

**The Divine Decree: The Aftermath: Herod Executes Prison Guards, Goes to Caesarea, Dies of Worm Infestation, Acts 12:19, 22– 23; God Shifts Missionary Emphasis to Europe, vv. 24–25; Divine Decree: Application: Death of James: Allowed by God to Inspire Prayer; Peter's Retrospection, 1 Pet 5:6–7; 2:18–20; 4:12–13; Divine Decree & Grace Pipeline, Matt 4:4; 6:31–32; John 8:31–32; the Antonine Caesars & the Advance of Christianity Westward; Conclusion: Genuine Humility, Prevailing Prayer, Doctrinal Orientation, & Reversion Recovery Can Rescue a Client Nation in Decline, 2 Chron 7:13–15**

#### The Aftermath:

1. Herod had the prison guards executed. Under Roman law, when guards allowed a prisoner to escape they were to suffer the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered (Acts 12:19).
2. Distraught over the unexpected turn of events from Peter's escape, Herod took a power to Caesarea which was a coastal community.
3. He attended a festival at the local theater in honor of Claudius. He was dressed in an outfit woven completely from silver threads. As he addressed the crowd, the early morning sun's rays reflected dramatically off the silver ensemble and he lit up like Dallas. His awestruck sycophants began to shout "The voice of a god and not of a man!" (Acts 12:22)
4. Herod was allowed only a moment to bask in his own metallic glory. We learn of instant justice administered by a destroyer angel in:

**Acts 12:23 - And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.**

5. Herod's sin unto death by means of a vile digestive ailment is described in Acts 12:23:

**Luke's reference to worms suggests an infection by intestinal roundworms, which grow as long as ten to sixteen inches and feed on the nutrient fluids in the intestines. Bunches of roundworms can obstruct the intestines, causing severe pain, copious vomiting of worms, and death. Luke sees it as part of God's activity on behalf of the Jerusalem church.<sup>1</sup>**

6. The prayers of the Jerusalem church resulted in the divine execution of a man whose murder lust toward Christians was simultaneously terminated.
7. Dictators, tyrants, and despots are allowed to wreak havoc for a time, but once their cruel causes result in the desired effect, they are removed from the battle.
8. Herod's anti-Christian hatred inspired those in Jerusalem to turn their eyes upon Jesus for the rescue of the apostle Peter.
9. The end result was a revival. Although temporary in Jerusalem, it had its impact elsewhere as doctrine was taken to those whom God knew would give it an attentive ear.

**Acts 12:24 - But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.**

10. This resulted in Paul taking the lead among the apostles and organizing his first missionary journey:

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard N. Longnecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1981), 9:413.

**Acts 12:25** - And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

11. This is a transitional verse that shifts the scene from Jerusalem and the church located there to Paul and his missionary team's arrival in Antioch.
12. This verse is designed to emphasize the importance of the week-long prayer meeting at John Mark's house in Jerusalem.
13. The development of a missionary organization that would take the Word to Gentiles is described in Acts 11:19–30. In Acts 13:1–5, the first missionary journey begins.
14. Although the events involving James, Peter, and the prayers of the Jerusalem church formed the catalyst for Christianity's move westward, interest among the Jews in Judea waned and faded out completely.

#### The Divine Decree: Application:

1. With reference to the divine decree, the will of God establishes with certainty what things would actually occur and those things that would not.
2. From the human viewpoint we might question why God allowed James to be executed and Peter to be spared. Knowing all that is knowable, God perceived that the death of James would inspire prayer that would free Peter. Also, James's death became the catalyst for the gospel to abandon the east and gravitate to the west.
3. Complacency is self-satisfaction when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies. Often disaster testing is required to jolt believers out of this dangerous mind-set. In the case of the Jerusalem church, it was the execution of the apostle James, son of Zebedee.
4. Peter spent eight days on death row in a Jerusalem prison. He did not panic or enter into self-pity. Instead, he claimed promises, recalled a doctrinal rationale, and rested on a doctrinal conclusion.
5. The concept of the promise Peter claimed could well have been what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write in:

**1 Peter 5:6** - Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

**v. 7** - casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

6. The doctrinal rationale is the recall of pertinent doctrines to the circumstance. Peter is in a hopeless and helpless situation so he must rely on the plan of God for his life. If his duty is done, then he will go to heaven when he dies; if not then somehow God will deliver him from danger. Either way, Peter is at peace.

**1 Peter 2:18** - Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

**v. 19** - For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

**1 Peter 2:20** - For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if, when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

7. Peter's doctrinal conclusion was based on the realization there was nothing he could do to alter his circumstance. The only thing left to consider was the advice Moses gave the Exodus generation as the Egyptian army closed in:

**Exodus 14:13** - "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today."

**v. 14** - "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."

8. Peter quite possibly reflected back on Moses' advice when he wrote this in:

**1 Peter 4:12** - Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

**v. 13** - but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

9. The divine decree contains the provisions necessary for our physical and spiritual lives:

- (1) Our nourishment is provided by the grace pipeline in two categories: **(a)** food and drink for the body and **(b)** the Word of God for the soul. As we must choose to eat what has been provided in grace, we must also use our free will to study Bible doctrine.

**Matthew 4:4** - "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

- (2) The Lord promised us physical clothing and food in:

**Matthew 6:31** - "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'

**Matthew 6:32** - "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

- (3) The Lord promised spiritual clothing and food in:

**John 8:31** - Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

**v. 32** - and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

10. When believer's pray to the Father in the filling of the Spirit, that prayer is processed in heaven. Even though those who pray have doubts about the answer, the sovereignty of God still responds in the decree.

11. The believers at the Jerusalem church spent a week in prayer, but when Peter arrived at the house of John Mark's mother, they were in disbelief:

**Acts 12:13** - When Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

**v. 14** - When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

**v. 15** - They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is an angel."

**v. 16** - But Peter kept knocking; and when they had opened the door. They saw him and were amazed.

12. Regardless of the church's lack of faith, Peter was indeed at the door. The divine decree contained the prevailing prayers of the believers in the PROM chip and God's answer was in the ROM chip.
13. Believers in client nations are protected from evil rulers in the divine decree. Herod Agrippa's anti-Christian crusade was halted by his horrid death at Caesarea. Nero committed suicide within weeks of Paul's execution.
14. The Antonine Caesars provided the environment for the expansion of Christianity from the reign of Nerva through Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 96–180).

**Visual #9:****The Antonine Dynasty:  
The 5 Good Emperors**

**The Antonine period was one of great internal peace and prosperity, when the sense of unity, the reconciliation of the peoples, was greatest throughout the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup>**

- Events managed by the divine decree produced the necessary environment for the rapid growth of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.
16. And it all started with that first cause: Herod Agrippa's anti-Christian attack on the church beginning with James. What transpired after that – the conditions, successions, and relations – continue apace to this very day.

**Isaiah 55:11 -** “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

**Conclusion:**

Prayers inserted into the divine decree were perceived in eternity past but answered in time. A prayer not prayed is not perceived. There is no answer to a petition not prayed.

We must become prayer warriors. The impact of divine involvement in our lives has no bounds if we will access God's power.

The power of prayer is obviously available for personal application. The weapon is also available for a much broader use, such as praying for our country.

Paul commanded us to “Pray without ceasing” which is better translated, “Keep on praying habitually as with the consistency of a hacking cough” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, EXT).

James commented on the power of prayer when he wrote, “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (James 5:17b, NET).

Our nation is in need of such prayers. Those with a biblical inventory of ideas are the ones best prepared to utter appeals to the throne of grace for the deliverance of our country.

With this in mind, I direct you to this challenge the Lord addressed to Solomon regarding client nation Israel but which has application to ours:

**2 Chronicles 7:13 -** “When I close up the sky so that it doesn't rain, or command locusts to devour the land's vegetation, or send a plague among My people,

**v. 14 -** if My people, who belong to Me, humble themselves, pray, seek to please Me, and repudiate their sinful practices, then I will respond from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

<sup>2</sup> “Antonine,” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 1:466.

v. 15 - “Now I will be attentive and responsive to the prayers offered in this place.” (NET)

(End 2012 Shreveport Bible Conference.)