

The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Acts 12:8-11 – Study Notes

- **Preparation For A Jailbreak: v.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.”

First-century typical clothing: A long, light weight under-tunic which could be cinched at the waist. This was covered by a heavier outer garment.

“Binding Up The Under-Tunic” or, “Girding The Loins”: Mentioned many times in the Bible in connection with getting ready to walk or run. See: Exodus 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29; 1 Peter 1:13.

At night, Easterners set aside the outer garment and the belt that synched the under-tunic. The angel tells Peter to synch his under-tunic, put on his sandals, throw his outer garment on, and follow him.

- **Seeing A Vision Or Actually Escaping? v. 9-10:**

“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.”

Have you ever been sleepy when you had to get up and go somewhere else? That’s how Peter was. He wasn’t sure if he was really seeing an angel or if it was a vision. Nonetheless, he did what he was told.

Verse 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.”

Peter and the angel made their way to the iron gate leading to the city streets outside the Fortress of Antonia. There is some debate as to whether Luke means they passed the first and second warders or guards (as the NIV puts it) or wards – as in different sections of the prison.

What about the guards? How could the angel lead Peter right pass two sets of warders? Luke doesn't tell us, but this is a repeat of what happened in Acts 5, when the entire group of Apostles were held by the high priest in the Temple Courts' prison. See: Acts 5:19-20

Note what Luke says in verse 10: When they got to the iron gate leading into the city: “It opened for them by itself, and they went through it.”

1. Luke's topographical precision: He notes that it was an iron gate. This only adds to the impossible odds Peter faced in his imprisonment and soon execution by Agrippa I.

2. The gate opened of its own accord. How does a gate open of its own accord? Dr. John Piper: *“Of course, we know it's a figure of speech. Gates don't have impulses. God opened the gate. I wonder if that figure of speech was used to remind us that even if the gate had a mind [it] would swing on the hinges of God's will – when God means to get something done.”* – Dr. John Piper

- **“Then Peter Came To Himself” – v. 11:**

“Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”

The wording of Luke's report seems far from second hand. Some suggest that it came from John Mark – since Peter was with him in

Rome for a season.

“Then Peter came to himself”. The Greek text literally says, “Having come to himself.” In the story of the Prodigal Son, we also find that phrase: “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’” – Luke 15:17

“To come to oneself” can be translated as, “to come to one’s senses”. That fits Peter situation. As he realizes that his dream was really taking place, he says to himself: ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.’”

- **“The Disbelief Of Joy”: verses 12-14:**

“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 girl 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!”

Luke tells us that Peter immediately went to house of Mary, John Mark’s mother.

This Mary is only referenced here in the New Testament. She was a relative of Barnabas. We have little direct information about her, but we can infer some things from the context of the story:

1. She was obviously a Christian.
2. She was well-known in the Early Church, as her home served as a place for prayer.
3. She had the financial means to support the efforts of the Jerusalem Church.

Mary’s support should not be overlooked. There is ample evidence that women supporters were essential to the ministries of both Jesus and the apostle Paul.

Luke's Gospel contains twenty-three stories that are absent in the other Gospels. For examples, in Luke 8 he writes: "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. – Luke 8:1-3

These women were more than financial supporters. They were actively involved in Jesus' ministry. The Greek word used to describe this is diakoneó – where we get our modern word "deacon." John Mark's mother was likely one of these "deaconess – type" women in the Early Church.

Some scholars have suggested that Mary's house contained the 'large upper room, furnished and ready', which Mark himself mentions. It could be the place where Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples. Others have suggested that it was the house where the Twelve lived and prayed during the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost (See: Acts 1:12–14).

The Jerusalem Church now numbered well above 10,000. Except for Solomon's Court, they could not meet in one place. Instead, they met in homes for fellowship, teaching, and communion. Mary's house was very likely one of these "house churches" – and Peter may well have been its resident elder.

Mary's house must have been spacious since it had an outer entrance or vestibule where Peter was standing when he knocked on the door. This was probably in a courtyard between this and the main house.

- **John Mark: A Preview**

Luke mentions of John Mark is a prelude to the story of his missionary journey with his uncle Barnabas and Saul. See: Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13.

John Mark: John was his Jewish name. Mark was his Roman name. Other examples: "Joseph, surnamed Justus" - Acts 1:23; "Saul, also called Paul" - Acts 13:9.

John Mark's missionary journey did not go well; he got frustrated and eventually left Barnabas and Paul. However, years later, he again served alongside Paul, who called him a "fellow worker". See: Philemon 1:24

How much had he matured? Most Bible scholars believe sometime between 55 and 59 AD, John Mark wrote the Gospel that bears his name. This John Mark is probably identical with the Mark mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. See: Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13.

As we end this segment, we find Peter is standing at the door of the courtyard leading into Mary's house. He is waiting to tell the believers that are gathered inside praying for his release – that an angel has already rescued him.

Next Time: Rhoda tries to convince the prayer warriors that Peter is standing at the courtyard door.