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THE TRUE KING RULES

ACTS 12



You cannot help but admire the artistry with which Luke depicts the complete reversal of the church's situation. At the beginning of the chapter Herod is on the rampage—arresting and persecuting church leaders. By the end, he is struck down and dies. Chapter 12 opens with James, the son of Zebedee dead, Peter free, and the Word of God triumphing. Such is the power of God to overthrow hostile human plans and to establish his own in their place.

SATAN STRIKES THE CHURCH (12:1-5)

1. How does Herod¹ strike at the church and how does the church respond?

2. Read Mark 10:35-40. Both James, the martyr of our passage, and John, the beloved disciple are addressed by Jesus in Mark 10. What does Jesus say is going to happen to them? What does Jesus' reference to the "cup" (v. 38) have to do with sitting at his right hand? (See also: Matt 26:39; Rom 8:16-17)

THE CRUSHED SERPENT

One theological theme you can trace throughout the bible is the promise of Genesis 3:15 – the Promised One will come to crush the serpent's head and deliver his people. Herod persecutes God's church and thieves from God's glory. God will not suffer him forever. Satan suffers yet another defeat through the death of Herod.

¹The grandson of Herod the Great, half-brother of Herod Antipas who tried Jesus, and an Edomite by ancestry, this **KING HEROD** is Herod Agrippa I. He will die in AD44 and be succeeded by his son, Agrippa II, who we'll meet in Acts 25-26. Thought by the Jews as "their man" King Herod was charged with rooting out dangerous movements. In both ways, he was another enemy of the Christian faithful. Herod becomes a part of the footstool Jesus is making of his enemies (Heb 10:12-13).

RESCUED FOR REAL (12:6-17)

3. Why does the church, gathered in James' house, have a hard time believing that their prayers have been answered? Why do you sometimes have a hard time believing that God has heard and will answer your prayers? How does 1 John 5:13-15 help?
4. When you need courage to stand with the Lord in the face of opposition, where do you tend to turn? If it's not to Jesus, do these other saviors keep the promises they make to you? What promises does Scripture offer you (Rom 8:31-38)?

THE WORD OF GOD PREVAILS (12:18-25)

Luke has reached a decisive turning point in his narrative. In keeping with the risen Lord's prophecy (1:8), witness has been born to him "in Jerusalem" and in "all Judea and Samaria." Now the horizon broadens to "the ends of the earth."

5. Compare and contrast king Herod with the true King of Israel. Make as many observations as you can.
6. Acts 12:24 represents the end of Luke's record of God's gospel work in the Jewish world. Acts 2:41 and 12:24 serve as bookends to this work. How do these verses summarize these initial years of the apostle's ministry? List the things God's Word can do? (See: Ps 19:10; Jer 23:29; Eph 5:26; Jam 1:23-25; 1 Pet 1:23)
7. What have you learned from this passage about God's purpose through suffering (Rom 8:18; Phil 1:29; Heb 13:12-14; Pet 3:14)? How could you use this chapter to encourage a fellow believer?