



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Study 19: DIVINE INTERVENTION AFTER DISCIPLES' INTERCESSION Acts 12:1-25

The enemy's opposition against the spread of God's saving truth was resumed by Herod. He stretched forth his hands to vex the Church. He intended to pursue the violent, intense, severe persecution of the Church to "please the Jews". What would please the Jews and please the Herods at the same time? "That it (the message of salvation through Christ) spread no further among the people" (Acts 4:17). That they "speak not at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). That the Apostles "should not teach in this name" nor fill "Jerusalem with (His) doctrine" (Acts 5:28). "That this Jesus of Nazareth" should not "change the customs which Moses delivered" them (Acts 6:14). That Jesus be not proclaimed as Saviour and Lord of all (Acts 9:29). Herod, in pleasing the Jews and pleasing himself, displeased God. "He killed James and proceeded further to take Peter also." His plan was to eliminate the Apostles so he could destroy the Church. He began by destroying "the pillars" so he could demolish "the temple". He imprisoned Peter, intending to execute him later. The Church prayed fervently and without ceasing. God delivered Peter miraculously by angelic visitation and ministrations. Herod, because of his sin and pride was smitten dead by the angel of the Lord and the Word of God has continued to grow and multiply until this day.

SEVERE PERSECUTION AND PLOT AGAINST THE PIONEERS

Acts 12:1-4; John 15:18-20; 16:1-4; Mark 10:35-40; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6; Matthew 24:9-14; Luke 21:12,16-19,34-36; Proverbs 19:21; 21:30; Isaiah 14:24,27; 46:9,10.

"Now about that time", the time of the predicted famine, when Barnabas and Saul took "relief to Jerusalem" (Acts 11:29). "Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex", that is, to oppress and persecute the leaders in the Church. James, Peter and John were pillars in the Church. The Apostles were the foundation on which the visible Church was built (Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 2:20). To discourage, disorganize and destroy the Church, Herod focused his attention on the pillars and pioneers – to afflict, injure and even kill them. He began by suddenly killing James, the brother of John. The incident was not surprising or shocking to the early Church that James, one of the two sons of Zebedee, became the first martyred Apostle. It was the fulfilment of Christ's prediction and the Apostle's commitment. "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "We can." "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." Neither Herod nor any other persecutor could go beyond whatsoever Christ's "counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." His actions were not based on the principle of righteousness or justice. As a king or ruler, he was not committed to 'upholding the constitution', protecting the innocent, preventing evil and punishing evil-doers. The promotion of his own popularity was the motive of his actions. Herod sacrificed his soul and his eternal happiness to keep a temporary position of no lasting value. Oh, how foolish! How many monarchs and political figures there are, how many people there are, who throw their souls to hell, who sell themselves to Satan, living only and always to please men in order to earn and secure popularity. Peter was Herod's next object of attack. He took him, apprehended and imprisoned him, intending to kill him after the Passover of the Jews. That was the end of Herod's evil ambition. Soon after this, he perished without seeing his desires fulfilled.

SUPERNATURAL PRESERVATION OF THE PREACHER THROUGH PRAYER

Acts 12:5-17; Ephesians 6:18-20; Hebrews 13:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Isaiah 26:3,4; Philippians 4:6,7; Acts 5:17-20; 16:25,26; Psalm 34:7; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; Matthew 18:19,20; 1 John 5:14,15.

"Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Confronted with the sudden arrest and imprisonment of the Apostle Peter, the Church immediately gathered to pray unto God. They had no other source or hope of release. They had no contact among the Jews or supporters in the court of Herod to appeal on his behalf. The Church had no representative or defender in the religious arena or in the political circles. "We know that every where it is spoken against" (Acts 28:22). "By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small" (Amos 7:2,5). By whom shall Peter or the Church escape death and destruction? God is "the Governor among the nations" (Psalm 22:28). In seasons of persecution and danger, in periods of injustice and oppression when circumstances seem hopeless, we can seek release and refuge in God. Peter, at the mercy of merciless Herod, in the grip of Herod's iron hands, in the

custody of sixteen armed soldiers, in the prison secured by iron gates, appeared to be in a hopeless situation. But with a powerful God in heaven and a praying Church on earth, no situation is hopeless. "The same night" before his imminent death "Peter was sleeping". This is a remarkable evidence of unwavering faith in God, undisturbed peace of mind and absolute confidence in the words of Christ. Christ had promised that Peter would minister and live till old age (John 21:17-19) and he believed the Lord implicitly, without any shadow of doubt. "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and raised him up. And his chains fell off from his hands." By an unprecedented manifestation of divine power, without the use of any natural means, Peter was miraculously delivered, brought through iron doors and gates, released and set free from danger and death. In response to the prayer of the Church, honouring the faith of Peter, fulfilling the words of Christ, affirming the irreversible will of God, the Lord sent His angel to deliver His servant from Herod's prison and the expectation of the Jews.

SINNERS' PUNISHMENT AND THE PREVALENCE OF PREACHING

Acts 12:18-25; 2 Peter 2:9; Isaiah 13:6-11; 26:20,21; Matthew 25:41,46; Hebrews 10:29-31; Acts 6:7; 11:21-24; 9:18-20; 20:24-28; Colossians 4:17; Matthew 16:18.

The guards who were entrusted with Peter's custody could not explain how he had escaped. His escape was a miracle to the Church, a mystery to the four quarternions of soldiers, a mistake to Herod. Herod punished the keepers who could not give account of his escape "and commanded that they should be put to death". After Peter's escape, disappointed that he could not gain more popularity with the Jews through the planned execution, Herod "went down from Judea to Caesarea and there abode". Abiding in Caesarea, Herod became displeased with some of those under his domain. Fearing the effects of his anger and displeasure they made moves to be at peace with him. "And upon a set day" the people were gathered together and he "made an oration unto them". His speech and manner of delivery with the splendour of his royal apparel drew a blasphemous applause and flattery from the crowd, "The people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." "He gave not God the glory" and sudden, divine judgment came on him immediately. His cup of iniquity was full, he sinned beyond the day of grace, he went too far on the dark road to hell and reached a point of no return; "the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms." His empty pride plunged him into eternal punishment, divine wrath and fiery indignation. Flattery drove him to the eternal lake of fire. "But the word of God grew and multiplied." The persecutor taken away from the seat of power, the servants and children of God continued preaching the Word to every creature everywhere. The miracle of Peter's deliverance and the suddenness of the persecutor's destruction increased the zeal, the faith, the faithfulness, the dedication, the courage, the sacrifice and the fruitfulness of the Apostles, the disciples, the whole Church.

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