

## **PETER**

### *And His Miraculous Escape from Prison*

**Scripture:** Acts chapter 12

**Place:** Jerusalem

**Time:** AD 44 during Passover Week, about 10 years after Jesus' death.

**The story:** Let's read Acts chapter 12 out loud and review the story. Who are the principle characters in this story?

**King Herod:** This Herod is the third generation of Herods (kings), appointed by Roman Emperors Caligula and Claudius to rule over Judea and Samaria.

Herod the Great (37-4 BC) was the Herod that had the Jewish babies slain after Jesus' birth. The next generation Herod was Herod Antipas (4 BC – AD 39) who was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded. The third one was this Herod Agrippa I (37-44 AD), the grandson of Herod the Great and nephew of Herod Antipas. He had James killed with the sword (probably beheaded) and put Peter in prison. The fourth generation was Herod Agrippa II and the Herod before whom Paul was examined in Acts 25. The Herods were cruel, bloodthirsty, vain and fond of magnificent display.

Herod Agrippa I was utterly loyal to Rome, but knew how important it was to gain sympathy of the Jewish leaders. Hence he moved to persecute the Christians. He was struck down by God with a horrible illness. The Emperor Caligula went insane as the result of an illness – probably lead poisoning as the Romans used lead pipes in their plumbing.

**James:** This is the brother of John, sons of Zebedee and two of the 12 disciples of Jesus (see Matthew 20:20).

**John:** James' brother. This is the apostle John, one of the 12 disciples and son of Zebedee. He is the author of the books Gospel of John, I, II, and III John and Revelation (written while imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos).

**Peter:** He is the Apostle Simon Peter (one of the 12 disciples of Jesus). His name means "rock" or "stone". Peter, the impulsive, outspoken disciple, always in the forefront is also the one who at Jesus' trial before his crucifixion, denied his Lord. Yet God used Peter mightily. He had been preaching, healing and spreading the Gospel throughout the area. He has been arrested and imprisoned twice before. His prior incarcerations are recorded in Acts 4:1-12 and Acts 5:12-21. Peter, who fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane and in this story sleeps chained between two guards, apparently does not have a problem with insomnia!

**Soldiers:** Perhaps because of Peter's prior escape from prison in Acts 5, Herod is taking no chances of him escaping again. He assigns four squads of soldiers to guard the prison (that is 4 soldiers in each squad, taking the four shifts); sentries to guard the entrance; 2 guards chained to him in the cell – and all this behind an iron gate! Often in Eastern custom, the prison formed a part of the dwelling house of the chief of the executioners, or some other prominent personage, sometimes even the king's palace. This may have been the case here. He was to be kept until the end of Passover before being executed.

**Angel of the Lord:** There is no doubt here about how he escaped. This was not a heroic rescue by his Christian friends. This was an angel of the Lord on direct assignment from God. He does only what Peter can't – removes the chains and opens the door. Peter has to dress himself and walk out.

**Mary:** Mary, the mother of John (Mark). Mary was probably wealthy and had a large home which was the meeting place for Christians. This is possibly the home of the "upper room" of Mark 14:13, Acts 1:13, and possibly the house where Pentecost occurred (Acts 4:31).

**John Mark:** This is the author of the Gospel of Mark. He is also the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey, and later with Barnabas.

**Rhoda:** Servant girl in Mary's home who went to see who was knocking at the door. It was probably solid and she recognized his voice. What a delightful picture this conjures up. She was so excited that Peter was there she ran to tell the others, failing to let him in! They believed it must be his ghost!

**James:** This is the brother of Jesus, who throughout Jesus' ministry did not believe in Him. But after the death and resurrection became a believer. He became a leader in the Jerusalem church. He is the author of the book of James.

**Conclusion:** Let's read again Acts 12:5. "So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." Peter was the one being tested, BUT the church was *praying*. And what happened? God answered their prayers (even if they could hardly believe it!) There are many Christians *today* around the world being persecuted and imprisoned and killed for their faith.

**Discussion:** *Get some information about imprisoned Christians around the world. Share current news and spend time in prayer for them*

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee; Acts of the Apostles (William Barclay); Great People of the Bible and How They Lived (Readers Digest); Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times (Readers Digest); The Acts (Charles Eerdman); Unger's Bible Handbook; Zondervan study Bible notes.