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## SIMON PETER DELIVERED BY THE HAND OF GOD

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 45  
ACTS 12:1-16

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ACTS 12:1-2 "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." This chapter brings to our minds the power and influence of the family of Herod the Great. In this verse we are confronted with Herod Agrippa, but to refresh our memory let us go back for a moment and recall the power and influence of Herod the Great. (Lived from 73 to 4 B.C.) He was one of the wealthiest men in all the world and was the greatest construction genius of all times. He built a fantastic signal system so he could check on all that was happening at all times throughout Palestine. His grandson is known as Herod Agrippa. He was named for his grandfather and his grandfather's very close friend Marcus Agrippa. Herod Agrippa had his education in Rome and was a very close friend of Caligula. Uticus, their chauffeur, was a spy and he reported to Tiberias that they were plotting against him and he put Herod Agrippa in prison. When Caligula came to the throne as Caesar, one of the first things he did was to set Herod Agrippa free. Herod had golden replicas made of the chains that had bound him and took them with him from Rome and displayed them in the Temple in Jerusalem. Herod Agrippa in 44 A.D., which is the time of our Scripture passage here, was at the zenith of his power and was one of the most powerful men in the world. He admired the Jews and often worshipped with them. And to please certain of the Jews, he began to persecute believing Jews. James, one of the apostles, was the first apostle to die. John, his brother, was the last apostle to die. These boys, James and John, are the sons of that mother who in Matthew 20 requested that they be allowed to sit on the right and left hand of Christ in his Kingdom.

Now here is a paradox. The Lord did not deliver James, but a little bit later delivered Simon Peter. Why was James killed and Simon Peter allowed to go free? To kill them both was the plot of these Jews, but God allowed one to be killed and delivered the other. But please notice that God is going to use the death of James to arouse the sleeping church. They will pray all night about Simon Peter being set free and then when he is set free, they refuse to believe it, even though they see him standing at the door. They actually think Simon Peter is an angel. Now it would be more difficult to believe that it was an angel than to believe that it was Simon Peter. But you see, people get to believing that prayer is human merit, and they agonize and moan and think that things are accomplished because they pray rather than because of the action of God. This kind of people do not approach God on the basis of who and what he is, but rather on the basis of who and what they are. There is only one thing worse, and that is no prayer at all. This Jerusalem church was declining and it took something desperate to wake them up.

ACTS 12:3 "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)" This verse introduces us to a new crisis. He took Simon Peter and put him in prison, and he was next on the list to be executed. It was the time of the Feast of Unleavened bread. The Passover depicts the work of Christ on the cross. Christ is our passover. The seven days that followed, which is the feast of unleavened bread, stood for fellowship the believer had with God. On the first day of that seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread was the feast of the First Fruits which depicts the resurrection of Christ. Then fifty days later came the Feast of Pentecost. Then there is a big gap of about five months then comes the three other feasts and all of them have to do with the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his eternal Kingdom. These three feasts are The Trumpets, The Atonement, and The Tabernacle. But these unbelieving Jews don't care anything about these feasts, and they had no meaning for them. But they know this is the last night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and they know that Simon Peter is scheduled to die on the next day.



ACTS 12:4 "And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." Herod Agrippa delivered Simon Peter to four quaternions of soldiers. This is the smallest unit of the Roman army, or sixteen Roman soldiers. They would shift the guard every eight hours. Two were in the cell with Simon Peter, two just outside, then two more a bit farther out and two more at the iron gates. So there was no way for Simon to get out. Peter by this time was a V.I.P. and this is the most recognition that the Roman Government ever gave him.

There is not proof at all that Simon Peter was ever in Rome. His only claim to fame, as far as Rome was concerned, was that Herod Agrippa assigned sixteen Roman soldiers to guard him until he could be executed. Please notice this phrase--"Intending after Easter". Easter is a Norse term from "OSTERA" and means the goddess of fertility, and that's why we have bunnies and eggs at Easter. Easter was a part of their immoral practices in connection with their pagan worship. But when Christ arose from the grave in the spring, the church and state later being united, it offered them an opportunity to develop a fantastic system they called Lent and Easter. This is why we do not place major emphasis on Easter, for to the true Christian every Sunday is Easter and every Sunday reminds us of the risen Christ. The word "Easter" doesn't appear here at all, and the Greek word is "Paska" and means passover. These men who translated this put down Easter but the word is "Passover".

So the situation was hopeless and Simon Peter was as good as dead. He was under heavy guard and the next day they were to kill him.

ACTS 12:5 "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Peter was guarded with great zeal. Prayer was made for him during the whole week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But by this time Simon Peter had put the whole thing in the Lord's hands.

ACTS 12:6 "And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison." Please notice that Peter "was sleeping". The Greek says, "He kept on sleeping". This is the picture of a man relaxed and at rest in the will of God. He knows his doctrine. If the Lord wants to take him, he will and no effort of the Roman Empire can rush up God's will for his life. There is not reason for a Christian to lie awake at night worrying about what will happen the next day or the next month. Remember, God is in charge. When the Lord Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, Simon Peter was asleep.

I suppose we could say that at least Simon Peter was consistent. But please notice that here he is sleeping for a different reason. Back in Gethsemane he was physically exhausted. Here in the prison he is sleeping the sleep of trust and faith. In 1 Peter 5:7 Simon Peter would later write, "Casting all your cares upon him for he careth for you". The church is awake and praying, doing the right thing. Simon Peter is asleep and he is doing the right thing. Please notice that Simon Peter was sleeping so hard that the angel had to hit him a hard blow to wake him up. Please remember this--if God wants Simon Peter to remain on earth, all the Roman Government can't get rid of him.

ACTS 12:7 "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands." Please notice--"And behold an angel from the Lord stood beside him". Light filled the prison. Both angels and Christ have light as a part of their makeup. He smote Peter on the side, since he didn't wake up. He smote him on the ribs to break the breathing pattern and this awakened Simon Peter.

ACTS 12:8 "And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." "Gird thyself". God takes care of what we cannot do but he expects us to do what we can do. The Angel of the Lord is going to break the chains off, but Simon Peter is going to have to dress himself. Principle--God is never going to do for us those things we can do for ourselves. If you are out of a job, you can't sit at home and expect a job to come and knock at your door. We take care of the natural functions and God takes care of the supernatural ones. Simon had to bind on his own sandals.

ACTS 12:9 "And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision." Simon Peter thinks he is dreaming or in a trance and is not conscious of what is really happening. You and I have been delivered by God many times, and we were not really conscious of it. God always is perfect in his action toward us.

ACTS 12:10 "When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him." This explains the mechanics of his deliverance. He came to the gate, which was his last barrier, and after that was opened the angel left him. This all seems complicated to us, but to God this deliverance was very simple.

ACTS 12:11 "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." Thus we see that Peter became conscious of what God had been doing all along. It greatly strengthens our faith when we can look back and see how the hand of God has delivered us.

ACTS 12:12 "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying." This is the house where the prayer meeting was going on. Evidently Simon thought through what was happening and realized that this was the logical place for him to go.

ACTS 12:13 "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda." This was a dramatic knock. Rhoda was a teenage girl and hearing the knock, she came to answer it.

ACTS 12:14 "And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate." Now Rhoda knew that voice-- "Let me in. Let me in!" But she panics and runs back to the prayer meeting and fails to open the door. But Simon stood there and continued to knock and continued to ask them to let him in.

ACTS 12:15-16 "And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished." Please notice the three-fold reaction of this church.

First--They said to Rhoda, "Thou art mad". They had been praying for a week and now that their prayers are answered they say, "Thou art mad".

(You see, Baptists haven't changed much since those early days.)

Second--They said that it was an angel. Rhoda kept telling them that she knew the voice she heard was the voice of Simon Peter but still they didn't believe. Now let me ask you--which is easier to believe, that Simon Peter is standing out there, or to believe that an angel was standing out there?

Third--We read, "They were astonished". They were astonished that their prayers had been answered.

Please remember that an answer to prayer always depends on the character of God. God knew a million years before what he would do. He didn't answer because of their great faith, for they didn't even believe it had happened even after they heard Peter calling to them at the door. But God answered because of his character and on the basis of grace.