

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Date: 06.22.25 | Peter and Cornelius - James and Peter are Persecuted
Scripture: Acts 12

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

Middle School Students:

- God is eternal and has existed for eternity past and will exist for eternity into the future.
- Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is given a spiritual gift.
- Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to minister to God's people in a special way.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf.
- The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible.

High School Students:

- God is eternal, and although He is not bound by time, He chooses to operate in it to relate to us.
- Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is endowed with a spiritual gift to be used to serve in the church.
- Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit has come to convict, teach, comfort, lead, strengthen, and seal us, as well as to produce fruit within and through us.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf when we do not know how to or what to pray.
- The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.



MEMORY VERSE

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." - Acts 2:38-39



INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

- **Set the Scene:**

Say:

“Imagine you’re stuck in a room with locked doors, no phone, no help, and guards at the door. You didn’t do anything wrong—but you’re trapped. What would you do?”

- **Ask Discussion Questions:**

- **“What’s the first thing you’d try?”**
- **“Would you be scared? Hopeful?”**
- **“Who would you want to help you?”**
- **“What would you want people on the outside to do?”**

- **Connect It to Real Life:**

Say:

“We don’t usually get locked in prison like Peter did—but sometimes life feels that way. We get stuck, scared, or feel like there’s no way out. Acts 12 tells us how Peter escaped an impossible situation—and what the church did while he was trapped.”

- **Transition to the Bible Story:**

“Let’s read about a time when Peter was locked up tight and God showed that no prison can hold back His power—or His plan.”



BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Acts 12 tells the story of God’s divine and miraculous rescue of His apostle Peter. While King Herod Agrippa I sought to make an example of Peter, God alone showcased His power and might amidst the church’s persecution. This passage highlights the power of prayer during hardship and reveals how God’s purposes for His church will prevail despite the futile attempts of the enemy.

The chapter begins with intense persecution. Herod, the grandson of Herod the Great (who had tried to kill baby Jesus), initiates a wave of violence against the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1). He has James, the brother of John and one of Jesus’ twelve apostles, put to death by the sword (Acts 12:2). This James, a son of Zebedee, was known for his fiery personality (Matthew 4:21; Luke 9:54). Jesus had predicted his suffering (Mark 10:39), and James becomes the first apostle to be martyred. Perhaps the Jews were pleased with James’ execution, encouraging Herod to arrest Peter as well (Acts 12:3).

Peter, a prominent leader in the church, was seized during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since the seven days following the Passover meal were considered holy and executions were forbidden during that time, Peter was imprisoned to await a public trial afterward (Acts 12:3–4). Herod assigned four squads of soldiers to guard him. Roman practice held that soldiers who lost their prisoners would suffer the same penalty as the prisoner—in this case, death (Acts 12:19).

While Peter was imprisoned, the church prayed fervently for him (Acts 12:5). Their prayers were intense and persistent, though it’s clear later that they did not expect a miraculous release (Acts 12:14–16). Still, God chose to answer their prayers in a miraculous way.

The night before Peter’s trial, he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, with guards at the door. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and Peter’s chains fell off. The angel had to wake Peter, instruct him to get dressed, and lead him past the guards, through locked gates, and into the city (Acts 12:6–10). At first, Peter thought it was all a vision, but once he was alone in the street, he realized he had truly been rescued (Acts 12:11). As Hebrews 1:14 says, angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark (Acts 12:12). This John Mark would later join Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13). When Peter knocked at the door, a servant girl named Rhoda answered. Recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that she left him outside and ran to tell the others (Acts 12:13–14). The believers didn't believe her, thinking she was out of her mind. When Peter continued knocking, they finally opened the door and were amazed (Acts 12:15–16).

Peter told them how the Lord had delivered him and instructed them to inform James and the other brothers (Acts 12:17). This James was not the martyred apostle but the brother of Jesus. From this point forward, James becomes the prominent leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13–21; 21:18). Though he was not one of the original twelve apostles, he became an apostle later (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Peter then left Jerusalem for another place, indicating a leadership transition within the Jerusalem assembly.

The next morning, there was a great commotion among the soldiers over Peter's disappearance (Acts 12:18). Herod questioned the guards and had them executed (Acts 12:19), per Roman law. Since the soldiers knew their lives were at stake, they certainly wouldn't have all fallen asleep apart from the miraculous intervention of the angel who rescued Peter.

Luke then shifts the focus to Herod's downfall. Herod traveled to Caesarea, and during a public address, the people shouted that he spoke in the voice of a god, not a man (Acts 12:20–22). Unlike Peter, who immediately rejected worship in Acts 10:26, Herod accepted the people's flattery. Because he did not give glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he died a painful death, eaten by worms (Acts 12:23). This gruesome end was divine judgment.

Despite the persecution and hardship, the word of God continued to spread and flourish (Acts 12:24). This consistent theme throughout Acts (see Acts 6:7; 13:49) reinforces that no power can triumph over God's purposes.

Barnabas and Saul (Paul) returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, bringing John Mark with them (Acts 12:25).

Most who fled Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom shared the gospel primarily with Jews. However, some began to speak to Gentiles in Antioch, resulting in a growing church

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



(Acts 11:19-21). Antioch, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, soon became a center of Gentile Christianity. When the church in Jerusalem heard this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. He confirmed the grace of God at work and brought Paul from Tarsus to help teach the believers for a whole year (Acts 11:22-26). It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26).

The early Christians cared not just for spiritual needs but also for physical ones. When they learned of a severe famine, they took up a collection and sent it to believers in Judea, showing concern for the whole person (Acts 11:27-30).

Though Acts 12 seems to interrupt the Antioch narrative, Luke includes the story of Herod’s persecution and Peter’s deliverance to contrast God’s judgment with His salvation. While James was martyred, Peter was rescued. While Herod tried to destroy the church, he met divine judgment. This tension reveals the mystery of God’s sovereignty. The chapter ends with the confirmation that God’s mission moves forward despite everything.

Acts 12 is the last chapter focusing on the Jerusalem church without referencing Paul’s ministry. From this point forward, the spotlight shifts to Paul and the mission to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Nothing can stop what God is doing. Though persecution and political power rise against the church, God’s sovereignty prevails. The prayers of the saints matter. The suffering of the apostles is not in vain. And through it all, the word of God continues to increase and spread (Acts 12:24).



LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



Remind your group that we are studying the New Testament. The book of Acts is about God sending the Holy Spirit to permanently dwell within Jesus' disciples and other believers after He ascended back to heaven. With the help of the Holy Spirit, those who followed Christ told many people about Jesus, helped others, and started the first churches. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of Jesus began to spread all over the world.

**TELL
THE
STORY**



Tell the story:

As we've been studying Acts, we have seen how God is faithful to His church. He gave them the Holy Spirit to be their Helper and Comforter, especially when facing hard times. Today, we will learn that the church, particularly Peter, was in a tough spot. Yet, God chose to rescue Peter and answer the prayers of His church.

Read directly from Scripture, use The Jesus Storybook Bible, The Biggest Story Bible, or the summary provided in the lesson

When Stephen was killed because of his faith in Jesus, many believers in Jerusalem scattered to other towns. While persecution was intended to stop the church, God used it to grow His church and spread the church further into the world. Peter and the other disciples shared the good news of Jesus everywhere they went, both to Jews and Gentiles. Many people believed, and the church grew.

King Herod Agrippa was persecuting believers in the church. He killed James, one of Jesus' apostles. When the king saw how happy this made the Jews, he arrested Peter too. The king imprisoned Peter and assigned groups of soldiers to keep guard. While Peter was in prison, other believers in the church prayed and asked God to help him.



Put the events in order, draw a comic strip, build it with blocks or playdough, act it out, etc...

The king planned for Peter to be killed. The night before his trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers. He was in chains, and other soldiers stood guard at the gate of the prison. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a bright light shone in Peter's prison cell.

The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" the

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



angel said. The chains fell off Peter's wrists. The angel told Peter to get dressed, so Peter put on his sandals and his cloak. Then he followed the angel. Peter wasn't sure what was happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

The angel led Peter out of the prison, past the guards, through the gate, and onto the streets. Then the angel left. When Peter looked around, he realized the Lord had rescued him from prison and certain death!

Peter hurried to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the believers had gathered to pray. When Peter knocked at the door, a servant named Rhoda answered. She heard Peter's voice and was so happy she rushed back inside, leaving Peter outside. "Peter is here! He is at the door!" she announced.

But the others didn't believe her. "You're crazy!" they said. Peter kept knocking, and they could hardly believe it when they opened the door. Peter motioned to them to be quiet and told them how the Lord had rescued him from prison.

"Tell James, Jesus' half-brother, and the other brothers about this," Peter said. Then he left. When the sun came up, the soldiers at the prison couldn't figure out what happened to Peter, and the king punished the soldiers because Peter had escaped.

King Herod Agrippa was the king of Judea, and he desired to please people rather than God. He didn't want Peter to share the good news of Jesus because he wanted to make the Jews happy. King Herod thought his plan would stop Peter, but God's plan prevailed. God is more powerful than any earthly king! God worked through the prayers of His church to free Peter and allow him to continue to share the gospel in other places.

Re-tell the Bible Story: Have students retell the story as best as they can

Share the GOSPEL: God answered the people's prayers for Peter. God had a plan for Peter and the church, and He rescued Peter from his enemies. Peter knew he would face death because he believed in Jesus, but he kept going so he could share the good news of the gospel.

God has done more for us than send an angel to rescue us from earthly hardship. He sent His very Son to rescue us from the eternal consequence of our sins. Christ's sacrifice on our behalf offers the hope we need to endure difficulties and the boldness we need to share His divine hope with others.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



QUESTIONS TO REBUILD THE STORY

What is the church? The church is all Christians everywhere, who gather together in their communities to worship and serve God. **What is one way we saw today that the early church worshipped God?** As the church gathers together, one way we worship and serve God is through prayer. Believers share prayer requests, offer praises, and devote time to pray for one another. God hears our prayers and desires that we talk with Him. We can worship Him by having a heart that wants to be with God in prayer. It is also a way to serve others as we pray on their behalf.

The church was persecuted thousands of years ago, and it is still persecuted today. Yet, God uses evil intentions for good, and evil will not overcome His church. **How did God use persecution for the good of the church? (Acts 12:5).** Even though James had been killed and Peter was in prison, God used these circumstances to draw His people's hearts to Himself in prayer. While we all wish to avoid hardship, what we need most is God Himself. Prayer is the way we come into God's presence. Prayer is how we talk and listen to God so that we can be comforted by Him, experience His peace, and strengthen our faith in Him.

God heard the church's prayers and sent an angel to rescue Peter. **What was Peter doing when the angel rescued him? (Acts 12:7).** Peter had been asleep when the angel came to rescue him. **Why do you think Peter was able to sleep in prison, knowing that his good friend James had just been killed?** Perhaps Peter trusted God no matter what he faced, even death. Peter was willing to die for the gospel because he had faith that even if he died for Jesus, he would live forever with Him.

How was Peter able to courageously face prison and even certain death? Peter believed what he preached: all those who trust in Jesus are forgiven of their sins and will live with Him forever. The truth of the gospel gives us boldness and courage to face difficult circumstances because Jesus has rescued us from eternal punishment.

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



What if God does not answer our prayers as we hope? James was also arrested, but God chose not to rescue him from death. God's wisdom and plans are far beyond our understanding. Following Jesus means trusting Him even when our prayers are not answered as we hope, knowing that everything will be made right one day.

How can you pray for others? Who do you know who needs prayer? Everyone needs people praying for them. We can pray for people's needs, but we should also pray for their spiritual growth. God hears our prayers, and as we pray, we grow closer to Him.

What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?

What does the story teach me about myself?

Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?

Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?

How does this story help me live on mission?

Application (include Mission Measures where applicable) - See Attached Application Questions. Choose the questions that work well with this section of scripture and tailor them to fit the age group of your students.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



PRAYER PROMPT:

God used the prayers of His people to rescue Peter from prison. God doesn't need our prayers to act, but He works through our prayers to teach us to depend on Him and trust Him in all things. As the church meets together, we can pray for Christians around the world who may be facing persecution, trusting that God hears our prayers.

Lord, thank You for hearing us when we pray. Help us pray for guidance every day so that we can share the good news of Jesus with others. Amen.

MISSIONS EMPHASIS:

Our Creek Families will collect money in the funnel for United Christian Ministries in May and June.

REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

Acts 2:38-39

38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

apstt,rabbeooyitnojcftfoys,aywrtgoths.ftpifyafycafawafo,ewtlogcth. - Acts 2:38-39

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

COMPASSIONATE - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR - God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER - God rescues and saves his children.

ETERNAL - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL - God always keeps his promises.

GENEROUS - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS - God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

JEALOUS - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

JUST - god is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

MERCIFUL - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?

THE POWER OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**



Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD >>>

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and in the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD >>>

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?