

Scripture Reading:

Acts 12:16 “Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. **17** But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, [Peter] declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place. **18** Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. **19** But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there. **20** Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. **21** So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. **22** And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" **23** Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And [King Herod] was eaten by worms and died. **24** But the word of God grew and multiplied. **25** And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.”

"Judgment Comes to the Nation of Israel"

As I have mentioned this will be our last message from Luke's orderly account until after the Advent Season this year.

- For the last five weeks of ordinary time this year my sermons will, Lord-willing review the key elements of the worship services held here at Church of the King: What we call Covenant Renewal Worship.

It is an appropriate place to take a short break as Luke in today's text gives us an important final picture of the Jewish nation and then in Chapter 13 he will begin to present the great missionary journeys of Paul as the Spirit of God continues to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

- These two clearly go hand and hand as I will attempt to show you this morning.

Before Luke takes on the journeys of Paul he has quickly given us the final history of the other Apostles that we see in the Bible. Their lives and ministries were filled with great blessings and great persecutions, just like the Saints that are given to us in the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven. There is more we can gather from Church history about the Apostles & their work, but we must remember this is what the Spirit has given us.

Luke now turns to the King of Israel at this time: King Herod Agrippa.

The wicked King who killed James with the sword and arrested Peter.

- As we saw last week Peter was miraculously delivered and Luke now turns to what happens in the aftermath of his escape:

18 “Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.”

There was no small stir because no one had any idea what had happened and because they all understood that under Roman Law the penalty for letting a prisoner escape is death.

- We will see this again when the Philippian jailer almost takes his own life after what he thought was a great jail break!

19 “But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards & commanded that they should be put to death.”

You can imagine the frustration of King Herod after he had gone to all the trouble to make Peter secure. Now before we think their execution was unfair, we need to remember that these same soldiers had been assigned to guard Peter for that entire week: Do you think they heard the Gospel?

- **In fact, some may have come to faith and witnessed to King Herod as well, but we are not told.**
- **Whether we will see these soldiers in heaven or whether they are now in hell depends fully on what they did with Jesus!**

Then King Herod decides it is time to leave town:

“And [King Herod] went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there. 20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.”

We are not told why the King was upset with Tyre and Sidon but it created a big problem for them because they depended on Judea for much of their food.

- **So, they did what good negotiators in wicked countries always do, they found the right man to bribe!**

The man who guarded the King's bedroom had to be very trusted! So the leaders of Tyre and Sidon went to Blastus because they knew he would have the ear of the King. It appears that Blastus convinced the King that it would be in his best interest to make peace and then make a BIG deal out of it at the upcoming games to honor Caesar. King Herod had wanted to kill Peter after Easter and these games were likely held in early August.

- **So it would have appeared that King Herod had a period of peace and progress even after his great sins in Jerusalem.**

Any Saints who wondered about this might have taken comfort from the mediations of Asaph in Psalm 73 which was on our reading list this week. Asaph almost despaired when he saw how the wicked prospered but when he entered the Temple he saw things from God's perspective & knew there would be justice in the end!

Such was the case with Herod as well: 21 “So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.”

- **The King was going to put on quite a show if he had to make peace with those who had upset him!**

Josephus gives an account of this day and describes the cloak that the King wore as made out of pure silver and how he timed his entrance so it would be gleaming in the sunlight.

- **This was not a man caught up in the moment, but one who planned for this moment.**

These types of celebrations and the worship of men was common in those days: We will see it often as we go forward in Acts. The contrast we need to understand is that Peter or Paul or Barnabas immediately tell people to stop when they attempt to worship them as gods, commanding them to worship only the one true God. Here we see King Herod fully caught up in the sin of the culture that surrounds him: Instead of being salt & light...

- **Instead of being a blessing to the nations of the earth he is ready and willing to accept their worship.**

➤ How often do we fall prey to similar temptations?

-- Do we faithfully raise our covenant children according to the Scriptures or do we go along with the latest “time-outs” or other fads of our day?

-- Do we follow the simple Biblical advice regarding economics to work hard and spend less than we make? Or do we look to the world’s ways of getting “rich” with excessive debt? Or thinking we must have everything RIGHT NOW to be content?

-- Do we base our fashions and appearance on the modest guidelines that we find in the Bible or go with the latest examples, reviews or comments that we see in magazines or on the Internet?

➤ All of these might seem trivial when compared to what King Herod has done here, but we must remember the warning that James gives us about sin:

“13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

King Herod has committed murder with the unjust execution of James and now allows himself to be worshipped as a god and he is about to receive his just reward...

➤ But we must remember that this man, as do all others, made small steps in the beginning of this road to hell and James has given us all fair warning about traveling the same path.

It has been weeks if not months since James was slain and Peter arrested: The Saints may have wondered how King Herod could prosper after such sins and now he is becoming even more famous, but it was not to last...

22 “And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.

And [King Herod] was eaten by worms and died.”

➤ I know we all have had those times where we wonder why God does not take such swift action!

We are to be comforted in knowing that He does at times, and in the end all sin will be judged justly.

➤ The penalty for sin will be propitiated by the work of Jesus for those who are saved!

➤ And born by the sinners who refuse to accept so great a salvation for all eternity.

So we have judgment against King Herod and then Luke again speaks of the blessings being poured out on the young Church: 24 “But the word of God grew and multiplied.”

➤ The seed of the serpent has been crushed by the seed of the woman!

Here King Herod represents the end of the nation of Israel, just as Jesus had foretold... There is no more mention of Israel as a nation in the Scriptures and even when Paul makes his last journey to Jerusalem, we see the Jewish council being called by the Roman authorities and a lot of what is just plain mob action.

The story of Acts is the story of the Spirit bringing glory to Jesus by filling the earth with His kingdom!

➤ It begins the story of the glorious reign of Jesus over this Kingdom

What we call the church age is not a plan B or parenthetical time-out until God gets around to finishing His work with the nation of Israel.

This was known and understood by the church for almost 1,800 years until error about the end times crept in and diverted much of our attention from the real work that needs to be done.

What has rightly been called ‘end-times madness’ has given us charts and graphs about the Church age coming to an end with the triumph of the Anti-Christ and Jesus having to rapture His Saints out of harm’s way before the great tribulation. We have best-selling novels and movies and lots of sermons to back all this up, but there is one small problem:

- **It does not follow the story of salvation outlined in the Scriptures and does great violence to many passages they try to use in its defense.**

Let me give you a simple test that I trust we all will pass, but would cause real problems in many churches:

- **How many times does John mention the Anti-Christ in the Book of Revelation?**
- **That’s right he doesn’t: It is in his letters where he refers to the anti-Christ!**

Obviously I won’t have the time this morning to review all of this and if you want to study it further I would recommend David Chilton’s book *Paradise Lost* as a good beginning.

- **What I do want to do this morning is stress the point that Luke is making in giving us the details about the death of Herod.**

It is about as horrible a death one could imagine for an individual in the same way that Jesus said the destruction of Jerusalem would be for a city. King Herod was literally eaten alive by worms. It apparently has hit a number of proud leaders down through history and Josephus tells us the Herod lived for five days in his sufferings. He would be the last Jewish leader to rule in Judea and the end would come for Jerusalem and the Temple in just a few short years...

The end would come for the very same reason: They rejected Jesus! King Herod knew the Gospel and likely had it preached to him by James or Peter or both. King Herod not only rejected the truth of the Gospel but lashed out at the Saints with great violence, just like the Jewish leaders before him.

- **It is Matthew in his Gospel who gives us the fullest picture of how Jesus pronounced judgment on the nation of Israel after His triumphal entry:**

-- Jesus goes and cleanses the Temple which He had done once before in His ministry as John tells us: The Old Testament image is that of leprosy returning to a house which must then be destroyed.

-- Jesus curses the fig tree that had no fruit, but only leaves just as the people of this city could proclaim Hosanna on Sunday and crucify Him on Thursday!

-- The Pharisees question the authority of Jesus and He exposes them as those who did not heed John’s warnings.

-- Jesus then tells them a series of telling parables:

First was the two sons who were told to work in the vineyard, with Israel being the one who said SURE I will go and then not doing any work at all in the vineyard. Next came the parable of the tenants who refuse to give the owner his harvest, abuse his servants and finally kill his own son.

The Jewish leaders at this point are without excuse because Matthew tells us that “they perceived that he was speaking about them.” [As your homework you can study Isaiah chapter 5 or Psalm 80 to see why this vineyard image bothered them!]

- **But rather than repent and turn to the Messiah for salvation they instead sought to kill Him**

Jesus then lets them know that they cannot ruin God’s plans with the parable of the wedding feast, where the invited guests refuse to come and again abuse and kill the master’s servants:

- So “he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

The master then sent his servants into the highways and byways to invite one and all to the wedding feast: The Good News would go to the Gentiles!

Next they try to trick Jesus with the question about taxes and Jesus warns them about entanglements with Caesar which in the end destroyed their last King as we saw in our text this morning.

Finally, Jesus silences the Sadducees with the truth about the resurrection and the Pharisees try one last trick with a question about the Law: Jesus tells them there are Two Great Commandments and then challenges them with a question about Psalm 110: Who is David’s son?

- He predicts the coming of His Kingdom by quoting this Psalm, “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”

Matthew then tells us that, “no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare ask Him any more questions.”

- It is at this point that Jesus pronounces the final judgment on the leaders of Israel with the seven woes for the Scribes & Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty-three.

Jesus then gives His great lament over Jerusalem: “37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' " "

- There would be those who at Pentecost and thereafter repent and turn to Jesus and they were greatly blessed!

Now the disciples, as they were very prone to do in those days, were NOT listening... Just as many today miss all of this from Matthew’s Gospel. Instead of seeing the Old Testament image of God leaving the Temple as Jesus left to go up on to the mountain to the east...

These disciples are marveling at the wonders of the Temple so Jesus has to break the bad news to them: “You see all these do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down!”

Once on the mountain, looking down on Jerusalem and the Temple, the disciples ask when these things will happen and Jesus goes on to describe the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Temple, in great detail. Again, I don’t have the time to go through all the details, but we must notice in verse 34 that Jesus says, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

- History records that these predictions of Jesus were carried out in AD70: *In that generation!*

And just to make sure no one misses the point, Jesus goes on to tell His disciples what are likely the last two parables He gave on earth: First the story of the Ten Virgins, where the unprepared Five come saying, “Lord, lord, open to us” and then comes the sobering answer from within, “truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

And finally, the Nation of Israel is clearly the faithless servant in the parable of the talents who buried the master’s treasure. The master orders his talent to be taken from him and that they should “cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- Jesus reminds them that they will be on the wrong side of the final judgment and then proceeds to offer Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of His people.

In all of this the words of the Prophet Jeremiah should have been ringing in the ears of these shepherds of Israel: Jeremiah 25:10 “Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.”

- The predicted destruction of Jerusalem is not covered by Luke in the Book of Acts nor mentioned directly in any of the Epistles.

God considers the old covenant nation of Israel as well as the great nations of the earth in that day to be like chaff blowing in the wind as we learned from Daniel.

Their fate is not the focus of the Book of Acts nor the rest of the New Testament:

- What God’s Word is rightly focused on is the Kingdom of God filling the earth.

Looking back to our text, Luke spends just four verses on the demise of King Herod, the last of Israel’s rulers, and then speaks not another word about the nation of Israel. Then Luke says, “But the Word of God increased and multiplied!”

- This is the important part of the story and where we will spend the rest of the Book of Acts!

We must remember that it continues to be the important story TODAY! Sadly, as we look back on the history of the American Church over the past fifty or sixty years, there has been a whole lot more attention given to the restored Nation of Israel and the end times than there has to the advance of God’s Kingdom.

- It has gotten so bad in some circles that Saints often hope that things fall apart in the world so Jesus can come back!

This is not what Jesus said, this is not the plan the Spirit is carrying out and we must do all we can to bring things back in line with them! We do look with great hope to the second coming of Jesus to judge the world and our glorious resurrection, but we must remember the proper order of how things work out in history as the Apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth:

“20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” I Corinthians 15:20-26

The destruction of Jerusalem is described in apocalyptic terms because of the gravity of the event: Those in the nation of Israel were God’s chosen people: In Exodus 19 we read:

“5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

They did not obey, but this did not frustrate God’s great plan of salvation:

- Listen to what the Apostle Peter himself declares in his first Epistle to the Saints:

7 “Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” 8 and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”

➤ **The nation of Israel stumbled and has been destroyed**

9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

➤ **May we be faithful servants as the Spirit uses us as a nation of priests to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 75:

“4 'I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' And to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn. 5 Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck.' “6 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. 7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another. 8 For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain and drink down. 9 But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. 10 'All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.'”