

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Tragedy and Triumph: God's Plans are Never Thwarted

Acts 12:1–25

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to **Acts 12**. Today we are returning to the book of Acts and returning to our series, "No Other Name." The title of our message today is "Tragedy and Triumph: God's Plans are never Thwarted."¹ Today's message is going to be an overwhelming affirmation of God's sovereignty. And you can either believe in God's sovereignty and be encouraged by it, or you can reject it and despair. Those are your options. But the truth of the message of God's Word is this—come tragedy or triumph, come hell or high water, in good times and in bad times, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted.

Here's another way to frame this message today. If you oppose God, you lose. If you trust God... if you obey God... you win. Even if you die, you win. Even if you get your head chopped off by a violent, despotic, self-aggrandizing, world leader, you win. It's that simple.

And here's the thing for us today. What was true twenty centuries ago is true today. If you oppose God, and his son, Jesus Christ, you lose. You lose forever. On the other hand, if you obey God... if you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you win. Even when you die, you win.

Now King Herod is the foil in **Acts 12**. He opposes God and he loses. He loses big. And Luke presents him to you as a test case. Don't do what this guy does. Don't follow in his footsteps. Because even after a few apparent victories, it's clear by the end of this chapter that he loses big. And if you oppose God and reject Christ, the same verdict awaits you. You'll lose big. And it doesn't have to be that way.

Now look with me at **verse 1 of chapter 12**. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, writes:

¹ About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

Let's quickly review where we've been in the book of **Acts** thus far. The gospel has been spreading throughout the ancient world. It's gone from Jews in Jerusalem to Samaritans in Samaria and even to Gentiles in places like Caesarea and Antioch. When we were last in the book of **Acts**, Paul and Barnabas were as far away as Tarsus and Antioch preaching the gospel and building up the church. Antioch is more than three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. That's how far the gospel has spread in just a few years after Jesus's resurrection.

But now the narrator, Luke, goes back to where it all began in Jerusalem. And he tells us that...

¹ About that time

In other words, around the time that Paul and Barnabas were making converts in Antioch...

Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

Now, quick history lesson here. There are a number of rulers in the Roman Empire that took the name Herod. Three of those rulers are especially significant in the Bible. First of all there is Herod the Great. He was ruling at Jesus's birth. He was that neurotic ruler who got tricked by the Magi after Jesus's birth and subsequently killed the babies in Bethlehem (**Matt 2:1–18**). Then there was Herod Antipas, who was Herod the Great's son. He's the one who had John the Baptist beheaded at the behest of his wife Herodias (**Mark 6:15–28**).² And he's the one that Jesus called "that fox" in **Luke 13:32**. Then there's this Herod from **Acts 12**. This is

¹ I'm indebted to Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 361 for the language of this title.

² Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. So her marriage to Antipas was both incestuous (uncle and niece) and adulterous (her previous husband, Philip, was still alive). This is what John the Baptist renounced, and this is what got John the Baptist executed.

Herod Agrippa I. This is Herod the Great's grandson.³ He grew up in Rome, and while in Rome he got himself into a lot of hot water. I won't bore you with the details, but suffice it to say he had a short leash when he was sent to Judea to rule that region. And one of the things that he had to do while he was there was keep the Jews happy. That was his primary mission—Keep 'em happy.⁴ Keep them from revolting.⁵ And so Herod Agrippa lived a quasi-Jewish lifestyle, and did things that pleased the Jews, like persecute the church.⁶

² He killed James⁷ the brother of John with the sword,⁸ ³ and when he saw that it pleased⁹ the Jews,¹⁰ he proceeded to arrest Peter also.¹¹ This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.¹²

Now don't move past these verses too quickly. In **verse 2**, it says He killed James the brother of John. He killed James, the son of Zebedee. This was one of Jesus's twelve apostles, the first to die a martyr's death.¹³ In fact, not only was he one of the original twelve, but he was also part of Jesus's inner circle—Peter, James, and John. When Jesus was transfigured on the mount of transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were there. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane he set aside for himself Peter, James, and John. And so now, this faithful apostle, this member of Jesus's inner circle, is unceremoniously executed on a whim by King Herod.¹⁴

And sometimes that happens. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. And faithful followers of Christ suffer. Everyone with me? If anyone ever told you that if you vote for Jesus all your wildest dreams will come true... that person lied to you. If anyone ever told you that if you follow Christ, then your life will be just one big comfy gravy train heading towards eternity without suffering and without

³ But Agrippa I was not the son of Herod Antipas. Agrippa I was the son of Aristobulus IV (and his wife Bernice), who was put to death by Herod the Great.

⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 535: "Agrippa presented himself as a pious king who loved the Jewish people (he lowered taxes), who sought to improve the fortification of Jerusalem with a third wall, and who championed the sanctity of the temple. His actions against the leaders of the Jerusalem congregation seem to have been part of these measures that were initiated to demonstrate the new policies promoting traditional Jewish concerns."

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 424: "His popularity among the Jews may well explain his hostility to the new movement that the Jewish leadership so opposed, especially as he sought to stay in the good graces of the ruling Sadducean party."

⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 278: "Everything Josephus said about Agrippa [For Agrippa sections see Josephus, *Ant.* 18.126, 131–34, 143–69, 179–204, 228–301; 19.236–44, 265, 274–77, 288, 292–354. See Bruce, *Acts*: NIC, 246–47] would indicate that he made every attempt to please the Jews, particularly currying the favor of the influential Pharisees. His 'Jewishness,' however, seems to have been largely a face he put on when at home. When away, he lived in a thoroughly Roman fashion."

⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 535–6: "James's execution demonstrates that Agrippa's measures against the church were severe and violent, ending the period of tranquility of about ten years since the persecution."

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 425: "James, son of Zebedee, is probably beheaded as John the Baptist was, although, if some Jewish sensibilities are maintained, he may have been run through with a sword (Deut. 13:15 [13:16 LXX]; 1 Sam. 22:18–19; 2 Sam. 1:13, 15; Jer. 26:23; beheading as part of execution, 1 Sam. 17:46, 51; 2 Kings 10:6–8). On the other hand, *m. Sanh.* 7.3 allows beheading, among the most shameful of deaths, in the Roman manner, and so this is the likely form of execution."

⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 267: "The arrest took place because Agrippa I saw that it pleased the Jews that he had killed James. Herod the Great was of Idumean ancestry, which meant that his grandson, Agrippa I, was also an Edomite by descent. Because of this, Agrippa I was always insecure about his Jewishness and overcompensated for that insecurity by doing what he could to appease the Jews."

¹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 425: "This is the first time in Acts that the term 'Jews' is used negatively."

¹¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 278n144: "A later tradition, which should be taken with considerable reservation, tells of how the officer who led James to trial was converted by James's testimony, professed his faith, and was himself condemned and executed together with James (Eusebius, *Ecccl.Hist.* 2.9.2f., quoting Clement of Alexandria)."

¹² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 425: "It is the very same season of the year during which Jesus was executed (Luke 22:1). So the note sets an ominous tone." Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 362: "At the time when the Jews were celebrating the deliverance of their nation through God's intervention, a herald of God's climactic act of deliverance was taken into custody to please the Jews. While they should have been celebrating a great salvation, they were hoping to inflict a great punishment on the representative of the Savior (v. 11)."

¹³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 278: "Some interpreters have suggested that his brother John was also executed at this time, interpreting Mark 10:39 as a prediction that both would be martyred. John 21:23, however, seems to predict the opposite; and early church tradition has John living to an old age and dying a natural death."

¹⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 422: "Fitzmyer (1998: 486) notes that no effort is made to reconstitute the Twelve after James's death, a point with implications about the view of a permanent role for the Twelve. In other words, Judas was replaced as the twelfth member, and then no replacement was made after James's death here, probably on the belief that the Twelve would be reestablished in the resurrection."

trials, that person was lying to you. That person either never read the NT or deliberately ignored it. The truth is bad things happen to good people all the time. But here's the good news. God is sovereign over those things. And God will never let that suffering be in vain. Don't ever forget that.

Jot this down as the first point from our message. The refrain for today's message is as follows: "God is in Control and His Plans are Never Thwarted." And here's the first point.

1) **When tragedy strikes**, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted (12:1-5)

When good people die... When despotic rulers seem to get the upper hand on the church... When Christians suffer... God is in control and his plans will never be thwarted. That's a truth that God's Word teaches.

Can I just say something here this morning? Can I share a hard truth with you? This is something that unfortunately you won't hear in a lot of churches today, and I think it's a shame because when this truth is ignored, it creates a lot of unhealthy, immature Christians. But I don't want you to be that way. So I'm going to tell you. Are you ready? You will *suffer* as a Christian. You will. Just come to terms with that.

Some of you will contract cancer and die a slow and painful death. Some of you will experience the loss of a child or a loved one that will absolutely break your heart. Some of you will be persecuted at work or in your family because of your faith in Christ. Some of you will be ostracized from family members because you actually believe what the Bible says. And the worst thing that I could tell you as your pastor is: "That'll never happen! God won't allow you to suffer like that." That's just not true. You can't teach any book of the NT without eventually dealing with the topic of suffering.

Your sincerity won't exempt you from suffering. Your service to Christ won't exempt you from suffering. Your sacrificial conduct won't exempt you from suffering. Your stature as a Christian leader won't exempt you from suffering. And if you think that somehow because you're suffering, then God is punishing you or you are distanced from his power, you couldn't be more wrong. Suffering is that thing that God uses to refine us and make us more like him. And you're going to experience that. If James experienced it, and if Peter experienced it, you will too. They were better men than us.

Why am I telling you this? To prepare you. Because if you don't have a theology that tells you that God is in control and no matter what happens he's going to work it out for good, even with your suffering, you are going to end up in a place of despair. But there's no reason to despair. Because even if we suffer, even if we are executed by a ruthless God-opposing ruler, we win. We win! The moment that James died he was whisked away into God's presence for an eternity of ecstasy and bliss. No more pain. No more suffering. No more death. That's what awaits us if we trust Christ.

Now pay attention here, because there are some really cool things that are going to happen in this passage. Notice first in **verse 4**.

⁴ And when he [Herod] had seized him [Peter], he put him in prison,¹⁵ delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest¹⁶ prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Just a few things to notice here. (1) Herod puts four squads of soldiers in charge of guarding Peter. Why'd he do that? Probably because Peter has a reputation for breaking out of prison. In **Acts 4**, Peter was arrested and released with only a flogging. In **Acts 5**, Peter was arrested for preaching, but an angel of the Lord broke him out of prison and he went right back to preaching. What a jailbird! What a jail-breaker! And so

¹⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 535: "The conditions in the prison—in which James stayed before his execution (v. 2), and presumably also Peter (v. 4)—were harsh. When Silas, the commander of the army under Agrippa I, was thrown into prison for being presumptuous, he complained to the king that all that he received as a reward for his loyalty was "chains and a gloomy dungeon" (Josephus, *Ant.* 19.324)."

¹⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 362: "The word translated 'earnestly' (*ektenos*) literally means 'stretched out' ... Luke's use of *ektenos* here, therefore, seems more like his use of this word in Luke 22:44, where it refers to Jesus' earnest prayer in the garden (see also Acts 26:7). This idea of earnestness (see niv) comes from the idea of hands *stretched out* to God in fervent supplication. It gives the impression of wholehearted, urgent pleading to God."

Herod's like, **"That's not happening this time."** And he puts four squads, or sixteen soldiers total, in charge of guarding him.¹⁷

(2) Notice also that as Peter is awaiting his sentencing in prison, guarded by sixteen soldiers, the church of Jesus Christ starts to pray. And it says they were praying *earnestly*. That's the same word that Luke uses of Jesus when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.¹⁸

So what happens? Well look at **verse 6**.

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night,

In other words, this is just a few hours before Peter was going to die. Herod was about to bring him out for a public trial, conviction, and execution, just like Jesus. And to that you might say, **"When tragedy strikes, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted. You just said that, Tony."** Yes, but hold on now. **"God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform."** We can't always predict in this world what God has planned next.

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring [Peter] out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

Now I love this. Peter was about to die in just a few hours. And what's he doing? He's sleeping. He's sawing logs. There's no anxiety here. **"Yeah I'll probably die tomorrow. O Well. Might as well get some shut eye before I go get my head chopped off."** You've got to love that!

John Chrysostom, the fourth century preacher, notes the way that both Peter and Paul dealt with imprisonment: Paul sings hymns and Peter sleeps.¹⁹ Both were equally defiant of death. And that's because both of them had a deep confidence in the sovereignty of God! Peter's like, **"If I die, I die. So what? Let's get some shut eye?"**

And notice too, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. So Herod wasn't taking any chances with this guy. Two soldiers were in the cell with Peter, bound to him by chains. There's no way this guy is getting out, right? Those people in church praying for Peter are praying in vain. Herod has every basis covered. Herod has gone totally overboard to make sure that this guy gets executed the next morning.

But God's like, **"No, I'm not having that. We're not doing this."** Look at **verse 7**.

⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck²⁰ Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

That word "struck" is a really strong word in Greek. It's the same word that is used of Peter when he cut off Malchus's ear in **Matthew 26:51**. The angel basically walloped Peter on the side and said, **"Wake up. We're busting you out of this joint."** You're going to die someday, Peter, but not today. Live to die another day!

Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And [the angel] said to [Peter], "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."⁹ And he went out and followed him. [Pause – this is great right here] He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real,²¹ but thought he was seeing a vision.

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 279: "Peter was placed under heavy security, being guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. This was the usual Roman practice, changing guards every three hours throughout the twelve night hours to assure maximum alertness."

¹⁸ See ἐκτενῶς and ἐκτένεια, BDAG, 310. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 426: "While he is held, the church is praying for him earnestly (ἐκτενῶς, ektenōs; BAGD 245; BDAG 310). This is the only use of this term in Acts, but variations appear in Luke 22:44 (Jesus at Gethsemane) and Acts 26:7."

¹⁹ CHRYSOSTOM: "See how Peter slept and was not in anguish or fear. In the very night when he was about to be brought before the court he slept, leaving everything to God." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 153.

²⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 427: "The verb for 'strike' (πατάσσω, patassō, v. 7) is usually negative, meaning 'smite,' as in the approaching scene containing Herod's death in verse 23, but here it bears the lighter meaning 'strike hard' (Johnson 1992: 212; Exod. 2:12; Judg. 1:5; Pss. 3:8 [3:7 Eng.]; 77:66 [78:66 Eng.]; Matt. 26:31, 51; Mark 14:27; Luke 22:49–50; Acts 7:24; 12:7, 23; Rev. 11:6; 19:15–16)."

²¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 280–1: "This was not Peter's escape. It was rather his deliverance. Peter was totally passive throughout the entire incident."

Peter's response to this was, **"Whoa, psychedelic, man! This is awesome! "Am I dead already?"** Peter's had some crazy visions before, hasn't he? Remember the sheet with all those unclean animals. He must have been sleeping pretty hard when the angel awakened him.

Look at **verse 10**.

¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish ²² people ²³ were expecting."²⁴

Now write this down as a second point from this passage. What happens here with Peter is awesome. God answered the prayers of the church. God rescued Peter who was staring down the barrel of a gun. He was moments from death. And I want to present this second point in contrast, but also as a complement to the first point. 1) When tragedy strikes, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted!

But also,

2) When saints are rescued, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted (12:6–11)

When saints die, we win. Sure, we mourn and we grieve their loss. I'm sure James's family members, including his brother John, were very sad to see him go. But that doesn't nullify God's victory and James's victory that follows after death.

And also when saints are rescued... Hallelujah! We win there too. The only way to lose is to oppose God or to doubt that his sovereign plan is being accomplished.

Some people might say, "Yeah, well Satan scored a touchdown with James, but God got it back with Peter." "God fumbled the ball away with James, but then he tied the score with Peter." Is that what's happening here? "It's a tie game. Satan scored, and then God scored."

Okay, let me be clear on this. 1) When tragedy strikes, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted. And also, 2) When saints are rescued, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted. Let me put it this way, "God never says, 'oops.'"²⁵ God never fumbles the football. Are we clear on that?

Now let's tease this out a little further. Let me just ask you some questions about Peter and James. Does God love Peter more than he loves James? Is that why he rescued Peter? Here's a harder question—Is Peter somehow essential to God's plan whereas James was expendable? Is that what's going on here? No, I don't think that's the case. God can use whoever for whatever purpose.²⁶

Some people might say, **"Okay, I got it, Pastor Tony. Peter had more faith than James. And that's why he was rescued and James was assassinated."** Is that it? No, of course not! Than what is it? Why did God allow James to die, and yet he rescued Peter? Here's the answer. Are you ready? "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord" (**Job 1:21**). The Lord does what he wants to do, and we've got to trust that his greater purposes will be accomplished in the end.

And by the way, there are no losers here among God's people. James gets martyred in **Acts 12** and goes to heaven. God wins! And James wins! In fact, you might remember that Jesus told James and John that they would drink the cup that he had to drink. In other words, they would die a martyr's death, just like he did. And that proves true here. James gets martyred and sent to heaven. God wins. Peter gets rescued in **Acts 12** and spends another quarter century ministering for the Lord. God wins!

²² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 538: "Since, for Luke, the expression 'the people' (ὁ λαός) usually suffices to denote the Jewish people, the emphatic 'the people of the Jews' (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) presents Peter as separated from the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem."

²³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 273: "This angel rescued Peter out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. King Herod Agrippa I had killed James. Perhaps the Jewish people were looking forward to seeing Peter killed even more, because they all knew that he was the chief of the apostles."

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 427: "The apostle is confident that they want him dead, and the rescue has prevented that result... Peter has recognized that many Jewish people are against him. They are opposed to him and what he represents."

²⁵ I'm indebted to John Piper for this statement.

²⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 422: "The church is giving witness at any cost and is establishing its identity while God is protecting it, whether in death leading to glory (Stephen) or in miraculous escape (Peter)."

Do you remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Otherwise known by their Hebrew names Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but they're better known by their Babylonian names. Well, King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them into the fiery furnace if they didn't bow down to his golden image. Do you remember what they said to him? This is one of my favorite passages in the OT:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan 3:16–18).

In James's case, God allowed his life to be taken. In Peter's case, God allowed his life to be spared. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord." In fact, I would say this. This might sound a little ghoulish to you, but I think that James in some ways got off easy. Because Peter would go on to suffer and serve the Lord for another twenty plus years before his eventual martyrdom.

Now write this down as point #3.

3) When prayers are answered, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted (12:12–17)

Look at verse 12.

¹² When he realized this,

In other words, when Peter came to his senses after his grogginess. When he realized this wasn't a dream...

he went to the house of Mary,²⁷ the mother of John whose other name was Mark,²⁸ where many were gathered together and were praying.²⁹

John Mark, if you don't know, is the author of the Gospel of **Mark**. He and Peter worked alongside each other in future days. John Mark was also the cousin of Barnabas, and he went on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas later in **Acts**. We'll get to that soon.

But he's introduced here as just a disciple. He and his mother, Mary, were both faithful disciples. They even opened up their home for fellowship and prayer. This must have happened regularly, because Peter's first thought was to go to her house.

Look at verse 13.

¹³ And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate³⁰ but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.³¹

"Peter's here! Peter's here! Our prayers have been answered. Wait right there for a second while I go tell everyone." You can't make this stuff up. This is so true to life.

So Peter's at the door, right? And the door was locked. Why was it locked? Well, because they are actively killing Christians right now. And instead of letting Peter in... maybe Rhoda thought that it was a setup, I don't know.... this servant girl, Rhoda, goes in to tell everyone. **"Hey guys, our prayers have been answered. Peter's at the door."**

But look how they respond. Look at verse 15.

¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind."

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 539n2567: "The NT mentions six women with the name of Mary: 1. Mary, the mother of Jesus; 2. Mary Magdalene, a disciple of Jesus; 3. Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha, a disciple of Jesus; 4. Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, a disciple of Jesus who was at the tomb on Easter morning; 5. Mary, the wife of Clopas, a disciple of Jesus who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion; 6. Mary, the mother of John Mark. The Jewish name was also used later by Christians."

²⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 539: "As she is mentioned without a reference to her husband, she was presumably a widow, unless her husband tolerated Christian meetings in his house despite not being a follower of Jesus himself, which seems less likely."

²⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 428: "She is obviously a woman of some means if the church can gather in her home. This is yet another confirmation that in Acts 4 the giving over of material goods was voluntary and did not involve every single possession."

³⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 363: "While the big iron gate of the prison opened with no effort to let Peter out (v. 10), he was unable to get past the gate of his own friend's home."

³¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 539: "The reference to a 'gate' (πυλῶν), as distinct from a door (θύρα), describes the house of Mary as an apparently elegant residence which consisted of a house (οἰκία) which was separated from the street by an inner courtyard and a gateway"

“You’re crazy, little girl. Peter’s not at the door!” It makes me wonder what they were praying. Were they praying, **“Lord, please help Peter not to suffer too much when he gets put to death. Lord, please don’t let happen to us what happened to Peter.”** Maybe that’s what they were praying, and the thought never crossed their mind that maybe God’s going to break this guy out of prison. It should have crossed their mind, because it’s happened before.³²

I think this is a case in which God does exceedingly and abundantly beyond what they ask.³³ He’s been known to do that.

But [Rhoda] kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!”³⁴

Well even if it was his angel, I’d go and open the door.³⁵

¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking,³⁶

“Hello! Hello! Remember me. It’s Peter. People are trying to kill me out here, please let me in.”

And finally they opened the door.

and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.¹⁷ But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James³⁷ [not James the brother of John... he just got executed. This is a reference to Jesus’s half-brother James who becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem... he also wrote the book of James in the NT]³⁸ and to the brothers.”³⁹ Then he departed and went to another place.⁴⁰

³² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 536–7: “The content of the church’s prayer is often thought to be Peter’s liberation, which would have to be miraculous (if the believers were informed about the conditions of his imprisonment); but since vv. 14–15 probably implies that they did not anticipate Peter’s escape, they may have prayed for a positive outcome of the trial that was to take place (in 4:21 Peter and John are let go), or they prayed for a lesser punishment than execution (in 5:40 the apostles are not executed, but flogged), or they prayed for courage and strength to endure the interrogation and execution (as Jesus had endured both).”

³³ JOHN CALVIN: “When they suppose that the girl, who announces Peter’s arrival, is mad, we gather from that that they were not expecting the liberation of Peter. And yet we shall not say that they prayed without faith, because they were looking for other results: that Peter, armed with heavenly power, would be ready to glorify the name of Christ whether by his life or by his death, that the flock might not be scattered in terror at the violent inrush of wolves, that the weak might not give way, that the Lord might disperse that hurricane of persecution. But the Lord, with his immeasurable goodness, outdid their prayers, granting them more than they had hoped for.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 167–168.

³⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 428–9: “Some take Rhoda’s announcement more seriously and suggest another alternative: that ‘his angel’ is present. Tobit 5:4–16 records an angelic visit by Raphael to heal a blind man but lacks the idea of his being a particular person’s angel. Tobit 5:22 has a specific angel accompany a person (on angels, Gen. 48:16; Ps. 91:11; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 2–3 has an angel associated with a church). The later rabbinic text Gen. Rabbah 78 [50a] on Gen. 33:10 has a specific personal angel whose look matches that of the person he protects.” The concept of a guardian angel seems to originate from this and was even affirmed by CHRYSOSTOM: “And they said to her: ‘You are mad!’ But she confidently affirmed that it was so. And they said, ‘It is his angel.’ This is true because everyone has an angel.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 155.

³⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 282: “This response reflects the Jewish belief that each person has a guardian angel as his or her spiritual counterpart. It was believed that one’s angel often appeared immediately after the person’s death, and that idea may lurk behind the response to Rhoda... They found it easier to believe that Peter had died and gone to heaven than that their prayers had been answered.”

³⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 428: “Peter is left behind at the door while everyone tries to sort things out. The varied reactions and emotions to such a surprising event are quite normal.”

³⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 540n2582: “‘Bauckham, *Relatives*, 73–76, reconstructs a list of these Elders from the bishops list of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.5.1–4) and the apocryphal *Letter of James to Quadratus*—Zacchaeus, Tobias, Benjamin, John, Matthias, Philip, Senekas (Senikus), Justus, Levi, Ephres (Aphre), Joseph, Judas. Of these twelve (!) elders, John, Matthias, and Philip could have belonged to the Twelve, i.e., they might have been disciples of Jesus who stayed in Jerusalem. Levi and Zacchaeus could be identical with the followers of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels having this name. Justus is perhaps identical with the Justus Barnabas mentioned in Acts 1:23. Joseph and Judas could be identical with the brothers of Jesus with that name (Mark 6:3), or with other leading members of the Jerusalem church who had these common names.”

³⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 540n2581: “‘Calvin, *Acts*, 1:343, identifies James (correctly) with the James of Gal 2:9, one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church, and infers from his assumption that the apostles would not have been ‘put in the background’ by Luke that v. 17 refers to James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve. This interpretation has not convinced commentators.”

³⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 541: “The fact that in 11:30 and 21:18 the ‘elders’ (οἱ πρεσβύτεροι) are mentioned as a group exercising leadership in the Jerusalem church suggests that the apostles (οἱ ἀπόστολοι) had left Jerusalem and that their role in the congregation had been taken over by the elders.”

⁴⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 429: “Where Peter goes is debated by scholars; Rome and Antioch are among the possibilities (Polhill 1992: 283). Peter does not reappear until Acts 15, when he is back in Jerusalem. This makes Rome unlikely, but the lack of reference to

We don't know where Peter goes after this. From this point forward in the book of **Acts**, he's a subordinate character. He shows up only one more time in **Acts 15**. But we know from other sources that he traveled to Antioch and to Rome and to other places in the Roman Empire, preaching the gospel and encouraging believers.

But in **Acts**, the focus of the book shifts to Paul and his missionary journeys throughout the Gentile world. And that's okay. Ultimately this book is not about Peter or Paul or John or James. It's the acts of the Holy Spirit. It's the acts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the collective church. And the sum total of what God is doing is more important than any of the constituent parts.

But Peter's last hoorah here in the book of **Acts** is quite amazing. God answers the prayers of the church that are prayed on Peter's behalf. And let me just reiterate that third point for you. **"When prayers are answered, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted."** **In a sense all prayers are answered. The possible answers are yes, no, or not yet.** In this case, the prayers of God's people lead to the deliverance of Peter, and there is rejoicing.⁴¹

Now, one more point. There's one more historical matter that Luke wants to tie up in this passage, and it has to do with one of the other main characters in this passage, the infamous Herod. Jot this down as a fourth point.

4) **When enemies are vanquished**, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted (12:18–25)

¹⁸ *Now when day came,*

That is, the next morning...

*there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.*⁴²

Yeah, that's for sure. "Where'd he go?" "He was chained up next to you!" "I don't know, he was chained up to you too."

¹⁹ *And after Herod searched⁴³ for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries⁴⁴ and ordered that they should be put to death.*

By the way, it was pretty common for prison guards to be executed for losing their prisoners. In fact, when soldiers lost their prisoners, they had to suffer the penalty of their prisoners.⁴⁵ And so, instead of putting Peter to death, Herod puts these soldiers to death.⁴⁶

Then he [Herod] went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Antioch also argues against his staying there for any significant time, although Gal. 2:14 lets us know that he was there at least briefly. Corinth is also an option (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5). In short, where he went is not clear, and an itinerant ministry is quite likely."

Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 276: "He fled out of Jerusalem. Luke chose not to disclose where Peter went, but we do know something about Peter's travels from other passages. According to 1 Corinthians 9:5, he had an itinerant ministry; according to 1 Corinthians 1:12, he spent some time in Corinth; according to Galatians 2:11, he was in Antioch of Pisidia; according to 1 Peter 1:1, he was in Asia Minor; and according to 1 Peter 5:13, he was in Babylon."

⁴¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 269: "Before moving into the next passage, the contrast between the way God dealt with James and the way He dealt with Peter should not be missed... There are some who apply Hebrews 13:8 to the works of God. The verse states: Yeshua the Messiah is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever. After quoting the verse, these people claim that because some were healed before, God must always heal people now. But in order to make such a claim, one must ignore the context of Hebrews and ignore certain events in Acts, for God did not act the same yesterday, today, and forever in all instances. Hebrews 13:8 deals with God's divine nature, and as to His divine nature, God is indeed always the same. He was always God; He is still God; He will always be God."

⁴² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 430: "The narrative has been quite vivid with the comical details of Rhoda's response, leaving Peter stranded at the gate of the home. It now turns to a scene that has the modern feel of "meanwhile back at the ranch" in a television show."

⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 541: "The king 'organized a search' (ἐπιζητήσας), which is unsuccessful (v. 19a–b) since Peter had left Jerusalem several hours earlier, perhaps hiding among the thousands of Passover pilgrims who are leaving Jerusalem in all directions."

⁴⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 430: "Such an examination of guards could include torture (Johnson 1992: 214; Chariton of Aphrodisias, Chaer. 5.1–2; Pliny the Younger, Ep. 10.96.8). The guards are 'led away' (ἀπαχθῆναι, apachthēnai). In this context this verb is a euphemism for being led away to execution (BAGD 79 §2c; BDAG 95 §2c). This was frequently the cost for letting an important prisoner get away."

⁴⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 283n159: "The Roman Code of Justinian 9.4.4. The Greek literally says that Agrippa commanded that the guards be "led away," ἀνάγω, but that verb is often used euphemistically for execution."

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 283: "Agrippa had every intention of subjecting Peter to the same fate as James."

We've talked about Caesarea already. It was the Roman capital of this region. And it was the administrative center for the whole area. It was also on the Mediterranean Coast, and so I imagine Herod was like, **"I've had enough of these Jews and these Christians; I need some time to relax."** But something else happens while he's in Caesarea.

Look at **verse 20**.

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain **[the King's personal assistant]**, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Now, Luke's a historian. So these historical details are fascinating. And the gist of the issue is that the people of Tyre and Sidon have to play nice with Herod or else they're going to starve to death.

Now let me show you on the map where all these places are located. Below is the larger region of the Mediterranean encompassing much of the Roman Empire. There's Antioch and Tarsus in the northeast. That's where Paul and Barnabas were at the end of **Acts 11**.



Antioch, etc.⁴⁷

But now, let's zoom in on the region of Judea and the surrounding areas. There's Caesarea, about sixty miles northwest of Jerusalem. **If San Antonio were Jerusalem, then Caesarea is Kerrville.** And Tyre and Sidon are north of Caesarea up the coast.



Jerusalem, Caesarea, etc.⁴⁸

Now why is Luke telling us this? Why is this recorded in the Bible? Well, Luke is setting us up for the dramatic climax of Herod's reign. Because you might have thought to yourself after reading the previous section, **"Well Herod killed James, and God rescued Peter. It's a tied score. One for the good guys, and one for the bad guys."** But that's not God's perspective on this. God's plans will not be thwarted.

And this guy, Herod, who loves the praises of his people... this guy Herod, who opposes God's people and God's plan of salvation... he's going to lose. And he's going to lose big. And Herod, in microcosm here, is going to show us what happens with people who oppose God. Even if they win, they lose. And so Luke is just setting this up.

⁴⁷ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), June 7, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁴⁸ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), June 7, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

So, according to **verse 20**, there's this friction between Herod and the residents of Tyre and Sidon. These two coastal cities are dependent on Herod for food. And they need the king's good graces in order to get fed.

By the way, we saw in **Acts 11** that there was this famine that is happening in the land. Look quickly at **Acts 11:28**, "And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea." So they send Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with a gift of benevolence for the church.

So this famine may have already been affecting the people of Tyre and Sidon too. So these guys from Tyre and Sidon come up with a brilliant plan. If they don't ingratiate themselves with the king, they're all going to die. So they decide to butter up the king so that they can get fed.

Look at **verse 21**.

²¹ *On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.*

Now I don't know what Herod preached that day, but it was probably something like this, **"I'm awesome, and you are not. I'm the king, and you are not. I've got power, you don't. Honor me. Pay homage to me. Adore me."** It might have been more subtle than that, but that's probably the essence of his oration.

The Jewish historian Josephus records this event. He describes the robe the Herod put on and the ceremony as follows, "On the second day of the spectacles, clad in a garment woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous, he entered the theater at daybreak. There the silver, illumined by the touch of the first rays of the sun, was wondrously radiant and by its glitter inspired fear and awe in those who gazed intently upon it."⁴⁹ So Herod was reveling in his pomp and circumstance.

And the Bible tells us in **verse 22**, that as the people saw this, they started shouting to him.

²² *And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"*⁵⁰

Now this is just a bunch of hogwash!⁵¹ I'm sorry. How in the world do people come to this conclusion? Personally I question the sincerity of these people. They're not stupid. They don't want to bite the hand that feeds them. In fact, they want to butter up the king so that he'll be gracious to them. And so, what do they do? They lionize Herod. They flatter him. They sweet-talk him. They deify him.

And for King Herod, this must have been one of the crowning moments of his kingship. he's being worshiped by adoring fans. He's being deified by the subjugated masses. But instead of becoming a crowning moment, it becomes instead his swan song.

Look at **verse 23**.

²³ *Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down,*

Angels are really active in this chapter! It makes me wonder how much angels are actively doing the Lord's bidding right now in our world; we just aren't privy to see them.

²³ *Immediately an angel of the Lord struck [Herod] down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.*

Yikes. This is an ignominious death for an ignominious king. And the way that I would describe this death is as follows: "poetic justice."⁵²

Josephus elaborates here, "The king did not rebuke them nor did he reject their flattery as impious. But shortly thereafter he looked up and saw an owl perched on a rope over his head [This was some kind

⁴⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.8.2 (§343–350).

⁵⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 432: "Paul's and Barnabas's immediate response to being called a god in Acts 14:11–15 stands in stark contrast to Herod's nonreaction in Acts and his delayed reaction and understanding in Josephus."

⁵¹ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 363: "Herod's deflated ego received a big boost at his conference with the desperate delegates from Tyre and Sidon, who, deprived of their food supply, resort to flattery to win him over (vv. 20–22)."

⁵² JOHANN SPANGENBERG: "For this reason, that Herod tolerated the people's blasphemy against God, and he did not give God the glory. On account of this he had to suffer such a wretched affliction, that the worms ate him alive and no human could remain near him due to the stench and filth. 'O dear friends,' he said, 'what a pathetic god I am! Look, your god must die!'" Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 169.

of bad omen in Josephus's mind... like an angel of death or something]. At once . . . he felt a stab of pain in his heart. He was also gripped in his stomach by an ache that he felt everywhere at once Exhausted after five straight days by the pain in his abdomen, he departed this life in the fifty-fourth year of his life and the seventh of his reign.”⁵³

The expression “eaten by worms” could be metaphorical for the death of a tyrant. Or it could be literal. Some have suggested death by tapeworms. Agrippa could have had roundworms due to the lack of medical hygiene.⁵⁴ I tend to believe that some kind of literal interpretation is meant here. Death by worms is the perfect ending for a person who was constantly self-inflating. This noble, regal, powerful leader comes to this ignoble end as worms eat him from the inside and bring about his death.

And notice this. Look at **verse 24**.

²⁴ But the word of God increased⁵⁵ and multiplied.⁵⁶

The kings of this world come and go. But the word of God just keeps marching on. I love that.

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem⁵⁷ when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Let me say it again. **“When enemies are vanquished, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted.”** And let me say it this way. Let me add a bonus fifth point from the message. **“When the wicked seem to prosper, God is in control and his plans are never thwarted.”⁵⁸** And those who oppose God will lose. Count on it!

I'll close with this. I read this week a bit about the Scottish missionary John G. Paton who ministered to tribal peoples on the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific. One night on one of those islands, a group of hostile tribesmen surrounded him and his wife intending to kill him and burn down his mission headquarters. Paton and his wife were terrified. They prayed all night long. And amazingly the attackers departed.⁵⁹ It was like Elisha and the chariots of fire in the OT (2 Kings 6:8–23). God miraculously protected and saved Paton and his wife.

But God doesn't always answer prayers like that. Paton's wife died in childbirth on those same islands. And despite his prayers, Paton's newborn baby died just a few days later. And he buried them in

⁵³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.8.2 (§343–350).

⁵⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 285n162: “The same word is used of worm-eaten crops. Neither Josephus nor Acts provides sufficient detail to make a proper medical diagnosis. Many suggestions have been offered—a ruptured appendix, arsenic poisoning, or tapeworms (see E. M. Merrins, ‘The Deaths of Antiochus IV, Herod the Great, and Herod Agrippa I,’ *BibSac* 61 [1904]: 561f). As his title suggests, those former villains of Jewish history, Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great, also died in a ‘worm-eaten’ state according to Josephus.”

⁵⁵ Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC, 207: “Though the word of God is not fettered, its servants may well have to suffer and be bound.”

⁵⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 529: “Luke notes the continued growth and expansion of the church (12:24), connected with Peter's departure.”

⁵⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 434–5: “There is the combination of a textual and a syntactical problem in the verse. Many read the phrase εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ (eis Ierousalēm) with the verb ‘returned’ and see a return to Jerusalem here (ⲥ, B, 81, Byz, and some Syriac MSS). This is problematic because of Paul's list of trips to Jerusalem and the fact that Barnabas and Paul are in Jerusalem already in 11:30, when we last saw them (but NET adopts this reading). This issue led to two variants reading “from.” One used ἐξ (ex), as in ⲡ74, A, 33, 945, and 1739, while the other reads ἀπό (apo), as in D, E, Ψ, 36, 323, 453, and 614. The fact that two variants have the same meaning and the other reading is more difficult makes it unlikely that either of them is original (but apparently the NIV accepts one of these variants). Some of these MSS even make the text clearer by speaking of a return “to Antioch” (E, 104, 323, 945, 1175, 1739; note how these contain a mixture of the other variants)... A syntactical solution looks more promising (Haenchen 1987: 387; Fitzmyer 1998: 493; Schneider 1982: 109; Barrett 1994: 595–96; discussed in Metzger 1971: 398–400 with the problem rated as ‘D,’ indicating its difficulty [upgraded to ‘C’ in UBS4]). This solution also removes any need to take the reference to John Mark ‘being taken along’ as a futuristic aorist, which also is an unusual force in this context. The syntactical solution ties the phrase ‘to Jerusalem’ to the completion of the mission, which makes good sense (so ‘had fulfilled their mission in Jerusalem’). The translation reflects this choice. Now Luke can give renewed attention to what the church in Antioch is doing.”

⁵⁸ HANS HAS VON HALLSTATT: “Do not be daunted! If God sends suffering to you, he will also send grace and comfort to you. May you suffer all the adversity with great patience, praying earnestly that his fatherly will might come to pass. He is the Father and knows how to deal with his children in a proper manner.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 167.

⁵⁹ See Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 370.

grief. And he wrote, “The ever merciful God sustained me to lay the precious dust of my loved ones in the same quiet grave. But for Jesus, and the fellowship he vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave!”⁶⁰

I’ve often wondered in thinking about this narrative in Acts 12 if Peter ever struggled with “survivor’s guilt.” Did he ever cry out to the Lord and say, “Why me, Lord? Why’d you keep me alive?”⁶¹ Or maybe, “Why didn’t you let me die with James when I had the chance? He got off easy.” I don’t know if Peter ever did that. And all the evidence in Acts and in 1 and 2 Peter indicates that he didn’t do that.

If not, why not? Why didn’t he struggle with this? Well, I would suggest to you that Peter had such an absolute confidence in God’s sovereignty, that he didn’t worry much about death.⁶² I mean he was sleeping in the jail cell just before he was going to be executed.⁶³ The angel had to whack him to wake him up. That’s a guy who’s pretty confident in God’s sovereignty.

And maybe too, Peter realized that James died just a few years before he was destined to die.⁶⁴ The math is something like twenty to twenty-five years. But that twenty to twenty-five years is nothing in comparison to eternity. It’s just a sliver of time.⁶⁵

So if you die early and go home to glory, God be praise. If you live a long life and minister for the Lord for 50 or 60 years, God be praised. If you get killed by a despotic, godless ruler, God be praised. If you die in a nursing home at age 99 because your body just wears out, God be praised. No matter what, we as Christians win! We win! And “God is in control and his plans are never thwarted.”

⁶⁰ Taken from *Daily Readings from F. W. Boreham*, selected and arranged by Frank Cumbers (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), 320. Cited in Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 371.

⁶¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 271: “Although he knew that James was killed, he was not worried because he had a promise from Yeshua that James did not have. Yeshua had promised Peter that while he would be executed for his faith, it would happen when he was of old age (Jn. 21:18–19). Therefore, he was sleeping unconcerned, not anxious, between two soldiers, bound with two chains, with one chain fastened to each soldier.”

⁶² Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 364: “Often in applying this passage, we focus on God’s deliverance of Peter in answer to fervent prayer (vv. 5–11) and ignore the nondeliverance of James, which resulted in martyrdom (v. 2). This is how I approached this passage for several years. But the fact that Luke has placed these two events side by side suggests that the two ways in which God’s sovereignty is expressed—physical rescue and no physical rescue—should both be considered when thinking about God’s help in times of trouble. What is common to these situations is that both Peter and James were faithful to Christ. Just as the disciples earnestly prayed for Peter’s release (v. 5), we too have the freedom to pray earnestly for physical deliverance. But we must leave it to God to let his sovereignty over a situation be expressed in the way he regards best. What is most important is that, like James and Peter, we remain faithful and obedient to God regardless of the outcome of a crisis we face.”

⁶³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 280: “That Peter could sleep so soundly the night before his trial is perhaps indicative of his calm assurance that he was in God’s hands.”

⁶⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 534: “The power of God does not exempt the church from suffering: James is executed, Herod Agrippa dies after several years of persecution, and Peter, though miraculously spared a day before his execution, is forced to leave Jerusalem.”

⁶⁵ RUDOLF GWALTHER: “And even though all who are imprisoned and in chains for Christ’s sake are not delivered in such wonderful ways, yet there are universal promises that all who give themselves to God’s service are under his protection.” Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 166.