

STUDY NOTES

The Acts of the Apostles

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH (Spring 2016)

WWW.NEWCITYPHX.COM/SERMONS - BRIAN KRUCKENBERG

The following content is based on the message “Prisoner of Peace” spoken on 05/08/16 by Brian Kruckenberg at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis of the message but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective communities.

THE SCRIPTURE

¹About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ²He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

⁶Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”

⁹And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” ¹²When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

¹³And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. ¹⁵They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!” ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” Then he departed and went to another place. **ACTS 12:1-17**

ENEMIES OF GOD

This is the second time that we see Peter thrown in jail for preaching about Jesus. This time the authorities were taking no chances and were going to make sure that Peter did not escape from prison. They planned to kill Peter just as they had James, so they had 16 soldiers (4 squads of 4) watching him at all hours and had him bound with chains between two guards.

In this passage it is easy to see that Peter had enemies. In our culture, sometimes we can be led to believe that we do not have “enemies.” But we do. There are people who do NOT want to see the message of Jesus taught and proclaimed.

Preston Sprinkle said that “A person who chooses to love his or her enemies can have no enemies. That person is left only with neighbors.” On the one hand, this might have some truth to it. We should not MAKE enemies and we should not hold hate in our hearts towards those who are against us. Further, we should pray for those who persecute us. But, even if we love people well and pray for them, they still might hate us. After all, Jesus loved perfectly and His enemies ultimately killed Him.

The enemy will go to great lengths to keep you in chains.

As we live the Christian life we will discover that we often face two types of “enemies.”

Internal Enemies:

- What do we struggle with internally that keeps us in chains?
- What keeps you in prison? Temper? Material possessions? Greed? Insecurity? Addiction?

External Enemies: As you live as a Christian in this world, your life should show a stark contrast with the world around it. Christians treat relationships, marriage, power, success, sex, money and many other things very differently than the rest of the world.

- Do you see a stark contrast with your life and what the world promotes? If not, maybe it is time to re-evaluate your life.
- Are you not aware of the collision of light and darkness around you?

PRISONER OF PEACE

If we learn anything from this passage it is that you can have peace in the midst of your enemies. Notice what Peter was doing the night he was going to be killed. He was chained between two soldiers and he was **sleeping?!? How was he sleeping?** Apparently Peter was at peace. **It was a super-natural peace that comes from knowing that no man can take anything from us that really matters.**

True peace comes through being grounded in the reality of the Kingdom of God and knowing your place in it.

True peace comes from knowing that nothing about our external circumstances can change what really matters about us.

If we understand that we are a citizen of the Kingdom of God and that our place in that Kingdom is secure, then nothing that happens around us should shatter us. Yes, we might mourn. Yes, we might be upset or angry. We are subject to all sorts of human emotions but if we are at our core children of God, then our ultimate value and our peace can never be taken from us.

This truth about peace is something that can't really be taught: it has to be experienced and believed.

To tell Peter to have peace is one thing but there's nothing peaceful about this situation. Peter had peace because he was in the hands of God and he had already experienced God working in the midst of chaotic circumstances. Peter could be grounded in peace because he knew God and knew God's promises. Peter understood that ultimate victory wasn't at stake here. That had already been secured.

- *What does it take for you to have peace? Describe a time when you felt most at peace.*
- *What does it mean to have the peace that surpasses all understanding?*
- *Have you ever had peace in a time when all of your circumstances suggested that you shouldn't have peace?*

THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN BRINGING PEACE

If we look back at the story one more time, we would all have to agree that Peter is done. There is nothing he can do to get himself out of this. His only hope was that God do the impossible, and that is what God does. God sends an angel who tells Peter exactly what to do as the chains fall off of him and the gates open. Make no mistake:

This was not Peter's escape; it was his deliverance.

Often when things are against us, we look to what WE have to try and solve the problem. That is not a bad thing to do. After all, God gave us wisdom, discernment

and the ability to reason and create. We have a vast amount of human resources but where we go wrong is depending on our human resources more than God's resources.

Often, our problem isn't our lack of human (material) resources it is our belief in what our material resources can bring.

- *In what ways do you believe that your material resources bring peace?*
- *Talk about a time that you thought something would bring peace, but after getting it, peace quickly faded.*

If we put our own human will above God's we are missing out on what God might do! In this situation, material resources and human capacity weren't going to help Peter. He needed God to directly intervene. The great thing for Peter is that he had people praying to God that God would do just that. At the very time Peter is being delivered, people are praying earnestly for him (v. 5, 12).

We can pray just like the people were praying for Peter and God might give us similar results. He might do the impossible! These people were not super-human people. They were normal just like us. We see that in their reaction to Peter's deliverance. They all thought Peter was dead and that Rhonda had just seen his ghost. They told her she was crazy! It was a "crazy" event, but it did happen.

If we look closer at this story, perhaps the people *were* different than us in one key respect. Maybe they were a little more desperate to see God move than we are.

They weren't different than us but they were more "desperate" than us, and desperate people are more prayerful people.

They were offering up a "no way" prayer. *Have you ever done that?* Prayed for something that there is "no way" it can happen but for God intervening. There was "no way" Peter could get out. But, he did.

- *Do you believe that God can do miracles? Have you ever experienced that?*
- *What is the "no way" prayer that you might want to offer?*
- *Are you ok if it doesn't get answered like you want it to?*