

## **Unstoppable Kingdom**

### **With Diversity: Only One True King**

Acts 12:1-25

Have you ever heard the following leadership axiom? *An organization with no head is dead, and an organization with two heads is a monster.* It makes sense, doesn't it? I've certainly experienced both in my life, and it's not pretty. One of the fundamental questions that must be answered in nearly any group, organization, family, business, or association is this...

#### **Who is in charge?**

We have been journeying through Acts seeing how God worked through the early church to fulfill the Great Commission and expand his kingdom. So far, we have seen miraculous things such as healings and resurrections, as well as fierce opposition including false imprisonment, beatings, and even executions. But a common thread has emerged...

*“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls...and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”* **Act 2:41, 47 (Following Pentecost)**

*“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number...And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”* **Acts 6:1, 7 (Getting Organized)**

*“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”* **Acts 9:31 (After Saul's Conversion)**

*“And a great many people were added to the Lord.”* **Acts 11:24b (Antioch)**

Chapter 12 records events approximately 12 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. It will show us the reality of who is in charge and why the Unstoppable Kingdom is Unstoppable...

*“About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword, <sup>3</sup> and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. <sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his hands. <sup>8</sup> And the angel said to him, ‘Dress yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’ <sup>9</sup> And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a*

*vision. <sup>10</sup> When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. <sup>11</sup> When Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’ <sup>12</sup> When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, ‘You are out of your mind.’ But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, ‘It is his angel!’ <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Tell these things to James and to the brothers.’ Then he departed and went to another place. <sup>18</sup> Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. <sup>20</sup> Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. <sup>21</sup> On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people were shouting, ‘The voice of a god, and not of a man!’ <sup>23</sup> Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. <sup>24</sup> But the word of God increased and multiplied. <sup>25</sup> And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.”* **Acts 12:1-25**

**Main Idea:** There Can Only Be One True King in the Unstoppable Kingdom

#### I. **One True King Over All Others – Acts 12:1-5, 18-23**

Herod Agrippa I who was ruling over this part of the world. His grandfather, Herod the Great, was so terrified by the words of the Magi about the one born King of the Jews that he had all baby boys under the age of two murdered to try and kill Jesus. His uncle, Herod Antipas, was so offended by the preaching of John the Baptist that he had him ruthlessly beheaded. Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I, will examine Paul in Acts 26.

*“Saul had deserted to the other side, so Herod took the role of chief persecutor...Agrippa made special efforts to win Jewish affection. He decided to persecute Christians as one way to elevate his own reputation among the Jews. Herod's favor with Rome depended...on his ability to keep the Pax Romana. In Israel, that meant advancing the majority and suppressing minorities, especially disruptive groups like this growing band of Christians.”* **Kenneth Gangel** Herod Agrippa I's agenda is perfectly clear. Power!

*“I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.”* **Isaiah 42:8**

*“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”*

**1 Timothy 6:15b-16** There is none above him or beside him!

In our world today, it may look like politicians, corporations, activists, or other rich and powerful people are in charge. But that is only an illusion. James was dead, Peter was in prison awaiting execution, and Christians were hiding out in a house praying for their lives. God is still on his throne!

*“At the beginning of Acts 12, Herod seemed to be in control and the church was losing the battle. But at the end of the chapter, Herod is dead and the church – very much alive – is growing rapidly.”* **Warren Wiersbe**

There is no one threatening God for the throne of your life more than yourself. We live in an individualistic society drunk on personal autonomy! Our flesh rejects the idea of submitting to the will of another, especially an eternal king of an unstoppable kingdom. Therefore, we must constantly surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus as King of our Hearts.

## II. **One True King Who Hears Our Prayer – Acts 12:6-17**

Peter was fast asleep, not worried at all. The angel woke him up, gave instructions, led him out, and disappeared. Peter knew that his fellow apostles and disciples would be praying for his release at Mary’s house.

*“And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, ‘You are out of your mind.’ But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, ‘It is his angel!’ But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.”* **Acts 12:13-16**

*“Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the power of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den...Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for: Prayer is for the accomplishment of wartime mission.”* **John Piper What are we praying for? Will it advance God’s Kingdom?**

Though I can’t explain it, I know it’s true: Prayer moves the sovereign hand of God. Many times, God restricts his activity to the prayers of his people.

## III. **One True King Who Cannot Fail – Acts 12:24-25**

This is another example of intense persecution and violent opposition, yet there is explosive growth of the Unstoppable Kingdom! It never fails, HE never fails!

*“But the word of God increased and multiplied.”* **Acts 12:24 What it does!**

*“The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”* **Isaiah 40:7-8**

Success in this life is not about affirmation of a tribe or culture, or the recognition by the rich and powerful. It’s about pleasing the one true king!

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* **Romans 3:23**

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* **Romans 6:23**

*“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* **Romans 5:8**

*“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* **Rom 10:13**

In the late 1930’s there was a horrific school fire in Itasca, Texas that killed 263 children. It devastated an entire community and wrecked countless families with grief. In the years that followed, the community adopted a “Never Again” mentality as they built a new school with the finest fire prevention measures available at the time, including a state-of-the-art sprinkler system that covered every square inch of the building. The town grew to the point that the school needed to build an expansion wing. As the existing walls were opened, the contractors made a startling discovery: the state-of-the-art sprinkler system had never been connected to the water source. If a fire had broken out, the sprinklers would have been useless, and a disaster would rock the entire community once again.

### **Two Thoughts:**

1) Living life for the affirmation of any king, culture, tribe, or person is like that sprinkler system. It might make you feel good for now, but it is completely useless to you when you need it the most.

2) If you are tied into the source (you have been saved), then you need to draw your identity and sustenance from that same source through fellowship with the King!

### **Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:**

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *Word Pictures in the New Testament* – A.T. Robertson (1933)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)
- *The Kingdom Agenda* – Tony Evans (1999)
- *Earnest Prayer and Opened Prison Doors* – J.D. Greear (2014)