

The Book of Acts: Verse by Verse

Study Notes: Acts 12:5-7

- **Recap:** As Luke continues his report ... he makes it clear that Herod was determined to ensure that Peter would not escape his grasp before he could execute him.
- **But The Church Was Earnestly Praying: v. 5**

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

The Greek adverb Luke uses for “earnestly” praying is “ektenocæs”. It can also be translated as, “unremittingly” or “fervently”. It is used of Jesus’ Gethsemane Garden prayer as well as Elijah’s prayer. For the latter, see: James 5:17-18

Consider what had recently happened: Herod had arrested James and executed him publicly – all for political gain. No doubt they had prayed for James when he was arrested, but he was executed.

Many of the believers must have seen James’ death as a defeat. Some might have thought it was pointless to pray for Peter’s release. However, they had some recent history to consider: Peter had been imprisoned and released twice before. See: Acts 4:29-30 and Acts 5.

- **A Different Gauge Of Successful Prayer**

What exactly makes prayer successful? Is it a matter of winning or losing? Is it a matter of some prayers succeeding and some failing?

The Bible insists that – despite whatever humans do or don’t do – God is still in charge of a believer’s life.

Isaiah 45:6–7: “I am Yahweh and there is no other besides me. I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity; I, Yahweh, do all these things.” - Isaiah 45:6–7 (See also: Job 19:25; Daniel 3:17-18; Philippians 1:27–29)

Is successful prayer a matter of “wins” and “losses” or is it coming to a place of confidence in God – whether He intervenes in an expected way – or allows what appear to be negative events to occur?

- **“The Night Before”: v. 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.”

Peter was in chains, sleeping between two smelly soldiers and the Church was in unrelenting prayer. The Church was utilizing its most powerful weapon – Prayer.

Four squads of four soldiers kept guard on Peter. Two were chained to Peter while two stood just outside the cell door. Each squad would have worked either three-hour or six-hour shifts. The idea was maximum security, with maximum alertness.

Luke says that although Peter was chained between two smelly guards he was sleeping. Sometimes we sleep as an escape. Sometimes we sleep because we are secure.

I think Peter was sleeping the sleep of the secure. He was convinced God was in control no matter what happened to him the next day.

- **“Suddenly, An Angel Appeared”: v. 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.”

Because Luke used the word “angelos” for “angel” in verse 7, some commentators have argued that it was a human that engineered Peter’s release.

The word, “angelos” can, at times refer to a human agency, such as a “messenger”. (See: Luke 7:24; 7:27; 9:52) Question: Would Luke really have given us all this build up before Peter’s escape if it was going to be by natural, human means?

Notice the words, “And angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell.” Aren’t these the same kinds of “tip-offs” that we find in Luke’s gospels and the rest of the New Testament? Supernatural lights don’t accompany humans; that’s never the case in the Bible. (See: Luke 2:9; Luke 24:4; Matthew 28:2-3).

Would Luke bother mentioning a “messenger” appearing and a light shining in the cell if it was a human holding a first-century oil lamp?

“He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.”

Do wrist manacles just fall off? No, we are meant to see a supernatural event here. This is an angel ... this is supernatural stuff happening.

I think the context of the story makes Luke’s intentions very clear. He is telling us about a supernatural event that not only confronts but overcomes the power of King Agrippa. God is showing that He is greater than any human power – and He’s using Peter as his example.

- **Next Time:** Leaving Prison to go to a Prayer Meeting.