

PETER RESCUED FROM PRISON

Acts 12:1-19

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Peter

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- King Herod's actions: he arrested believers (Ac 12:1); he had James killed (Ac 12:2); he put Peter in prison (Ac 12:3); he had a search made for Peter (Ac 12:19); he ordered the guards executed (Ac 12:19).
- Peter's situation: King Herod put Peter in prison with soldiers to guard him (Ac 12:4); the church prayed for him (Ac 12:5); Peter was to go to trial the next day (Ac 12:6); he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains (Ac 12:6); guards were on duty at the door (Ac 12:6); the Lord sent his angel to rescue him (Ac 12:7-9); the church didn't believe Peter was free (Ac 12:15-16).
- Prayer: church prayed to God for Peter (Ac 12:5); people were gathered to pray (Ac 12:12).

Key-attitudes:

- Church's desperation when James was killed and Peter was imprisoned.
- Peter's hopelessness in prison.
- Peter's surprise when he was freed from prison.
- Christians' unbelief when Peter appeared at the house where they had gathered.
- King Herod's arrogance.

Initial-situation:

After Pentecost, the number of Jewish believers increased. Saul tried to destroy the church, and believers fled from Jerusalem. Saul was converted on the road to Damascus.

Some scattered Jewish believers went to Antioch and told the Greeks the Good News about the Lord Jesus. Barnabas and Saul were teaching the Christians in Antioch. A visiting prophet predicted that a severe famine would affect the world. The Antioch church sent a contribution to the needy believers in Jerusalem.

Initial-problem:

King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church and had the apostle James executed.

Final-situation:

King Herod had a thorough but unsuccessful search made for Peter, who had been rescued from prison by an angel.

BIBLE STORY

It was about the time that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with contributions for the needy poor.

King Herod arrested some church members. King Herod had the apostle James, the brother of John, killed by the sword. King Herod saw that James' death pleased the Jews, so King Herod put Peter in prison with sixteen soldiers in units of four to guard Peter. King Herod intended to put Peter on public trial.

Peter was in prison, but the church prayed to God for him. The night before Peter was to go to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Guards were on duty at the door. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared and woke Peter up. The angel said, "Quick, get up!" The chains fell off Peter's wrists.

The angel told Peter, "Put on your clothes and sandals, and follow me." Peter followed the angel out of the prison; however, Peter thought he was seeing a vision. Peter didn't know the angel was real. The angel and Peter passed the guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. The gate opened for them and they went through it. The angel and Peter walked the length of one street; suddenly the angel left Peter (Ac 12:1-10).

Peter came to his senses. Peter realized that the Lord had sent his angel to rescue him from King Herod and from persecution from the Jewish people. Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people were gathered to pray. Peter knocked at the outside door. Rhoda, a servant girl, answered the door. Rhoda recognized Peter's voice. Rhoda was so overjoyed that she forgot to open the door, but ran back inside the house and shouted, "Peter is at the door!"

The people told Rhoda, "You're crazy." Rhoda insisted that Peter was at the door. They said, "It must be his angel." (*This reflected the common Jewish belief that a person's guardian angel would sometimes appear shortly after a person's death.*)

Peter kept knocking. They opened the door, saw him, and were amazed that it really was Peter himself. Peter told them to be quiet, and he told his story about how the Lord rescued him out of prison. Peter said, "Tell James, the brother of Jesus, and the other believers about this." Then Peter left for another place (Ac 12:11-17).

Daylight came and the soldiers were in an uproar over what happened to Peter. King Herod had a thorough but unsuccessful search made for Peter. King Herod then ordered that the guards be executed (Ac 12:18-19).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The King Herod in this story was the nephew of the King Herod who ruled during the time of Jesus. What does the story reveal about King Herod's character?
2. Why would King Herod, a Roman official, join in the opposition to the church?
3. Why do some government leaders today oppose the church?
4. When James was murdered and Peter arrested, what was the reaction of the church?
5. How do you explain that God saved Peter, but not James?
6. What happened when God answered the believers' prayers and released Peter from prison?
7. How has God surprised you by the way he answered your prayer?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Christians may suffer from common crises, and they may suffer persecution for their faith.** Believers in Jerusalem suffered as a result of the widespread famine (Ac 11:28). Believers also suffered because Jewish and Roman governmental persecution against them intensified as time passed (Ac 12:1-3).
2. **Life is full of difficult questions that remain unanswered in this life.** We do not know why God allowed King Herod to kill James and yet God miraculously saved Peter (Ac 12:1-11).
3. **The ruler who desires to please people will fight God.** King Herod persecuted James and Peter to please the Jews (Ac 12:1-3).
4. **God's enemies cannot frustrate his plans.** King Herod killed the apostle James and planned to kill Peter. God answered the church's prayers and orchestrated Peter's release from prison (Ac 12:7-10). God previously orchestrated Peter's release from prison in Jerusalem (Ac 5:18-20). He later did the same thing for Paul (Ac 16:23-29).
5. **Those who pray may be surprised by the way God answers their prayers.** Peter was in prison while believers were in a home praying for him. However, they didn't expect him to show up at the house. When Peter arrived, they didn't believe that it was really him (Ac 12:12-16).
6. **The effectiveness of believers' prayers doesn't depend upon the leadership of the church.** The leaders of the church were absent from the group that met to pray at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Ac 12:17).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Ask for volunteers to tell the story from the viewpoint of the characters in the story. Retell the story. Then volunteers tell the story from the viewpoint of their designated character:

- Rhoda telling the church that Peter is at the door.
- A Christian who was praying for Peter's release from prison, but didn't believe Peter could be at the door knocking.
- A soldier reporting to King Herod that Peter isn't in prison.