

Great Events Of The Bible – Herod  
Persecuted The Church; He Died!

(SLIDE #1) “GREAT EVENTS OF  
THE BIBLE -- HEROD PERSECUTED  
THE CHURCH; HIS DEATH!

**Introduction:**

- A. Text: Ac. 12:1-19
- B. At The End Of Acts 9, The Story Returned To Peter Who Went To Lydda And Then Joppa.
- C. In Chapter 10, Peter Went To Caesarea, Taught Those In Cornelius’ House, And After They Received The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit, He Baptized Them Into Christ!
- D. In Chapter 11, Peter Returned To Jerusalem And Defended His Actions To The Other Apostles And Brethren In Jerusalem!
- E. In This Chapter, We See Some Vicious Persecution Brought Upon The Church!

**I. (Slide #2) Persecution Again Rears Its Ugly Head Against The Christians -- Herod Persecuted The Church! Ac. 12:1-19**

- A. Text: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. <sup>2</sup>Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. <sup>3</sup>And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup>So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. <sup>5</sup>Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. <sup>6</sup>And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. <sup>7</sup>Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off *his* hands. <sup>8</sup>Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and tie on your sandals’; and so he did. And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me.’ <sup>9</sup>So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup>When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they

came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. <sup>11</sup>And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.’ <sup>12</sup>So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. <sup>13</sup>And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup>When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. <sup>15</sup>But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’ Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, ‘It is his angel.’ <sup>16</sup>Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup>But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.’ And he departed and went to another place. <sup>18</sup>Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup>But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.”

B. The Church Experienced Phenomenal Growth In Its First Days. Acts 2,3

C. Subsequent Persecutions:

1. Persecution began when the Sanhedrin twice arrested Peter and John. Acts 4,5
2. Stephen’s pointed and powerful indictment of the unbelief of the Jews caused them to become enraged and they stoned him to death! Acts 7
3. Saul of Tarsus, with authority from the Jewish leaders, led a determined onslaught to try to eradicate Christianity from the face of the Earth! Acts 8,9.
  - a. However, his conversion brought an incredible impediment to that persecution.
  - b. In fact, the Lord’s Church experienced peace and multiplied after this assault abated. Ac. 9:31
    1. Gentiles had been invited into the Church. Ac. 10
    2. Peter defended those actions to the other Apostles and Christians in Jerusalem. Ac. 11:1-18
    3. The Gospel was spreading. Ac. 11:19-21
    4. The Apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch. He edified the brethren and converted many more. He then went to Tarsus to assist him in that work; they labored in Antioch for a year. Ac. 11:22-26

- D. Then Another Vicious Persecution From A Different Source Arose! 12:1-4
1. Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great determined that he would oppress and mistreat certain ones of the Christians!
    - a. His grandfather, Herod the Great, was appointed to be king of Judea by the Romans about 37-34 B.C.
      1. The Herods were not of Jewish heritage; they were Edomites by lineage -- descendants of Esau.
      2. When Herod the Great got the throne, he was determined to keep it by ANY means possible; he even murdered his wife and two sons.
      3. He is the same one who killed all the children of Bethlehem in an attempt to thwart the prophesied "King of the Jews -- Jesus" from coming to power.
    - b. Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas, is the one who killed John the Baptizer, Mk. 6:14-29 and mocked Jesus. Lk. 23:7-12.
    - c. The Herod in Acts 12 is Herod Agrippa I who was ruler over Judea and Samaria.
      1. He was the grandson of Herod the Great and the nephew of Herod Antipas.
      2. He had been given part of Herod the Great's domain by the Emperor Claudius; now he ruled it all.
      3. He was the father of Drusilla, Agrippa II, and Bernice.
  2. This is the first time we see persecution against the Church originate outside the Sanhedrin. Having a friend, Herod, as king, they saw this as THE opportunity to exterminate Christianity!
  3. This time the persecution is driven by a king who liked Judaism and sought to please the Jews. This is persecution that originates politically instead of religiously.
  4. And his harassment is very pointedly directed -- right at the Apostles! 1-4
    - a. This was in A.D. 44, 3 years after the conversion of Cornelius.
    - b. This is the first account of persecution against the Church since peace had been restored. Ac. 9:31 (About A.D. 40)
    - c. Herod had James, the brother of John, killed with a sword. 2
      1. Jesus had foretold that James would be martyred.
        - a. Mk. 10:39 "Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;'"
        - b. Mt. 20:22,23 "But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' <sup>23</sup>So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with;'"
      2. James thus became the first martyr among the Apostles. (Remember that Stephen was the FIRST Christian to be martyred. Ac. 7)

3. Amazingly, this event is recorded in only 11 words in the English text and only 7 words in the Greek text! There are no glowing words; just the facts!!!
4. An interesting tidbit -- James was the FIRST Apostle to die; his brother John was the last to die!
- d. Seeing that the Jews were pleased by his assassination of James; Herod therefore determined to kill more of the Apostles!
  1. He reminds us of a person who commits a crime and likes it so much that he is addicted to committing more crimes.
  2. He reminds us of a wild animal that kills a human; once introduced to the kill and the smell of blood, he is quickly on the prowl to kill again!!!
  3. **(Slide #3)** Herod's next action -- the arrest of Peter, a dear friend of James -- he goes for the one viewed as THE LEADER of the Apostles!!
  4. Why did he not immediately kill Peter?
    - a. It was during the Days of Passover.
    - b. He likely wanted to appear to be respectful of the customs of the Jews.
    - c. Thus, he decided to keep Peter imprisoned until after the Passover.
      1. Four squads of soldiers guarded Peter -- 4 quarternions (groups of 4) = 16 soldiers!
      2. Herod intended to bring him before the people as soon as the Passover observance was completed and to execute him before the Jews!

E. Peter Was Supernaturally Delivered From Prison. 12:5-11

1. **(Slide #3)** Differing circumstances for the brethren. 5
  - a. Peter, on the one hand, was kept in prison.
  - b. The brethren, on the other hand, prayed fervently to God for him!
    1. Obviously they felt personally helpless to resolve this frightening situation.
    2. They certainly trusted God; thus, they took their fears and their concerns for Peter to Him!
    3. Perhaps too they prayed for Peter's courage, faith, and strength to endure the awful ordeal!
2. As the time neared that Herod would bring Peter before the people to be executed, God sent an Angel to deliver him from prison! 6-11
  - a. The night before Herod was going to bring Peter before the people to be executed the next day, the Lord acted! 6

- b. Peter was sound asleep, chained between two guards. 6
  - 1. He had one hand chained to each guard -- he was determined that what happened to the Sanhedrin when they had Peter would not happen to him [See Ac. 5:17-23] -- HE WILL NOT ESCAPE.
  - 2. Other guards were just outside the door.
  - 3. Herod was determined that there would be NO snags in his plan -- NOTHING and NOONE would help Peter escape or deter him from killing Peter.
- c. An angel freed Peter. 7-11
  - 1. **(Slide #4)** The Lord's angel came to deliver him. 7
  - 2. His arrival was accompanied by light in the prison.
  - 3. The angel, tapping Peter on his side (rib), told him to "Rise quickly!"
  - 4. Immediately the chains fell from Peter's hands!
  - 5. Then the angel told him to put on his clothes, his sandals, and his outer garment; he obeyed. 8
  - 6. Peter followed the angel out of the prison; it was so amazing that Peter thought he was seeing a vision (dreaming a dream)! 9
    - a. His thoughts: "Is this REALLY happening?"
    - b. He saw no humanly possible way of getting out of the dire predicament! The extraordinary measures of confinement seemed hopeless to escape.
  - 7. **(Slide #5)** The angel led Peter to freedom. 10
    - a. The angel directed him past the guards that were at the door, past a second guarded check point, and to the iron gate of the prison that led back to the city. [It was a gate that took 25 men to open it; when it was closed, they left it; no one was going to open it! There was NO REASON to guard it!]
    - b. That door opened spontaneously as they approached it. It opened as if it had a sensor on it that caused it to open!
    - c. Peter and the angel walked down the street together.
    - d. As they walked down that one street, suddenly the angel disappeared and Peter was alone.
  - 8. As Peter regained his wits, he realized that the Lord had delivered him by an angel from the deadly plot of Herod and the Jews. 11
    - a. He realized that THIS REALLY IS HAPPENING to me!
    - b. "I AM free!"
  - 9. Peter's deliverance here is similar to the deliverance of Peter and John's deliverance in Ac. 5:19-24

F. **(Slide #6)** Peter Returned To Meet With The Brethren! 12:12-17

- 1. Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. 12
  - a. Many of the concerned brethren, in deep fear and concern, met together for strength.

- b. They were praying for their beloved brother Peter.
      1. Perhaps they were praying for his strength to endure the harsh confinement.
      2. Perhaps they were praying for him emotionally and psychologically.
      3. But, with James having just been killed, they obviously were praying for God for his release!
2. When Peter came to the house, he knocked at the outer entrance (Some translations say “gate”), a maid (slave girl) named Rhoda answered the knock. 13
3. When she heard and recognized Peter’s voice, Rhoda was so overwhelmed with emotion that she did not open the door; rather, she ran back into the house and announced to the praying brethren that PETER WAS STANDING AT THE OUTER ENTRANCE! 14
4. The brethren did not believe Rhoda! 15
  - a. They first told her that she was “mad” or “insane!” (See its use in Ac. 26:24,25 “Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’ <sup>25</sup>But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’”)
  - b. She continued to confidently assert that Peter was at the outer entrance.
  - c. Then they concluded that Peter’s angel was at the entrance.
    1. Some surmise that they thought it was Peter’s guardian angel that was at the entrance.
    2. Others believe they thought it was an angel who had come to announce Peter’s death.
5. Peter continued to knock; finally, they opened the door and were astonished that HE REALLY WAS THERE!!!! 16
6. Peter Quickly quieted their elation and informed them of his delivery from prison! 17
  - a. Imagine their unabated excitement! 17
  - b. However, Peter quickly gestured to them to be quiet.
  - c. He told them every detail of his deliverance from prison by the angel of the Lord.
  - d. Then he told them to report his deliverance to James, the Lord’s brother, and to the brethren.
7. Peter immediately left Mary’s house and went to another location. 17

- G. Confusion And Anger Confounded Herod And The Guards! 12:18,19
1. When daylight arrived, the guards realized that Peter was gone.
  2. This caused an instant commotion! Imagine their questioning, “WHAT HAPPENED? HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?” This is the same Greek word used in Ac. 19:23 describing the angry mob in Ephesus!
  3. And imagine their fear! Remember that Roman soldiers were under the penalty of death if they let a prisoner escape. Ac. 16:27
  4. When Herod came to bring Peter out to be executed and realized that he had escaped, he questioned the guards and then commanded that all 16 [See verse 4] of them be executed! 19

## II. (Slide #7) The Death Of Herod. Ac. 12:20-24

- A. (Slide #15) Text: “Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s *country*. <sup>21</sup>So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. <sup>22</sup>And the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’ <sup>23</sup>Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. <sup>24</sup>But the word of God grew and multiplied.”
- B. (Slide #16) Herod Left Judea And Went To Caesarea. 12:19
1. Historical events suggest that Herod went there to oversee the games and ceremonies honoring the Emperor, Claudius.
  2. He remained in Caesarea.
- C. (►) While In Caesarea, Herod Became ENRAGED Against The People Of Tyre And Sidon. 12:20
1. Those people sought to appease Herod’s anger.
  2. They knew that most of their food supply came from Herod’s country; therefore, they longed for this peace and were willing to do whatever they had to do they maintain that peaceful relationship.
  3. Thus, they persuaded Blastus, the chief over Herod’s household, to convince the king to be peaceable toward them.

D. (►) Herod's Speech And Death. 12:21-23

1. On an appointed day, Herod sat on his throne in radiant royal apparel. 21
  - a. Josephus says the garment was made of silver.
  - b. He describes Herod entering the theater early on a sunshiny morning; the garment was so resplendent that it caused those who saw it to be astounded. Some were in awe; some were terrified.
2. When Herod gave a great oration, the people magnified him by saying his voice was the voice of a god, not the voice of a man! 21,22
  - a. Some also suggest that this raucous crowd may have included Herod's princes from all over the country. If this is correct, these people were showing their homage to him as king.
  - b. Others speculate that many of this crowd may have been people who were from Tyre and Sidon. If so, the crowd was enrapt with the fact that they were back in the good graces of Herod.
3. This blasphemous idolatry enraged God! He immediately sent an angel who struck Herod with worms that brought about his death!!! 23
  - a. God uses 18 words to tell of Herod's death!
  - b. The Greek word "skwlhkovbrotoç" is a compound word that comes from two words that mean "worms" and "to eat."
  - c. Josephus said that Herod died 5 days after this speech.
    1. See Antiquities, xix, 8. READ!!
    2. Josephus says Herod lingered for 5 days and says that his rotting flesh produced worms. He died in August, A.D. 44.
      - a. Josephus claimed that the king saw an owl sitting on a rope over his head; he immediately realized that this was a messenger of ill tidings.
      - b. He died at age 54, in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of his reign..

E. (Slide #19) Christianity Grew After Herod's Death. 12:24

1. The great enemy, Herod, who attempted to destroy the Church by killing off its leaders one by one was now destroyed! The message: NO ONE and certainly NO MAN will stop the spread of the Word of our God!
2. (►) Herod's death brought the end to another vicious persecution.
3. The result -- The Word of God grew and multiplied -- more and more people became Christians!



#### IV. (Slide #20) Great Truths From This Text.

##### A. (►) Those Who Persecute Christians Will Go To ANY Extremes To Destroy Them!

1. We see wave after wave of persecution against the Lord's people.
2. And politicians will join the persecution if it seems politically expedient!
3. Herod was a vicious persecutor:
  - a. He determined to "start at the top!" His philosophy was "kill the leaders, kill the movement!"
  - b. So, he killed James with the sword.
  - c. Seeing that the "opinion polls" were positive, he was determined to get more positive feedback by killing Peter.
4. Rulers can be TERRIBLE persecutors of the Church!
  - a. Contemptuous -- Herod "laid his hands" on people of the Church!
  - b. Brutal -- he killed James with the sword! His philosophy: kill the leaders, kill the movement! So, he killed an Apostle!
  - c. Mean -- he saw that his actions pleased the Jews (just like in America, "What are the opinion poll results?"); therefore, he could not wait to do more!
  - d. Impotent -- his effort was totally ineffective; an angel delivered Peter; an angel of God brought about Herod's death! And the Church just grew by leaps and bounds!

##### B. (►) The Arrogance Of Pride!

1. The correct way to live: "To God Be The Glory!"
2. We must never allow position to cause us to be overcome with pride!
  - a. Husband
  - b. Boss
  - c. Elder
    1. I Tim. 3:6 "not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil."
    2. I Pet. 5:3 "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;"
  - d. Preacher
  - e. Any leader in any circumstance!
3. The acquisition of power can cause one to exalt himself WAY ABOVE himself; it can inflame ambition and cause one to think he is SO great that he is literally a god himself.
4. We should live "To God Be The Glory!"

- C. (►) The Addictive Nature Of Persecution -- The Amazing Length To Which One Will Stoop When He See's People Pleased With His Sinful Actions!
1. When Herod had James killed, the Jews were delighted.
  2. This only spurred him on to arrest Peter.
  3. How many people do sinful things just because others are pleased, praise them, or prod them on?
- D. (Slide #21) God Is Greater Than ANY Ruler!
1. The All-sovereign God knew what was occurring and could stop it at any time that He chose.
  2. Thus, the night before Peter's execution, God sent His angel and delivered Peter from prison.
  3. And to further show His power over a vicious ruler, God struck the arrogant Herod with worms that killed the pompous king.
  4. God has shown His power over all kinds of rulers -- Pharaoh, Jeroboam, Ahab, Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar, and the Herods.
  5. And He is greater than ANY ruler or dictator of any nation in the world today!
  6. And just as Jesus had declared about the institution of His Church, "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it", Mt. 16:18, the determined persecutions by Paul previously against members of the Church and now the evil intentions of Herod to annihilate the leaders, the Apostles, would not destroy the Lord's Church!
- E. (►) The Unrepentant Proud Will Be Punished!
1. Pr. 16:18 "Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall."
  2. Pr. 18:12 "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor *is* humility."
  3. Pr. 29:23 "A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor."
  4. Js. 4:6 "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: '*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*'"

F. (►) God Can Humble Any Arrogant Ruler And Enable The Cause Of Christ To Again Grow And Multiply!