

Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison

Scripture Reference: [Acts 12:1-19](#)



Suggested Emphasis: The church prays together for those in need.



Background
Study



Story
Introduction



Telling
the Story



Review
Questions



Songs



Learning
Activities



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Story Overview:

King Herod (King of the Jewish people) persecuted Christians and ordered the arrest of the apostle, Peter. The whole church was very afraid so they gathered together in a house to pray. While they were praying, an angel visited Peter's prison cell and miraculously released him. Peter found his way to the house where the church was praying. Peter went into hiding but Herod was eventually struck down by an angel when he received praise from the people as if he was God.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)

The name “King Herod” appears a few times in the New Testament. Here are descriptions of three of them:

1. Herod the Great- (37-4BC) King at the time of Jesus’ birth. Visited by the wise men. In an attempt to kill baby Jesus he ordered Jewish boys under the age of two to be killed. [Matthew 2:1-15](#)
2. Herod Antipas- (4BC-AD39) He put John the Baptist to death ([Matthew 14:1-12](#)). Pilate sent Jesus to him before his crucifixion ([Luke 23:7-12](#)).
3. *Herod Agrippa I- (AD 37-44) The Herod of today’s story.

The James that King Herod had put to death was the brother of John. Years earlier Jesus had called James and John to follow him while they were in a fishing boat with their father ([Matthew 4:21-22](#)). James was the first of the original twelve apostles to die for his faith.

Jewish kings of this time were not trusted by the people and were more concerned with pleasing the Roman leaders. When Herod saw the Jews approved of the killing of James he knew a public trial of Peter would make him very popular with the them. He had Peter arrested and thrown in prison during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover). He knew the trial would have to wait until after Passover was over.

The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would have already been gathering for Passover so the news of Peter’s arrest must have gotten around quickly. Although Christians pray as individuals it had been common from the beginning for the church to also gather together to pray ([Acts 2:42](#)). In this case many people gathered at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark and relative of Barnabas ([see Background Information on the story of the Antioch Church](#)).

Peter was heavily guarded. Escape would have been impossible since he was sleeping between two guards and bound with two chains. Sentries were even guarding the door. But God is certainly the God of the impossible! When the angel appears he patiently guides Peter in getting up and dressed and then leads him past

all of the guards, through the city gates (which opened on their own) and down a street before disappearing as quickly as he had appeared.

At first Peter thought he was in a vision but, when the angel disappeared, he knew that these events were actually happening. Upon realising this his first thought was to go to Mary's house. This must have been a common place for Christians to meet.

The instant recognition that the servant girl, Rhoda, had of Peter and her immediate excitement and joy when she opened the door reveals how all social levels of society met together as Christians. This house full of people had been praying for Peter's release so it is almost humorous that they don't believe Rhoda when she announces that he had indeed been freed. It is so like us in our own prayer life, isn't it?

One suggestion to Rhoda was that she had seen Peter's angel ([Acts 12:15](#)) instead of Peter. Personal "guardian angels" are mentioned a few times in Scripture but there is never a full explanation or detail of exactly how they function. Many depictions of angels today are simply assumptions and guesses instead of being based on Scripture. See [Matthew 18:10](#) and [Hebrews 1:14](#).

Peter asked the people gathered to let the other church leaders (including James, the brother of Jesus) know what had happened and then he seems to have gone into hiding for a little while. When Herod could not find Peter he had the prison guards executed.




King Herod was not able to produce Peter for public trial so he escaped embarrassment and travelled to Caesarea where he had a number of meetings to resolve disputes against him. At one point he dressed in all of his royal robes and addressed the people. This particular audience needed to make peace with Herod so that their trade in food would not be cut off. They began to shout praises to him and began calling him a god instead of a man. After the humiliation in Jerusalem being called God must have sounded wonderful to him.

Sometimes the sin is in what we do and sometimes it is in what we choose not to do. Herod listened to the praise and chose not to give the praise to God. Judgement was immediate. An angel of the Lord struck him down. He was eaten by worms and died. ([Acts 12:23](#)).

Herod's attempt to stop the word of God failed.

"But the word of God continued to increase and spread."

Acts 12:24, NIV

-  [What happened before this story?](#)
-  [What happens after this story?](#)
-  [List of all Bible stories and themes on this website.](#)

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Way to Introduce the Story:

Before class write the letters "J" "O" and "Y" with large letters on the board. Explain to the children that these letters are one easy way to remember how to pray. We should pray about Jesus (and the good things He has done) first because He is most important. Then we can pray about Others next so that God can help them. Lastly, you can pray about Yourself and the needs that you have. Sing "J-O-Y"— (sung to the tune of Jingle Bells) "J-O-Y, J-O-Y, This must surely be. Jesus first, yourself last, and others in between." "At the end of class I hope that we can all pray together. Today we are going to learn about a time when the whole church prayed for Peter. Some amazing things happened when the church prayed together."

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The Story:

King Herod was the king of the Jews. He persecuted Christians and tried to hurt them. He ordered that the Apostle James be put to death by a sword. All of the Christians were very sad.

But the Jews that did not believe in Jesus were happy and thought King Herod had done the right thing. King Herod wanted to be popular with the Jews so he had the Apostle Peter arrested. He planned to have a public trial to accuse Peter and stop

him teaching about Jesus.

Peter had chains put around his wrists and feet and he was chained between two guards. There were also guards guarding the prison doors.

When Peter had been arrested the Christians in Jerusalem gathered together to pray to God. Many of them gathered at the home of a woman named Mary and prayed that Peter would be released from prison

The night before Peter's trial he was sleeping in the prison chained between the two guards when someone woke him up. It was an angel. The angel told Peter to get up and get dressed. The chains immediately fell off of Peter. Peter followed the angel past all of the guards and out of the prison. When they came to the locked city gates the gates just opened all on their own.

Peter followed the angel out of the city and to the end of a street. All of this time Peter thought he must be having a vision. Then, as quickly as he appeared, the angel vanished.

When Peter looked around he realised that this was no vision. He really was outside the city! God had sent an angel to save him.

Peter quickly made his way to the home of one of the Christians, Mary. He knew that other Christians liked to meet there.

A servant girl named Rhoda answered the door and she couldn't believe what she was seeing. She was so happy and so surprised that she left Peter standing there and didn't even let him in.

When Rhoda told the others that Peter was at the door they didn't believe her. They thought she was seeing things that weren't there.

But when they went and checked, they realised Rhoda was right. God had answered their prayers. Peter was out of prison. Peter spent time with the Christians who had been praying and then he went to another place so Herod could not find him.

Herod was extremely angry. When he could not find Peter he had all of the guards

executed.

King Herod was so angry that he travelled to another city to settle some business. The people in the other city were afraid Herod would be angry at them and stop letting them buy food. So they began to praise Herod and say he was God.

Herod should have stopped the people and corrected them. But instead of telling him he was not God he just let them keep saying it. Then something shocking happened. An angel struck Herod down and worms started eating him. Then Herod died.

Herod thought he could kill Christians and stop God. He thought he was as good as God. But he was not. The church only continued to grow more after this. Here's the last verse in the Bible Story: *But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. Acts 12:24, NIV*

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here to download the pictures to print](#). Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

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Review Questions:

1. When Peter was in prison, what was the church doing? Praying
2. When Peter was sleeping in his prison cell, who tapped him on the shoulder

- and released him from prison? An angel
3. How did the angel get Peter out of the prison past all of the guards? It was a miracle- the angel walked with Peter and they just walked by all of the groups of guards. The iron gate to the city just opened all by itself and they walked through it. After that the angel “suddenly left him.”
 4. When Peter came to the house where the church was praying, who answered the door? A servant girl named Rhoda
 5. Who did the church think was at the door? An angel- but it was Peter

Song Suggestions:

- [God is Listening When We Pray \(Song\) English/Cebuano](#)
- [Read You Bible. Pray Every Day.](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Look over today’s church bulletin with the children to see if there are any prayer requests that they can pray for.
- Invite someone from the church prayer ministry or someone with a mature prayer life to talk about what they do.
- Begin a class prayer project for the term. One idea might be to draw a tree (or bring in an actual limb) and have the children write their prayer requests on green “leaves” each week and attach them to the tree. If you attach them with blue tac then they can be taken off and passed out so that children can pray for that item in a chain prayer. Another idea is a “prayer line” where prayer requests are written on pieces of paper and attached to the wall, one after the other, to form a line. This can get longer each week. Children can add comments on answered prayers.
- For more prayer ideas see [Prayer in Bible Class.](#)

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Escape from Prison" printables to print \(A4 paper\)](#)

[Click here for "Escape from Prison" to print \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Jelly bean prayer craft \(dltk-holidays.com\)](#)
- [Craft: Praying hands memory verse \(mssscrafts.com\)](#)
- [Craft: Prayer pail with popsicle/craft sticks \(lubirdbaby.com\)](#)
- [Five finger prayer activity \(sermons4kids.com\)](#)
- [Recipe for praying pretzels \(dltk-bible.com\)](#)
- [Fill-in-the-blank worksheet \(sundayschoolsources.com\)](#)
- [A good selection of puzzles and games \(gardenofpraise.com\)](#)
- [Teacher's Guide \(ccquakertown.org\)](#)
- [Devotionals from ccquakertown.org](#)

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