

Sermon Title: Herod Agrippa's 15 Minutes
Scripture Text: Acts 12:1-25 (Acts #28)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-12-23

If you can remember all the way back to a week ago today, I did something rather unusual for *me*: I preached through an entire chapter of the Bible in *one sermon*! Buckle up—we are going to do it again! These two chapters fall together correctly; and as we come to Acts Chapter 12, it is such an interesting chapter of your Bible, and I think it really does fit very well for us to deal with it as one unit.

At the end of Chapter 11—where we left off last week—remember, Barnabas and Saul left Antioch, where the first big Gentile church had been planted; and they were sent to deliver an offering from the Gentile believers in Antioch to the Jewish believers in Judea because a famine was sweeping over the land, and this was a marvelous way to show the connection between Jew and Gentile, "all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28; cf. Jn. 10:16; Eph. 2:11-16; 3:6; Col. 3:11). When we get to the beginning of Chapter 13—the next chapter—Barnabas and Saul are back in Antioch, and the stage is set for sending Barnabas and Saul on the First Missionary Journey. Chapter 12 ends with Verse 25—and we will get there in a little while—"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark." Now, if you took *that verse* and stuck it at the end of the previous chapter, if the first 24 verses of Chapter 12 were not here, and you read through everything else, you would not say, "What's missing?" It connects *perfectly*.

But Chapter 12 *is* here, and so this developing story of the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles is the big sweep of this—and to that end, it does not look like Chapter 12 is even necessary, but it *is* here. Therefore, we know it is "inspired," it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," and it is all about us being "equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17; NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

So we have this chapter here, and at the center of this chapter is a man named Herod Agrippa I. It is his "15 minutes of fame." More accurately—and you will agree, once we see this—his 15 minutes of *infamy*. Chapter 12 is going to show us what to expect from government leaders. It is going to teach us, by example, how to pray better. From observing what goes on here, it is going to teach us to better understand and be reminded of God's sovereignty and His providence. And it is going to show us even more of the human side of the transitions that are going on as God is whittling away at things that are carryovers from the Old Covenant that need to be scraped away, and the New Covenant in force fully (Heb. 8:13).

So I want to do the whole chapter. I want to give you the Cast of Characters so that I don't have to stop a whole bunch of times along here and give you details. So, here we go—here is the Cast of Characters for this chapter:

The main guy is "Herod the king" (vs. 1)—Herod Agrippa I. He is a grandson of Herod the Great: the Herod you hear about around the birth of Christ. He was the one who got Rome to give him the title "King of the Jews"; and so, when Jesus was born and these Magi showed up from Persia and said, "Where is He who has been *born* King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2), oh, boy, did the sparks fly at that point! He was the one who tried to kill the baby Jesus. He was a brilliant man, and a spectacularly wicked man.

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Well, Herod Agrippa I was a skunk—just like his grandfather, Herod the Great, but without as much clout. Herod the Great had a whole bunch of people killed, including many family members; one of them was his son, named Aristobulus, and Aristobulus was the father of Herod Agrippa I. So the guy in this chapter—grandson of Herod the Great.

Agrippa I had gotten in trouble in Rome by getting into serious debt. We don't know how he managed to do that, but he ran away to Palestine; and when he was there, he made some careless and unwise comments on the Internet that got back to the ears of the Emperor Tiberius. He didn't even have an Internet, and he managed to offend the Emperor hundreds and hundreds of miles away! So, Tiberius threw him in prison.

Then, after Tiberius died, Agrippa was released, and there was still this heritage of Herod the Great being passed on through his family, and Herod Agrippa I was made the ruler of part of Palestine—what we would call Israel—where he was in power from the years 37 to 44 A.D.

Because he was on shaky ground with Rome, it was *especially* crucial that there not be any trouble in his realm. He had to keep the Jews peaceful and happy, and maintain their tenuous loyalty to Rome—make sure that the tax money kept flowing to Rome—and he found that one of the ways that he could appease the Jews was to persecute the Christians, especially the Apostles; and we are going to see that play out in the chapter.

Okay, moving on in the Cast of Characters, much quicker: "James the brother of John" (vs. 2). He is one of the Twelve Apostles. Along with his brother John, they were the "sons" of the man named "Zebedee" (Mk. 10:35); they were the ones nicknamed "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). His part of the story in this chapter is going to be tragically brief, but you will see his name.

"The Jews" (vs. 3) refers to the leaders of the Jews: the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:21). They were primarily composed of "Sadducees" (Acts 5:17), but they held their power in this tense balance with the Pharisees.

You are going to see "Peter" (vs. 3). He is our good friend Peter the Apostle. He has been the central figure in Acts since the beginning.

They you are going to meet "four squads of soldiers" (vs. 4). Those are Roman soldiers, and a "squad" was four men. So these 16 were given the task of guarding one prisoner, Peter.

Then you are going to meet "an angel of the Lord" (vs. 7). He is going to be dispatched from God, just like Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation."

And you are going to meet a woman named "Mary, the mother of John" (vs. 12). She is the woman who owned a house where many Christians met in Jerusalem; and then you will see, in a minute, who that "John" is.

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"John" is the one "who was also called Mark" (vs. 12), and he is a "cousin" of "Barnabas" (Col. 4:10). Are you getting all this for the exam? In our daily e-mails, we are studying the book that Mark wrote—the Gospel According To Mark, Peter probably being his source for that book (see 1 Pet. 5:13).

Then you are going to meet "many...gathered together" (vs. 12). That is a group of devout believers in Christ. They "gathered" in the home of "Mary" in order to pray. Mary obviously had some wealth, because she had a house that was big enough to be a regular meeting place for Christians.

You are going to meet a "girl names Rhoda" (vs. 13). She was "a servant-girl" in the home of "Mary." She wound up getting her name in the Bible, even though she is known *only* for answering the door and never letting the guy in! Interesting.

Then there's "James and the brethren" (vs. 17). That refers to a *different* James—"James," one of the half-brothers of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Gal. 1:19), who became the de facto leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9). The Apostles were sent out, scattered, taking the Gospel everywhere; and so it was a non-Apostle, but a very close associate of the Apostles, James the half-brother of Jesus, that led that church there.

And "the brethren" refers to whatever other Apostles who were still in Jerusalem, and the other leaders of the church there—like, for example, the deacons that we met in Chapter 6, and whoever else it might be.

You are also going to see "the people of Tyre and Sidon" (vs. 20). "Tyre and Sidon" were two seaport cities north of Caesarea along the Mediterranean "coast" (Lk. 6:17). They were not part of Herod Agrippa's reign, but they did a lot of business with Galilee, and there was a problem in that relationship. You will see how that tension getting resolved is part of this story.

And then, you are going to meet a man named "Blastus" (vs. 20). If you are pregnant and looking for a Biblical name, there's one for you to try. He was apparently the treasurer—or, it says "chamberlain" in our translation—serving under Agrippa, and he mediated a resolution to that tension with "Tyre and Sidon."

And then, you are going to meet another "angel of the Lord" (vs. 23), who was dispatched by God on the tragic final day of the life of Agrippa I.

And then, the last two names: "Barnabas" (vs. 25)—same guy we have seen. He is *everybody's* friend; he is faithful; he is tireless. He is going to play a very big role in the coming chapters.

And "Saul" (vs. 25) is Saul of Tarsus—brought to the Lord miraculously after persecuting the church (Acts Chapter 9). He is soon—starting in the next chapter—finally going to be known as the Apostle Paul.

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Well, here comes Herod Agrippa the First's 15 Minutes Of Fame. Here is how the chapter goes:

1. Herod Murders An Apostle (vss. 1-2)
2. Herod Arrests An Apostle (vss. 3-4)
3. Herod Is Overruled By An Angel (vss. 5-17)
4. Herod Throws A Tantrum (vss. 18-20)
5. Herod Becomes Worm Food (vss. 21-23) [I worked on that one.]
6. Herod Can't Stop God (vss. 24-25)

Let's dive in: Herod Murders An Apostle.

Chapter 12, Verse 1—"Now about that time..." What time? Well, the time of the "famine" (Acts 11:28)—the time when Saul and Barnabas had taken that gift up to Jerusalem. "About that time, Herod the king laid hands"—that means "arrested"—"laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them." And again, "Herod the King" is Herod Agrippa I, grandson of the murderous Herod the Great.

By the way: There is *another* "Agrippa" that we are going to meet. Later in the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul is going to be put on trial in front of Herod Agrippa II, who is the *son* of Herod Agrippa I—therefore, the *great*-grandson of Herod the Great. Someday as we go through Acts, I'll have to show you the family tree of the Herod family; quite interesting, and it intersects with the Bible in *many* places (see last page of this transcript).

Well, Agrippa figured out that he could please the Jewish leaders if he persecuted their enemies, the Christians; and so, he went after an unspecified number—a number of "some who belonged to the church." The worst case was one of the Apostles: Look at Verse 2—"And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword."

Interesting: "James the son of Zebedee" (Matt. 4:21; 10:2) was the first Apostle to die, *and* he is also the only one whose death is recorded in the Bible. Now, we have some fragments of historical records, and a *fairly* good idea of what happened to most of the Apostles. And interestingly, John the son of Zebedee and James the son of Zebedee were the last and the first Apostles to die—James being the first, and John being the second one; and John went on to write five books of the New Testament.

Interesting detail here: "he had James the brother of John put to death..." If you had a period there—again, like this whole chapter—you would not say, "I'm missing something. How did he die?" Well, he was killed by King Agrippa. But "with a sword"—if you want to make anything of that detail, it could very well be that the Jews convinced Agrippa *how* they wanted James killed. The Romans, if they had a big-time criminal, how did they kill him? Crucified him. So, killing him "with the sword": *Probably* what is going on here is that those leaders of the Jews, in their *utter* hypocrisy—"Well, let's commit murder!"—but they wanted to do it in a manner that was "biblical." Deuteronomy 13:12-15 specifies death by "sword" for those who would lead Jews to follow other gods. And how much irony is that? They understood that Jesus claimed to be God (e.g., Jn. 5:18, 23a; 8:58)—

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they just rejected the claim (Jn. 10:33). So, they considered Him a false teacher; and therefore, James and all the other Apostles were leading people to what *they* thought was a false god.

This chapter is here for our edification. What can we apply from observing this?

Well, understand: Leaders of government quite often—more often than not—consider Christians either to be dangerous threats to their power, or they discover that attacking Christians can gain them favor with people that they want to please. Don't be surprised when it happens. Now, it's okay to rejoice when the government *doesn't* try to kill you, but government is *never* what makes the church holy. Government is *never* what makes the church fruitful. And as a matter of fact, government in the hands of unregenerate people is *almost always the enemy* of the church, to one degree or another. Now, don't make an absolute out of it, but that is the case.

Now, secondly: Herod Arrests An Apostle.

"Well," he said, "I hit a homerun with that one! Let's do some more!" Verse 3—"When he saw that it pleased the Jews"—that is, killing James—"he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread." That is the seven-day feast that went on for seven days after the Passover (Ex. 12:14-20). "When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people" (vs. 4). So, what he is doing is, he wants to get the *maximum* PR benefit that he can by having Peter killed as *visibly*, publicly as possible. Oh, how nice.

So he assigns 16 men—"four squads of soldiers." That kind of reminds me of the arrest of Jesus—a totally peaceful guy, praying in a peaceful garden at night—and they sent *hundreds* of soldiers to arrest Him (Jn. 18:3), as if He is this dangerous, dangerous criminal. He says two words, and they all get knocked "to the ground" (Jn. 18:6); let's you know who is in charge (Jn. 10:17-18; cf. Matt. 27:50). Or then, Pilate placing the soldiers to "guard" the tomb (Matt. 27:65-66).

Well, each squad was four soldiers—a total of 16 men. It looks like they probably, logically, took shifts of guarding him two by two, one at each side, and two others at the door. So they could have had four different shifts per day to guard him 24 hours a day, until Herod could bring him out as a spectacle during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

So what are we supposed to apply, what are we supposed to learn from observing this?

Well, in our society, we have ones in power who also want to do evil things. We don't have any Apostles to get arrested, but lots of Christians around that could be arrested. And we have people in power who are *bent* on making it legal and convenient—and with no shame attached to it—to kill unborn children; people who want to live in mental fantasy-land, believing there are multiple genders; people who want to be able to have sex freely with anyone at any time, with no unintended consequences.

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We have people that are getting more philosophical about it, and enforcing the ideology of "DEI"—that's the new acronym: "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion"—which means that "We are diverse, we include *all* ideas and *all* people, and give them equal treatment...as long as they believe exactly what we say they should believe, and that they hate what we hate." We are living in a *tough world!*

And we have our *versions* of Herod, even if not somebody with that much power. Now, we are not yet being murdered and imprisoned here in America, generally speaking, or here in Idaho; but many of our brothers and sisters around the world *are*. Pray for them! And be wise, be prudent, be faithful, be prayerful—because the powers of darkness "*hate* the light" (Jn. 3:20); and if you "let your light shine" for the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:16), you become a target (2 Tim. 3:12; cf. Ps. 37:12; Prov. 28:4; Jn. 7:7b; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 12:17). And we are to learn from this example here.

Well, the next one—here comes the happiest part of the chapter: Herod is Overruled By An Angel.

Right at the time he was about to go make sport of Peter and make a spectacle of him, he encountered a problem: Verses 5 and 6—"So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward"—so, probably, meaning the night before he was going to do this in the morning—"Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains"—so you get the idea: chained to one on the right and one on the left—"and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison." So apparently: two chained to Peter, two at the door, and then they would rotate the shifts. That *sounds like* a pretty secure way to keep control of a totally peaceful man—that is, unless you are actually fighting against God, and there are a bunch of people *praying* for the release of that prisoner.

So, look at Verse 7—"And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And his chains fell off his hands." How *cool* would that be? You had already been there for a couple of days; every time you moved, *clank-clank-clank-clank*. They *fall off!* "And the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' " (vs. 8)

Angels are *really cool!* You have probably never met one in person; I haven't, either. Isn't it marvelous how an angel can just *show up* in the locked room; awaken *one person* chained to two guards, sleeping between them; leave the other guys sleeping; and he can even cause his heavenly headlights not to waken the guards. Again, it reminds me of the guards at the tomb of Jesus. Remember, they "became like dead men" (Matt. 28:4) when the stone was rolled away, and Jesus came out.

This angel was very efficient in carrying out his mission, and Peter—he wasn't sure if this was actually happening or if he was seeing a vision. A couple chapters ago, he *saw* that vision while he was praying and he saw the vision of the sheet; he didn't know if that was happening again, or just what.

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Look at Verses 9 and 10—"And he went out and continued to follow"—Peter following the angel—"and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first"—that would be the guard right at his cell—"and second guard"—that would be outside the little area of the prison—"they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself"—go ahead and be jealous, Yoda; the angel just said, "Open" and it opened—"and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him."

So, there's Peter, outside the prison now, down the street, and his escort is gone! "What do I do now?" Well, he realizes he is actually free. He had a pretty good idea of a place that he could go. Apparently, these prayer meetings were a regular event. But then, a funny thing happened to Peter on the way to see his friends, and he temporarily got left out in the cold. Good thing the angel told him to bring his cloak! The angel probably knew what was going to happen because God had told him.

So, look at Verse 11—"When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' ["What do you mean, thinking that the guy who we've been praying for his release is *released*, and he is outside the front door? What, are you *crazy* or something?"] But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, 'It is his angel.' " (vss. 11-15)

Now, there is a little bit of an insight here: There are many superstitions that were added to the Scriptures by the rabbis. One of them was that everybody has a specific "guardian angel" who can take on your form and impersonate you. That's crazy, but that was what they believed.

There is an insight there. These were *solid* Christian people, and they had not yet been expunged of all the carryovers from their pre-Christian beliefs. Well, they still had that little superstition going on, and false beliefs and superstitions die hard.

Now, I can't vouch for the state of mind of Rhoda, and explain why she answered the knock but did not open the gate. Maybe she had been told, "Look, Agrippa is in a really bad mood. Peter has been arrested. Don't open the gate." Maybe she had been told that, but then they tell her that she is *crazy*—it had to be tough for the poor girl.

But Peter was not going to stand out there all night. Verses 16 and 17—"But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door"—they means somebody went with Rhoda—"they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.' "

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Well, I *guess* they were amazed! What a glorious moment that must have been! And there must have been a commotion; maybe they started singing or something, because Peter is motioning them to be quiet. Look, it is not a great idea to make a ruckus during the night when you have a fugitive from the law in the house! And I am absolutely sure that, if not at that moment, there was soon to be an APB out for Peter's re-arrest. So Peter is not going to stay there; he is going to disappear, make himself scarce. But before he fled into hiding, he said, "Report this to the rest of the Apostles, and James the brother of Jesus." And I'm sure Peter wanted to warn them: "Everything you have heard about Agrippa—yeah, it's all true. *Be careful!*"

So, one more note: From here on, Peter is no longer in the spotlight. The only other time we are going to see him in the Book of Acts is very briefly at the Jerusalem Council in Chapter 15. That's not insignificant, but from here on, the focus is on Paul. Now, Peter is mentioned in some other books of the New Testament, not to mention the two that he wrote—First Peter and Second Peter, which are marvelous.

But what are we to apply from this?

Does that mean that if you are ever arrested, just get a lot of people to pray, and an angel is going to come and set you free? No. This is *not* a promise of miraculous intervention by God sending angels *any time* that we are in trouble; only when He wills.

But it *is* a confirmation of His power and His care for His people. He will get you where He wants you to be, one way or another (Prov. 20:24; Jer. 10:23; 2 Tim. 4:18).

Next point: Herod Throws A Tantrum.

It turns out: Apparently, Agrippa was easily scared off from arresting more Apostles. Instead of making a spectacle of Peter, now he has a rogue Apostle running loose that he meant to kill.

So now, he turns his murderous attention to his own guys—to the guards. Clearly, he didn't work very hard at understanding what actually happened—you know, interviewing witnesses, or anything like that. He didn't give any credence to the *real* explanation: that this was the hand of God. And we know that the death penalty was normally in place for soldiers if they let a prisoner escape.

That is going to come into play two other times in the Book of Acts, by the way. On those later occasions, the guards—the soldiers—are going to be spared, but not here. Herod Agrippa was furious. His plan blew up in his face, and *boy, was he mad!* So his solution was: Kill 16 innocent men, then go on vacation to your favorite spot from which he often carried out his rule, down in Caesarea. Look at it in Verses 18 and 19—"Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there." Caesarea is that place on the Mediterranean, built by Herod the Great—spectacular place.

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Well, Agrippa was still in is foul mood; he had just moved his foul mood from one place to another, and now he has another problem. This one *temporarily* worked out a lot better for him; it looked good.

There were those cities of "Tyre and Sidon"—not part of his realm, not part of Agrippa's reign—but they did a lot of trade with the region of Galilee, where Jesus did most of His earthly ministry for about a year and a half or two years. Galilee was sort of the bread basket that fed Tyre and Sidon; they needed each other economically, and their economies were linked.

Well, Tyre and Sidon were not under Agrippa's control, so he was *very angry* because this dispute was hurting the economy of Galilee, and Galilee was part of where his taxes came from! So, "Gotta fix *this one!*" And somebody had caused some sort of a trade strike—hurting Tyre and Sidon, therefore hurting Galilee, therefore hurting Agrippa.

Well, representatives from Tyre and Sidon somehow won over this guy named "Blastus." All we know is that he is a high-ranking servant of the king. Your translation says "chamberlain." They "won him over"—well, how did they do that? Maybe they were very persuasive, and maybe Blastus was reasonable. But then again, he served a guy like Agrippa. More likely, they bribed him to get Agrippa's ear, and it worked. We don't know why or how, but it set up Agrippa with a chance now to *look good*; and this is a Herod—he seizes *every* opportunity to look good.

So, Verse 20—"Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country." The farms in Galilee fed Tyre and Sidon, so they *needed* the trade.

Now, what can we apply from observing *this*—his tantrum?

Well, those who are willing to murder and imprison Christians—they have no scruples about doing the same thing to anyone that does not do their bidding (Prov. 21:10). Agrippa executed the guards, thumbing his nose at the power of God. He was "very angry" with these people for hitting him in the tax pocketbook, shutting down his revenue.

Such people like that *cannot* be reasoned with, but they are in the world. Sometimes they gain positions of much power. The only hope for them is to be brought to new life in Christ. And as we have to sometimes live under their influence, "be wise as serpents," gentle "as doves" (Matt. 10:16, NKJV); be circumspect.

Well, Herod Murders An Apostle, He Arrests An Apostle, He Is Overruled By An Angel, He Throws A Tantrum, and then: Herod Becomes Worm Food.

The stage is set here for Herod Agrippa. He is thinking that something is working out really good, and he is happy to take *all* the credit. However it was done, Blastus did the hard work, and then Agrippa is *happy* to jump in and show off his pomp and his power.

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So, look at it in Verses 21 and 22—"On an appointed day Herod..." That's the only thing Herod *ever* did anything in public. "I'm going to be out there, go gather a crowd. This is the day for *Herod* to show off!" "On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' "

Now, understand: Emperor-worship was part of that culture; we don't relate to that. So this *isn't really* a surprise, but it is a bad idea. Remember, Cornelius wanted to worship Peter, and Peter immediately snuffed that out. Well, not so with Herod Agrippa. He was *happy* to let them say, "The voice of a god!"

If you have been to Israel—and if you haven't been, you can look this up—you almost certainly have been to Caesarea, and you have seen this amphitheater built by Agrippa's grandfather, Herod the Great. The Jewish historian named Josephus—who was paid to write a history of this time of the early church and the Jews dealing with the early church—he describes the scene this way: ""[Herod] put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner."

God treated this pompous, proud, arrogant, murderous man in a unique way—but *for one moment*, they were crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" The way that theater is situated, at the right time of year the sun could come up and it could gleam off of the guy that is down there facing up to the crowd where he is going to make his speech.

And then this happened: Verse 23—"And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died." That might have been the same angel. God might have said, "Okay, let Peter out of prison, take a couple days off, and then head down to Caesarea; I have something else for you to do." More likely, another angel was dispatched for that. Maybe this angel had already served in the days of the Tenth Plague, and maybe he was one of those "angels" of death (Ps. 78:49; cf. 2 Ki. 19:35; 2 Chr. 32:21). We don't know.

I like you so much, I'm not going to give you the detailed biological description of what almost certainly happened to Herod. Here is the lightweight version of it: He had obviously become infected with tapeworms; words used here in the Greek tell you that. These tapeworms—you get them from eating food that is infected with the eggs of the tapeworms and they form cysts on the liver; and as they grow, as they multiply, when the cysts rupture, the infection spreads rapidly, and the result is *exceedingly* unpleasant. And it is deadly. Josephus wrote that Herod Agrippa lingered for *five days* in excruciating pain.

Well, the manner of his death illustrates God's view of such a man. What crime was he executed for? It's right there: "he did not give God the glory." Read Romans 1:21-23 and you will see that the reason all who reject Christ will be condemned is: They "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (vs. 18), they did not glorify God for who He is (see Ex. 20:3-5; 34:14; Is. 42:8; 48:11).

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After the coroner examined it, the cause of death was ruled "angel of the Lord," but the symptoms were "eaten by worms"—that was a flourish of God's displeasure.

So it says that "an angel of the Lord struck him..." Did this angel shine? I don't know. Herod Agrippa is enjoying the sun shining on his shiny silver suit, and probably an angel comes in with *blinding* light and touches him. And I think the angel said, "Psst! Little tapeworms! Go!" Five excruciating days, followed by eternal torment (Matt. 18:8; 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 7).

What can we apply from observing this?

Well again, understand: This passage is *descriptive* of what happened; it is not *prescriptive* for what *should* happen or *will* happen. It is not usually so vividly played out in this world, but understand: It is *true*. Hebrews 9:27—"It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."

Or, Jesus said: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which *all* who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (Jn. 5:28-29; cf. Dan. 12:2; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:11-13). Herod Agrippa *will be resurrected* to "judgment"—and in the meantime, he is in "torment" already (Lk. 16:24, NKJV). It is *not* going well for Agrippa, and it won't get any better. He will be resurrected and sent to "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 14-15).

But finally, understand: Another reason this chapter is here is to say: Herod Cannot Stop God. And fill in the blank: "Herod—*Anybody Else*—Cannot Stop God."

As I said, the chapter ends with it all set up for launching the ministry of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles throughout the Roman world. The last two verses: 24 and 25—"But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."

Have you noticed: Every time somebody goes after God's people, you read a few verses down: "And the word of the Lord multiplied, and many believed, and the church grew!" That is sometimes why there *is not* as much *overt* physical persecution—because *it causes the growth of the church!*

Verse 25—"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark." They came back to Antioch. Next week, we meet in Antioch; we are going to launch Paul and Barnabas.

So, what can we apply from observing this?

Why did God stick in Chapter 12? We don't *need* it, as far as the spread of the Gospel to "Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But it is here for us to learn: *He is in control!* His plans *cannot be stopped* (Job 40:9-12; 42:2; Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; 21:30; Is. 46:10; Dan. 4:35). Even the *worst* that man can do cannot thwart God's eternal plan!

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Saul, who was about to become Paul, had not even begun his overt public ministry to the Gentiles. He hasn't written any books of the Bible yet, but eventually he will write Romans, from which you know these famous words in Romans 8:28—"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

You say, "Well, was that *good*, for James to be the first Apostle murdered?" Well, *yeah*—for James! I mean, tragic for everybody around him, but he got to be the *first* of the Apostles in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). Had to wait awhile for his brother to get there. That's okay.

Look: "God causes *all things* to work together for good *to those who love God*, to those who are called according to His purpose." Now, "all things" includes the good things that happen to you: the promotions, the blessings, the children, the grandchildren, all of that stuff. And it also includes the murder of servants of Christ. It includes being unjustly imprisoned. It includes bad outcomes of elections. Have you checked to see how things went in this last round of elections around here? *Devastating* for things like promoting the murder of children. It includes wars. Any of *those* going on these days? Natural disasters—a typhoon where some of our beloved missionaries work, and *all their stuff just crushed!* God is going to cause *all of that* "to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose."

If we remain faithful, we know that everything we see in this world—it is *not* the end of the story! We live in a world where there are lots of people in leadership in governments who are morally, theologically, spiritually *just like* Herod Agrippa I. The church will grow (Matt. 16:18). The church will be *completed* (Jn. 6:39). Jesus will come again (2 Thess. 1:7-8), and *all* will be made *right* in "judgment" (Ecc. 12:14; cf. Acts 17:31; 1 Pet. 4:5). How glorious!

Let's pray:

Father, thank You for letting us know of these last days of Herod Agrippa I. Thank You for including this in Your Word. Oh Lord, please, make us faithful. Some here are going through things that do not feel good, going through situations where truth is being twisted and maligned and ignored, or righteousness is being scoffed at and evil is being exalted. Oh Lord, by Your grace, we will be faithful. Cause us to stand in Your presence blameless, for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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