

The Sunday School.

BIBLE LESSON.

Adapted from Hurlbut's Notes.

Second Quarter.

Lesson IV.—April 25. Acts 12:5-17.

Read the whole chapter.

PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON.

GOLDEN TEXT.

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.—Psalm 34, 7.

I. THE PRISONER.—VERSSES 5, 6.

5. BUT PRAYER WAS MADE.—A tremendous word in this connection. A handful of friendless men and women place a bar across the path of the mighty Herod by earnest prayer.—"a weapon more powerful than all the resources of the monarch of Judea." WITHOUT CHASING—"Earnestly." The same Greek word is used in the description of the prayer offered by our Lord in Gethsemane (Luke 22, 44.) FOR HIM.—We should pray, not only for ourselves, but for others in trouble.

6. WOULD HAVE BROUGHT HIM FORTH.—"Was about to bring him forth." THE SAME NIGHT.—The night before his proposed execution. PETER WAS SLEEPING.—"I question whether Herod, who imprisoned him, slept half so soundly." See how trust in the Saviour can give perfect peace. "He had slept in Gethsemane through weakness of the flesh; now he sleeps in prison by the strength of his faith." "It was a common practice with the Romans to chain the right wrist of a prisoner to the left wrist of a soldier who guarded him. In this case, as in that of Paul, in Acts 21, 33, the extra precaution is taken of chaining each hand of the prisoner to that of a soldier on that side." KEEPERS.—Guards; the soldiers outside the door leading into the court of the prison.

II. THE ANGEL. VERSSES 7-11.

7. AND, BEHOLD.—It must have been between three and six o'clock, for Peter was not missed until morning light, so the last change of guards had been made. THE ANGEL.—Better, "an angel;" a supernatural manifestation, not an unknown human friend who had secured entrance. LIGHT SHINED.—Perhaps celestial light from the angel's person, like our Lord's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter sees by it his prison, his chains, his cloak, his sandals, and his emancipator. IN THE PRISON.—Better, "in the cell;" in Peter's dungeon. SMOOTH PETER.—Touched him awake. RAISED HIM.—The verb does not indicate that he helped him to arise. CHAINS FELL OFF.—Divine power easily overcomes earthly difficulties.

8. GIRD THEMSELVES.—Orientals do not take off their garments, but loosen them, when lying down to sleep. BIND ON THY SANDALS.—The sandals are always removed, as we would remove hats, on entering a building, in almost every part of Asia to-day, from the gates of the Hellestrop to the seas of Japan. At temple entrances and school-house doors one will see a large collection of shoes or sandals of various models, which persons dropped there on entering the building. Some Europeans have given grave offense, and even run the risk of being mobbed, because they entered the sacred places of Asia with their shoes on. Nothing is more insulting than to strike a person with a shoe or a sandal. CAST THY GARMENT.—His outer mantle, laid over him while sleeping, and needed now that he was about to go out into the cold air of an early spring morning. The angel did for Peter what he could not do for himself—broke his fetters; but did not do for him what he could do for himself—put on his tunic and mantle.

9. FOLLOWED HIM.—In a dazed and dreamy way. THOUGHT HE SAW A VISION.—It seemed like the revelation he had received upon the house top in Joppa. (Acts 10, 10-17.) He might wake up from this to find the horrors of the prison and the doom that awaited him. The thought of deliverance evidently had not entered into his mind.

10. FIRST AND SECOND WARD.—Not different parts of the prison, but men, members of the guard. "It is uncertain whether each watch consisted of one or two soldiers. Peter's entire guard included four quaternions, or sixteen men."

11. WAS COME TO HIMSELF.—Became again self-conscious. The absence of his heavenly guide and the sight of familiar objects enabled him to realize that he was really awake and free. NOW I KNOW.—By the best assurance, that of experience. HATH DELIVERED.—He perceived that the rescue was divine and miraculous. THE EXPECTATION OF THE PEOPLE.—Peter's death was what these Jews fully and unanimously expected. Like wild beasts they

scented his blood from afar, and longed to see him killed like James.

III. THE DISCIPLES. VERSSES 12-17.

12. WHEN HE HAD CONSIDERED.—Rather "having become fully aware," that is, aware of his deliverance. "The thing" is an addition of the translators, which unfortunately alters the sense. Peter was not the man to linger in the street debating what he should do next. THE HOUSE OF MARY.—Tradition declares that her house on Mount Zion was spared in the destruction of Jerusalem, twenty-five years after this, and was standing in the fourth century. MOTHER OF JOHN.—John Mark, or rather Marcus, a Latin surname, the courier of Paul and Barnabas, and according to an early tradition the writer of the second gospel. This man was a 'sister's son to Barnabas' (Col. 4, 10) if the usual translation is correct. At all events his mother was closely related to that eminent Christian worker. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts 12, 25; 13, 5; 15, 37.) He was one of Peter's converts (1 Peter 5, 13.) MANY WERE GATHERED.—They had continued all night in prayer, as the morning was expected to witness Peter's execution. They could pray for Peter when there was nothing else to be done. Let us work while we can, but pray always.

13. THE DOOR OF THE GATE.—Probably the outer or street door. Another door inside the porch led directly into the house. CAME TO HEAR.—"To answer." In the East a person always pronounces his name before the door is open. The recent outburst of persecution rendered caution specially necessary.

14. KNEW PETER'S VOICE.—Showing that he had been a frequent visitor at the house. It was a maidservant who recognized Peter by his voice when he denied his Lord. The tones and footsteps of familiar friends come more readily to our memory than their forms and features.

15. THOU ART MAD.—The personal peril of being a Christian was great, and Rhoda must have been, as we would now say, "nervously strained;" they were not giving their deliberate opinion that she was a lunatic, but, as men might now say, "disconcerted," "unbalanced." CONSTANTLY AFFIRMED.—With the quick ear of youth she had recognized his voice, and knew that she was not mistaken. IT IS HIS ANGEL.—For some cause these men conjectured that this was their friend's guardian angel. There appears to have been a floating belief among the Jews that every person had a guardian angel, who sometimes assumed his look and voice. The Greeks and Romans shared this belief, and all who have read about Socrates will remember the "demon" of which he so often spoke. That the church believed in the doctrine of guardian angels at an early period is certain, and it is probable that whatever these primitive Christians believed was based on that very remarkable text (Matt. 18, 10.) "In heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Precisely what that verse means is not beyond dispute. But in no case is this verse to be taken as announcing a doctrine; it simply gives a rash conjecture of the disciples.

16. BUT PETER CONTINUED KNOCKING.—Whatever the opinions of other folks were, Peter was sure that he was very human, and very much alive, and that delay might betray him into the hands of his enemies. THEY WERE ASTONISHED.—They were astounded. They had spent the night asking God to liberate Peter, but they never expected him to do so. Many modern Christians act in the same way. Many a useless speculation might be laid to rest by simply opening the door.

17. DICKENING.—Perhaps unable to make himself heard in the excited clamor; perhaps as there was danger of attracting

attention from the neighborhood. DECLARED.—Told the story. SHOW THESE THINGS UNTO JAMES.—"The Lord's brother," probably the son of Joseph and Mary, and a leader in the early church. He was the author of the Epistle of James; martyred not long before the destruction of Jerusalem. THE BRETHREN.—He sent to the various centers where, as in the house of Mary, prayer was being offered for his deliverance. HE DEPARTED.—As he would be sought for in the city, he left it for a season, but soon afterward returned. See Acts 15, 7. ANOTHER PLACE.—Some suppose Casarea; others, with more probability, Antioch.

God's deliverances vary, but they are certain. James's was out of the world into glory; Peter's out of prison into labor; Paul's thorn could not be removed, but he had his equivalent in enduring and triumphing grace. Jesus watches over his servants who seek to be just where he wants them, and will gloriously guide them and never forsake them. (Exod. 14, 13; Psalm 27, 5, 6; 73, 24; Isa. 32, 2; 2 Cor. 12, 7-9; Heb. 13, 5, 6; Rev. 2, 10.)

A Havana despatch says Gen. Rivera's fate has been decided on and the empty formality of a drumhead court martial will be followed by his hasty execution. Gen. Weyler believes such a course will work terror to the other Cuban leaders. It is reported Gen. Santanaya has notified the Spaniards at San Cristobal that if General Rivera is shot, or "murdered," as he expressed it, a sharp reprisal would be made on every Spanish officer hereafter captured. It is said the Spanish authorities have the key to the cipher code used in telegraphic communication between Consul General Lee and the government at Washington.

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Twenty persons were killed and many injured by an explosion at Lisbon on Tuesday in a fireworks factory.

Through the magic of his famous father's name, aided by a split in the regular Republican ranks, and the flocking of the discontented laboring class to the standard of silver democracy, Carter Henry Harrison was elected mayor of Chicago on Tuesday and a great Democratic triumph was recorded. The 39,000 plurality of McKinley over Bryan was turned into a Democratic plurality of about 85,000 over Judge Nathan Sears, the machine Republican candidate for mayoralty. Carter Harrison, Jr., it will be remembered, was assassinated a few years ago while he was mayor of Chicago.

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