

Acts 12.1-25—The Gates of Hell Cannot Prevail

Herod vs. God

- I. Herod's plan, vv.1-5.
 - A. Herod laid violent hands on the members of Jesus' Church, hoping either to win or stay in the Jews' favor.
 - B. These events took place between the time described in 11.28 and 11.30.
 - 1. What a stark contrast! While the Gentile church was at work sending relief to support the Jerusalem church, Herod was at work trying to destroy it.
 - C. He killed James, the brother of John, because he was one of the pillars of the church, v.2; cf. Mt 10.39; Rev 1.9.
 - D. Seeing how much this pleased the Jews, he laid hands on Peter as well, but was waiting until after the feast to execute him, v.4. The situation seemed hopeless. Yet, the night before Peter's execution, the church prayed, v.5.
- II. Herod's defeat, vv.6-19.
 - A. Peter was in prison, chained to two guards with two more standing guard at the door. Escape was impossible.
 - B. Peter's at peace with God and prepared to be in glory by morning. That's the only peaceful way to live: ready at any time to leave this world behind and meet our God.
 - C. Regarding Peter's remarkable deliverance, the bottom line is that the Lord brought about His deliverance, vv.11, 17.
 - 1. What brought it about? It was God's providential plan; but what occasioned it? The prayers of the church, vv.5, 12.
 - 2. Herod wore a crown and carried a sword; but it was no match for the church's prayers.
 - D. Peter went to Mary's house because it was the primary meeting place for the Jerusalem Church, Lk 22.7-12; Acts 1.4-5, 12-14.
 - 1. Upon arrival there, he found them praying, v.12.
 - 2. After encouraging them that the Lord had answered their prayers, he went into hiding for 1-2 years, v.19. We'll meet him next at the great assembly in Jerusalem in Acts 15.
- III. Herod's death, vv.19-23.
 - A. The Lord avenged his Apostle's death by the death of Herod. The same angel who was sent in mercy to bring about Peter's deliverance was sent in judgment to bring about Herod's judgment.

IV. God's move forward, vv.24-25.

- A. The Word of God increased and multiplied. It's Luke's characteristic way of describing the increasing progress of the Kingdom of Christ.
- B. It was a complete reversal of the church's situation from the beginning of the chapter to the end. Violent hands were being laid on the church and now the church's ministry is advancing without hindrance.
- C. What brought about the great change? The church's prayers, vv.5, 12, 17.

Reflections

- I. We see an example of the role that God's angels have in caring for the people of God. The Lord uses them to keep His people safe and to thwart the enemy's plans, Heb 1.14; Ps 91.11.
 - A. It's a wonderful testimony to the blessings we receive as a result of the incarnation of Christ in our humanity, Eph 5.30; Heb 2.14-16.
- II. It's a testimony to the believing power of prayer, Ps 115.3.
 - A. The church prayed and God answered. This convicts us when our faith is often so weak that we don't pray because we figure if our hands are tied so are God's. It convicts us because it shows that we have not because we ask not, Jn 4.2.
 - B. It's a call to believe Christ's words in Jn 16.23 and recommit ourselves to prayer.
- III. It's a reminder of the mysterious nature of God's providence when we see that James was killed and Peter was delivered.
 - A. The church lives by faith in the wisdom of God, who knows best what each of us needs and knows best when a "No" will bring Him the most glory and us the best good, Heb 11.34, 37.
 - B. God's providence is often mysterious, but it's never inexplicable. It's always governed by His infinite wisdom, covenant love, and saving grace—and that's where our comfort lies.
- IV. It's a reminder that in this world we will have tribulation, Jn 16.33.
 - A. Let us prepare for suffering so that we won't be surprised when it comes, 1Pet 4.12.
- V. It's a reminder that Christ's church is a praying church, v.12.
 - A. I encourage you to put the prayer meeting on your family calendar and commit to be a praying church. It'll bring glory to God, blessings to you, and encouragement to your elders, Heb 13.17.