

# God Delivers Peter from Prison

(Acts 12:1-19)

## Pre-Session Warm Up

### **Object Lesson on the Power of Prayer:**

Spread a blanket on the floor. Have children stand around the edges of the blanket without touching it. Have an adult or large child lie on the blanket, then say, "Let's see if any of you can carry the person on the blanket by yourself." Let one or two children try to lift the blanket and carry the person. Then say, "Carrying someone on a blanket isn't easy to do by yourself. But what happens when lots of people join in? Let's see!" Encourage everyone to hold an edge of the blanket, gently lift the person, and carry him or her a few feet across the room. Say, "See? When we all join together, we're stronger!" Gently set the blanket and the person down.

Say, "When we work together, great things happen. Prayer is just like that. When lots of people pray together, wonderful things happen."

Today we're going to find out how God answered prayers in a miraculous way when things looked completely hopeless to them.

## Opening Prayer

Father, teach us this morning the importance and the power of prayer. Make us prayer warriors. Help us to have total confidence in Your ability to help us even in hard times. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16 NIV)*

## Lesson

During the past few weeks we have been learning about life for the first Christians that lived right after Jesus ascended into Heaven. At that time people were persecuted for believing in Jesus.

The Romans had appointed Herod to be the king in Jerusalem. He wanted to do all he could to please the Jewish priests and rulers. He knew that Jews hated Jesus' followers and were treating them very bad. So, Herod put James (the apostle) into prison and later had him killed with a sword. Because he saw this pleased the Jewish leaders, Herod also put Peter in prison and was no doubt planning to kill him right after the Passover feast.

Acts 12:1-4

*About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. (2) He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. (3) When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) (4) Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover.*

Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. So you know that Peter was in prison, guarded securely by these 16 soldiers.

Peter was being treated unfairly by the king who was against Christians. Today in many places around the world Christians still suffer and are mistreated because they love the Lord and want to serve Him.

Have you ever been persecuted because you are a Christian? [Teacher, let the children respond.] If you ever take a stand at school against something you know the Lord disapproves of (e.g., evolution or abortion), your teacher or classmates may give you a hard time.

God allows hard times to come into our lives. He doesn't protect us from difficult times because He knows that our faith grows when we go through trials. James 1:2-4 tells us that "*the testing of your faith*

*produces patience.*" Patience is the ability to go through hard times calmly and pleasantly. When you are being persecuted, God is working to make your faith stronger so that others will see the Lord Jesus in your life. As a result, you will grow in the Lord and His name will be glorified. Knowing this, you should have confidence in God even in hard times. God allowed Peter to be put in prison unjustly for a special purpose.

Acts 12:5

*But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.*

Herod's plan undoubtedly was to execute Peter, but the believers were praying for Peter's safety. [Teacher, review the Memory Verse!] Prayer changes things! The believers offered constant fervent prayer for Peter even though the possibility of rescuing him from Herod seemed hopeless. This is an example of how we should pray for others who are going through difficult times.

The night before he was to be tried, Peter calmly slept.

Acts 12:6

*The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate.*

Peter undoubtedly knew of Herod's intent to put him to death, yet he showed complete trust in God in the midst of trouble and calmly went to sleep. Could you do that? Peter knew that God is in control of every situation. That is why he could peacefully sleep in prison during this hard time.

Peter didn't know that something exciting was about to happen!

Acts 12:7-10

*Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. (8) Then*

*the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. (9) So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. (10) They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.*

Some pretty amazing stuff was happening here! Peter's chains fell off, they walked right by two sets of guards, then the iron gate opened of its own accord! Peter didn't know if this was real or if he was dreaming this!

Acts 12:11

*Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"*

Peter immediately realized that God had delivered him! God had done a miracle! No doubt Peter was praising and thanking God. Peter's faith in God would certainly be much stronger now because he had experienced God's help in a difficult situation. If Jesus is your Savior, you should have confidence in God even in hard times.

The Bible says in Psalm 56:3, "*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.*" When you are treated unfairly or even persecuted, you can know God has allowed it for your good. You must trust in God alone and know that He is working in all things — good and bad, easy and hard, happy and sad. He's the One who will make things work out for good. God is sovereign: He is in control and can do anything. He certainly proved that to Peter by freeing him from prison in such a miraculous way.

Acts 12:12-15

*When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. (13) He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it.*

*(14) When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" (15) "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel."*

The disciples didn't believe Rhoda that Peter was at the door! Even though they had been praying earnestly, they were surprised when God answered their prayer!

Acts 12:16

*Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.*

They couldn't believe their eyes!

Acts 12:17-19

*He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place. (18) At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. (19) Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.*

Can you imagine what the other believers did when they heard how God had delivered Peter from prison? They no doubt realized the power of prayer, understood that God is all-powerful, and gave thanks to God. Seeing God work in this hard situation in such a great way, strengthened their faith, gave them joy, and renewed their courage. They continued to go through more persecution, but now their trust in God was stronger.

If Jesus is your Savior you should trust in God, too. If you're going through a trial, instead of getting angry, worried, or upset, you can trust Him for quietness and peace on the inside. Remember, He is with you every minute and will cause everything to turn out for good. Talk to God, ask Him to give you peace about the situation and trust that He will make everything work out for the best.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for giving us the gift of prayer. We're glad You hear every prayer. Please help us to remember to pray. Make us prayer warriors. Help us to have total confidence in Your ability to help us even in hard times. Thank You, God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### CRAFT CORNER

### GAME CENTER

Use the following review questions in a discussion.

1. Why did God allow James to be killed with the sword and yet miraculously save Peter? (Acts 12:2)

Life is full of difficult questions like this. Why is one child physically disabled and another child athletically gifted? These are questions we cannot possibly answer in this life because we do not see all that God sees. He has chosen to allow evil in this world for a time. But we can trust God's leading because he has promised to destroy all evil eventually. In the meantime, we know that God will help us use our suffering to strengthen us and glorify Him. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

2. Why do you think Peter was able to sleep when he knew Herod was planning to kill him the next day? (Acts 12:6)

Look up John 21:18. Peter had Jesus' promise that he would live to an old age. God always keeps His promises. Peter knew God is in control of every situation. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

3. Even though the possibility of rescuing Peter from Herod seemed hopeless, what did the believers do? (Acts 12:5)

They prayed. Prayer changes things, so you should pray often and with confidence. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

4. Why did the believers think Rhoda was out of her mind? (Acts 12:15)

They didn't believe it was really Peter! The prayers of the group of believers were answered, even as they prayed. But when the answer arrived at the door, they didn't believe it. We should be people of faith who believe that God answers our prayers. When you pray, believe you will get an answer. And when the answer comes, don't be surprised; be thankful. Remember our Memory verse, James 5:16.

5. In verse 17, Peter tells the believers to "*Go tell these things...to the brethren.*" Can you imagine what the other believers did when they heard how God had delivered Peter from prison?

They no doubt realized the power of prayer, understood that God is all-powerful, and gave thanks to God. Seeing God work in this hard situation in such a great way strengthened their faith, gave them joy and renewed their courage. So you should always share with others the great things that God does for you! It will encourage people to put their trust in God, even in hard times.