



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

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## Acts 12

### A Review of Jesus' Strategic Plan and Growing Opposition

#### A Review of Jesus' Strategic Plan (Acts 1-11)

The New Testament book of Acts records a major tipping point in human history - the unstoppable revolution of Jesus. When Jesus ascended back to His Father, he had only about 120+ followers; today His followers number 2.38 billion. The revolution He launched transformed the world and Luke tells this remarkable story in his two-volume history: The Gospel of Luke tells the story of salvation through the public ministry of Jesus and then His death, burial and resurrection. Acts details how, after Jesus' ascension, the Gospel of salvation spread.

A few important points of review:

· Acts is a transitional book.

#### The Old Covenant

- 1446 BC to April AD 33
- The ceremonial, sacrificial system of Covenant Israel
- It was completely fulfilled during the public ministry and the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Messiah (see the book of Hebrews)

#### The New Covenant

- Prophesied in Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36
- Inaugurated by Jesus and implemented on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit (on 24 May AD 33)
- Acts 1:8 defines the strategic plan for spreading New Covenant Christianity - Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, then "uttermost parts of the world"

·The themes of promise and fulfillment permeate Luke-Acts. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: His birth, public ministry, rejection, death, resurrection, ascension, and the pouring out of the Spirit all fulfilled OT prophecies. The agent of this unstoppable revolution of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Confirming that He is the Messiah and Lord, Jesus sent the Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit is also the sign of the New Covenant, applied equally to both Jew and Gentile. The Spirit fills and empowers believers and He guides and directs the progress of the Gospel(see Acts 8, 10, 11, 13, 16).

·Miracles in the book of Acts are Messianic, validating and authenticating the message of Jesus and His Gospel. Acts records 20 specific miracles and 9 times when clusters of miracles occurred. Used of Jesus' ministry, the phrase "signs and wonders" also characterized the ministry of the Apostles (e.g., Acts 2:43; 5:12). Indeed, Acts 14:3 states that Paul and Barnabas evidenced the Lord "granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." [ESV] Miracles authenticated the ministry of the Apostles, just as Jesus' miracles authenticated His claim to be the Son of God and the Messiah.

·Jesus' Strategic Plan was outlined in Acts 1:8

·Pentecost (24 May AD 33) was the key to implementing Jesus' strategic plan.

1. As the fulfillment of Scripture, the pouring out of the Spirit meant that the culmination of God's redemptive plan had arrived—the New Covenant.
2. That Jesus sent the Spirit, as He promised, confirmed that He had been vindicated by His resurrection and ascension and was now enthroned as Lord and Messiah at the right hand of the Father.
3. Jesus' resurrection, ascension and the pouring out of the Spirit all demonstrated God's sovereignty over human history. God is moving history toward the fulfillment of His plan and His purpose.

·After the stoning of Stephen, there was "a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." [Acts 8:1 ESV] This dispersion marked the beginning of the second major geographical and ethnic expansion of the church. One of those forced to flee was Philip, one of the seven chosen in Acts 6:5, who headed north to preach the Gospel in Samaria.

·Certainly one of the greatest conversions in the history of the church is Saul.[Saul was his Jewish name; Paul was his Roman name.] His conversion is detailed three times in Acts: In Acts 9; in his testimony before the Jewish mob in Jerusalem in Acts 22:3-11; and in his testimony before King Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:2-18. What was especially significant was the zeal Saul manifested as a Pharisee in his devotion to God. Indeed, he even argued that his persecution of the church was done with a "good conscience"(Acts 23:1). He believed that the church was an evil religious force that needed to be eliminated. But, his religious zeal had to be channeled towards the church, his perceived enemy. Only Jesus could do that!

·The Church at Antioch, 11:19-30: In this unit, Luke describes the founding of the church in Antioch, a church that became the launching point for Paul's missionary journeys. We learn that the first Gentile conversions occurred in Antioch, long before Peter's visit to Cornelius, and that Barnabas and Saul had played a key role in starting this church. The Antioch church was full of Hellenistic Jews and the ministry among them was immensely successful(11:19-21). Therefore, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to oversee the work there, which caused him to go to Tarsus to get Saul. The church was exploding at Antioch, where the believers were first called "Christians" (11:26). God's protection of the Jerusalem church during a severe famine was evidenced through the ministry of Agabus. The believers in Antioch made provisions for the Jerusalem church. In God's providence, as the Jews brought salvation to the Gentiles, the Gentiles reciprocated by bringing material support to the Jews. Reconciliation was evident not just in words but in deeds as well.

### **Growing Opposition to the Revolution (Acts 12)**

Persecution became more intense for the Jerusalem church during the reign of Herod Agrippa I(ca. 9 BC-AD 44), the grandson of Herod the Great. He was very popular among the Jews, which probably explains his hostility to the Jesus Revolution. The Sanhedrin opposed the church and wished it destroyed. For that reason Herod murdered James and arrested Peter.

#### **·12:1-5—King Herod's Violent Response**

Herod Agrippa I was a close friend of Caesar's Caligula and Claudius; he was also close to the Pharisees and very popular among the Jews. This explains his hostility to the early church and his execution of James, the brother of John, "by the sword." James was the first apostle to be

martyred; the second one recorded in Acts after Stephen in chapter 7. Furthermore, during the feast of Unleavened Bread, Herod arrested Peter. Four squads of soldiers guarded Peter (i.e., a total of 16 serving as a squad of 4 in three-hour shifts), with the goal of executing him after the holidays. While he was in prison, the church was praying for him.

#### **·12:6-11—Peter imprisoned and miraculously freed**

Peter was sleeping between two soldiers to whom he was chained, with the other 2 sentries at the door. Then an angel appeared in a bright light, stood over Peter, woke him up, and instructed him to get up, dress, put on his sandals, wrap himself in a cloak and follow him. The text implies that Peter assumed this was a vision or a dream. They passed through various gates and doors with the third one opening to the street. The angel then departed. As v. 11 attests, Peter now realized God has delivered him from his enemies - Herod Agrippa and the expectations of the Jewish people (i.e., his execution).

#### **·12:12-19—Peter joins the other Apostles**

Peter headed for Mary's house (i.e., the mother of John Mark, most likely a widow) - a house church of some size. As Peter knocked at the gate, a servant, Rhoda, greeted him but ran to the others to announce Peter's presence, which they rejected as madness. Others suggested that it might be "his angel." Peter kept knocking and was finally let in. He summoned the church at Mary's house and reported on all that happened, instructing that they tell James, the Lord's brother. He then fled Jerusalem for safety in another place.

Herod demanded answers for Peter's escape and presumably ordered the execution of the guards. He then returned to Caesarea, the center of the province of Judea.

#### **·12:20-23—King Herod judged**

Herod Agrippa was caught in a dispute with Tyre and Sidon over the provision of food. The dispute apparently involved an embargo of some sort and these two cities appealed to Herod through his "chief of staff," Blastus, for relief. The matter was resolved so Herod addressed the crowd in royal robes at the theater in Caesarea. The crowds hailed him as more than a mere mortal. [The occasion was the quinquennial games at Caesarea, celebrating Caesar Claudius's birthday in March AD 44.] Herod accepted their praise but was struck down by an angel of the Lord. His body was consumed by worms. God had judged Herod Agrippa!

What a contrast: God rescued Peter but judged Herod Agrippa for opposing the people of God and for his arrogance in allowing himself to be declared equal with God.

### ·12:24-25--Antioch

The blessing of God continued as the church “grew and multiplied.” Meanwhile, Luke now shifted his attention from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Peter to Barnabas and Saul. John Mark was the son of the Mary in whose house the Jerusalem church met (see 12:12).

Through this coming week, prayerfully reflect upon these questions:

1. One of the themes of Acts is the prayer life of the church. How important was prayer to them? To you?
2. Persecution of the church grows as we proceed through the book of Acts. How did persecution affect the Jerusalem church? James was executed; others imprisoned. What forms of persecution is the 21st century church experiencing? In the world? In America? How does God use persecution?
3. Think about the faith of the early church, and its leaders, James and Peter. How would you describe their faith? What so transformed Peter from a frightened fisherman into a mighty, fearless Apostle? How can we have that same quality of faith today?
4. The Jerusalem church seemed shocked that God had answered their prayers and freed Peter. The evidence was compelling. Why did they initially doubt that Peter was at the door? When you pray, do you expect God to answer?
5. Why did God judge Herod Agrippa I? Does God hold leaders accountable? Some he judges immediately. Others we will have to wait until the Great White Throne (Revelation 20). Do you have the certainty in your faith walk with God that He will hold leaders accountable—either now or in eternity?

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