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The Power of Prayer

Definitions in **bold** letters are from **Strong's** Exhaustive Concordance
Other definitions are from **Webster's** Dictionary, 1828 /1913 Edition
or Roget's Thesaurus - **November 1, 2015**

Acts 12:1-11

Introduction: In this chapter we have the story, **I.** Of the **martyrdom** of **James** the apostle, and the imprisonment of **Peter** by Herod Agrippa, who now reigned as king in Judea, Acts 12:1-4. **II.** The miraculous deliverance of Peter out of prison by the ministry of an angel, in answer to the prayers of the church for him, Acts 12:6-19. **III.** The cutting off of Herod in the height of his **PRIDE** by the stroke of an **angel**, the minister of God's justice (Acts 12:20-23) and this was done while Barnabas and Saul were at Jerusalem, upon the errand that the church of Antioch sent them on, to carry their charity and therefore in the close we have an account of their return to Antioch, Acts 12:24,25.

(Source: <http://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/mhm/view.cgi?bk=43&ch=12>)

Acts 12:1, Now about **that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to **VEX** (harm) certain of the church.**

NOTE: A comparison of the last verses of Acts 11 and this chapter (Acts 12) suggests that Barnabas and Paul made that trip to **Jerusalem** with **relief** for the **victims** of the **famine** at about the time of the events given in Acts 12, this being in 44 A.D., a date determined by the death of **Herod Agrippa I.** That monarch had succeeded in putting together the whole domain of his grandfather Herod the Great, and had also been given the title of king by Claudius. He was a staunch friend of the Jews and was no doubt influenced by them to make the move to **destroy Christianity.**

He martyred **James**, seized and imprisoned **Peter**, planning to execute him publicly after the Passover festivities. Nowhere in the New Testament does the **intervention** of **Almighty God** on behalf of his church **appear** any more timely and dramatic than in this chapter. With their friend on the throne, the Jewish hierarchy decided to **exterminate Christianity**; and there was no reason why they could not have succeeded, except for the intervention of the Father in heaven.

The Encyclopedia Britannica has this regarding Herod's death: His **sudden death** in **44 A.D.** ... at Caesarea during games in honor of Claudius was a disaster for Jewry, because with all his **faults** of **sympathy** (mean talebearing; obsequious [compliant] flattery) and **ostentation** he had successfully kept the balance between Rome and the Jews and shown that the two could co-exist to the advantage of both.^[1] ...The **finger of God** is clearly seen in this chapter. ENDNOTE: ^[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 11, p. 512. (Source: <http://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:2, And he **killed James** the brother of **John** with the sword.

NOTE: Only seven words in the **Greek**, translated by eleven in **English**, recount the martyrdom of the first apostle; and such restraint by the sacred historian shows how

different are the words of inspiration from those of ordinary writers. It should be noted that the New Testament records no appointment of a successor to James. Why? He is still an apostle, still "**reigning** over the **twelve tribes** of (spiritual) Israel" as Jesus promised (Matthew 19:28). Death never removed an apostle. It was not death but **transgression** that removed **Judas** (Acts 1:25). John Wesley, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), in loco.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Matthew 19:27-28, Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; **what shall we have therefore?** And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, **in the regeneration** when the Son of man shall **sit** in the **throne of his glory**, ye also shall sit upon **twelve thrones**, **judging** the twelve tribes of Israel.

NOTE: By killing with the sword we are to understand beheading. Among the Jews there were four kinds of deaths: **Stoning; burning;** killing with the **sword**, or **beheading;** and, **strangling.** The third was a Roman as well as a Jewish mode of punishment. Killing with the sword was the punishment which, according to the Talmud, was inflicted on those who **drew away** the people to any **strange worship**, Sanhedrin. fol. iii. James was probably accused of this, and hence the punishment mentioned in the text.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:3, And because he **SAW** it **pleased the Jews**, he proceeded further to take **Peter** also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

NOTE: ...he saw that it pleased the Jews - This was the principle on which he acted. It was not from a sense of right; it was not to do justice, and to protect the innocent; it was not to discharge the appropriate duties of a magistrate and a king, but it was to **promote** his **own popularity**. It is probable that Agrippa would have acted in this way in any circumstances. He was ambitious, vain, and fawning (flattering by cringing and meanness); he sought, as his great principle, **popularity**, and he was willing to sacrifice, like many others, truth and justice to obtain this end. But there was also a particular reason for this in his case. He held his appointment under the Roman emperor. This foreign rule was always unpopular among the Jews. In order, therefore, to secure a peaceful reign, and to prevent insurrection and tumult, it was necessary for him to **court their favor**; to indulge their wishes, and to fall in with their prejudices.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

NOTE: **Days of unleavened bread** ... This refers to the great annual **Passover feast** of the Jews; and, as it was at Passover that our Lord suffered, Peter must have associated his own imprisonment and impending death with the events of our Lord's Passion.

ENDNOTE:^[2] John Wesley, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), in loco.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:4, And when he had apprehended him, he put him in **prison**, and delivered him to four quaternions of **soldiers** to keep **him**; intending after **Easter** to bring him forth to the people.

NOTE: ... **four quaternions of soldiers** - A "quaternion" was a company of "four"; consequently the whole number employed here was sixteen. The Romans divided the **night** into **four watches** so that the guards could **be relieved**; those who were on guard occupying THREE HOURS, and being then relieved. Of the four who were on guard, TWO were with Peter in the prison Acts 12:6, and TWO kept watch before the door of the prison. The utmost precaution was taken that he should not escape; and Herod thus gave the most ample assurance to the Jews of his intention to secure Peter, and to bring him to trial.

Intending after Easter - There never was a more absurd or unhappy translation than this. The original is simply after the Passover... The word “**Easter**” now denotes the festival observed by many Christian churches in honor of the resurrection of the Saviour.The translation is not only unhappy, as it does not convey at all the meaning of the original, but because it may contribute to foster an opinion that such a festival was observed in the time of the apostles. The word “**Easter**” is of **Saxon origin**, and is supposed to be derived from “**Eostre,**” the goddess of Love, or the **Venus of the North**, in honor of whom a festival was celebrated by our PAGAN ancestors in the month of April (Webster). Since this festival coincided with the Passover of the Jews, and with the feast observed by Christians in honor of the **resurrection of Christ**, the name came to be used to denote the latter. (Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:5, Peter therefore was kept in **prison**: but **PRAYER** was made **without ceasing** of the church unto **God** for him.

Thought 1. If we don't EXAMINE this verse in the light of other scriptures about “prayer”, we'll miss the “light” that God wants us to see in it. Some commentators believe since James was arrested and put to death quickly, it was because the church didn't have time to pray for him to be delivered. But, that doesn't hold up in the light of how “faithful” God is to hear our prayers, especially those who are in direct need of deliverance. James could have prayed for himself like Daniel, Elisha, and others did.

Others say “prayer” is the only weapon the church could turn to. But, Ephesians 6:16, says, **ABOVE ALL** the weapons available, we should take the **shield** of **FAITH**. And verse 18 says, “Praying always with **ALL (all manner of) prayer** and **supplication** IN the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints... And last of all, Jesus said, “**All things are possible to him that BELIEVETH**. (Mark 9:23)

To help us understand how long they prayed, we learn that this festival, to include the Passover, is eight days long. And on the night before Peter was to be executed, HIS FAITH in God allowed him to SLEEP, while the church was still up “praying.” We must remember that Peter had Jesus' word about HOW he would die and that he'd be OLD when it happened. This event is about 15 years after Jesus gave Peter that prophecy.

John 21:18-19, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt **be OLD**, thou shalt **stretch forth thy hands**, and another shall gird thee, and **carry thee** whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by **what death** he should **glorify God**.

NOTE: When thou shalt BE OLD - Ancient writers say that **Peter** was put to death about THIRTY-FOUR years AFTER this. His precise age at that time is not known. **Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands** - When Peter was **put to death**, we are told that he requested that he might be **crucified** with his head downward, saying that he who had denied his Lord as he had done was not worthy to **die as he did**. (Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=joh&ch=21#1>)

Thought 2. When we look at scriptures about “prayer”, we LEARN that the most important principle about it is that it must be a “prayer of **FAITH**” to God. To just SAY, we're praying, and NOT have FAITH when we do so, is not praying as Jesus taught.

Matthew 6:7-8, But when ye pray, use not **VAIN REPETITIONS**, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be **heard** for their **MUCH speaking**. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father **knoweth** what things ye have need of, **BEFORE** ye ask him.

Thought 3. So, it's the **QUALITY** of words said in prayer, NOT the **QUANTITY** of words! In Hebrews 11, we find a number of people were delivered. But, it states the reason they were delivered was because of their “FAITH.” Some even call Hebrews 11 the “Hall of faith.”

Hebrews 11:32-35, And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of **David** also, and **Samuel**, and of the **prophets**: Who **through FAITH** subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the **mouths of lions**, **Quenched** the violence of fire, **escaped** the edge of the **SWORD**, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their **dead raised to life** again: and OTHERS were **tortured, NOT accepting deliverance**; that they might obtain a **better resurrection...**

Thought 4. As stated in Hebrews 11, Daniel was SAFE because of his FAITH in God expressed in HIS prayers and HIS actions. The same is true of the three Hebrew boys that were cast into the fiery furnace but were protected by God.

Daniel 6:23, So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and **no manner of hurt** was found upon him, because **HE BELIEVED in** his God.

Mark 11:22-24, And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have **FAITH in God** (*Yahweh*). For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall **say** unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall **not doubt** in his heart, but shall **BELIEVE** that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall **HAVE** whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever **YE desire (crave), when ye PRAY, BELIEVE** that ye **receive** them, and ye shall **have** them.

Thought 5. When Jesus prayed, he asked just ONE time in faith, which means his request was based on God's word, which he knew and understood. When he was in the garden of Gethsemane, he was not asking in prayer, he was committing to his Father's will, which may be said in PRAYER more than ONE time.

Matthew 26:42, He (*Jesus*) went away again the **second time**, and prayed, saying, O my Father, **IF (forasmuch as [SINCE])** this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, **THY WILL** be done.

Thought 6. God's words, written or spoken, reveal his will for us. So, wisdom says, ask for and receive the word pertaining to the problem, and then ask in agreement with it!

John 15:7, If ye abide in me, and **my WORDS** abide in you, ye shall **ASK** what ye **will**, and it shall be **DONE** unto you.

Philippians 4:6-7, Be **careful (be anxious about)** for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and **supplication (petition)** with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God (*Yahweh*). And the PEACE of God, which passeth all understanding, shall **keep (protect)** your **hearts (thoughts or feelings)** and **minds (disposition [frame of mind])** through Christ Jesus.

Thought 7. As you can see, once we ask, and BELIEVE we received when we asked, then, we use PRAYERS of thanksgiving for the things God gave us when we asked. They were given in the spiritual realm, but it may a little while before we see them in our physical hands. But, since God heard and answered our prayer, we just continue to thank him, OVER and OVER for them, as they come to mind.

The truth is God has a time SET for them to show up. And it's through faith and and patience, we inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:12) But, every need is met ON TIME.

1 John 5:14-15, And this is the **confidence** that we have in him, that, if **WE ASK** any thing according to **HIS WILL**, he heareth us: And if we KNOW that he hear us, whatsoever we **ask**, we KNOW that we **HAVE** the **petitions** that we **desired** of him.

Luke 11:5-8, And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a **friend**, and shall go

unto him at **midnight**, and say unto him, **Friend, lend** me three loaves; **For a friend** of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me **in bed**; I cannot RISE and GIVE thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his **friend**, yet because of his **IMPORTUNITY** he will rise and **give** him as many as he needeth.

Importunity defined 335, importunity [pertinacious [determined, unwavering] solicitation; URGENT request], **impudence** (audacity, the quality or state of being IMPUDENT [shameless, BOLD { not timid: fearful; shy } with disregard]).

NOTE: ...several things in Jesus' **culture** would have EMBOLDENED someone to do this. First, hospitality was considered **essential**. To be a **good** host, one **had to provide a meal** for the traveler, no matter how late the **hour**. To do **less** was a blot on one's **reputation**. So, the man in Jesus' story had the choice of waking up his **neighbor** or being a bad host. The **embarrassment** of the first choice was minor compared to the embarrassment of the second.

(Source: *The Bible Expositor and Illuminator*)

Luke 18:1-8, And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought **always** to **pray**, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a **judge**, which feared-not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, **Avenge me** of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I **fear not God**, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she **weary me**. And the Lord said, Hear what the **unjust judge** saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them **speedily (quickly)**.

Thought 8. This widow went to an "UNJUST Judge." So, it was necessary to be persistent in asking. On the other hand, our Father is "JUST." That means, he'll avenge his elect as "quickly" as his wisdom dictates. And because he's God, no one can weary him. Most of all, continuing to ask for the same thing is NOT faith.

1 Peter 3:7, Likewise, ye **husbands, dwell with them** according to **knowledge**, giving HONOUR unto the **wife**, as unto the weaker (not having force of authority) vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that **your PRAYERS** be **not hindered**.

Acts 12:6, And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night **Peter** was **sleeping** between **TWO soldiers**, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

NOTE: Two soldiers guarded his person; his right hand being bound to the left hand of one, and his left hand bound to the right hand of the other. This was the Roman method of guarding their prisoners, and appears to be what is intimated in the text.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:7, And, 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.

NOTE: And he smote Peter on the side - This was, doubtless, a **gentle blow** or stroke to arouse him from sleep.

And his chains ... - This could have been only by **divine power**. No natural means were used, or could have been used without arousing the guard. It is a sublime expression of the ease with which God can deliver from danger, and rescue his friends. Compare Acts 16:26.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:8, And 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.

NOTE: It seems Peter had put off the principal part of his clothes, that he might **sleep** with more **comfort**. His resuming all that he had thrown off was a proof that every thing had been done leisurely. There was no evidence of any hurry; nor of any design to elude justice, or even to avoid meeting his accusers in any legal way. It appears that the two soldiers were **overwhelmed** by a **DEEP SLEEP**, which fell upon them from God. (Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:9, And 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.

Thought 1. Since Peter is not fully awake and is having an “OPEN vision” where his eyes are open, yet he sees the angel, he thinks he’s in a trance SEEING a vision.

Acts 12:10, When 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.

NOTE: ...first and - second ward - It is supposed that ancient Jerusalem was surrounded by three walls: if so, then passing through the gates of these three walls successively is possibly what is meant by the expression in the text. The prison in which he was confined might have been that which was at the outer wall.

Iron gate - This was in the innermost wall of the three, and was strongly plated over with iron, for the greater security.

Which opened - of his own accord - Influenced by the **unseen power** of the **angel**.

The angel departed from him - Having brought him into a place in which he no longer needed his assistance. What is proper to God he always does: what is proper to man he **requires HIM to perform**.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:11, And 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**.

NOTE: Now I know of a surety, &c.— The apostle may be understood here as alluding to a similar deliverance, chap. Acts 5:19. The time in which he was delivered was very critical, —it being the night preceding the day appointed for his execution; and if the apostle had not been thus miraculously freed, he would probably have been put to death like Stephen or James. (Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tcc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=12#1>)

Acts 12:12:17, And when he had **considered** the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were **gathered** together **praying**. And as **Peter** knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, **Thou art mad**. But she constantly affirmed that it was he. But Peter continued **knocking**; and when they had opened the door, and **saw** him, they were **astonished (astound)** [SURPRISED]. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, **declared** unto them how the Lord had **brought him out** of the **prison**. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

Thought 1. Since FAITH is the substance of things hoped for (EXPECT). Anybody praying in FAITH” is NOT surprised when they receive what’s expected. Remember, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? And don’t forget Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, and even Peter in Acts 3.