

Acts 12:20-24 NIV

"The hazards of boasting"

"Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. ²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, '**This is the voice of a god, not of a man.**'

"²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.²⁴ But the word of God continued to spread and flourish."

Those who attend a church that strictly follows the Lectionary might not know about this unsavory, but true story.

What happened?

Why did it occur?

Does it matter to you today?

A few details help.

Though Rome's emperors controlled the first century known world, but they sometimes let conquered countries rule their own areas.

Rome permitted local rule on two conditions:

A) Local rulers had to keep the peace;

B) The people of the region paid taxes.

In Israel's case, Roman often sent its own administrators like Governor Pontius Pilot.

At other times, local rulers like King Herod and his family oversaw Israel.

King Herod's grandfather ruled ruthlessly.

Granddad Herod also distinguished himself as a builder.

He constructed the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem and other impressive landmarks.

Because he loved racing, as folks now follow NASCAR, Granddad Herod built a hippodrome for horse and chariot racing in Jerusalem.

He also built the port city of Caesarea and its huge capacity amphitheater (see pp. 5 & 6).

Grandpa Herod died in 4 BC.

The incident in our text occurred about 45 AD.

Grandson Herod killed the Apostle James.

He failed, though, to execute Peter, so he decided to return to Caesarea's more comfortable digs.

One more detail helps us understand.

At the time, the urban centers Tyre and Sidon depended on agricultural areas for food supplies.

Citizens of Tyre and Sidon offended Herod.

That created a crisis because Herod controlled the breadbasket interior regions.

Herod cut off the cities' grain shipments.

Hoping to repair the relationship, the Tyre and Sidon folks apparently sponsored a huge event at the Caesarea Amphitheater and invited Herod to give a speech.

Adding intriguing details, the first century Jewish historian, Josephus wrote about the event:

At a festival honoring Caesar, "A great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons and . . . of dignity through his province. On the second day . . . he (Herod) put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of . . . contexture truly wonderful and came into the theatre early in the morning; . . . the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays shone out after a surprising manner . . . so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him . . . presently **his flatterers cried out, one from one place and from another (and not for his good,) that he was a god;** and they added 'Be thou merciful to us for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.' Upon this, the king did neither rebuke them nor

reject their impious nature. . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly."

King Herod died at age fifty four.¹

King Herod's horrible death occurred as a warning, not just to rulers, but to all people.

What caution signs does this incident raise?

Pride caused Herod to claim he was a god.

Similar pride caused Adam and Eve to assume they knew more about life than God.

God later warned Israel:

"But if you will not listen to me and . . . fail to carry out all my commands . . . then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain . . .

¹⁷ I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. ¹⁸ If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. ¹⁹ **I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.**"²

¹ Josephus, *ANTIQUITIES of the JEWS*, Book XIX, Chapter VIII, 2, *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, p- 582

² From Leviticus 26: 14-19 NIV

Daniel 4: describes the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, mightiest country of his time.

Nebuchadnezzar “said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

He was quite a braggart, wasn't he?

God quickly humbled King Nebuchadnezzar with the agony of madness for a time.

When God restored him, the king confessed:

“³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation . . . **those who walk in pride he is able to humble.**”³

God regularly humbles human pride.

As gravity pulls us to earth, He brings us down.

Something tells us about the dangers of bragging or assuming something will take place.

How many times have you expressed confidence, but then quickly added, “Knock on wood,” and anxiously looked for wood to knock on?

Often when I was young and getting proud or acting brashly, my mother would tell me:

“Bob, you're getting too big for your breeches.”

Pictures of me when I was young show that my trousers were usually baggy, not tight.

Mom didn't refer to my clothes, but my attitude.

If I brag about something I make, it often falls apart or fails.

To a friend, who commented on how well my 46 Chevy ran, I boasted that I had tuned it myself.

Within minutes that Bob-tuned Chevy quit on a four lane highway.

Years later, a visiting preacher commented on how well my classic 56 Chevy ran.

The engine blew up almost immediately at the intersection of Melrose and Vine in Hollywood.

Though the Bible repeatedly warns us, we Christians struggle to learn the pride lesson.

- “We are like the new grass in the morning,” Ps. 90.
- Jesus: “When you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” Luke 17:10 NIV
- Let me share something that shocked me in the Bible I've used for about two years.

The country's largest Bible publisher printed it.

Its concordance was produced by a large Christian foundation that purportedly contains “**a collection of the principal common words**” in the Bible.

³ Daniel 4:30-37 NIV

This Bible concordance lists the word *Ebenezer*, which appears only once (1 Samuel 7:12).

Yet this concordance, which appears in millions of Bibles, does not list the word *pride*. So you can see for yourself, I’m providing you a copy of page 1239 in my Bible, where I expected *Pride* to be listed. The concordance skips from *Pregnant* to *Priest*. You might say “they aborted it.” After I noticed the absence of *Pride*, I began listing occurrences of *Pride* I found during my daily reading. You can see my list in the space between the two columns on page 1239.

Remember, this concordance does include *Ebenezer*.

Would you believe me if I told you that this concordance also excludes the words *Hope, Humility, Humble, and Wisdom*?

In numerous contexts, many people in our society promote pride.

“Strut your stuff!”

“If you’ve got it, flaunt it!”

They despise any kind of humility.

“Don’t be an Uncle Tom!”

Recall, also that the Lectionary does not include our text about King Herod’s pride.

Here’s another passage Lectionaries exclude:

“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion,

kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you . . .”⁴

If we pass ourselves off as special, we attempt to make others subservient to us or less than we, don’t we?

Worst of all, we don’t glorify God, our Creator. Jesus demonstrated total unselfishness and complete dedication to God:

“He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross,” *Philippians 2:8 NIV*.

Few people credit God or honor him.

Above all other things, we believers should be notable for praising God.

Media figures, politicians, and sometimes preachers excel in the pride God abhors:

Arrogance, which is being puffed up;

Boasting, which is loud clanging.

Paul noted that the Lord subjected him to “a thorn in the flesh” to keep him from becoming conceited (literally “hyper proud) because of the great revelations Paul had received.⁵

⁴ Colossians 3:12-14 NIV The rest of Colossians chapter 3 and parallel passages in Ephesians 5, 6 illustrate how far human pride has led societies away from God.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Paul told the Corinthian church:

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁶

Having read what the Scriptures say about human pride, I’m reluctant to say I am proud of anything.

I’m thankful for God’s mercy. I know He wants me to love and honor Him.

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”⁷

If we praise and honor God, there’s no place for bragging, boasting, or pride, is there?

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Times of Israel photo of the Caesarea amphitheater, originally built by King Herod the Great; died 4 BC.



alamy photo of model city of Jerusalem (1st Century).

⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:2 NIV

⁷ Ibid, 10:31 NIV

