

Acts 12:6-19

1. The book of Acts and the value of history
2. Observation and exposition
3. The take-away for us?

The book of Acts and the value of history

RE the article “A Christian Case for the History Major,” my take-away from that is that as Christians, the book of Acts is our history, just as much as the history of America is our history as Americans.

Observation and exposition

1. Read the passage
2. General observations
 - a. Compare the level of detail in this passage with the account of Peter and the other apostles being arrested and freed in Acts 5:17-21.
 - i. Why the difference?
 - ii. First-hand account from Peter (or Rhoda or John Mark) to Luke of this event?
3. Setting
 - a. When?
 - i. A.D. 44 [SLIDE]
 - b. Where?
 - i. Jerusalem [SLIDE]
 - ii. Prison (Antonia Fortress?) [SLIDE]
 - iii. Another place (17)
 - iv. Caesarea
 - c. Who?
 - i. Herod Agrippa I
 - ii. Peter
 - iii. 4 squads of soldiers (16 total?)
 - iv. An angel
 - v. The Lord
 - vi. The Jewish people
 - vii. Mary, the mother of John Mark

- viii. John Mark
- ix. Rhoda, a servant girl
- x. Many church “members”
- xi. James
- xii. The brothers (other church members? elders?)

4. Observation and exposition

a. Peter is freed from prison by an angel (6-11)

- i. “God is an 11:59 God”
- ii. Peter is sleeping - not pacing in anxiety of his looming death by execution.
 - 1. Why was James killed but Peter rescued?
 - 2. See **Hebrews 11:33-37**, especially verses **34** and **37**
 - 3. **1 Peter 2:21-23; 4:19**
- iii. Who is the “angel of the Lord?”
 - 1. The Greek word “angel” simply means “messenger.”
 - 2. A person sent by God (such as Ananias in **Acts 9**)?
 - a. **Matthew 11:10**
 - b. **James 2:25**
 - 3. A spiritual angelic being? **[SLIDES]**
 - a. What evidence is there for this option?
 - i. The light that shone in the cell.
 - ii. The chains fell off his hands.
 - iii. The soldiers in his cell did not awake (or did not see what was happening).
 - iv. Peter thought he was seeing a vision (dreaming a dream?), and did not realize that it was real.
 - v. They passed other guards without being stopped.
 - vi. The iron gate leading into the city opened of its own accord.
 - vii. After Peter was on his way the angel immediately left him. Disappeared? Became invisible again?
 - b. Interesting observations:
 - i. Peter could hear the angel speak
 - ii. The angel struck him physically
 - 4. “Marshall...rightly observes that ‘the person who believes in the reality of the supernatural will not find it difficult to accept this story as it stands, along with other, similar stories in the Bible and Christian history’. Acts contains a limited number of such stories, indicating that such divine intervention was experienced only on

certain critical occasions in the early church.” Peterson, 364

- b. Peter tells the church what happened (12-17)
 - i. Who is John Mark (John whose other name was Mark)?
 - 1. According to F. F. Bruce, “Mary’s son had both a Jewish name (John) and a Roman name (Mark).” 238
 - 2. “Luke’s readers would be more familiar with Christians of the second generation than with those of the first, especially when a second-generation Christian attained such distinction as Mark eventually did; hence Mary is identified as the mother of Mark (one might compare the identification of Simon the Cyrenaeon as the father of Alexander and Rufus in Mark 15:21).” Bruce, 237-238
 - 3. **Acts 12:25; 13:13-14; 15:36-40**
 - 4. **Colossians 4:10**
 - 5. **2 Timothy 4:11**
 - 6. **Philemon 2**
 - 7. **1 Peter 5:13**
 - ii. What do you think the church was praying for regarding Peter? To be released? To be faithful until death?
 - 1. Had they also prayed for James?
 - a. Perhaps James’ execution played into their doubts(?)
 - 2. Were they really expecting an answer or the granting of their prayers?
 - 3. Had they forgotten that Peter had been rescued from this kind of situation before?
 - 4. Is it fair to even ask these questions?
 - iii. What do we know about Rhoda?
 - 1. Just a servant girl?
 - 2. Part of the church?
 - a. “Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy...” (14)
 - 3. Why didn’t she just open the door???
 - iv. What is meant by, “It is his angel!”?
 - 1. “In connection with the Jewish belief in protecting and guiding angels, Barrett notes that ‘these were sometimes thought to resemble the human beings they protected.’” Peterson, 365-366
 - 2. **Daniel 3:28; 6:21-22**
 - 3. **Matthew 4:5-6 (Psalm 91:11-12)**
 - 4. **Matthew 18:10**
 - v. Which James is Peter referring to in verse 17?
 - 1. **Mark 6:3**
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 15:7**
 - 3. **Galatians 1:19; 2:9**

- vi. Who are the “brothers” that Peter refers to?
 - 1. Possibly the rest of the church
 - 2. More likely the other elders of the church
 - a. **Acts 11:30; 21:18**
 - vii. “Then he departed and went to another place.” [SLIDE]
 - 1. Where? Somewhere else in Jerusalem? Or did he leave Jerusalem at this point?
 - 2. **Acts 15:7** - Peter was back in Jerusalem at the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 48/49.
 - 3. **1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5**
 - 4. **Galatians 2:11** - Peter was in Antioch
 - 5. **1 Peter 1:1; 5:13**
 - 6. Peter eventually martyred in Rome (according to church tradition)
- c. Herod reacts! **(18-19)**
- i. “No little disturbance among the soldiers...”
 - 1. Luke has a way with words!
 - ii. Did Herod think it was God who rescued Peter?
 - 1. Definitely not!
 - iii. Are there others who think it was not an angel (spiritual being)?
 - 1. Yes
 - iv. Where did Herod search for Peter? **(19)**
 - 1. All of Jerusalem?
 - v. Bad deal for the sentries, but their execution was in accordance with Roman law, which “was not binding on [Herod] Agrippa in the internal administration of his kingdom” (Bruce, 240)
 - 1. All four squads of soldiers? Or just the soldiers on duty?

The take-away for us

1. The power of prayer
2. If this hadn’t happened, 1 and 2 Peter would be “missing” from the New Testament.
3. Possibly the inspiration for Charles Wesley’s hymn, *And Can It Be*

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”

Resources

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce, 1990
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce, 1988
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III
6. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/christian-case-history-major/>