

# A “God” Vanquished by Worms (Part 2)

Acts 12:19-24

*Halifax: 22 July 2012*

## **Introduction and Review**

Last week, I began an exposition of Acts 12.

- In this chapter, we have the account of the persecution of Herod Agrippa that leads to:
  - the death of James to the glory of God,
  - the marvellous deliverance of Peter by the hand of God,
  - and the demise of Herod, also by the divine hand.

We have seen again and again in Acts how the Lord makes His work very visible.

- He is revealing Himself and His ways with His church so that we might more easily learn of Him and of how He deals with us.
  - Right from the start of Acts, we have Jesus visibly ascending into heaven,
    - and then at Pentecost, we have the Holy Spirit visibly and audibly poured out with a manifestation of His presence through tongues.
    - We should not expect the visible, audible, outpouring to be done whenever anyone receives the Spirit.
      - These things were done to make visible at the first what would afterward be invisible.
      - So in Acts 12, God makes His hand visible in His deliverance of Peter as well as His destruction of Herod.
- We saw that Herod is presented to us here as a people pleaser.
  - He kills James (one of the twelve), and seeing that it pleases the Jews, proceeds to kill Peter also.
    - It was not that James and Peter had done wrong—
    - It was not even that Herod was particularly offended by them—
  - He kills them because he sees it as a way to ingratiate himself to the Jews.
    - He was not like his grandfather, Herod the Great, who constantly offended the Jews!
      - He was very kind and generous toward them...very liberal in his gifts and donations.
      - He played up the fact that his mother was a Hasmonaean Jew, which caused them to much more readily accept him even though his father was an Edomite.
      - And he even kept the Law of Moses whenever he was in Jerusalem, though he lived as a Roman when in Rome.
    - He had learned to operate as a people pleaser from his youth.

- His father had been killed when he was only four, so his mother had sent him to Rome to be educated...
- And there he became close friends of Caligula and Claudius, his schoolmates.
  - These friends served him well, later giving him the title of king and complete dominion over the region that had belonged to his grandfather, Herod the Great.
  - This territory had been divided into fourths after the death of Herod the Great, but in 41 AD it had all been given to Herod Agrippa.
- And now he had done all he could to please his subjects and gain their support—even to the point of killing the disciples of Christ...
  - It was the perfect time for Herod to take this step against the Christians—about 43 AD.
    - The Sadducees and chief priests had wanted to get rid of them for a long time but had been hindered by the Jewish people and by the Pharisees.
      - But now that Stephen, the first martyr, had spoken of the passing of the temple and the ceremonial law...upsetting many of the people and the Pharisees...
      - And now that Saul of Tarsus, a former Pharisee, had been converted...
      - And not that the news had come that Peter had been eating and baptising Gentiles without circumcising them,
        - the support of the people and the Pharisees was waning fast!
      - Herod seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself by lifting up his hand against the church.
        - The Sadducees had done it out of malice at a time when it stirred up opposition, but Herod did it not out of malice but as an opportunity.
  - People-pleasing is a very vile sin that leads to worse and worse actions.
    - Once you have put people-pleasing before pleasing God, nothing will be restrained from you.
    - So Herod lifts up his hand against innocent men.
      - He acts as if his blessing will come from the people rather than from God.
        - It is a great wickedness!
        - What do you live for? Are you all out for Christ, or are you more concerned about the people around you?
        - Herod had killed James and now he had arrested Peter with the intent to do the same to him.

But we saw how God made His divine hand very conspicuous in delivering Peter from Herod's clutches.

- He made it very clear that Peter's deliverance was from Him...
  - sending an angel when Peter was all locked up in prison with sixteen Roman soldiers guarding him—in shifts of four,
    - with two of them chained to him on either side, and two of them watching the door...
    - All when Peter was fast asleep!
  - It is a very funny account.
    - Peter was very hard to wake up!
      - The angel appeared in the cell with light, but Peter slept on.
      - The angel had to give him a hard poke in the side and order him to stand up, but still Peter was half asleep.
    - The angel had to direct him as you would a child...
      - Put on your shoes, gird yourself, put on your coat, come with me...
      - And then the angel led him through two sets of doors to the iron gate at the entrance to the prison which opened by itself—then down the street—and then the angel disappeared...
  - And finally, Peter realised that the Lord had delivered him!
    - **Acts 12:11: 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."**
    - The way all this was done emphasised the fact that it was the Lord's doing!
      - Our lives are in His hands. Blessing comes from Him.
        - The sooner you all learn that, the better.
- Luke shows us all the more that it was the Lord's hand when Peter goes to the house of Mary where the disciples were gathered for prayer.
  - They were praying, and God had answered their prayer, but not at all as they had expected!
  - How joyfully surprised they are when Peter comes knocking at the gate to Mary's house.
    - The servant girl, Rhoda, goes to the gate and is so excited that she runs back into the house without letting Peter in.
      - He just went through two doors and huge iron gate in a prison, but now he can't even get through the gate to the house of his friends!
    - No one is expecting Peter because they all knew that he was in prison, so they think Rhoda is crazy.
      - Peter's escape was not their doing, but the Lord's hand of deliverance!
      - How glad they are when they return with Rhoda...
        - They are so excited that Peter has to quiet them down.

- And then tells them how the Lord had delivered Him—again, stressing that it was the hand of God.
  - And he tells them to pass the news on to James and the others of how the Lord delivered him.
  - Peter gives all the glory to God because that is where it belongs.

Herod Agrippa was seeking to obtain a good life by pleasing the Jews and taking control of things by his own cleverness and devising,

- but Peter and the other believers knew that blessing comes only from the Lord.
- With Peter’s deliverance and James’s martyrdom, they learned afresh that their lives were in the sovereign hands of the Lord...
  - Indeed, James had the inestimable privilege of giving his life for the Lord, but the Lord had delivered Peter because it was not time for him to depart yet.
- But now we must move on to see what happened with Herod and what lessons we may learn from his demise.
  - Here too, we see the hand of God in dealing with Herod, the persecutor.

**I. First, see that it is not always good for you when things go your way as they did with Herod Agrippa.**

A. It is not always good when you succeed in leaving the past behind.

1. Herod had done a great wickedness in killing James and in arresting Peter with the intent to kill him also.
  - a. He surely knew that it is wrong to kill innocent men, but in his own mind he had redefined right and wrong.
    - For him, **right** was whatever seemed to secure his kingdom and promote his relationship with the Jews...
      - And persecuting the disciples of the Lord did just that!
      - So he was pleased with initial outcome of his persecution because he was using the wrong standard of measure.
        - He felt that he had done a good thing, though his conscience surely told him that it was not morally good.
    - You all know how that can be—
      - Perhaps you get away with tax evasion and you feel that you have done a good thing—
        - but your conscience tells you that it was not morally good.
      - Perhaps you have indulged your laziness and found a way to get out your duty—missing church? avoiding chores? and it feels good to be free,
        - but your conscience tells you that what you have done is not pleasing to the Lord...
          - You get the picture...

- b. Be that as it may, the Lord had brought about circumstances that should have humbled Herod.
  - He had pricked Herod's conscience by the miraculous deliverance of Peter even though Herod had gone to rather extreme measures to keep him secure—with four squadrons of soldiers and all.
    - I rather suspect that Herod did this because he had heard about how Peter and John had escaped in the past.
    - But now that Peter had escaped, it must have made Herod pause!
      - It was not reasonable to suppose that all four guards who were on duty had arranged to let Peter go!
      - A bribe would have been out of the question because their lives were on the line if they let a prisoner escape.
  - Peter's unexplainable escape surely pricked Herod's guilty conscience.
    - The Lord often does this when we have not admitted our wrongs...it is a mercy to us!
      - He often brings about circumstances that prick us—
        - as when He sent the prophet Nathan to David when David had sinned,
        - or as when you neglect your tithe and then lose your job,
        - or you see something that reminds you of a neglected duty..
- c. How much better if Herod had responded to God's voice!
  - How much better if he had repented as soon as he saw that Peter had miraculously escaped!
  - Just think how good it would have been if right then and there,
    - he had confessed his sin to God and then to all the people that he had killed an innocent man and was about to kill another,
      - but that God had intervened to stop him!
        - Remember how the Lord used Abigail to stop David when he was ready to slaughter Nabal's household in anger?
        - Remember how the Lord used Nathan the prophet to prick him after his great sin with Bathsheba and Uriah?
          - God's hand was heavy upon him until he admitted his sin.
    - How good it is for you if you will let God stop you in your tracks and will repent instead of going on denying the truth—
      - It is hard for us to own up to our sin, but it is so much better when we do.

➤ But Herod does what so many people do when they are chastened by the Lord!

  - Here he is, with the embarrassment of an escaped prisoner that he was planning to execute the next day for publicity!
    - Pretty embarrassing stuff—pretty hard to explain. So...

2. He does what is often called “movin’ on.”
  - He finds a convenient way to put the past behind him instead of taking responsibility for the past and repenting of the past.
  - a. First, he finds someone to blame.
    - 1) He examines the guards and leads them away to be executed!
      - In this way, everyone is given the impression that Peter got away because of corruption in these Roman guards.
        - Of course the Jewish leaders wouldn’t want to say too much by way of criticism because Peter had gotten away from them too.
        - You will remember how they just re-arrested the disciples and sort of ignored their escape back in chapter 4.
          - That was what they did, but as Herod could not find Peter, he threw blame on those Roman guards.
      - This made everyone feel better—
        - Nobody wanted to admit that it was divine deliverance—no one but the disciples of Jesus.
        - They were happy to believe the lie that it was the soldiers’ fault.
          - “Peter got away by bribery no doubt!” they assured their uneasy consciences.
            - “At least those guards got what was coming to them even if Peter didn’t!”
      - But voice of conscience said:
        - “No, Peter did not get away because of the guards.”
        - “He got away because he is God’s servant and Herod wrongly arrested him and the Lord delivered him.”
          - “It’s not about the guards that did wrong, it was Herod.”
    - 2) This method of blaming someone rather than facing your own sin is a time honoured method that goes all the way back to the garden...
      - You remember that when the Lord came to meet with Adam and Eve for evening worship after they had sinned,
        - Adam went and hid himself.
        - And then when the Lord approached him and asked him why he was hiding and if he had eaten of the forbidden fruit,
          - he immediately said,
            - **Ge 3:12: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."**
        - What a loaded statement that was!
          - Adam ate the fruit... but...
            - God was to blame for giving him such a woman...
            - And the woman was to blame for giving him the fruit.

- Everybody wants to blame someone or something else!
  - “Everybody else was doing it, so I just joined them.”
  - “I am a criminal because I did not get a good education.”
  - “I responded that way because I was tired.”
  - “I am like this because I was abused as a child.”

TRANS> That is the blame game, and it made Herod feel a bit better, but it was not quite enough...so...

b. Herod also leaves town and goes up to his palace in Caesarea.

- You can see that at the end of verse 19:
  - **“Then he went down from Judah to Caesarea, and stayed there!”**
- That kept him from having to live with Peter’s escape.
  - By getting away, he could avoid trying to search for Peter or any more of the embarrassment.
  - He could “get on with his life” and leave the past behind him.
    - You hear people saying that this is what they are doing after a ruined marriage or some such thing.
    - “I am just going to get on with my life.”
- When you come to the Lord and repent of your sin, and make restitution to those you have wronged,
  - Getting on with your life is a great thing to do.
  - You are forgiven, you have taken responsibility for what you have done, and it is good to move on...
    - But it is not good when you are “getting on with your life” in order to avoid facing what you have done...
      - in order to avoid making restitution and seeking God’s forgiveness.
      - If that is the case, “moving on” is exactly the opposite of what you ought to do!
  - If you do that with your spouse or with your siblings, the problems that are never dealt with will only fester...
    - They will erode your relationship not only with those you have sinned against, but also with the Lord.
    - Don’t do this and don’t allow your children to do this!
      - Make sure that matters are fully dealt with before you move on.
        - Of course, there are times when you may need to let someone cool off, but be sure that the matter is not simply ignored!
        - We must all learn to take responsibility for our actions.

TRANS> But look!

- For Herod, it seemed to work quite well to move on...

B. Instead of experiencing chastisement, he experiences tremendous prosperity!

- It appears that there are no consequences for his sin!
- 1. In Caesarea, he has the good pleasure of having the Phoenicians of the wealthy port cities of Tyre and Sidon come to him on their knees (as it were)!
  - Verse 20 explains:
    - **v. 20: 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.**
  - Tyre and Sidon were very wealthy cities, but they did not have much farm land.
    - They made their money by importing goods from all around the world.
    - But one thing they did not have to import from far away was their food because for a thousand years or so,
      - they had relied on their near neighbour, Palestine.
      - They did not want to see this change on account of Herod's anger, so they did a little people pleasing of their own...
        - They made Blastus, who was Herod's chamberlain, their friend.
          - It is easy to guess what method two of the wealthiest cities in the world might have used to secure his friendship!
          - And having done that, they petitioned for peace with Herod.
            - What a great position this put Herod in!
- 2. And then things get even better for Herod!
  - Herod responded to Phoenicia's offer for peace by giving them an oration at a festival which happened to be at the time of the harvest when games were put on to celebrate the birthday of Claudius...
    - At least, that is what the event was according to Josephus, the Jewish historian, whose account parallels that of Luke and provides some additional details...
  - But look what these Phoenicians did when Herod came out to speak to them on the morning of the second day of the festival!
    - Josephus tells us that they were greatly excited when they saw what Luke calls his royal apparel,
      - which Josephus describes as being made of silver which picked up the rays of the morning sun so that Herod shone brightly like the sun-god whom the Phoenicians worshipped...
        - and so began to worship him as a god...



- And Luke tells us that they were impressed by his oration and began to say, “The voice of a god and not of a man!”
  - What could make the day of a man who yearned for the approbation of his subjects and for elevation of his status more than this!
    - He was like a rock star when the crowd is going wild over him!
    - It was a dream come true for a people pleaser!
    - He has climbed up on very high horse, doing what he does best—
      - receiving praise from men.
3. Does our sinful flesh not yearn for this?
- a. Not that you want people worshipping you just like this...
    - But in your sin...
      - do you not suppose that you are not being treated as well as you ought to be treated—
        - that people ought to have more appreciation for you?
        - Wouldn't it make you happy if they saw your worth a bit more?
  - b. Is pride not what is at the root of all our sin from the fall?
    - Did Satan not originally tempt us with the suggestion that we would be like God—in the place of God—on the throne of God?
      - No longer under Him as His subjects, but ruling our own lives according to our own pleasures and desires.
      - Is this not at the root of our every sin we commit? “I will be like the most high”?
      - “I am at the top and do not have to answer to anyone.”

TRANS> Herod had done wrong to James and Peter, but it appears that he has gotten away with it!

C. Beware when things go your way despite grievous wrongs that you have done!

1. This is how God sets up His enemies for a fall!
  - Especially those He wishes to make a public example out of!
    - He gives them everything they want—for a time.
    - They can sing, “everything's goin' my way!”
  - a. The Bible says:
    - **Pr 16:18: Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.**
  - b. Is this not what happened to Pharaoh in the time of the Exodus?
    - Instead of immediately bringing trouble upon him for oppressing His people,
      - the LORD raises him up to a greater and greater height of prosperity and pride!
      - So much so that he says, “Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?”

- The Lord tells Pharaoh that He has deliberately raised him up in order that He might bring him down...as an example...
    - **Ex 9:16: But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.**
  - Do you see what this is saying?
    - God was not absent when Pharaoh prospered!
      - He was the One who prospered him in order that He might show His power to Israel and to all the world in bringing him down!
- c. Be sure that you are not like the person who is warned in Deuteronomy 29:19 who does wrong and then...
- **Deut 29:19: Blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart'.**
  - Deut 29:20-21 tells us what God will do to the one who says this:
    - **Deut 29:20-21: "The LORD would not spare him; for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Law,**
2. Do not be glad when you sin without repentance and there are no consequences—rather be terrified!
- You will not get away with anything!
- a. Hebrews 12:8 says that if you are without chastisement, you are illegitimate and not sons—bastards—false sons!
- Prosperity for the wicked is the worst thing that could ever happen to them!
  - Even after the plagues had begun,
    - the worst thing that happened to Pharaoh was their removal!
    - Every time a plague was removed, he hardened his heart!
      - His heart was softened while the plague was still on, but as soon as it was removed, he was hardened again!
- b. My dear brothers and sisters, be thankful for God's humbling providences!
- **Hebrews 10:5-7: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?**
  - The Lord uses affliction in your life if you are His child to preserve and you to keep you looking to Him.

- We all rightly confess with David when we sing Psalm 119:
  - **Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.**
  - **Ps 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.**
- How terrible it would be to be like Pharaoh and Herod—

TRANS> But here is Herod,

- Raised up for a fall... fattened for judgment!
  - Tremble for those who prosper in their wickedness.
    - They are much to be pitied!

## II. See what becomes of the wicked when they are raised up for judgement!

A. Look at how Herod is knocked off his high horse, suddenly, and without remedy.

1. In verse 23, Luke says:

- **Acts 12:23: Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him.**
  - a. First of all, note the word *immediately*.
    - This is one of the most terrible things about God's judgement.
    - Warnings have been there all along, and opportunities to repent,
      - but once judgement comes, there is no turning back.
    - Perhaps you have been in an accident before—
      - If you are going down the road and suddenly realise you are about to crash into a wall, it is a dreadful thing once you know it is coming because there is no way to stop it...
        - All you can do is wait for sound of crunching metal
        - If you could just turn back and come down the road again, but now it is too late!
    - Just moments before Herod was soaking up the glory and thinking nothing of judgement,
      - but in a mere moment all of that is changed.
      - Oh how you will regret it when the day of judgement comes if you have never repented!
        - Terror will overtake you!
        - If only you could turn back—but the horror will be that it is too late to turn back—forever!!
  - b. Luke tells us that an angel of the Lord *struck* him.
    - 1) This is the very same word that was used for the angel's striking of Peter to wake him up in the prison...

- It was a sudden jolt for both Herod and Peter,
    - but what a different purpose!
      - For Peter it was to wake him so that the angel might deliver him from prison,
      - But for Herod it was a blow that signalled the falling of God's dreadful judgement!
- 2) It must be one way or the other with you.
- Either you will be struck in your sluggishness that you may be delivered by His gracious omnipotent hand...
    - Or you will be struck in judgement that you may be brought to a dreadful end.
    - Our Lord has a powerful hand to deliver—and to judge!
  - Is this not what we see in Psalm 110, our Psalm of Focus?
    - Jesus will reign until all His enemies are brought under His feet.
      - In the day of His power, some become willing volunteers while the bodies of the rest are scattered in the way.
      - You can never be on neutral ground with Jesus.
  - Look to Jesus for mercy before it is too late!
    - Each day, your life hangs by a thread and suddenly that thread will be broken.
      - It could break right now—it could break while you sleep tonight.
        - **Pr 6:15 Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly; Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy.**
      - Do not be so foolish as to go on without Jesus!
        - Oh how you will regret it if you do!
- c. See what happened to Herod as a public example... an example to warn us all...
- Luke tells us that:
    - **Luke 12:23: “He was eaten by worms and died.”**
  - Josephus describes this in his history—with more detail...
    - He tells us that Herod was struck with a terrible pain in his midsection and immediately saw the owl above his head...and confessed:
      - “Behold me, whom you call a god; I am enforced to finish my live most miserably”
    - Eusebius, the church historian, says that the owl was the messenger or angel of the Lord that came to execute judgement on Herod for his sacrilege.

- Herod was in so much pain that he had to be carried out and he remained in terrible pain for five days until he died.
- The pains he felt were apparently on account of worms that began to consume him.
  - 2 Macc 9:9 gives an account of a similar judgement that fell upon Antiochus Epiphanes, the proud Greek who persecuted the Jews in the period between the old and new testaments...
  - It says:
    - **2 Macc 9:9: “And so the ungodly man’s body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay.”**
  - What a dreadful, filthy, disgusting way to die!

B. Luke tells us why such an awful thing befell Herod.

1. Look at verse 23—it was because he did not give the glory to God.
  - a. God is a jealous God, and He will not give His glory to another!
    - How inappropriate it was for Herod, a mere man, to receive accolades from men calling him a god!
      - He knew the scriptures of the Old Testament!
      - He knew what God said about this!
        - But he went on soaking up the praise of men because that was what he had lived for.
          - Even though he worshipped God with the Jews, he did it only for the praise of men.
  - b. What are you living for?
    - To praise God and to lead others to praise Him? ...or for self-praise?
    - Do you seek glory for yourself or give glory to God?
    - Understand that this is both the root and branch of our rebellion!
      - Mankind fell under the temptation that we would be like the God—that we would have His authority and His honour and His glory for ourselves!
      - This is the root of our rebellion with which we are born, and it is the branch that grows out of the root when our sin matures...
        - as it did with Herod.
- Do you not see this sin in you?
  - It may not be a blatant as it was with Herod...

- Most people are never given the opportunity to stand before an adoring crowd of people.
  - Most of us never have the ability to bring wealthy cities to their knees in dependence upon us for food.
    - And it is a good thing that we don't have such opportunities because if we did, we would take them unless the grace of God were to restrain us.
  - Don't you see the potential in yourself?
    - Tell me, are you passionate about the glory of God?
      - Do you burn with indignation the way David did when he heard Goliath uttering blasphemies against the Lord?
      - How much of that spirit is in you to give God the glory?
    - He is the most high God!
      - He has created us!
      - He is the judge of all the earth!
      - He is worthy of all glory and honour and praise...
        - Where is your worshipping, adoring, loving heart?
          - It is not where it ought to be, is it?
          - Who among you can say, "I have made my heart pure and there is no sin in me?"
2. How appropriate it is for the one who presumes to be a god to be eaten by worms!
- a. It is a death that is far from princely!
- The lowliest, most stupid filthy creatures are used to destroy him—to eat him—to show that he is mortal.
  - It is no great intelligence that overcomes him but creatures with very little wit outwit him.
  - It is not a creature of beauty that does him in, but stinking maggots!
  - It is no great army of power with shining spears that overcomes him,
    - but the most despicable of creatures...
    - creatures that can be crushed under foot—mere worms!

TRANS> This is the end to which Herod was brought while he was still alive...

- as an example to all of what the man deserves who tries to be as God...
  - the native sin of us all!
    - This death shows how far even the most princely among us is from divinity!

b. But consider, my dear friends, that this is the end to which we all actually do come.

- Few of us are consumed by worms while we are still alive,

- but this is what befalls us when our bodies are put into the grave where they rot and become food for worms!
- We were indeed created to be princes, given dominion over the earth and over all that is in it,
  - but because we sought to be gods,
    - the earth over which we were given dominion swallows us up.
    - Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, so we return to the ground from which we came forth.
      - Not as gods, not even as princes, but food for worms.
  - How we ought to be humbled by the curse of death.
    - Herod's end is the end that befits us all!
      - A stinking, maggot infested corpse!
      - There is no unrighteousness with God in this—
        - all the unrighteousness is with us...
          - princes who deigned to be like the Most High!

TRANS> But where sin abounded, grace far more abounds!

### III. Look at the glorious outcome of the whole affair with Herod!

- Verse 24—Here, let me read it with verse 23...
  - **Acts 12:23-24: 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. But the word of God grew and multiplied.**
  - What a blessed outcome from our grace-loving God!

A. Do you know what the Word is that grew and multiplied?

1. It is the Word of the Gospel, of course!
  - **Rom 10:8-11: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."**
2. This is none other than the good news that James and Peter were preaching when Herod arrested them!
  - It is the good news that there is full and free forgiveness of sins for all who are sentenced to be eaten by worms if they will look to Jesus Christ.
    - That Jesus came into the world to deliver us from the curse!
    - That Jesus, who was indeed truly God—very God of very God—took the curse upon Himself for our sins...

- so that through Him we might obtain eternal life and full remission!
  - And not only that, but in Him there is resurrection so that our worm infested bodies will be raised up to glory!
3. Tell me, do you want to go on playing god until you are eaten by worms?
- Do you say, “I don’t want to be like God, I just want to be left alone...”
    - That is what Herod was judged for!
      - His sin is described not by what he did, but by what he did not do.
      - He did not give God the glory!
        - He did not worship God as God deserves!
  - It is the height of immorally and wickedness for you to act as if there is no God to be worshipped.
    - When you do that, you act as if **you** are God!
      - Do you know why I say that?
      - Because the only being that has no god to worship is God!
        - Yet, even the members of Trinity glorify one another...
          - And you put yourself above them as if there is no God above you to be worshipped!
        - You assume to yourself the highest place—
          - The place of authority with no one you have to answer to.
          - The place of divinity with no one to worship.
      - You do not belong in such a place!
        - You will be eaten with worms with no remedy if you continue to refuse to repent and turn to Jesus.

B. Herod sought to suppress the gospel that Peter and James preached, but instead he furthered it.

1. As is always the case, when men attack the gospel, God uses their attacks to further it!
  - The contrast is noteworthy—
    - Herod was eaten by worms, but the Word of God grew and multiplied.
  - It reached more people than it had ever reached before!
    - The kingdom of grace was advanced and many more people were brought to enjoy the benefits of salvation!
2. My brothers and sisters, this is what you can expect from persecution!
  - a. Take China as a modern example—
    - The missionaries were driven out and the believers were assaulted when Mao came to power...
    - Many thought the Gospel would be lost when this happened...



- Mao thought so...
- Many Christians thought so too...
  - But instead the Word grew and multiplied—and Mao is being eaten by worms.

b. Many more examples could be given...

- So do not be discouraged if persecution comes to us as it surely will...
  - All who die as persecutors will be food for worms forever and ever,
    - but the kingdom of God will grow and multiply.
  - Oh yes, false sons will run away, but the Word will grow and multiply.
    - Some will die, like James, and others will be delivered like Peter, but the kingdom will increase.

C. How did persecution cause the Word to grow and multiply?

1. Through God's dealing with James, the Lord caused the people to take the gospel seriously.
  - James testified that he had walked with Jesus and that he had seen Jesus crucified and then risen again.
    - He was willing to die in the profession of that belief.
    - If it had been a lie, he would not have died for it.
      - As we saw last week, through the death of God's saints, many come to salvation.
2. The Word also grew and multiplied through God's dealing with Peter.
  - With Peter, the Lord manifested His mighty arm, to show that He is the Lord who delivers.
    - By marvellously delivering him from prison, He showed that Peter, who preaches the gospel, is His servant...
      - In this way, God vindicated the gospel that Peter preached, showing that it was from God.
    - And this caused many who looked on to see and believe.
      - God wrought miracles through the Apostles for this very purpose.
3. And the Word grew and multiplied through God's dealing with Herod.
  - It was widely recognised that he was struck down because of his sacrilege.
    - Luke says so and so does Josephus, the Jewish historian.
    - This, would no doubt, put fear in the hearts of many!
  - And that fear would cause them realise that they deserve the same end as Herod—
    - for who can honestly say that they give God the glory He is due?
    - And what remedy is there but the gospel of Jesus Christ?

- Those who truly come to fear God have no recourse but to come to Jesus for forgiveness.
  - Where else can they go?
  - He has the words of eternal life!
  - Where else can you go?
    - Where?? When you see such things as we see here in Acts 12.

**Conclusion:**

Let James's martyrdom and Peter's deliverance and Herod's demise cause the Word of God to grow and multiply in the soil of your own heart and life!

- It is the Gospel of God and it will never disappoint.