

PASSAGE: Acts 12:1-19 (NIV)

12 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.

LAUNCH

Can you remember the last time you were in a serious fix (health, employment, relational). What thoughts were racing through your head as you reacted to it?

How might Peter have normally reacted to the desperate situation that he found himself in?

DISCOVERY

What were Herod's plans for Peter and why was he treating Christians this way?

What are some of the reasons that Peter was able to sleep so soundly despite the highly dangerous situation he found himself in?

Can you think of a time when God was with you in a time of trouble and you were remarkably peaceful? What biblical truths helped you to have this peace?

What is impressive about the way the church responded to James's death and Peter's capture (2 significant leaders out of action)?

What are some of the alternative ways in which they might have responded?

John Wesley famously said 'God does nothing but in answer to prayer'. Do you agree with this statement and if so why?

What types of prayer would you be surprised at God answering and what types do you have greater faith for? Why the difference?

The encouraging thing about the believers praying is that they had very little expectation that their prayers would be answered. This leads to the comic scenario with Rhoda and Peter at the door. How does this situation encourage you in your prayer life?

APPLICATION

Spend time as a group praying for 'impossible things'. It might be healing, a miraculous conversion or a change in situation. As Steve encouraged us, try to pray for a specific outcome

Paul suggested that like Peter, God may need to break us out of strongholds, addictions or wrong situations. Pray for anyone that needs this.