

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for March 4, 2014

Herod's Repression
Acts 12:1-5

Acts 10-11 tells the story of the church welcoming the Gentiles through faith in Christ. Acts 12 tells the story of the consequences the church suffered for this outreach.

1. The suffering of the church (12:1)

“Herod the king” is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2), the nephew of both Herod Antipas (Luke 9, 13, 23) and Herod Philip (Matthew 14) and the father of Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25-26). Herod Agrippa I ruled in Judea from 41 to 44 AD, which means that Acts 12 is chronologically before the actual delivery of the gift from the church of Antioch (c. 46 AD).

The Herod family was of Jewish descent but was often despised due to their support of the Roman occupation of the land of Israel. They had a long history of ruling the Jews by means of both appeasement and brutal suppression. No ruler, no matter how ruthless, can thwart the work of God.

2. The slaying of James (12:2)

James is identified as the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, in order to distinguish him from James, the brother of Jesus, and author of the epistle of James (cf. Acts 15).

James was one of the leading apostles (Acts 1:13; cf. Matthew 17:1). His death is the first and only death of an apostle recorded in the New Testament and was alluded to by Jesus (cf. Matthew 20:23). Death by a sword may indicate the Jews had charged James with blasphemy (Deuteronomy 13:12-15).

The work of God continues unhindered through persecution and even death.

3. The seizing of Peter (12:3-4)

Acts 12:3 is the first time that the word “Jews” is used negatively in Acts, as the earlier persecution came from the ruling Council (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 6:12). The reason the Jews, as a whole, had become active in opposition to the church was related to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church (Acts 11:18).

The Old Testament Law required all Jewish males to come to Jerusalem during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, giving Herod an opportunity to gain favor with a large number of

Jews. This was the same season when Jesus had been brought before Herod Agrippa's uncle, Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), a decade earlier.

The guarding of Peter was expanded due to his earlier escape from the Jews (Acts 5:17-24). It is ironic that Roman soldiers guarded Peter as the Jews used Gentiles to persecute the disciples for associating with the Gentiles.

4. The supplication by the church (12:5)

The nature of fervency in prayer displays the concern of the church for Peter's life, as well as their faith in God.

The church was not praying for Peter's release, since they never considered it possible (Acts 12:14-15). God delivered Peter in spite of the lack of hope of those praying. The issue in prayer is not the amount of our faith in an outcome but rather the Person in whom we have faith (cf. Matthew 17:20).

Peter's faith was seen in his trust in God in spite of his dire circumstances, as that night he was not in distress but sleeping (12:6; cf. 1 Peter 5:7). God responded to prayer simply because of His sovereign will.

May we display our faith in God by trusting Him through prayer regardless of the earthly outcome.