

## 41. The Church Saw Peter Delivered

In our last topic, we saw that Herod Agrippa 1 began to persecute the church. He saw that when he killed James, the brother of John, the Jewish religious leaders were very happy. As a result, we see that the next person he arrested was Peter. We saw that the early church had constant prayer for Peter. In our topic today, we are going to see how the Lord answered that prayer.

We saw in our last topic that Peter was sleeping between two soldiers the night before he was to be put to death. At the same time, the church was in constant prayer for Peter. In Acts 12:7-10, we read, “Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off *his* hands. Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and tie on your sandals’; and so he did. And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me.’ So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.” Sometime during the night, an angel sent from the Lord stood beside Peter. This caused the prison to be filled with light.

However, Peter had such peace that the light did not even wake up Peter. As a result, the angel had to hit Peter in the side to even awaken him. Peter had such peace as he faced death that he was in a very sound sleep. The angel told Peter to get up quickly. Immediately, the two chains that attached Peter and his two guards fell from the hands of Peter. The angel then told Peter to get dressed and tie on his sandals. Here, we see that the Lord had put all of the guards to sleep so soundly that none of them woke up even though the cell was filled with light and the ends of the chains attached to Peter fell to the floor. After Peter was dressed, the angel told Peter to put on his coat and follow the angel. Peter thought he saw a vision and did not realize what was happening.

Peter actually thought that he was seeing a vision in his sleep. However, he got up and followed the angel. They walked past the place where the first and the second guard were standing. The Lord had also put these guards into a very sound sleep. There was a large iron gate that separated the prison from the street of the city. The heavy iron gate moved on its own without anyone even touching it. As a result, Peter and the angel just walked through where the gate had been and were now on the street in front of the prison. The angel walked down one street with Peter and then departed. Suddenly, Peter realized that he was not just seeing a vision. It had really happened and he was now free and was outside of the prison. The Lord had sent an angel to set him free.

Acts 12:11-12 says, “And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.’ So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.” We see that Peter was surprised when he realized that three things had happened. First, he realized that the Lord had sent his angel. Peter had seen the Lord work in many different ways including a similar event when an angel opened the prison and told the apostles to go back and speak in the

temple in Acts 5:19-20.

Second, Peter realized that the Lord had delivered him from the hand of Herod. This was probably much more of a surprise than the fact that the angel had let him out of prison. Herod had already killed James. Many years later, Paul spoke to Herod Agrippa 2, the son of this Herod. Paul told that son and his sister, Bernice, in Acts 26:17-18, that Jesus had told him, “I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, “to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”” Paul did not mention the fact that the Lord had earlier delivered Peter from their own father and the Jewish people.

Third, we see that the Lord delivered Peter from all the expectation of the Jewish people. With the killing of James and the arrest of Peter, the Jewish religious leaders thought that Herod was now a strong supporter of their efforts to destroy the leaders of the church. Instead, they would learn the next day that God had stopped the plans of both Herod and the Jewish religious leaders to get rid of Peter. Peter would later write in 2 Peter 2:9, “*Then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” Peter certainly knew how the Lord had delivered him from those who were seeking to destroy his life.

When Peter fully realized that he was out of prison, he started thinking where to go. After thinking for a moment, Peter was sure that he would find some Christians at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Colossians 4:10 says, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him).” Here, we see that this particular Mary was a relative of Barnabas. The fact that Peter knew that there would be Christians praying at the home of Mary meant that she was well known in the church at Jerusalem.

When Peter got to the house of Mary, he knocked on the door. Acts 12:13-15 says, “And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’ Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, ‘It is his angel.’” Rhoda had asked who was knocking at the door. When Peter answered, Rhoda recognized the voice of Peter. Rhoda got so excited when she recognized the voice of Peter that she forgot to open the door. Instead, she ran into the house where the people were praying for Peter and told them that Peter was at the door.

Apparently, those praying did not like to have their prayers for Peter interrupted as they told Rhoda, “You are beside yourself.” The word that is translated “You are beside yourself” means *to not be in your right mind*. This probably tells us about the way that the Christians were praying for Peter. They were probably praying that Peter would be faithful as he was put to death rather than praying that the will of the Lord would be done in the life of Peter. Here, we see that the Lord still had more work for Peter to do and so the Lord had answered their prayers in an unexpected way by

releasing Peter from the prison. This is an important lesson for us to learn about prayer. We need to pray that the Lord will carry out His will. We do have a wonderful promise in Romans 8:26-27 which says, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.” The Lord did answer their prayer according to His will.

Rhoda kept insisting that Peter was at the door even though those in the prayer meeting told her that it was his angel. Meanwhile, Acts 12:16-17 says, “Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, ‘Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.’ And he departed and went to another place.” Since no one had opened the door, Peter just kept knocking. Finally, someone did open the door and let Peter into the house. Those who were gathered for prayer for Peter were astonished when they saw that it was actually Peter that had been knocking at the door.

The people were all excited and probably everyone started asking questions at the same time. Peter knew that time was short, because they would soon find him missing at the prison. As a result, Peter held up his hand and motioned for everyone to be quiet. Then, Peter explained to those present how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. This is important. We need to help people understand how the Lord works in our lives. Peter had earlier done this when he explained how the Lord led him to the house of Cornelius. Acts 11:12-14 says, “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ‘who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’”” Here, Peter told them what the Lord had done in bringing him out of the prison.

Peter told those present to go tell James and the rest of the brethren. This is not James, the brother of John, because we read in verse two that he had been put to death. Instead, this is James, the half-brother of Christ. This James is first mentioned in Matthew 13:55 where we read, “‘Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?’” In Acts 15, we will see that this James had become the key leader in the church in Jerusalem. He later is the one who wrote the book of James. After telling what had happened, Peter left and went to another place.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Holy Spirit will also cause our prayers to be in agreement with the will of God, because we do not always know how to pray either. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how the Holy Spirit works with our prayers.