



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 152 - Persecution Flares Up (Acts 12)

The First Apostle Is Martyred

James was one of the three disciples who made up the inner ring of Jesus' disciples (along with Peter and his brother John). This group witnessed Jesus' raising the dead daughter of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. They too saw His transfiguration and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Along with John, James requested the honor of sitting at the highest places of honor—alongside Jesus' right and left in His Kingdom. Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" (See Mark 10:38.)

Jesus was speaking of the suffering He would undergo to save the world. Taking our sins on Himself, He suffered on the cross to satisfy God's wrath and rose again to promise us our own resurrection on the Last Day.

Not realizing He was talking about suffering and death, they answered, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink My cup" but He told them His Father would decide who should sit in those places of honor (Matthew 29:20-23). Fourteen short years later, James indeed drank the Lord's cup.

- What important lessons would the other 11 apostles learn from James' early death?
- How could the Holy Spirit give them courage from James' death?
- What encouragement can we gain from James' death?

Fourteen years before, James had stood on the Mountain of Transfiguration. He was one of only three disciples to see Jesus' divine glory for that brief, passing moment. Now he was the first disciple to see Jesus' divine glory, shining out from His throne in heaven. He knew that because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, he would be able to stay and bask in that glorious light forever.

Peter Escapes Herod's Sword

When Herod saw the Jewish leaders were pleased with James' execution, he arrested Peter, intending to execute him after the Passover. Peter was chained to two guards behind an iron gate. But when God decided to set Peter free, no guards or maximum security jail would be able to hold him.

- What impact do you think the church's earnest prayers for Peter's safety had on his deliverance?
- Undoubtedly, the church also prayed earnestly for James when he was first arrested, but God answered that prayer no. What consolation can we take when God chooses a different answer than the one we are seeking in our prayers?
- When we offer prayers for people in need, why is it important to always seek the Lord's will instead of our own?

Herod's Horrible End

The Roman emperor had given Herod Agrippa authority to rule over a large territory, even larger than his grandfather Herod the Great, who was king when Jesus was born. Like his grandfather, Herod Agrippa held onto that rule through intrigue and favoritism, threats and violence. When the people of Tyre and Sidon praised him as a god (because they depended on him for their food supply) Herod refused to humble himself. Therefore God struck him down with a horrible wasting disease of the digestive tract. Despite his influence and power, Herod was not able to save himself from God's judgment.

- How did Herod's removal benefit the church and its apostles?
- What confidence can Christians take from this incident when they face governmental opposition or persecution?
- How can God's intervention in Herod's reign remind us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ?