

Our **GUIDE** for little ones

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IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 69

Peter Delivered from Prison

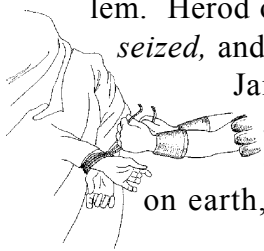
Acts 12:1-19

In our story for today we meet another Herod, king of the Jews. Like his grandfather who killed the babies of Bethlehem; and like his uncle who murdered John the Baptist, this Herod also was an enemy of God and of His Christ. And of Christians.

Herod began, the Bible tells us, by “vexing” some of the Christians in Jerusalem. Probably by putting them in *prison*, and by beating them. And then he did still more. The best way, he thought, to destroy the church, would be to kill the *leaders*.

James, the brother of John, was in Jerusalem. Herod ordered that James be *seized*, and put in *prison*, and *tried*.

James was *beheaded*. Yes, James, one of the three closest of Jesus’ friends on earth, was *killed*.



How can that *be*? Was Jesus, maybe, not paying attention? Did the enemy of the church *win* this one — and the church *lose*?

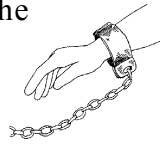
It must have looked that way to *Herod*. And when he saw how happy the *Jews* were when James was killed, Herod decided to grab another one of the apostles. It was none other than *Peter* — the biggest prize of all. The apostle Peter was grabbed, and jailed.

But it was the time of the Pass-over. And the Jews didn’t like to be troubled with *criminal trials* on their feast days. So Herod decided to keep

Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.

Peter in prison till after those days were past, and then take him out to the people.

Herod remembered, however, that, once before, Peter and the other apostles had managed, somehow, to *escape* from prison. Well, Herod would see to it that *that* didn't happen again. Day and night there will be *armed guards* — two of them at the door, and two of them right next to Peter, *chained to him*. The only way Peter can escape from *this* prison is by dragging two soldiers along with him. Thus did Herod make *doubly sure*, even *triply sure*, that Peter would not get away.



Meanwhile, the Christians in Jerusalem were praying, day and night, for Peter, and for the church.

The feast days are passing. Closer and closer is the time for Peter's trial, a trial that would lead surely to his *death*. Finally it is the *night before*. Peter is ... sound asleep. Not worrying, fretting, about tomorrow. He has *peace* ... because he knows that, not Herod, but *Jesus* reigns.



And then, suddenly, Peter is awakened ... by the touch of an angel. Peter opens his eyes to a brightly lit room. "Arise up quickly," the angels says. And Peter does so. The chains? Well, what are mere *chains*, when the power is the *Lord's*? The chains simply fall from his hands. Probably silently.

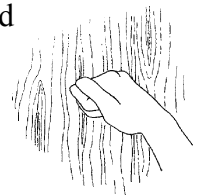


But it didn't matter. They could fall with a loud clang, and these guards will not awaken. What are mere *men*, when the power is the *Lord's*? They sleep on, totally unaware that their prisoner is *free*.

"Follow me," the angel says. And Peter follows. Past the guards at the door — who see and hear ... nothing. Peter follows the angel to the massive, locked, iron gate, which swings open ... all by itself. Peter continues following, in a daze, thinking that all of this cannot be *real*, but that he must be *dreaming*. And then the angel disappeared.

It didn't take long for Peter to realize, then, that he wasn't dreaming. This was *real*. The Lord had *delivered* him. And he knew what he had to do. He must go into hiding, until the danger is past. First, however, he wants to be sure that his friends in Jerusalem know what has happened. So he hurried through the dark streets of Jerusalem till he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Maybe, he thought, somebody will be awake there.

Truth is, there were *many* people there. And they were *all awake*. In the middle of the night. Praying. For Peter. While they are praying they hear a knock on the door. That would be kind of scary, wouldn't it? A maid by the name of Rhoda, a young servant girl, went to the door. She didn't, of course, *open* the door. She just asked who was there. And when she heard *Peter's* voice, she was so excited that she ran straight back





to the others to tell them the great good news.

And they didn't believe her. Rhoda, they thought, was only imagining things. It can't be *Peter*.

But when they opened the door, there he was. The Lord, Peter said, yes, the *Lord*, had brought him out of prison.

That was all that they needed to know. With that, Peter went out again into the darkness and, by the time the guards awoke, and discovered that their prisoner had escaped, Peter was well on his way to another place.

Herod must have been furious. This was going to be a big day for him. And now he learns that Peter had *gotten away!* Somebody will *pay* for this. The guards — call the guards. So the guards come, but they can tell Herod *nothing*, because they *saw* nothing. But, Herod wonders, are they telling the *truth*? Did, maybe, somebody *bribe* them, give them a pile of money, if they would *let Peter go*? Yes, that must be it — because the only other possible explanation for Peter's escape would be ... that the *Lord did it*. Never will Herod *admit* that. Never will he admit that he was overruled by ... God. So, kill the guards! Let everybody think that the *guards* did it.

But the Jews knew better. They knew that a *higher power* had snatched Peter out of Herod's hand. Herod knew it too. And, best of all, *God's people* knew it. And they know it still today. There is no power on earth that can do them harm.

Why not? Because Christ rules in heaven. Peter knew it was true — when he walked out of that jail, right past the armed guards. And James, in heavenly glory, would agree.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What did Herod do to James?
2. What were the Christians doing while Peter was in prison?
3. How did Peter get out of prison?
4. Where did Peter go after the angel disappeared?
5. What did Herod do to the prison guards?

The Sending of Barnabas and Saul

Acts 12:20 - 13:12

Herod knew that no human hand had gotten Peter out of his prison. There was a higher power there — a power higher by far than Herod — a power *for* the Christians, and *against* Herod. Herod dared not touch another apostle. In fact, he soon packed up his bags and got himself out of Jerusalem, and out of Judea. He went to Caesarea. He would, if possible, get *away* from the God of the Jews.

Herod was a proud man. More than anything else, he cared about ... *self*. He wanted to have *power*. He wanted to be *popular*. He liked to be the *center of attention*. And so one day in Caesarea he gave a *speech*. Lots of important people were there. Here was Herod's chance to

wow them all. He didn't just *stand* in front of them. He *sat* in front of them — on his *throne* — wearing his most magnificent royal apparel. All eyes were on him. He loved it.



People like to flatter kings. Often they don't mean a word of it. The people listening to Herod didn't even wait for him to finish his speech. They interrupted him to shout their flattery. "It is the voice of a *god*," they say, "and not of a *man*."

How would you like it, if somebody would say that about *you*? You wouldn't like it at all, would you? Herod *did*. He *loved* it. It tickled his ears. Glory is what he wanted — for *himself*.

But Herod was the king of the *Jews*, whose God was *Jehovah*. It was *His* glory that Herod was *robbing*. God saw it. And He was displeased. He sent His angel. The angel had only to touch Herod, and death began to work in his body. No, he didn't die immediately, but worms, maggots, began eating his body as if it were already dead. Thus did an enemy, a persecutor, of the church *perish*.


The *church*, meanwhile, was *multiplying* and *growing*. More and more believers, every day — both Jews and Gentiles. Certainly that was true in Antioch, under the preaching of Saul and Barnabas. Trouble is, the church there was *staying in Antioch*. Not yet had this church, or the church *anywhere*, thought about *sending out missionaries*. In this last part of our story for today, God tells

the church in Antioch to *do* that — to send out missionaries. Antioch, the first *Gentile* church, becomes also the first *missionary* church.

Who were the first missionaries? "Separate me *Barnabas* and *Saul*," the Lord said, "for the work whereunto I have called them." The work, that is, of *missions*.

The church in Antioch obeyed. They "separated" Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which *God* had called them. Yes, God Himself had called them. But the church must "separate" them. And not simply by giving them a farewell party. No, the church must *appoint* them, must give them the *authority*, the *right*, to go out and preach. The church at Antioch did that, first, by *praying* — praying, surely, that God would make Barnabas and Saul wise, and courageous, and spiritually strong. And then they *laid their hands* on the heads of the two missionaries. Why? As a *sign* — a sign of the *Holy Spirit* giving them spiritual power. By no *other* power could they go out on a *mission to the world!*



Soon the two missionaries, accompanied by John Mark as their helper, were on their way. Down to the sea they went, to get aboard a ship that would take them on the first step of their first missionary journey. The big boat leaves the dock and heads out to sea. From the shore,  three men on the deck would look ever so small. And, truth is, they *are*

small. Two missionaries, two *mere men*, are on a *mission to the world*, sent by a *little church in Antioch*. How can anything great ever come of *this*? But it *will*! Why? Because the *Spirit* called them. And *Christ* reigns in heaven.

First stop for Barnabas and Saul was the island of Cyprus. There were some Jews on the island. The missionaries preached in their synagogues. And they talked to Gentiles, as they made their way from one end of the island to the other. About a hundred miles it was. At last they reached the city of Paphos, the main city of Cyprus. The governor of Cyprus lived here. His name was Sergius Paulus. It didn't take long before he heard that there were two Christian missionaries on his island. And, believe it or not, he wanted to *hear* them. So he *sent* for them, so that he could learn more about the word of God.

Think of that! The *governor* wanted to hear about *Jesus*. What a boost this would be for Christianity in Cyprus, if the *governor* became a Christian! Barnabas and Saul were delighted. So, to the governor's court they went. And when they talked to him about *salvation for sinners*, they could see that he was a *serious listener*.

Another man in the court of the governor could see that too. His name was Bar-jesus. He was a *Jew*. And he was a *sorcerer*. He pretended to have *special powers*. And the governor had

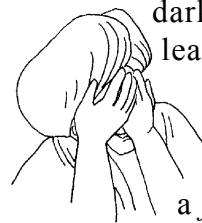
believed him. But now, here are two *Christian missionaries*. Bar-jesus knew very well that, if the governor became a *Christian*, he wouldn't allow a *sorcerer* to be in his court.

So Bar-jesus spoke up. He interrupted Barnabas and Saul. He said they were wrong. He tried to persuade the governor not to believe these two Jews.

Do you know who was behind it all? The devil. Yes, Satan was paying attention. He saw that Gentiles in Cyprus were *believing in Jesus*. He saw that the *governor* called for Barnabas and Saul. And, oh, how he hated it all. He will use Bar-jesus to try to stop it.

Saul understood. And he acted. "Thou child of the devil," he said to the sorcerer, "wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season."

And so it happened. Bar-jesus was struck *blind*. He stumbled around in darkness, looking for someone to lead him by the hand.



Sergius Paulus saw it all. And he understood what it meant — that Bar-jesus was a *fake*, and that Barnabas and Saul spoke the *truth* ... about Jesus. And he *believed*. Satan's plan had *backfired*. Because Christ reigns in heaven.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What did the people say to Herod when he was giving a speech?

2. How did Herod die?
3. What church was the first to send out missionaries?
4. Who were the first two missionaries?
5. What island was the first stop for the missionaries?
6. What important man on Cyprus wanted to hear the missionaries?
7. How was Bar-jesus punished for arguing against the missionaries?

2. Why didn't the guards at the door see Peter walking past?
3. Why did Herod kill the guards?
4. What did Herod do in Caesarea that was displeasing to God?
5. Who was it that called Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries?
6. Why did Bar-jesus want to persuade Sergius Paulus not to believe the missionaries?

How Well Do You Understand?

1. What did Herod do to make sure that Peter could not escape?

Memory Verse

Acts 12:24 "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

Color the Shapes

Color in
all the shapes
with dots.
What did you color?

