

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=

Lesson 12

The Deliverance of Peter from Prison - Acts 12

AIM: to teach my pupils the story of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison.

POINT OF CONTACT: Any one of several ideas might be good for this lesson:

1. You could discuss angels. See who can give the most places in the Bible where angels are mentioned, or see who can list the most things that angels have done in the Bible.
2. You might have the class discuss jails or prisons. See how many have ever visited a jail. You will get their attention this way.
3. You might ask the class to share with you some time when they were in trouble. Ask them to explain briefly how they got out of it.

INTRODUCTION: The persecution that had arisen because of the death of Stephen had scattered the Christians northward from Jerusalem. However, the church at Jerusalem was still working and reaching people. We come back to Jerusalem for our lesson today. Last week we were at Antioch; next week we will return to Antioch. Let us notice Peter's deliverance from prison.

- I. THE STORY ITSELF. The story itself is interesting enough to spend a great deal of time telling it. It should be told very carefully to the pupils.
 1. The condition of Peter.
 - 1) James had been killed. See Acts 12:1, 2. He had been killed with the sword. This, no doubt, was beheading. Among the Jews, there were four kinds of death: 1) stoning, 2) burning, 3) killing with the sword, or beheading, and 4) strangling. Killing with the sword was a Roman, as well as a Jewish, mode of punishment and was, according to the Talmud, inflicted upon those who drew the people away to strange worship. James, no doubt, was accused of this because he had drawn the people to true Christianity from Judaism and had drawn them to become followers of Jesus Christ. James was the main pastor of the church at Jerusalem. There were several pastors, as seemed to be the case in all early churches, but there was always one main pastor. This was James.
 - 2) Peter would have been killed. According to Acts 12:3, 4, as soon as James was killed, the enemies decided they would also kill Peter. However, it was the Jewish days of unleavened bread, and they decided to wait until after the Passover to kill Peter. This was simply to please the Jews. The word "Easter" here is not Easter as we know it; it simply means the Passover. So Peter was waiting to be killed, even at this time.
 - 3) Peter was guarded by 16 soldiers. In Acts 12:4, the words, "four quaternions of soldiers," means 16 soldiers, or four companies of four men who had the care of the prison. Each company took a turn guarding during one of the four watches of the night.
 - 4) Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with chains. Two soldiers were guarding his person. His right hand was bound to the left hand of one soldier and his left hand was bound to the right hand of the other soldier. We would call these handcuffs. (It might be wise to bring a pair of handcuffs to class—even two pairs might be advisable to show just exactly the condition of Peter.) This was the Roman method of guarding their prisoners.
 2. The deliverance. In the deliverance there are many interesting things, in fact, almost humorous things that the class should know.
 - 1) Peter was awakened by an angel. In Acts 12:7, notice the words, "and he smote Peter on the side." He punched Peter in the ribs and said, "Arise up quickly," just like we would wake someone up who is sleeping soundly. Actually it also says, "and raised him up." In other words, the angel picked him up and tried to make him realize where he was and what was going on. You will also notice in this verse that the chains fell off from his hands. This was miraculously done.
 - 2) The angel told Peter to put on his clothes. In Acts 12:8, we read these two commands from the angel to Peter: "...Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals..." and "...Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." Obviously Peter had either put on some sleeping attire or taken off some

of his heavier clothes to sleep more comfortably. To me this is rather humorous. The angel came, punched Peter in the ribs, and said, "Peter, wake up!" The angel pulled him up, tried to bring him back to his senses, and then said, "Get your clothes on. We're leaving!"

- 3) The gate opened! See Acts 12:10. It just opened of its own accord—miraculously—as they walked through.
- 4) Peter was led outside the gate by the angel. Read Acts 12:9-13. Then the angel left, and Peter went to the place where the church was praying. It is almost humorous to think of this picture. The little girl named Rhoda came to the door. She went back and told the people who were praying for Peter's deliverance that Peter was delivered. They said she was crazy and sent her back to the door, and they continued their praying for Peter's deliverance. How little faith we Christians oftentimes have!

II. THE TEACHINGS IN THE STORY.

1. It is not always God's will to deliver. We find this in the story of James and Peter. James was one of the greatest Christians who ever lived. He was the first of the Apostles who was martyred. Peter was spared; James was killed. Oftentimes God delivers; oftentimes God does not deliver. One thing, however, is for sure, and that is, God will deliver until He is through with us.
2. God is able to deliver. God is showing us here that He can fulfill His purpose, even though men try to thwart His workings. Though God does not always choose to deliver, as was the case in the story of Stephen, James and others, nevertheless, God's power is able!
3. Oftentimes God will deliver if only one will believe. It is obvious that the only one in this church who really believed was Rhoda. The church said that she was crazy and that perhaps it was an angel. It was a common opinion among the Jews that every man has a guardian angel. The Jews believed that angels oftentimes assumed a likeness of this particular person; hence, they felt that Peter had been killed and that his angel had come to tell of his death. Rhoda, however, believed. The word "Rhoda" means "a rose." (It seems to have been the custom with the Jews to give the names of flowers and trees to their daughters.) Rhoda believed. In Revelation 3, concerning the church at Laodicea, the Lord says if any man will hear His voice and open, He will come in and sup with him, etc. He is telling us that oftentimes the faith of one will bring the blessings of God upon a church or upon God's work.
4. Sometimes God answers prayer, even if we have little faith. Dr. John Rice said in one of his books that faith is not the only condition for answered prayer. He advises us to consider several grounds on which God has promised to answer prayer:
 - 1) Having faith. Matthew 21:22; Mark 9:23; 11:24.
 - 2) Asking in Jesus' name. John 14:13, 14.
 - 3) Having two or more united for the same object. Matthew 18:19.
 - 4) Keeping God's commandments and doing the things that please Him. I John 3:22.
 - 5) Being persistent in prayer. Matthew 7:7, 8; Luke 11:9, 10; 18:1.

At any rate, we do know that God is anxious to answer our prayers, and God wants to answer them. We also know that faith the size of a grain of mustard seed can remove mountains. Sometimes then it is much faith and little prayer, and then other times it is little faith and much prayer.

5. Sin must be paid for! Notice Acts 12:20-23. Herod was riding high for a while, but now look at him. Wrong will always turn out wrong in the end!
6. Right will turn out right in the end! Sometimes God uses adversity for His glory. The church marches on. Herod is dead. People have tried to burn the Bible for years. The people who burned it are dead. The Bible still lives. Nations have tried to stamp out the Gospel for years. The nations are dead, and the Gospel still lives! Someone has said that Nero persecuted the Christians and killed Paul, and now people name their boys Paul and their dogs Nero. Right will turn out right; wrong will turn out wrong. It may take a while, but in the end, right will be vindicated!