

The Hand of God—Part 2 (Acts 12)

1. The Hand of Herod was against God's People.

A. The scene shifts back to Jerusalem.

1. Another king has his hands in the mix. (Herod Antipas)

Verse 1 "Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, to do them harm."

2. The first Herod was known as "Herod the Great" and is the one who sought to kill Jesus (Mt. 2) by slaughtering all the infant boys. Herod Antipas is the nephew of the Herod who killed Jesus.

3. Similar to when Jesus was put to death, it was Passover, an opportune time to do something to endear himself to the Jews.

Verse 2 "And he had James the brother of John executed with a sword."

B. James was one of Jesus's closest followers.

1. James and his brother John asked Jesus if they could sit on his right and left when he established his kingdom.

Mark 10:39 "They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."

2. When Jesus spoke those words it would have been difficult for James and John to understand exactly what he meant (3-5). Apparently Herod's murder of James was well received by the Jews. He has also seized Peter, put him in prison and quadrupled the guards since he knew that Peter has slipped out of prison before.

C. The hand of God is greater than the hand of Herod—Peter is rescued. (5-11)

1. Peter was chained and sound asleep. The hand of God was at work (12-17). He goes to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark. Believers gathered there often to worship and pray. They are praying for Peter. The answer to their prayers literally knocks on the door, but they do not believe Rhoda. When they finally let Peter in the locked gate, he's evidently making hand gestures to get them to be quiet so they won't attract the attention of four squads of soldiers who are likely looking for him. (18-19)

2. Herod is giving orders but clearly he is not the king with all of the power. Clearly, the hand of God is about to be turned against him.

3. Can you name a time when God answered your prayer that quickly?

2. The Hand of the Lord against Herod.

Isn't it true that we want God to put his fist down and put an end to the opposition that brings suffering to his people. The truth is, one day he will. Luke gives us a preview.

Verse 20 "Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one mind they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was supported with grain from the king's country."

- A. Luke doesn't tell us exactly why Herod was angry with Tyre and Sidon.

1. We know that these cities were dependent on Herod for food, so they will say whatever they need to say to be able to get Herod to open the pantry doors.

Verses 21-22 “On an appointed day, after putting on his royal apparel, Herod took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. 22 The people repeatedly cried out, “The voice of a god and not of a man!”

2. Of course, Herod was just a man, but a man in rebellion against the Creator King.

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.”

B. The death of two kings. (King Jesus and King Herod)

1. Jesus was stretched out on a cross, the hand of God against him in judgment—not because he robbed God of glory but because you and I have done so. He was “smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4-5) so that we might be healed. Jesus gave God glory even as he breathed his last. He was not eaten up by worms in death but was raised to life and has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. Nothing and no one can thwart his plans for salvation and judgment.

Verse 24 “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”

2. The word of God is spreading and people are being opposed. There is suffering at every step of gospel advance. Is there not a part of us that doesn’t understand why God doesn’t make things easier on his children? Don’t we want things to be easier? But if we think that’s what we should expect, we haven’t been listening.

John 15:20 “A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow yours also.”

C. So what do we do with this passage?

1. What are we to do with the reality that James was killed and Peter was rescued? Why do some people recover and others don’t? Why do some people suffer significantly for the gospel and others don’t seem to? We don’t know.

2. We know that God’s plans for his gospel and for the ultimate salvation of his people are firmly in his hands. Nothing and no one can thwart them. Not a blood thirsty mob, or a power-hungry tyrant. Not a cancer causing gene. Not a drunk driver.

3. There is no promise in the Bible that God will always use his powerful hand to rescue his own from physical harm in this world. But his promise still stands.

John 10:28-29 “and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

4. We are in good hands. Jesus believed this!

Luke 23:46 “And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I ENTRUST MY SPIRIT.” And having said this, He died.”

If Jesus found the hands of his Father to be the safest of all places to be, we can too, no matter what happens to us in this life.

