

## **Celebrating God's Sovereignty - Acts 12:1-25**

### **1. Introduction**

- The Bible emphasizes both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Lord reigns, but we are not mere puppets.
- *"God has an eternal and all-embracing plan, which cannot be defeated and will result in His glory and the good of His people"*.

### **2. God's purposes are inscrutable (1-4)**

- Herod Agrippa was a psychotic murderer – like his grandfather Herod the Great (Matthew 2:16-18) and uncle Herod Antipas.
- He was a playboy who persecuted the church in order to secure the favour of the Jewish authorities (1-2).
- James was the brother of John and one of Jesus' inner circle (Matthew 26:36-37). He is the first Apostle to be martyred – his brother John was last. Herod arrests Peter in order to destroy the church.
- We cannot understand God's purposes – why does he allow the church to suffer? Why do evil men flourish? The mystery of providence.

### **3. God's power is invincible (5-11)**

- The church prayed passionately and God sent an angel (5-7). The angel delivered Peter from Herod's clutches (11).
- It is Passover (3) and 12:11 echoes Exodus 18:4 – God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt. God delivers us by his power alone (Exodus 14:13-14).
- This is a picture of salvation – *"My chains fell off; my heart was free. I rose went forth and followed thee."* (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13-14).
- God does not always deliver his people from danger – James died. However we can be confident that his power is invincible.

### **4. God's provision is incredible (12-17)**

#### *a) God uses our prayers*

- The rescue of Peter is the result of the prayers of the church (5, 12). The angel brought Peter but prayer brought the angel.
- Prayer is vital to the health and well being of the church (Acts 4:23-31). Prayer is laying our needs before God (2 Kings 19:14).

#### *b) God exceeds our expectations*

- The church does not expect their prayers to be answered and what follows is almost farcical (13-15). They are amazed when they realize it is Peter (16). He goes on to other ministry (Galatians 2:11 - Antioch).
- God loves to do more than we imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21)

### **5. God's plans are irresistible (18-25)**

- God always punishes the evil (18-23). The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that Herod dressed in silver robes and accepted the praise of his subjects. He died in agony 7 days later.
  - ⇒ Sin defies God – it claims the glory that belongs to him alone.
  - ⇒ Sin is stupid – if you take on Jesus you will lose.
- God always prospers the good (24-25). The word spreads (breadth) and flourishes (depth). World mission is launched (12:25-13:3)
- At the start of the story – Satan is victorious; Herod is triumphant; James is dead; Peter is in prison and the church is in retreat.
- By the end of the story – Satan is in retreat; Herod is dead; Peter is free; the church is amazed and encouraged and the word is victorious.