

I. CONDITIONS GROW PERILOUS

- A. A new division in the book of Acts begins in Chapter 12
 - 1. At first, we see the Gospel only going primarily to the Jews
 - a. Now, the book will begin to focus on the Gospel elsewhere
 - b. Jews not forgotten or neglected, but the story now follows Paul
 - c. ROMANS 1:16 – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”
 - 2. Three rough divisions in the Book of Acts:
 - a. The Early Church in Jerusalem – the Very Beginnings
 - i. The Ascension and Great Commission
 - ii. The wildfire Salvation and Membership by Baptism
 - iii. The Persecutor Saul and Martyrdom of Stephen
 - iv. The Great Sheet of Peter and Cornelius
 - b. The Missionary Journeys of Paul
 - i. Antioch Becomes the Focal Point – the Middle Part
 - ii. Barnabas and Saul, then Saul and Barnabas
 - iii. Saul and Silas, but also Barnabas and John Mark
 - iv. The Gospel Expanding and the Salvation of Luke
 - c. The Captivity of Paul
 - i. The Prophecy of Paul’s Capture / Preaching in Rome
 - ii. The Events of Paul’s Incarceration
 - iii. The Preaching to Felix and Festus / Appeal to Caesar
 - iv. The Shipwreck and Arrival at Rome
 - 3. We can also divide the Book other ways
 - a. Peter and Paul
 - b. Jerusalem and Antioch
 - c. Peter, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Saul
- B. Here, GREAT persecution continues against the church in Jerusalem
 - 1. This began in Acts 3 and grows progressively stronger (it won’t end)
 - a. We should expect persecution as long as we do our job!
 - b. The only time we should expect a “different result” is if we stop!
 - c. Only the Millennial Reign of Christ will end it!
 - 2. Stephen killed – the source was the religious Jews (Priests and Council)
 - a. They persecuted for religious reasons
 - b. Now the secular world gets into the game (Herod / Government)
 - c. They ALSO persecuted for religious reasons – it ALWAYS is!
 - 3. Now James is beheaded by Sword (vs. 2)

- a. LUKE 9:28 – “And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.”
 - b. Who? James, who was beheaded. Now, Peter is in Prison
 - c. And we know what they finally did with John in Revelation!
 - d. Why should we think we are going to skate through life?
 - e. ROMANS 5:3 – “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;”
- C. Now Peter is cast into Prison by Herod – he “stretched forth his hand” (vs. 1)
- 1. Perhaps formerly restrained now he actively seeks to VEX the church
 - a. WEBSTER’S 1828 – “To plague; to torment; to harass; to afflict.”
 - b. Webster also says, “to persecute,” using Acts 12:1 as an example
 - c. In other words, it was PURPOSEFUL
 - i. Never think that Satan is not purposeful
 - ii. He is not an aimless force of chaos, but a dedicated enemy
 - iii. Even if his agents are working unawares!
 - 2. Peter in prison, heavily guarded – soon to be KILLED like James (vs. 3)
 - 3. Conditions truly have become PERILOUS!
 - a. But the answer is a Church in Prayer
 - b. Which breaks the Chains of Peter
 - c. Even if it causes Confusion with God’s Provision
 - d. But there’s Comfort in His Protection

II. CHURCH IN PRAYER

- A. They prayed to the right Person “UNTO GOD” – (vs. 5)
- 1. They didn’t pray to Herod. Not the Soldiers. Not the Roman Empire
 - a. They didn’t pray to Mary. Didn’t pray to Buddha.
 - b. Nor out to the “Universe”
 - c. They didn’t hold “good thoughts” or “positive energy”
 - 2. The Model Prayer teaches us the CORRECT address:
 - a. LUKE 11:2 – “And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.”
 - b. If you don’t put the right address on the envelope, your letter won’t arrive into the right hands!
 - c. Pray to God in the way He taught us!
 - 3. We also don’t pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit
 - a. I’ve been among the AG’s and the Evangelicals
 - b. The prayers are confused and improperly addressed
 - c. We show the Trinity in biblical prayers (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- B. They prayed without ceasing! They were PERSISTENT
- 1. That’s a good memory verse: 1 THESS. 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.”

- a. LUKE 18:1 – “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;”
 - b. Never stop praying! Always be in an attitude of prayer
 - c. Pray when you lay down, pray when you get up. Pray when you work, pray when you rest. Pray when you eat, pray when you fast. Pray when you drive a car, pray when you ride in a car (sometimes more!)
2. It is ALWAYS prayer time!
 3. PSALM 127:2 – “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”
 - a. This is a testimony of prayer – give it over to God and REST
 - b. It’s vain to worry. It’s vain to try to take it into your own hands
- C. They prayed a DEFINITE prayer! “FOR HIM”
1. Not some nebulous “God please help...” or “We pray for..”
 2. They ASKED GOD to DO SOMETHING
 3. We must do this today...
 4. Not “for the lost” but for “my friend Dave” or “Mary” or “Sally”

III. CHAINS OF PETER

- A. Look at Peter’s position – He was SLEEPING (vs. 6)
 1. James had just been beheaded, but Peter wasn’t worried or fretted
 2. It was the NIGHT BEFORE his execution! (vs. 6 – brought him forth)
 3. There were chains, guards, keepers, doors, wards, iron gates – who cares!
 4. Peter was resting sweetly and safely in the Lord!
 5. He was CONTENT – PHIL. 4:11 – “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”
- B. Look at Peter’s deliverance – “led by the Angel of the Lord”
 1. The chains fell off (vs. 7)
 2. The wards were past – without opening? Jesus also appeared in the room without going through a door.
 3. The iron gate opened on its own (vs. 10)
 4. Peter was OBEDIENT even when he didn’t understand (vs. 9)
- C. God had answered the prayer of a praying church!

IV. CONFUSION WITH PROVISION

- A. The church was surprised – they were gathered in a prayer meeting (vs. 12)
 1. And there came a knock at the door
 2. Go find out who it is Rhoda – we’re too busy praying!
 3. She leaves the house and goes to the gate – IT’S PETER!!!
 4. She runs in and forgets to unlock the gate, she’s so excited!
- B. The prayer was answered but the church didn’t believe it
 1. Do we pray like this? In unbelief?

2. MATT. 7:7 – “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:”
 3. LUKE 17:6 – “And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.”
- C. They finally got around to letting Peter in, he gives them his testimony (vs. 17)

V. COMFORT IN PROTECTION

- A. The keepers were put to Death (vs. 19)
 1. This is why the Philippian Jailor prepares to kill himself in Acts 16
 2. They had put their hand against one of the Lord’s churches
 3. And God acted! Why would we ever expect differently
 - a. It isn’t a threat of violence, but a sad reality
 - b. People who come against God or a church suffer loss
 - c. God doesn’t balance His books every month
 - d. But He DOES balance them!
 4. Herod gets scared and leaves – Judea isn’t comfortable anymore
 5. He sees firsthand that God is real and Herod has no real power
- B. Herod forgets his brush with God
 1. He sets himself up AS a God – (vs. 21-22)
 2. The same God that delivered Peter from prison, takes Herod’s life
 3. And most importantly, the Word of God increases
 4. Despite Satan’s persecution. Despite all that Herod could do!
 5. There is COMFORT in the PROTECTION of God!
- C. Do you have God’s Protection?
 1. For the Christian, that means living in obedience to His Word
 2. For anyone here who does NOT have a relationship with God
 - a. That means get Saved (explain the terms)
 - b. We say Relationship because He adopts us into His family
 - c. He becomes our Father and we become His children
 - d. An earthly father will snatch a child back to safety who is wandering too close to danger
 - e. Why would our Heavenly Father be any different?
 - f. There’s SAFETY and SECURITY and COMFORT with God
 3. Do you know Peace? Do you have Comfort?
 - a. Do you have prayers answered?
 - b. Do you have a Father in Heaven?
 - c. You can!
 - d. Be Saved Today?