

When Prison Doors Open

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I. Introduction. Text: Acts 12:1-25.

II. Three events for instruction.

A. The murder of James.

1. This happened the same time of the year when Jesus was crucified.
2. James was one of the leaders of the church who was a "son of thunder."
3. The Lord had indicated that James would die with a violent death--James was beheaded.
4. The church was not disturbed when James was captured because they believed that he would likely be released. They were stunned when James was killed.

B. The deliverance of Peter from prison.

1. The church prayed earnestly for Peter because they realized with James that they could not count on the automatic deliverance of God.
2. Peter was delivered, and it surprised many in the church.

C. The death of Herod.

1. Innocent soldiers died because of Herod's unbelief.
2. Herod was ultimately killed as Acts and Josephus record.
3. Herod was so pompous that he actually believed that he was a god.
4. The tragedy of mankind is the thinking that we do not need God.

III. The explanation for these events.

A. The difference between the end of James and Peter was prayer.

B. When danger threatens the program and people of God this is a call to prayer. God will set people free in response to prayer where He would not have otherwise.

C. Prayer is the most natural and normal response of the heart dependent upon God.

D. The basic motive of prayer is a sense of dependence.

E. Prayer can change the time schedule--it can put off imminent danger.

F. Prayer gives peace. As we pray, the Spirit helps in our weaknesses.

Application questions:

1. How was the church's response to the arrests of Peter and James different?

2. What is prayer at its core?

3. How would you respond to someone who says that God does not change His plans when we pray? Explain.
