

One of our unfortunate tendencies as believers is to pray in unbelief. We say we believe that God answers prayer and yet when we ask God for help in a particular situation, we pray doubting that anything will happen. The early church was guilty of this as well because they prayed for Peter and yet were slow to believe that God had miraculously answered their prayers so quickly and completely.

**Verses 1-4:** King Herod, wanting to insure the political support of the Jews, began to persecute the church in Jerusalem. He had James, the brother of John, put to death and when he saw that the Jews approved of this, he proceeded to arrest Peter. Herod's plan was to keep him in prison until the end of the week-long Passover feast and then bring him out to be condemned and put to death.

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5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

**“Peter therefore was kept in prison”** – Herod could not execute Peter during the Passover feast since the people would not look at him favorably to put anyone to death during a religious celebration. Thus Peter was kept in prison until the end of the feast.

**“but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”** – Herod had already killed James and was preparing to kill Peter next, so the church obviously feared for his life and were fervently praying round-the clock that God would protect him. They were praying but they apparently did not believe the truth expressed in **James 5:16b**: *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*

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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.

**“And when Herod would have brought him forth”** – Evidently this was the night before Herod would bring Peter out to face the accusations of the Jews. God often seems to wait until the last minute to answer our prayers, perhaps so that the situation is desperate enough that we realize that it only could have been Him that solved the problem.

**“the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains”** – Peter was in the custody of four quaternions of soldiers (v. 4). A quaternion consisted of four soldiers and each quaternion took turns guarding Peter in six hour shifts, insuring round-the-clock security of the prisoner. During a shift, two of the soldiers were chained to either side of the prisoner and the other two guarded the door. Peter was sleeping between the two soldiers whose duty it was to be chained to him that night.

**“and the keepers before the door kept the prison”** – The other two members of the quaternion were standing guard at the prison door to prevent unauthorized entry or exit.

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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. 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.

**“And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison”** – While Peter is sleeping, an angel appears in the cell with him, illuminating the entire prison. We are not told if the soldiers are also asleep or if they are frozen in fear.

**“and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands”** – The angel wakes Peter and tells him to get up. When Peter stands, the chains that bound him to the two soldiers fall off his wrists.

**“And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did”** – Peter had apparently taken off his outer garments and shoes to be more comfortable when sleeping, so the angel tells him to get dressed.

**“And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me”** – Peter's outer robe was all that was left, so the angel tells him to put this on as well and follow him.

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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.

**“And he went out, and followed him”** – Peter obeys the angel and follows him out of the area where he had been sleeping.

**“and *wist* [to know; to be aware] not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision”** – Being freshly awakened out of sleep, Peter thought he was dreaming or seeing a supernatural vision. It didn't occur to him that what he was experiencing was real. Perhaps it was a lack of faith on Peter's part that made him think that this angelic rescue was only a vision or else he was still half-asleep and not thinking clearly.

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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.

**“When they were past the first and the second ward [guard], they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city”** – The Greek word translated “ward” can refer to a person guarding or the place where that person stands guard (a guard post). Luke may be referring to the two “keepers” who were standing guard at the door of the prison. We are not told if these guards had supernaturally fallen asleep or if God supernaturally prevented the guard from seeing/hearing Peter and the angel. After passing by all the guards they came to the front gate of the prison.

**“which opened to them of his own accord”** – The angel did not have to unlock the gate and push it open, but it supernaturally opened on it's own.

**“and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him”** – The angel did not leave Peter standing outside the gate of the prison but apparently led him to an adjacent street. Perhaps this was to prevent the soldiers from seeing Peter and recapturing him while he was standing there confused about what had just happened.

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. 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.

**“And when Peter was come to himself”** – Perhaps the coolness of the night air had helped Peter to become more fully awake or maybe it was the fact that once the angel had departed, things had now returned to normal and he was no longer in the prison, but Peter finally came to the realization of the reality of his situation.

**“he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel”** – He understood that his experience with the angel was not his imagination, dream or a vision.

**“and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod”** – Peter was no longer in Herod’s custody.

**“and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews”** – The Jews had planned to condemn Peter to death, but God had rescued him from their intentions.

**“And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark”** – Peter thought about what he should do next and decided to go to the house of the mother of John Mark (who later writes the gospel of Mark). Peter is apparently close to this family and many commentators believe that most, if not all, of Mark’s information for his gospel came from Peter.

**“where many were gathered together praying”** – Another reason for Peter to go to this house is that he apparently knew that many people from the church would be there praying for him. He wanted them to know that God had rescued him and that he was safe.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 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.

**“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda”** – The Greek word for “damsel” can mean a young girl or a female servant. Rhoda hears Peter knocking on the door and comes to see who it is.

**“And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness”** – Since Herod has been arresting Christians, Rhoda does not open the door to see who is there in case it is Herod’s men. Apparently she instead asks “Who is it?” and recognizes Peter’s voice when he answers. Rhoda is so excited that God has answered their prayers that she apparently forgets to open the door for Peter.

**“but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate”** – Her excitement and joy is evident as she runs back in the house to tell everyone that Peter is no longer in prison but standing at the gate.

15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished.

**“And they said unto her, Thou art mad [insane; talking nonsense]. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so”** – Herod had already killed James (v. 2) and it seemed impossible that Peter would be spared the same fate. Despite it being an example of unbelief, it would be understandable to be surprised that Peter had been released from prison and was standing outside the gate to the house. However, they refused to believe that God had answered their prayer in such an impossible situation. They accuse Rhoda of being crazy and talking nonsense but she insists that she is telling the truth.

**“Then said they, It is his angel”** – Jewish superstition believed that each person had a guardian angel that would assume the form of that person. Another possibility is that they thought Peter was dead and that it was his ghost that was at the gate. They apparently believed that these possibilities were more probable than the simple explanation that God had answered their prayer.

**“But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished [astounded; to be out of one’s mind]”** – Peter is still knocking at the gate, waiting to be let in. He may have been concerned that one of Herod’s men might see him and recapture him. The people who were skeptical of Rhoda’s story apparently hear the knocking and come to investigate. When they open the door and see Peter, they are astounded. The Greek word for “astonished” goes beyond mere surprise. It implies that they believed that Peter’s situation was hopeless and that they would never see Peter alive again.

17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

**“But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace”** – Apparently everyone was blurting out questions and exclamations of amazement at the sight of Peter. He had to motion with his hand for them to be quiet so that he could answer the burning question on their minds: How did he escape Herod’s prison?

**“declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison”** – Peter describes how the Lord had sent an angel to wake him up and miraculously lead him out of the prison into the street.

**“And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren”** – James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod (v. 2). This James is the half-brother of Jesus who had become the leader of the church during the absence of Peter. Peter wants these believers to pass the word on to James and the rest of the church so that they are aware of what has happened.

**“And he departed, and went into another place”** – Peter leaves for his own safety and likely leaves town. We are not told where Peter goes, and the book of Acts turns its focus from Peter’s ministry to the Jews to Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.