was guided by Gamaliel, the great Pharisee of the Sanhedrin who had taught Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul.

"JAMES WAS THE VICTIM OF HEROD'S SCHEMES TO WIN POPULAR FAVOR AND PETER'S IMPRISONMENT WAS DUE TO THE SAME SCHEME." WILLIAM BARCLAY

I. THE POLITICIAN'S POWER PLOY ACTS 12:1-4

"*Now about that time*" points back to the famine announced in Acts 11:28-30 and the gift that Barnabas and Saul were bringing from the half-Gentile church for "*those brothers dwelling in Judea.*" It is possible that they are in Judea at the time because they return at the end of this chapter (v. 25). Herod may have already killed "*some*" in the church in Jerusalem until he got bolder and ignored the wisdom of Gamaliel to leave the Apostles alone, "*or else you may even be found fighting against God*" (Acts 5:39). The fact that he killed the Apostle James "*with a sword*" means that he probably falsely accused him of leading the people astray after false gods (Deut. 13:12-15), and thereby James became the first and only Apostle to acquire the martyr's crown in the New Testament. Jesus had predicted that James would drink the same cup as Himself (Mt. 20:23). Herod, seeing how much the death of James had pleased the Jews, went on to arrest the leading Apostle, Peter. But he put Peter under maximum security with a rotation of sixteen soldiers guarding him.

"HE CUNNINGLY CHOSE THE PASSOVER SEASON, WHEN JERUSALEM WOULD BE THROGGED WITH DEVOUT JEWISH PILGRIMS. THAT WOULD ENSURE HIS ACT MAXIMUM COVERAGE." JOHN MACARTHUR

II. THE PETITIONERS' PASSIONATE PRAYER ACTS 12:5

Luke must have smiled as he penned such a majestic understatement, "*but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.*" The sweet smelling savor of prayer arises again, as has been emphasized in every chapter we have studied in Acts, and it is the greatest privilege of the church. The word "*fervently*" means to stretch a muscle, even to its limits, to strain, and even to be in agony. Luke has used this word earlier of Christ in prayer before the cross, "*And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" (Lk. 22:44). As in the last chapter, when one was to suffer, they all joined in. As Peter is incarcerated they continue with him every moment in fervent prayer.

"THE STRICTER THE CUSTODY, THE MORE WONDEROUS THE DISPLAY." CHRYSOSTOM

III. THE OMNIPOTENT'S PERFECT PLAN ACTS 12:6-11

As the mock trial threatens the next day with bloodthirsty Herod, Peter is sound asleep. Though he is bound, each hand shackled to a soldier, in spite of the light, he has to be "*struck*" (not a soft word), to wake him up. When told to "*get up quickly,*" "*His chains fell off his hands.*" He is still so groggy that he has to be told to put on his clothes and his shoes and his cloak to get ready to leave. From that inner prison cell he simply follows the angel until he is free. Even the iron gate opened for them "*automatically.*" Jesus had told him he would be old (Jn. 21:18) and he wrote the most beautiful words of God's care (I Pet. 5:7).

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) In what ways are you fighting against God?
- 2) Is your confidence in yourself or do you depend upon God in Prayer?
- 3) Are you at peace with God and therefore, "*Casting all your care upon Him for He cares for you*"?