

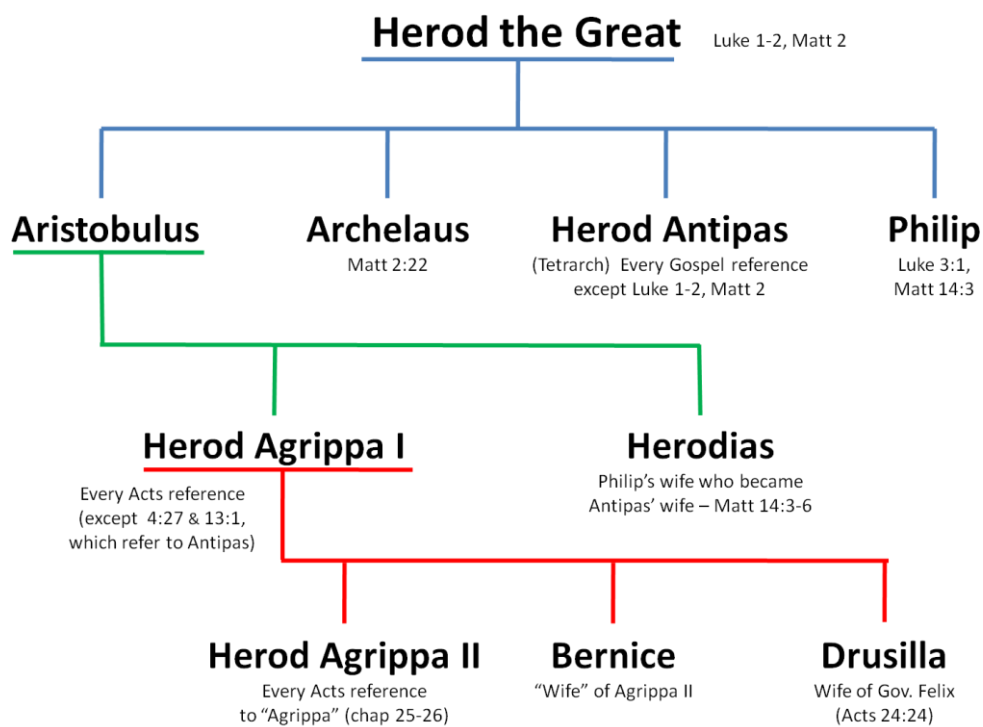
Message #27
“THE FOLLY OF FIGHTING GOD”
Acts 12:1-24

The last few verses of Acts 11 are an interesting transition marker. Verses 27-30 tie in with some later passages in Acts (reference to drought/famine), give us an historical hook as a reference point (the reign of Claudius – 41AD – 54AD) and shows two important steps in the early church and its mission....

1. The Gentile church (in Antioch), having struggled for acceptance from the Jewish Christians (and finally been fully accepted as equal members) was not going to be backward in coming forward with support for their Jewish brothers and sisters in the Lord. They voluntarily raised financial support for the Christians in Judea in preparation for the prophesied coming famine. This was a practical picture of the unity and acceptance now at the heart of the church.
2. This famine relief gift from the believers in Antioch was sent back to Jerusalem with Barnabas and his associate, Saul. This was an important step in the renewed acceptance of Saul (later to be known as Paul) into the ranks of the leaders of the early church.

ACTS 12:1-19

Then Luke, once again, shifts focus back to Jerusalem and the apostle Peter. King Herod (Herod Agrippa I, see chart below) was engaging in some severe persecution of the Christians. This included the killing of James, the brother of John, and the imprisonment of Peter, surely to be sentenced to the same fate.



What do we learn about Herod and what motivates him in the first four verses of Acts 12?

Have you ever acted wrongly for the sake of trying to please someone? What were the consequences?

Read 12:5-11. Peter is under tight guard in maximum security. Yet he is able to escape.
Put yourself in Peter's sandals. What would have gone on in your heart and mind during your escape?

Back in Acts 5:39 Gamaliel had warned the Sanhedrin not to be "found fighting against God". Here, with Peter's angel-led escape, Herod is discovering the folly of fighting against God. Herod is finding that:

- God's power cannot be contested
- God's punishment cannot be avoided
- God's purposes cannot be frustrated

Now, whilst Peter is in prison, and then in the process of escaping from prison, the church is praying. Acts 12:5 tells us that the believers were praying "*earnestly to God for him*". Luke uses the same Greek word *ektenos* (earnestly) here that he used in his Gospel writing to describe how fervently they were praying. In Luke 22:44 he was describing the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His arrest. The use of this same word indicates how focused and serious they were in their praying....they were praying continuously, earnestly and specifically.

How earnest are you in your prayer life? How important is prayer to you?...to your church?

Why are church prayer meetings so poorly attended?

Having escaped from prison, Peter heads off to the house where the church is gathered and praying. He knocks on the door and Rhoda, a servant, came out. She was so excited to see Peter that she ran off to tell the others....and left Peter standing outside!
With a touch of irony, Luke tells us that the group that were praying for Peter's release did not believe it when they were told that Peter had been released!

Why do you think the praying Christians reacted as they did to Peter's return?

How do you respond when God answers prayers in ways you did not expect? How do you respond when He does not seem to answer at all?

Has God got a sense of humour? What do you think he finds funny? Should we laugh more in church?

Peter then goes "somewhere else" and he does not make another appearance until Acts 15.

Acts 12:19-24

But, back to Herod, who is finding out all about the folly of fighting God. He has the guards (presumably all 16) killed and then he goes off to his coastal retreat in Caesarea. There have been issues with Tyre and Sidon (Mediterranean ports north of Caesarea in Phoenicia), so Herod puts on a big show to impress the ambassadors. Historian Josephus records that he dressed himself in an outfit made out of silver. This wowed the audience so much that they called out, proclaiming him to be a god and not a man (12:22). Herod, proud, arrogant, violent, "did not give praise to God" (23)...he took it for himself. Consequently, an angel of the Lord struck him down with an infestation of worms and he died a painful death.

What does Herod's death tell you about God?

Why is pride so dangerous? How can we spot it in ourselves? How can we prevent it? (Phil.2:3-11)

But the Word of the Lord continued to spread and flourish! (12:24).....because nothing can stop it!