

CALVARY CHAPEL OF PHILADELPHIA

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

1ST GRADE

TEACHER'S PACKET

SUNDAY MORNING

Study 41

Peter Escapes from Prison



Peter Escapes from Prison

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the "reward box" found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective This lesson will show that God is all-powerful and that no one can stand against Him, and therefore they can take all their problems to Him in prayer.

Key Verses

Acts 12—Main Teaching Passage
Luke 18:27

Memory Verse - Romans 8:31

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Hook

Review last week's memory verse, Galatians 3:28.

Each class will be provided with a stack of cups. Have the class take the cups and construct the strongest castle they can make out of them. Then ask for a volunteer to knock it down.

That tower might have been big or impressive, but it didn't stand a chance against a first grader. However, even that cup tower stood a better chance than someone who fights against the Lord. In today's story, one character will learn the hard way that God is able to overcome any obstacle to accomplish His will in the world.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

At this point in Acts, more than just the religious leaders were getting involved in persecuting Christians. In today's passage, King Herod had James killed. This pleased the religious leaders, so Herod decided to put Peter in jail as well. Peter was to be put on trial at the Passover, and in the meantime Herod set four squads of guards in charge of keeping him locked up. While this was going on, the believers began to pray for him.

That night, Peter was sleeping while chained to two guards. All of a sudden, a light shone in the cell and an angel struck Peter on the side and ordered him to get up. Immediately, Peter's chains fell off and the angel told him to put his sandals on. However, Peter thought he was seeing a vision and did not realize that what was going on around him was actually happening. Peter and the angel walked through the prison, past the guards, without anyone stopping them. Then, when they got to the outer gate, the gate opened by itself and the angel left. At that point, Peter realized what had just happened. He went to the house of a group of believers who were praying for him. When he knocked on the door, the girl who answered the door was so surprised, she forgot to let him in. The people at the prayer meeting couldn't believe he was still alive. The next day, Herod searched for Peter and was furious that he had escaped. Later, Herod would be struck down and killed because he did not give glory to God when the people of Tyre and Sidon admired his royal apparel.

LOOK

Things did not look good for Peter in this story. James had just been executed, and it looked like he was next. It was unlikely that he would be set free and between the chains, gates, and guards, and even less likely that he could escape. The Christians were praying for him, but based on their reaction when he came to their door, even they didn't think he was going to be free. Herod was going to execute Peter, and Peter had no power to stop him. However, Herod was not fighting against the power of Peter. He was opposing the power of God.

From a human perspective, Peter faced an impossible situation. He had no chance of survival. Yet God was able to deliver him from prison. What is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27), and there is no one who can fight against Him or stop Him from accomplishing His will. That does not mean that Christians will never have any problems, or that believers will always escape difficulty or persecution. After all, James did not escape Herod. However, God still had a plan for Peter, and there was nothing that Herod could do to thwart that plan.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK (Continued)

Like Herod, the world continues to try to do things to fight against God and stop the spread of the Gospel. In some countries, there are laws against being a Christian or telling other people about Jesus. At school, you might not be allowed to share the Gospel with others. Maybe you have friends or family members that will try to convince you to reject your faith. For 2000 years, Satan has tried everything to stop the Church from growing and spreading, but God cannot be stopped. God is able to take care of His children and protect His Church. It should give us great confidence as believers that God is on our side and none can stand against Him.

Notice the response of the Christians when Peter was taken. They didn't negotiate with Herod or try to break Peter out of prison. They prayed! They knew that they had no power to set Peter free on their own, so they trusted God knowing that His plan could not be stopped. While their faith could have been stronger that God would answer, the important part is that they prayed. When you are faced with temptation or difficulty, don't try to handle it yourself or in your own power. Give it to the Lord in prayer and trust Him to take care of it. That doesn't mean you will always escape your problems. Perhaps God instead will give you the strength to make it through. No matter how He responds to our prayers, we know that God is our almighty, loving Father and He will take care of us and do what is best for us.

TOOK

As a class, memorize Romans 8:31.

Take some time for prayer requests. Encourage the students to lay all their problems before the Lord. Explain that when we pray, we are saying that we need God to take care of our difficulties and trusting Him to help us.

Pray: Worship God for His power and His ability to take care of His children. Ask Him to take care of all your needs and give you the strength to get through all difficulties.

Parent Question: Why should we pray about our problems instead of trying to fix them on our own?

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Acts 12 by David Guzik

JAMES IS MARTYRED, PETER IS SET FREE

A. James the apostle dies as a martyr.

1. ([Acts 12:1](#)) Herod harasses the church.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.

a. **Herod the king:** This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth ([Matthew 2:1-16](#)). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus ([Luke 23:7-12](#)).

b. **Stretched out his hand to harass some from the church:** No doubt, this was done because it was politically popular for Herod. It pleased many of his citizens who didn't like Christians. Many political figures are ready to persecute Christians if it will make them politically popular.

2. ([Acts 12:2](#)) The death of the apostle James.

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

a. **Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword:** This was a new development in the history of the church. Of the twelve who followed Jesus, James was the first to be martyred.

i. Up to [Acts 12](#), the church had been on a streak of success, experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the highly successful work among Gentiles (and Jews) in Antioch. But in [Acts 12](#), the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raised its head.

ii. James was certainly not the first *Christian* to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen ([Acts 7:58-60](#)) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection.

b. **James the brother of John:** James, in particular, might have thought to have been protected. He was one of the special intimates of Jesus, often mentioned with his brother John and with Peter ([Matthew 17:1](#), [26:37](#), [Mark 5:37](#), [9:2](#), [14:33](#); [Luke 5:37](#), [9:2](#), and [14:33](#)).

i. But Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution ([Matthew 10:16-26](#)).

ii. In [Mark 10:35-40](#), John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief lieutenants. Jesus replied to them, *You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?* James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they could. Jesus promised them, *You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized.* This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

c. **With the sword:** Normally, this means that James was beheaded. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was also willingly executed for Jesus alongside of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

i. Significantly, there was no attempt to replace James, as there was to replace Judas ([Acts 1](#)). This was because James died as a faithful martyr, but Judas revealed his apostasy in betraying Jesus. There was no need for another man to take the office of James.

B. The release of Peter from prison.

1. ([Acts 12:3-4](#)) Herod imprisons Peter.

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

a. **Because he saw that it pleased the Jews:** Seeing his increased popularity when he killed James, Herod sought to improve his ratings even more when **he proceeded further to seize Peter also**.

i. There was a significant difference between the persecution from Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 8:1-3](#)) and from Herod. Saul, wrong as he was, persecuted out of sincere (though misguided) religious conviction; Herod persecuted out of purely political motives. Both were wrong, but one had a better motive.

b. **Intending to bring him before the people after Passover:** Herod decided to deal with Peter at a politically opportune time, fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims filled Jerusalem.

i. Horton suggests three reasons for the delay in executing Peter: (1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover; (2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot; (3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish population.

c. **Delivered him to four squads of soldiers:** Knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before ([Acts 5:17-21](#)), Herod assigned a high-security detail to guard Peter.

i. "Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled" (Stott)

ii. "So there were always four soldiers guarding Peter. Extraordinary precautions were also taken by chaining him to two soldiers instead of one as usual (compare Seneca, *Epistulae*, 5:7). The other two soldiers kept watch outside the cell." (Hughes)

2. ([Acts 12:5](#)) The church prays for Peter.

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

a. **Prayer was offered to God for him by the church:** In this contest, Herod had his soldiers and his prisons; but the church had the power of prayer. The outcome would soon be seen, and easily decided.

i. **Peter was therefore kept in prison**, but the church was free to pray. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. We take advantage of that open gate through prayer.

b. **Constant prayer was offered to God for him:** The word **constant** also has the idea of *earnest*; literally, the word pictures someone *stretching out all they can for something*. "The verb *ektenos* is related to *ektenes*, a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits." (MacArthur)

i. Luke uses this same word *ektenos* for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Luke 22:44](#)).

ii. Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness. Too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about.

iii. *Earnest* prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about, fulfilling Jesus' promise *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you* ([John 15:7](#)).

c. **Constant prayer was offered to God:** It is also important to see that the church prayed **to God**. It may seem obvious, but often our prayers are weak because we are not consciously coming into the presence of our great and holy God, offering our requests to Him.

3. ([Acts 12:6-11](#)) God sends an angel to free Peter from prison.

And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. 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. 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.*”

a. **That night Peter was sleeping:** Peter showed no signs of anxiety. He was able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution. Remember, *He gives His beloved sleep* ([Psalm 127:2](#)).

b. **Bound with two chains between two soldiers...guards before the door:** The chains, the guards, the prison doors meant nothing to God and His appointed messengers; Peter was instantly set free.

c. **Did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision:** Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening. He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.

d. **They came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord:** The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gate — were all nothing when God was with Peter and prayer was behind him.

i. Many of us worry about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month beforehand, and we are anxious about the **iron gate**! But God will take care of it when we come to it. For Peter, it opened **of its own accord**. That phrase uses the ancient Greek word, *automate*. One could say that the gates opened automatically for Peter.

ii. F.F. Bruce relates the story of Sundar Singh, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover set over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in there. On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one. When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key — and found it on the official’s own belt. God is still writing the Book of Acts!

e. **And has delivered me from the hand of Herod:** James was martyred ([Acts 12:1-2](#)) and Peter was rescued. The reasons God does such things, or does not do them, are often known only to Him. We do know that James, having graduated to glory, did not consider himself a loser in any way.

i. Simply, it wasn’t time for Peter to go to his heavenly home yet. Until it was time, he was invulnerable. He couldn’t be harmed. It was time for James; it was not time for Peter.

4. ([Acts 12:12-17](#)) Peter presents himself to the believers that prayed for him.

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. 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." 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.

- a. **He came to the house of Mary...knocked at the door of the gate:** Peter naturally went to where he knew Christians would be gathered and praying. They would want to know that their prayers had been answered.
- b. **Because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate:** Rhoda was so excited to hear from Peter that she left him out at the gate! The natural, true-to-life feel of these accounts show the reliable historical character of the Book of Acts.
- c. **But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!"** We are comforted (and amused) by the little faith of these Christians. Even while they prayed for Peter, they found it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.
- i. Their prayer was earnest ([Acts 12:5](#)), but their faith was not overwhelming. Little faith can accomplish great things if it is placed in the great God.
- d. **It is his angel:** The Jews believed in the idea of guardian angels, and it seems that some among them may have believed that one's guardian angel bore some kind of resemblance to the human it was assigned to.
- e. **Go, tell these things to James and the brethren:** The **James** that Peter told others to report to was not the James who was just martyred. It was probably James, the brother of Jesus, who was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.
- f. **And he departed and went to another place:** Except for a brief mention in [Acts 15](#), this is the last Luke speaks of Peter. We know that Peter later met Paul in Antioch ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)), and later he wrote his two letters.

5. ([Acts 12:18-19](#)) The execution of the soldiers who guarded Peter.

Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

- a. **There was no small stir:** This is one of the great understatements of the Bible. Herod was furious that his prized prisoner had escaped.
- b. **He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death:** The execution of the guards was customary. In that day, if a guard's prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner — in this case, death.

C. God judges a blaspheming Herod and blesses an obedient church.

1. ([Acts 12:20-21](#)) Herod gives a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon, who are anxious to please Herod.

Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.

- a. **They asked for peace:** The **people of Tyre and Sidon** wanted to make **peace** with Herod (Herod Agrippa

l), the grandson of Herod the Great. Since Herod **had been very angry** with them, and they needed the **food** that came from Herod's **country**, the crowd was motivated to please Herod.

b. **Arrayed in royal apparel...gave an oration:** Dressed in impressive clothes, Herod spoke before an audience eager to please him.

2. ([Acts 12:22-23](#)) Herod receives the overstated praise of the people of Tyre and Sidon, and he receives the judgment of the God he refused to glorify.

And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

a. **The voice of a god and not of a man!** It is in human nature to look for political deliverers and messiahs, and the people of Tyre and Sidon seemed to praise Herod as if he were a god. For his part, Herod enjoyed it, taking the glory unto himself (**he did not give glory to God**).

b. **He was eaten by worms and died:** The manner of Herod's death was appropriate to his spiritual state; he was corrupted from the inside out. In writing to the Roman world, the ancient Jewish historian Josephus also described the death of Herod in gory detail.

i. "He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god...A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner... when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life." (*Antiquities*, XIX.8.2)

3. ([Acts 12:24-25](#)) The work of God continues without hindrance.

But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

a. **But the word of God grew and multiplied:** The contrast between Herod and the church was clear. Herod believed he had the upper hand against God's people, but God showed who was really in charge — Herod was judged, and the church was blessed.

i. Herod fought against God. He killed James but didn't defeat God's plan. He arrested Peter, but the earnestly praying church saw God rescue Peter and the apostle's work continue.

ii. History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done. Friedrich Nietzsche was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition. Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for literature, and fought against God in his book *Elmer Gantry*. The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome. Writer Ernest Hemingway lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences — until he shot himself in the head with a shotgun. Fighting against God just doesn't work.

b. **Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem:** Coming back from their relief effort to Jerusalem ([Acts 11:30](#)), Barnabas and Saul brought John Mark with them back to the church at Antioch.