

Sovereign Grace & Sudden Judgment - Acts 12:1-24 **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

Notes from the Sermon

At first glance, the confrontation between the early church and King Herod Agrippa I seemed to be a mismatch. Acts 12 verifies something that probably terrified early believers, the reality that the persecution of the church was now being instigated by a major ruler representing the Roman Empire. The Herods were a family of rulers from the Middle East, yet who gained favor with the line of Caesars in Rome. When possible, Rome would set up local rulers to govern people in areas of the empire who would work to keep the region loyal to the Empire while ruling their local people. The Bible tells us of six men in this dynasty of local kings and rulers who governed areas of the Middle East beginning with Herod the Great. The Herod in Acts 12 was known as Herod Agrippa I, and he is the only one whose rule came anywhere close to the size of his grandfather, Herod the Great. He was a sly politician who developed friendships with multiple men who eventually became Roman Emperors. He also accomplished something his predecessor had been unable to do, gaining favor and creating a level of peace in Judea and Jerusalem. He did this by moving the seat of his rule from Caesarea, a Roman city on the coast to Jerusalem when he gained power in the early 40's AD. Furthermore, he became active in the religion of Judaism, attending Temple and honoring the Jewish laws and rituals in his rule. Historians believe this was more an act of political expediency rather than authentic belief. Still, this favor gained him great trust in Rome as he maintained peace in a region that had for the most part been volatile.

Acts 12 is a bit of an excursus in the flow of Acts. In Acts 11 we are introduced to the church in the Roman city of Antioch in Syria. Acts 13 returns to the story of the church in this town. But Acts 12 focuses on the story of Herod Agrippa, his attempt to persecute the church, and his ultimate demise. An interesting fact, this chapter is also a beautiful reminder that Luke is writing history, and that he is an excellent historian, as the details of this chapter are verified by First Century Jewish historian Josephus. But why does Luke include this story? I think there are a few important reasons. First, he is showing us that the location of Christian persecution is no longer centered in Jerusalem, but now is being brought by a prominent Roman ruler. It's one thing when the Jews, with limited power and regional authority are seeking to harass believers in Jesus, but the game changes when the persecution is initiated by Rome. This chapter is written to tell the story of Peter's release and Herod's doom to give the future church hope as it too faces the immanent threat of Roman (or any future kingdom's) persecution.

As mentioned, it seemed like a mismatch. In one corner is Herod Agrippa, the King, along with the Jewish religious leaders. Herod laid violent hands on some in the church, and he executed James, the brother of John. This James was a fisherman, called by Jesus to follow Him and become a fisher of men. So this story tells us of the first death of an Apostle, martyred for being a witness of Christ. That act pleased the Jews solidifying Herod's favor, so he followed this up by snatching Peter who came to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover, and having him placed in prison. Peter is guarded by a rotating group of soldiers, four squads of four soldiers who take three hour rotations making sure this one lowly fisherman follower of Christ does not try to escape. Hope seems lost. Yet in the other corner is a band of people on their knees in a Jerusalem home. People praying, seems pretty weak and helpless. Yep, it's a mismatch! The story tells us of the miraculous deliverance of Peter in a very comical account ending with the hilarious account of Peter knocking at the door of the home

wanting in, and the praying people on the inside calling the servant crazy for telling them that Peter is outside, which was the answer they had hoped for. Even prayer mixed with a little unbelief, yet made to the True and Living God, the King of the universe carries more weight, more power than any human ruler. Kings can kill believers, but this only gives them true life. And the more they squeeze the more God will use this to advance the Gospel and spread the church. The story ends with Peter free and preaching the Gospel somewhere else in the Roman Empire unfettered. Eventually he will make it to the ultimate seat of power in Rome to preach there. Meanwhile, Herod meets his ultimate demise at the very moment he received praise from a crowd of people willing to declare him a god, and is ultimately eaten by worms.

John Piper sums up this chapter with this quote. "This is a very simple chapters. If you oppose God you will lose, if you stand at the side of Christ you will win!"

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
1 Kings 13	1 Kings 14	1 Kings 15	1 Kings 16	1 Kings 17	1 Kings 18	1 Kings 19

Reading from this past week: Acts 12:1-24

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3

Family Worship

Song - *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

<https://youtu.be/2yZVweZ2Cvg>

Gospel Project

Unit: King David

Story: God Made a Covenant with David

Big Picture Question: What is grace?

Answer: Grace is when God gives us something good even when we do not deserve it.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 6-7

New City Catechism

Question #29: How can we be saved?

Answer: Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross.

Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9

Scripture

Acts 12:1-24

- Who seems to have the upper hand when you start reading this chapter, Herod or the praying church and Peter? How does this story help us with our faith?
- Was Jesus unfair to James who died? Why or why not?
- What does the demise of Herod show us about all rulers and people who stand in prideful opposition to Jesus and the Gospel?

Prayer

*Pray for Kids Clubs we have coming up this and in the next couple weeks

*Pray for the Emerald Forest neighborhood

*Pray that you would stand clearly on the side of Jesus.