

THE RIGHT AND ONLY
KING
ACTS 12



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Right and Only King: Acts 12
Copyright 2022 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, all Scripture are taken from the *New King James Version*. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All quotations from the early Church Fathers are from *Acts: Ancient Christian Commentary Series, New Testament V*, Francis Martin, ed., General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2006). All quotations from the Reformation Church Fathers are from *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Acts, New Testament VI*, Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, eds., Timothy George, General Editor (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014). All quotes from John Calvin are from *Commentaries on Acts*, Rev. John Pringle, tr. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translational Society). All quotations from Matthew Henry are from *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary*, E-text version Copyright 1996, 2002 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All quotes from Earl Radmacher are from *The NKJV Study Bible*, copyright ©1997, 2007 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All psalms for singing are from *The Ailbe Psalter* (Williston: Waxed Tablet Publications, 2006), available by [clicking here](#).

Introduction to Acts 12

We have been observing the breakout of the Gospel and the Kingdom from its beginnings in Jerusalem, into the foreign soil of Samaria, and, most recently, among Gentiles from Caesarea to Antioch. The progress has been stunning, even exhilarating.

We need to catch our breath.

Acts 12 provides something of an interlude in the action of the ongoing work of Christ. It's not without its drama and sadness; nevertheless, Luke uses this chapter to remind us of the sovereignty of God in the Gospel. Nothing, not even the power of Rome, can stand in the way of Christ's ongoing work. There is only one right and true King, and it's not Herod..

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 Clamping Down, Crying Up

Pray Psalm 83.1-3.

Do not keep silent, O God!
Do not hold Your peace,
And do not be still, O God!
For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;
And those who hate You have lifted up their head.
They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.

Sing Psalm 83.1-3.

(St. Chrysostom: [*We Have not Known Thee as We Ought*](#))

O God, do not be quiet now; do not be silent, nor be still!
See how Your foes erupt in a row and those who hate You chafe at Your will.
Shrewdly they plan, conspiring as one, against Your daughters and Your sons.

Read and meditate on Acts 12.1-5.

Preparation

1. Whom did Herod kill? Why?

2. What happened to Peter?

Meditation

The matter-of-fact tone of this paragraph is a bit startling. James was put to the sword because it pleased some jerk king to do so; and Peter, it seemed, would be next. No hand-wringing, despairing, or cries of outrage. Just the facts. But the *tone* is important.

Acts 12 provides an interlude between the breakout of the Gospel and the Kingdom reported in Acts 8-11, and their rapid advance and expansion which will begin in Acts 13. Luke did not want us to be surprised by continuing persecution as though it should be considered abnormal. Jesus promised it, and even His closest companions did not escape. Moreover, death in this life is not the end of things for the believer, so we don't regard martyrdom as a tragedy. But we need to be ready for it.

Knowing that persecution is inevitable, believers should cry up to God as opponents try to clamp down on their liberties. Perhaps if we were as constant in our prayers as those first believers were (v. 5), and if we didn't think that political solutions were *real* solutions or the *best* solutions for such problems, we might see the kind of results the first Christians realized.

By the way, what does it suggest about Herod that he felt he needed four squads of soldiers – perhaps as many as 36 men! – to guard one fisherman-turned-preacher? Was this a matter of mere overkill? An attempt to impress? Or was Herod perhaps a little concerned that powers might be at work here which he did not understand – and it's always best to be prepared?

We should not think that persecution, harassment, scorn, mocking, and the like are not to be part of our experience as believers. It is given to us not only to believe, but to suffer for the Lord (Phil. 1.29, 30). We must prepare ourselves to stand firm in our witness in the event of such clamping-down beginning to clamp down on us, and constant prayer is the place to begin.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Why did Herod feel emboldened to pursue his cruel path? Because he saw that it pleased the religious folk (Acts 12.3).

And that was horrible.

Yes indeed. Religious folk hating on other religious folk. It happened then; and it still happens now.

Could it be jealousy? Or greed? Or envy? Pick one.

Whatever it is that causes us to dislike other people in the church, that dislike always has a disastrous effect.

So far, the religious have killed: Jesus, Stephen, countless women and men, and now James.

This cruelty is being perpetrated by those who believed, but had not yet turned (Acts 11.21).

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13 34, 35).

Is there any place in your heart that this kind of hatred happens? Or that Jesus’ kind of love does not happen?

Does this ever happen in your church? Is there any reason the church should allow this to happen?

Should we strive with all our hearts to love other believers? How important is it that we obey Jesus’ new commandment?

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I AM the LORD” (Lev. 19.17, 18).

We do not ever want it said of us, that persecution happened to any brother or sister in Christ, at the hands of a wicked leader, because they saw that it pleased us (Acts 12.3).

That would be horrible!

For reflection

1. Why do people persecute Christians for their faith?
2. What can we do to support and help those believers who are persecuted for their faith?
3. How should you prepare for persecution, and why should you?

“Earnest prayer,” it says. Listen as to how they were disposed toward their teachers. They did not divide into factions or make an uproar but turned to prayer, that true alliance which is invincible. In this they sought refuge. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Act of the Apostles 26

Pray Psalm 83.13-18.

Pray for Christians who endure persecution. Pray that God would shame those who persecute them and either lead them to a change of heart or remove them from power.

Sing Psalm 83.13-18.

(St. Chrysostom: [*We Have not Known Thee as We Ought*](#))

Make them like whirling dust, O God! Scatter them like the windblown chaff!
Rage like a fire consuming a wood, like flames that burn a mountain pass!
Blow like a tempest, bring them to harm, and terrify them with Your storm!

Fill with dishonor every face that they may seek Your Name, O Lord.
Bring them to shame, dismay, and disgrace, and let them perish under Your Word,
that they may learn Your infinite worth, O God Most High of all the earth!

2 Power beyond Power

Pray Psalm 91.1-3.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust.”
Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.

Sing Psalm 91.1-3.

(Lauda Anima: [*Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*](#))

All who dwell within God’s shelter in His shadow will reside.
He our Tow’r, our Fortress ever, in Him we our trust confide.
From the trapper’s snares He saves us; safe from sickness we abide.

Read Acts 12.1-9; meditate on verses 6-9.

Preparation

1. What precautions were taken in guarding Peter?
2. What did the Lord do to deliver him?

Meditation

This story is so rich in meaning! Again, we note Herod’s precautions: Two soldiers, one on either side to guard Peter; two chains to hold him in place; sentries at the door (v. 6); four squads of soldiers positioned in various places around (v. 4). Herod is going to make sure that Peter doesn’t *get out*.

Perhaps he should have thought about how to keep God from *getting in*?

Suddenly, here’s an angel (v. 7)! Where’d he come from? Right there. In the unseen realm. All around us all the time (Heb. 12.1, 2). He just stepped through the veil at the Lord’s command and filled the cell with light. He came to deliver Peter. Why? For the ongoing work of Christ, of course.

But the angel is not going to do all the work. Peter must take responsibility for his part in this little drama. Next steps, next steps: Get up, get dressed, get moving! At each step, as Peter obeyed, weird, unlikely stuff happened. Chains fell off. Guards apparently didn’t realize what was going on, even though the angel had “turned on the light” for them. Peter thought this was a dream or a vision, but he obeyed nonetheless.

Christ is seated in glory, continuing His work of overthrowing the kingdom of darkness and the lie, replacing it with His own Kingdom (1 Jn. 2.8). He commands us to make all the nations disciples. And He commands angels to bring Kingdom power to bear on our behalf (cf. Ps. 91.11-16; Rev. 14.6, 7). “King” Herod gave it his best shot to do his “kingdom” thing to Peter. But the eternal King and His Kingdom are not subject to the whims and wiles of foolish men. Neither are His subjects: Get up! Get dressed! Get moving!

There is power beyond mere human power waiting to be discharged in and through us, if only we will obey (Acts 1.8).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

This is such an exciting story! Every step, every action, every thing orchestrated by the hand of God.

But before the excitement started, the peace was preparatory: "...that night Peter was sleeping" (Acts 12.5). And this was not a sleep brought to us by Sealy Posturepedic or Mattress Discounters. No. This was a sleep that only can be brought to us by Total Trust in God.

Look at his circumstances. He isn't snuggled up in 800 count cotton sheets or covered by a feathery down comforter. Peter's sleep aids were chains and a soldier on either side. No melatonin required.

So how did he come by this sleep? He knew the Scriptures and he believed them: "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around" (Ps. 3.5, 6). "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4.8).

Peter's actions, his restful sleep, and his total trust in the loving hands of God, make his words written later in his life so believable: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5.6, 7).

We, too, can experience this same peace. Peace that comes from knowing that we are set free from our sins. We are called to "Arise quickly" and go forward to follow Jesus (Acts 12.7), after a good night's sleep in Him.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.
(Wesley, 1738/Campbell, 1825)*

For reflection

1. What "next steps" of rested, obedient faith are spreading out before you today?
2. How can you have the power of God working in you to help you realize more of the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom today?
3. Make a point to give thanks to God every time today you sense Him guiding, nudging, alerting, or otherwise working in you. Jot them down, then pray them back to the Lord with thanks and praise before you retire tonight.

*When as the angel smiteth Peter's side, it appeareth hereby what a care God hath for his, who watcheth over them when they sleep, and raiseth them when they are drowsy. And surely there were nothing more miserable than we, if the continuance of our prayers alone did keep God in his watching over us; for such is the infirmity of our flesh that we faint and quail, and we stand most of all in need of his help when our minds, being drawn away, do not seek him. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 12.7**

Pray Psalm 91.11-16.

Commit your day to the Lord. Trust Him to guide, empower, and keep you. Thank Him in advance for the help He will provide as you work your Personal Mission Field today.

Sing Psalm 91.11-16.

(Lauda Anima: [*Praise My Soul the King of Heaven*](#))

He shall give His angels charge to bear us up, lest we should fall.

They will guard and carry all who on the Savior's mercy call.

Cobra, mighty lion, serpent: We shall tread upon them all!

Save us, Lord! We love You only; set us up secure on high!

You we know, on You we call in trouble: Hear us when we cry!

Show us Your salvation, let long life forever satisfy!

3 Now I Get It!

Pray Psalm 40.1-3.

I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.
He has put a new song in my mouth—
Praise to our God;
Many will see *it* and fear,
And will trust in the LORD.

Sing Psalm 40.1-3.

(Dix: [For the Beauty of the Earth](#))

I waited patiently for God; He inclined and heard my cry,
lifted me up above the sod, set me on a Rock on high!
New songs in my mouth He gave; may He through me many save.

Read Acts 12.1-11; meditate on verses. 10, 11.

Preparation

1. What happened to Peter?
2. What did he do then?

Meditation

Peter was bemused. He thought this might be a vision (been there, done that, Acts 10). But he did what he was told. He and the angel walked right past the first and second guards (“Evenin’, gents!”). Next, they arrived at the door of the prison and *voilà*, it swung open, seemingly by its own power (but not). Now, out in the street, the angel’s work was done, and he stepped back through the veil into the eternal realm.

Peter reflected on the strangeness and wonder of all this, and he drew the right conclusion: “Now I know for certain...” (v. 11).

This is important. The “Now I know for certain...” came *after* the obedience, not *before* it. What about us: We don’t usually operate this way. We want to be sure that, if we share the Gospel with someone, nothing awkward or troubling will happen. But God doesn’t promise us that. He simply says, “make disciples” and “be My witnesses.” Have we got the cart before the horse?

We won’t see the *fruit* of obedience until we obey. We’ll “get it” about the Spirit’s power to make us witnesses for Christ – strange and unlikely as that may seem – when we have actually *drawn on* that power by obeying our mandate, taking the next steps to reach out to the lost, and opening our mouths with the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom.

Understanding leads to *obedience*. *Obedience* generates *faith* and *understanding*. Faith does not grow by knowing the *outcomes* of our next steps, but only by *understanding* and *obeying* the next steps. And we learn our next steps

from the Lord, in His Word and prayer.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“The ‘Now I know for certain...’ came *after* the obedience, not *before* it.”

This is the way God likes to do things. Absolute and pure faith in Him pleases Him. And He likes to give His people lots of opportunities to prove our faith in Him.

We’ve just read about Peter and his faith. I wonder if he was thinking about Moses, and his faith?

When God appeared to Moses in the bush that looked as if it was burning, but wasn’t (Ex.3.3, 4), He told him to go to Egypt and free His oppressed and sorrowful people. God had heard their cry and He was sending Moses to help them.

First of all, Moses was in Midian at the time. And on this occasion, he was on Mt. Horeb tending to a flock of animals. Egypt happened to be around 240 miles away. Planes, trains, and automobiles were not an option.

So Moses questioned God’s plan and asked, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3.11) God’s answer was this: “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Ex. 3.12).

So Moses traveled all the way to Egypt, tangled with Pharaoh about freeing God’s people, dealt with all the logistical issues of traveling with approximately a million men, women, and children, and eventually arrived back at this starting point on Mt. Horeb; and only *then* would he know for certain that God had sent him.

Again, Moses’ certainty came after the obedience. Obedience generated by faith. Without this trusting, obedient faith “it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11.6).

With faith, like Moses’ and Peter’s, we also can please God. And do what He has called us to do.

“...the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2.4; Rom. 1.17).

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5.7).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith...” (Eph. 2.8).

“Faith does not grow by knowing the *outcomes* of our next steps, but only by *understanding* and *obeying* the next steps.”

For reflection

1. What is faith? How does faith work to draw us more deeply into the knowledge of God and His will?
2. How does the concept of “next steps” demonstrate faith?
3. Why are reading the Scriptures and prayer so important to faith and obedience?

If we believe that God is good and wise, we can trust that what He allowed to happen was part of His wise plan for the good of all of His people. When we place our complete trust in the goodness of God, we can find true peace. God is in control despite any appearance to the contrary. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 12.11

Pray Psalm 40.11-17.

Call on the Lord for mercy and grace to help and sustain you through all the activities of your day. Commit to magnifying His Name in all you do.

Sing Psalm 40.11-17.

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Keep Your mercy not from me; let Your love and truth prevail.

Evil and iniquity make my trembling heart to fail.

Lord, be pleased to rescue me! Let my shelter with You be.

Bring to shame my ev'ry foe, all who would my life destroy;

bring them down to scorn and woe who at my hurt sing for joy.

Let them come to grief and shame who heap scorn upon my name.

Let them shout for joy and sing who in saving grace delight!

Let them praise to Jesus bring, though affliction be their plight.

Christ, our help, our Savior He! Of us ever mindful be!

4 Departures

Pray Psalm 146.1, 2, 10.

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

While I live I will praise the LORD;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being...

The LORD shall reign forever—

Your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 146.1, 2, 10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior! [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Praise the Lord, my soul, give praise! While I live, His Name I'll raise!

And exalt Him all my days – God forever reigns in Zion!

Read Acts 12.1-19; meditate on verses 12-19.

Preparation

1. How was Peter received? What did he tell the believers?
2. What happened to those assigned to guard Peter?

Meditation

If Shakespeare had written this story and featured it as a scene in one of his plays, we would be in the aisles, holding our sides. Even *before* this little “knock, knock” game. Knock, knock. Who’s there? Peter. Yeah, right (vv. 12-15). Didn’t these folks believe in the prayers they were earnestly making to the Lord (v. 12)? Certainly they did. But they could not have imagined *how* the Lord would answer their prayers.

We note they are gathered in a home, and we are introduced to John Mark (v. 12), whom we’ll meet again soon (Luke’s way of keeping his history moving forward is to give us these “previews”). This was probably one of many “house churches” in the Jerusalem church.

We also note that James, the Lord’s brother, had already achieved a place of prominence among the apostles (v. 17). We’ll see just how prominent in Acts 15 (here is another “preview”). A doubter throughout Jesus’ earthly life, James finally “got it” when the Lord showed Himself to His half-brother after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15.7) and enlisted him in the work of the Kingdom.

Staying in Jerusalem was not an option for Peter at this time, although he will return when things have settled down a bit – after Herod’s demise. He departed and went to “another place”, probably Antioch (cf. Gal. 2).

We read that “there was no small stir among the soldiers” about Peter’s being gone (v. 18). They understood what this meant. And this time there weren’t any Jewish religious leaders to keep them from Rome’s “justice” (Matt. 28.11-15). Failure of duty was a death sentence in the Roman world, and Herod was doing what the law required.

But what a callous king! He ordered the death of *four squads* of soldiers, then headed off on holiday to the seaside. Departures: Peter, Herod, and those poor soldiers. But not God. He’s there in the midst of it all, unfolding the ongoing work of Christ.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

So many amazing things happened throughout the Scriptures to unnamed people. And here, we will forever remember this named girl, Rhoda, for her unabashed excitement and profoundly unhelpful response. There's that.

Then we have the prayer meeting. One wonders, "What were they praying?"

These were dedicated believers, praying together during very difficult times, in the middle of the night. Were they praying for Peter's release? Or were they praying that his heart be strengthened as he faced death? Were they praying for their own courage? Or safety?

Whatever they were praying, they were not expecting Peter to show up at their door.

I think this group of believers might have been praying the prayer that Jesus taught them to pray:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Lk. 11.2-4)

That covered all the bases. And exuded pure trust and faith in God who knew and loved them. And knows and loves us.

As Moses prayed before his death:

"There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,

Who rides the heavens to help you,

And in His excellency on the clouds.

The eternal God is your refuge,

And underneath are the everlasting arms..." (Deut. 33.26, 27).

In this we can all trust. Even for our own departure.

For reflection

1. Why is prayer such an important part of a healthy and fruitful walk with the Lord?
2. Meditate on Genesis 12.1-3 and 2 Peter 1.4. How should the precious and very great promises of God affect the way we pray? The way we live?
3. How important is prayer as preparation for our own departure from this life?

*Although the soldiers had no guilt because Peter escaped, nevertheless it was an excessively great concession that the soldiers through their guarding collaborated with the godless king, so that the innocent Peter would be killed. It is fine if a servant suffers his fleshly lord treating him somewhat unfairly and unjustly, but he should never allow it to come to doing something godless to please his fleshly lord or helping him to carry out his godlessness or performing and completing such deeds by himself. Johannes Brenz (1499-1570), *The Acts of the Apostles 12:19.14**

Pray Psalm 146.3-10.

Commit your day to the Lord. Call on Him for all your provision and for strength to be a witness for Jesus. Praise Him that He reigns forever and ever.

Sing Psalm 146.3-10.

(Hallelujah! What a Savior!: [*Man of Sorrows*](#))

Trust we not in prince or man – no salvation's in their hand.
Death shall take them, breath and plans – God forever reigns in Zion!

Blessed are they whose hope resides in the Lord, Christ at His side.
By Him heav'n and earth abide – God forever reigns in Zion!

He is faithful evermore; He gives justice to the poor,
feeds the hungry from His store – God forever reigns in Zion!

Jesus sets the pris'ner free, heals blind eyes that they may see,
lifts those burdened painfully – God forever reigns in Zion!

He the righteous loves the best; wand'rers in His grace are blessed;
needy ones in Him find rest – God forever reigns in Zion!

But the wicked who defame His eternal blessèd Name,
Them He brings to ruin and shame – God forever reigns in Zion!

5 The Right and Only God

Pray Psalm 71.19, 20.

Your righteousness, O God, *is* very high,
You who have done great things;
O God, who is like You?
You, who have shown me great and severe troubles,
Shall revive me again,
And bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Sing Psalm 71.19, 20, 3.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

Your righteous deeds are great and true. O God, there is no one like You!
Though many troubles I have seen, You will revive my soul again!

Refrain

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Read Acts 12.1-24; meditate on verses 20-24.

Preparation

1. How did the people respond to Herod?
2. What happened to him? Why?

Meditation

Herod was angry at the people in the region of Caesarea, and he may have been threatening an embargo of food against them. They resorted to kowtowing to regain his favor. He beamed approvingly in the light of their mewling acclamation: “The voice of a god!”

And so an angel – never very far away, as we have seen – struck Herod with an illness and infestation that ultimately (not right then) took his life. This is not about “getting Herod, the jerk” for what he did to James and Peter and others. It’s about God, Who is God and who isn’t, and what’s due God, even by those who think the world owes them deference, respect, and honor. Meanwhile, the Word of God continued to grow and multiply (v. 24).

This episode dramatically punctuates the story line of Acts: Christ is replacing the kingdom of darkness and the lie with His own Kingdom of life and light. The power of the eternal, spiritual realm is overcoming with good all the wickedness and evil of the temporal, material domains of men (Rom. 12.21). Herod came under the judgment of God for claiming to be a god, and his demise foreshadows the overthrow of the Roman Empire – and in the end, of all the empires and kingdoms of men.

Only God is God. And only God is King. All others are servants or pretenders. We can trust the Lord to assert His uniqueness, authority, and power, albeit not always as dramatically as in this chapter. Luke is trying to shape the way we think about the times in which we live and our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12). We must seek that Kingdom above and over all (Matt. 6.33).

Jesus, the only right and true King, continues His ongoing work, even in the face of the vain pretensions of sinful men.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

No matter your political persuasion, this situation provides one outcome for which we can pray for our leaders.

Keeping in mind, of course, that it is God's business, who is in power and who isn't. "But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another" (Ps. 75.7).

I hear with much consternation Christians declaring that it was the Lord's will that their candidate won an election. Truly, it is just as much the Lord's will if the opponent had won! Nothing happens outside His instruction and His control. "Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God is Judge" (Ps. 50.6).

And He tells us: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55.8, 9).

But I think we have been given permission to pray, when we see a leader standing in the stead of God, and taking glory upon himself as a god, that God, our God, the One True God, the Right and Only God, would work His will upon that leader. Maybe even akin to Herod's fate (Acts 12.23).

Even as I say that, my heart is grieved to remember, I was once just like Herod. Ruling my own life and not glorifying God as God. And God, in His mercy and grace, reached into my heart and changed me.

In thankfulness, in mercy, and in grace, we also must pray that these leader's hearts will be changed. That they, too, as we once did, will accept the undeserved gift of salvation, and turn from their wicked ways, and follow Jesus. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom.5.8).

Why is the one prayer harder to pray than the other? Regardless, what we all really want is that the word of God grows and multiplies (Acts 12.24).

Maybe just one tiny worm?

For reflection

1. What should the Christian's attitude toward civil government be?
2. When governments overstep their legitimate bounds, what should the Christian do?
3. We're told to pray for our government (1 Tim. 2.1-8). How should you pray?

... such men as Herod, when puffed with pride and vanity, are ripening fast for signal vengeance. God is very jealous for his own honor, and will be glorified upon those whom he is not glorified by. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 12.20-25

Pray Psalm 71.1-8.

Pray that God will embolden you as His witness today and make you alert and ready for every opportunity to praise, thank, or proclaim Him.

Sing Psalm 71.1-8.

(Solid Rock: [*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*](#))

In You, O Lord, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

The Right and Only King: Acts 12

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

From wicked hands redeem me, Lord, from all who wrest and break Your Word.
My hope, my confidence from youth, my praise forever reaches You.

Refrain

While many see in me a sign, I shelter in Your strength will find.
Lord, fill my mouth with endless praise and with Your glory all my days.

Refrain

6 Preview

Pray Psalm 99.1, 2, 9.

The LORD reigns;
Let the peoples tremble!
He dwells *between* the cherubim;
Let the earth be moved!
The LORD *is* great in Zion,
And He *is* high above all the peoples...
Exalt the LORD our God,
And worship at His holy hill;
For the LORD our God *is* holy.

Sing Psalm 99.1, 2, 9.

(Sine Nomine: [For All the Saints](#))

The Lord is King! Let all the peoples quake!
He rules above the angels; let earth shake!
Amid His people Jesus Christ is great:
Exalt the Savior! Exalt the Savior!

Read Acts 12.1-25; meditate on verse 25.

Preparation

1. Why did Saul and Barnabas return to Antioch (cf. Acts 11.27-30)?
2. Whom did they bring with them?

Meditation

Saul and Barnabas had watched the horrible and wonderful events in Jerusalem. James was dead. Peter was miraculously delivered and now departed to another place. New leadership was emerging in the church in Jerusalem. And the people were well-supplied by the gifts Saul and Barnabas had brought from Antioch. So they headed home, back to Antioch.

The fact that John Mark accompanied them suggests either that they required some assistance in their return to Antioch or they had plans in mind for a young man who showed promise. They don't appear to have been in the least deterred or distracted from the work of the Kingdom by what happened in Jerusalem. Stuff happens; the work of the Kingdom goes on.

Barnabas and Saul were clearly a team at this point. They worked together, and they would work together, as we shall see, until John Mark became a bone of contention and an issue between them. But even that, as we also shall see, worked out for the progress of the Kingdom. Stay tuned.

Luke uses Acts 12 as a kind of bridge into the story of the Kingdom's wider expansion. Jewish opposition and Roman power could not stop the Word from increasing. Old leaders died, but new ones – James, Saul, John Mark – were ready to rise. The foolishness of unbelief continued, but heavenly hosts and an exalted King are pursuing a different agenda, turning the world rightside-up for the glory of God.

New leaders, new horizons, new opportunities are opening before the Lord's faithful witnesses. What was true in Acts 12 remains true today. Right there in your own Personal Mission Field.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The team of Barnabas and Saul was a winning combination: Saul tended toward the aggressive and Barnabas tempered that with encouragement.

These two were learning many skills from one another, and their differences balanced both of their personalities for use in the Kingdom.

Although Peter was writing about husbands and wives, the same dynamic put forth for them, can be true of fellow-workers in the Kingdom: “as being heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3.7).

Proverbs 27 contains several verses that we can see these heirs putting to good use:

“Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed” (v. 5).

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend...” (v. 6)

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (v. 17).

And now they were adding another personality to the mix, John Mark. Saul and Barnabas will be a whole different kind of influence than Rhoda (Acts 12.12-14). “The righteous should choose his friends carefully...” (Prov.12.26) Bless her heart, there wasn’t anything wrong with her, but perhaps John Mark was ready for more.

Perhaps being with these two men pushed John Mark way out of his comfort zone. And there he learned to rely on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are we content to stay secure, and not force ourselves to trust God for everything?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3.5, 6).

All of our relationships should be for the edification and encouragement in the Lord, of each other. And all for the glory of God. That is the purpose. That is the plan. That is the preview of heaven.

And I must admit, I am encouraged that Rhoda had a purpose and a Personal Mission Field. There is even a place for those of us who excitedly forget to open the door! Because truly, her omission was done out of love and gladness (Acts 12.14), which clearly fulfilled the Law of God (Rom. 13.8).

For reflection

1. Is it your practice to see every task and every opportunity as a *Kingdom* task or opportunity? Explain.
2. How can friends – and how can spouses – help one another to be more consistent in working our Personal Mission Fields?
3. How can prayer help us to be more consistent in seeing all our tasks and opportunities as ways of seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God?

[That Saul and Barnabas took John Mark with them] is here set down to prepare and transition into the following history. The English Annotations (1645, 1651, 1657), Annotations on Acts 12:25, 23

Pray Psalm 99.3-5, 9.

Pray for the coming of God’s rule – His Kingdom – in justice, uprightness, righteousness, and worship throughout the earth.

Sing Psalm 99.3-5, 9.

(Sine Nomine: [*For All the Saints*](#))

Let all men praise Your great and awesome Name,
O holy Lord, of strength and justice fame.
Your righteousness and justice we proclaim:
Exalt the Savior! Exalt the Savior!

You have established strength and equity;
before Your throne, O Lord, we bend the knee.
To You, O Savior, praise and honor be:
Exalt the Savior! Exalt the Savior!

7 Garments of the True King

Pray Psalm 2.1-6.

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
“Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion.”

Sing Psalm 2.1-6.

(Agincourt: *O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?
Earth’s kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Read Acts 12.1-25; meditate on verses 20-24.

Preparation

1. What was Herod’s sin?
2. What happened after God removed Herod?

Meditation

From the beginning of the Gospel, religious and civil powers sought to silence the Good News, going so far as to murder the Savior, imprison and threaten His witnesses, bring martyrdom upon leaders of the movement, and scatter the believers from their homes and communities.

Every attempt by religious leaders or Roman authorities to put out the flame of the Gospel was like throwing gasoline on a fire. Because no worldly power – civil, religious, or otherwise – can stop the ongoing work Jesus is doing from His throne at the right hand of God (Ps. 110). Herod allowed himself to be called a god. God showed him he was not. Subsequent Roman emperors – for 250 years more – would insist on empire-wide recognition of their status as gods on earth. All of them would perish, and in the fourth century, the empire itself would bow the knee to Jesus.

Jesus is the only true God and King. The book of Acts shows us what to expect wherever He is pursuing His ongoing work. Enemies are converted or removed. Nations and peoples rejoice to believe. Churches pop-up

all over the place. Morals change. Love abounds. And though persecution continues, it cannot stop what Jesus is doing, filling the world with Himself (Eph. 4.8-10).

Herod learned the hard way not to try and rob God of the glory due to Him alone. Civil magistrates are God's servants, and they are appointed to oversee good order in the world (Rom. 13.1-4), not to make a name or accrue honors unto themselves. All rulers – civil and religious – answer to God, in this life and beyond. So do we. We who believe must not allow any puffed up opposition to distract us from our mission or defeat us in our work. Christ is doing His ongoing work through us, and our responsibility – like Saul and Barnabas and Peter and James and all those early believers – is simply to give thanks, rejoice, and obey.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, “apparel oft proclaims the man”, which has morphed today into “clothes make the man”.

Herod was an early believer in those rules of fashion. There he was “arrayed in royal apparel” waxing eloquent about the glories of himself (Acts 12.21). Pompous clothing.

Luke had previously written about clothing. In Luke 2 he tells us what the angel told the shepherds: “And this will be a sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (v. 12). This Babe is the Savior, Christ the Lord. Tender clothing.

Then in Mark 9 we are given a description of Jesus' clothing on the Mount of Transfiguration: “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.” (vs.3) Awesome clothing.

Next we are given a glimpse into Herod's disturbed use of clothing during the false trial of Jesus: “Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.” (Lk. 23.11) Cruel clothing.

And in Acts Herod becomes the poster boy for the Hans Christian Andersen story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

In striving for a god's greatness, he managed to get himself exposed before his subjects. And eaten by worms.

Clothes are not a negligible issue. Their use and misuse are throughout literature—Scriptural and otherwise.

And now, clothing for us, from the true God and King, tailored to cover our sins: “Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’” (Rev. 7.14). Saving clothing.

And our true God and King, His own clothing goes far beyond mere fabric and fashion. Hear what the psalmist has to say:

“O LORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty,
Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.”
“I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.”
(Ps. 104.1, 2, 33)

Clothed, covered, and cared for by Christ; in apparel that proclaims Whose people we are!

For reflection

1. What does it mean to “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13.14)?

2. God does not look on the outward person, but on the heart (1 Sam. 6.16). What kind of “clothing” is God looking for on your heart?

3. Revelation 3.14-18: How can we acquire the clothing God wants to see on us?

The Jewish historian Josephus also provides an account of this display, informing us that in an attempted appeasement of the king the people confessed that he was “more than a mortal.” Herod, instead of rebuking the address of deity, enjoyed the adulation—until he discovered the consequence of such blasphemy. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 12.22

Pray Psalm 2.7-12.

Pray for God to advance His Kingdom over all the earth, and to overwhelm with grace and truth all those who oppose His King. Pray for a great revival of true religion and a great awakening to faith in all nations.

Sing Psalm 2.7-12.

(Agincourt: *O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav’n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus’ grace, and worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by saying that God is sovereign in the Gospel and the ongoing work of Christ?
2. What's involved in discerning the Lord's next steps for our lives?
3. What does it mean to be clothed with Jesus? How does this relate to our calling as His witnesses (Acts 1.8)?
4. Based on all that we have seen thus far in Acts, how would you summarize the main points of the Good News of the Kingdom?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 12?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.