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Acts 12 and the Resurrection and Exodus of Peter

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Discussing themes of resurrection and exodus in Acts 12 and beyond. Purchase a copy of my book on Exodus here: <https://amzn.to/2KI16CX>. You can also read more about these themes in Acts 12 here: <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-34-the-resurrection-of-peter-and-the-coming-of-the-kingdom/>.

Transcript

Hi everyone. I thought I'd do another one of these videos. This time we'll discuss something in the book of Acts.

I was thinking we'd look at Acts chapter 11 to chapter 12, the end of chapter 11, verse 27, until the very end of chapter 12, which I'll read out now. And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them named Agabus stood up and showed by the spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples each according to his ability determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some of the church.

Then he killed James, the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the days of unleavened bread.

So when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him intending to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. When Herod was about to bring him out that night, Peter was sleeping bound with two chains between two soldiers and the gods before the door were keeping the prison.

Now, behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the prison and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up saying arise quickly and his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, gird yourself and tie on your sandals. And so he did.

And he said to him, put on your garments and follow me. So he went out and followed him and did not know what that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were passed the first and second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord.

And they went out and went down one street and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter had come to himself, he said, now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people. So when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark where many were gathered together praying.

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl came, a girl named Rhoda came to answer when she recognized Peter's voice because of her gladness. She did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, you're beside yourself.

Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, it is his angel. Now Peter continued knocking and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished, but motioning to him, to them with his hand to keep silent.

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

But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the gods and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. 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 chamberlain, their friend, they asked for peace because their country was supplied with food by the King's country.

So on a set day, Herod arrayed in royal apparel sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting the voice of a God and not of a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God.

And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry.

And they also took with them John, whose surname was Mark. Now this is an interesting passage for many reasons. I'm sure it's familiar to many of you, but you may not have

noticed some of the deeper themes and patterns that are visible within this text.

So one of the first things to notice is that it's bookended by Saul and Barnabas going down from Antioch to Jerusalem and then returning from Jerusalem after they'd fulfilled their mission of bringing relief to the saints in Judea. So that's sandwiched by those two things. Beyond that, there's an interesting occurrence here of Peter's deliverance from prison, which is actually the last time that we really see Peter at the front of the stage.

Prior to this point, he's been the focus of the book of Acts in many respects. He's the one who's the first to go to the Gentiles in the Cornelius mission. And then he's the person who leads the speech on the day of Pentecost.

He's the person who's prominent throughout the book to this point. After this, we only really see him at the council at Jerusalem. And for the most part, the book after this point is a story of Paul and his missions.

So there's a very significant switch here from a story that's focused upon Peter and the disciples in Jerusalem to a story that's focused upon the missions of Paul. So it's as if the camera goes in Jerusalem and then it follows Paul and Saul and Barnabas as they leave and go on their mission with John Mark. So there's a transition here.

The other thing to notice is that the story is one that emphasizes a divine theme of challenging the powers. So the significance of Herod as a figure within this story should not be neglected or forgotten. Herod is the person who's the antagonist, who's trying to attack the early church.

And he takes James and has him put to death and then takes Peter for a similar purpose, but then is thwarted in that. And at the end, he's brought down as a result of his sinful failure to give God the glory. So Herod is an important character.

We have this conflict between God and the powers. And Herod is an important figure within that. Herod here is Herod Agrippa I. You have other Herods within the gospel.

So Herod the Great is at the beginning and you have Herod Antipas, who's the one who puts John the Baptist to death. But this is a new Herod. Later on, we'll see Herod Agrippa II.

But Herod is continuing the battle of the Herods against Jesus, his disciples and John the Baptist and all these figures, the figures who bring forward the mission of God and the kingdom of God. Herod's kingdom is in direct opposition and conflict with that. Now, Herod in the gospels is often portrayed in a way that allies him with figures like someone like Ahab.

So Ahab has this wife Jezebel and he puts to death, tries to put to death the prophet Elijah. There's this conflict. And then you have an Elijah type figure within the gospels

who's John the Baptist and he's put to death by Herod under the instigation of his wife.

And so there are similar patterns that we see from Old Testament stories. But we also see a comparison between Herod and the pharaohs. Now, the parallel there is also one that's drawn between Ahab and Pharaoh.

So it's a significant parallel that needs to be explored. Now, this story is striking for other reasons. If you're listening with any degree of care, you probably noticed a number of things about it that stand out.

So not least the fact that there are a number of significant details to this event that are familiar. So there's a capture and a death around the time of Passover. There's a closed and a guarded site of bondage.

There's someone on the right hand, someone on the left. There's the appearance of a glorious angel to set the person free. There's an encounter with a woman who then goes and tells the rest of the disciples who don't believe her, who think that they've that she's probably seen a ghost.

Then the church experiences an appearance of this person more directly and they're instructed to pass on the message. And then at the end of this, we see Peter going elsewhere and then we're told what happened to the soldiers that guarded him. Now, all of this is familiar from the story of the resurrection in the Gospels.

We have each one of these details is seen as a detail associated with Christ's own death and resurrection. Christ set free from the tomb, which is a prison as it were. The door opened by a mighty angel and first encounters a woman who runs and tells the disciples who don't believe at first.

And then he appears to the rest of the disciples, instructs them to tell the message to others. And then he disappears from the scene. He, after the resurrection, Jesus is never on the scene in the same way as he was before, leading the disciples around.

He appears at key moments. There are key events of eating together, of speaking and experiencing Christ's presence. But his presence is far less immediate and far less continuous after the resurrection.

And then we're told what happened to the soldiers. The soldiers are bribed in the Gospels. Here, the soldiers are put to death.

And so there are significant themes that seem to connect these two stories. Now, why might there be some significance to that? Not least the fact that Jesus' experience is one that is worked out in the lives of his disciples as well. His disciples continue the pattern of what Christ himself has done.

So within the church, the experience of the church is a recapitulation and continuation and development of what happens in Christ. What happens to the bridegroom happens to the bride afterwards. And so there's this succession of the narrative of the church after the narrative of Christ.

This is a more general theme within the Gospel and within as it moves into the Book of Acts. So first of all, there's a transition at the very beginning of the Gospel, at the very beginning of the Book of Acts. You have Christ ascending and then the church experiences Pentecost.

This is similar to the story of Elijah and Elisha, where at the beginning of two kings in two kings chapter two, Elijah is taken up into heaven and his spirit, the mantle of Elijah falls onto Elisha, who continues the mission of Elijah. So if you look in 1 Kings 18, I think it is, when Elijah is given his mission, there are three different elements to his mission that he's given to appoint Haziel, Jehu, and also to appoint Elisha. Now, he only does the appointing of Elisha as his successor.

Elisha does the rest. And so he's continuing with the spirit of Elijah upon him, the mission of Elijah into the future. Now it happens as a crossing of a water as well on the banks of the Jordan.

So there's a significant transition point. So the ascension of Elijah is the Pentecost of Elisha. Within the beginning of Acts, we have a similar pattern.

The ascension of Christ is associated with the Pentecost of the church. The spirit of Christ ascends upon the church so that the church might continue his mission. Luke begins his account in the book of Acts, talking about his previous account of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.

In the book of Acts, it's the continuation of that, what Jesus continues to do and teach through the mission of his church. Now, in the story of Paul and Saul and the road to Damascus, you have a very powerful account of Christ's identification with the church. That's why are you persecuting me? The statement that Christ makes is one that associates him most intimately with his bride.

That Christ as the bridegroom is associated with the bride. And so the persecution of the bride is the persecution of the bridegroom. That continuation of the mission of the church from the mission of Christ also takes other forms, other ways that we can look at it.

So if we look back in the Old Testament in Numbers 11, the spirit of Moses is taken and put on a number of elders. And within that experience, they bear the spirit of Elijah so that they can lead the people and continue and do his work. So there's a significant pattern there.

Christ's spirit is taken and put upon the disciples so that they can continue his work and act in his name and in his power. Another example, on the banks of the Jordan again, Moses and Joshua. That Moses passes over his mission to Joshua and Joshua continues as he goes into the land.

So the action of the Exodus is completed through the work of Joshua. Now, that comparison is significant because we've seen Moses and Joshua, a desert prophet and a prophet of the land. We've seen Elijah and Elisha, a desert prophet and a prophet of the land.

And we see in Christ as well that Christ, as I mentioned last time, I think Christ is the one who passes over. And there's this transition from the ministry of John the Baptist, the Elijah like figure, the one who dresses like Elijah, the one who's compared to Elijah, to Christ, who takes the mission forward. Now, at the beginning of Acts, there's a similar transition from the ministry of Christ to the ministry of the church.

And then there's all the events associated with that. Now, this is significant for reading Acts 12 because the experience of the church is a recapitulation, a playing out on another scale, a sort of Russian doll within a Russian doll of what Christ himself has done. So there's the pattern of Christ being worked out in his people.

And we see this elsewhere in Acts. So first of all, we see Christ being anointed for his mission. He receives a baptism and he sets out on his mission.

The church is baptized at Pentecost in an event that is paralleled with the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, and then the church goes out on its mission. Beyond that, we see other events. The very structure of the book of Acts is shaped in a way that maps the experience of the disciples, so the experience of the apostles and of Paul and of others onto the story of Christ.

So the story of Paul's shipwreck at the end of the book of Acts is significant here. Paul's shipwreck occurs after a series of trials. He's tried by Jewish courts, by the leaders of the people in the temple.

And then he's tried by Roman courts, Felix and Festus. And then he's tried by Herod Agrippa. And so each one of these trials maps on the trials that Christ experiences in the book of Luke.

So these patterns of trials are similar ones to Christ himself. What we find beyond that is this shipwreck event. And in this shipwreck account in Acts chapter 27, I think it is, in the shipwreck account, there are a number of details that should make you think about patterns that we see within the gospels.

Paul is cast into the deep and he ends up emerging from the deep like Jonah and he's delivered. And then he shows his power of the serpent later on as the serpent bites him.

And yet he recovers.

There's no harm to him at all. And the serpent is thrown into the fire. Now, at midnight on the 14th night.

Now in verse 27 of chapter 27, that should make you think the 14th night is associated with the Passover. There's a fasting and then there's an emphasis upon staying within the ship. Stay within the ship to be safe.

And if you do not stay within the ship, your life may be forfeit. He takes bread. He gives thanks.

He breaks it. And then there's deliverance at dawn. And so this pattern is a pattern that should remind us both of Christ and his Passover and his celebration of the Last Supper with his disciples, his death, and then his resurrection.

Lots of themes that are parallel there. And more generally, the cycle of the book leads towards this point where Paul ends up in Rome and that's deliverance from the deep. That's his cross and resurrection.

And then he ends up at the end of his mission. And so this is a parallel to the story of the Gospels of Christ. Christ's mission, again, maps on the experience of the apostles because they are his people.

And so they are formed into him. That as we are God's people, we are people who will live Christ-shaped lives. And this takes a very strong form within the Gospels themselves and within the book of Acts that follows from them.

Now, looking more in more detail at this story, there are other things that emerge. So it's not just that we see a pattern of the events of Christ's life, his death and resurrection, but we also see a pattern of Exodus. It occurs at Passover around the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

There's a conflict between God and his people and a hard-hearted king. Herod is introduced by a famine. So there's the famine predicted by Agabus and then the disciples come and bring Saul and Barnabas, bring the gifts of the disciples to the Christians in Jerusalem.

There's the statement that he should girt himself and tie on his sandals. Again, that's reminiscent of the story of the Exodus. The angel comes at midnight and leads him out.

There's a quick departure. There's the killing of the soldiers of the wicked king, a defeat of the tyrant. And that's paralleled with the raising up of the faithful.

Now, if you notice, there's a parallel here, a piece of poetic justice, but also a parallel that needs to be recognized. So the angel strikes Peter on the side and raises him up,

saying, arise quickly, and his chains fall off his hands. Now, at the end of the chapter, we read, then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, Herod, because he did not give glory to God and he was eaten by worms and died.

And so there's a parallel here. There's a parallel between being struck by an angel and raised up. And then the contrast with being struck by an angel and brought down to death.

And so these two events are being juxtaposed in a significant way. The raising up of the faithful witness and the striking down of the wicked king, the hard-hearted king. In the same way as we see the baby boys of the Israelites that were drowned in the Nile and then the poetic justice of God drowning the men of Pharaoh, the boys of Egypt within the Red Sea.

But also that the Red Sea is the means of deliverance for Israel. So there's a juxtaposition and a contrast that is being drawn. There's also deliverance.

This deliverance and destruction as paralleled events is a significant pattern in Scripture. Growing and multiplying in a state of persecution. But the word of God grew and multiplied.

This hard-hearted king, the situation of persecution. But yet God's word is thriving. Just as we see at the beginning of the Exodus, the people of God are multiplying within a position of oppression and then leaving the land of persecution.

So there's the entrance into the land as a result of dreams and prophecy. And there's the story of Saul and Barnabas as they go into the land. Mention of famine.

And then at the end they leave and there's a movement out from Jerusalem. Jerusalem here being aligned with Egypt. And so the story of Acts more generally is a story of exodus and conquest.

There are a number of patterns that we can already see. There's an exodus, a general exodus from Jerusalem or Egypt and a conquest of the world. Moving into the land of Rome itself.

Crossing over, as it were, the Jordan of that shipwreck and everything. Crossing through the Mediterranean and then ending up in Rome in this promised land. And then taking over that, as it were.

And so Pentecost also is a great Asanei. The leader of the people ascends to the top, to God's presence and then gives as a gift, the spirit to the people of God. Now the spirit is the law written on the hearts.

The law was given through Moses who ascended into God's presence, received the law

and gave it down to the people. Christ ascends on the day of the ascension and then he gives their Pentecost the spirit that writes the law in the hearts of his people. So Pentecost is a great Asanei.

Then there's the progress of a holy war against false powers and a gradual moving out and including of different people into this. So Achan, for instance, is paralleled with Ananias and Sapphira, people who steal from the Lord, steal that which has been devoted to Christ. And so we take our place within this story.

This is very much a story of holy war that's developing out. And this story is one that is bound up with the destruction of Jerusalem as well. So there's the destruction of Jerusalem and there's the moving into the wider world.

If we're reading this story, then we can see that it's significant for understanding of who we are as Christians, that the experience of Peter, who experiences a Christ-like death and resurrection, being trapped in the tomb, as it were, of the prison, locked up, prepared for death. He's as good as dead. He's about to be brought out and put to death.

And then he's set free. He's the tomb is opened. The bars are removed and nothing can hold in the people of God.

This is something that we see throughout the book of Acts, that God keeps opening up these prisons, whether that's in Philippi or whether it's in the story of Acts 5. The disciples cannot be held by bars, just as Christ cannot be held by the grave. And this is a challenge to the rulers of this world. The political emphasis of the book of Acts should not be neglected because Christ is at conflict with the rulers of this world.

They put him to death. All of them gathered together to destroy him. And yet he was vindicated by God.

And the church is declaring this message to the world, a message that is threatening and challenging because it declares the limits of their powers. And it declares that there is a greater power at work within the world. And we see again and again that Paul and the other disciples meet with rulers of the people, bear witness before them, whether that's Festus or Felix or Agrippa or Herod, all these figures or the leaders of the Jewish people, all of these figures are witnessed to and powerfully witnessed to by the early church who declare the power of King Jesus, that King Jesus is the one who is Lord and Christ.

He has been declared as such by being raised from the dead, declaring to the people in Athens that Christ has been made judge by the father, by the resurrection from the dead. And he has been marked out by that for that purpose and that all people must answer to him. This is a very powerful message that should be seen to have a political weight.

It's in conflict with the rulers of this age, people like Herod. And so Herod, the Pharaoh

type figure within this story, a Pharaoh type figure who's seen in continuity with Herod the Great, who was the one who tried to put the baby boys to death, like the Pharaoh of Exodus chapter one. He's also a figure like Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas and Pharaoh are connected together. When we see John the Baptist being put to death by Herod Antipas, we also see the connection with someone like John the Baptist and Elijah, Herod Antipas and Ahab. And then Ahab is connected with Pharaoh.

If we read the story of Naboth's vineyard, that's an interesting thing to notice. Naboth's vineyard, a vineyard is a significant thing. It's associated with Israel.

Israel is a vine within a vineyard that God has planted. And Ahab wants to take Naboth's vineyard and turn it into a vegetable garden. Now, if you read the Old Testament and you know your Old Testament well, you'll know that the vegetable garden is associated with Egypt.

He wants to turn the vineyard of Israel into an Egypt like vegetable garden. And so he's a Pharaoh type figure. And then as we go back and we look at Pharaoh, the early Pharaohs themselves, we can see that their persecution of the people of God is very much in continuity or is very much an example of what we see later on being developed through Ahab and through Herod Antipas and through these other figures.

At the beginning of Matthew, we also see this example of Herod dying and being told and Joseph being told that the people who sought the life of his child have died and so that he can go back into the land. If we read Matthew 2 alongside Exodus 4, we should see a very striking parallel there. So in Exodus 4 we read, in Exodus 4 we read, So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt and see whether they are still alive.

And Jethro said to Moses, go in peace. And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, go return to Egypt for all the men are dead who sought your life. Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey and he returned to the land of Egypt.

And Moses took the rod of God in his hand. In Matthew we see a very similar passage in Matthew chapter 2, if I find it. Matthew chapter 2. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, arise, take the young child and his mother and go to the land of Israel.

For those who sought the young child's life were dead. Then he arose, took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel. So again, similar patterns.

We see Herod and we see Pharaoh. They're connected characters. And here we see again, Herod and Pharaoh within Acts 12.

They're associated characters that the rising up of the people of God, the rising up of

God's servant Peter and the striking down of the wicked king, the hard hearted king. These are paralleled events. And so there's an Exodus pattern.

So what we see in both of these examples, the connection with Christ's resurrection and the connection with the Exodus, we see a pattern of God's people being made part of a deeper story, the story of Christ that brings everything to a crescendo. And then the story of the Exodus, which represents the depth and the historical depth of this story, that this has been going on since the very beginning. We see this pattern within Genesis and we see it far more developed within the book of Exodus.

And as we go through the Bible, this is something that we see more generally, which is why I've written this book on the subject with Andrew Wilson, that the Exodus pattern is one that is structurally present throughout the books of the Bible. Everywhere you look, almost, you will see this Exodus pattern being played out. It's a pattern that is not just a neat literary trick, nor is it just something that is an interesting quirk of history.

Rather, it's something that shows the deep unity of God's work of salvation. And it shows not just the unity of that work within the book of the Bible, the books of the Bible, but it shows its unity as something that we are made part of. The people of God are brought into this pattern, a pattern that was brought to its climax in Christ is now something that the church is being knit into.

We see this here with Peter and we see it also within our own lives as well, as we are made to have lives that have the patterns of God's Exodus that he achieved, as we see the patterns of Christ's resurrection worked out in us. These are things that we can commemorate and we celebrate within baptism in the Lord's Supper. It's something that we memorialize and we speak about as we declare God's great works in the past.

It's something that we are caught up in as we wait for the deliverance to come. As we are people who wander in the wilderness of this age, waiting for God to bring us into the promised land that he has prepared for us, as we are led by the spirit into the age to come, into the new creation, the promised land. We are people who are freed from the Pharaoh of sin who pursued us.

He's drowned in the waters and we are brought free. We are those who are knit into Christ, into Christ who has gone this path before us. He has pioneered the way.

He has torn open the abyss of death so that we might walk through on dry land behind him. And so these patterns are patterns that help us to understand who we are, where we are, and where we're going towards. So this is a very brief description of Acts 12.

There's so much more that could be said about it. But I hope you can see these patterns within it, this pattern of resurrection, this pattern of exodus, and to see maybe something of how this could be significant for us. Thank you.