

(Acts) the God Who Intervenes

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen's sermon explores God's miraculous intervention during persecution as seen in Acts 12, emphasizing the power of prayer and God's unique plans for each believer.

Duration: 59:59

Scripture: Acts 12:1-3, Acts 12:5, Acts 12:7, Acts 12:11, Acts 12:23-24, Acts 13:1-3

Topics: "Divine Intervention", "Miraculous Deliverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing and embracing the supernatural aspects of the Bible. He highlights the story of Peter's miraculous escape from prison, where his shackles fell off and the gate opened on its own. The speaker encourages believers to not lose heart when faced with impossible situations, but to pray and trust that God can intervene and work miraculously. He shares the story of a Tibetan minister who was miraculously rescued from a well after being left to die, demonstrating that God still works miraculously today.

Transcript

Let's open our Bibles to the twelfth chapter of Acts. Acts, the twelfth chapter. Let's go ahead and pray for God's blessing on the Word as we study it.

Lord, we do pray that you'd speak to us tonight. And Lord, we're gathered here for that very reason. Because, Lord, we need to hear from you.

We need to be spoken to in our hearts by your Spirit. So, Lord, we ask you to do that. In Jesus' name.

Amen. As we left off in our story, Barnabas and Saul had been more or less commissioned by the church in Antioch to take relief to the saints in Jerusalem. There was a famine in the land and it had hit particularly hard in that region.

And so, the saints in Antioch, the Gentiles, they wanted to send some relief to their Jewish brethren. They wanted to show their appreciation, really, to them. And so, they selected that through Barnabas and Saul, they would send a gift to them to Jerusalem.

And so, they went on their way. And at the same time that Barnabas and Saul were journeying to Jerusalem and perhaps had even arrived there by this point, there broke out another wave of persecution against the church. Things had been somewhat quiet for a while.

Remember, Saul of Tarsus, he was sort of leading the charge with the persecution. And with his conversion, it would seem that things calmed down and there was a time of prosperity for the church, a time of peace, a time of liberty, and the gospel was spreading. But now, suddenly, there is a new outbreak of persecution.

And so, that's what we read about as we come now to the twelfth chapter. So now, about that time, Herod, the king, stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Now, as you read through the New Testament, you come across the name Herod on several occasions.

And actually, there were many different men who were part of this family of Herod. And we, of course, first encounter Herod as the king who's ruling over the land at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ. And he was the one who was threatened by news that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem.

So, he sent his soldiers and they massacred the children in Bethlehem, all of them that were two years old and under, the male children. And then, later on, we read about Herod who persecuted John the Baptist. Actually, had John the Baptist executed, put him in prison for a period of time and then had him beheaded.

Now, the Herod during the time of the birth of Jesus was known in history as Herod the Great. The Herod who put John the Baptist to death and then also presided over one of the trials concerning Jesus was known as Herod Antipas. And now we come to another Herod, and this is Herod Agrippa I. He was the grandson of Herod the Great, and he was the nephew of Herod Antipas.

He was the son of a man named Aristobulus. And it's interesting that he now has become the king over Israel. Herod the Great held that position, but after his death in about 4 BC, no one held a position of, you know, sort of an absolute monarchy over the land.

It was divided up between the sons of Herod. They were Tetrarchs. They were ruling over a portion, not the entire land, but a portion of the land.

But here now, Herod Agrippa I, he has become king over the whole realm. And he became king pretty much because he had befriended Caligula prior to Caligula becoming the emperor of Rome. And because of that friendship, when Caligula became the Roman emperor, he then put Herod Agrippa in the position of king over the land.

Now, this Herod had endeared himself to the Jews, unlike his grandfather. His grandfather, although he attempted to do that, he never really was able to win the favor of the Jews. But this man, Herod Agrippa, he was embraced wholeheartedly by the Jewish population.

He was partially Jewish. Herod himself was an Idumaeen or an Edomite. But he married into the family of the Hasmoneans or Maccabees.

He married into the priestly family. And this particular King Herod Agrippa I here was a descendant of the Hasmonean dynasty. So he was partially Jewish, along with being an Edomite.

And he also embraced the Jewish religious system to a large degree, but primarily for political reasons. He knew that if he could endear himself to the Jews, then he would have a peaceable reign. He knew that he would have a prosperous reign.

And so he embraced Judaism. He was favorable toward the system of religion. He actually himself was committed to keeping the various laws and things.

So he was a friend of the people, but he wanted, of course, more and more to gain their favor. And so the move that we read about here and that he stretched out his hand to harass some from the church was really a political move seeking to bring himself into more and more favor with the ruling party among the Jews at that time. So as he stretches forth his hand to harass some in the church, we read in verse two that he killed James, the brother of John, with a sword.

This is the second mention only of James in the book of Acts. The only other time we read about him is when he was gathered together in that upper room in the very beginning, just before the day of Pentecost. And that's really interesting because James is frequently mentioned in the gospel accounts.

Perhaps you remember that there were three apostles that Jesus was particularly close to. That was Peter, James and John, and they seem to be part of an inner circle with Jesus. And yet when it comes to the book of Acts, there is no mention at all of the ministry of James.

We just read about him there in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. And now the next thing we read about him is that he has been beheaded by Herod. But you can know for sure, even though Luke did not really give us any insight into his ministry, you can be certain that James was a key leader in the church.

And that, of course, would be why Herod chose him and singled him out. Now, what he was doing at that particular time to cause his arrest, we have no idea what was going on, but he was taken and he was put to death by Herod. And because Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.

Now it was during the days of unleavened bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after the Passover. So he sees that his ratings have increased.

They've taken a poll and now Herod is more popular than ever before because of this striking out against this new sect, the church, and putting to death James. So he figures, all right, I'm on a roll. I'll take it a bit further.

And so he has Peter arrested. But it's during the days of unleavened bread. It's during the feast time.

And of course, it's a time of celebration. It's a time of resting. It's a time where it wasn't politically correct to put Peter on trial, but he's determined that the moment the feast is passed, he's going to bring Peter out as well.

And he is going to have him condemned to death. That was the plan of Herod. And so Peter was kept in prison.

Now notice that he was arrested and he was delivered to four squads of soldiers. There were 16 soldiers assigned to guard Peter. And I would imagine that there were that many men assigned to him because of things that had happened in the past.

Of course, Peter had been arrested before and put in prison and miraculously delivered. And so Herod must have been aware of that. So he was going to make sure that there was no way this guy was going to escape.

So he assigned 16 soldiers to watch this one man and to be chained to him while he's there in the prison. So Peter is cast into prison. But constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

So here's all the power of the government coming down upon this new little movement. And they've taken and killed one of the great leaders and they've arrested another one. And how could the church stand against this? What could they do? Well, they could pray and they began to pray.

You know, governmental persecution of the church is nothing new, as we can see. It began right back in the earliest days of the history of the church. As a matter of fact, the experience that we've had in this country over the past couple of hundred years has really been the exception rather than the rule historically.

And the experience, of course, that we have had is that the government has pretty much stayed out of the affairs of the church. And there hasn't been to date any real government led persecution of the church. But that historically is the exception.

You find that all throughout history, the church has been persecuted by the powers that be under the various nations where the church has been established. Quite often, it's been the governmental authorities that have led the charge against the church. We have been excluded from that by the grace of God.

But it is, of course, possible that things could change in this country and that one day our government might lead the charge in persecuting the church. We certainly know that there are those in our government that would like to do so. But as of yet, they've been restrained.

But what do we do when those kinds of things happen? You know, presently, we're able to vote and we're able to protest and we're able to write our congressmen and, you know, do those kinds of things, which are all, you know, a great blessing and benefit. But what do you do when you don't have those options? What do you do when there isn't that alternative to turn to? Well, what you should do regardless is pray. And that's what the church did.

They gathered together and they were in constant prayer for Peter. Now, they might have also prayed for James. We don't know because Luke is so brief in his account.

He doesn't give us any of the details. We don't know. Was James arrested and then just immediately taken and executed? Was he put on trial? Was he in prison for any period of time? We don't really know.

But it could be that they had prayed for James, but yet God saw fit not to deliver him. But they are seeking the Lord in prayer now for Peter and what Herod was about to bring him out. That night, Peter was sleeping.

So this is the night before Peter is about to be brought out and condemned. And notice Peter is sleeping. It shows you that Peter had grown tremendously in his faith at this stage in his life because he wasn't afraid.

Remember, Peter was a very courageous man, you know, in a natural sense. But he also was very fearful when he thought his own life was in jeopardy. And we can go back into the accounts of the arrest of Jesus.

And there at the trial of Jesus, where Peter actually denied that he even knew Jesus. And of course, he did all of that out of fear. But we can see that now he's been emboldened by the Spirit.

And the night before he's to be condemned, he's not filled with anxiety. He's actually sound asleep. He's bound with two chains between two soldiers.

And the guards before the door were keeping the prison. So he's inside the cell. He's bound between two guards.

And then there are guards outside the door. So Herod wants to make sure that nothing happens in any way to get Peter out of this situation. He's kind of taking all the precautions possible.

Now, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shown in the prison. And he struck Peter on the side and he raised him up saying, arise quickly. And his chains fell off his hands.

Then the angel said to him, gird yourself and tie on your sandals. And so he did. And he said to him, put on your garments and follow me.

So he went out and followed him and did not know that or did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they were past the first and the second guard post, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord. And they went out and went down one street.

And immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people. So the miraculous intervention of God.

Now, there are some Bible commentators, believe it or not, who refuse to see anything miraculous in this. You know, the word angel can also be translated messenger. And so there are some who, you know, sort of wanting to downplay the supernatural elements in the biblical account.

They say, well, you know, it wasn't an angel, you know, in the sense that we would normally think of an angel. This was simply a messenger who somehow made his way into the prison. He probably bribed the guards and he was able to, you know, get them to free Peter.

And then he, you know, he's the one who actually led Peter to liberty. And they go into all this elaborate detail about, you know, the various possibilities of how it was that Peter was freed up. And, you know, the whole while really stressing that it wasn't a miraculous thing or a supernatural thing.

It was just, you know, something, you know, very natural. But yet, as you read the account itself, I mean, who cares whether or not the word angel simply means messenger, which it does. But obviously, many times the messengers were angelic in the sense that we think of, they were spirit beings.

And I think the context here would necessitate that a light, a bright light shines about Peter in the prison. And something has happened to the guards. And suddenly Peter's shackles just simply fall off from him.

And as he proceeds, the gate opens of its own accord and all that. All of that speaks of the supernatural. And for the life of me, I don't understand why anybody would want to be a Bible teacher, a preacher of the scriptures, and yet somehow deny the fact that the supernatural is a reality.

I mean, the supernatural is what it's all about, really. The miraculous is what it's all about. If we if our God is limited to just natural means and things like that, we're all in bad shape and ought to be disappointed in many ways.

But he's not. He never has been. And the whole biblical record is one supernatural event after another taking place.

It's God intervening in history. And when things look hopeless, this is what we've always got to remember. When things look hopeless, when there is no human solution to a problem, there's still hope because you see, God can intervene at any time.

From the human standpoint, Peter was history. It was over. James had already been executed.

And Herod is just simply waiting to go through the formalities. And Peter's next. And he's going to make sure that Peter doesn't escape.

He's got 16 men guarding him. So from the human standpoint, there's no way out of this situation. But you see, for God, it's not a problem at all.

And we will at times find ourselves in these kinds of situations, maybe not an identical situation where our life is being threatened, but maybe so. But at those times when we find ourself in these impossible situations where humanly there just isn't anything that can be done, we need not lose heart. Rather, we need to pray and remember that God intervenes in human history, that God introduces the supernatural into the everyday things of life.

And God works miraculously. And he still works miraculously today. I read the story of a Tibetan minister who was arrested and was cast into a dry well and left there to rot.

Actually, he was cast into the well and then the well was covered and locked. And as he sat there in the well, there were the bones of those who had been thrown there before him, and there were the decaying corpses of those who had been more recently cast into the pit. And he was basically left there to die.

After three days in the well, suddenly he heard some motion up at the top of the well and suddenly it was opened and a voice called out to him and said, grab the rope. And interestingly, the rope had been looped. The man, when he had been cast into the pit, had broken his arm and had not the rope been looped, he would not have been able to grasp it and be hoisted up.

But the rope had been looped. He put his foot through, held on with his other hand, he was pulled up. And when he got to the top, there was no one there.

And he thought that perhaps, you know, someone had, you know, just scurried off because they were afraid of being found out. And he went back to right where he had previously been. He went back to preaching and he was arrested again.

And he was brought before the ruler. And they began to question how he was released. And he talked.

He actually told the story about how it happened. And the man in charge surmised that someone must have stolen the key. And so they began to search for the key.

And in their search for the key, they found it around the waist of the man that ordered the search. It had been there the whole time. No one had stolen the key.

It was right around his waist. But the conclusion being, God once again sent his angel and delivered his servant. And so what we're reading here is not something that just happened, you know, back in apostolic times.

But this kind of miraculous intervention is the kind of intervention that we can at times anticipate God doing in our situations. It doesn't have to be something as dramatic as, you know, being in prison and awaiting your execution. There's all different kinds of prisons that we can be in.

But the Lord has the key and he will release us. He will let us out if that is according to his plan and purpose, which is the best thing possible. Now, Peter is released.

James is executed. How do you understand that? Why was one apostle who was equally powerful and effective and as close to Jesus? Why was he allowed to suffer death? And yet Peter is liberated. And, you know, the answer to that question is really a mystery.

We don't know. But we do know that God had a purpose. And according to God's plan, this was obviously the best thing to do at the time.

Now, I'm sure of this. James was not disappointed when James arrived there on the heavenly scene. We can be absolutely certain that he didn't say, Oh, Lord.

Now, why did you call me up here so soon? I was having such a good time down there. I'm sure James had nothing like that to say at all. I'm sure he was very happy to be delivered from the situation, not just the difficulty, but just the situation here in this world.

So James was a winner. The church seemed to maybe lost a little bit, but James was the winner. Peter is allowed to live.

And I think the lesson is simply this, that God has a different plan and a different purpose for each person's life. And we have to be content to embrace the fact that what God decides is the best. Peter, perhaps you remember earlier before the ascension of Jesus, he was told by Jesus that he would one day die for his faith.

Perhaps at this point he thought, well, this is this must be what the Lord was talking about. But it wasn't. But he had been told by Jesus that he would one day be led away to a place that he didn't want to go.

And this is, you know, this was signifying the kind of death that he would glorify God through. And as Peter became aware of the fact that he was going to die a martyr's death, John was standing nearby. And Peter said to Jesus, he said, well, what about that man? In other words, OK, Lord, you're telling me I'm going to die for my faith.

And I guess that's OK. But what about John? Can he die with me? I mean, you know, it might be a little easier if I had a partner in this or whatever he might have been thinking. But Jesus said to Peter, he said, Peter, if I will, that John remains alive till I come again.

What is that to you? You follow me. And that's something that God would say to all of us. You know, in the end, God is the one who determines what's going to happen, not us.

And there are times when the Lord might be saying something, oh, but Lord, but what about this? But and what about that? And but God and he would say to us now, what is that to you? That's not your business. It's my business. You just keep following me.

I'll take care of these other people and and all of these other things. And so, Peter, he is released because God has more work for him. James had finished his work.

You think of somebody, you know, in the prime of their life and being so effective in ministry and and you think, well, wait a second. How could he have finished his work already? But remember, Stephen, Stephen was a young man and he evidently finished his work as well. You think of some of the martyrs in the history of the church who died fairly young in the prime of their life when they were really seeming to, you know, have a tremendous impact and suddenly they were taken out.

But yet the work of God still goes on. You think of Jim Elliott, for example, and these other young men that were with him who had this great passion to reach these Indians in Ecuador and they spend all of this time preparing and prayer and all the other practical things they had to do and, you know, disciplining themselves and all of the effort put forth to to go and to make an impact on this tribe of people in their first actual encounter with them results in their all being murdered. And you think, well, wait a second, that doesn't seem like the best plan, but yet it's what God allowed.

And interestingly enough, subsequent history now shows us that it was really a wonderful plan because those very people that they long to reach with the gospel, they did reach them. And the majority of that tribe is saved today. And part of the impact upon their lives was when they were actually killing these missionaries and the missionaries weren't resisting them.

That was part of the testimony that would eventually bring some of these men to faith. So you see, you never know. We have to leave certain things with God.

And the death of James is one of those things where I'm sure from the human standpoint, it was a bit difficult to understand, but yet it was part of God's greater plan. And again, as I said earlier, no, no problem for James whatsoever. So Peter, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many people were gathered together.

Now, this young man that's mentioned here, John Mark, he is the Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark. He was the sort of the secretary to Peter. Most believe that the gospel of Mark is actually the gospel of Peter, or according to Peter, Mark is simply the one who wrote it.

But he happens to be the nephew of Barnabas. And so Mary, this woman mentioned here, she would be the sister of Barnabas. And it's her home that the disciples are gathered together.

And some people speculate that this might have been the very place where Jesus held what we know now as the Last Supper with his disciples. It's obviously a large enough house because there are many people gathered together. And it was a place where they met there in Jerusalem.

But whatever the case, many were gathered together there praying. And so Peter, he knocked at the door of the gate and a girl named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognized Peter's voice because of her gladness, she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

So it's almost humorous to think, you know, here's Peter, he's escaped from prison. And I'm sure it's, you know, late, the wee hours of the morning sort of a thing. And the last thing Peter wants to do is draw attention to the fact that he's out of prison.

So he's probably knocking and trying to keep it as quiet as possible. And now the girl is so excited that he's there, she just leaves him out there and runs back in. And, you know, she tells everybody.

She announced that Peter stood before the gate. Now, listen. But they said to her, you are nuts.

You're mad. You're beside yourself. You're crazy.

Now, these are the people that are praying for Peter's release. So they're praying, Lord, deliver Peter. Oh, God, please save him.

Oh, Lord, don't let him, you know, suffer the fate of James. Oh, Lord, we need him. Keep him with us, Lord.

And Rhoda comes in and says, Peter's at the door. You're crazy. What do you mean, Peter's at the door? You know, and it just goes to show you that the first century Christians were just as human as we are, because we all do the same kinds of things, don't we? We're praying.

We're begging God. We're pleading. And, oh, Lord, we just want to do this.

And then the Lord does it. Well, are you sure? And, you know, where's our faith? But here's the great news. My faith isn't the final factor in determining what God is going to do.

And, oh, how I'm thankful for that. Isn't that great to know that, you know, sometimes our faith is weak, but that doesn't stop the Lord from carrying out his plan and purpose. And the accomplishment of his purposes is not dependent on me.

Thank God for that. It's not dependent on us. Now, God offers us the opportunity to participate, to be involved with him, to, you know, join together in his work through prayer and by believing him and all of that.

But in the end, my faith or lack of faith isn't going to hinder the plan of God. God's going to get his work accomplished. You know, I think sometimes we do get a lot of wrong ideas instilled in our minds.

And sometimes we take this big sort of a burden on ourselves and we really sort of act as though if we don't come through, somehow God's, his plan is going to fail in some way. And I've even heard people, you know, give, you know, some sort of illustrations of, you know, perhaps you were in a situation and you, you know, there was a witnessing opportunity or whatever and you let it pass by you and that person was ready to receive the Lord, but you didn't capitalize on it. And on their way home, they got in a car crash and died.

And because you didn't witness to them, they've perished and you're responsible. And I've heard those kinds of things. I've read those kinds of things implied by certain people.

You know what? I don't believe that for a moment. If people getting to heaven is dependent on my faithfulness, pity the world. People are in big trouble if it's up to me.

And this is not the God of the Bible. What do you think God would say to a person like that? Well, you know, I really wanted to let you into heaven. I actually had a plan to save you, but this Christian never got the gospel to you and I'm sorry, you just you have to go to hell.

Now, it wasn't what I wanted, but you know, these people down here, they're just they're just not doing that good of a job, but I am sorry I can't let you in. That's what it would kind of amount to really, you know. Now, I'm not saying that to take away from, you know, the responsibility that we have to reach out with the gospel to people, but we have to understand that the burden of the world salvation is not on my shoulders.

It's not on your shoulders. It's a work that God must do and God allows us to participate in it. But if we fail in some way, shape or form, that doesn't mean that the whole program of God is a failure as well.

God could and in many ways does get his plan accomplished without our help at all. He lets us be part of it, not because he needs us and not because he couldn't do it without us, but simply because he wants us to just be involved with him as a matter of fellowship and as a matter of privilege and blessing. But sometimes people can lay these big, heavy trips on you, you know, and you feel all condemned and guilty because you didn't do that.

You know, today I had an interesting little experience. I went somewhere and there was a crowd of young people and they were, you know, just an interesting group. There was a few bands there.

They were doing some music and, you know, everybody had tattoos from head to toes, you know, not just the guys, but the girls as well. And, you know, it was just that one segment of the culture that we see, you know, here and there and everywhere. And I'm, you know, I'm looking at these kids and I'm actually, you know, sitting in my car waiting for something.

And I'm, you know, on the one hand, I'm looking at them thinking, you know, how could these kids need the Lord? They need to be reached. And yet at the same time feeling like, you know, I'm not the one to do this. And as I'm just sort of wrestling with this in my own mind, you know, the Lord was just impressing on me, but you can pray for them and you can pray that one among them might be saved and that they could be the catalyst to bring salvation to others.

You know, and I just thought, yeah, that's the way the Lord works so often. And it actually kind of, you know, caused me to go back in my thinking to, you know, the late 60s, early 70s, when the whole great move of God happened here in this area and the young people at that time all were getting saved. And I think of Pastor Chuck, who, you know, by his own admission said, you know, his burden for the hippies was that they all should get jobs.

You know, that was about the extent of it. He needed a haircut and jobs. And so obviously, you know, he would have felt that same sort of disconnected kind of thing like, man, I can't relate to these people.

But yet God had from their own generation, those that he would then touch and raise up and they would then impact their peers. And then they would subsequently be led here to be instructed, to be taught. But it was from their own, you know, sort of cultural group that God reached out to them in an evangelistic endeavor.

And, you know, so my point is this. Sometimes, you know, we look around and we know that people need to be saved. And you might look at certain groups of people and just say, Lord, you know, you feel no connection.

You know, there just isn't any possibility. It seems that you would have a part in it, maybe not physically, but perhaps spiritually, perhaps through prayer, perhaps through saying, Lord, raise up somebody, send somebody to touch these young people. So, again, God's work is going to get accomplished.

These guys were praying passionately, but they really didn't believe that Peter was going to be delivered. That's obvious from what they said to Rhoda. They said, you're beside yourself.

She kept insisting it was so. And so they said it is his angel. Now, among the Jews, there was the belief that, first of all, there was the belief that every person had a guardian angel attached to them.

And Jesus sort of lent some credence to that belief by referring to the fact that when, you know, children, their angel always beholds the face of my father in heaven. But there was also the belief that when a person died, they sort of became like an angel. They took on sort of an angelic form after death.

And so basically what they're saying is it's his spirit. Peter's dead. Herod's killed him already.

It's over. And it's just, you know, we're being visited by his spirit now is what they were actually implying by what they said. Now, Peter continued knocking and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, Go tell these things to James and to the brethren. And he departed and went to another place.

Now, James, we read, was put to death by the sword of Herod. But now Peter says, Go tell this to James. This is obviously not the same James.

And by the way, James, just for your information, was not the actual name of the brother of John. His name was Jacob or Yaakov. There was no James in biblical times.

James was added into the English translation out of respect to King James. And so the translators took Jacob or Yaakov and they just sort of changed his name to James. And that was to please the king.

So, but this James or Jacob, as he would have been Yaakov, he is the brother of Jesus. James, the brother of Jesus, was one of the key figures in the church in Jerusalem. Now, that's very interesting because during the lifetime of Jesus, the public ministry of Jesus, James was not even a believer in the Messiahship of Jesus.

You remember as you read through the Gospels, Jesus would be preaching in certain places and his mother and his brothers would come to try to talk some sense into him. They thought that he'd lost it. And his brothers just could not themselves believe at the time that this one in their own home could actually be the Messiah.

But once Jesus went to the cross and resurrected, they also became believers. And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus made a special resurrection appearance to his brother James. And it was there that James was converted.

Now, in the New Testament, we have the epistle of James and we also have a small letter from Jude. Both Jude and James were the brothers of our Lord. And so this is the James that's being spoken of here.

And notice he's already in a in a key leadership position in the church in Jerusalem. Peter says, go and tell these things to James and to the brethren. And so Peter departed and he went to another place.

Then as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and he stayed there.

So here we see Herod's true character again coming out. He's a politician. He's committed to Judaic principles and ceremonial things and so forth.

But really, because it it sort of endeared him to the Jews and made his reign more comfortable. But he is a vicious, cruel man, as seen by his striking out against the church and now his own soldiers. He has them put to death.

And actually, at that time, if a prisoner escaped, then the soldier who allowed the prisoner to escape had to suffer that prisoner's fate, whatever it might be. And so he had these soldiers put to death. And then he went to Caesarea from Judea.

Now Caesarea was the city there on the coast with a great harbor, a great amphitheater. It was built by his grandfather. Herod the Great was known as Herod the Great primarily because of his building ventures.

He wasn't a great man in a humanitarian sense. He was a very corrupt and wicked man, but he was an incredible builder. He built these great fortresses and he was the one who beautified the temple.

And he built this harbor in this city here in Caesarea, basically dedicated it to Caesar, as Caesarea would imply. And so Herod, he goes to Caesarea and he had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. That would be the region up in Lebanon.

But they came to him with one accord and having made Blastus, the king's personal aide, their friend, they asked for peace because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. Now there's a great, as I said, there's a great amphitheater there right on the sea in Caesarea.

It has been unearthed today. And if you travel to Israel, if you've ever been on one of the trips with Pastor Chuck, you can go and sit right in the very theater where Paul would later be tried by Agrippa II, right in the very place where this king, Agrippa I, would have given his oration on that particular day. And so he was arrayed in royal apparel.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, gives us a record also of what Luke records here. And he tells us that Herod was decked out in a garment that was actually made of silver. And so as he would stand there under the bright sun, the sun hitting the silver, this glare would come and give a sense of sort of an aura around him that there was a brightness emanating from him.

And so the people, as he was giving this oration, the people kept shouting the voice of a God and not of a man. And then immediately the angel of the Lord struck him because he didn't give glory to God and he was eaten by worms and died. So in the midst of this great ceremony, all of that theater filled with thousands and thousands of people, and there he is in these shining garments and he's speaking and the people are shouting the voice of a God and not of a man and he's just taking all of this in himself.

Suddenly, in the midst of that, he struck down, doubled over there on the stage and he has to be carted off. Five days later, he was dead. And what they discovered is that he had worms in his intestines that had consumed him, basically.

So as we look at this whole account here, it is quite interesting because verse 24 says, But the word of God grew and multiplied. So at the beginning of the chapter, Herod is on the rampage, arresting and persecuting church leaders. At the end of the chapter, he himself is struck down and dies.

The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing. It closes with Herod dead, Peter free and the word of God triumphing. How God turns the tables.

And this has really been the history of the church. The word of God goes out, it advances, the enemy opposes, suppresses, persecutes, but the persecutors eventually pass off the scene and the word of God continues to go forth. And it happens over and over and over again throughout the cycle of history.

It's just been repeated so many times. So many have come on to the world scene, determined to obliterate the remembrance of Jesus Christ, wipe it out. But yet they have their short reign, sometimes a reign of terror, wreaking havoc on the church and the people of God.

And it would seem for just a moment that maybe the enemy would be victorious, but suddenly that person perishes. Suddenly they're gone and everything is turned around. God has been doing that all the way through history, all the way back to the earliest days, right up to this very day.

Who would have ever dreamed 20 years ago that we would be free to plant churches in what was then known as the Soviet Union? Who would have ever dreamed 20 years ago that this June, Pastor Chuck would take a team of people to Moscow because he's broadcasting on the radio there and thousands of Russians are being ministered to by the word of God? Who would have ever dreamed that that would have happened 20 years ago? We would have never imagined that. It just seemed that that empire was going to go on and on indefinitely and it was just going to continue to grow and expand. And yet, just suddenly, God brings it to an end.

And we look at certain regions today. We look at certain regimes today. And again, it seems that so many places the word of God cannot go freely because of oppressive government and things like that.

And we might think, oh, it's a hopeless situation. But you know, the Lord can change it so quickly. It can be as simple as one leader dropping dead and another one coming in that has a different attitude.

And so we need to not give up hope, but we need to keep hoping. I remember years ago having a large map in my office like I do now. I love to just look at the map of the world and kind of pray over it.

And I remember so clearly sitting in my office years ago with this map of the world and looking at it and thinking, so much of this world right here before us is closed to the gospel because so much of it was under communist rule. And then to realize that that whole region there of what was formerly the Soviet Union, what was Eastern Europe, those Eastern bloc countries and all that, to see how it just opened up. And now we look at a map today and we see the great Islamic empire that spread throughout a large part of the world.

And we think, oh, it just seems like such an impossibility, but you never know what the Lord can do in a day. Herod's on the rampage. He's persecuting the church.

He thinks he's a god. He's got it all under control and he's dead within a week. And the word of God is spreading still.

So I think as we look around us, the lesson here is to realize that things do ebb and flow historically. That's the way it's always been. But the word of God triumphs and will keep triumphing.

And our part is just to say, Lord, here I am. What would you have me to do? Our part is to pray for the work of God on that larger scale. But our part, of course, is to pray for the work of God in the lives of people all around us in our own lives.

When we find ourselves in those humanly impossible situations, then like these people, we need to go to prayer, be constant in prayer. And through constancy and earnestness in prayer, even if there is a tinge of doubt, even if there is, oh Lord, I wish you'd do this, but I just don't see how it could happen. God's not going to be limited by that.

As we see here, Peter was liberated, much to the surprise of those who were praying for him. But the word of God grows and is multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul, so here we come back to Barnabas and Saul.

To me, it seems that they were there in Jerusalem during all of these events. That they were there when Herod stretched out his hand to harass, when he killed James, when he imprisoned Peter. It was all during that time that they went up to Jerusalem.

And so Barnabas and Saul then returned from Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled their ministry and they also took with them John, whose surname was Mark. Now, this part of the history, in a sense, closes out one period.

And as we move on, we open up a new stage in the church's development. Because up until this point, the church, as you know, has been predominantly Jewish. There was the reaching out to the Samaritans, who were still having somewhat of a Jewish connection.

But then there was the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile. And then in Antioch, a church developed that was, to a large degree, a Gentile congregation. And now, from this point on in the history, Luke is going to begin to narrate for us the missionary endeavors of Barnabas and Saul.

As they go out now in fulfillment of what Jesus commanded to begin to take the message to the uttermost parts of the earth. And we're going to get into some exciting things as we follow these men in their missionary endeavors. Also, Peter now sort of fades out of the picture.

The only mention of Peter after this point will be during the council that occurs in Jerusalem in the 15th chapter. And there, for just a brief moment, Peter will interject his view on something and a decision will be made. And then Peter vanishes from the history.

Not that he vanished literally, but just as far as Luke's account goes, he is not mentioned after that. And Luke, from that point on, centers predominantly upon the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And so that's what we have to look forward to as we move into chapter 13.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the study of the word. That we can study it together, that we can be encouraged together through it.

And Lord, looking at this account tonight and realizing that, Lord, you are the Lord of history. And Lord, you're the one who is guiding your church. And even when opposition comes, you have your plan that you want to work out even through that.

And Lord, we realize that there are things that we might not understand on this side of eternity. But we thank you that we can trust you to do the right thing. We thank you, Lord, that there's power in prayer.

We thank you that we can anticipate the supernatural. That we're not limited to the help of man. And we're not defeated by our own circumstances.

But Lord, we know that at any given moment you can intervene, you can step in. You can send an angel if you choose. You can come yourself.

Lord, you can speak a word. We thank you that we serve the living God who acts on our behalf. Lord, how we rejoice in that tonight.

And Lord, for some situations have developed, Lord, where you need to act. Man cannot help. And Lord, we look to you.

And we pray that you would intervene. We pray that you would come and resolve these issues. Thank you, Lord, that we can hope in that.

Trust in that. Believe in that. Rest in that.

Help us to do that. Lord, thank you that in a moment's time you can change the direction. And we see it right here in this chapter.

It begins so dismally and it ends in triumph with the word of God being spread. Lord, may we see that over and over again in these days, we pray. In Jesus' name.

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