

BRYAN STATION BAPTIST CHURCH

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GOD’S CARE OF HIS OWN

By: C. D. Cole

Acts 11:19-12:24, “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of

them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter [Pass-over] to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the

prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hear-ken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the

gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied."

Romans 8:35-39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor

things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The book of Acts is the inspired history of the early church. It gives us the nature and the mission of the church. It is the story of expanding Christianity. It is the missionary book of the New Testament. It is a glorious account of how God takes care of His own.

The word church comes from a Greek word which means "to call out." The church is made up of people called out from the world to be God's own peculiar treasure. So one of the titles of God's people is that of "the called." Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." II Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." I Corinthians 1:22-24, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." I Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." II Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

There are many Scriptures which assure us that God takes care of His own. I Peter 5:7, "Casting

all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." II Timothy 1:12, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Hebrews 7:25, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." I Corinthians 15:25-26, "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." God's care of His own is the message of Psalm 23. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

We see this truth demonstrated in the book of Acts, passage quoted earlier. The church is in a hostile world and is scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen. But this persecution resulted in the extension of the kingdom of God. Through persecution the gospel was carried to the Gen-

tiles in Antioch of Syria, where disciples were first called Christians. Antioch became the new center of missionary endeavor, and from Antioch Paul and Barnabas went out as foreign missionaries. The disciples in Antioch sent a relief offering to the famine stricken saints in Judaea.

And during this time of famine Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. This was in fulfillment of Christ's prediction, Matthew 20:23, "*And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with...*" The death of James does not mean that God does not take care of His own. He took care of James by taking him out of this wicked world unto Himself.

When Herod had killed James, he also laid hands on Peter when he saw it pleased the Jews. God will take care of Peter, but in a different way in which He took care of James. He took care of James by taking him out of a hostile world; he will take care of Peter by preserving him in a hostile world. Look at the stage all set for action. Here is Herod the politician; Peter the prisoner, and the church in prayer. But there is something else in the picture: the purpose and the power of God. The results of this conflict was determined by the purpose of God and the effect of the power of God. Whatever God purposes will be effected by His power. Job speaks of God: Job 23:13, "*But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.*"

The church is praying without knowing what the will of the Lord was. God had allowed James to be killed and the church had no assurance that He would do otherwise with Peter. They must have be-

lieved in God's ability to deliver Peter without knowing that He would do it. Paul prayed like this when he prayed three times for the thorn to be removed. He believed God could remove it, but did not know it until God told him that He would not remove it. II Corinthians 12:8-9, "*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee...*"

The word used for prayer here in Acts indicates that it was earnest and persistent. While Herod waited for the seven days of unleavened bread to come to an end, the church kept calling up God in behalf of Peter.

What will God do: He can do anything He wants to do. What does he want to do? We will see.

Herod means to slay him, but God means to deliver him. What can puny Herod do against the Almighty God? Sixteen soldiers were in charge of Peter, four at a time; two watching the gate and two chained to him. How could the church deliver him? It could not, but it believed God could. So they prayed waiting for the will of God to be made known.

Peter knew he could not escape and made no effort to, but he believed God could and would take care of him. And in this confidence he is sleeping between two soldiers.

And now look at God work. How will He deliver Peter? Not as we might expect. He does not kill the soldiers. He seems to ignore them. The angel of the Lord comes, lights up the prison, smites Peter on the side, lifts him, telling him to get up quickly. As he gets up the chains fell from his hands. The angel says "gird thyself, put on thy shoes, and throw thy garment around thyself and follow me." Simple, wasn't it? Peter acted as if in a dream or vision. The angel

leads him out of the prison, the gate opened of its own accord, and after leading him safely up the street, the angel left him.

Peter finally comes to himself and realizes the Lord had delivered him out of the hands of Herod and the expectation of the Jews. He then does the most natural thing: he finds his way to the house of Christian friends who were praying for him. Peter knocks and Rhoda comes to the door. When she recognized Peter's voice she is so beside herself with joy that she does not open the door, but reports to the crowd that Peter is outside. Proverbs 13:12, "*Hope deferred maketh the heart sick...*" The church had been praying for days and nothing had happened and they had given up hope that Peter would be delivered. And as proof that all hope had fled the damsel had great difficulty in making them believe Peter had been delivered. When they finally opened the door and saw Peter they were astonished. But with joy they listened to his story of how the Lord had brought him out of prison.