

who still confined their work to the Jews. Notice, also, the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles by others (ch. 11:20,21), and the gradual widening of the outlook towards the great heathen world beyond Judaism.

1. Consider the beginning of the second persecution, by Herod, and especially the part the Jews at Jerusalem had in encouraging this vile work. The boldness and violence of the movement is seen in the murder of James, the prominent, aggressive, ambitious, well known apostle. Study his character as it is revealed in the gospel narrative (see Luke 9:51-56; Mark 10:35-40).

2. The imprisonment of Peter. Note: (a) The motive,—“it pleased the Jews”. Herod was an ambitious, time-serving politician, willing to commit any crime for the sake of popularity or power. (b) The precaution taken. Peter was closely guarded in prison. Observe the reasons for this. Peter was an outstanding man. He was the leader in spreading the gospel among the Gentiles. He was very aggressive and resourceful. He had once before been miraculously delivered from prison, ch. 5:18, 19. These things show the critical situation, and, indirectly, the prominence the church has attained.

3. The attitude of the church,—prayer: (a) The need was urgent, as a far-reaching plan to destroy the church was on foot. Note how great need calls out correspondingly great faith and prayer. (b) The spirit and persistence of the prayer should be observed, vs. 5, 12. There is an undercurrent of intense, fervent pleading for Peter. (c) The answer. The form of it was unexpected. The whole incident is full of precious meaning, in that it shows God’s messenger at work for man.

Having seized the main thoughts of the Lesson, there are two things to be very especially emphasized:

First—The determining Factor in moral and spiritual conflict is God. The human forces here were unequally matched. On one side, were Jewish cunning, Roman power, the mighty fortress of Antonia and the guard of soldiers. On the other, one unarmed man. The victory was with Peter, because God was the unseen Leader. The manner is

noteworthy. The Golden Text makes it the central thought,—the ministry of an angel. The part angels have played in the history of redemption, should encourage us to expect their help in our need. Heb. 1:14 is the classic passage describing the office of the angels in relation to the human race.

Second—The power of a praying church. Jesus left prayer as the unlimited resource of His people. Modern church power and revival are always steeped in prayer. The teacher should seek to lead the scholars to enter into this life of prayer.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

Peloubet suggests two excellent methods of teaching the Lesson:

First—Four written accounts of Peter’s imprisonment and release to be prepared by four scholars, who will write as if they were Herod, Peter, one of the Roman soldiers chained to Peter, and Rhoda, respectively; these accounts to be read to the class.

Second—Each scholar may be asked, in advance, to bring two lists, one, of the advantages which Herod had on his side in this contest, the other, of the advantages which Peter had; these lists to be compared and discussed in the class.

Either of the above methods, or the one to be next suggested will be much helped out by a print of Raphael’s Deliverance of Peter, or Hilton’s Deliverance of St. Peter from Prison (Wilde’s Bible Picture).

A third plan—Begin with the time (see v. 1); when the followers of Jesus were multiplying rapidly, not only at Jerusalem, but far and wide (see ch. 11:19-21).

Then picture vain, jealous, bloodthirsty Herod: he could not bear that any movement should take away from his own consequence and importance (compare vs. 20-23). To take a man’s life was no more, to such as he, than brushing off a thistle down.

The slaughter of James, “the brother of John”. They were sons of Zebedee and in the inner circle of our Lord’s friends and companions. Why did the risen Lord permit the cutting off of this useful life so soon, and spare John to old age and long service? Life is as God wills. He is the Master-workman, and knows best when to bid His workmen cease