



August 11, 2024
"Why Pray?"

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Camp starts August 29th

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For the Kids: Why do Christians pray? Luke 22:42

ACTS 12:1-4 ~

A little background, anyone?

"Herod the king" in verse 1:

His grandfather Herod, grandmother Mariamne, father Aristobulus and sister Herodias:

His friends Claudius and Caligula:

37 A.D.

39 A.D.

41 A.D.

In early 43 A.D. Agrippa arrested and executed James, among others most likely.

James the Greater:

Was "executed with a sword":

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

When Agrippa realized how much it pleased the masses, he had Peter arrested and held for execution.

The Jews were incredibly nationalistic, which made it easy for Agrippa to stir up support for himself by stirring up resentment for others...

ACTS 12:5–12 ~

The church had few options, but not no options...

Peter, after realizing that he was free, gratefully praised the Lord. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord.

Mary the mother of John Mark, John Mark, and Barnabas:
(Colossians 4:10 & I Peter 5:13).

ACTS 12:13–17 ~

Slavery was so common around the globe in the first century that 1/3 of all human beings were slaves.

Rhoda, recognizing Peter's voice, was so overjoyed that she left the man outside.

The devout Christians praying to the Almighty, dismissed her report.

They were willing to believe that it was an angel, but not Peter.

God didn't answer their prayers because they were faithful – He answered their prayers because He is faithful.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____

WELCOME CHILDREN: Why do Christians pray? What if two Christian kids play a game and both kids really want to win the game equally and so they both pray super hard that God helps them win. What happens? Does the kid who wins the game love God more, or does she have better prayers, or is he a better Christian kid, or does God just like that kid more than the other kid?

We pray for things that we think we want or that we think would be best. How do we know what is best? Would we ever know better than God does about what is best? What about Jesus dying on a cross?

When Jesus was arrested and put on trial and then beaten and killed, did that seem like a good thing to any of His family or friends?

Don't you think that they were praying that Jesus would be saved from His situation? If Jesus had been Saved, we couldn't be Saved. It was His sacrifice that made our Salvation possible. We don't know what to ask for because we don't know what is best. God does.

Our prayers are for what we think is best, but then knowing that we don't really know what that is and so

trusting God to do what is best even if it doesn't seem like it. That's praying for God's Will to be done on earth. When we pray that way God helps us accept what He does.

We pray so that our heart is okay with what God knows He has to do.

DISMISS CHILDREN:

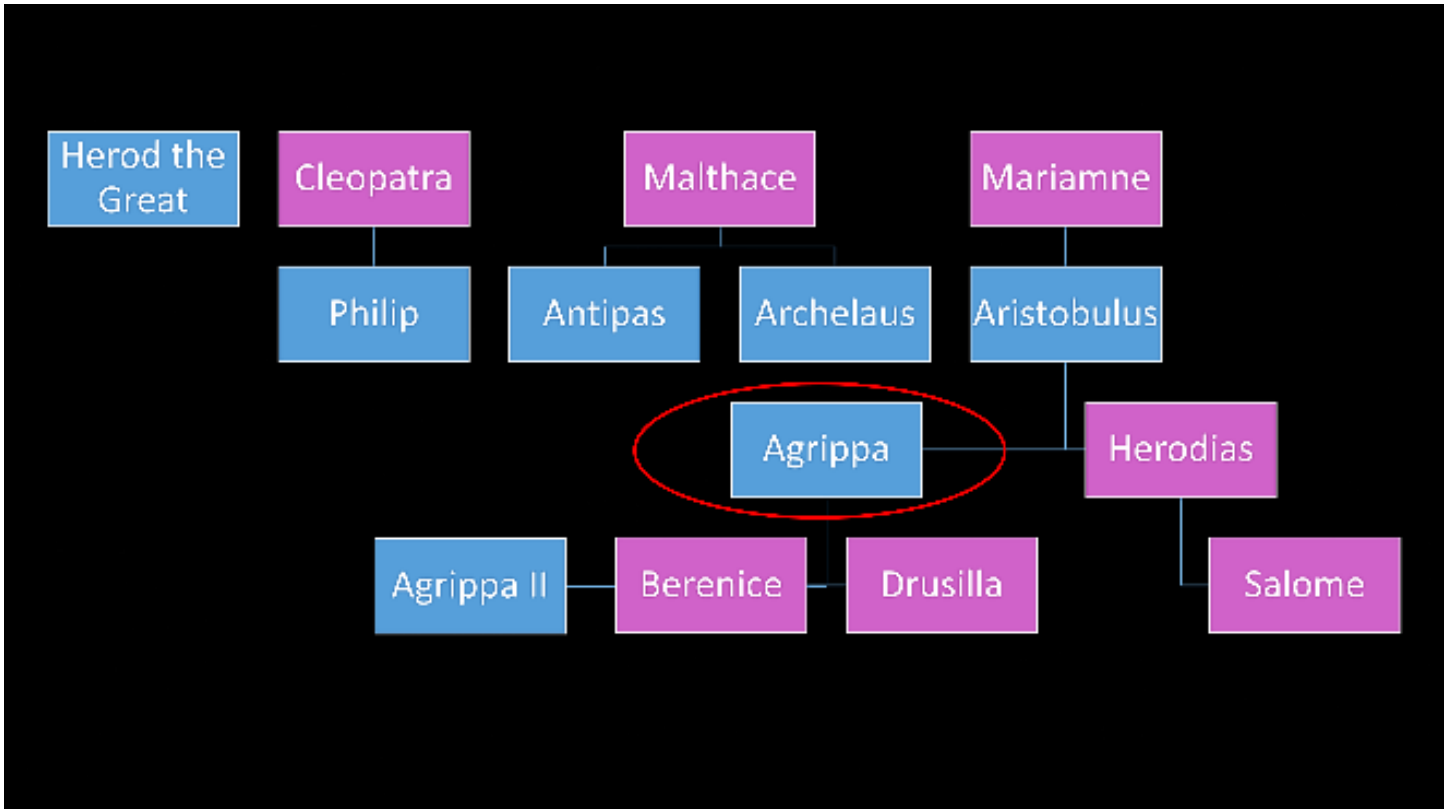
Acts 12:1–4, 1Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, to do them harm. 2And he had James the brother of John executed with a sword. 3When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter as well. (Now these were the days of Unleavened Bread.) 4When he had arrested him, he put him in prison, turning him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending only after the Passover to bring him before the people.

I think that we need a little background here. Last week we finished chapter 11, where, in response to Agabus' prophecy about a coming severe famine, Barnabas and Saul traveled to Jerusalem with a donation of money from the churches around Antioch in modern-day southern Turkey to the church in Jerusalem.

It was charity from both Hellenistic Jewish Christians and from former pagan Gentile Christians for the support of Judean Jewish Christians. Historically, we know that the famine began in 42 A.D. in Rome and then spread over time to the outer provinces, like Judea, ending roughly five years later.

It seems reasonable that a prophecy about a severe famine wouldn't be much of a prophecy if it was given after the severe famine began. I also said last week that as soon as Rome began experiencing a famine the emperor always began diverting food production, rerouting nearly everything to the capital city. Money would not have done the Christians in Jerusalem any good if there wasn't any food to buy.

I think Barnabas and Saul arrived in Jerusalem with the relief money in about 42 A.D. before things got too bad in Rome. The events that we're looking at today, most likely, occurred in the early spring of 43 A.D. 6-9 months after the Antioch delegation went back.



“Herod the king” in verse 1, was Marcus Julius Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, son of Aristobulus. (This is a very abbreviated tree. Herod had many more wives and children as did nearly all the other people listed). You probably remember that Herod the Great ruled all the lands from Egypt in the south to Syria in the north and from the Mediterranean in the west to the Nabatean Kingdom in the east. He was the king when Jesus was born in 5 B.C. The one who had all the baby boys in Bethlehem murdered among countless other atrocities. He died a miserable death a year later in 4 B.C.

He wasn't Jewish, his dad was Idumean, and his mom was Nabatean, so his racially prejudiced Jewish subjects hated him and often plotted against him. To help win some approval he rebuilt the Temple and even though it wasn't finished before he was, what he did accomplish was, by all accounts, magnificent. The Jewish Temple was one of the must-see sights in the Roman Empire.

Another thing he did was to marry the last of the Jewish Hasmonean princesses, Mariamne. Through her he had Alexander and Aristobulus. These two guys were raised and educated in Rome in the court of Caesar Augustus. There was a constant Jewish plot to get rid of Herod and elevate one of these two sons to the throne due to their royal Jewish blood from their mother.

Herod's famous paranoia was stoked by his son Antipas (the Herod who later had John the Baptist beheaded) resulting in Herod executing both of these Jewish sons as well as a third son, by another of his wives, named Antipater. Caesar Augustus remarked that "It would be better to be Herod's pig, than his son."

The Herod here in chapter 12 is Agrippa. He grew up with and was close friends with the future emperor Claudius as well as many other royal princes in Rome. As such, Agrippa was well connected and well educated, fluent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was likely conversational in Aramaic as well. He was thoroughly familiar with Roman politics and Jewish tradition and Law.

Augustus was emperor at Jesus' birth, Tiberius at Jesus' death and Resurrection, Caligula as the church grew beyond Jerusalem, Claudius during the events of chapter 12. Back in the early 30's A.D. the Emperor Tiberius appointed Agrippa, by then a man in his 40's, to mentor his heirs, one of whom, was Caligula.

Even though there was a 20-year difference in their ages, Caligula and Agrippa became very close friends, and when Caligula succeeded Tiberias as emperor in 37 A.D., he rewarded his dear friend.



Caligula named Agrippa king over the many territories of both his uncle Herod Philip and of Lysanias to the north and east of Galilee.

In 39 A.D., Caligula deposed Herod Antipas sending him into exile in modern-day France, adding Uncle Antipas' territories to Agrippa's kingdom as well. Even though Agrippa was now king of a large region including Abilene, Gaulanitis, Perea, and Galilee, he still mostly remained at Caligula's side in Rome.

By about 40 A.D., Caligula had declared himself a living god and demanded that everyone worship him as

such. He had several temples built and others repurposed for his worship. In each one there was a central statue of Caligula in the guise of Jupiter, known to the Greeks as Zeus.

Before long he set his eyes on one of the most magnificent Temples in the empire. You guessed it, Caligula ordered a massive bronze statue of himself as the most powerful god of gods to be erected in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

The statue was evidently finished by artisans in Sidon and was to be delivered to the Temple by the Syrian governor Petronius accompanied by two Roman legions. Petronius repeatedly delayed the delivery of the statue for a variety of contrived reasons, knowing that completing his mission would lead to all-out war with the Jews.

Agrippa pleaded with his friend Caligula to relent, and it seems that he did, at least for a while, but then his ego got the best of him, and he insisted that his orders be carried out regardless of the consequences. That, along with many other things, sealed the 28-year-old Caligula's fate. In January of 41 A.D. a group of people

that may have included Agrippa conspired to and succeeded in assassinating Caligula.

What is certain is that Agrippa was one of the primary forces in getting his old friend, Caligula's much maligned uncle Claudius, crowned as the new emperor. Claudius, as one of his first official acts, added the Roman provinces of Samaria, Judea, and Idumea to Agrippa's kingdom thus ending 35 years of direct Roman rule by governors like Pontius Pilate.

Agrippa was now king over all the territory that had once belonged to his grandfather Herod the Great. The Jewish people were ecstatic about the reunification of all their former territories under one king especially since he was the grandson of Mariamne and so a descendant of the royal Jewish Hasmonean dynasty.

Agrippa didn't permanently set up shop in his kingdom until about 42 A.D. The people were so excited, and loved him so much, that the new governor of Syria, a guy named Vibius, began flooding Rome with concerned reports that Agrippa's popularity with the Jews posed a considerable threat to the empire. That last bit will be important for next week.

In the early spring of 43 A.D. Agrippa arrested some Jewish Christians undoubtedly on charges of blasphemy made by the Jewish Council. Agrippa could be relied upon to do things for his profit or for his esteem that penciled. If he ran the numbers in his personal cost benefit analysis and it came out on the plus side for him, he would do it without hesitation or remorse. Historical documents indicate that Agrippa had 1,400 criminals executed on a single occasion for the entertainment of the masses.

That was his Roman training, but it was also very much his family tradition. It's possible that the Jewish people in Jerusalem were feeling the effects of the famine and this was a nice way to distract them. Whatever the specifics, Agrippa had a number of Christians arrested, no doubt tortured and perhaps executed. James, as one of the pillars of Christianity was given special attention.

James the Greater as he's known, was the son of Zebedee and Solome (the sister of Jesus' mother Mary). He was the brother of the Beloved Disciple, the Apostle John, and the cousin of Jesus. He was in Jesus' inner circle along with Peter and John, and was, with John, called a "son of Thunder," by Jesus.

He was “executed with a sword.” That means that he was arrested, probably tortured, put on trial, convicted, likely scourged, and then beheaded. In the Roman world, you couldn’t ask for a much better way to be executed. That was about as good as it got.

It’s interesting that Agrippa would kill James in that way. Agrippa was not squeamish – he wasn’t above ordering a more horrible end. Although his uncle Antipas murdered John the Baptist that way, it was still considered a humane means of execution, so it’s certain that Agrippa had some degree of respect for James. From that, we can be sure that the elder “Son of Thunder” comported himself honorably and brought credit to Christ and His church.

When Agrippa realized that this actions against a noted Christian leader gained him more support from the people than he anticipated he immediately arrested Peter. By this time Peter’s influence as the first pastor was waning, probably due in part to his ministry to Gentiles, but he was still the most prominent Christian figure alive and the most senior leader of both the church in Jerusalem and Christianity at large.

Seizing him was quite a coup and you can easily imagine that Agrippa was fairly excited to curry even more favor from his subjects with the public execution of Peter. Maybe he would draw this execution out and make it a bigger demonstration. Waiting until after Passover was actually a very good move politically. Let the Jews have a joyous and uninterrupted celebration all the while building in them the excitement about the upcoming spectacle of Peter's violent demise.

The Jews, as we've seen throughout the New Testament, were incredibly nationalistic, meaning that they were absolutely preoccupied with the idea of becoming a great and powerful nation. Agrippa well understood his people and he stoked those ambitions. He was giving the Jews tremendous hope and building their nationalistic pride, much to the concern of Rome. Again, that will come into play next week.

Probably in March of 43 Peter was arrested and imprisoned where he was heavily guarded. It was a bit extreme to guard a single prisoner with 16 Roman soldiers, "four squads" of four soldiers each, which speaks to the importance of Peter to Agrippa's plans after the Passover.

Acts 12:5-12, 5So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made to God intensely by the church. 6On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. 7And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near Peter, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. 8And the angel said to him, "Put on your belt and strap on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9And he went out and continued to follow, and yet he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10Now when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. 11When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." 12And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

It's easy to imagine the state of the church in Jerusalem. It was Passover and the city was bursting at the seams with pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean and beyond arriving to participate. James had already been murdered, Peter was awaiting his execution, and other Christians had been mistreated, abused, jailed, tortured, and probably killed. What were they going to do without James and Peter? Who was going to be next on the hit list?

The church had few options, but it wasn't like they had none. They could have protested. Making a large public disturbance would usually get someone's attention – remember the most important thing a leader in the Roman world had to do was keep relative peace within their jurisdiction. Cause enough commotion and maybe Agrippa would back off.

The Christians could have gone to the governor in Syria and asked for help, or they could have sent a delegation to Rome to complain to the emperor. They could have taken up arms and tried to fight Agrippa. They could have fled Judea entirely. They didn't do any of those things. What they did was continue to meet together and pray.

The narrative is pretty straightforward. Peter was asleep chained to a soldier on either side of him with the other two soldiers from this particular watch guarding the only door. The other 12 soldiers constituting Peter's guard detail were off duty that late into the night.

Notice that the angel wasn't gentle with Peter. He wacked him in the side, abruptly ordered him about and coolly led him out of the prison. Once outside the angel simply disappeared without so much as a goodbye.

Peter was dazed and confused, but after realizing that he was free he made his way to find the church after gratefully praising the Lord for his deliverance. The Lord can do anything. "Nothing is too difficult for God." We know that and they knew that... At least until it's put to the test.

Here we see the evil machinations of the most powerful man in the area and the malicious anticipation of tens of thousands of Jews looking forward to their king's brutality against their perceived enemies was nothing

to the Lord. The Lord merely dispatched an angel, and the entire situation was altered.

Peter made his way through the city in the darkness to the house of Mary. Mary was the most common name for Jewish females in the first century and so she is further defined as the Mary that was the mother of John. John was one of the most popular names for Jewish males at the time and so he is further defined as also being called Mark.

Mark was a Roman praenomen and probably indicated Roman citizenship. In Colossians 4:10 Mark is identified as the cousin of Barnabas. We know that Barnabas was wealthy, and we now know that wealth ran in his extended family. His aunt was almost certainly a wealthy Hellenistic Jewish widow with a home in the city that was large enough to accommodate big gatherings and require servants.

Papias, the disciple of the Apostle John and friend of Polycarp became the Bishop of Hierapolis in 70 A.D. wrote that John Mark functioned under the authority of Peter in writing the Gospel of Mark. Peter closes his First Epistle with greetings from him and from “my son, Mark.”

Acts 12:13-17, 13When he knocked at the door of the gate, a slave woman named Rhoda came to answer.
14When 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.
15They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They said, "It is his angel."
16But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.
17But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brothers." Then he left and went to another place.

It doesn't play well with many modern people, but as I've tried to describe before, slavery was as much a way of life back then as cell phones are to us.

As we discussed just a month ago, slavery was invented long before the Flood and resurrected very shortly after Noah and his family got off the boat. We have extensive historical records documenting well-established laws governing slavery from Africa, Asia, and Europe dating back 4,000 years. We have archeological evidence of slavery long before that and

in every corner of the planet. Slavery likely started as the spoils of war. You could say that it was better than genocide, but in many cases, not by much.

In the first century it is estimated that 1/3 of all human beings were in bondage as slaves. Some slaves were treated extremely well, some were treated horrifically, and the vast majority were treated about the same way that a rancher in Montana today treats his cows. There is a balance of only spending enough resources on them to still make a profit – to make it worth having them around.

Slave prices depended on the individual, but the average price in Judea in the first century was 2,000 denarii. That was the wages a common laborer might make in 7 years. Slaves were not cheap, so Mary was wealthy. It's very difficult to put it into terms we can understand because our economy and lifestyle is so vastly different. A day laborer back then lived hand-to-mouth and had no real possessions other than the clothes on his back. It would probably be something on the order of \$75,000 today.

What is absolutely shocking and at the same time disturbingly disgusting is that a young slave today sells

for about \$100. At that price it's more cost effective to replace slaves rather than keep them healthy. Think about that for a moment and then couple it with the fact that there are about 40 million slaves around the world as we sit here this morning.

We would presume that as a Christian widow, Mary probably treated Rhoda, a fellow Christian sister, fairly well... But I ask you, would you want to be owned by a wealthy Christian widow in Kalispell?

Like I said before, white men did not invent slavery, but they were the first people on planet earth to entirely eliminate it from society. White men in England, then in France, and then, after America's bloodiest war, white men here outlawed slavery. No one else had ever done that before.

Anyway, Rhoda recognized Peter's voice, and she was so overjoyed that she left the man standing on the stoop and ran in to tell her mistress that Peter was outside.

The devout Christians praying to the Almighty, dismissed her out of hand. Can't be – you're delusional – how could Peter be outside the door?

They were willing to believe that it was an angel, but not that God could deliver Peter to them. The craziest part to me besides the shocking lack of faith is that they were evidently going to leave the angel standing outside. “Oh, it’s just an angel. We can let him in and see what he wants when our prayer meeting is over.”

Finally, after what seems like a Cheech and Chong routine, they opened the door and they were amazed, shocked, stunned, astonished... They were all praying and ironically couldn’t believe that God would answer. Why? Can you see how quickly despair sets in when we have setbacks?

These people had been under some serious stress with several church members arrested and James murdered, and Peter set to be next. They were praying, but their faith was in the dumps.

God didn’t answer their prayers because they were faithful – He answered their prayers because He is faithful. Never forget that part because it will help you remember the purpose of prayer. It isn’t to get our will done in Heaven; it is to get our will in alignment with what God has already decided to do.

Did they pray when James was arrested? Of course, they did, and I'll guarantee that in that situation they prayed with far greater fervency and hope. Their faith was still quite strong as they prayed for James and yet, he was beheaded.

Now, with Peter, they had little hope that God would intervene. He didn't before. Strange, isn't it? We see in the Bible where God reveals that He's going to do something and then His people pray, and God changes His mind.

God never changes His mind... Never. The problem that we have is we take the Bible far too simplistically. We must recognize that the Bible is written with a human point of view of a spiritual reality. As an example, Luke 23:44&45, "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the entire land until the ninth hour, 45because the sun stopped shining." Really? The sun stopped its nuclear fusion of hydrogen, that's what happened? Of course, God could have done that, but it's simplistic nonsense to believe that He did. This is just a way of saying that the sun's effulgence was blocked. From a human standing on

the third rock, it appeared as though the sun shut down for a while.

From Moses' point of view, God was going to destroy the Jews and relented in His plan after Moses prayed.

What really happened was God got Moses to change his own heart concerning the people in his charge. Prayer is always about getting our heart right with God, never the other way around.

When we pray for what we think is best, but then admit that we don't know what is best and will trust that God does thereby submitting to His Will rather than our own knowing that He will do what is best, then our heart is open and ready for whatever transpires.

Pray without ceasing that God gets you on the same sheet of music that He's operating on. If you do that you will never be amazed in the same way that Peter's friends were amazed. You'll simply be amazed at how good God is all the time.