

Acts 12:1-19

Aim of Lesson

To show how God is able to look after people who serve him faithfully, and that he hears and answers sincere prayers.

Background study

Familiarise yourself with the persecutions of the early Church as recorded in the early chapters of Acts.

Suggested outline of lesson

At the beginning of the lesson it will be necessary to provide a background to the situation in which the apostles found themselves at that time. Endeavour to stimulate the children's imagination by conveying the dramatic impact of the series of events that occurred. The Christian church had been rocked to its foundation by the death of one of its foremost apostles, James, who had been one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. His public execution had been ordered by Herod. When Herod saw how this killing had pleased the Jews he arrested Peter, planning to kill him, too, when the passover was ended. Here was a real test of faith for the believers. Peter, held in a maximum security prison, was bound in chains and guarded by two soldiers inside the cell and sentries outside the cell. Clearly there was no means of escape. In spite of the danger to themselves the rest of the church, fearing that Peter would suffer the same fate as James, gathered together to pray that God might help Peter.

Endurance was tested to the limit as the night before Peter's trial and possible execution arrived. Describe Peter's incredible and dream-like experience. The earnest prayers of the church were answered in a most extraordinary way as, with the help of God's angel, Peter made his escape. Little wonder that Peter thought he had been dreaming. The eventual realization that he was free and that God had rescued him from a seemingly impossible situation must have greatly strengthened his faith as he hurried to the home of Mary, John Mark's mother, where he knew he would find friends. Rhoda, in her excitement, left Peter outside the gate, but as soon as he entered the house he told them the amazing story of his escape; then departed quickly so that they would not be implicated. Ask the children to imagine how the disciples must have felt when they saw Peter. It must have been almost impossible to believe that he was there with them and that God had answered their prayers before they had finished praying! What excitement, as they realized that the wonderful power of God had been directed towards saving his apostle.

The lesson would be incomplete without some mention of the sensation that the news of the escape caused the next morning. Describe the scene at the prison as the soldiers searched in vain for their prisoner, and Herod's angry reaction, which led to the ruthless killing of innocent guards. Possibly as a result of the incidents connected with Peter's imprisonment, Herod left Judaea and took up residence in Caesarea. This may have meant an easing of the persecution of the Christians in Judaea, at least for a time.

Relevance to the children's lives

Do you say your prayers? What do you pray about? Do you pray for other people? When praying, should we always be asking for something? If not, what else should our prayers include?

Worksheets

The words on the stones are Peter, prison, night, get up, clothes, iron gates, street, Mary, John Mark, Rhoda.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for looking after us and giving us everything we need. We know that if we pray to you, you will always listen. Teach us how to pray. Amen.

Memory verse

"Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).