



# God Frees Peter from Prison

Acts 12:1–24



## LESSON GOAL

The child will understand that the sovereign God blesses his servants but punishes his enemies.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- Herod was persecuting the apostles.
- God freed Peter from prison.
- The believers were praying for Peter
- Herod did not give God glory so God killed him.

## KEY VERSE

“And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.’ —Acts 12:11

## APPLICATION

- Believe that God works through prayer.
- Trust God because He cares for His servants.
- Ask if you have glorified yourself rather than God.

## NEXT WEEK

The Gentiles Are Saved by Faith  
Acts 15:1–35

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4

# Teacher Planning Sheet

## PREPARE

**Objectives/Truths** to cover this week

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Personal Application

*As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to...*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Three ways students need to apply this passage are...*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## POINT

*Choose from various ideas to point students to the coming Bible lesson.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PROCLAIM

*Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.*

### Presentation Ideas

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Praise/Music Ideas

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PRACTICE

*Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Materials Needed:

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## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children.” —Deuteronomy 11:18–19*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

After the conversion of Saul, the church in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee had peace for approximately 10 years. God blessed the church with a period of rest in which the church continued to expand. Although the persecution of the church had subsided, the majority of Jews remained opposed to the Gospel. The Jews’ visible persecution of the church had stopped but their internal hatred for the Lord Jesus only grew. The respite from persecution lasted until 44 AD when the first apostle was martyred. In Acts 12, Luke records how God powerfully blessed His servant Peter but punished His enemy Herod Agrippa. Whether one is blessed or punished is determined by how each person responds to God’s Son. Regardless of man’s response, God will be glorified when the reign of His Son continues to spread through the preaching of the Gospel.

#### God Blesses His Servant (Acts 12:1–19)

When King Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, wanted to solidify his control over the Jewish area, the king “stretched out his hand to harass some form the church” (Acts 12:1). The king believed that the best way to gain favor with the Jews was by persecuting the church. Herod “pleased the Jews” when he had James the apostle arrested and executed (Acts 12:2–3). James was the first apostle to be martyred. James’ death by beheading (“with the sword”) indicates that he may have been found guilty of leading the people to follow false gods (Deut. 13:12–15). Seeing how James’ murder satisfied the Jews’ hatred, Herod arrested Peter “intending to bring him before the people after Passover” (Acts 12:4). After the Days of Unleavened Bread (the week-long feast following Passover), Herod planned on trying Peter before the multitudes of Jews who had come to the city to celebrate Passover (12:3-4). Just as he had killed James, Herod Agrippa intended to kill Peter in order to increase his popularity among the Jews.

Even though they had seen James killed, neither Peter nor the church stopped trusting God. During Peter’s imprisonment, “constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (12:5). The saints trusted that the same God who had glorified Himself in James’ death could glorify himself in Peter’s rescue. The night before his trial the church was “gathered together praying” (12:12). Peter similarly trusted in God’s sovereignty. The night before his trial, Peter trusted the Lord enough to fall asleep (12:6).

God answered the church’s prayer in such a startling way that both Peter and the church had a hard time believing what God had done. From man’s perspective, Peter was in an impossible situation. He was chained “with two chains between two soldiers” (12:6). Other soldiers guarded the prison doors. (Herod had appointed four squads of soldiers to guard Peter. Each squad consisted of four

soldiers (12:4.) God answered the church's prayer not by granting Peter the grace to suffer for the name of Christ but by sending an angel to rescue him from prison. After the angel shook Peter awake, "his chains fell off his hands" (12:7). Still groggy, Peter was given explicit instructions by the angel to get dressed and follow (12:8). Peter obeyed even though he "thought he was seeing a vision" (12:9). Peter and the angel walked past both the first and second guard without anyone noticing until finally they reached the iron gate which led out into the city (12:10). The iron gate "opened to them of its own accord" (12:10)! It wasn't until the angel disappeared that Peter realized that he had really escaped. Peter said to himself: "Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people" (12:11).

When Peter came to the home of Mary, the believers had as hard a time believing that Peter had escaped as Peter himself had! Although the believers had met to pray for Peter, they did not expect God to deliver him in such a miraculous way. When Peter knocked on the door, a girl named Rhoda recognized Peter's voice. In her excitement, the girl left Peter standing outside while she ran in to tell the others (12:12–14). At first, the believers thought she was out of her mind, but because she was so insistent they concluded she had seen his angel (12:15). (Jews believed that each person had a guardian angel). Still outside, Peter continued knocking until the door was finally opened (12:16). Peter quickly quieted the astonished saints, retold to them how God had rescued him from prison, and instructed them to tell James what had happened. (James was a brother of Jesus who had become an important elder in the Jerusalem church (12:17).) Perhaps the astonished believers reconvened their prayer meeting to praise God for his deliverance of the apostle.

The search for Peter began the next morning (12:18). When the soldiers discovered Peter was missing, they frantically looked for him, no doubt distraught that the impossible rescue had happened during their watch. Knowing that Herod would be furious over his lost prisoner and that the soldiers would be desperate to recapture him, Peter most likely left Jerusalem right after visiting the believers. Herod did all he could to find the apostle, but when Peter was not found, he executed the soldiers who had been responsible for guarding him (12:19). According to Roman law, when a prisoner escaped, his guard suffered the punishment his prisoner was going to receive. Instead of increasing his popularity among the Jews, Herod had to deal with the disappointed Jews who hated Jesus and longed for Peter's execution. Perhaps his embarrassment was the reason for Herod's leaving Jerusalem and going to Caesarea (12:19).

### **God Punishes His Enemy (Acts 12:20–24)**

When God demonstrated His power by releasing Peter, Herod did not humble himself but continued in his opposition against God. Herod was finally judged by God for being His enemy. Luke records how Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon (for reasons unknown) and cut off food to those cities (12:20). The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had no choice but to send delegates to ask Herod for peace. Herod continued to exalt his power at a feast the next day by dressing himself in his "royal apparel" and giving a speech to those from Tyre and Sidon (12:21). The historian Josephus tells that Herod had put on a garment made from silver which reflected the brightness of the sun. The humiliated people gave Herod the praise he desired and shouted, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" (12:22). When Herod accepted the praise from the people, "immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (12:23). Josephus records that Herod suffered intensely for five days before dying. The Lord cursed Herod with tapeworms because he did not give glory to God. God's wrath is similarly coming upon all sinners who do not glorify Him (Rom. 1:18–23).

## Conclusion

From the beginning to the end of Acts 12, Luke describe how God is sovereign over the growth of the church. The same God who is sovereign over the death of His apostle in Acts 12:2 is sovereign over the Gospel's spread in Acts 12:24. God's plans are not thwarted by evil men like Herod Agrippa. Within the context of God's unstoppable plan for His church, Luke shows how God responds to His servants differently than He does His enemies. Both Peter and the church enjoy the blessings of being in a right relationship with God. God answered the prayers of the saints and rescued His apostle in such an amazing way that both Peter and the church had a tough time believing it had really happened. In stark contrast to God's blessing upon the saints is His punishment of Herod Agrippa. Even though Herod's death didn't directly have to do with the church, Luke records God's punishment as a reminder that those who glorify themselves instead of God will be punished.

## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children." —Deuteronomy 11:18–19*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.



## Review Questions

Who did God send an angel to talk with?

*God sent an angel to Cornelius, a centurion, telling him to send for Peter.*

What did Peter see as he was on top of the roof?

*He saw a vision of a sheet come down from heaven and tell him to get up and kill and eat.*

How many times did this happen?

*This happened three times.*

What happened after Peter's dream?

*After Peter awoke from his vision the men who Cornelius had sent arrived at the house.*

What did Peter do with the men?

*The Holy Spirit told Peter that He had sent them and to go with them. So he went with them.*

Why did Cornelius want Peter to come?

*He wanted to know how to be saved.*

Who was at Cornelius' house when Peter arrived?

*Cornelius had invited his family and close friends to come to his house.*

What did Peter tell the people and Cornelius when he arrived?  
*He told them that God had opened the door for all to be saved. He then told them how to be saved.*

What happened to show that God did accept the Gentiles into His family?  
*The Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles who were there.*

What did the Jews think who saw these things?  
*The Jews saw what happened and were amazed because the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles.*



### Difficult Concepts

Why were the believers at the home of Mark's mother?: Believers gathered at the home of Mark's mother in order to pray for Peter's release from prison. Christians did not have churches to go to in Peter's time. They did not go to a church building like we do on Sundays. They met in homes, usually of wealthy people, to pray and listen to preaching.

**Apostle:** "Apostle" is a special title for men sent by God to accomplish a specific job. To be an apostle, the men had to be assigned specifically by God. They also must have seen Jesus Christ personally. James is the name of one of the original 12 disciples who was also an apostle. He is probably the James mentioned here. Jesus also had a brother named James, but he is not referred to as an apostle. Galatians 1:19 is the only possible exception to that fact.

**Martyrdom:** James the apostle is the second martyr we have seen in the book of Acts. This concept of martyrdom can be hard to grasp for children who live in countries free of religious persecution. Yet even still, martyrdom continues to be a reality today. For this reason, this would be a good time to go over martyrdom that continues to take place in the world. Bring in a map and highlight those countries where believers still die for their faith in Christ. Once the class has observed those areas of continued religious persecution, take the time to pray for those countries (including those believers who are suffering within).



### Taking Credit

How do you take credit for good things that you really shouldn't? Ask the students if they ever let their parents praise them for cleaning up their bedroom, when really their brother or sister did it. Ask them if they have ever surprised their mom by doing the dishes, but failed to mention it was a brother or sister's idea. Herod took the credit for speaking like God. Instead of being honest, he let people say he was a god. Maybe the students can sing or play the piano. That ability comes from God, and unlike Herod they should admit God gave them that ability.

## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done." —Psalm 78:4*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

The Jews didn't hurt the Christians as much after Saul had become a Christian. There was peace for about ten years. This gave the church a chance to rest and grow even larger. The Jews still hated the gospel of Jesus Christ, but they were not as hurtful against the Christians during this time. That peaceful time came to an end though, when the apostle James was killed because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

King Herod Agrippa was a wicked king who wanted all power and glory to be given to himself. He thought that a good way to get the Jews under his control and to get them to like him was hurt the Christian church. So, Herod had James, the brother of John, killed. The Jews were very pleased by this, so Herod decided he would do it again. This time, he had Peter arrested and thrown in prison. He was waiting for the end of Passover, then he would bring Peter before the Jews and have him killed also. Herod wanted to be sure that Peter would not escape, so he put sixteen soldiers in charge of him, and two soldiers were chained to him at all times.

The Christians prayed for Peter constantly. They had not lost their faith or hope in God because James had been killed, but rather knew that if God wanted to glorify himself by rescuing Peter from Herod, He would. So they prayed and prayed for Peter. God chose to do just what the people were praying for, and He miraculously arranged for Peter's escape. The night before he was to be brought before the Jews, Peter was asleep in his cell, chained to two guards, when someone shook Peter's side and woke him up. It was an angel of the Lord, shining brightly in the prison. The angel said, "Arise quickly!" (12:7) The chains on Peter's hands fell off, and the angel said, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals. Put on your garment and follow me" (12:8) Peter did as he was told, but he didn't know if what was happening was real or a dream.

The angel and Peter walked right past all of the guards and out of the prison. When they came to the gates of the city, the gates opened up all by themselves. They walked down a street, and then the angel disappeared. After Peter realized that he was not dreaming, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people" (12:11).

Peter went on down the street and came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Many believers were gathered there praying for Peter, and he knocked at the door. A girl named Rhoda came to answer, and when she recognized Peter's voice, she was so shocked and excited she ran off to tell the others and forgot to open the door for Peter!

When she told the others, they thought she was crazy. They thought if anything, she had seen an angel. It was easier for them to believe that an angel had knocked at the door than to believe that Peter himself was there. Peter, still waiting outside,

kept knocking, and when they finally opened the door, they were shocked! Peter motioned for them to keep quiet; he didn't want them to make a lot of noise and draw attention to the house. He told them the story of how the angel had come and helped him to escape, and then instructed them to go and tell the other apostles and Christians. He left the house and went somewhere to hide from King Herod.

When morning came, there was quite an uproar at the prison when they realized that Peter had escaped. King Herod looked everywhere but could not find him. As a punishment for losing their prisoner, Peter's guards were sentenced to death.

King Herod was still hungry for power and glory. He had not gotten enough from the Jews to satisfy himself. He decided that he would cut off the food supply from two cities, and make them beg for his mercy. The people from these cities did beg Herod to be peaceful with them, so he came out to address these people and dressed himself in his finest royal clothing. The people shouted to him that he was a god, not a man. King Herod did not correct them, and because of his arrogance, and because he glorified himself instead of glorifying God, an angel of the Lord was sent to Herod and he struck Herod with a horrible disease. King Herod was eaten by worms and died because He did not give glory to God.

God is sovereign and in complete control of all things. God allowed James the brother of John to be killed by Herod and He allowed Peter to escape, and in both cases He brought glory to His name. God also was sovereign over the death of King Herod. Just as God had King Herod killed for not bringing glory to Him, someday God will punish all people who do not bring glory to his name.



## Lesson Questions

What happened to Peter?

*He was arrested and put in prison.*

What was the church doing for Peter as he was in prison?

*They were praying for him constantly.*

What happened as Peter slept?

*An angel stood by Peter and a light shone in the prison. The angel and told him to get up and Peter's chains fell off. Then they left the prison.*

Where did Peter go after leaving prison?

*Peter went Mary's house, who was the mother of John.*

What happened when Peter knocked on the gate?

*Rhoda answered the door but did not let Peter in because she recognized his voice and was very excited.*

What did Rhoda do?

*She told everyone inside praying that Peter was at the gate but they did not believe her.*

What happened when they opened the door?

*They were astonished and they let Peter in.*

What happened to Herod?

*Herod did not give God the glory and he died.*





## Presentation Ideas

### A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



### Glory Box

Before class, prepare a box by elaborately decorating it with the materials of your choosing. This will be the glory box. After describing how God's servants, Peter and James, gave glory to God in today's lesson, have the children write down different ways that they can give God glory also. Once they have made their lists, have each student deposit their list into the "Glory Box."



### And the Chains Fell Off

To prepare for the events of Peter's imprisonment and release, have the children remove their shoes. Right before the lesson (to avoid a later disruption), wrap paper chains around the children's hands while they sit and listen to what happened to Peter. Then, immediately after reading Acts 12:7, let the children stand and break their chains, letting them fall to the floor. Then have them put their shoes back on.



### Puppet Skit

Have a puppet brag about how well he can sing, then demonstrate with a few bars from "Jesus loves me." Let him talk about how fast he can run as you move him back and forth on the stage. Have him boast about what a good speaker he is with such a wonderful voice. Then take your hand out and confront the puppet with the fact that you make him sing and move and talk. Tell the students how foolish it is for a puppet to boast about all the things he can do. Then ask the students if they ever boast about things God helps them to do.

## Praise and Worship

*I Love You, Lord*

*I Will Call Upon the Lord*

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord*

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

*“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” —Psalm 78:7*

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



5

### “The Deaths of Two Men”

Materials: copies of “The Deaths of Two Men” on cardstock, crayons, scissors, glue  
Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft page. Have them do the color by number with green and brown crayons. Next, cut off the bottom strip and cut the shapes apart to make tombstones. Fold at the dotted lines and glue on top of the brown burial plots.



### “The Door at the Gate”

Materials: copies of “The Door at the Gate” craft pages, scissors, glue, crayons or other decorations

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft pages and have them color and decorate the pictures. Depending on the age of the students, cut the door along the top, bottom, and left edge so that it opens and closes. Have the students glue the page with Peter to the back of the page with the door. When the student opens the door, he or she will be able to see Peter.



5

### “Servants and Enemies of God”

Materials: copies of “Servants and Enemies of God” craft pages, scissors, glue, crayons

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft page. Instruct the students to color and cut out each picture and match it to the appropriate verse.



### “When an Angel of the Lord Strikes”

Materials: copies of “When an Angel of the Lord Strikes” craft pages, brads, crayons

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft page, one cutout of Herod, and one cutout of Peter. Instruct the students to use brads to attach the cutouts to the appropriate picture. Herod should be able to be moved down and Peter should be able to raise up.



### Peter’s Escape

Have the children run a relay race using Peter’s escape from prison as a model. To play this game, bring to class two pairs of adult sandals, two large t-shirts, and two bathrobes. The children should be divided into two teams of the same number of children. Each team will need a helper, who will play the part of the angel. When the game begins, each “angel” will direct the first child from their team to put on the shirt, sandals, and bathrobe (like Peter putting on his clothes) and then will direct the child through an obstacle course as quickly as possible (like Peter escaping from prison). When the child finishes his course, he should return to his team and take off the sandals, T-shirt, and bathrobe. The helper can then direct the next child to do the same thing. When all the children on one team finish the course, that team wins.



### **The Search for Peter**

In this game, one child at a time pretends they are one of Herod's guards who is looking for the apostle Peter (Acts 12:19a). Prepare for this game by cutting out a picture of the apostle Peter. Pick one child from the class and have them stand outside the room (or close their eyes) so they don't see what is going on inside the room. The teacher should then hide the picture of Peter. After the picture has been hidden, the child can come back in the room (or open his eyes) and begin his search for the picture. The other children can yell out whether the child is getting "hot" or "cold." The child who finds the picture can hide it for the next child.

### **Coloring Pages**

Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.

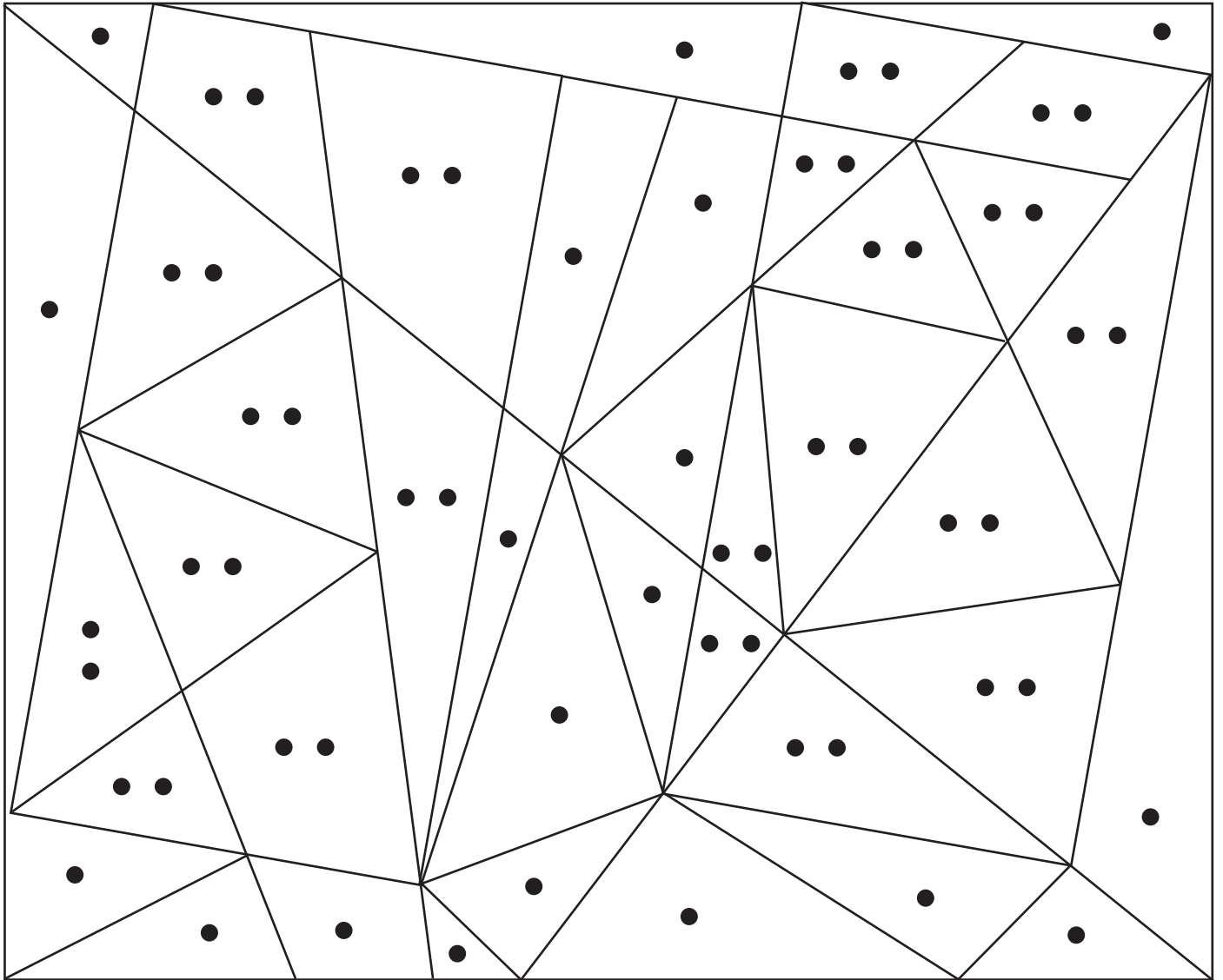


### **MEMORY VERSE**

"But the word of God grew and multiplied." —Acts 12:24



# The Deaths of Two Men



Color by number:    ● ● = brown                      ● = green

**Herod**

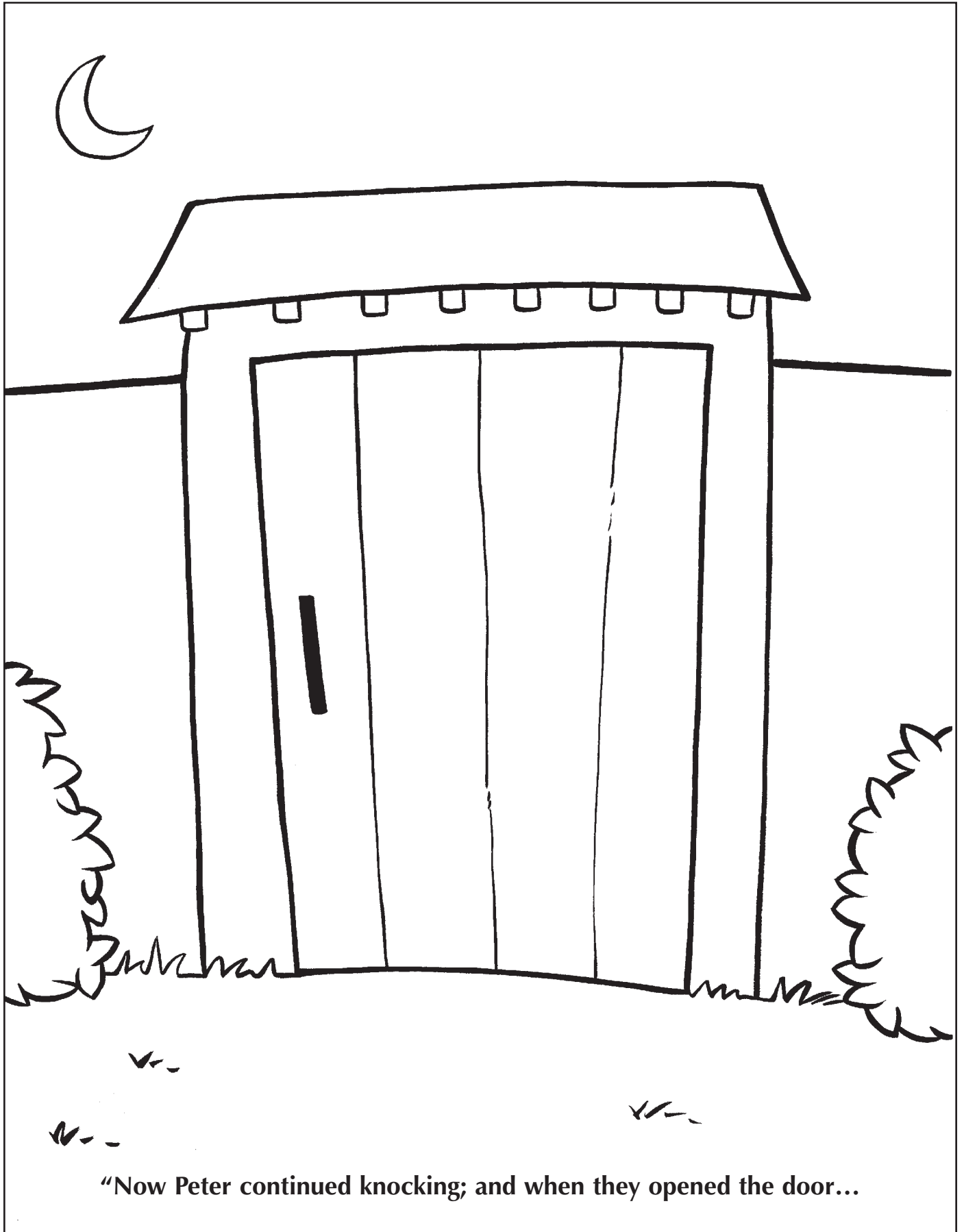
An enemy of God  
Acts 12:21-33

**James**

A servant of God  
Acts 12:1-2



# The Door at the Gate







# The Door at the Gate

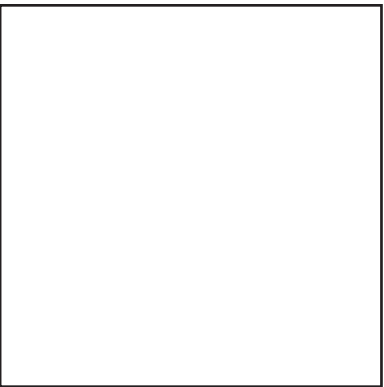


and saw him, they were  
astonished." —Acts 12:16

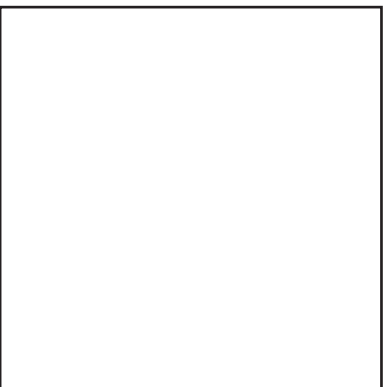


# Servants and Enemies of God

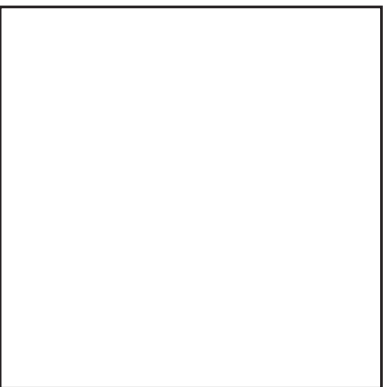
Cut out the pictures and match them to the verses in order to remind you of the events in Acts 12 regarding James and Peter, servants of God, and Herod, and enemy of God.



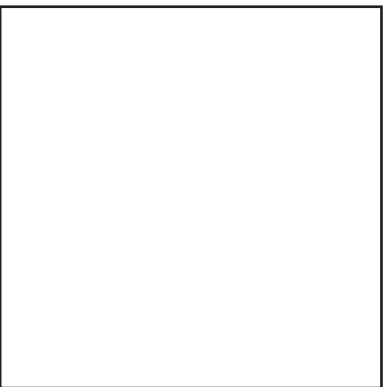
"Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with a sword."  
—Acts 12:1-2



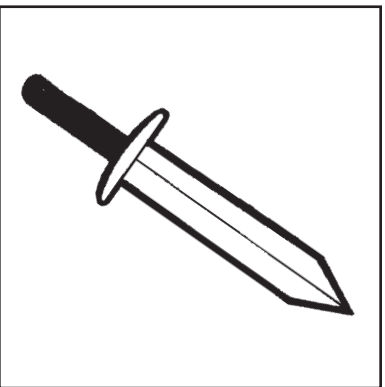
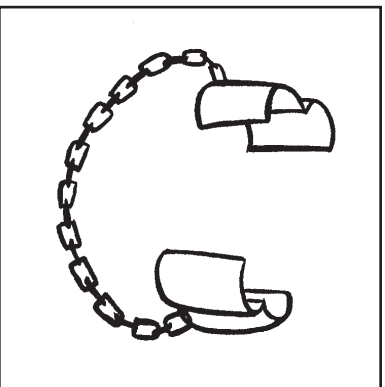
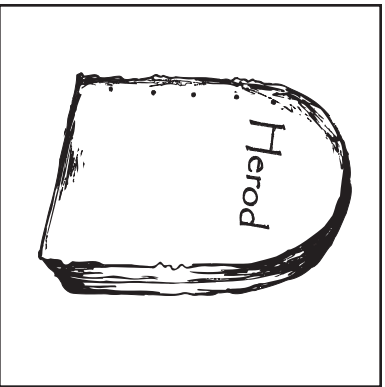
"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church."  
—Acts 5:12



"Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raise him up, saying, 'Arise quickly!' And his chains fell off his hands."  
—Acts 12:7

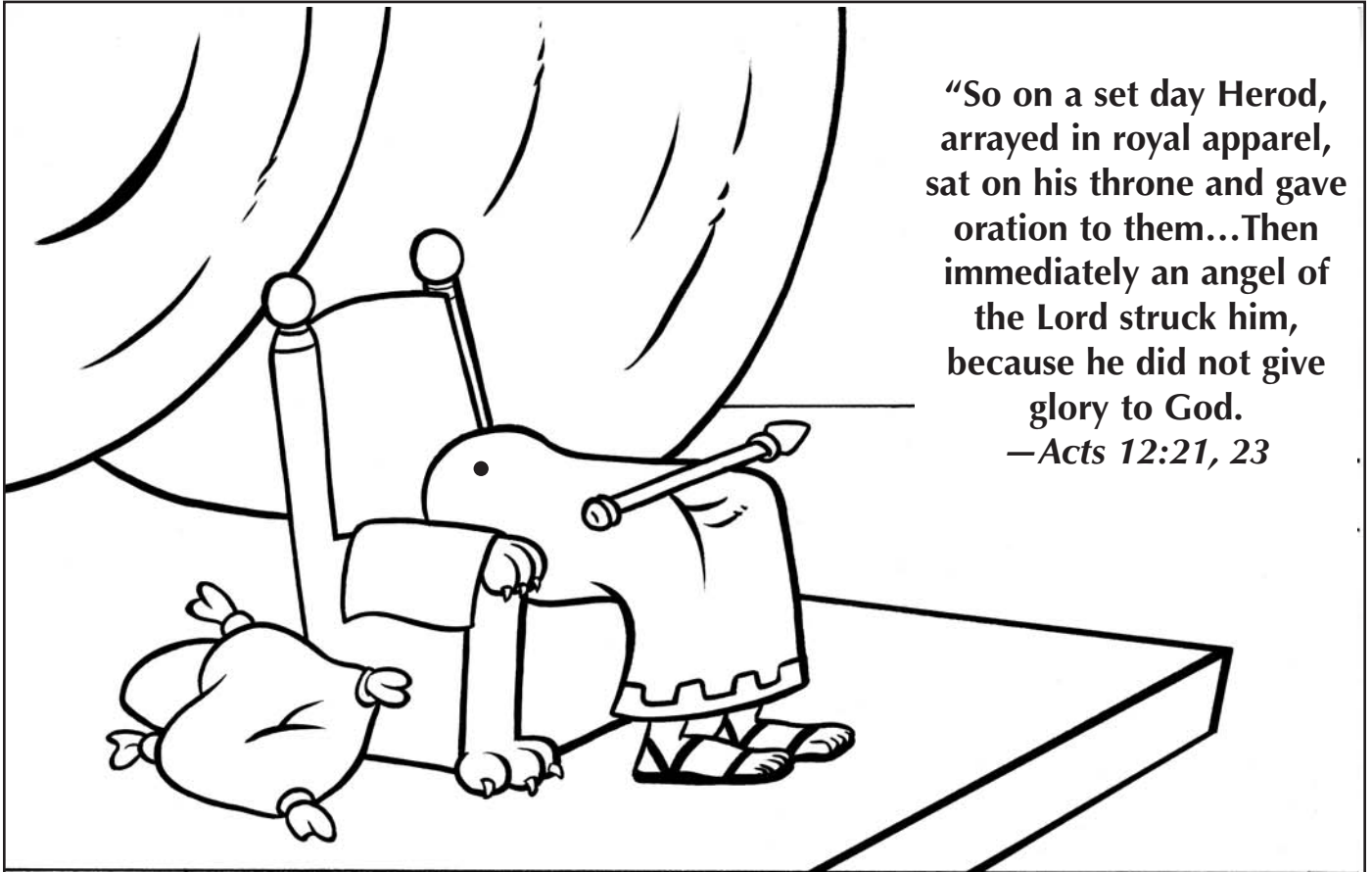


"So on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God."  
—Acts 12:21, 23



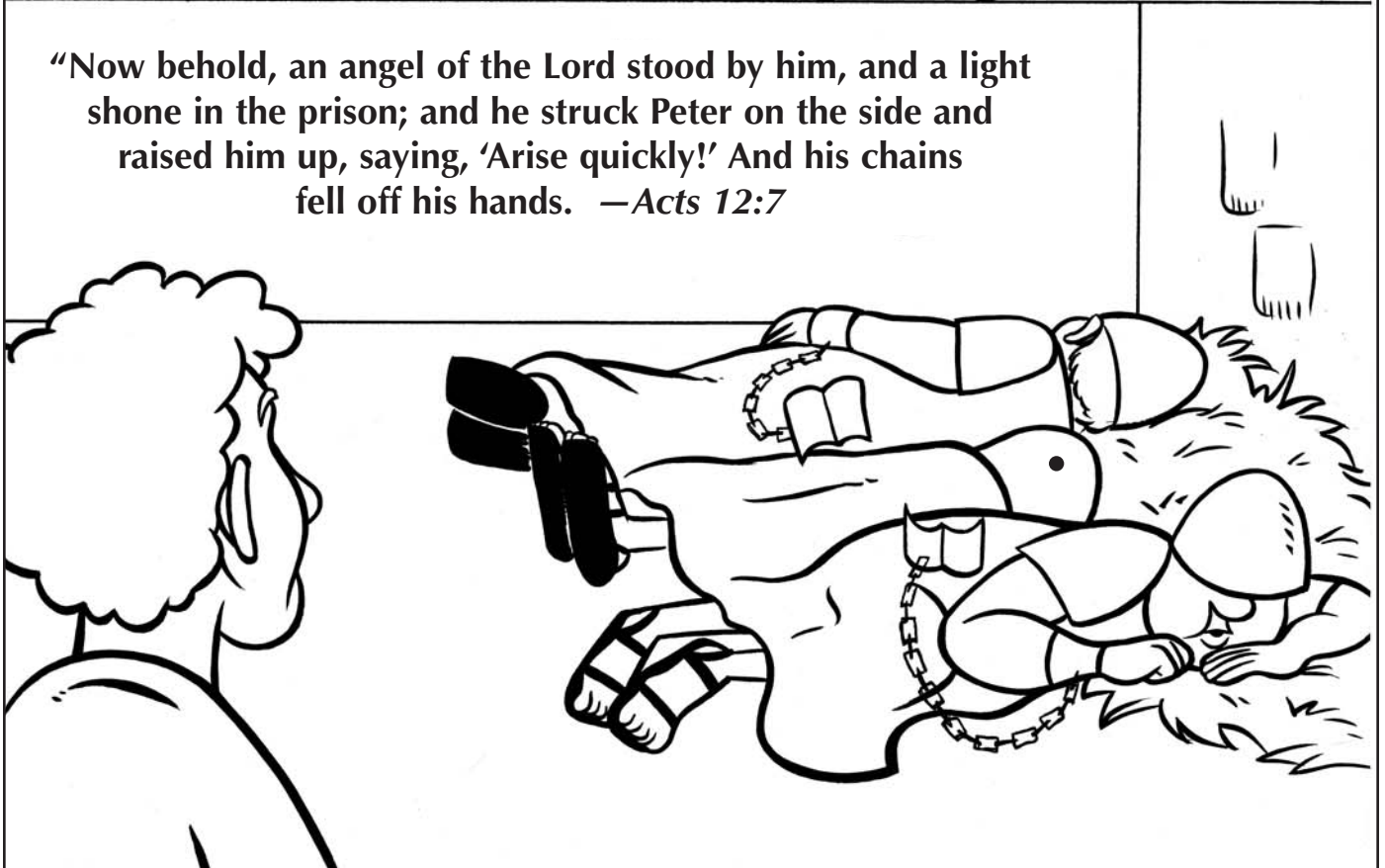


# When an Angel of the Lord Strikes



**“So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave oration to them...Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.  
—Acts 12:21, 23**

**“Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off his hands. —Acts 12:7**



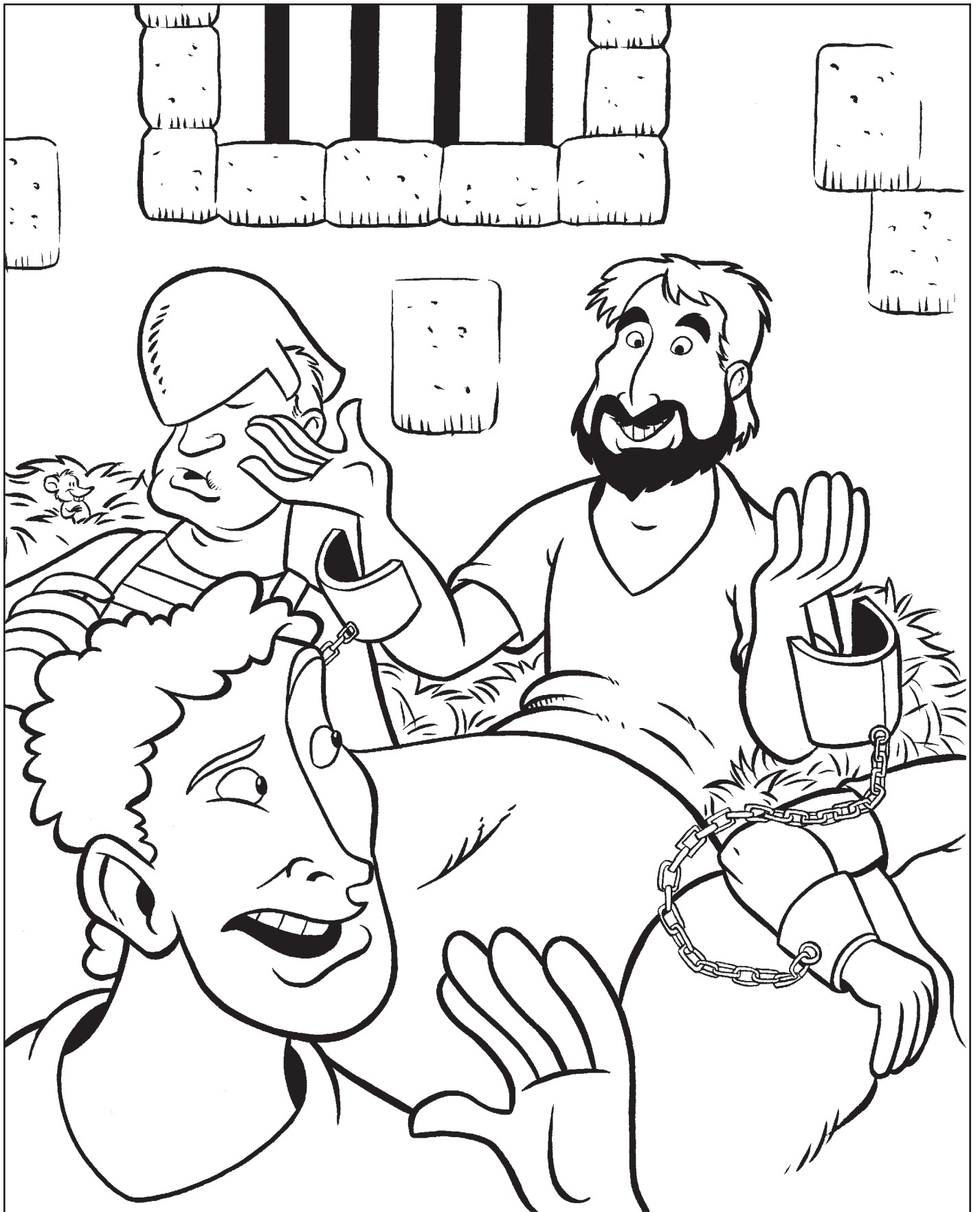


# When an Angel of the Lord Strikes



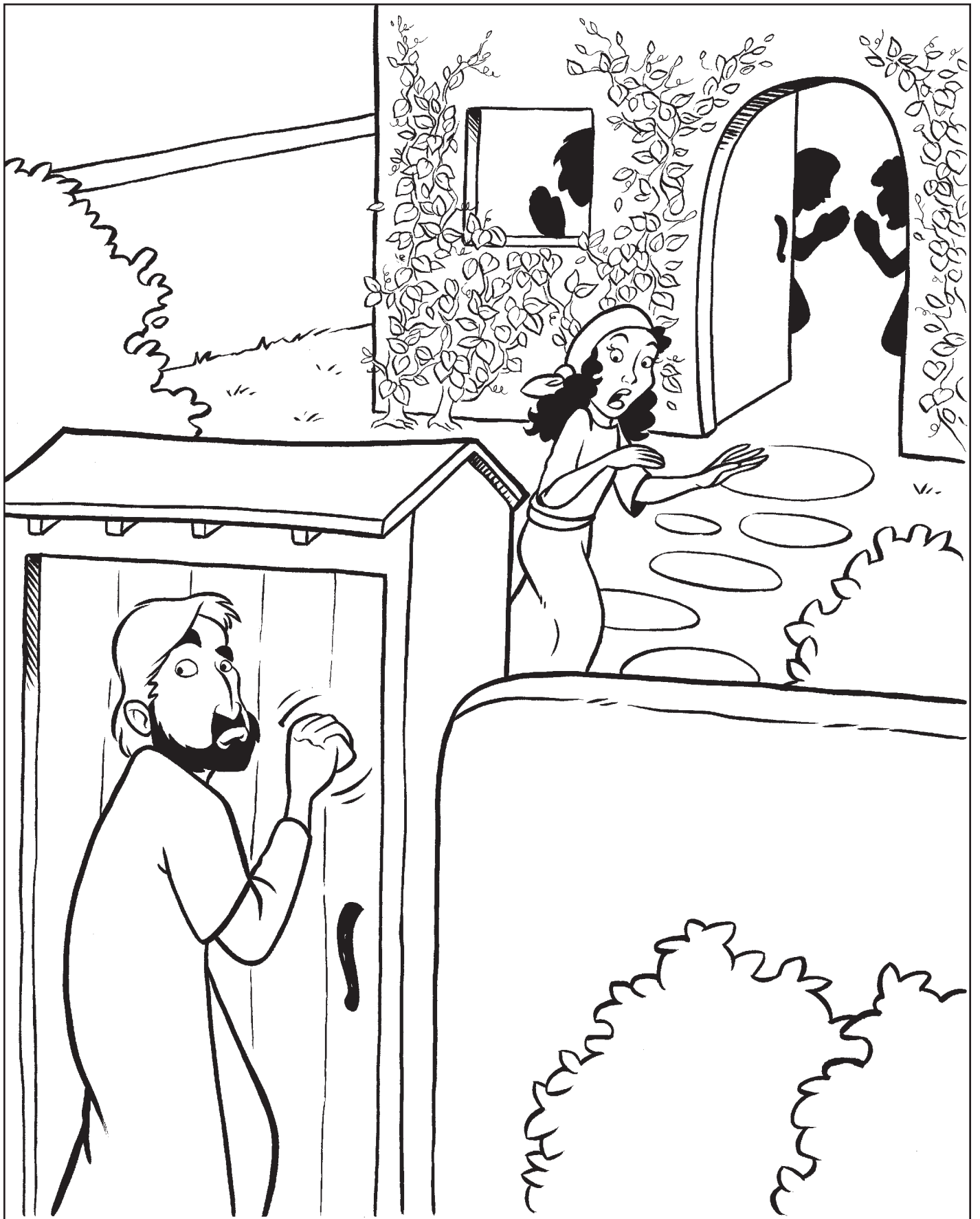






**“Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off his hands.” —Acts 12:7**





**“So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.”**

**—Acts 12:12**

