

“PRAYER CHANGES THINGS”

Acts 12:1-17

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INTRODUCTION

Meanwhile, back at Jerusalem—cf. 11:27-30 with 12:25—Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem after fulfilling their mission of charity.

There had been several persecutions before this time, but this was the most severe and threatening one yet. Three parties were now aligned:

- Sadducees
- Pharisees
- Herodians—as seen here by the activity of Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great who had tried to kill baby Jesus.

This attack was against the Apostles themselves, who up until this time had been somewhat impervious to persecution because of their strong Jewish connection and their popularity with the common people.

In this instance, Peter would undoubtedly think back to the incident of his denial of Christ in the court of the Jewish High Priest. He would no longer consider denying Him!

It is true that we can and should learn from this incident that we **must be willing to suffer for our Lord** and must not fear opposition. Yes, we must even be willing to die for Him if need be. But the main emphasis we see here is the *importance of* and the *power of Prayer*.

You Must Pray and Trust God for Great Things, for PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

In this passage we see *The Plot of the Enemy; The Plan of God, and The Prayer of the Church*.

I. THE PLOT OF THE ENEMY (1-5)

You can mark it down, if we are doing the work of God in the way God wants us to do it, the enemy is not going to be happy and will do all he can to ruin the work!

A. The Identity of the Human Enemy (1)—Nephew of Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist; had become ruler in succession of Philip’s realm, then of Antipas’ realm, then of Judea and Samaria in AD 41.

- Had grown up with the Royal family of Rome.
- Was “in and out” of favor with them prior to his rule.

1. Laid hands on some “who belonged to the Church”—the *ekklesia* or assembly of believers.
 2. He planned to “mistreat” them—likely **scourging** and **imprisonment**.
 3. It had been about 10 years since the persecution involving Stephen—that stopped abruptly with the conversion of Saul!
- B. The Persecution by the Enemy (2-5)
1. James the Apostle killed with a sword—brother of John
 - First apostle to die.
 - One of the 3 “inner circle” apostles
 - Fulfilled Jesus’ prediction that James and John would drink His “cup” of suffering (Mt. 20:23).
 - His death avoided future confusion with James the Lord’s brother.
 - His nature as “the son of thunder” may have caused him to stand out.
 - He was present in Jerusalem at the time.
 - We have no mention of a **replacement** for him.
 - This was a political execution—beheading—likely for “disloyalty to the state”. Compare the fanatical concern of Herod the Great earlier.
 - This is the only apostolic death mentioned in the NT.
 - Note the lack of details and lack of interest in the morbid!
 2. Peter Arrested (3-5)
 - a. Herod did so out of political expediency—“it pleased the Jews”—like grandfather, like grandson!
 - b. Herod delayed in the trial and execution due to Passover season—here referred to as “the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread” (3). The same feast during which Jesus was killed!
 - c. Herod took serious safeguards to protect Peter until his trial—*four quaternions of soldiers*: four groups of 4 each. No more prison escapes like the apostles earlier in chapter 5.
 - d. Peter kept in prison.
 - e. Maybe Herod heard about Peter’s violation of Jewish exclusivism in the Cornelius incident.

So, the enemy’s plot was hatched. Now what would happen? *O Woe! Things will Fall apart!*

No, for this was all part of God’s plan in order to manifest His mighty power, to deliver His people, to encourage them, and to cause them to grow.

II. THE PLAN OF GOD: DELIVERANCE (6-11)

God was not **worried** about the plans of man; He had His own providential plan!

- A. The Moment of the Deliverance (6)
 1. The very night that Herod planned to bring him out for trial (cf. the timing in the book of Esther).
 2. Peter was peacefully sleeping
 - Chained to a guard with each arm!
 - Guards watching the outside doors also.
 - Cf. Ps. 4:8—“Lay me down in peace and sleep”; Ps. 127:2—“He gives his beloved sleep”; **I Pet. 5:7**—“Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”
 - He had committed his soul to God, the righteous Judge (I Pet. 2:23).
- B. The Messenger of the Deliverance: “an angel of the Lord” (7)
 - Sudden appearance—only to Peter here.
 - Glory of the appearance—“light shone in the cell”—the glory of God.
- C. The Method of the Deliverance (7b-11)
 1. He aroused Peter by striking his side (7b)
 - This was a friendly yet firm striking.
 - Likely between watch changes—thus 3-6 AM.
 2. He frees Peter from his chains—without waking the guards, doing what Peter could not do. (7b)
 3. He commands Peter to do what he was able to do (7b-8)
 - Get up quickly—the matter is urgent!
 - Clothe yourself—gird, bind, your tunic with a belt, put on your sandals, wrap your cloak (outer garment) around you, follow me—notice how practical the Lord is! (8)
 4. He guides Peter out of the prison (9-10)
 5. Peter’s assurance of his deliverance (11)
 - He “came to himself”—in some kind of a trance before this; the trance left with the angel.
 - Now he knows that the Lord sent His angel to rescue him.
 - Neither Herod, nor the Jewish people (leaders) were able to fulfill their plans.
 - Peter once he saw the **whole picture** goes to Mary’s house—the mother of John Mark. He wants them to be informed about him (12).

Yes, man had his plans, but God had His own and accomplished them! This day had become a true Passover deliverance for Peter.

III. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH (12-17)

- A. Persistent and Fervent (5)

- Addressed to God—the only one who could help.
 - Made by the “Church”—not just the leaders (“many were gathered together”) (12)
 - A large number late at night—early in the morning!
 - People “were praying”—emphasis a second time on **persistence**.
- B. Place of Prayer (12)
- Note that Peter expected to find people here praying. Cf. James 5:16: “The effective prayer of a righteous man **can accomplish much.**”
 - Here, prayer did accomplish much!
- C. Powerful answer to prayer (13-17)
- They were not expecting **this kind of an answer!** We limit God!
 - Note, that James had been killed already.
 - True, Peter had been delivered earlier, and even by an angel; but no guarantee here.
1. Peter’s knock at the door (13)
 2. Rhoda’s answer of the door—joyfully recognizing his voice without opening it (13-14).
 3. Her announcement of Peter’s presence: he stands in front of the gate (14b).
 4. Their response—“You are Crazy!”—Lit. “to be disordered in mind”
 5. Certainly a strange rebuff from those who had been praying for Peter’s release!
 6. After further insistence they said, “It is his angel” (15). Maybe he was dead and his guardian angel has come to inform them.
 7. They finally open, after Peter continues to knock! Peter must have been quite frustrated: “*He was continuing and was knocking—repeatedly!*”
 8. *When they finally opened the door, they were “beside themselves” with amazement (16).*
 9. ***Let us not be so absorbed in prayer that we fail to listen to God’s voice to learn when prayer is no longer needed!***

CONCLUSION

Prayer can change things in our lives also!

You Must Pray and Trust God for Great Things, for PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

- Unsaved loved ones
- Sickness
- Persecution
- The “sinner’s prayer”

LET US BE A PEOPLE OF PRAYER.