**Research on: Deliverance of Peter from prison**

**Acts 12:1, 3, 5, 7-11**

“The Jews persecuted their Christian countrymen whenever it was possible. As they had killed Jesus, so they stoned Stephen to death and in the following extensive persecution of the church, they had tried to discipline the disciples by imprisonment and death. But, just as later the Romans started persecutions and allowed them to wane, so did the Jewish people and their leaders. Thus in Luke 9:31, it says the church, in the whole of Palestine, was at peace, indicating a pause.

“But now, in chapter 12, a new persecution began, aimed above all at the leaders of the congregation: the apostle James, the son of Zebedee, who was beheaded, and Peter, who was put in prison pending execution after the Passover” (*Anchor Bible*.9.115).

1Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.

“The Herod of Acts 12 is Agrippa I (born in 10 B.C.), the grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus. After his father’s execution in 7 B.C., he was sent with his mother Bernice to Rome, where he grew up on intimate terms with the imperial family. In his youth he was something of a playboy, and in A.D. 23, he went so heavily into debt that he had to flee to Idumea to escape his creditors. Later he received asylum at Tiberius and a pension from his uncle Herod Antipas, with whom, however, he eventually quarreled. In 36 he returned to Rome but offended the emperor Tiberius and was imprisoned.

“At the death of Tiberius in 37, he was released by the new emperor Caligula and received from him the northernmost Palestinian tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias and the title of king. At the death of Caligula in 41, Claudius, who succeeded Caligula and was Agrippa’s friend from youth, added Judea and Samaria to his territory, thus reconstituting for him the entire kingdom of his grandfather Herod the great over which he ruled till his death in 44 A.D.” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.9. 407).

“Most commentators speculate that the palace of Peter’s imprisonment was somewhere within the Fortress of Antonia, which overlooked the temple area to the north and had entrances to both the temple courts and the city” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.9. 408).

3And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.

5Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

“Earnest prayer: The same Greek word that is used of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44)” (*Interpreter’s Bible*.9.157).

7And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him,* and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.

**Angel of the Lord** is *angelos* in Greek which means “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, a messenger from God” (Thayers 32).

“Peter slept, submitting himself to his fate. Throughout his liberation, initiated and carried out at every stage by the angel, Peter was as passive as one in a dream. . . Not until he was outside in the city, did Peter recover and realize what had happened. The house which served as a meeting place for the Christians was fairly large and had an entrance gate with locked doors” (Anchor Bible, Acts, 114).

8And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

“The angel awoke Peter, and as he stirred, the chains by which he was bound fell from his wrists. Then the angel, like a parent with a child awakened from sound sleep, carefully instructed the groggy apostle to get dressed” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.9. 409).

9And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

“The angel ordered Peter to follow him, and they left the cell. But Peter, too sleepy to grasp the reality of what was happening, thought he was dreaming. Herod Agrippa I had planned to try Peter as the leader of the divisive minority in Palestine that identified itself with the crucified Jesus of Nazareth and then execute him as a warning to other followers of Jesus to stop their activities. Usually a prisoner was chained to only one guard but in view of Agrippa’s intentions, the guard was doubled. The Christians in Jerusalem understood Agrippa’s intentions because he had earlier imprisoned some of them and killed James the son of Zebedee. It was a crisis of great magnitude for the life of the early Christian community at Jerusalem.” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.9. 409).

10When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

“The first and the second guard: Of the four soldiers on duty, two would be chained to Peter while the other two mounted guard” (*Interpreter’s Bible*.9.159).

11And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

“Peter’s deliverance must be ascribed entirely to God for it was in no way due to the apostle’s own efforts or those of the Christian community – apart, of course, from their prayers” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.9. 408).



The ***Liberation of Saint Peter*** is a [fresco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fresco) [painting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painting) by the [Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italians) [High Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Renaissance) artist [Raphael](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael) and his assistant [Giulio Romano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giulio_Romano). It was painted in 1514 as part of Raphael's commission to decorate with [frescoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fresco) the rooms that are now known as the [*Stanze di Raffaello*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Rooms), in the [Apostolic Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic_Palace) in the [Vatican](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vatican_City). The painting shows how [Saint Peter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Peter) was [liberated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_of_Saint_Peter) from [Herod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrippa_I)'s prison by an [angel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel), as described in [Acts 12](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_the_Apostles).

The fresco shows three scenes in symmetrical balance formed by the feigned architecture and stairs. In the center the angel wakes Peter, and on the right guides him past the sleeping guards. On the left side one guard has apparently noticed the light generated by the angel and wakes a comrade, pointing up to the miraculously illumined cell. This adds drama to the serene exit of Peter at the right.