

The Divine Decree: Integrity & Free Will: Religions of the World: 2 Billion Christians: 360 Million Protestants; the Desire of God & the Will of God; Actions Have Consequences: Prayer; Some Die Young, Some Don't, Acts 12:1-2; Herod Agrippa I Orders the Execution of the Apostle James to Win Favor with the Jews; the Death of James: the Presumptuous Request, Matt 20:20-23; Motivation for Prayer, Rom 8:28

12. There are seven billion people on this earth at present and each one was selected by God. All seven billion are in the decree by God's sovereign will, they function under the aegis of His integrity, and are kept alive by means of His grace.
13. All seven billion have free will and have the option of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone.
14. The largest "religious" group is reported to be Christians, some 2 billion strong, but the multiplicity of fuzzy gospels makes that number suspect and, of those who are believers, there is justifiable concern about just how many are spiritually advanced.¹
15. Second largest are 1.3 billion Muslims the majority of which are rabid followers of the Qur'an and Muhammad. They are rapidly overtaking the West without the need of terrorism.
16. Their strategy is expressed by two of its leaders. In 1974, Algeria's President Houari Boumédiène \bū-mād-yen\ said, "We will conquer you through the wombs of our women." Speaking at a meeting in London, Anjem Choudary said, "It may be by pure conversion that Britain will become an Islamic state. We do not integrate into Christianity. We will ensure that one day you will integrate into the Sharia Islamic law."²
17. The next three of the top five are Hinduism (900 million), Buddhism (360 million), and Sikhism (23 million).
18. All of these, plus heathen systems including atheists, add up to another 3 billion. The source I consulted for these numbers gives a rounded off total of over 7 billion, the approximate current world population.
19. Of the seven billion people on this earth, only 360 million are Protestants. From these numbers we are able to draw two conclusions:
 - (1) At the present hour among the religions of the world, the free will of man is rarely choosing to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation and an even smaller number of those are growing in grace.
 - (2) Under the circumstances, it appears that the size of the pivot necessary to sustain a client nation is not as large as one might suspect.
20. Please note that of the categories that make up Christianity's total figure of 2 billion souls, I only count the 360 million who are classified as Protestant. All of these are not saved and only a small portion of them are advancing spiritually.
21. God knew this in eternity past. This information is in the decree and He knows each believer by name. However, the Father is allowing the angelic conflict to continue to move forward until that unknown time He terminates the Church Age at the Rapture.

¹ Roman Catholicism 1.1 billion, Protestants 360 million, Eastern Orthodox 220 m., others 364 m. (WordIQ.com)

² "Jihadist preacher Anjem Choudary," *Jihad Watch*, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2008/09/jihadist-preacher-anjem-choudary-we-will-ensure-that-one-day-you-will-integrate-into-the-sharia-islam.html> (accessed August 21, 2012).

22. In the meantime, He allows “the heathen to rage, and the people to imagine a vain thing.”³ Merrill Unger comments on this idea:
- It is plain from the testimony of Scripture that God is permitting Satan’s career and program of pride and rebellion to run its course, both as it affects man and the earth and the angelic beings, in order to bring glory to Himself in His redemptive grace in Christ and to furnish a stern lesson for eternity, to all created intelligences, of the wicked folly of revolt against their Creator (Matthew 25:41; Rev. 19:20).⁴**
23. Distinction has to be made between the decree of God and the desire of God. The decree contains innumerable things that are not God’s desire.
24. Sin, human viewpoint, human good, and evil are not among His desires, but fallen man has used his free will to indulge these categories since the fall of Adam.
25. It is God’s desire that everyone use his free will to carry out His will and desires, but only during the period before the fall has this actually occurred.
26. According to 2 Peter 3:9, The Lord “is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”
27. It is not God’s desire that any person’s soul be cast into the lake of fire, but righteousness demands that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ must face judgment at the Great White Throne where justice will find them wanting. (Revelation 20:11–15)
28. During human history, how many billions of people have had their names blotted out of the Book of Life at the moment of their physical deaths? Enumerable only to God, however none of these rejections was the desire of God.
- The decree contains the will and desire of God, but these may be trumped by the free will of man.
- Every sin violates the divine desire; every involvement in human good and evil is in opposition to His will.
31. All these violations are dealt with in the decree so that believers are remiss if they do not recognize the folly of engaging in either of these categories of wrongdoing.
32. We will now consult the Scripture and draw examples from those whose bad or good decisions created a domino effect illustrating causes, conditions, successions, and relations that the decree determined to be certainly future.

Visual #8:**The Book of Life:
Selection, Rejection,
& Perfection****Actions Have Consequences:****A. Prayer**

1. Prayer is the exclusive prerogative of the royal priesthood of the believer and becomes operational under the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit.
2. The believer is qualified to express to God intercessions for others and petitions for self.

³ Psalm 2:1; Acts 4:25 (KJV).

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of the Spiritual Forces behind the Present World Unrest* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1952), 189.

Visual #4-C:
**Computer of the
 Divine Decree**

3. A prayer is the result of a volitional decision to approach God with thanksgivings, requests, guidance, and provision.
4. The prayer not prayed is a prayer not contained in the PROM chip and therefore the ROM chip contains no answer.
5. The prayer prayed is a prayer that is contained in the PROM chip and therefore one the ROM chip may or may not address. Prayers prayed out of fellowship or by unbelievers are not processed.
6. God processes all Spirit-filled prayers, but His response is based on His plan and purpose for the individual praying as well as others who may be the subject of the prayer.
7. The more doctrine a person has the more effectual his prayer will be and the greater the likelihood of the desired response.
8. To what degree God answers a believer's prayer is strictly up to His sovereignty; however a prayer not prayed is never answered.
9. Therefore, when you pray to the Father, the thought behind it, the decision to express that thought, and the verbalization of that thought was recognized in eternity past and included in the PROM chip of the divine decree.
10. The answer to that prayer was inserted into the ROM chip of the divine decree and will occur in history at God's appointed time.
11. When a believer makes requests to the Father, he is usually addressing issues which are of concern for the immediate future.
12. Artillery has been a factor in warfare since man first devised ways of launching missiles and is customarily employed to soften up the enemy before ground troops are deployed.
13. In the Invisible War, prayer often serves as the believer's artillery to address circumstances he is unsure of how to manage.
14. We will illustrate a passage of Scripture that will illustrate how the sovereignty of God and the free will of man coexist by divine decree.
15. In this passage, we will first observe how the sovereignty of God is the overriding issue in human history. Second, we will discover how prayer is used to coordinate with the sovereignty of God to bring about the divine will.

B. Some Die Young, Some Don't

1. Acts 12 opens with the execution of the apostle James by Herod Agrippa I. The year is c. A.D. 44. Herod is the son of Aristobulus \a-rīs-tō-bū'-lūs\ and Bernice and the grandson of Herod the Great.
2. Herod Agrippa had an affinity for the Jews and Judaism. He enjoyed their rituals and had persuaded Claudius, the Roman emperor, to allow him to rule the Jews.
3. He also knew how to play politics so he also subscribed to emperor worship and attended all the requisite festivals associated with Roman culture.
4. Herod's affinity for the Jews led him to the conclusion they would be pleased if he persecuted the church by either imprisoning or killing Christians.

Acts 12:1 - Now about that time [A.D. 44] Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

v. 2 - And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.⁵

5. James was not guilty of a crime but of being a Christian. The most likely method used for his decapitation was by the sword.
6. He was the son of Zebedee and the elder brother of John. They ran a large and profitable fishing business that operated on the Sea of Galilee.
7. James became a very devoted follower, disciple, and apostle of Jesus. He and John were among the first four to respond to the appeal of "Follow Me," by Jesus.
8. The execution of James by Herod made him the first martyr. His brother John was the last of the apostles to die.
9. In Acts 12, Luke gives us an historical account of two men facing the specter of death. We find James taken out in chains from prison into the Praetorium where he was executed.
10. In the same passage Herod also imprisons Peter, also bound with chains, and orders him executed the next day.
11. James is now dead whereas Peter is still alive and will escape with the assistance of an angel. These two events are in the divine decree.
12. Why is James permitted to die while Peter is allowed to live? Why did the sovereignty of God permit both to be imprisoned yet decreed the assistance of an angel for one but not the other?
13. Peter went on to live until the late sixties while James dies in the mid-forties. James is now absent from the body and face to face with the Lord. Peter will be led to freedom but, except for a brief appearance in Acts 15:7-11 and a dressing down by Paul in Galatians 2, he is never heard from again.
14. The sovereignty of God made this determination in eternity past. To discern the reasons why, we must study the differences between the two men.

C. The Death of James

1. There is a purpose in each thing that God does and allows. The context of chapter 12 emphasizes the power of prayer which apparently was not being practiced with any regularity by the Christian church in Jerusalem.
2. As time will tell, the church in Jerusalem will not make it over the long haul, but the believers in it and those that will join them later must be given an illustration of the power of prayer.
3. Herod's decision was to have James killed. This was a free-will decision. God did not dispatch an angel to literally bail James out of his predicament.

⁵ "The constitutional mode of inflicting capital punishment on a Roman citizen was by the lector's axe. The criminal was tied to a stake; cruelly scourged with the rods, and then beheaded. But the military mode of execution (was) decapitation by the sword" (W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* [London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1893; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974], 781).

4. James was a well-known, well-liked, and honorable believer who was a leader in the Jerusalem church. Yet no one prayed for James.
5. To wake up the church, the Lord allowed James to be removed from the battlefield. He had the honor of being Christianity's first apostolic martyr.
6. Another reason for James's death can be discerned from the writings of Eusebius:

In book 7 of *Outlines*, Clement adds an interesting tradition regarding James that the man who brought him into court was so moved by his testimony that he confessed that he too was a Christian:

So they were both taken away together, and on the way he asked James to forgive him. James looked at him for a moment and replied, "Peace be with you," and kissed him. So both were beheaded at the same time.⁶

7. James's conviction resulted in a Jew believing in Christ. Both are in heaven today.
8. Finally, James was no doubt influenced by his ambitious and presumptuous mother who envisioned great things for her sons. James, along with his brother John and Peter, was with Jesus when He displayed His Shekinah glory on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9.
9. Impressed by her sons' presence there, their mother jumped to an arrogant conclusion and posed this question to the Lord in:

Matthew 20:20 - Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

v. 21 - And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

v. 22 - But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup [**the imputation of all humanity's sins**] that I am about to drink?" They [**James & John**] said to Him, "We are able."

v. 23 - And He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."
10. James was a motivated believer. He was brought down to size by the Lord's response to his mother's request and the over-zealous answer given by him and his brother.
11. James went on to become a very strong believer. He came to realize that neither he nor his brother John were qualified to drink the cup the Lord would be offered.
12. But he did drink the cup of martyrdom. His death was permitted by the sovereignty of God to amplify the reality of the Invisible War and to motivate believers in the Jerusalem church to get serious about intercessory prayer.

⁶ Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 66, 67.

13. In this sequence of events, Herod Agrippa made a decision to do something dramatic to impress the Jews. James was selected because he was a popular figure among the city's Christian community.
14. God recognized these circumstances in eternity past and chose not to intervene but to allow the martyrdom of the apostle.
15. The impact of James's execution resulted in motivating believers to make intercessory appeals to the Father once Peter was placed in similarly dire straits.

Romans 8:28 - We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.