

**Rescued
from**

PRISONS

by Kings

and Angels

and an Earthquake

Jean Dougan

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INTRODUCTION

We read today of many innocent people being thrown into prison. This is nothing new. The Bible has several stories of such people. But the Lord had His own way of rescuing them —
by kings
and angels
and an earthquake.

1

JOSEPH

Genesis 37—41

Joseph was in prison. He had not killed anyone. He had not stolen anything. He had not cheated anyone. He had not caused any harm. He was an innocent man. But there he was—in prison. Why? His employer's wife had lied about him. Her husband Potiphar believed his wife's lie. He had the power to put Joseph in prison—without a trial. And he did.

From Home to Prison

Joseph had nowhere to turn for help, no friend to plead his case, and no family to call on. It was really his very own family who had brought this about in the first place! For Joseph was one of twelve brothers. His father Jacob had favored him—to the fury of the others. One day Jacob sent Joseph to see how his brothers were doing as they worked in the fields. They saw him coming, seized him, tore off his coat, and threw him into a dry pit. Most of the brothers wanted to kill him, but one suggested selling him to some merchants passing by. Great idea! He was sold cheap—for 20 pieces of silver. The merchants later sold him to Potiphar, Genesis 37.28,36. Jacob and Joseph knew his brothers were not good men, Genesis 37.2. But who would think they would consider killing their own brother? That's how much they hated him.

But our Lord faced far worse. He had created the very people who hated and tried to kill Him, John 1.3,10,11. How this must have grieved His loving soul.

Things looked bad for Joseph. No relatives. No helpful friends. But Joseph had far greater help than these. Joseph had a God who cared for him. Joseph's God had a plan for Joseph's life.

Years later Joseph could say to his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,” Genesis 50.20.

But right now he was in a cruel prison. We read, “Joseph . . . whose feet they hurt with chains. He was laid in irons,” Psalm 105.17,18. This was worse than the pit he had been thrown into by his brothers. Joseph must surely have wondered, Why? Why, Lord?

Yet we do not read of complaints or crying from Joseph. Instead we learn that the Lord began working for Joseph. He led the prison keeper to notice that Joseph could be trusted. So he put other prisoners in Joseph’s care. Twice we read, “the Lord was with him, and made what he did to succeed,” Genesis 39.3,4,22,23.

Dreams Interpreted

At this time Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was angry with two of his servants—the chief wine server and the chief baker. In some way they had insulted their king. Therefore, again without trial, they were put into prison. They were put under Joseph’s care.

One night both the wine server and the baker had dreams that disturbed them. When Joseph came in the next morning, he saw that they looked sad. “Why are you both so sad?” he asked. “We each had a dream, and there is no one to tell us what they mean,” they said. At once Joseph said, “Don’t such meanings belong to God? Please tell me the dreams.” Even in an Egyptian prison Joseph was not ashamed to show his faith in God.

The wine server and the baker did not laugh at this Hebrew prisoner. They were eager to tell him their dreams. They trusted him. “I dreamed of a vine,” said the wine server. “It had three branches and had fruit. Ripe grapes appeared on it. I pressed the grapes into Pharaoh’s cup and gave it to Pharaoh.”

Joseph had the answer. “This is what it means,” he said. “The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will restore you to your position.” Now there was a happy thought, and Joseph knew it came from God. He believed it would happen for he added, “Remember me when things go well with you. Show

kindness to me by speaking of me to Pharaoh. For I have done nothing wrong to be put in this prison,” Genesis 40.14-15.

The wine server must have been delighted to hear the meaning of this dream. . . . So was the baker. Now he wanted to know what his dream meant. “There were three baskets of white bread on my head,” he said. “The top basket had all sorts of baked goods for Pharaoh. Birds were eating the food out of the basket.”

Then Joseph said, “The three baskets are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will have you hanged on a tree. The birds will eat your flesh. . . .” How awful! We are not told what the man said. The baker must have wished he had never asked. But we do know it all came to pass. Three days later Pharaoh had a birthday. He had a party and released both men. The wine server got his job back. The baker was hanged.

There is one final, sad note to all this. The Bible says, “Yet the chief wine server did not remember Joseph. But forgot him.” Just like that. The wine server was out of prison. He had his job back. Things were “going well with him.” And so he forgot Joseph. Joseph had especially asked the wine server to remember him. But he forgot.

Before we judge the wine server, let’s think of our own ways. When “things go well” with us, we may often forget the Lord. But let any trouble strike us, and we are immediately at the Lord’s feet. Are things “going well” with you? Do you feel little need to remember your Savior? Do you “speak of Him” to others?

But the Lord had not forgotten Joseph. His plan for Joseph was to be fulfilled in an amazing way. Two full years went by with not a word from the chief wine server. He was back in his old job serving wine to Pharaoh in the palace. Things were still “going well” with him.

The story now centers on Pharaoh the Egyptian king. We have seen him angrily order two servants sent to prison. Then on his birthday he ordered them released. He gave one servant his job back again. But he took the life of the other. Here is a man with great personal power.

Now he was the one with disturbing dreams. One night he dreamed he saw seven well-fed cows coming up from the Nile River. They were eating grass. Then seven ugly and thin cows also came up from the Nile. They stood by the fat cows on the river bank. Then the thin cows ate up the fat cows. Pharaoh woke up.

He fell asleep again and dreamed of seven good heads of grain on one stalk. Then seven thin, burnt heads of grain grew up after them. The seven thin heads quickly swallowed up the seven good heads of grain. Pharaoh awoke again. They were just dreams but strange ones.

In the morning Pharaoh was troubled about these dreams. What did they mean? How could he find out? Kings had all kinds of advisors. He called in all the wise men and magicians of Egypt. Then he told these men his dreams. What did it all mean?

These wise men were at least honest. They did not have the least idea what the dreams meant. Seven thin cows eating seven fat cows? Seven thin heads of grain swallowing seven good heads of grain? Who could make anything of that? Seven seemed important. But why? There in the court of the palace were the finest minds of Egypt. But they were no help to the king, see also Daniel 4.5-7.

Suddenly, the chief wine server came to life. He remembered Joseph. He said to the king, "Sir, I must tell you of my mistake. When the chief baker and I were in prison, we both had a strange dream. There was a young Hebrew man there also. He was a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he told us what they meant. And they turned out exactly as he said. I got my job back. The baker was hanged."

Rescued from Prison

Pharaoh was not one to waste time. He sent for Joseph immediately. His servants went to the prison to get Joseph. Joseph shaved himself, changed from his prison clothes, and was brought before Pharaoh.

What a different scene! That morning when Joseph got up he was a servant in prison. He went about doing his work. Meantime, the wisest men in Egypt were gathered in Pharaoh's palace. Suddenly Pharaoh's servants arrived at the prison with orders for Joseph's release. The king wanted to see him.

What were his thoughts? Had the wine server finally spoken to Pharaoh on his behalf? Now here he was standing before Pharaoh, King of Egypt. And Pharaoh was talking directly to him before the whole court. "I have had strange dreams," he said, "and no one can tell me the meaning. I have heard that you can explain dreams."

Joseph answered at once. "It is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a good answer." Joseph was not ashamed of God before prisoners or kings, see also Romans 1.16.

Pharaoh began telling Joseph his dreams. Here is an amazing sight. The king of Egypt telling his dreams to a Hebrew prisoner—and asking for his help! Only God could have arranged this.

When Pharaoh finished, Joseph said, "God has shown Pharaoh what He is going to do." He then went on to explain the meaning of the dreams. Seven meant seven years. God was going to send seven years of plenty, then seven years of famine. He was warning Pharaoh. Prepare now. Then Joseph suggested that Pharaoh put a man in charge of preparing for the bad time coming. Have him store a portion of the grain harvested each year. Then when the famine comes, the Egyptians can use the stored grain and not starve.

Think of this again. What was going on? Joseph the prisoner was now an advisor to the King of Egypt! Surely this reminds us of our Lord. His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9.6. Do we daily accept the wisdom of our Lord from His Word?

From Prison to Palace

Pharaoh and his servants were greatly impressed with Joseph's explanation. It made sense. Then Pharaoh asked, "Where

can we find a man like this?" Then he spoke to Joseph. "Since God has informed you of this, there is no one as wise as you. I am going to set you over all Egypt. Every one will honor you. You will be next to me. Only I shall be greater than you."

Pharaoh took off his ring and put it on Joseph's hand. He gave him good clothing. He put a gold chain around his neck. In his wildest thoughts Joseph would never have dreamed of such a thing. From prison to palace, he was released by the king himself. But God had planned it all along.

What a picture of our Lord. He was accused, Luke 6.7; 23.10-23. He was despised, Isaiah 53.3; Matthew 9.34. He was oppressed, Isaiah 53.7-8; Matthew 12.14. He was forsaken, Matthew 26.56. He was crucified, Matthew 27.35. Yet He rose from the dead and is now seated in glory. Soon He will be crowned—not the second in command as Joseph—King of kings and Lord of lords, Revelation 19.16.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 1 – Joseph

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. Joseph's brothers
 - a. loved him.
 - b. killed him.
 - c. sold him.

2. Potiphar
 - a. had Joseph put in prison
 - b. trusted Joseph.
 - c. put Joseph on trial.

3. We read that Joseph "was laid in irons" in
 - a. Genesis 39:19.
 - b. Hebrews 11:22.
 - c. Psalm 105:18 (NKJ).

4. While in prison
 - a. Joseph did not care about the other prisoners.
 - b. Joseph complained and cried.
 - c. the Lord began working for Joseph.

5. Joseph
 - a. could not explain Pharaoh's dreams.
 - b. was enabled by God to explain Pharaoh's dreams.
 - c. claimed that he could interpret dreams.

Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. God had a plan for Joseph's life.
7. Joseph was ashamed to show his faith in God.
8. When freed from prison the chief wine server remembered Joseph.
9. Joseph was released from prison by the king himself.
10. Joseph the prisoner became advisor to the king.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In what ways is Joseph a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ?

2

HANANI

2 Chronicles 16.7-10

The Setting:

Some prophets spoke to the people and wrote books as well. We do not know of anything Hanani the prophet wrote. Only once do we read anything Hanani said, and it cost him a lot.

Hanani lived during the reign of Asa, king of Judah. Asa was a good king. The Bible says, “Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God,” 2 Chronicles 14.2. He cut down idols. He commanded Judah to worship the Lord and obey His laws. The land was quiet because God gave him rest.

In this time of peace Asa did not sit back and do nothing. He said, “Let us build walls and gates around the cities. We have worshiped the Lord and He has given us rest.” But that did not mean they should neglect things. To Asa it meant time to get prepared. Thus, they built and prospered. Asa also trained a big army.

The First Test

The army, however, was not big enough. Suddenly the Ethiopians declared war on Asa and the people of Judah. The Ethiopians came with a huge army of one million men. Asa had only about half that number.

Many leaders would have given up without a fight. This is what Jehoiachim did, 2 Kings 24.11-12, but not Asa. He went out against the Ethiopians and set up for the battle. Then Asa made his best move. He cried to the Lord his God. “Lord, numbers don’t matter to You,” he said. “Help us, for we rest in You. In Your Name we go against this huge army,” 2 Chronicles 14.11.

At once the Lord struck the Ethiopians. They ran from the men of Judah. The men of Judah followed the Ethiopians, defeated them, and took much spoil from their villages. It was a complete victory.

As Asa returned home, the prophet Azariah met him. “Hear me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin!” he said. “The Lord is with you while you are with Him. . . . Be strong for your work shall be rewarded.”

Asa was greatly encouraged with these words. So he set to work again to clean up the land from evil. He also restored the altar of the Lord. Word of this spread around other regions of Israel. The result was that many people from other tribes joined him in Judah, 2 Chronicles 15.9. They all met in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

They also renewed their vows to worship the Lord God of their fathers. All Judah rejoiced! The Lord gave them rest for many years.

The Second Test

Then, in the 36th year of Asa’s reign, trouble began again. Baasha, king of Israel to the north, became alarmed that so many of his people were leaving to join Judah. They wanted to be with those who were worshipping the Lord. Is this your desire? Do you feel an attraction towards those who worship the Lord? Do you wish to be with them? The Bible encourages us to do this in Hebrews 10.25.

Baasha, however, was not at all interested in worshipping the Lord. So he began to fortify the town of Ramah, which was on the border between Israel and Judah. He hoped to prevent the people from leaving his country.

We have seen how King Asa met such a problem before. He turned to the Lord, and the enemy was defeated. Surely Asa would do the same thing again.

But peace and prosperity had not drawn Asa closer to the Lord. This time he did not turn to Him for help. Instead, we are

surprised to learn that he brought out the gold and silver treasures from the house of the Lord. To hide them? Not at all. He brought them out to send them to Benhadad, King of Syria. The King of Syria? What ever for? . . . “You and I are friends as our fathers were,” Asa said. “How about helping me now? I’m sending you this gift of gold and silver. Break your agreement with Baasha so that he will leave me alone.”

What kind of nonsense is this? King Asa is asking help from a heathen king and nation? What about turning to God as he had before? Alas, Asa had slipped away from his dependence on God. He now looked for help from a heathen king. A good beginning of peace, prosperity, and victory had turned into a downfall as Asa now leaned on his own understanding for help.

King Benhadad of Syria liked this offer. He sent his captains and his army against the cities of Israel. He struck them with force. Word came to Baasha who was busy building up the city of Ramah. He had to stop at once, leave Ramah, and go back north to defend his land.

Asa promptly ordered his people to remove the stones and wood that had been built into Ramah. Great. Now all was well. Did it really matter where Asa got his help?

It mattered to God.

Consequences to Asa

God sent the prophet Hanani to pay Asa a visit. A visit from a prophet could make a person afraid, 1 Samuel 16.4; 1 Kings 21.20. Hanani wasted no time. He said to Asa, “You depended on the king of Syria and not on the Lord your God. You lost a great opportunity. Now the Syrians have escaped out of your hand. Weren’t the Ethiopians (test #1) a huge army? Yet you trusted the Lord, and He delivered them into your hand. The Lord looks around the whole earth to find those who trust Him. But you have been very foolish. From now on you will have wars.”

This short message was a shock to Asa. Was Asa perhaps a good man who had just made a bad mistake? Did he admit his

wrong and bow down before the Lord? No, he didn't. Well, at least he thanked Hanani for bringing God's message and went quietly to pray? 2 Samuel 12.20. No again. Even wicked Ahab had torn his clothes and fasted when he was rebuked, 1 Kings 21.27-29. But "good" King Asa did not. Did he try to excuse what he did? No. What did he do? He became very angry against Hanani. But Hanani was just the messenger. And the message that angered King Asa was from God. No matter. Asa ordered the prophet to be thrown into prison, 2 Chronicles 16.10.

Consequences to Hanani, God's messenger

This godly king and faithful servant could not accept correction or rebuke. What Hanani said had hurt his pride. He knew Hanani's message was true. But instead of confessing his sin, Asa attacked Hanani, the messenger of God, and had him thrown into prison.

Sadly, Asa's downward slide continued. He began to oppress some of the people. These may have been supporters of Hanani.

Not long after this Asa began to suffer from a severe disease of his feet. Yet even then he did not turn to the Lord for help. He died two years later. In this matter Asa is an example of "a man reaps what he sows," Galatians 6.7. Asa threw Hanani in prison where his feet would be held in stocks. Later, he himself suffered from very painful feet.

But what of poor Hanani? He was only doing his job as God's messenger. We do not read that Asa ever repented of this unjust act.

The rest of the story

There is an interesting follow-up to this story. Asa's son Jehoshaphat was the next king of Judah. He, too, was a godly man seeking to serve the Lord. But he fell into the same sin as his father. He joined up with a wicked king to go to war, 2 Chronicles 18.3. The king was Ahab who angered the Lord God more than any other

king, 1 Kings 16.33. What was Jehoshaphat doing helping him? Good question.

After this battle, the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, went out to meet King Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 19.2. “Should you help the ungodly and love those who hate the Lord?” said Jehu. Here was Hanani’s son rebuking Asa’s son. But the result was completely different. To his credit King Jehoshaphat did not attack Jehu the prophet. He accepted the rebuke and went on to serve the Lord, 2 Chronicles 19.1-3. Perhaps, as king, he also released Hanani.

Solomon wrote, “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you,” Proverbs 9.8. Asa did not act here as a wise man. He was a great king. But his pride was greater still.

How do we take rebuke? The Lord says, “I rebuke those I love,” Revelation 3.19. That means all who believe in Him are rebuked at some time. It may be we are rebuked by a person, or by something we read in the Bible or elsewhere. The Lord has lots of reasons to rebuke us. How do we accept it? Remember King Asa.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 2 – Hanani

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. Hanani
 - a. was a priest.
 - b. wrote a book.
 - c. lived during the reign of king Asa.

2. Asa
 - a. was a good king.
 - b. was king of Israel.
 - c. always turned to God for help.

3. Asa's best move was to
 - a. build up his arms.
 - b. cut down idols.
 - c. cry to the Lord his God.

4. Hanani
 - a. praised king Asa.
 - b. told king Asa that he was foolish.
 - c. was afraid of king Asa.

5. Hanani was thrown into prison because
 - a. he rebelled against the king.
 - b. he was faithful to God.
 - c. he disobeyed God.

Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. Asa's army was twice the size of the Ethiopian army.
7. Hanani was sent by God with a message for king Asa.
8. Hanani's son, Jehu, rebuked Asa's son, king Jehoshaphat.
9. The Bible tells us that Hanani was released from prison.
10. All who believe in God are rebuked at some time.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How do you accept rebuke?

3

JEHOIACHIN

2 Kings 24.8-16; 25.27-30; 2 Chronicles 36.9-10;
Jeremiah 24.1,2; Matthew 11.12.

His early years

He was just 18 years old when he was crowned king. His name was Jehoiachin, and he reigned only three months and ten days. That was all. What happened? Even in that short time the Bible says, “He sinned against the Lord.” These words have been repeated through the reigns of most of the kings. There are only a few bright lights among the kings of Judah, but none at all among the kings of Israel. Again and again God sent His prophets to warn the kings and the people. But the prophets were ignored, thrown into prison, and even killed, 2 Chronicles 16.10;18.26; 24.20-21; Jeremiah 26.23; Amos 2.12.

But throwing a prophet into prison does not change the Word of God. Neither does burning the written Word of God. Jehoiachin’s father Jehoiakim learned that. The Lord just added more words, Jeremiah 36.32, and pronounced a terrible ending for Jehoiakim, Jeremiah 22.18; 36.30.

Jehoiachin had learned nothing from all that had happened to his father. He sinned against the Lord, 2 Kings 24.9. Jeremiah the prophet had been preaching for years, “Obey My voice, and I will be your God,” Jeremiah 7.23. But the people would not listen. The Lord had warned, “I will put an end to the sounds of joy in the cities of Judah,” Jeremiah 7.34. Now that time had come.

Nebuchadnezzar attacks

That great king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, once again attacked Jerusalem. Young King Jehoiachin gave up immediately—he and his mother, wives, officers, princes, and servants. The

Bible says, “They surrendered to the King of Babylon.” Did they remember Jeremiah’s words, “Give up to the Chaldeans, and you will live”? Jeremiah 21.9-10. We don’t know. Jehoiachin’s life was spared, but he was thrown into prison.

Jehoiachin in Prison

A Chaldean prison was not a choice place to spend the rest of your life. But for Jehoiachin it could have been worse. The Chaldeans were noted for their cruelty. The prophet Habakkuk warned the Israelis about them. He said God was going to send a cruel people against them. Everyone in Jerusalem was terrified when the Chaldeans approached. No fortress could stop them. They gathered prisoners like sand, Habakkuk 1.8-11.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a suitable leader for them. He was a cruel man. Yet the Lord used him to punish His own disobedient people, Jeremiah 25.8,9. This happened in the case of Ahab and Zedekiah—two disobedient prophets of Israel. They lied to the people. At the time of Jehoiachin’s capture, Jeremiah prophesied saying that God wanted the captives to settle down in the land where they were taken. They were to plant gardens, marry, have children, and pray for the cities where they were. In His own time—70 years—God would return them to Israel, Jeremiah 29.4-10. But the false prophets Ahab and Zedekiah chose to make up their own prophecies. They said all those captives would soon be able to return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah repeated his warning that God had not sent these prophets. They were giving out a false message. God called them lies, Jeremiah 23.25. Any prophet who dared to speak his own message was under a sentence of death, Jeremiah 23.21-32. God judges false prophecy as a most serious evil. God said, “I will hand them [Ahab and Zedekiah] over to King Nebuchadnezzar. He will put them to death before your eyes.” Nebuchadnezzar may have looked on these “prophecies” spoken by Ahab and Zedekiah as possible rebellion against himself. He then had Ahab and Zedekiah roasted to death in the fire, Jeremiah 29.21-23.

But what about King Jehoiachin? At least he was still alive. There he was living each day in a Chaldean prison. He was not

alone. It was often the custom to throw kings into prison after they were defeated, Judges 1.7. None of these kings could have saved themselves or been rescued, Psalm 49.7. No doubt many died in those terrible places. But Jehoiachin lived year after year after year for 37 years. Jehoiachin was now 55 years old. He had spent the major part of his life there in prison. Did he repent of his evil ways? We can hope so, but we do not read of that. We do, however, read of an amazing event in his life at this time.

Jehoiachin—free

Nebuchadnezzar finally died and his son Evilmerodach became king. In the first year of his reign, he released Jehoiachin from prison! He gave him a place above the other kings. Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. He ate his meals with King Evilmerodach for the rest of his life, 2 Kings 25.27-30.

What a change for Jehoiachin! It must have seemed like a dream come true. He had done nothing to earn his freedom. He could not pay for it. It was a gift from a king.

What a picture of the grace of God. We, too, have done nothing to earn salvation. We cannot pay for it. It is a gift from the King of kings. “For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God,” Ephesians 2.8.

We well know His kindness. “When the kindness and the love of God our Saviour appeared according to His mercy He saved us,” Titus 3.4-5. His kindness will never leave us, Isaiah 54.10.

Now we wear the clothing of salvation and are wrapped in a robe of righteousness, Isaiah 61.10. We have been brought into His dining hall, Song of Solomon 2.4. He gave us shepherds to feed us with knowledge and understanding, Jeremiah 3.15. Our own feeding on His word in His presence should be a daily activity, Acts 17.11. His goodness and mercy shall follow us as long as we live, Psalm 23.6.

Surely Jehoiachin must have been filled with joy and thanksgiving every hour of every day. Are we?

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 3 – Jehoiachin

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. Jehoiachin
 - a. reigned for 18 years.
 - b. sinned against the Lord.
 - c. was the father of Jehoiakim.

2. The Lord
 - a. sent prophets to warn the kings and the people.
 - b. sent judgement without warning.
 - c. sent warning and the people listened.

3. When King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem
 - a. King Jehoiachin fled.
 - b. the king surrendered and was put in prison.
 - c. the king was captured and killed.

4. Jehoiachin
 - a. was 55 years old when he died.
 - b. died in prison.
 - c. survived in prison for 37 years.

5. King Jehoiachin
 - a. was freed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - b. was never freed.
 - c. was freed by Nebuchadnezzar's son, King Evilmerodach.

Write **TRUE** or **FALSE** after each statement

6. There were a few good kings among the kings of Israel.
7. King Jehoiakim burned the Word of God.
8. False prophecy is not a serious evil.
9. The Bible tells us that King Jehoiachin repented of his evil ways.
10. Salvation is a gift of God.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What do you know of the goodness and mercy of God?

4

JEREMIAH

Appointed as God's Prophet

It was not Jeremiah's plan to become a prophet. It was God's plan. Perhaps Jeremiah had no desire to boldly face a wicked king as Elijah had, 1 Kings 17.1; 18.17-18; or hide in a cave living on bread and water as 100 prophets did, 1 Kings 18.4; or be thrown into prison as Hanani was, 2 Chronicles 16.10; or be stoned as Zechariah was, 2 Chronicles 24.20-21. It was not exactly a comfortable job, 2 Chronicles 36.15-16. Why would anyone want it?

Jeremiah didn't. He tried using the same excuse as Moses had used. He told God he was too young and he was not a good speaker, Exodus 4.10, Jeremiah 1.6. But the Lord had an answer: "Don't say you are just a child. You shall go where I send you and speak what I command. You will not be afraid—for I am with you," said the Lord. Then Jeremiah wrote, "The Lord touched my mouth." And He said, "I have put my words in your mouth," Jeremiah 1.9. Jeremiah took the job.

Why would the Lord choose Jeremiah? All we know about him is that his father's name was Hilkiyah. He lived in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, the smallest tribe, 1 Samuel 9.21. He was of no great importance in the world. But he was to God. And he proved to be a great choice.

We can also ask why God chose Moses. He was just taking care of sheep on the back side of the desert. And he was 80 years old! But he led the whole nation of Israel out of Egypt and for 40 years more. He, too, was a great choice, Exodus 3.10.

God had also chosen David. Why? He was a young shepherd, the least of his family, but he became a poet, writer, soldier,

and beloved king of Israel. He was another great choice, 1 Samuel 16.11-13; Psalms 78.70-71.

Someday it may occur to us that the Lord knows what He is doing. His thoughts are not like ours, Isaiah 55.8. He knows the end from the beginning. He told Jeremiah He knew him before he was born, Jeremiah 1.5.

God did not say the work would be easy. Far from it. Twice He told Jeremiah, “Don’t be afraid of their faces.” Then He said, “I have made you like a strong city and an iron pillar.” Jeremiah was going to need all the help he could get. For kings, princes, priests, and people would all fight against him, said the Lord. That sounds like almost everyone would oppose him. Jeremiah’s heart must have sunk. But again, the Lord said, “I am with you to deliver you,” Jeremiah 1.18-19.

When the Lord said, “Go and preach!” Jeremiah went. He did not bring words of cheer. Judgment was coming on the people. They had abandoned God and had turned to idols. They actually worshiped idols they had made with their own hands, Jeremiah 2.28; 7.18.

Now the Lord was going to bring a nation from far away to attack them, Jeremiah 5.15-17. They had refused to listen to the prophets God had sent, Jeremiah 7.25-26. God said they would not listen to Jeremiah either, Jeremiah 7.27. And they didn’t, Jeremiah 26.7-11.

Opposition by Priests, Princes, Prophets, and People

God had told Jeremiah that kings, princes, priests and the people would all be against him, Jeremiah 1.18-19. Here we have an example of two groups—the priests and the people. The Lord ordered Jeremiah to stand in the court of the temple. There he was to speak to all who came to worship. He was not to leave out one word, Jeremiah 26.2. Tell them, “If you listen to My word, I may not bring punishment upon you. But if you will not listen, I will make this city a curse.” Jeremiah went on to repeat what God had told him.

The priests and prophets and all the people heard. Did they weep? Did they bow their knees and repent? Not at all. They became furious at Jeremiah. They said to him, “You are going to die!” Then they gathered together against him and made a disturbance in the temple.

News of this reached the princes who were in the palace and they came down to see what was going on. They sat down at the door of the temple to listen. The priests and prophets spoke to the princes and the people. They said, “This man should die! He has prophesied against this city. You heard him!”

Unlike Naboth, 1 Kings 21.13, Jeremiah was given a chance to reply. He repeated what he had said, “Obey the Lord, and He will not bring judgment on you. But I am in your hands. Do what seems right to you. But truly the Lord has sent me,” Jeremiah 26.15.

Now we see a difference. The people have changed their minds. They now join with the princes. They say to the prophets and priests, “This man should not die! He has spoken in the name of the Lord.” What had happened? It shows how quickly a crowd can change. First, they want to kill him. Now they want to save him, Jeremiah 26.8-9,16.

It was the opposite with our Lord. First, they went to meet Him as He came to Jerusalem. They took branches of palm trees and spread them before Him. They cried, “Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord!” Only a few days later they cried out, “Crucify Him!” John 12.12-13; Mark 15.13.

Fortunately for Jeremiah, there was a man present named Ahikam. This man had been a chosen servant of King Josiah. He was one of the five men sent to ask help from Huldah the prophetess, 2 Kings 22.12-14. Now he appears again—this time to help Jeremiah. He persuaded them to let Jeremiah go, Jeremiah 26.24.

But what were prophets doing in this crowd against Jeremiah? They rejected his teaching and preferred to lie. “They prophesy falsely to you in my name, I have not sent them,” said the Lord, Jeremiah 29.8-9.

The prophet Hananiah was one example of a false prophet. He told the people that God had said that He would bring King Jehoiachin back safely. Nebuchadnezzar's power would be broken. All would be well. Jeremiah heard him say this and answered, "May it be so! When this peace comes then we shall know the prophet speaks the truth." Hananiah was not worried. He said this would all happen in two years, Jeremiah 28.1-4.

Jeremiah left, and then the word of the Lord came to him, "Go and tell Hananiah the Lord has not sent you. You are making the people trust in a lie. Therefore, I will take your life from you. You shall die this very year." Two months later, Hananiah died, Jeremiah 28.15-17.

Why would such prophets lie to the people? They gave the people good news. It was what the people wanted to hear. It would make the prophet popular. All through the Bible the Lord's true servants had warned the people, "Turn to the Lord," or else sorrow would follow, Deuteronomy 4.39-40; 1 Samuel 7.3; 2 Chronicles 30.6-10; Jeremiah 4.1, 5.3; Joel 2.12-14. But they did not listen. Now they were paying the price.

Surely it is like today. People do not want to hear about the need to turn to the Lord and confess their sins. They want to hear good things about themselves. But the time is fast coming when it will be too late. Hear the word of the Lord! Jeremiah 21.11.

Opposition by Kings

(i) Jehoiakim

Finally, there were kings who opposed Jeremiah. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah first when Josiah was king. Josiah was a good king. We read his story and of his goodness in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. However, his sons and grandson did not follow his fine example. His son Jehoahaz reigned only three months. Then the King of Egypt removed him and put his brother Jehoiakim on the throne, 2 Kings 23.31-34. He was 25 years of age and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. We are given an interesting view of some of his

deeds. He taxed the people and gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh, 2 Kings 23.35.

Now the Lord had something to say to Jehoiakim and the people of Judah. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, "Take a roll of paper and write down all the words I have spoken since I first called you. Perhaps Judah will listen to me now," Jeremiah 36.2,3.

By now Jeremiah had been a prophet for over 20 years. That would be some job. Jeremiah called his friend Baruch. He asked him to write as the words came to him. It took a long time.

Then Jeremiah said to Baruch, "I cannot go. But you take the roll you have written on and read it to the people in the Lord's house," Jeremiah 36.5. Baruch did. At the end of a year the people were ordered to the temple. Baruch went to a room over the entrance and read Jeremiah's words to the people.

Some listened. A man called Micaiah heard Baruch. He was so impressed that he went to the king's house with the news. All the princes were there together. Micaiah told them what he had just heard from Baruch. At once the princes sent Jehudi to get Baruch and bring the writings. Baruch came. He sat down and began to read the words. The princes heard the words from God, and they were afraid, Jeremiah 36.13. "We must tell the king," they said.

Now the princes knew what kind of a man their king was, and they said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah go and hide. Don't tell anyone where you are," Jeremiah 36.19. Next they hid the roll of writings. Then they went in to the king and told him about the writings. Jehoiakim asked for the writings to be brought and read to him. Jehudi got the roll and began to read to the king.

It was winter, and there was a fire in the fireplace to warm the room. Jehudi read three or four rows of writing to the king. The king had heard enough. He picked up a small knife, took the roll of writing from Jehudi, cut the writing with his knife, and threw the pieces in the fire. They were burnt to ashes. But that was the word of God! Didn't anyone say anything? Well . . . yes. . . . Three of the princes begged the king not to burn the writings. But he paid no attention.

Then he ordered three men to go and arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. But the three men could not find them. God knew what would happen, and He had hidden them, Jeremiah 36.26. Jehoiakim was a wicked king who would gladly have thrown Jeremiah in prison. God did not allow it at this time.

What happened about the roll? Jeremiah got another one and gave it to Baruch. Baruch wrote down all Jeremiah's words from God that Jehoiakim had burned, and the Lord added many more words, Jeremiah 36.32.

What happened to Jehoiakim? King Nebuchadnezzar captured him and bound him with chains to carry him to Babylon. When he died, no one mourned his death, 2 Chronicles 36.5-6; Jeremiah 22.18-19, 36.30. God is not happy with those who destroy His Word.

(ii) King Zedekiah

The next king Jeremiah faced was Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiakim. Sadly, neither he nor his servants nor the people listened to God's word, Jeremiah 37.2. Zedekiah did try—a little. He sent two men to Jeremiah to ask, "Pray for us."

Once more Judah was in trouble. Nebuchadnezzar was attacking Jerusalem again. Now the Egyptians decided to come and help Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar's army went home. But God said to Jeremiah, "Tell the King of Judah the Egyptians will soon go home. And the Chaldeans will come back. They will fight against this city and take it and burn it. Don't fool yourselves into thinking the Chaldeans have gone for good. They will fight again to the last man and burn the city with fire," Jeremiah 32.29; 37.8.

We are not told how Zedekiah received this bitter information. At this time Jeremiah happened to leave Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin. At the gate of the city a man called Irijah took hold of Jeremiah. "You are going to join the enemy!" he cried. "Not so!" said Jeremiah. "I am not joining the Chaldeans!" But Irijah took Jeremiah to the princes.

Now what would those princes do? They refused to believe Jeremiah. They hit him, and they threw him in prison. He was put into one of the holes dug to catch water under a house, Jeremiah 37.11-15. But Jeremiah was innocent. This was terribly unjust.

Where was King Zedekiah in all this? He did nothing to save Jeremiah. Yet he believed Jeremiah was the prophet of the Lord. For he sent for Jeremiah secretly. "Is there any word from the Lord?" he asked. "There is," said Jeremiah. "You are going to be captured by the king of Babylon," Jeremiah 37.17. It was the same message. God had not changed His mind. Zedekiah likely wished he hadn't asked. But he was still not willing to accept it.

Then Jeremiah said, "What have I done to you or the people? Why have you put me in prison? Where are all those prophets who said the King of Babylon would not come against this city? Now—please—don't put me back in that hole. I could die there." Then Zedekiah ordered that Jeremiah be put into the court of the prison. He was to get a small loaf of bread each day, Jeremiah 37.16-21.

That was a little better, but not for long. For this did not keep Jeremiah quiet. He kept on preaching. He did not change his message. He said, "The city is doomed. But surrender to the Chaldeans, and you will live. Stay here and you die," Jeremiah 38.2.

Once again the princes were angry at Jeremiah's preaching. They went to King Zedekiah. "Let this man be put to death," they said. "He is discouraging the people." It did not matter to them that the message was from God. They didn't want to hear his message because it was discouraging. It did not matter that Jeremiah also told them how they could be saved. "Leave the city", he advised, Jeremiah 38.2. This message upset them. They wanted the prophet to die to shut him up.

How like so many people today. They do not want to hear of coming judgment. It upsets them. In Isaiah's day they said, "Speak to us smooth things," Isaiah 30.10. But God has offered a way of escape by trusting His Son. He paid our debt. But people don't like to be disturbed. They just want the messenger to go away.

Zedekiah did not have the courage to stand up for Jeremiah. He let the princes take him. They took the prophet to a worse place than ever. It was a deep dark pit—so deep they had to let him down with ropes, Jeremiah 38.6. There was no water in the pit—just wet mud. Jeremiah sank down into the mud. Poor Jeremiah. Who would dare to care about him? After all—the king had allowed this. The princes had done it.

Rescued by Ebed-melech

But there was one man who cared. He was a servant of King Zedekiah. He was from Ethiopia, and his name was Ebed-melech. He heard what had happened to Jeremiah. He did not sit down and cry. He did not go and complain to his friends. He did not call a meeting to talk about it. He went directly to the king. Zedekiah was sitting at the gate of the city, judging the people.

“My lord the king,” said Ebed-melech, “these men have treated Jeremiah wickedly. They have thrown him into a pit. He is likely to die there!” Jeremiah 38.9. Those were the facts. The king now knew them and he was responsible.

Ebed-melech’s plea worked. The king realized that he would be blamed for Jeremiah’s death. At once he said to Ebed-melech, “Take 30 men and go and pull Jeremiah out of the mud,” Jeremiah 38.10. Thirty men? Yes, they would need that for Jeremiah had sunk deep into the mud, Jeremiah 38.10.

Ebed-melech went to a room under the palace and got some old clothes. He tied these with rope and lowered them down to Jeremiah. Then he called down to Jeremiah to put the clothes under his arms. He told Jeremiah to tie the ropes around himself. Ebed-melech knew Jeremiah must be weak. Rope burns can be very painful. Ebed-melech wanted to hurt Jeremiah as little as possible. How like our Lord who made our salvation without hurt and without cost to us, Romans 6.23.

Suppose Jeremiah had called up to Ebed-melech, “Thanks—but don’t trouble yourself! I’ll be able to get out of here myself!” You would say, “What a fool! He can’t get out of that mud

and up those walls!” But this is what people say every day: “I don’t need help from the Lord, I can get to Heaven on my own.” They can’t. And they are rejecting the free salvation offered by the blood of Christ, Psalm 40.2; Colossians 1.14.

Jeremiah was not a fool. He accepted the offer of clothes and ropes and was gently pulled to safety, Jeremiah 38.13. He was taken back to the courtyard of the prison.

Rescued by Nebuchadnezzar

Jeremiah was still in Zedekiah’s prison when Nebuchadnezzar came back with his army and attacked Jerusalem, just as Jeremiah had said they would. They broke up the city. The Chaldean officers and princes came in and sat at the middle gate. They were prepared to judge the people.

Zedekiah saw this danger and tried to escape. He and all his men fled by night. They got out through a gate in the king’s garden. But the Chaldeans caught them and brought them to Nebuchadnezzar. They had refused to listen to Jeremiah. Now they paid the price.

But what about Jeremiah? He was still in prison. What would the Chaldeans do with him? Why would they even care about a Hebrew prophet? They cared—on orders from the king. King Nebuchadnezzar? That cruel man? He cared about Jeremiah? He cared! He gave orders to the captain of his guard: “Take care of Jeremiah. Do him no harm. Do whatever he says.”

The captain, four other officers, and all the king’s princes obeyed. They sent for Jeremiah and took him out of prison, Jeremiah 39.11-14. He was even given a choice of where to live. “Come with me to Babylon,” said the captain, “and I will care for you,” Jeremiah 40.4. But Jeremiah chose to stay with his suffering people.

We look at this situation, and we are amazed at Jeremiah’s choice. But God had promised Jeremiah, “I will cause the enemy to treat you well in the time of evil,” Jeremiah 15.11. So they did. Jeremiah was put in prison by his own king—Zedekiah. And he was rescued by an enemy king—Nebuchadnezzar.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 4 – Jeremiah

(Use **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. Jeremiah
 - a. was important to God.
 - b. wanted to be a prophet.
 - c. was confident in his abilities.

2. Jeremiah
 - a. was welcomed by the people.
 - b. brought words of cheer to the people.
 - c. repeated what God had told him.

3. Baruch
 - a. read the words which Jeremiah had written down.
 - b. read the words of Jeremiah outside the temple.
 - c. read the words of Jeremiah to the princes.

4. Ebedmelech
 - a. was a Jew.
 - b. rescued Jeremiah from the pit.
 - c. was afraid to go to the king.

5. The Bible (the Word of God) warns people today of coming Judgement
 - a. and most people take notice.
 - b. and shows how salvation can be earned.
 - c. but also how God offers a way of escape. He paid our debt.

Write **TRUE** or **FALSE** after each statement

6. The prophets told the people what they wanted to hear.
7. It took 30 men to rescue Jeremiah from the pit.
8. Jeremiah advised the people to leave Jerusalem.
9. Jeremiah's prophecy was not fulfilled.
10. Jeremiah was put in prison by King Nebuchadnezzar and rescued by King Zedekiah.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What is God's plan for your life? Have you 'taken the job' as Jeremiah did?

5

JOHN the BAPTIST

Matthew 14.3-12, Mark 6.17-29

The Amazing Birth of John

Some Bible events are difficult to understand. John the Baptist's life is one of them. We know exactly what kind of man he was because our Lord tells us there was no greater man than John, Matthew 11.11.

John was a special person. Even his birth was special. He is one of only four people whose birth was announced ahead of time. They are Isaac, Genesis 18.9-10; Samson, Judges 13.2-5; John, Luke 1.5-17; and our Lord, Luke 1.26-35.

John's parents were Zacharias and Elizabeth, a godly couple. The Bible states clearly that they were righteous. They obeyed the commandments. They were blameless before God, Luke 1.6. They had no children and were now old.

Zacharias was a priest, and one day he was assigned to be on duty in the temple. The priest's job was to burn incense there while the people waited outside and prayed. This day, Zacharias suddenly saw an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias was terrified. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid. Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a son. You shall call him John," Luke 1.8-13.

The angel went on to say that this son of Zacharias and Elizabeth would be great in the Lord's eyes. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit. He would turn many Israelis to the Lord their God. He would have the spirit of the prophet Elijah, and he would prepare the people for the Lord, Luke 1.14-16.

Zacharias found it hard to believe all this. There was an angel standing right before him, telling him what was going to

happen. Yet he said, “How can I be sure about this? Both my wife and I are old.” Did the angel not know this? And had he forgotten the miracle God worked for Abraham and Sarah when they were old? Genesis 17.17; 21.1-7.

The angel did not argue or explain. “I am Gabriel,” he said. “I stand before God! I was sent to you with this message. Now you will be struck speechless because you did not believe me!” Luke 1.19,20.

Often people say, “I would believe in God if I saw some miracle, or if an angel appeared, or if someone returned from the dead.” But even then they would not believe, Luke 16.27-31. Here was Zacharias, a man who already truly believed in God. He actually saw and talked to an angel. He was terrified. Yet he found it hard to believe the message.

He had a lot of time to think about this incident and the angel’s message because he was immediately struck speechless. The people waiting outside wondered at Zacharias’ delay in the temple. When Zacharias finally came out, he was not able to speak a word. The people realized he had seen a vision, Luke 1:21-22.

Soon after this incident Zacharias returned from serving in the temple to his own home. His wife Elizabeth became pregnant just as Gabriel had prophesied. A son was born to them, and they named him John. Right then Zacharias’ voice was restored, and he praised God.

People heard the details of this event, and they feared and wondered. What kind of a child would this be? Zacharias knew. He said the child would “go before the Lord to prepare His way,” Luke 1.76.

John’s Work

That was John’s work—to prepare people to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. And he did. He began by living in the wilderness. He ate locusts and wild honey. He wore rough camel’s hair and a leather belt, Matthew 3.4; 11.8. There he waited for his call from God. In Luke 3 we read when it came:

“Tiberius Caesar was in the 15th year of his reign,
Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea,
Herod was the ruler of Galilee,
Philip was ruler of Ituraea,
Lysanias was the ruler of Abilene,
Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.

But the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.”

The word of the Lord did not come to Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, or Caiaphas. It came to John in the desert. John was God’s choice. What a special man!

He immediately began to preach. He urged everyone to repent of their sins. People came out from the towns and cities to hear him. He spoke clearly and faithfully to all. The people considered him a true prophet. Some even wondered if he might be the Messiah. But John was firm about that. “I baptize with water,” he said, “but there is One mightier than I who will come. I am not worthy to untie His sandals,” Luke 3.15-16. Another time, John saw the Lord Jesus walking toward him. He said, “See, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1.29. It was a beautiful, clear statement. Jesus was the Saviour, the Messiah.

John spoke boldly and was not afraid of powerful men. Herod was a very powerful man. He had done much evil. He also considered himself above the law because he had taken Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for himself. We don’t know what the priests or the people thought of this. But we do know what John thought. And so did Herod. For John said directly to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have her,” Matthew 14.4. That was clear and short and to the point.

But surely Herod would ignore this strange-looking prophet from the desert. Why should he care what John thought? No, Herod could not ignore John. Luke writes that Herod had done many evils. But the worst of all Herod’s evils clearly was putting John in prison, Luke 3.20. Just like King Asa before him, 2 Chronicles 16.10, Herod’s method of silencing a prophet was to put him in prison. He

even wanted to put John to death, Matthew 14.5, as did Herodias, Mark 6.19. But Herod was afraid of upsetting the people because they considered John to be a prophet, Matthew 14.5.

Look again at the order of events:

- John told the people to turn away from sin.
- He urged all to repent.
- He was faithful in every way.
- He pointed to the Lord as the Lamb of God.
- He claimed no honor for himself.

What then was he doing in prison?

What indeed! Surely the Lord Jesus would rescue him? As John sat in prison, he began to wonder. Why was the Lord Jesus not beginning to set up His kingdom? John sent two of his own disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the One who should come? Or do we look for another?” Matthew 11.2-3.

The Lord was not insulted. He knew what it must be like for John in prison. He understood. He showed John’s disciples what He was doing. He was not setting up an earthly kingdom. He was curing the sick and giving sight to the blind. He was helping people to hear and raising the dead. “Go and tell John what you have seen,” He said. It is here our Lord says, “There has not been anyone greater than John the Baptist,” Matthew 11.11.

But He did not take John out of prison.

John Rescued from Prison—by Death

Later, Herod had a birthday supper. He invited his officers and the chief men of Galilee. Herodias’ daughter was asked to dance for the party. Herod and his guests were delighted with her performance. Herod was so pleased he said to her, “Ask me for anything you want!” At an earlier time, King Ahasuerus had given this same offer years before to Queen Esther. She had asked that the lives of her people be spared, Esther 7.3.

Herodias’ daughter did not know what to ask for. She made the mistake of asking for her mother’s help. At once Herodias said,

“Ask for the head of John the Baptist!” Matthew 14.8. What a wicked woman.

But surely the daughter would say, “I can’t ask for that!” No. She didn’t. She went back and asked for it right away. Surely Herod would refuse such a shocking request? No, he didn’t. The Bible says he was extremely sorry, but he felt he had to “keep his word.” His pride was greater than his sense of justice, Matthew 14.6-12; Mark 6.21-29.

And an innocent man lost his head. An evil woman got her revenge.

This is a sad and horrifying story. But we must remember that God allowed it. He is over all. For some reason He chose this way to take His dear servant out of prison and into His heavenly, kingly presence.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 5 – John the Baptist

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. John the Baptist was
 - a. named after his father.
 - b. a special person.
 - c. one of only 3 people whose birth was announced ahead of time.

2. When Zechariah saw the angel Gabriel
 - a. he was terrified.
 - b. he believed his message.
 - c. he praised God.

3. John the Baptist was God's choice to
 - a. proclaim His Word in Jerusalem.
 - b. tell people to keep the law.
 - c. proclaim Jesus as the Lamb of God.

4. Herod
 - a. did not care what John thought.
 - b. was an evil man.
 - c. ignored John the Baptist.

5. John the Baptist
 - a. was faithful in every way.
 - b. was rescued by Jesus.
 - c. claimed honour for himself.

Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. John the Baptist's father was a prophet.
7. John's work was to prepare the way of the Lord.
8. John urged everyone to repent of their sins.
9. John was afraid to confront Herod with his sin.
10. John was rescued from prison - by death.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Jesus could have rescued John from prison but He did not.
What can we learn from this?

6

PETER and the OTHER APOSTLES

Acts 5.12-42

Our Lord had risen from the dead. Then He appeared again to His disciples for 40 days afterwards, Acts 1.3. Finally, He was taken up to Heaven right before their eyes, Acts 1.9. These amazing events completely changed the apostles. They became men of real strength and boldness, preaching the gospel everywhere. The Lord gave them gifts to be used in preaching and healing. Their fame began to spread. Many people accepted the Lord Jesus as Saviour. Many people brought their sick to be healed by the apostles. All who came were healed, Acts 5.16. It was an exciting time for all of them!

The Religious Leaders Oppose

But of course this did not please everyone. It made some people quite angry. Angry? Why? Why not be happy to see people cured of their diseases? It was simply envy, Acts 5.17. And the opposition was headed by the high priest himself. We have seen this before. For it was the chief priests and Pharisees who plotted against the Lord Jesus. Why? Because He did many miracles, John 11.47. They could not do the miracles, and they did not want anyone else to do them. It took attention away from themselves.

This high priest went even further. He ordered the apostles put into prison. The apostles were healing people in the name of the Lord Jesus. The people were filled with joy about this and thus the high priest and his followers put the apostles in prison! The apostles did not resist nor complain. They trusted their lives to higher hands.

God came to their rescue. For that same night the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors. He brought the apostles out. Then the

angel gave them their orders: “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people. Tell them the message of this new life.” Acts 5.20.

The apostles went. They did not hold a meeting. They did not take a rest. They went. They entered the temple early the next morning and taught. We don’t read that they were amazed at their rescue. It was the Lord’s doing, and they accepted it that way. How wonderful to have that calm confidence! Isaiah 30.15; 1 Peter 1.7.

What about the high priest and his crowd? They were very busy. The high priest called the Council. He called for the elders of Israel. They all came together. They sent officers to the prison to bring the apostles. It was time for the trial. It was time to put the apostles on trial for doing good!

God Intervenes

The court officials returned to the waiting high priest, Council, and elders. They had shocking news. There were no prisoners! “The prison was closed, and the doors were safely locked,” they said. “The guards were standing on duty in front of the doors. But when we opened the doors—there was no one there!” Acts 5.23.

Picture this solemn group waiting to condemn the apostles. But no apostles were found! What could have happened? (We can be sure no one thought of an angel of God opening the doors!) What was going to happen now?

They soon found out. Someone came by and reported to them: “The men you put in jail are standing right in the temple. They are teaching the people!” The captain and his men hurried to the temple and brought back the apostles. They used no force for they were afraid the people might stone them.

Now the apostles stood before all the officials. “Didn’t we order you not to speak in this Name?” said the high priest. (Note that he would not even use the name “Jesus.”) “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. And you want to get us punished for this man,” Acts 5.28.

The apostles were not trying to condemn these officials or the nation. The Israelis had done that to themselves. For at the Lord's trial the people had all said, "His blood be on us and on our children," Matthew 27.25. Their defense now was to try to move the blame.

Peter and the apostles were not afraid. The Lord had warned them that they would have troubles, Luke 21.12. That time had come. They answered, "We must obey God rather than men. You hung Jesus on a cross. But the God of our fathers raised Him to His right hand. He is our Prince and Saviour. We are witnesses of these things. And so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." This is the gospel in a few words.

The high priest, the Council, and the elders were furious. They wanted to kill the apostles. Kill them? For what? The apostles spoke the truth. And it hurt. It hurt so much that the high priest and company were ready to kill innocent men.

Gamaliel Speaks up

But it was not God's time for the apostles to die. He had used an angel to bring them out of prison. Now He used one of the Council's own men. There was a Pharisee there called Gamaliel, a member of the Council. He was a teacher of the law and was highly respected by all. Gamaliel stood up and ordered the apostles to be taken out of the room for a little while.

Then he spoke to the Council: "Men of Israel—take care as to what you do to these men." Then he pointed out that in the past there had been other men who had made similar claims. They often had gathered followers. But then they were killed, and their followers scattered leaving no trace. "Stay away from these men and let them alone," he said. "If it is only men doing this then it will disappear. But if it comes from God then you cannot possibly defeat them. You could find yourselves fighting against God," Acts 5.38,39.

Gamaliel's warning settled them down. They took his advice....They brought the apostles back in and told them they

could go?...Oh, no...They had to have their revenge. They beat them first. They ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the Name of Jesus. Then they let them go.

The Apostles' Response

Did the apostles find this so unjust that they complained bitterly? Not at all. The Bible tells us that they left the Council happy. Happy? Why? Because God thought them worthy to suffer shame for Jesus, they were happy!

Did they stop preaching? Not for one day! They were fresh from jail and a beating, yet they continued every day in the temple and in people's homes. They taught and preached the good news about Jesus the Messiah.

What a wonderful example! Could these same words be said of us? Do we talk about our Lord every day to someone?

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 6 – Peter and the Other Apostles

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. After the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus
 - a. life became very dull for the apostles.
 - b. the apostles were fearful for their lives.
 - c. the apostles became men of real strength and boldness.

2. The apostles were freed from prison and
 - a. went home to rest.
 - b. went straight to the temple and taught.
 - c. hid from the council.

3. The court officials
 - a. removed the apostles from the temple by force.
 - b. were afraid the people might stone them.
 - c. were supported by the people.

4. Peter and the other apostles
 - a. preached the gospel to the council.
 - b. were afraid.
 - c. had not expected trouble.

5. The apostles
 - a. complained about their suffering.
 - b. stopped preaching.
 - c. were happy that God thought them worthy to suffer shame for Jesus.

Write **TRUE** or **FALSE** after each statement

6. The high priest ordered the apostles put in prison.
7. The court officials found the prison closed and doors locked – but no apostles.
8. The apostles condemned the officials and the nation.
9. Gamaliel, a council member, was a highly respected teacher of the law.
10. The council took no notice of Gamaliel's advice.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What is your response when everything seems to go wrong?

7

PETER

Acts 12

It would be nice to report that was the end of apostles going to prison. It was not. Another Herod had been made king. He was anxious to please the Jews. And he knew one way to do it: cruelty to the Christians. It was easy. He could simply order the death of a Christian. This he did. He chose the apostle James, brother of John. James had been one of the three apostles chosen to see the Lord's transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were witnesses of that great sight, Luke 9.28-31. Now this wicked king ordered that James be killed with the sword, Acts 12.2. What a sad loss to all the disciples of the Lord.

Herod Arrests Peter

But it pleased the Jews. It pleased the Jews that an innocent man had been put to death. This encouraged Herod to continue on his evil path. So he ordered Peter's arrest. He had him seized and put in prison. To be sure Peter did not get out, he ordered 16 soldiers to guard him. This was done in groups of four. And to be even more sure—he had him chained as well. He did all this to one man—who had not broken any law!

This all happened at Passover time. So Herod decided to wait until that event was finished. Then he would decide what he would do with Peter. But Peter had help that Herod had never heard about: prayer. Continuous strong prayer went up from the believers to a powerful God.

Poor Herod. He did not stand a chance against such a power. The night before he planned to bring Peter out, all was well in the prison. Peter was fastened with two chains. He was asleep between two guards. Peter was not lying awake worrying. Did he

remember that his Lord had said he would one day die when he was old? John 21.18-19). Other guards were watching at the door. Four men and two chains were keeping guard over this dangerous criminal.

Freed by an Angel

Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood beside Peter. A light shone in the cell. The angel touched Peter on his side and woke him. "Get up quickly!" he said. At once Peter's chains fell from his hands. Fasten on your belt and sandals," he said. "Put on your coat. Follow me!" Acts 12.8,9.

Peter did as he was told. But actually he thought he was dreaming. Together they passed the first guard post, then the second. When they came to the iron gate leading to the city, the gate opened for them by itself. They went out and walked up the street. There the angel just as suddenly left him.

Then Peter realized it was not a dream. "The Lord has sent His angel," he said. "He has rescued me from Herod and all that the Jewish people were expecting," Acts 12.11. Peter himself was a Jew. But he knew his own people would gladly see him dead.

The Prayer Meeting

Peter now saw where he was and at once headed for the home of Mary, Mark's mother. Since Peter had been already asleep, it was likely well after midnight by now. But a large number of people had met in Mary's house. They were praying. Here were believers who were not concerned about themselves. They were gathered together at this hour to pray for their friend Peter. They had already lost James. They prayed the same thing would not happen to Peter.

Peter walked up to Mary's house and knocked at the outer gate. A servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Peter spoke to her, and she recognized his voice at once. She was so happy that she forgot to open the gate! She ran inside and told the group that Peter was at the gate! But the others simply refused to believe this wild story. They said, "You are out of your mind!" Acts 12.13-15.

But Rhoda insisted it was Peter. They still did not believe her. “It is his angel!” they said. There they were, at that hour, praying earnestly for Peter’s release. Their answer was at the gate, but they refused to believe it. They had prayed he would not be condemned to death, but they did not even consider that he might be freed. Now, the surprising answer came from the Lord in His own way. The answer, Peter himself, stood at the gate in person!

How like us. We pray about something and have the answer we want all figured out. But the Lord has a different—and a better—idea. And it often takes us a while to recognize it.

The “answer” to their prayers kept standing and knocking. Finally, they went to the gate and opened it. There stood Peter himself. They could not believe their eyes. He held up his hand for quiet. It was no time to make a noise. Then he told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell the others,” he said. Then he left, Acts 12.17.

Think of the rejoicing and thanksgiving of these dear people. They would never forget this “answer” to their prayers.

Herod Humiliated

But what about our great King Herod? The day had arrived for his big show. He would order Peter to be taken out of jail. Then he would show the people his power. He would do what he liked to that hated Christian. It would make Herod popular. But when the guards went to get him, there was no Peter in the cell. No man was in the chains. No prisoner named Peter was to be found.

Think of the disturbance this caused! Who was going to tell King Herod? We are not told what terrified man had that job. The Bible says Herod immediately ordered another search for Peter. No Peter was found. How humiliating. Next he examined the guards. What could they tell him? Last night the prisoner was chained up. Four guards were on duty. This morning the guards and chains were there, but Peter was gone.

Herod had been made to look foolish. All his plans of a great display were shattered. He had to blame someone. So he

blamed the guards. Herod's method of punishment was simple. He had them put to death. Then he left Judea—no doubt in a rage—to go to Caesarea.

While Herod was in Caesarea, a delegation from Tyre and Sidon came to see him. But he was angry with the people of these two cities. The delegates humbled themselves and asked Herod for peace. A day was set for Herod to meet with them. Herod put on his royal robes. He sat on his throne and gave his speech. The people shouted and said, "It is god speaking—not a man!" How flattering to Herod. He accepted this as his due.

But he did not have long to enjoy their flattery. For the angel of the Lord struck him with a terrible disease. Herod had accepted the people's worship and had not given God the glory. Thus Herod died. Herod had ordered James killed with a sword, and the angel of the Lord killed Herod with the "sword of the Lord," Deuteronomy 32.39-43. Herod was struck down just as he had killed James, Galatians 6.7. The word of God continued to spread and grow, Acts 12.24. And Peter kept on doing the work of an apostle—out of prison, Acts 15.4-11.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 7 – Peter

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. The death of James
 - a. caused the Jews to riot.
 - b. pleased the Jews.
 - c. pleased the Romans.

2. Herod had Peter arrested
 - a. because he had broken the law.
 - b. and immediately put to death.
 - c. and put in a secure prison.

3. In prison, Peter
 - a. lay awake , worrying.
 - b. slept.
 - c. was at Herod's mercy.

4. People were praying for Peter
 - a. in Rhoda's house.
 - b. and they expected his immediate release.
 - c. but they did not believe that it was him knocking at the door.

5. After Peter's escape
 - a. King Herod was humiliated.
 - b. King Herod was popular.
 - c. King Herod stayed in Judea.

Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. King Herod ordered the death of James the son of Alphaeus.
7. Herod thought that *he* would decide Peter's fate.
8. When Peter was freed by the angel, he thought that he was dreaming.
9. King Herod died a natural death.
10. Once he was free Peter kept on doing the work of God.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Can you share an occasion when God answered your prayer in an unexpected way?

8

PAUL and SILAS

Acts 16

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, Romans 1.16. He preached it everywhere. He began just days after he believed in the Lord, Acts 9.20. For this change in his activities, the Jews tried to kill him in Damascus, Acts 9.23. He escaped and continued to preach in Jerusalem. Sometimes he taught in synagogues to large crowds, Acts 13.14-41, and other times by a river to just a few people. It is here by a river that our story begins.

Paul Travels to Philippi

Paul and Silas and two other men were in the city of Philippi, a Roman colony within Rome's vast Empire. It seems there was no synagogue there. Paul and his companions went to a place where they understood some people met for prayer. It was by a river. A few women had gathered there. Paul and his friends began to talk to these women about the Lord. A woman named Lydia listened carefully. She heard their message about Christ, and she believed. She accepted the Lord right there. She immediately offered the use of her home to Paul and his friends—and persuaded them to accept her offer. They did. What an example of hospitality Lydia was! (See also Romans 12.13; Hebrews 13.2; 1 Peter 4.9.)

One day as they were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl met them. She had a "gift of fortune-telling" and made a lot of money for her masters. She followed Paul and his friends as they travelled around Philippi. She began to shout, "These men are the servants of the Most High God! They are telling you how to be saved!" Acts 16.17. This kept up for days and days.

Paul was grieved. He knew this was a demon speaking

through the slave-girl. They did not need “help” from a demon. Finally, he turned and spoke to the demon: “In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her!” At that very moment the demon left—as did the girl’s so-called “fortune telling” ability. She was a whole person again.

A Healing Stirs up Trouble

Her owners were furious. Without her demonic gift of fortune-telling, she was no longer able to make money for them. That was all they cared about, not her physical or spiritual health. So angry were her owners that they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the public square. They called in the highest officials. What were their complaints? “These men are Jews. They are stirring up a lot of trouble in our city. They are teaching things we Romans cannot accept,” Acts 16.20,21. Notice that they made no mention of a slave-girl being released from a demon. And what was the trouble that Paul and Silas had caused?

No one seemed to care that these men were falsely detained. The crowd joined in this attack. Surely the officials would ask for calm so that they could hear Paul and Silas’ side of the story? Not at all. The officials joined the attack by tearing the clothes from Paul and Silas. They ordered them to be beaten severely. Then Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to keep special watch over them in case they escaped! He carefully did just as he was ordered. He put them into an inner cell and fastened their feet securely with chains.

So there were Paul and Silas in a dark, wet cell bleeding from their beatings. Their feet were chained together. They did not know what might happen in the morning. Were they terrified? Angry? Actually they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. Singing? Hymns of praise? Exactly. And the other prisoners were listening to them. Here was something new—two men thrown into prison and singing praises to God. Not many of us could do that, but Paul and Silas did. We may sing and give thanks in good times, but what do we do when times are difficult? Ephesians 5.19-20.

God Sends an Earthquake

The prisoners heard them, and so did God. About midnight there was a great earthquake. It shook the foundations of the jail, and all the doors were opened. Every prisoner's chains were loosened. They were free!

Suddenly, the jailer awoke. He saw the jail doors all open. He knew what that meant. The prisoners had escaped, and he would be blamed. His only thought was to kill himself. He drew out his sword to end his life. But Paul shouted out, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" Acts 16.27,28. How could that be? No one had tried to escape.

The jailer called for lights to be brought to the dark prison. Did he go around checking out the prisoners? No. Did he try to lock the doors? No. He rushed in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Trembling?—before Paul and Silas? What was going on here?

Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" But this was the same man who had put them in the darkest room. He had chained their feet together and left them there. Now he is asking how to be saved? Right. What did he know about being saved? Had he heard them speak of "salvation" as the slave-girl had said? Had he heard them singing praises to God while in this awful place?

The Jailer is Saved

Paul and Silas had an immediate answer for him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be saved and your whole household," Acts 16.31. Then they talked to him and all his household. They told them the message of God. The jailer took Paul and Silas that same hour and washed their wounds. He and all his household were then baptized. Then the jailer took them to his own home and gave them food. Like Lydia, this man showed immediate evidence of a changed life by his actions. Last, we read that they all rejoiced to have found faith in God. All this excitement happened in the middle of the night. No waiting till morning to think it over. Now is the

day of salvation, 2 Corinthians 6.2. Have you been waiting to put your trust in Christ? Act now. Wait no longer.

Paul and Silas were still officially prisoners. The jailer could do nothing about that, but God could. The next morning there was a surprise at the jail. The chief officials sent policemen with a message. Paul and Silas were to be set free. Why? We are not told. Just set them free! The jailer went to Paul and Silas with this good news: “The officials have sent word to let you go. Now you can come out and go in peace,” Acts 16.35,36.

Not so fast. Paul was having none of this strange change of heart. “Oh, no,” he said. “They beat us in public without a trial. They put us in jail. We are Roman citizens. Let them come here themselves and take us out!” Acts 16.37,38.

Here was a real shock, a terrible violation of Roman law. The police reported this to the officials. The officials were now truly frightened. They had put Roman citizens in jail without a trial! What would happen to them when this news got out? They rushed to the jail and pleaded with Paul and Silas. They begged them to leave the city. The officials now demanded that they go away as quickly as possible.

Paul and Silas Teach and Encourage New Believers

Paul and Silas were in no hurry. These officials had shamed them. Now they planned to leave the city in their own time. They left the jail but did not leave the city. They went to Lydia’s home. There they saw the other Christians and took time to encourage them. Paul and Silas were the ones who had been thrown into prison, yet they encouraged the others. Then, they left the city.

Paul and Silas had been sent to Philippi and to jail for a reason. No two people come to know the Lord in exactly the same way. The Lord seeks to reach each of us separately. Paul himself was an example of that. On his way to kill Christians, the Lord reached him with a blaze of light and His own voice, Acts 9.1-9. In Philippi Paul and Silas joined a prayer meeting where Lydia was. The Lord gently opened her heart, and she accepted Him. Here also,

the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to be beaten and put into prison. Then He sent an earthquake. All this planning to reach one jailer is God in action.

What has He done to try to reach you?

Rescued from Prisons

We have seen men thrown into prison by kings and officials and a high priest. God allowed one man to be killed. He had the others released by kings, by angels, and this time by an earthquake, Psalm 102.19-20.

Surely, He controls the universe, Psalm 47.2.

Rescued from Prisons – TEST 8 – Paul and Silas

(Use the **EXAM FORM** on the website menu)

Indicate the letter of the correct answer

1. In Philippi, Paul
 - a. preached by the riverside.
 - b. preached in a synagogue.
 - c. did not preach.

2. Lydia
 - a. was a native of Philippi.
 - b. was a slave.
 - c. was a dealer in purple cloth.

3. The slave girl's owner
 - a. was pleased that she had been healed.
 - b. dragged Paul and Silas to the prison.
 - c. falsely accused Paul and Silas.

4. In prison, Paul and Silas
 - a. were angry with God.
 - b. sang praises to God.
 - c. felt sorry for themselves.

5. The jailor
 - a. tried to stop the prisoners escaping.
 - b. asked how to be saved.
 - c. killed himself.

Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement

6. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.
7. Paul and Silas were freed by an earthquake.
8. All the prisoners escaped.
9. Lydia and the jailor showed immediate evidence of changed lives.
10. God controls the universe.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How has this course helped you in your relationship with God?