


**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**June 15 - 21, 2008**

Acts 12:1-25

 Nothing clever, nothing conceived, nothing contrived,  
 can get the better of God.

Proverbs 21:30 Message

# Steamroller

## 1 Killed with a sword

**Read.** Acts 12:1-5 NLT

About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

**Think.**

- Herod Agrippa I was appointed king over Judea — which included all the territory ruled over by his great uncle Herod the Great — from AD 38-44. Why do you think this “king of the Jews” would restart major persecution of the church in Jerusalem?
- Whom does he have executed? Whom does he imprison?
- What is the response of the Jewish leaders?
- How does the church respond?
- What do you think you would do if the government clamped down on the church like Agrippa did?
  - a. Find another way to spend Sundays for a while
  - b. Keep doing what I've been doing
  - c. Move to Canada
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Pray.**

Father, prepare my heart for the harder times, the harder mountains I must cross, the longer days I must bear. Give me the grace to respond to my trials with prayer and perseverance.

**Live.**

Find a way to bless someone in prison this week.

He writhed on the royal bed in relentless agony.

For five days he had suffered, powerless to stop it.

He had hobnobbed with the wealthy and powerful of the Roman world. With Imperial favor he had accomplished something seemingly messianic in scope: he had united all Jewish territories in Palestine and freed them from direct Roman rule.

His rise to power had seemed unstoppable.

“The voice of a god, and not of a man!” the mob had shouted.

Now the god-king is consumed by worms.

Just one of many to fall under a kingdom steamroller paving the way through a crooked, fallen and broken world.

There's not much glamour in a steamroller. Not much in the way of subtlety either. A slow, sure, unstoppable, leveling force, creating a path where there was none before; that's the power of a steamroller.

It's just that the kingdom steamroller looks like anything *but* a steamroller. The Herod Agrippas of the world are the ones who better fit the description — an unstoppable beast of a machine rolling over all before them. The rulers and kingdoms of the world are always pictured that way in biblical portraits: powerful beasts that devour all in their way. And squaring off with them? A son of man. A lamb slain. It's Godzilla versus Bambi.

But the Lamb levels them all.

So think perhaps of something as harmless and unassuming as a tricycle ridden giddily by a toddler — but that levels everything like a steamroller. That's what Herod met, in shock and dismay crying out as he passed under it's wheels. For it's not the great king who triumphs, but comical Jesus-followers who can't even believe the answer to their prayers that's knocking on the door “as the Word of God continues to multiply and spread.”

## 2) A bright light in the cell

**Read.** Acts 12:6-11 NLT

The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

**Think.**

- When's the last time you experienced a dramatic divine intervention like Peter did? When's the last time you thought about pinching yourself to see if you were dreaming?
- James is killed but Peter is released. Why one and not the other? Why are some healed and delivered and some not? How might Jesus' answer to Peter in John 21:18-19 help us with this question?

**Pray.**

Lord Jesus, give me the quiet trust of Peter that allowed him to sleep even in prison awaiting death. Let me trust you whether the iron gate swings open or stays shut.

**Live.**

Commit a hopeless situation in your life to the Lord's keeping.

## 4) Herod put on his royal robes

**Read.** Acts 12:18-22 NLT

At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while. Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon Herod's country for food. The delegates won the support of Blastus, Herod's personal assistant, and an appointment with Herod was granted. When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. The people gave him a great ovation, shouting, "It's the voice of a god, not of a man!"

**Think.**

- What does Herod's treatment of the guards tell you about him? How about his ovation at Caesarea? Combining this with what we have seen previously of this Herod, how would you describe him? What is the good, the bad, and the ugly you see in him?
- Why does Herod go to Caesarea? What difficulties was he having with the people of Tyre and Sidon? What maneuvers do they make? How does Herod's response to the people compare with Peter's response to Cornelius' bowing to him?
- When have you been tempted to "lay it on thick" to appease or please someone? How do you respond to flattery?

**Pray.**

Lord, let me always and only seek to please you — and keep me real and humble as I relate to others.

**Live.**

Watch for an opportunity to give someone a genuine compliment.

## 3) Peter continued knocking

**Read.** Acts 12:12-17 NLT

When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.

**Think.**

- How did the believers respond to news that Peter was knocking on the door? If they were praying for Peter's release, why were they so incredulous?
- How do you think you would have responded if you had been in that prayer meeting when Rhoda brought news that Peter was at the door? In other words, when you pray for rain do you carry an umbrella? Why or why not?
- After quieting the group, what did Peter tell them? What instructions did he give them? Where did he go?
- Where in your life do you feel you need a "faith lift"?

**Pray.**

Holy Spirit, make me quicker to trust your moving, your persistent presence in the midst of whatever mess may surround me.

**Live.**

Join with other believers in expectant prayer this week.

## 5) He was consumed by worms and died

**Read.** Acts 12:23-25 NLT

Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God. So he was consumed with worms and died. Meanwhile, the word of God continued to spread, and there were many new believers.

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission to Jerusalem, they returned, taking John Mark with them.

**Read.** Revelation 11:17-18 Message

We thank you, O God, Sovereign-Strong,

Who Is and Who Was.

You took your great power  
and took over—reigned!

The angry nations now  
get a taste of your anger.

The time has come to judge the dead,  
to reward your servants, all prophets and saints,

Reward small and great who fear your Name,  
and destroy the destroyers of earth.

**Think.**

- What do you make of Herod's sudden death? Why this tyrant and not others?
- What earthly powers and influences seem all powerful to you? How does this chapter put them in perspective?
- After all is said and done with Herod, what is the status of the church?

**Pray.**

Lord, when people obsess over conspiracy and earthly powers, help me to keep my eyes rooted on you and your movement in this world

**Live.** As you read the headlines today, meditate on Rev. 11:17-18.