

# PLOT TWIST

When God Surprises His People

## Part 5: Touched By an Angel

### INTRODUCTION — Get Over Yourself, Herod

Mark 3:6

### DINE IN – The Great Escape

Acts 12

JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS...

- Considered a leading Apostle along with the 12 (Galatians 1:19)
- One of three "pillars" who lead the church (Galatians 2:9)
- Presides over Jerusalem council (Acts 15)
- Becomes head of Jerusalem church (Acts 21:18)
- Known well enough to be the identity marker for Jude (Jude 1:1)

THEORIES OF EARLY CHURCH LEADERSHIP...

- 1) Peter was the leader, first in Jerusalem and then in Rome.
- 2) Peter was the primary leader at first, but then passed his position on to James so he could focus on missionary work.
- 3) Peter, James, and John were a triad of authoritative leadership.
- 4) Although various personalities took on key roles in different situations, the Apostles governed as a team and passed this DNA on to the other churches where elders led together.

### TAKE OUT – I'll Have That to Go Please

#### TAKE OUT #1 – Seeing God at Work When Things Go Wrong

Eusebius (320 CE) preserves the tradition that the guard who watched James in prison was so impressed with his witness that he professed himself a Christian and was beheaded along with him. Whether true or not, we do know that the way Christians suffered and died became one of the greatest evidences of divine activity in their lives during the early generations of the church. Whether God delivers us like Peter (who would be killed about 20 years later), or helps us suffer well like James, everything that happens in our lives is an opportunity to honour God and show Jesus to others. (Also see **Daniel 3:16-18**.)

#### TAKE OUT #2 – Freedom of Choice as the Price of Love

We should remember that 16 good soldiers were disgraced and violently killed because one Apostle was freed from prison. The pessimist and sceptic will ask, "Why would God do that?" The answer is that he didn't. Herod did. Herod was given the evidence and the opportunity to accept that Peter's message was true. Instead, he chose ignorance, image, and revenge. People's freedom of choice will always be a source of great evil in our world. This freedom is the high price of love.

#### TAKE OUT #3 – The Priority of Prayer

Prayer is a normative state of being for followers of Jesus. As appropriate, God partners with our prayers to change the course of history. At other times, he overrides our prayers to bring about a greater good. So, if God is going to do what God is going to do, why pray? That's like asking, if my wife is going to go for a walk with me or without me, why should I bother to go with her? Prayer is the way we do life with God.

#### TAKE OUT #4 – The Priority of Partnership

Notice that God does just enough to ensure his plans succeed, but not so much that he overrides full human participation and partnership in bringing his plans about (e.g., God opens the prison gate miraculously, but Peter can't even get into the house gate without repeated knocking.) God deeply values us, not just as worshippers, but as partners in accomplishing good together. You are God's "Plan A".

#### TAKE OUT #5 – The Inerrancy of Scripture?

The earliest surviving (extant) manuscripts of Acts contain a discrepancy in verse 25 – saying "to Jerusalem" instead of "from Jerusalem". Later manuscripts correct this apparent error. Christians explain this conundrum in one of three ways: 1) The doctrine of inerrancy tells us that the original manuscript (now lost) must have been right and the earliest extant manuscripts show a temporary mistake that crept in and was then corrected in later copies. 2) The doctrine of inerrancy tells us that the original manuscript (now lost) must have been right and the earliest extant manuscripts tell us what it said. We must believe by faith that "from" is the right reading and try to figure out what that means. 3) Luke made a simple, easily identifiable mistake reflected in the earliest manuscripts. This mistake does not change the message of the story and it was later corrected by copyists. The church worked together to preserve the word of God. #1 is completely hypothetical. #2 is rooted in blind faith. #3 is offensive to most evangelicals, but should be considered as a valid way God's Spirit has preserved God's word through God's people.

### CONCLUSION – Prayer as a Divine Lightning Rod

Ephesians 6:19-20

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#### HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS

##### Warming Up...

1. Have you ever looked at some version of Christianity today and thought – I can't believe that is what Christ-followers have become. What styles of Christian expression seem most foreign to you? What seem the most familiar?

##### Look to the Book...

2. Take some time to review **Acts 12**. A) What verse, lesson, or idea stands out to you the most? Talk about it. B) We can assume James was prayed for as much as Peter, but he died and Peter was rescued. We can assume that God loves the Roman soldiers as much as Peter, but they died as an indirect result of Peter's rescue. Using this story (and any other Scriptures you think of), how would you respond to someone who asked why God allows some people to suffer while he seems more attentive to the prayers of others? C) Herod was idolized as a god by the people. What has the potential to come dangerously close to eclipsing God's status in your life?

##### So What?...

3. Review TAKE OUT #1. What suffering have you endured, are you enduring, or might you endure that gave / gives / may give you a chance to show Jesus to others? What can you do now to prepare for suffering well in the future?
4. Review TAKE OUT #4. Assuming (on good biblical grounds) that God intends to use you to reach certain people with his message, how well have you been cooperating with his plan? What can you do this week to become better aligned with his will to reach others with his message through your life?
5. New Service Times are being rolled out in our regional sites on February 28! Pray for the logistics to go smoothly for this large portion of our community.

The Meeting House | Sunday, February 14/21, 2010 | Bruxy Cavey

Notes are available online at [themeetinghouse.ca/teaching](http://themeetinghouse.ca/teaching)