

## ST. PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON

– APRIL 30. – ACTS 12:1-11. –

PASSOVER TRIALS AND TESTINGS – DEATH OF ST. JAMES  
– ST. PETER IMPRISONED – HIS MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE  
– AN ALL-NIGHT PRAYER-MEETING – THE REWARD OF FAITH  
– LESSONS FOR OUR DAY – DIVINE GUARDIANSHIP OF ALL  
WHO ARE TRULY THE LORD'S – THE POWER OF SATAN – THE  
POWER OF GOD AND THE POWER OF PRAYER.

**"The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear  
Him, and delivereth them." – Psalm 34:7.**

HEROD was the family name of several kings who ruled Israel, but who were descendants of Esau – Edomites. At the time of our Study for today Herod Agrippa I. had been appointed king of Judea. He was the grandson of Herod the Great, murderer of the babes of Bethlehem, and the nephew of Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and subsequently, with his soldiers, set Jesus at naught and mocked Him, just prior to His crucifixion.

Herod Agrippa appears to have been desirous of the good will of the people, even at the cost of principle. He took pains to observe the minutiae of Jewish ceremonials. He hung up in the Temple the gold chain which the Emperor Caligula had given him. The story is related that at the Feast of Tabernacles he caused the entire Book of Deuteronomy to be read in the hearing of the people; and that when the reader came to the words, "Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, who is not thy brother" (Deut. 17:15), the king "burst into theatrical tears." Thereupon the populace obsequiously cried, "Do not weep, Agrippa; thou art our brother!"

## **PASSOVER SEASON SIFTINGS**

On the lookout to curry favor with the Jews, especially the influential ones, Agrippa caused the Apostle James to be beheaded. St. James was one of the three who had usually accompanied our Lord in the most confidential capacity. Although the record of this noble Apostle's ministry is brief in the extreme, it contains nothing that gives the slightest suggestion of anything but zeal and faithfulness to our Lord and to His Cause. This James, who died early in the Christian Era, should not be confounded with the author of the Epistle of James – "James the Less," supposed to have been second cousin to our Lord, and for this reason styled "the Lord's brother," according to Jewish custom.

Finding that the death of St. James brought great pleasure to the Jews, Agrippa had the Apostle Peter arrested. The expression, "When he had apprehended him," implies that some delay occurred between the order for the Apostle's arrest and the time of his imprisonment – that his arrest was after searching. Probably all of the Apostles were more or less secreted about that time; but, trusting to the sacredness of the Passover season, St. Peter had ventured forth and was arrested and imprisoned, Agrippa intending his death directly at the close of the Passover week. Meantime, however, the Lord delivered His faithful Apostle, as this Study shows.

We can well imagine the sadness of the Church at this Passover season, which must have reminded them considerably of the time of our Lord's death and of the alarm then amongst His followers. For some years past it has seemed to us as though each Passover season, each Memorial celebration, was a time of special trial and testing amongst the followers of our Lord. Whether this is a fact or not, it surely will not injure the Lord's people to be especially on guard against the wiles of the Adversary at these times. Let us watch and pray always, lest we fall into temptation.

The thought of special trial, special temptation from the Adversary at this season of the year, seems to have been the foundation for the Lenten Season, a period of special restraint, fasting and prayer, which has come down to us through the oldest channels of Church history. The fact that with many today the Lenten season is a mere formality does not mean that it is so or that it was originally so. Strongly would we recommend the fasting and prayer at all times enjoined in the Scriptures; and we suggest that, if possible, alertness be especially [R5887 : page 120] exercised by all the consecrated during the forty days preceding the Memorial.

As we have already explained, our self-denials are not merely along the lines of food and drink, but are to extend to all of our appetites. Undoubtedly a very simple and limited diet during the Spring of the year would be beneficial for the majority of mankind, even though there were no spiritual blessings connected therewith. Winter cold brings hearty appetites; and the result is that toward Spring the system is apt to be surfeited, or over-charged. From this condition it need to be relieved by a measure of abstention, which is as favorable to spirituality as surfeiting is unfavorable.

### **PRAYING FOR ST. PETER**

St. Peter is supposed to have been imprisoned in the famous Castle of Antonia, where our Lord was arraigned before Pilate, and where St. Paul was subsequently taken when mobbed in Jerusalem. The Apostle had a guard of four quaternions – four soldiers each – who relieved each other every three hours. Two of the four were chained to St. Peter's arms, one to each arm; a third stood outside the door; and a fourth was stationed in the passage leading to the outer iron gate.

The power of Divine grace to help in every time of need and to give peace amidst alarms is well illustrated in this case by the fact that under all these circumstances St. Peter was fast asleep when the angel of the Lord came to deliver him. The proprieties of the case

are also illustrated by the fact that the Church were not asleep, but praying for the Apostle. It was not for him to pray for his own deliverance from the power of Agrippa; he had already consecrated his life unto death, and properly should feel quite ready to lay down his life at this time, if such proved to be the Divine will respecting him. For him to have asked for the prolongation of life would have been to ask amiss, and would have manifested a wilfulness incompatible with a full consecration to the Lord's will. But with the Church it was different. While expressing their confidence in the Divine supervision of the affairs of the Church, they could with all propriety tell the Lord of their love for St. Peter and express the hope that it might be the Lord's will that the Apostle should continue with them for their joy and comfort and for their upbuilding in the "most holy faith."

Then, too, the loss of the Apostle James, who apparently was the leader amongst the Apostles, would make St. Peter and every other Apostle doubly precious in the estimation of the Household of Faith. God purposed that St. Peter should live to be an old man; for this was our Lord's prophecy concerning him. (John 21:18,19.) But the emergency proved a blessing to the Church, by way of stirring up their pure minds to an appreciation of God's Cause in general and of St. Peter in particular.

### **DELIVERED BY AN ANGEL**

Between three and six o'clock in the morning St. Peter, who had been sleeping peacefully, was awakened by an angel, whose radiant features enabled the Apostle quickly to discern that his deliverer was a holy being. The Apostle was bidden to arise. Quickly and simultaneously the chains were loosed which bound him to the soldier by either hand. He was then instructed to put on his sandals and his outer garment, or cloak, and to follow his leader. He did so, realizing the facts as those in a dream. Thus he was led past the first and second wards, or doors, until they came to the great gate leading

into the city. This swung open of its own accord; and then the angel left him.

It is worthy of notice that the miracles performed were only such as were beyond St. Peter's natural power. Whatever he could do he was required to do; namely, to put on his sandals and his cloak and to follow the angel. He might have been transported; sandals might have been fastened to his feet; a new cloak might have been provided. But the lesson is more profitable as it was given. Similarly in the Lord's dealings with us today, we should remember that it is ours to do everything in our power; and that it is the Lord's to overrule all things for our good and to supply our deficiencies from His abundance.

When the Apostle came to himself, when he realized the facts in the case – that he was free – his faith was strengthened. Willing to die, he found that the Lord was willing that he should live, labor and endure; and he was equally pleased, rejoicing, we may be sure, for the privilege of further service, even though it would mean further sacrifices and sufferings for the sake of the Lord and of His people.

Doubtless the angel had started St. Peter in the direction of Mary's home, where prayer was being made on his behalf. The description of the house implies that it was one of the better class. St. Peter's knock was answered by little Rose (Rhoda), who child-like, was so delighted, when she recognized the Apostle's voice, that she neglected to open the door before running back to tell the praying household that he was at the gate. Expecting no deliverance at such an hour, some thought that the little maid was mistaken, and insisted that it must be his angel – in harmony with the prevalent thought that an angel had supervision of each individual of God's people, and that such might personate the one under his protection.

The brethren were surprised at the Lord's answer to their petition; for it came very unexpectedly as respects time. When they

realized that it was actually St. Peter who stood before them, there was an outburst of excitement and of questions which the Apostle was obliged to silence by the shaking of his hands. Then he narrated the wonderful story of his deliverance, and bade them tell it to the other James, the cousin of Jesus, and to the other disciples. Then he went his way, whether to another city or to another house we do not know. In any event, he exercised wisdom in not needlessly provoking Herod.

With the coming of daylight there was consternation in the prison. Later on in this same chapter we learn of another visit of the angel of the Lord. This time he came to smite the king with disease, from which he subsequently died. The entire chapter shows us the power of Satan, the power of God and the power of prayer.

### **THE GOLDEN TEXT**

Our Golden Text is a symbolical statement illustrative of the Divine guardianship of all those who are truly the Lord's. The thought is that the affairs of His people are under His continual supervision. Whether we think of the angel of the Lord as one of the Heavenly host especially appointed on our behalf, or whether we think of him from the standpoint of the various powers of nature, the levers of which are all in the Divine care, it matters not. We have the assurance that the Father Himself loves us, and that all the Heavenly powers are pledged to those whom He has accepted in Christ Jesus; and these unitedly guarantee blessings to all who abide in God's love.

To thus abide means to abide in the Redeemer. It means to abide loyal to our consecration, to do the Father's will to the best of our ability. That will is declared to be that we shall love the Lord supremely, shall love our neighbor as ourselves, and shall love all the members of the Household of Faith even as Christ loved us.

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