

Acts 12 "Peter and Herod" 2024-07-28.

Intro & Review:

Chapter 12 is the last part of section 2 of the book of Acts. Next week, we will begin part 3 that is mainly about Paul and his three missionary journeys. Again, you'll remember Luke is documenting how the gospel progressed from being primarily a Jewish phenomenon to being a gentile one. It is the story of how the risen and ascended savior is conquering not only the land of Israel but the whole world. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the outermost part of the world." Luke is demonstrating the fulfilling of that prophecy in the early NT church.

The broad division of the chapter is verses 1-19 are about Peter's imprisonment and subsequent miraculous release. Verses 20-25 cover the death of Herod.

Highlights:

1. Persecution 2-11

V2 James is killed

- There are two James' who were Jesus' disciples. This is James, son of Zebedee, brother of John. He was part of the inner circle of Jesus (Peter, James, and John). He and John were called "sons of thunder". Jesus predicted his persecution in Mark 10:39. This is not the James in v 17 who was the ½ brother of Jesus and leader of the church at Jerusalem and who wrote the epistle of James. There is also a third James, son of Alphaeus, who was one of the original 12 apostles, not mentioned here.

- There are five (!) "Herods" in the NT. This "Herod" is the grandson of "Herod the great", who was ruler during the birth narrative of Jesus and ordered that all the babies be killed. This is Herod Agrippa I, Herod the great's grandson. What happens here is in AD 41, so roughly 8-10 years have passed from the time Jesus ascended. This Herod was a people pleaser and after seeing how the Jews responded to the execution of James, he figured he'd do 'em one better and kill Peter too.

-This is the third imprisonment or jailing of Peter.

V6 Peter was SLEEPING.

V11 God releases Peter from Prison

2. V 5 & 12 Prayer is the *means* by which God does His will. God has ordained the end as well as the means.

-Omniscience, Providence and Sovereignty. The Westminster confession, chapter 3, paragraph 1: "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." We are not changing God's mind or moving Him to action. God is not capricious.

-Man's responsibility and faith.

-James 5:16 -context of confession of sin... "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"

The bottom line is that we pray because He told us to and somehow, in some strange and supernatural way, God uses those prayers to accomplish His will. Prayer is one of the means by which He has ordained or chosen to work and move.

Do it! Do it regularly, strategically, and extemporaneously. Just do it. Stay in constant contact.

3. Providence: V23 God killed Herod. This episode is also documented in Josephus' work. If you're not familiar, Josephus was a Jewish-Roman historian who lived from 37-100AD. You can read his works for free online. He records the account that we just read about in Antiquities 19: 343-350:

After the completion of the third year of his reign over the whole of Judea, Agrippa came to the city of Caesarea... Here he celebrated spectacles in honor of Caesar... On the second day of the spectacles, clad in a garment woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous, he entered the theater at daybreak. There the silver, illumined by the touch of the first rays of the sun, was wondrously radiant and by its glitter inspired fear and awe in those who gazed intently upon it. Straightway his flatterers raised their voices from various directions—though hardly for his good—addressing him as a god. "May you be propitious to us," they added, "and if we have hitherto feared you as a man, yet henceforth we agree that you are more than mortal in your being." The king did not rebuke them nor did he reject their flattery as impious. But shortly thereafter he looked up and saw an owl perched on a rope over his head. At once, recognizing this as a harbinger of woes..., he felt a stab of pain in his heart. He was also gripped in his stomach by an ache that he felt everywhere at once and that was intense from the start.

Josephus says that Herod endured this pain for five days before departing life in his fifty-fourth year. The lesson of Herod's death was not lost on those who were present,

certainly not on Josephus. No mere mortal dare take the glory due to God alone. Herod did that, and God struck him down. (JMB, Acts; pg 216-217).

Chapter 12 begins and ends with Herod. He persecuted the church and now, he himself is killed by God. Things are not always as they seem. Sometimes when it feels like we're losing, God is doing something we can't see in the moment.

This occasion reminds me of the popularized Ezekiel 25:17 where God tells the nations of Moab, Edom and Philistia, that he would execute vengeance upon them for what they had done to His people. Psalm 2 says:

1Why do the nations rage And the peoples meditate on a vain thing? **2**The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against Yahweh and against His Anointed, *saying*, **3**“Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!” **4**He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord mocks them. **5**Then He speaks to them in His anger And terrifies them in His fury, *saying*, **6**“But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.” **7**“I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. **8**Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth as Your possession. **9**You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like a potter’s vessel.” **10**So now, O kings, show insight; Take warning, O judges of the earth. **11**Serve Yahweh with fear And rejoice with trembling. **12**Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Herod opposed the king and His people. God killed him. Don't forget that Jesus wins.

4. Propagation: V24 “multiplied”

-There is a touch of irony here. It is something that occurs frequently throughout the Bible. “Irony, in its broadest sense, is the juxtaposition of what on the surface appears to be the case and what is actually the case or to be expected.” Herod, it would seem was in control and was going to stomp out the early church. Instead, God kills him and “the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied.”

Instead of the church declining, it increases. I wonder if in our very own day, where we see Christianity on a steep decline in the west and in our own country, if this is just a momentary setback. I am confident that Jesus is Lord and He will conquer the nations, just as He said. That's one reason I'm postmillennial. If you don't know that term, don't get hung up on it. It just means that we don't believe in the modern notion that things will continue to get worse

leading up to the return of Christ. Instead, we believe that on the grand global scale, things will get better as Jesus puts His enemies under His feet. We don't believe in a secret rapture and future for Israel as such. We don't get caught up in reading the Bible through the lens of the current news cycle. Instead, we believe that Jesus is building His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail. Both now, and forever. We are optimistic about the future.

Perhaps God is again doing something that we cannot see. Maybe we're winning. Indeed, Lord, let it be.

5. People: V25 Barnabas, Saul and John Mark.

-Here we see the different people that God used to bring about His kingdom rule. Each had a part to play. Barnabas was the elderly encourager and mentor. He seems to be the guy continually supporting the work of the ministry and in many ways is the tip of the spear.

Although not seen yet, Saul was the intellectual evangelist. He reminds me of other intellectuals that go on tour. I think about the late Chistopher Hitchens or the modern Jordan Peterson who travels around giving lectures to general audiences. We will get a very heavy dose of Paul soon enough. It is worth noting that Saul had been in obscurity for as many as ten years passed when Barnabas went to find him at Tarsus. There is a lesson there, in and of itself.

We also have Mark. AKA John Mark. He is Barnabas' cousin. He is the young disciple who ends up writing the first formal gospel that we have in our New Testament. He has a falling out with Paul but matures and becomes a strong man in the faith. There is another lesson here about reconciliation between brothers and longsuffering and not giving up on people.

1. Persecution, 2. Prayer, 3. Providence, 4. Propagation, 5. People.

Closing Prayer:

Oh Lord God, You not only created the heavens and the earth but You created us to worship and serve You. We now remember that Your Son has conquered sin, death, the devil and hell. No power in heaven or on earth can overcome Him. Move now, by your Spirit and quicken the hearts of those who need to be saved. Sharpen our experience of your word and nourish our souls now as we take the Lord's supper. Would You now, give us spiritual food and drink? For your glory and in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Outline of Textual Themes:

1. Persecution
2. Prayer
3. Providence
4. Propagation
5. People

Questions:

How is James described in v2? Who was he? How was he different from the James in v17?

What was Peter doing in v6?

Why did God kill Herod in v23?

What is the reoccurring theme found in the summary statement of v24?

Who is John Mark in v25?

Application:

What has the Spirit impressed on you because of today's message?

What needs to change? What previous commitment has been reinforced?