

## **God Deals with Herod**

**Text:** Acts 12:20-24

### **Introduction:**

A new obstacle has come against the church. King Herod Agrippa I, seeking to secure the favor of the Jews, has begun to harass the church. He has put James, the Apostle, to death by the sword, and then he took Peter into custody, with the intention of bringing him before the Jews, following the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread. And as it began to look bleak for Peter, the church prayed fervently and continuously for Peter, fully recognizing that only a divine act of God, could save him. And the brethren prevailed with God, in their praying! An angel was sent by God, to supernaturally bring Peter out of the prison, at the eleventh hour, as it were, when Herod was preparing to bring Peter out to the Jews, on the next day. After revealing himself to the brethren, who were praying in the house of Mary (the mother of John Mark), Peter had gone to another location, obviously having to maintain a low profile for a time. On the next day, there was a great disturbance in the prison, and after Herod could not find Peter, he had the prison guards put to death. And then he traveled north and west, to the major coastal city of Caesarea.

All of that said, the threat of King Herod, against the church, was still great. And so, this morning, we will find that, unto the preservation of His own glory, and unto the preservation of His church (the "apple of His eye"), God will deal with Herod in a very permanent way, such that he will never even return to Jerusalem!

### **I. God Deals With Herod**

"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" (vs. 20).

Here, we are told that the two coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon (up north in Phoenicia), for some reason (which we are not told), had angered Herod, and thereby earned his disfavor. This was to their own detriment, because, as coastal cities, they depended on the inland portions of Israel for food, where farms and crop produce were accessible. Apparently, Herod had stopped

trading with them, because of his anger toward them. And so, they (the representative leaders/authorities), being desirous to regain his favor, went to him (at Caesarea) with one accord, having gained the favor of Blastus (the king's personal aid), who was able to get them an audience with the king. And so, by the intervention and mediation of Blastus, they sought peace with Herod, in Caesarea. Josephus, the (non-Christian, Jewish) historian (and servant of Rome) (whom we will read in a moment), records this event, stating that it took place during a festival, which was given, in honor of the emperor of Rome.

"So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them" (vs. 21).

Having heard of their desire for peace and reconciliation, Herod, all decked out in his pomp and splendor, while resting on his throne, stands before the people, and gives an elaborate speech. And his appearance and gift of oration, greatly impress the people (who are already at his mercy), to say the least.

"And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" (vs. 22).

Hearing the impressive speech, given by the pompous king Herod, and looking to regain his favor, the people begin to worship him, ascribing divinity to him. And Herod, being a mere man, raised up to reign, solely by the sovereign hand of God, receives the worship, rather than refusing it, and fails to acknowledge the truth about his humanity, so as to ascribe such glory to God, and to God alone. And because of this, Herod will pay a dear price, right at this very moment.

"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" (vs. 23).

As Herod was basking in the praises of men, we are told here, that an angel of the Lord struck him, for his failure to give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms, and he died. Listen to the historical account, given by Josephus (again, the non-Christian), concerning the death of Herod:

The account of King Agrippa's death is told by Flavius Josephus:

"Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea [...] There he exhibited shows in honor of the emperor [...] On the second day of the festival, Herod put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a truly wonderful contexture, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment was illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it. It shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him. At that moment, his flatterers cried out [...] that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.'

Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and he fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, 'I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner.'

After he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign." (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.343-350).

Again, while Josephus's works are certainly not Scripture, or infallible in any sense, it is interesting to see how this particular event, lines up pretty well with the account, given here in Acts (providing additional historical information as well). Needless to say, Herod's death was clearly an act of divine judgment.

And then, finally, we are told, "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (vs. 24). And here, the very clear implication, is that, he who opposed the church and contended with God's Word, was dealt with, and removed. And God's Word continued to prosper, never returning void, but accomplishing all of God's holy will, bearing fruit in the building of Christ's church. Not only did Herod fail to destroy the church, but furthermore, the church grew, and God's Word continued to spread out, unto the expansion of Christ's Kingdom!

## **II. Concluding Thoughts**

1) We saw last time, from the positive standpoint, how God ordains the death or release of his saints, in accordance with His divine will. James was killed with the sword, but Peter was supernaturally spared. And we noted that none of this necessarily means that one had sinned or failed in some way, while the other was faithful. Both James (and Stephen before him) and Peter, were faithful, and God used them in accordance with His preordained will. Peter, in fact, would later face martyrdom himself, but his time had not yet come.

Well, likewise, there are times when God immediately strikes down the wicked, right in the midst of their blasphemies, and there are other times, when God patiently endures the evil of the wicked, and brings their judgment upon them at a later time, again, in accordance with His divine will. What Herod had done here was utterly rebellious and wicked, and more than deserving of the immediate judgment that he had received. But there are times, when others have committed like atrocities, and God allowed them to endure for a time, before striking them down, and that, perhaps, by more ordinary means. Consider the many wicked Caesars of Rome, who had often received worship, considered themselves gods, had temples built for them, and yet, were not immediately struck down. In fact, we have at least one example, where God had brought one man to repentance, who had blasphemed him in this kind of way. Consider Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4). [Also, consider Sodom & Gomorrah, Nadab & Abihu, Hophni and Phineas, the Apostle Paul's conversion...etc]. At the end of the day, brethren, God does as He pleases, in all of His creation. And He has various reasons and purposes for His delays and for His immediate acts of judgment.

Often times, when there is an immediate judgment, in part, God is providing an object lesson for the rest of the world, reminding us of what we all deserve, and that judgment will, indeed, come upon the wicked. At times, warnings come by way of such immediate judgments. And, in the case of Herod, not only was there a warning, concerning the utter foolishness of blaspheming God, but furthermore, there was a warning about the coming judgment upon all who contend with Christ's church. Every hindrance will ultimately be dealt with. Harming the bride of Christ, is a dangerous thing to do, which will ultimately incur the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb! And judgment will come, in due time, upon all who seek to rob God of His rightful glory, and to all who fail to subject themselves to the authority and reign of Christ!

2) Christ and His church cannot fail! Nothing can stop the Lord from building His church. Not even the gates of hell! Every obstacle will be removed or brought into the army of Christ!

3) While all of God's enemies will be destroyed; while even the mighty "King Herod's," are but fragile flesh and set for destruction; indeed, while the world itself will even pass away, the Word of God will take its due course, and it will abide forever! It has already long outlived many, many, many mighty kings and rulers, and it continues to grow, as it spreads throughout the world, continuing to accomplish the will of God, in the building of Christ's church! The Gospel; the power of God continues to do its redemptive work! [See verse 24 & Isaiah 40:6-8].

Amen!!!