

Crowd-Pleasing Can Lead to Death

International Bible Lesson

Acts 12:1-11

Sunday, November 1, 2015

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“When Herod saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 12:3—NIV).

The evangelistic efforts of the apostles and the growing number of new believers finally attracted the attention of King Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. He arrested the Apostle James, the brother of John, and beheaded him with a sword. When he saw how James’ death increased his popularity with many of the religious authorities, he arrested the Apostle Peter during the Passover Feast. He intended to behead Peter too, and put Peter under a strong guard until he was ready to put him on public trial after the Passover. Peter had miraculously escaped from prison before after he was arrested by the Sanhedrin, and King Herod wanted to make certain Peter did not escape again. What King Herod did not count on, however, was the fact that “the church was earnestly praying to God for Peter” (Acts 12:5). Furthermore, it was not within the plan of God that the Apostle Peter be martyred at that time. In a similar way, a crowd could not push Jesus over a cliff and kill Him, because God planned for Jesus to die on a cross in fulfillment of the Scriptures (see Luke 4:29; Acts 2:23). After God sent an angel to free Peter from prison, King Herod ordered all of Peter’s guards killed. King Herod would do or say anything to make himself appear greater than others. After he accepted a crowd calling him a god, an angel struck him and he was eaten by worms and died in 44 AD, “but the word of God continued to spread and flourish” (Acts 12:22-24).

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Thinking Further

1. Why do you think James was executed by Herod?
2. Why do you think Peter escaped execution by Herod?
3. When something seems impossible, why do you think it is important for the Church to pray anyway? Give a reason for your answer.
4. What are some opportunities Peter would have had while in prison?
5. What are some specific requests of the Church in prayers that may have helped Peter see and take advantage of his opportunities while in prison?