

Herod has just had James, the lesser, arrested and killed; when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he ordered the arrest of Peter, the ringleader of this dangerous conspiracy of traitors to Judaism:

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

It's easy to see how Peter could have wondered whether what he was seeing and experiencing was real or a dream or vision: bright light, an angel, chains falling off his hands, a gate opening of its own accord... but he had witnessed so many miracles by Jesus' hand and through his own... you'd think it would begin to sink in... he was no normal person and his was no normal ministry... he had been chosen, called and commissioned into a very extraordinary life and ministry... and yet, like so many of us, he did feel like just a regular person...

The theme, here, is the power of prayer, prayed according to God's will and the faithfulness of God to protect and deliver His children in and through impossible situations, according to His will. For us, it's easy to say, 'Well sure, we knew God was going to handle this; He's always been faithful in the lives of these, His disciples and Apostles; we wouldn't expect anything else!' And yet, when it is we who are in the middle of things, even which seem less impossible... it's always easy for us to fold into discouragement and despair: 'What if God doesn't see this... what if He doesn't love me like He did those early Christians... what if I'm not really that important to Him!'

These early Christians were experiencing genuine persecution and even death. Now we are living in times of increasing persecution of believers and it's only going to get worse until even here, in the 'freest' of all places on Earth, Christians and Jews will begin to be murdered simply because we are Christians or Jews; we very much need to be preparing ourselves and our loved ones for what will be coming **very** soon.

So Peter makes it all the way out and beyond the prison and the angel leaves him...

Verse 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.'*

Here, this is what I think he is saying: 'Now I know that I am in His Hand; now I know that God will even dispatch one of His powerful angels to guide and protect me; now I know that I need never worry or fear; He will never leave me or forsake me; as long as He wills, I will speak His Word clearly and boldly with nothing to fear from Jews, Gentiles or evil spirits: I am safe and secure in His loving all-powerful arms!'

I think this is the beginning of a real transformation in Peter; he will still make mistakes, he will fail when he withdraws from the Gentiles for fear of the Jerusalem Jewish believers but eventually, he will be the man who writes 1st and 2nd Peter: God's perfect Word to man.

In these early days of ministry, I think we see a decided difference between all the original Apostles and Paul; From the moment of his conversion, Paul will show a maturity in the Lord which is far beyond any of the other Apostles; he never exhibits fear or disbelief but he always trusts implicitly, never doubting.

And wouldn't you know... just like in Acts, so many so called Christians today, do not like Paul at all!

Everything about his Gospel of Grace which was delivered to him personally from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, grates against them all, the wrong way; it's the same resistance we'll see from Jews and Gentiles alike who resist the Gospel: they would not and will not humble themselves before the mighty Hand of God to

come to Him in humble faith, believing that His gift of Eternal Life is absolutely free and without any required work on the part of the recipient; they will not confess their sin and receive His forgiveness; they insist that it must require work, observance of the Law, doing our part, being good enough, having an important part in their own salvation. But, back to Peter stealthily moving through the night...

Verse 12: *'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.'*

'When Peter considered the thing...' *'...when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know for sure, that the LORD hath sent his angel...'*

How do we know this!? Luke wrote 'The Acts'... how did Luke know? He wasn't even with them yet... how did Luke know these things? Luke wrote his Gospel in about the year: AD 60; he wrote The Acts of the Apostles in about 61; the things we are reading now happened about 25 to 30 years earlier. In fact, we only hear of Luke, the man, two times in all of God's Word; Paul refers to him in his letter to the Colossians: *'Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.'* Col 4:14 That, too, was written about the same time in AD 61, and then in his second letter to Timothy: *'Only Luke is with me...'* 2 Tim 4:11, written a few years later in about AD 66. The fact that Luke knows and writes about all these things is one more proof that the Bible is God's Word which His Holy Spirit inspired every writer of all 66 Books to write exactly what He intended; the Holy Spirit told Luke every Word he was to write; it did not matter whether or not he, Luke, heard or experienced what he recorded; the same is true for every writer of God's Word.

In his same letter to Timothy, Paul wrote: *'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'* 2Tim 3:16

If we are to seriously study God's Word, it's incumbent upon us to never forget that it is, in fact, God's Word; every Word is God-breathed, Holy Spirit inspired and preserved and guarded over by God, Himself for all these centuries. *'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.'* Isa 40:8 *'For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.'* Heb 4:12

*'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**'* 2Tim 2:15

When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted, Satan challenged Him: (You're so hungry) *'If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. ⁴ And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'* Matt 4:4

This brings me to a final point about God's Word having been preserved and protected all these centuries: for some of us, reading the King James Version is not what we've necessarily been accustomed to; it was only translated into English almost 16 centuries after the Bible was written, but this is true: Jesus Christ is the Word of God. When He said: *'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,'* He was quoting Moses whom He, Himself had inspired to speak and write to the Israelites in the wilderness. Moses said: *'... that he might make thee know that **man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.**'* Deut 8:3

Jesus came to Earth, presenting Himself as the Bread of Life come down from Heaven; those who would receive/consume Him would have Eternal Life; He was quoting Himself through Moses as the Word of God.

Without question, when Jesus was quoting Scripture to Satan, He would never have left off the salient point of the quote: *'...but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God!'* When Luke 4:4 records the same thing, many of the modern translations leave off that ever so important truth; they record that Jesus simply

said, to Satan: 'Man shall not live by bread alone...' period! It doesn't even make sense without the complete statement. What else does man need? also fruit? also meat? also vegetables? It is senseless without the rest! Luke records Jesus as quoting Moses' entire statement; but there, in Luke 4:4, most of the modern translations leave off the all important second phrase, recording only: '*But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.*' Big deal!

Check it out: NASB, NIV, even the Amplified and others.

It doesn't matter what a specific Greek or Hebrew manuscript does or does not say... common sense tells you that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God would never have quoted only the first half of this ever so crucial Truth, His Own Word which He had given to Moses and then to Himself in response to Satan's temptation.

I think that, in itself, is a good point for the KJV.

Meanwhile: Peter roused himself, realized that God had sent His angel to lead him out of the prison, and came to the house of Mary... but Mary who? There are six Marys mentioned in the New Testament: first, of course, is Mary, the virgin girl chosen by God to bear His Son into the World; from the Cross, Jesus consigned her to the care of John. The second Mary is Mary Magdalene, a close follower of Jesus from whom He had cast out seven demons; she's the Mary who ran to tell Peter and John the tomb was empty. The third Mary is Mary of Bethany: sister of Martha and Lazarus. The fourth Mary is Mary, the mother of James, the younger and Joseph. The fifth Mary is this Mary, in Acts 12; she opened her home for believers to gather for prayer which is what we see them doing now, for Peter. Finally, the sixth Mary is a member of the Church in Rome; Paul includes her in the final greeting of his letter to the Romans. Mary/Miriam, was a common name at the time.

Luke tells us, here, that this Mary is the mother of John Mark; who is John Mark? More commonly known as Mark, he is a cousin of Barnabas: Col. 4:10. He was with Paul and Barnabas on their first Missionary journey but he did not stay the whole time; he deserted them in Pamphylia Acts 15:38. We're not told why John Mark left but it was after a potentially discouraging time of evangelism in Cypress with very few converts; in fact, only one is mentioned: Acts 13:4-12 and it was marked by much demonic opposition. Perhaps the young John Mark was discouraged with the hard life of an Evangelist and longed for home with his mom: Mary. When Paul decided to return to the cities of his first journey, to encourage the new believers, Barnabas agreed but only if they brought John Mark again. Barnabas, being the encourager that he was, perhaps believed that John Mark needed to be healed from the shame of having abandoned the first Journey; he was right, as we'll soon understand. Paul refused so he took Silas with him while Barnabas took John Mark with him.

The Holy Spirit inspired Barnabas to take and restore John Mark because God had an important assignment for him in the future. Also, this then produced two distinct missionary teams and, later, we see Paul having forgiven John Mark whom he calls his '*fellow-worker*' in his letter to Philemon 1:24 and then from prison, in Rome, Paul writes to Timothy: '*...Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*' 2 Tim 4:11

As to John Mark's later Holy Spirit assignment: he is better known as just Mark: author of the second Gospel.

As I studied this, I thought, once again: 'Lord, why didn't You give me someone like Barnabas to teach me important things as a boy, the things a young man should know and understand?' Why did I have to endure so much seemingly unnecessary and unhelpful life experience?

Then I was reminded of John Mark and so many others: Paul had lifelong regret over his murderous rampages against the early Believers. Peter had lifelong regret over his cowardly denial of Jesus. Moses had lifelong regret over early decisions. David's adultery and murder; it seems that so many whom God has chosen for His Work were first led through things which would foster a lifelong humility and dependence upon God: not that I'm equating myself with Paul, Peter, David, Moses or anyone else... but the principle is there and, certainly, being privileged to teach you... well... you are every bit as important to Him as are any other group, large or small... you are precious to Him which is the thing that causes me to try to do my best in opening His Word with you, that we would, together learn to rightly divide His Word of Truth, to honor Him and His Word.

...and back to Peter...

Verse 13: *'And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. ¹⁴ 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.*

Peter knocks; the young girl, Rhoda recognizes his voice and is so excited that she can't wait to run back and tell everyone the good news! Except she forgot one thing... to open up and let him in... you know how it is... you learn something new and exciting; you can't wait to be the first one to tell everyone else so that they all know that you were the first to discover it... you know how it is... Rhoda was like that...

Verse 15: *'And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.*

What Luke doesn't tell us is that these ones praying had also heard the knocking. Poor Rhoda: she keeps on telling her great news and these dunderheads not only refuse to believe her but none of them even get up to go see who really is at the door whose knocking they had all heard, as well.

Verse 16: *'But Peter continued knocking: and when they had (finally roused themselves to get up and) opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.'*

And Rhoda cries out, exasperatedly, 'I told you so; why doesn't anyone ever believe me!?' Everyone was loudly excited! But Peter holds up his hand and says: 'Shh! Quiet! Someone will hear you!'

Verse 17: *'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.'*

This is just a small group praying together in Mary's little home; none of the other Apostles are even there; they're all elsewhere, surely also praying for Peter's safety; remember, Herod had just killed James, the lesser, and was planning the same for Peter.

Peter only stays a moment; he tells them to go tell James and the rest that God had delivered him while he quickly goes off to another undisclosed place, just in case he might be recognized and reported; remember, the Jews, around, are all clamoring for his death.

Verse 18: *'Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.'*

There was no small stir. Five times in the Word that phrase is used: no small stir, no small tempest, no small dissention, no small gain... and it's only Luke who ever uses it and only in Acts; instead of **a big deal**, he would write: it was **no small deal**. It's an odd and unusual phrase; perhaps it has to do with the fact that Luke is the only Gentile whom God chose to write His Word; all the rest are Hebrews with their own peculiar idioms.

What an evil guy! Herod personally examined all 16 soldiers who'd been keeping Peter; they all told the same story; he had known of Jesus' miracles and of the miracles accomplished through His Apostles; he knew this had been a miraculous happening but to save face, he commanded all of them to be executed while he scurried off to his seaside villa in Caesarea. Horrid person! Soon he'll get just exactly what's coming to him!

'And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. ²¹ And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. ²² And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. ²³ And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.' Not much to add to that! Except, needless to say, after that fine showing:

Verse 24: *'But the word of God grew and multiplied.'*

Thank you, Herod for your selfless sacrifice in aiding the propagation and dissemination of God's Word!