**Resurgence**

*Acts 12*

**Introduction**

1. **Acts 12** is positioned between the introduction of the gospel to the Gentile world by Peter and those in Antioch, and the first missionary journey of Paul – ***“a chosen vessel of [Christ’s] to bear [His] name before Gentiles” (Acts 9:15).***
   1. The chapter demonstrates the utter rejection of the gospel by the Jews by the resurgence of conflict at the epicenter of persecution – Jerusalem.
   2. The chapter demonstrates the destined success of the gospel message, even reaching into the Gentile world which Paul and Barnabas were soon to evangelize, due to the divine protection and provision of God.
2. The chapter echoes circumstances which took place early in the church involving Peter.
3. It manifests a resurgence of sorts:
4. Of Evil Men
5. Herod Agrippa I – **Acts 12:1** – around 44 A.D.
   1. About 48 years before the events of this chapter, his grandfather tried to kill Jesus as a baby – **“Herod the Great”** (37-4 B.C) – **Matthew 2:16**
   2. About 33 years after this, his uncle, **“Herod the tetrarch,” or Antipas**, had John the Baptist beheaded – **cf. Matthew 14:1-12**
      1. Not long after this, this same Herod Antipas mocked Jesus after being sent Him from Pilate during His trial when it was discovered He was of Herod’s jurisdiction.
      2. Herod was complicit in Jesus’ death – **Acts 4:25-28**
   3. Like his grandfather and his uncle, Herod Agrippa I acted from selfish political motivation without regard for any who were in the path of his destruction – **Acts 12:1-3a** – ***“he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further…”***
      1. We’re not told the reason for his murder of James.
      2. **However, it is clear he followed in the footsteps of brutality of his ancestors.**
   4. **He was a dishonest man:**
      1. Peter was kept by 4 squads of solders – **(v. 4)** – 4 soldiers to a squad, 16 overall.
         1. Around the clock – squads likely working in shifts.
         2. **(v. 6)** – 2 chained to Peter, 2 keeping watch before the door of the prison.
         3. NOTE: several years before, Peter had escaped the custody of the Sanhedrin (**cf. Acts 5).**
      2. **(vv. 7-10)** – miraculous deliverance by an angel of the Lord – guards evidently kept from seeing – in a stupor?
      3. Upon the news, Herod examined the guards – **(vv. 18-19)**
         1. **Examined** – i.e. conducted an investigation.
         2. (**v. 18)** – the guards don’t know what happened.
            1. Their stories would have been of the same nature – complete confusion and ignorance – but adamant that they didn’t let him go.
            2. Why would that be their story if they had truly done something wrong?
         3. **Horns of a dilemma – (1) admit a miraculous release of Peter; (2) conclude that the guards conspired together to release Peter.**
            1. (1) – unacceptable to Herod.
            2. (2) – illogical – as the soldiers would know their fate.
            3. **RATHER THAN ACCEPTING THE MOST LOGICAL CONCLUSION OF TRUTH, HEROD KILLED INNOCENT MEN.**
   5. **He was a prideful man:**
      1. **(v. 20)** – angry – *thumomacheo* (θυμομαχέω, 2371), lit., “to fight with great animosity” (thumos, “passion,” machomai, “to fight”), hence, “to be very angry, to be highly displeased,” (VINE)
         1. “to carry on war with great animosity” (THAYER)
         2. “means to be angry enough to plan war against them.” (Reese, 442).
      2. **(vv. 21-22)** – welcomed glory as a god.
         1. Contrast – **Acts 10:25-26; 14:14-15** (idol worshipers at Lystra intend to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas)
6. Evil men are never in short supply.
   1. While we may be disgusted by their evil, we should not be surprised.
   2. **Politics – we should not put stock or faith in politics.**
      1. If a good one comes along, he is usually the lesser of evils.
      2. An evil one is likely to follow.
      3. Honor, but not faith or confidence – **cf. 1 Peter 2:17**
7. As there will always be a resurgence of evil men, there will be a resurgence of God’s justice, and vengeance – **(v. 23**)
   1. The Holy Spirit specifically indicates this was a Divine judgment.
   2. **Romans 12:19** – this is God’s place.
      1. Christians must know the evil of revolt and rebellion.
      2. The Roman Empire under which Christianity was born was evil, but Christians did not bear arms against it.
8. Of Persecution
9. **(v. 1)** – it has been at least 8 years since Stephen was stoned (**cf. Acts 7:54-60**).
   1. After Saul’s conversion – **Acts 9:31** – the church had peace.
   2. ***“about that time”*** – **Acts 11:27-30; 12:25** – the time Agabus prophesied about a famine, and loving brethren determined to take care of each other – Saul and Barnabas return from the trip at the end of the chapter.
   3. Relative peace had been enjoyed by the church for a short time, but persecution was on the rise.
10. ***“Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church” (v. 1)***
    1. ***“stretched out his hand”*** = **Acts 4:3; 5:18** – by the Sanhedrin (Peter and John)
    2. Here – BY THE KING – now persecution is being encouraged by a civil ruler! (**cf. Romans 13:3** – supposed to be a terror to evil works, not good)
11. The church has lost at least one prominent disciple at this point – Stephen – **Acts 6:8, 10** – effective, and his death demonstrates it.
12. Here, an apostle is lost – **Acts 12:2**
    1. **We aren’t told much about his work – “Luke has told us nothing of James’ work; but we may suppose he was doing significant evangelization, for otherwise it is hard to think of a reason for Herod or the Jews to make him a prime target of this persecution.” (Reese, 428)**
    2. One of the ***“Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17***):
       1. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus – **Luke 9:54-56**
       2. **It is not a stretch to suggest that misdirected passion was corrected (like Saul’s), and that his great energy was extremely effective in the making of disciples.**
       3. However – **Matthew 20:22-23** – when asked Jesus to sit on either side of Him in His kingdom, He foreshadowed their experience of suffering.
    3. No doubt, this affected the church greatly – **(vv. 3-5)** – they surely had been praying for James, and now their energy shifts for Peter lest they lose another!
13. We must not think it strange – **1 Peter 4:12-13; 2 Timothy 3:12**
14. We must strengthen our weaknesses now, that when persecution comes we are equipped to withstand – **Hebrews 12:12-13**
15. Of the Power of God
16. Peter was given the privilege of experiencing another divine deliverance as he did years before.
    1. **The resurgence of evil men, and evil deeds is not evidence of the retreat of God.**
    2. These are trials of faith – **1 Peter 1:6-7**
17. The power of God was aroused through fervent prayer by the church – **(vv. 5, 12)** – when Peter arrived at Mary’s house, they were still praying for him.
    1. Even after the loss of James, which surely caused great confusion and question as to why such happened.
    2. Jesus sympathizes – **Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1, 19-21** – despair, to blessed assurance as God hears.
    3. **Psalm 34:15-18** – the Lord hears, and acts.
18. Peter’s deliverance was notably of divine intervention – **(vv. 6-11)**
    1. **(v. 7)** – Peter had to be awakened, and his chains just fell off.
    2. **(v. 8)** – Peter had to be instructed to get dressed and ready to go.
    3. **(v. 9)** – Peter followed, not comprehending what was happening.
    4. **(v. 10)** – Peter was not even made to open the gate – of its own accord.
    5. **(v. 11)** – Peter knew for certain that God had delivered him.
19. God intervenes for His people, and brings them great joy – **(vv. 12-17)**
    1. **(v. 14)** – Rhoda too glad and excited to let Peter in.
    2. **(v. 17)** – So excited Peter had to quiet them down.
       1. **Tell it to James and the brethren – Joy is to be spread**
20. A resurgence of evil, persecution, and trial is high time for a resurgence of the power of God – **2 Corinthians 12:9** – but this requires our own faith in such.
21. Of Growth
22. ***“BUT”*** – **(v. 24)** – such makes a contrast.
    1. The persecution by Herod, and the undoubted backing of the Jews, was intended to halt the church’s progress.
    2. ***“BUT”*** that did not work – **Isaiah 55:11** – cannot stifle God’s will and word.
       1. Instead, not only did the word grow and multiply…
       2. …but the persecutor (Herod) is slowed and finished.
23. **NOTE: The context of growth is not always purely positive, but the growth itself is a ray of light bursting through the darkness.**
    1. Successful growth in number (evangelism), and strength (edification) is not dependent on outward circumstances.
    2. Often, growth occurs despite the difficult circumstances – **Nehemiah 1:17-18** – we must set our hands to the work.
    3. **(v. 25)** – this leads into the next chapter and demonstrates the 1st century Christian’s resolve to press on with the work even after immense adversity.

**Conclusion**

1. The difficulty in the book of Acts is far from finished, and the difficulties the church faces will never be finished.
2. There will always be a resurgence of evil, persecution, and hard times – this is life under the sun.
3. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our great God and Savior look down upon us from there to grant us aid in doing their will and will one day welcome us home to our great reward.
4. Until then, we must have a constant mind to do the work of the Lord and resist the Devil.