

The Divine Decree: Actions Have Consequences: Peter's Escape: Arrest & Incarceration, Acts 12:3–4; Prevailing Intercessory Prayer Undertaken by the Jerusalem Church, v. 5; Peter Restrained by Locked Cell, Chains, & Guards, v. 6; Peter's Faith-Rest, Ps 37:7; Isa 26:3–4; Ex 14:13b; 1 Sam 17:47; Ps 4:8; the Angelic Rescue: Miracles & Self-Help, Acts 12:7–8; the Great Escape, vv. 9–10; Peter's Faith & Prevailing Prayer; Mandates to Pray: Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17; Ps 66:20; Peter Orients to Grace, Acts 12:11–12

D. Peter's Escape

Acts 12:3 - When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

1. Herod desperately wanted to be accepted by the Jews. The pleasure they got from the execution of James encouraged the king to have Peter arrested.
2. Injustice was delayed since the arrest occurred on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which begins with Passover.
3. Jewish law prohibited executions during the observance of feast days so Peter's sentence was postponed for a week.

Acts 12:4 - When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads [τετράδιον (*tetrádion*): Latin: "quaternion" (KJV): half a squad or four men, 16 total] of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover [Πάσχα (*páscha*): "Easter" (KJV)] to bring him out before the people.

1. Herod has taken extreme measures to insure that Peter would not be able to escape captivity during the time of Passover and Unleavened Bread.
2. Each *tetrádion* takes a three-hour shift from six in the evening until six in the morning. Two guards are with him in his cell, two outside the cell, and four more at two stations leading to the exit of the prison.
3. As soon as the feast days are over, Peter will be brought "before the people" which means the Jews will condemn him to death and Herod will give the order to carry out the sentence.
4. Human reasoning is forced to conclude that there is no way that Peter could possibly escape this situation. However, something new was going on among the members of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 12:5 - So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made [γίνομαι (*gínomai*)] ferently [ἐκτενώς (*ektenós*)] by the church to God.

1. This verse is a brief summary of what takes place during the eight days of Passover: (1) Peter is in prison guarded by Roman soldiers and (2) the members of the Jerusalem church are said to be involved in fervent prayer.
2. Peter is in a helpless and hopeless situation, the very spot where the grace of God becomes the only available problem-solving device.
3. The death of James caught the church off guard. They had been neglecting prayer during a time they knew Herod was their antagonist and the Jews were his comrades.
4. Shocked by the suddenness of James's execution and the subsequent arrest of Peter, the church got serious.

5. Question: What will it take for believers to get serious about the impending chaos in store for this country? The coals of anarchy are being stoked as “the powers that be”¹ blow oxygen on smoldering embers of discontent.
6. The word “fervently” is the adverb **ἐκτενῶς (ektenōs)**:
The word combines the ideas of perseverance (“without letting up”) and intensity (“with fervor, urgently”).²
7. This is used in conjunction with the present passive participle of the verb **γίνομαι (gínomai)**: “was being made.” The participle is a periphrastic imperfect. This construction is decidedly durative in significance.
8. Not only were the Jerusalem believers praying with intense urgency, but they were also doing it over the course of the entire eight days.
9. This effort will produce an end result that will shock them when the last night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread arrives.

Acts 12:6 - On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

1. The same circumstance constrains Peter on the eighth night of his confinement as it did the first: he remains in chains confined to a cell, guarded by Roman soldiers inside and out.
2. When a believer is in a hopeless-helpless situation he is at the mercy of the grace of God. Such individuals are subjects for intercessory prayer.
3. When James was taken prisoner the church was asleep while James was condemned to death.
4. Now the church is awake. They perceive the danger that not only Peter faces but what is becoming a campaign against them all.
5. As Herod’s anti-Christian zealotry conjures murder lust, his Jewish supporters cheer him on.
6. This realization sends the Christians to their knees in prayer and they don’t let up. With no possible means of physically rescuing Peter, these believers go to the Lord.

Matthew 18:19 - [Jesus] “If two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 21:22 - [Jesus] “All things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”

7. There is a time to sleep and there is a time to pray. Peter applies the faith-rest drill: he claims promises, uses the doctrinal rationale of the plan of God, reaches a doctrinal conclusion, and then goes to sleep:

¹ “Those in control, the authorities. This expression appeared in William Tyndale’s 1526 translation of the Bible (Romans 13:1): ‘The powers that be are ordained of God’” (Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* [New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997], 511).

² Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 257.

Psalm 37:7 - [David] Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fear because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes."

Isaiah 26:3 - [Isaiah] "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.

v. 4 - "Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock."

Exodus 14:13b - [Moses] "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation [deliverance] of the Lord."

1 Samuel 17:47 - [David] "The battle is the Lord's."

Psalm 4:8 - [David] In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety.

8. PRINCIPLE: God does not help those who help themselves. He helps the helpless. He will *not* do for Peter what Peter can well do for himself. He *will* do for Peter what Peter is unable to do.
9. Hopeless situations are permitted in the decree so the believer can find out what God can do. Peter has turned the entire affair over to the Lord and has gone to sleep.
10. Throughout the week, the members of the Jerusalem church have been engaged in consistent prevailing prayer.

Acts 12:7 - And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

v. 8 - And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak³ around you and follow me."

1. Notice that Peter is sound asleep and must be awakened by the angel by a poke in the ribs.
2. At this point, unnatural events and miracles occurred in rapid order: (1) the light emitted by the angel illuminated the room, (2) the angel is inside the locked prison cell, (3) Peter's chains fell to the floor, and (4) the noise does not wake the guards.
3. The angel then tells Peter, who is groggy and half asleep, that there are four things he must do by himself: (1) "gird yourself," (2) "put on your sandals," (3) "wrap your cloak around you," and (4) "follow me."
4. God takes care of things that are impossible for Peter to do in verse 7 while Peter must take care of basic tasks for which he is fully capable of doing in verse 8.

Acts 12:9 - And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

³ "The tunic was the essential garment ... held to the waist by a girdle of leather or coarse cloth. When men needed freedom to work or for running, they lifted the hem of the tunic and tucked it into the girdle to gain greater freedom of movement. The cloak was worn on top of the tunic." (Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2005], 10, 11, 12).

v. 10 - When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

1. Additional miracles occurred: (1) the guards outside the cell remained asleep as the men walked by, (2) the main gate to the prison “opened for them by itself,” and (3) the angel disappeared.
2. Finally, Peter is on the streets of Jerusalem having been delivered from impending death by means of a miracle.
3. What was on the PROM chip of the divine decree that caused the sovereignty of God to program these miraculous events onto the ROM chip?
4. The faith of Peter and the prevailing intercessory prayer of believers in the Jerusalem church!
5. Prayer is a divinely ordained system provided by God so that believers can communicate directly with Him.
6. Numerous verses in Scripture contain mandates that instruct believers to pray:

Ephesians 6:18 - With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Philippians 4:6 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.

Colossians 4:2 - Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - Pray without ceasing.

Psalms 66:20 - Blessed be to God, Who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me.

7. Now free, it dawns on Peter that what has just happened was not a vision but reality. His statement confirms that his deliverance was of divine design:

Acts 12:11 - When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

v. 12 - And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

1. When Peter arrived at Mary’s home he knocked on the door and was eventually let in to the amazement of the group that for an entire week had been praying for his release.
2. They at first assumed he was an angel but Peter related to them the miracle that had occurred.
3. Peter knew that once the morning came, Jerusalem would not be a safe place for him. He requested that the group relate the details of his escape to James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church.

4. Peter then leaves and in verse 17 we learn that he “went to another place.” That place was Antioch which would become the new headquarters for the Christian movement westward.
5. The Jerusalem church failed to learn critical lessons from Peter’s miraculous escape.
6. Although the power of their prevailing prayer was answered by God, believers in Jerusalem did not have the spiritual muscle to stay the course.
7. Legalism gradually overtook Jewish believers in the East so that the Word of God was ultimately rejected in the city where Christianity originated.
8. The move was now westward and the one who would take the Word to those with positive volition was the apostle Paul.