

Stealing God's Glory (Acts 12:20-24)^a

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Context

1. Herod killed James, the brother of John. Next, he imprisoned Peter with the intention of bringing him before the Jews—which would have likely led to Peter's death.
2. As we saw last time, God intervened by sending an angel to miraculously lead Peter out of prison.
3. The passage continues by describing the vanity of Herod and his unpleasant end.

Passage (Acts 12:20-24)

[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 he was eaten by worms and died. [24] But the word of God grew and multiplied.¹

1. The Jewish historian Josephus records:

[Herod] put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god; . . . Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. . . . Accordingly he was carried into the palace; and the rumor went abroad everywhere, that he would certainly die in a little time. . . . (350) And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign;²

2. Failure to glorify God, *an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God* (Acts 12:23).

3. An example of the abuse of God's glory

A. Two aspects which mix and reinforce each other:

1. A mass of people who elevate a person beyond their due: *the people kept shouting, "the voice of a god and not of a man!"* (Acts 12:22).
2. A vain person, who allows or even facilitates the adulation of the crowd: *an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God* (Acts 12:23).

B. Today: take a closer look at the second aspect, "stealing God's glory."

Glory and idolatry: how are they related?

1. What is glory?

the exercise and display of what constitutes the distinctive excellence of the subject to which it is spoken; thus, in respect to God, His glory is the manifestation of His divine attributes and perfections, or such a visible splendor as indicates the possession and presence of these (Ex. 33:18-22; 16:7, 10; John 1:14; 2:11; 2 Pet. 1:17; etc.). God's "glory is the correlative of his holiness . . . is that in which holiness comes to expression. Glory is the expression of holiness, as beauty is the expression of health."³

- The manifestation of God's divine attributes and perfections.
- The expression His holiness (with an emphasis on understanding holiness as *uniqueness*, not just purity).
- To give God glory, then, is *to recognize, attribute, and express that which is uniquely due God on account of His unique attributes*—by whatever fashion that may take: worship, verbal expression, obedient living, devotion, expressing God's purpose through our lives.

2. Glory is uniquely God's

- A. *I am the Lord, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images* (Isa. 42:8).
- B. . . . *I will not give my glory to another* (Isa. 48:11b).
- C. This what make's a statement by Jesus all the more amazing: *And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was* (John 17:5).

3. What is idolatry, how is it related to God's glory?

A. Definition of idolatry⁴

I. "The paying of divine honor to any created thing."

II. "The ascription of divine power to natural entities."

III. It may include, "*idealism*, or the worship of abstractions or mental qualities."

B. The essence of idolatry: taking attention and glory due God and placing it elsewhere.

C. Conveying upon the creaturely that which is due the Creator alone.

4. How important is God's glory, how is it relevant for living?

A. Shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession:

- I. First on the list, question *numero uno!*
- II. Q: 1. "What is the chief end of man?" or, stated another way, "Why does mankind exist?"
- III. A: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."
- IV. To acknowledge that all that we have comes from God, depends upon God, and is meant to glorify Him — to be turned back toward him in recognition and offering.
- V. The most basic answer to the question: "What is God's will for my life?"

5. A key concept: the Creator/creation distinction

- A. There is only one Creator - God.
- B. All else is creation.
- C. In relation to living beings: there is One Creator, all else is *creature*.
- D. Between the two is an unbridgeable gap concerning the nature of being (ontology).
 - I. God alone is eternal - all else that experiences eternity does so only by dependence upon God.
 - a. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, [the] Beginning and [the] End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).*
 - II. God alone is living - all else that experiences life does so only by dependence upon God.
 - a. *14 If He should set His heart on it, [If] He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust (Job 34:14-15).*
 - III. God alone is holy - all else that expresses holiness does so only through connection with Him.
 - a. *"To whom . . . will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy [One].*
- E. God is unique!

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth

useless. Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble. "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.⁵

Abusing God's gifts: turning God's gifts *against* Him.

1. Our personal abilities and talents are given by God.

- A. Paul warns the Corinthian Church, . . . *that you may learn . . . not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.* ⁷ *For who makes you differ [from another]? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive [it], why do you boast as if you had not received [it]?* (1Cor. 4:6-7).
- B. Even among the Corinthian believers, there was a basic misunderstanding that whatever talents and abilities each had should not be a source of boasting: that it all came from God.
- C. God has given all men gifts with the ultimate intention that they serve and glorify Him. But the record of history is that it is often the most gifted who utilize their God-given gifts *against* God.

2. Gifted artists and musicians

- A. Given enormous artistic, creative, or musical talents by God.
- B. John Lennon, of the Beatles, in 1966 remarked:

Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; . . . Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me.⁶

- I. A few years later,⁷ it was non-other than John Lennon who would go on to write and record the incredibly popular song, "Imagine."
 - a. Contradicts God, robs His glory.
 - i. "Imagine there's no heaven . . . No hell beneath us . . . Above us only sky [not God!]"
 - ii. "Imagine there's . . . no religion too."
 - b. Ranked one of the 100 most-performed songs of the 20th century.
 - c. *Guinness World Records* named it the second best single of all time.
- II. IMMENSE gifting: used to glorify God? NO! Directed against God and His revelation.

3. Gifted scientists: Charles Darwin, Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking.

- A. The foundation: Darwinian Evolution which undergirds atheism and humanism, stripping God of His due glory as Creator and Sustainer of life.
- B. Instead of glorifying God for their gifts and mathematical eloquence, they worship theories, mankind, and even nature itself.
- C. Carl Sagan on our place in the universe:

The significance of our lives and our fragile planet is . . . determined only by our own wisdom and courage. We are the custodians of life's meaning. We long for a Parent to care for us, to forgive us our errors, to save us from our childish mistakes. But knowledge is preferable to ignorance. Better by far to embrace the hard truth than a reassuring fable. If we crave some cosmic purpose, then let us find ourselves a worthy goal.⁸

- D. Richard Dawkins on creation:

The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference." Richard Dawkins.⁹

- E. Stephen Hawking on creation:

The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies¹¹

- F. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, . . . (Rom. 1:20-22).*
- G. This is the primary form of idolatry in our technical day, the altar at which much of modern science worships: ascribing the super intellect and creative abilities of God to . . . *randomness, chance, nothingness, inevitability!*

What can we learn from the key Biblical examples: men who glorify themselves in the place of God?

1. The pride of the creature.

- A. A HUGE biblical theme¹²
- B. *These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: [#1!] A proud look . . . (Pr. 6:16).*

2. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon

- A. Enormous building projects of which the bricks bear a continuing witness to the egotism of the king.

Sir Henry Rawlinson writes : "I have examined the bricks in situ belonging, perhaps, to one hundred different towns and cities in the neighborhood of Bagdad, and I never found any other legend than that of Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon."¹³

Many of the bricks taken out of Babylon in the archaeological excavations bear the name and inscription of Nebuchadnezzar stamped on them. One of the records of Nebuchadnezzar sounds almost like the boast that Daniel recorded . . . Dan. 4:30; it reads, "The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever" (BAB, 479: PMOT, 302)¹⁴

- B. His vanity, the many "I" statements revealed by archaeology.

A great wall which like a mountain cannot be moved I made of mortar and brick. . . . Its foundation upon the bosom of the abyss . . . its top I raised mountain high. I triplicated the city wall in order to strengthen it, I caused a great protecting wall to run at the foot of the wall of burnt brick. . . . Upon the great gates strong bulls . . . and terrible serpents ready to strike, I placed. . . . A third great moat-wall . . . I built with mortar and brick . . . The produce of the lands, the products of the mountains, the bountiful wealth of the sea, within [Babylon] I gathered. . . . The palace . . . I rebuilt in Babylon with great cedars I brought from Lebanon, the beautiful forest to roof it. . . . Huge cedars from Lebanon, their forest with my clean hands I cut down. With radiant gold I overlaid them, with jewels I adorned them. (J. Thompson 1982a:191-193) [emphasis added]¹⁵

- C. God's judgment falls.

- I. The arrogance of the king: *At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! . . . That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.* (Dan. 4:29-33)

- II. Spurgeon:

See Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty builder of Babylon creeping on the earth, devouring grass like oxen, until his nails had grown like birds' claws, and his hair like eagles' feathers. *Pride made the boaster a beast, as once before it made an angel a devil.* God hates high looks, and never fails to bring them down. All the arrows of God are aimed at proud hearts.¹⁶

3. King of Babylon, as empowered by Lucifer (Isa. 14)¹⁷

A. Attributes

- I. Pomp - brought down to Sheol (Isa. 14:11).
- II. Energized by Satan - *How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer . . .* (Isa. 14:12).¹⁸
- III. Pride - *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High* (Isa. 14:13-14).
 - a. The "Most High" - of all the names referring to God: El Elyon - the Highest of the Highest.

IV. Self-deception

- a. Tremendous self-deception: attempting to erase the Creator/creature distinction, as if that which is dependent and temporal and dependent could ever achieve independence and immortality.
- b. Although dressed differently, this is the essential worldview of Humanism, and especially Transhumanism—fueled by a Darwinian denial of the Creator/creature distinction.
- c. Self deception concerning greatness. In the end it will be said, *Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms?* (Isa. 14:16).
- d. In the end, men turn out to be "just men."

4. King of Tyre, empowered by Satan (Eze. 28)¹⁹

A. Attributes

- I. Pride - *Because your heart is lifted up . . . I am a god . . . You set your heart as the heart of a god* (Eze. 28:2).
- II. Gifted - *You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty . . . You were perfect in your ways . . . Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty* (Eze. 28:12, 15, 17).
- III. Power/wealth - *your heart is lifted up because of your riches* (Eze. 28:5).
- IV. Self-deception - *Yet you are a man, and not a god . . . You shall be a man, and not a god, in the hand of him who slays you* (Eze. 28:2,9).
 - a. Mortality: the inescapable attribute of the creature.

b. *on the day you were created . . . from the day you were created . . .* (Eze. 28:13, 15).

5. Antichrist - the ultimate historical manifestation of a "glory thief."

A. Proudful declarations:

I. *A little horn . . . with a mouth speaking pompous words* (Dan. 7:8).

II. *I watched then because of the pompous words the which the horn was speaking* (Dan. 7:11).

III. *He shall speak words against the Most High* (Dan. 7:25).

a. Notice the emphasis: El Elyon!

IV. *He shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods* (Dan. 11:36).

V. *He was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies* (Rev. 13:5).

VI. *Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?* (Rev. 13:4).

B. Empowered by Satan

I. *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders* (2Th. 2:9).

II. . . . *The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority* (Rev. 13:2).

C. Seeks worship - stealing God's glory

I. *He shall exalt and magnify himself above every god* (Dan. 11:36).

II. *He shall regard neither the God of his fathers . . . nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all* (Dan. 11:37).

III. *[He] opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God* (2Th. 2:4).

IV. *So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"* (Rev. 13:4).

a. A demonically-inspired parody of the song of the Israelites after God vanquished the Egyptians in the Red Sea: *Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?* (Ex. 15:11).

V. *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, . . . (Rev. 13:8a).*

Summary

1. **Stealing God's glory is the ultimate motivation of Satan.**
2. **Stealing God's glory is the natural inclination of fallen men, just like Herod in this passage, who unwittingly aid Satan in this quest.**
3. **Participating in this grand larceny undermines the very reason mankind was created: our ultimate purpose.**
 - A. Q: "What is the chief end of man?" "Why does mankind exist?"
 - B. A: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."
 - C. Everything the Christian is and does revolves around this.
 - D. Our time, our devotion, our worship, our talent, our treasure—our very purpose for living!

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 12:20-24](#)
2. [Ref-0411, Antiquities of the Jews \(19.8.2\)](#)
3. [Ref-0185, glory](#)
4. [Ref-0185, idolatry](#)
5. [NKJV, \(Isa. 40:21-25\)](#)
6. [TDT, Maureen Cleave, "The John Lennon I Knew"](#)
7. John Lennon wrote *Imagine* in 1971.
8. [ICR, Larry Vardiman, "Carl Sagan's Pale Blue Dot"](#)
9. [ROOE, 131-132](#)
10. [Ref-0784, 28](#)
11. [Ref-0784, 41,44](#)
12. Concerning God's condemnation of pride: Lev. [26:19](#); Deu. [17:20](#); 2S. [22:28](#); Job [10:16](#); [35:12](#); [40:11-12](#); Ps. [10:4](#); [18:27](#); [31:23](#); [36:11](#); [40:4](#); [59:12](#); [73:6](#); [75:4-5](#); [101:5](#); [119:21](#); [123:4](#); [138:5,6](#); Pr. [8:13](#); [11:2](#); [13:10](#); [14:3](#); [15:25](#); [16:5,18](#); [18:12](#); [21:4,24](#); [28:25](#); [30:12-13](#); Ecc. [7:8](#); Isa. [2:12](#); [10:12-15,33](#); [13:11,19](#); [16:6](#); [23:9](#); [25:11](#); [28:3](#); Jer. [13:9,15,17](#); [43:2](#); [48:29](#); [50:29-32](#); Eze. [7:10,24](#); [28:2,17](#); [29:3,9](#); [31:10](#); Dan. [4:30,37](#); [5:20](#); Hos. [13:6](#); Amos [6:8](#); Hab. [2:4-5](#); Zep. [2:10](#); [3:11](#); Mal. [4:1](#); Mat. [23:11-12](#); 1Cor. [4:18](#); 2Ti. [3:2](#); Jas. [4:6](#); 1Jn. [2:16](#); 1Pe. [5:5-6](#)

13. [Ref-1392](#), 124
 14. [Ref-1394](#), 196
 15. [Ref-1322](#), 376
 16. [Ref-0595](#), March 6th, evening
 17. Isaiah wrote between 739-686 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar ascended to the throne almost a century later, in 606 B.C. Some commentators view the human king to be Sennacherib, who had jurisdiction over both Assyria and Babylon (706-781 B.C.).
 18. "O Lucifer" is [הֵילֵל בֶּן־שָׁחַר](#) [*hēlāl bēn-šāḥar*], *O Morning Star, Son of the Dawn*.
 19. Ethbaal III was king of Tyre in 591-590, 573-572 B.C. He was removed from his throne by Nebuchadnezzar in 573-572 B.C.
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Sources:

- ICR** [Institute for Creation Research](#)^d
- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- ROOE** Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden*
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).
- Ref-0411** Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. *The works of Josephus : Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987).
- Ref-0595** Spurgeon, C. H. (1995). *Morning and evening : Daily readings*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- Ref-0784** *Journal of Creation*, Creation Ministries International [www.CreationOnTheWeb.com].
- Ref-1322** Alfred Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998). ISBN:[978-0-8010-1129-0](#)^e.
- Ref-1392** Joseph Augustus Seiss, *Voices from Babylon; or, The Records of Daniel the Prophet* (Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates, 1879).
- Ref-1394** Joseph P. Free, Howard F. Voss, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). ISBN:[0-310-47461-4](#)^f.
- TDT** *The Daily Telegraph*, October 5, 2005. Retrieved August 5, 2014.
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Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/39_Acts_12_20-24/index.htm.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d** - See <http://www.icr.org/article/carl-sagans-pale-blue-dot/>.
- e** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-8010-1129-0>.
- f** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-310-47461-4>.