

In previous passages, we saw the revelation given to Peter that God loves the world and wants the gospel to be shared with the Gentiles (Acts 11:15-18). Some of the disciples who fled the early persecution at the time of Stephen's martyrdom had gone to Antioch where the first mostly Gentile church was planted.

¹ About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, Acts 12:1-2 Herod Agrippa was educated in Rome. His fellow classmates became powerful and saw to it that their friend Agrippa gradually increased the area he ruled. By 41 A.D. he added Judea to his region and then controlled as much area as his grandfather, Herod the Great.

We read that the persecution of Christians by Jewish leaders died down after Saul converted (Acts 9:31). Now it has picked up again led by king Agrippa. The growing difference between the Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah and those who did not was behind the persecution. The message of the Gospel causes the same reaction today (John 7:43). When Christians declare that without accepting Jesus' sacrifice for us we are doomed to face eternal judgment, the world either accepts the good news and is saved or is offended by the message. That is understandable for it sounds like we are saying that we are right and everyone else is wrong. However, our message is really that we are all wrong and all need Jesus. That is a humbling message. It offends the prideful (1 Corinthians 1:18). We would like to think man is basically good, but the depravity of man is one of the most empirically verifiable realities of human nature.

Seeing public sentiment turning against the people of The Way, Agrippa decided to bring to trial James, the brother of John. Those two were called Sons of Thunder. James was one of the inner three disciples (Matthew 17:1). Agrippa most likely tried him for sedition and sentenced him to beheading with the sword. The charge of sedition and the execution style were Roman. This was state sponsored persecution. It was a blow to the early church as this was the first apostle to be executed.

³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. Acts 12:3 It was April of 44 A.D. Perhaps Agrippa thought by getting rid of the leaders of The Way, the movement would die out. Seeing a chance to increase his popularity, he decided to arrest Peter.

⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. Acts 12:4 Most politicians love the praises of the people. As the Christian movement was still a minority and getting under the skin of many Jews, arresting Peter was one way to get a ratings boost. Agrippa assigned four squads of soldiers to guard Peter, a squad of four soldiers for each watch of the four night shifts. Two would be chained to him in prison. Two would stand before the cell door to guard it. Agrippa may have heard of an earlier jail break when all the disciples were let out of prison by an angel

Commented [PW1]: Acts 11:15-18 (ESV)

¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning.

¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Commented [PW2]: Acts 9:31 (ESV)

³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Commented [PW3]: John 7:43 (ESV)

⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him.

Commented [PW4]: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Commented [PW5]: Matthew 17:1 (ESV)

¹ And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

and followed the angel's command to preach in the temple. We read about that in Acts 5:19-21. Perhaps Agrippa thought Christians might try to physically help Peter escape.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Acts 12:5 Peter was the one whom Jesus asked to feed the sheep and tend to them (John 21:16-17). His arrest was another blow to the church. Many of the believers gathered to pray. The one place we read about is the home of John Mark's mother. Perhaps others were assembled at other locations as well. We aren't told if they were praying for Peter's deliverance or for him to stay faithful to the end. After all, he had failed when tested in Caiaphas courtyard (Matthew 26:74).

Earnest prayer was going up to God. **The Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of praying for one another in several of his letters (2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18).** I have a team of people who are out of state who I can ask for prayer regarding specific situations and needs. I know a number of you pray for me regularly, and if my ministry is to have any lasting effect, it is because of the grace of God and the prayers of God's people. God often brings to mind individuals in this church for whom I then know I need to pray. I can't explain the mystery of God's sovereignty and how prayer affects things. I just know both are true. God expects us to pray. Jesus told us to pray (Matthew 6:5-6). James tells us the prayer of a righteous man has great power (James 5:16).

A few months ago, the Lord put on my heart that we need to step up our prayer ministry. We are to be a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13). Since that conviction came, I've been putting on the bulletin quotes on prayer. We are going to open the church for prayer on Monday mornings from 8 A.M. The Hispanic church that meets downstairs has seen a big turn around since they began having prayer from 5:30 A.M. to 8 A.M. each morning. The Lord can teach us to pray and to pray earnestly for one another and for the church. We've seen amazing answers to prayer, but God has much more for us if we will pray His will for one another's lives and the ministry of Wayside. I know this entryway to the city was God's planning. We need to join Him in what He is doing. I also know there is a spiritual battle going on over God's purposes for it. That is another reason we need to pray.

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. Acts 12:6 It is the night before the planned trial and execution of Peter. Sometimes God waits until the very last moment so that our faith is stretched. Peter is sound asleep while chained to two soldiers. The guards are at the doors watching for any trouble. How can he sleep at such a time? He completely trusts the Lord. His life is in God's hands (Proverbs 3:24). He has no need to worry about tomorrow. If he dies, he goes to be with Jesus. If he lives he can continue to serve Him. Total trust in God is the best sleep aid! As the hymn says, "Safe in the arms of Jesus, there by His love o'ershadowed, sweetly my soul shall rest."²

Commented [PW6]: Acts 5:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

Commented [PW7]: John 21:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 26:74 (ESV)

⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed.

Commented [PW9]: 2 Corinthians 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Commented [PW10]: Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Commented [PW11]: Matthew 6:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Commented [PW12]: James 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Commented [PW13]: Matthew 21:13 (ESV)

¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

Commented [PW14]: Proverbs 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Commented [PW15]: Crosby, Frances Safe in the Arms of Jesus 1868

⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. Acts 12:7 The presence of the angel illuminated the cell. Peter was still sound asleep. The way the story is relayed is rather humorous. The angel had to poke Peter in the ribs to get him to wake up. Then he had to tell him to get up. And just at that moment the chains that held him to the other soldiers dropped from his wrists. It looks like angels have charge over the material things of this world when operating at God's command.

⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." Acts 12:8 Peter seemed to be in such a daze that the angel had to order him step by step. Get up. Get dressed. Put on your sandals. Wrap your cloak around you. Follow me. It reminds me of getting grandkids up when they have to get ready for school. You almost have to tell them to take each and every bite of their breakfast.

⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. Acts 12:9 Remember, Peter saw the vision of the sheet with the unclean animals. He knows visions. He was not sure if what was happening was real or a vision. After all, this kind of thing doesn't happen every day. I think of the times when my alarm goes off at 5 A.M. and I get up and walk into the kitchen, put the coffee in the coffee maker, turn it on, and five minutes later I realize I didn't put any water in it. A few times I put the coffee in and forgot to put the filter in. That's about as close as I can get to personally relating to what Peter was experiencing. I realize that's not very close, but having never had such a clear vision it's the best I can relate. Peter was about to become fully awake.

¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. Acts 12:10 They walked past the two outer guards. Were the guards in a daze, asleep, or blinded? Or perhaps the whole world was on pause while Peter left the prison. I've read several different testimonies of people who were directed to go through foreign immigrations and just walked right through as if invisible. Once Peter was outside and down the road, the city gate opened. Again, we see the power of the angel over the physical world. Once outside the city and down the street the angel went on his way (Psalm 103:20).

¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." Acts 12:11 Standing on the road outside the city all by himself in the dark, he finally realized the angel broke him out of jail. He realized the Lord had thwarted the plans of Agrippa and the Jews who were opposed to the Jesus' movement. Sometimes it appears that the devil has it all worked out and is about to pull off a big victory. That is what it seemed like when Jesus was crucified. But then God does something extraordinary and what looked like defeat turns into a great victory. How was Agrippa going to explain the missing Peter to the expectant crowds and others in his

Commented [PW16]: Psalm 103:20 (ESV)
²⁰ Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!

administration? Agrippa's public relations man was going to have to come up with some kind of story to explain it all away.

¹² *When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.* Acts 12:12 Suddenly it dawned on Peter that he should go to the nearby home church. There were no doubt a number of them in Jerusalem. By this time, the church would have had too much opposition to meet in the temple like they did in the early days (Acts 2:46). While most believers were poor, the wealthier believers would use their large homes as meeting places. John Mark's mother, a widow, apparently had a large home and servants. The church in her home had been praying through the night.

Commented [PW17]: Acts 2:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

¹³ *And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.* Acts 12:13 Rhoda means a rosebush. We can learn about early Christians relationships to slaves from this little verse. Christians still had servants, but the fact that she was not at the gate means she must have been in the prayer meeting. That means she was considered a sister in Christ. Paul will tell the Ephesians to treat servants with respect as fellow believers (Ephesians 6:5-9). The way Christians treated their servants was very different from the world.

Commented [PW18]: Ephesians 6:5-9 (ESV)

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

¹⁴ *Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate.* Acts 12:14 "Ahhhh! It's Peter at the gate!" She was so overjoyed that she forgot to open the gate. The wooden bar that secured the door from the inside was left in place. Peter was stuck outside. I guess if an angel just delivered you from jail you wouldn't be too concerned about someone suddenly finding you and taking you back to prison.

¹⁵ *They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"* Acts 12:15 Well, it looks like God will answer prayers at times even if we don't expect it. If they really believed they would have run to the gate praising God all the way. When she kept trying to convince everyone, they finally said it was his angel. That may have several different possible sources. Jews did believe that everyone had a guardian angel and that the angel could look like the one they were protecting.¹ I'd still run to the door to see the angel. The other possibility is that they thought Peter had been executed and that it was his spirit, sometimes referred to as one's angel.

Commented [PW19]: cf. Gen. Rab. 78 [50a],

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¹⁶ *But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed.* Acts 12:16 Peter is still standing outside the gate knocking, and maybe chuckling. "Hey, it's me! Let me in!" Finally they went to see who was knocking and are amazed. "God actually answered our prayer. Can you believe it?" Many of us have expressed as much amazement when God did what we were asking even though we had little expectation of an answer. I remember Mac Fish telling me about an employee who was an atheist who loved to argue with Christians. He asked me to pray for him. I did, but I was amazed when Jory was saved. You may wonder if your prayer request is possible, but never forget, with God all things are possible! (Matthew 19:26)

Commented [PW20]: Matthew 19:26 (KJV)

²⁶ But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place. Acts 12:17 When Peter finally got them to quiet down, he went over his amazing experience. I'm sure they all had a good laugh when he told them he couldn't understand why they wouldn't open the gate. Then he told them to tell James and the brothers.

James was what some call "the first among equals." He was the brother of Jesus and had an encounter with Jesus after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). He presided over the Jerusalem council, though every elder's input was considered equally important. Peter was a wanted man, so he had to depart Jerusalem to another place. He eventually went to Rome where he was martyred. The is the end of the account of Peter in Acts. Luke will now switch the focus to Paul and his missionary journeys.

18 Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there. Acts 12:18-19 A Roman soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape would receive the punishment the prisoner was to receive. In this case, it was death. I would be surprised if Peter did not share the gospel with them. Perhaps God spared them from the difficulty of being a Christian in the Roman army.

Luke does not tell us any more of Peter as Luke's account is not so much about individuals as it is about the advance of the kingdom of God through His servants. Persecution was a part of the advance of the kingdom as it caused the apostles to flee to other areas where they shared the gospel.

I believe we should take two important lessons from this passage. One is the power of prayer. While we are told ask in faith and not doubt (James 1:6), we can see that prayer doesn't always have to be based in great faith. The second point is that God will do whatever is necessary to advance His kingdom. He can break a prisoner out of jail if need be. While James, John's brother, was allowed to be martyred, Peter escaped martyrdom for the time being. Our times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). He can rescue us if it is good for us and His glory, or if it is our time, he will allow us to graduate. Apostle Paul said he preferred the latter by far, but if it was necessary for the help of others he would remain (Philippians 1:21-24). That should be the attitude of every child of God whose citizenship is in heaven.

Questions

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| 1 Why had persecution been renewed? | 8 What could "his angel" mean? |
| 2 Describe the security surrounding Peter? | 9 Why did God answer their prayers? |
| 3 Describe the humor in the angel encounter? | 10 What lessons should we take home? |
| 4 Why would it seem like a vision? | 11 Why did James die and Peter live? |
| 5 What is earnest prayer? | |
| 6 Describe Rhoda's humorous reaction. | |
| 7 What can we learn from verse 13? | |

Commented [PW21]: 1 Corinthians 15:7 (ESV)

⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Commented [PW22]: James 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Commented [PW23]: Psalm 31:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

Commented [PW24]: Philippians 1:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.