

Acts 12:1-24

God to the Rescue! Again.

Learning Objectives

- We should see God as our rescuer and give Him glory in all things.
- There is power in prayer, even when our faith does not measure up.

Steps To Prepare (For Leaders)

- There are a few questions below that ask for examples from our lives. Think about these questions in advance and be prepared to share so your group has some time/space to reflect with their own answers.

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: Acts 12:1-24 (NIV)

¹ It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ² He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. ³ When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

¹² When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

¹⁵ "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."

¹⁶ But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷ Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸ In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an

audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply.

²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴ But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

The **Festival of Unleavened Bread** is a seven-day celebration that takes place after Passover to commemorate God’s command to the Israelites to flee Egypt. He commanded them to leave without waiting for their bread to rise. It is a celebration of liberation and deliverance from slavery.

? Based on what you remember from our previous studies, why were the Jews pleased with Herod when he killed James?

Possible Answer: The Jews were upset that the Christians were challenging their authority, preaching that Jesus was the Messiah, and preaching to Gentiles. For reference see Acts 7 (the account of Stephen) and Acts 9:19-25 (Saul preaching in the synagogues).

? Peter was arrested during the Festival of Unleavened Bread, a celebration of God’s liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. The Jews would have been offended if Herod had tried or executed Peter during this celebration. How is the irony of Peter’s imprisonment during this celebration of God’s provision for the Israelites significant?

Possible Answers: They are celebrating their own freedom while making a prisoner of their fellow Jew. Even more, they imprisoned Peter because they were offended by his message of even greater freedom from the Law through Christ. The ultimate irony is that the Jews themselves were also imprisoned by the Law, but did not acknowledge it or the freedom they could have through Christ.

? Optional: How were the Jews themselves imprisoned spiritually?

Leaders’ Note: You may wish to use this question depending on how your discussion of the question above flows.

Possible Answers: See above.

? As Christians we celebrate the freedom we have in Christ, but oftentimes we are fighting off imprisonment of our own. What are the things that continue to hold us captive, even though we know we have freedom through Christ?

Possible Answers: Responses will vary. For some of us we are held captive by legalism or moralism. Wanting to look like “good” Christians rather than people in need of God as our Savior. We can fall into the same trap that the Jews did. We may also still be held captive by certain sinful behaviors that we haven’t allowed God to work on in our lives.

Leader’s Note: This maybe a question you want to revisit during application time.

? What does the fact that Peter was so heavily guarded while in prison say about Herod’s fears?

Possible Answers: Peter had performed many miracles, and been witness to many miracles of liberation at the hands of Jesus. Herod knew there was more than human power helping Peter and the other Christians. By having him so heavily guarded, he may have been acknowledging the power Peter had through Christ. On the other hand, Herod was also showing what power he possessed as a strong earthly leader. He may have been making a statement that even God would not be able to overcome the measures he could take to imprison Peter.

? How does the Church respond to Peter’s imprisonment?

Possible Answers: The Church was earnestly praying to God for Peter. They did not give up hope or believe that Herod was more powerful than God.

? Why is community prayer and support important during the times in our lives that are difficult or desperate?

Possible Answers: We are often too deep in our own struggles to see that God is bigger than our circumstance, but our community can have a better perspective on our situation. Our faith may be shaken and prayer and support from our community helps to remind us that we are not alone or forsaken.

? Peter is surprised by how he escapes, and when he goes to Mary’s home, his friends are shocked that their prayers have been answered. Has there ever been a time in your life where you’ve been surprised by God’s provision or seen Him respond to your prayers in a way you weren’t expecting? What happened? How did this impact your faith?

? The reaction of the believers to Peter’s escape suggests that they did not expect it to happen, but God answered their prayers anyway. What does this say about the power of prayer? How can we incorporate this truth into our own prayer life?

Possible Answers: Our prayers are not answered in correlation with how much we do. If we do not pray “hard enough” or “earnestly enough” God still hears our prayers and intercedes on our behalf. We should be reassured that God answers prayer according to His will, not ours.

? In what ways do we see Peter giving God glory for his rescue?

Possible Answers: When he realizes he’s not dreaming, his first thought is to credit God with rescuing him and the only thing he does before leaving his friends is share the story of how God rescued him.

? Why do you think Herod responded so harshly to Peter’s escape from prison?

Possible Answers: The sixteen guards placed on Peter as a show of Herod’s power failed to do their job of keeping Peter in prison and to show what a mighty leader Herod was. Herod had also disappointed the Jews by allowing Peter to escape and as we can see in the passage, it was important for him to win the favor of the people he ruled.

? How should Herod have responded to Peter’s escape? What kept him from responding this way?

Possible Answers: Herod should have acknowledged God’s power and authority and been humbled by the failure of his attempt to interfere with the spread of the Gospel. His desire to rule over others, please the Jews, and show his own authority kept him from acknowledging God’s power.

? Optional: After having his power brought into question by Peter’s escape, how does Herod attempt to repair his pride?

Possible Answers: He goes to Caesarea to exert his power over the people there who depend on him for their food. He forces them to submit to him or die from starvation.

? What is revealed about Herod’s heart through his death?

Possible Answers: Herod is proud and wants to be seen as a god-like figure by those he governs. He wants glory for himself.

? How is verse 24 a demonstration of God’s power, especially as it relates to human authority and pride?

Possible Answers: Verse 24 reveals why God made an example of Herod when he refused to acknowledge Him. It shows the contrast between the limits of human authority, power, and pride and God’s power.

? In what ways have you been humbled by your experiences and hardship? How has this given you a better understanding of God’s character and desires for you?

Possible Answers: My experiences have helped me better understand God's power, love, and mercy. These experiences helped reorder my worship from me, people, God to God, people, me. God desires for me to be rooted in Him and worship Him alone.

For Discussion and Accountability

? How can we pray in faith like the community of believers did for Peter?

? Do we give God the glory for the work He does in our lives like Peter did, or do we respond like Herod? Is there an area of your life you need to be intentional about acknowledging God's work and power in?