

# God Delivers Peter from Prison

(Acts 12:1-19)

## Introduction

As we have been studying the Book of Acts, we have seen God's power in many ways. Can you name some ways we have seen God's power in the lessons we have had in Acts? (Jesus ascended into Heaven, Peter healed a lame man, God transformed Saul's life, Peter healed Aeneas and raised Tabitha from the dead.)

Today we're going to learn about the power of prayer and we will find out about a time God answered prayers in a miraculous way when things looked completely hopeless to the disciples.

## 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

We have been learning about life for the first Christians. We learned that as more and more people were coming to faith in Jesus, some of the Jews didn't like that and they were making life difficult for the believers

At that time, the Romans were ruling Israel. Herod Agrippa was the king in Jerusalem. Herod wanted to please the Jewish religious leaders and he knew the Jews hated Jesus' followers. So, Herod put the Apostle, James, into prison and later had him killed with a sword. When he saw this pleased the Jews, Herod also put Peter in prison and was no doubt planning to kill him, 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 received the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. So, you know, Peter was guarded very 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.

**Ask:** Have you ever been persecuted because you are a Christian? Has anyone been rude to you or teased you because you made a stand for Jesus? [Teacher, let the children respond.]

Your teachers or classmates may give you a hard time, but Jesus says you should expect it and continue to trust Him.

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 trusting God. 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.*

Everyone knew that Herod undoubtedly planned to execute Peter, yet the believers were praying for Peter's safety.

**Ask:** The situation was hopeless for Peter, why were the believers praying?

The believers offered constant fervent prayer for Peter even though the possibility of rescuing him from Herod seemed hopeless because they knew prayer changes things! This is an example of how we should never give up in our prayer for others.

Let's see what Peter was doing the night before his trial.

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.*

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

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! An angel appeared and struck Peter on the side to wake him up. His chains fell off, they walked right by two sets of guards, then the iron gate opened all by itself! 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."*

**Ask:** Why didn't the disciples believe Rhoda?

Even though the disciples had been praying earnestly for Peter, they didn't believe Rhoda when she told them that Peter was at the door! They were not expecting God to answer their prayer!

There's a lesson here for us: we should always expect God to hear and answer our prayers.

## 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

*He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James [brother of Jesus] and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.*

**Ask:** When the believers heard how God had delivered Peter from prison, what do you think they did?

They had seen the power of prayer, and understood that God is all-powerful. They probably 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.

**Ask:** Why didn't Peter stay with his friends? Why did he depart and go to another place?

Peter knew that when Herod discovered he wasn't in prison, he'd come looking for him. So, it wasn't safe to be there with his friends.

## Acts 12:18-19

*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.*

Notice that the guards were put to death because the prisoner they were guarding escaped.

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****GAME CENTER****Checkers**

Place at least eight red and eight black checkers or plastic game pieces in a small paper bag. Divide the children in two teams and have them take turns answering questions. As a child answers a question correctly, he may reach into the bag and pull out a checker for his team. If he chooses a red checker, he gets to keep the checker and draw again. If he draws a black checker he keeps it but his turn is finished. At the end of the game, the team with the most checkers (red and black) wins.

Use the following questions in another game or discussion:

1. Who did Herod have put to death by a sword? (Vs 2. The Apostle James, the brother of John.)
2. Why did Herod arrest Peter? (Vs 3. Because he saw that the Jews were pleased when James was put to death.)

3. How many soldiers guarded Peter in jail? (Vs 4. Four squads or 16 soldiers.)
4. Even though the possibility of rescuing Peter from Herod seemed hopeless, what did the believers do? (Vs 5. They earnestly prayed. Prayer changes things, so you should pray often and with confidence. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.)
5. Why do you think Peter was able to sleep when he knew Herod was planning to kill him the next day? (Vs 6. Peter knew God is in control of every situation. Look up John 21:18. Peter had Jesus' promise that he would live to an old age. Peter knew that God always keeps His promises. You can have confidence in God even in hard times, too.)
6. How did the angel get Peter to wake up? (Vs 7. He struck him on the side!)
7. How did Peter get the prison gate open? (Vs 10. It opened of its own accord.)
8. Why didn't Rhoda open the gate for Peter? (Vs 14. She was so overjoyed that she ran back inside to tell everyone that Peter was at the door.)
9. Why did the believers think Rhoda was out of her mind? (Vs 15. They didn't believe it was really Peter! They weren't expecting God to answer! Yet, 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.)
10. 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.)
11. Why didn't Peter stay with his friends? Why did he depart and go to another place? (Vs 17. It wasn't safe there.)
12. Why did God allow James to be killed with the sword and yet miraculously save Peter? (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.)

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