

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 10



AN ANGEL IN PRISON

Scripture Text: Acts 12:1-19

In our last lesson we learned of a famine in Judaea. The church in Antioch sent money and food to the church in Jerusalem, and Paul and Barnabas were selected to take it.

About this time Herod began a new persecution of the church and killed James, the brother of John. Seeing it pleased the Jews, he put Peter in prison, but the church prayed for him continually. The night before Herod was to bring him forth for trial, the angel of the Lord appeared in the prison and caused the chains to fall off Peter's ankles and led Peter out of the prison and set him free. Peter went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the church was gathered praying.

In our lesson today we learn that we should spread the Gospel of Christ in spite of persecution. We should pray, expecting God to answer, even to bring miracles. We must not question God's wisdom and judgment. The thing of greatest importance is that God's program goes forward.

MEMORY VERSE: *Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?*

—*Jeremiah 32:27*

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—**2 Corinthians 4:7-18** A tried life.
- Tue.—**Matthew 5:10-20** Light of the world.
- Wed.—**2 Corinthians 5:1-15** A confident ministry.
- Thu.—**Luke 21:8-19** Things must come to pass.
- Fri.—**Ephesians 6:10-20** Put on whole armor of God.

Devotional Reading: **1 Peter 1:3-12** Kept by power of God.

Persecution by Herod

Acts 12:1-3 **About that time**—when Barnabas and Saul brought the relief gifts from Antioch to Jerusalem—**Herod** began to vex certain of the church. The church had enjoyed a period of rest from persecution, but it did not last. Herod Agrippa I was king of Judaea, Samaria, and other parts. He was a strict observer of the law, and he sought with success the favor of the Jews. With this in mind, he put James to death. The church was making great progress throughout the land. Opposition brought persecution. Seeing the death of James pleased the Jews, Herod put Peter in prison.

Why did God allow James to be killed, yet saved Peter? This is not ours to question. Jesus had told His people these things would be brought to pass (**Luke 21:16-17**). Death cannot destroy what has been put in God's hands. No persecution or death can destroy our life in Christ.

Peter's Imprisonment

Acts 12:4-6 Herod kept Peter secure, he thought. He was inside prison walls, guarded by sixteen soldiers, **bound with two chains**. Herod intended **after Easter to bring him forth to the people**—the Jews. The mind of the people would no doubt have been to kill Peter. They bitterly hated Jesus Whom Peter preached. **But**

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prayer was made . . . of the church . . . for him. On the last night before **Herod would have brought him forth** to meet the mob, Peter, bound and guarded, slept between two soldiers.

God gives us this record to show what He will also do for us. The church prayed without ceasing unto God. All trust was in Him, not in their own works. God answered just in time, not before. God is never late.

Acts 12:7-10 The angel of the Lord came . . . a light shined . . . he smote Peter . . . Arise . . . his chains fell off. Peter obeyed, dressed, and followed, thinking he was seeing a vision. Past one ward, two wards, through the city gate **which opened . . . of his own accord . . . through one street, and the angel departed.** The soldiers remained ignorant and helpless. Truly, with God all things are possible.

Peter Knew Where to Go

Acts 12:11-17 Left alone, Peter knew this was real, that he was not dreaming. **I know . . . the Lord . . . hath delivered me.** All the praise belonged to God. Peter **considered**—it was night. Who would be awake to receive him? Where would he find the saints? He went to the house of Mary, sister of Barnabas and mother of John Mark. The saints gathered there often. **Many were gathered . . . praying.** These prayers were the reason for Peter's release. Peter knocked. Rhoda was so surprised that she failed to open the door, but ran to tell. The surprise was so great that the others did not believe her at first. **Thou art mad**—insane. Then, as Rhoda insisted it was Peter, they said, **It is his angel,** or he is dead, and this is his ghost. Those saints were like we are. They had to overcome the same thoughts we have to overcome. Opening the door and seeing Peter, **they were astonished.** Had they no faith as they prayed? They did, for their prayers were answered. But this miracle was a greater answer than they expected. Perhaps they thought Herod would give lenient judgment. But God does better than we can ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). Peter quieted the people, and then told his wonderful story, **how the Lord had brought him out.** Leaving these saints, Peter **went into another place,** probably to escape re-arrest.

Mary was an active saint of the Jerusalem church. We have observed the Christian character of her brother Barnabas. John Mark, her son, was an evangelist with Barnabas and Paul (**Acts 12:25; 2 Timothy 4:11**). Her home was a gathering place for prayer. We need more homes like this.

Herod's Reaction

Acts 12:18-19 When day arrived, **there was no small stir among the soldiers.** It meant life or death to them, yet they were ignorant of the happenings. To let a prisoner escape was a capital crime. After examination, Herod **commanded that they should be put to death.** Unjust? Yes, but Herod did not know God nor what He had done.

Sixteen soldiers suffered death unjustly. This is part of God's plan in both the Old Testament and the New. God's program has often brought death or suffering to some, as the slaughter of babies at Jesus' coming (**Matthew 2:16**), the death of people and animals in the Flood (**Genesis 7:21-22**), and the loss of swine at the healing of the demon-possessed man (**Mark 5:11-13**). Why? Because of the influence of sin. God's program is not inferior, that it should wait on the convenience of every cause. It must be carried on. He will not allow any power to stand in His way of progress. It is not ours to question His judgment. Tragedies occur because it is a sinful world, not because God desires them. God's program will go forward. Can He use you?

JUST A THOUGHT

If you don't want the fruits of sin, stay out of the orchard.