

## Acts 12:1-24

### *God to the Rescue! Again.*

#### **Acts 12:1-24 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

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

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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."

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup>

Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

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

<sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup> 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.

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.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

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

**?** 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?

**?** 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?

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

**?** How does the Church respond to Peter's imprisonment?

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

? 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?

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

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

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

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

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

? 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?

### **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?