

WHO WILL COME TO THE RESCUE? / Sunday, November 1, 2015

Unifying Topic: GOD RESCUES PETER

I. Herod Moves Against The Church (Acts 12:1-5)

II. Peter Is Rescued (Acts 12:6-11)

The Main Thought: Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. (Acts 12:5, KJV).

Unifying Principle: In the midst of perilous life situations, deliverance sometimes appears to come through miraculous means. How might the faithful be rescued from dangerous life circumstances? Acts shows that the fervent prayer of the church and the work of an angel provided Peter's deliverance.

Lesson Aim: To examine the story of the death of the Apostle James and the imprisonment and deliverance of the Apostle Peter.

Life Aim: To understand that, while God does not always save us from trials in life, fervent prayer will help us face whatever He wills for us.

HISTORY:

Acts 11:19-30 Because of the leading of God's Spirit in Peter, the Gentiles in Caesarea are now believers in Christ receiving the filling of the Holy Spirit, water baptism, and God granting repentance (**vv.13-18**). The Christian believers had fled and were scattered abroad because of persecution during the martyrdom of Stephen. They traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch to scatter the Good News, but only to the Jews, but some preached Jesus to the Grecians. And a great number of these became believers. "*The Lord's hand was upon them*" meant that He was pleased with the gospel being preached (**vv.19-21**). This news traveled to the church in Jerusalem and this time Barnabas was sent to help the new converts. He is known as the "*son of Consolation*" or "*Encourager*" for when he saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain and stay close to the Lord, whatever the cost. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith. And as a result a large number of people were added to the Lord (**vv.22-24**). Barnabas then goes to Tarsus to search for Saul and upon finding him he brought him to Antioch for a full year teaching a number of the new converts that were first call "*Christians*." The believers at Antioch were the first to be called "*Christians*" (**vv.25-26**). Prophets came down from Jerusalem and one name Agabus stood up in one of the meetings by the Spirit and predicted a great famine coming to the land of Israel in the reign of Claudius Caesar. In response to this prophetic announcement, the believers at the church of Antioch determined to send relief; set aside a certain percentage of their income to collect contributions for the brethren who lived in Judea. The relief fund was to be sent to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul who were to manage the affairs of the congregation (**vv.27-30**).

LESSON:

Acts 12:1-5 Herod Moves Against The Church

12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. This King Herod was Herod Agrippa I, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. Herod, partly Jewish moved against, vexing the Christians. This word "*vex*" or "*persecute*" means to oppress, to torment, do harm, to do evil against.

12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. As Herod attacked the church, he went after the leaders. James the brother of John was killed with the sword by Herod. Among the Jews there were four kinds of deaths: 1. Stoning; 2. burning; 3. killing with the sword, or beheading; and, 4. strangling. James was the first of the apostles to fall victim to martyrdom. Stephen was the first deacon to fall victim to martyrdom.

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Christ had told James he would suffer as a martyr. "...*My cup you shall indeed drink...*" Matt.20:23. Although this promise was made to both James and John, John outlived all the other apostles, but nevertheless suffered.

12:3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)— Herod saw an opportunity to please the Jewish leaders who opposed them. He would rather please men than God. Apparently, the conversion of Cornelius and the founding of churches throughout the Gentile world upset some to the Jews to no end. This was a shrew approach on Herod's part, for by persecuting and seeking to destroy the church...

- it would keep Jews quiet, keep them supporting Rome's policies.
- it would solidify his own prestige and power with the authorities back in Rome.

So, he sought an opportunity to go further by arresting Peter. Then it was the days of "*Unleavened Bread*", which is often called "*Passover*" because only unleavened bread was eaten during these seven days. Leavened bread required time to rise. God instructed the Israelites to omit leaven (yeast) from their bread because of the need for a hasty departure from Egypt. This was the time for the Israelites to remember their deliverance from the hands of the Egyptians (Ex.12). More Jews were in the city than usual and thereby, Herod could impress most of them by arresting Peter at that time.

12:4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. "*Quaternions*", a group of four soldiers whom Peter was handed over to when he was apprehended and put him in prison. He was probably guarded by sixteen soldiers—four soldiers at a time served two separate three hour watches a twenty-four hour stretch. One wrist of the prisoner was usually chained to the wrist of a guard. The reason for the extra security with Peter was that of the huge throng of pilgrims visiting the city during the Passover. In the midst of the mass confusion within the city, Herod felt some of Peter's friends might attempt a rescue. ¹¹"*Easter*" is never mentioned in the original Scriptures. The Greek word that the King James Version translates as "*Easter*" is actually the word "*Pascha*" (*Hebrew: Pesach*) which means "*Passover*." It was during an annual Passover celebration that Jesus was crucified at Jerusalem. Passover is an Annual Jewish religious celebration instituted by God (Leviticus 23:5). So, Peter was heavily guarded as they intended to bring him out to the people after Passover.

Acts 12:6-11 Peter Is Rescued

12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. Herod's plan was to execute Peter, but the believers were praying for Peter's safety and sovereign deliverance. As he was kept in prison, prayer without ceasing (fervent, continuous prayer) was going on by the believers unto God for him. The picture captivates the church stretched out, prostrate before God, earnestly and fervently; not letting up; intense prayers crying out to God. This was not in public assembly, for it was evidently not safe to meet, but in little groups; in private houses, one of which was Mary's. As we will find out, Peter was saved. Why was James not? Believers have to remember that God knows the day when our labor will be over and will be called home to be with the Him to receive the fruit of our labor. It was James' time. God's plan is always higher than our plans.

12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two

¹ <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t019.html>
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soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. This happens the night Peter is to be executed, the same night he slept between two soldiers bound with chains, and other guards standing at the prison gate.

12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. Behold, God sends an angel to the rescue. He comes and stands beside Peter. He's arrayed in shining light in the prison; a light in darkness to the rescue. It probably shocked Peter. The angel struck Peter on the side, raising him up saying "*Arise quickly*"; get up quickly, and at that time the chains fell off Peter's hands. What a miraculous deliverance!

12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. Without thought, Peter had to obey the angel. He was to prepare himself to leave the prison. Peter was still in a gaze. Four things were to happen:

1. Gird thyself; was told to get dressed and put on his clothes
2. Bind on thy sandals.
3. Cast thy garment about thee; throw his cloak round him.
4. Follow me (the angel).

12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. But, Peter thought he was having a vision and didn't quite know if what he saw was real; that he was in some semi-conscious state, so it took a moment to collect his thoughts, but he went out of the prison and followed the angel.

12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. After leaving the prison cell, Peter successfully, by the leading of the angel, made his way through the first and second wards (the two guarded checkpoints before the gate) that led to the city.

12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. When Peter came to himself, he realized the Lord had sent an angel; hath delivered him out of the hand of Herod, and from all the spoiled anticipation the Jewish people were expecting to do to him.

SUMMARY:

King Herod began to harass the church in Jerusalem and now the leaders. The first apostle to be killed was James, the brother of John with a sword. Herod saw that this would please the Jews. He proceeded to have Peter arrested and imprisoned in the days of Unleavened Bread. He was heavily guarded as he was delivered into the prison, guarded by four quaternions of soldiers to be kept after the Passover intending to bring him before the Jewish people. Peter was kept there, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God on his behalf (**vv. 1-5**).

The time for Herod to bring Peter forth, that same night as Peter slept bound between two soldiers and the

keepers at the door, behold, an angel of the Lord, standing brightly shining before Peter. He struck Peter on the side; arousing him, telling him to arise quickly. Peter's chains fell off his hands. He was told to gird himself, bind on his sandals; throw on his garment and follow him. Peter went out and followed him, as though he was seeing a vision. But as he passed the first and the second gate that led into the city, it opened by itself to them, and he went into the street. Immediately the angel departed from him, he then realized what had happened. It came to him that the Lord sent the angel that rescued and saved him out of Herod's hand, and from what the Jewish people were expecting to do to him. Through the plan of God, Herod's plan didn't come to fruition. An angel of the Lord freed Peter from prison (**vv.6-11**).