

## “The night Peter slept amazingly well”

### Acts 12:1-18 NIV

“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup> He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. <sup>3</sup> When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

<sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. <sup>6</sup> The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup> Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’ he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. <sup>8</sup> Then the angel said to him, ‘Put on your clothes and sandals.’ And Peter did so. ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,’ the angel told him. <sup>9</sup> Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was

doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.

<sup>10</sup> They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

<sup>11</sup> Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.’ <sup>12</sup> When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup> When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’

“<sup>15</sup> You’re out of your mind,’ they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel.’ <sup>16</sup> But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

<sup>17</sup> Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. ‘Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,’ he said, and then he left for

another place. <sup>18</sup> In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter."

**This text raises at least three major topics:**

- **Sleep;**
- **Faith;**
- **God's justice.**

**Folks debate all three subjects.**

Browse the subject of sleep and you'll find myriads of studies, surveys, and ads, e.g.

- **TOP RATED SLEEP SUPPLEMENTS,**
- **WHICH SLEEP AIDS ARE BEST,**
- **NATURAL SLEEP AIDS FOR SENIORS.**

**Scads of pages besiege you.**

**Beware of copying anything,**

or you'll find yourself connected to more links than

in an ocean-length chain.



**In churches where I preached, I noticed that certain members easily fell sleep.**

Whether they slept well at night, I never asked them.

At one point when I was in high school, I worked two jobs; one fulltime the other part time.

**I tried to attend Sunday services.**

At the Oregon City congregation, where my family worshiped, sermons usually lasted close to an hour.

In their old building, the back pews where I often sat were placed at the rear wall.

As ministers droned on and on, my head sleepily nodded forward.

When I suddenly awoke, I jerked backward and invariably banged my head against the back wall causing great commotion.

You might have heard about the woman, who said to the preacher after a service: "I hope you didn't take it personally when my husband walked out during your sermon." Replied the minister: "I did find it rather disconcerting."

"It's not a reflection on you personally," said the wife, "my husband's been walking in his sleep since he was a child."

**The Apostle Peter easily fell asleep on some occasions.**

On the night he was arrested, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to stand watch while he prayed a short distance away.

After Jesus intensely prayed, he came back to find his trio of trusted watchmen fast asleep.

Three times they quick-napped this way.

**Regardless of Peter's slumbering propensity, and my own, his ability to snooze the night before his execution amazes me.**

**It was nearly a given: he would die the next day.**

**Murderous jealousy ran in King Herod’s family.**

When he heard Jesus was born, “King of the Jews,” Herod’s granddad killed hundreds of babies.

**This younger Herod beheaded the Apostle James.**

He won such approval from vocal constituents for killing James, he put Peter in his crosshairs.

**Imagine yourself in Peter’s situation.**

**You’re confined in a high security prison.**

**Authorities want you executed tomorrow; no appeals, no delays.**

**How well would you sleep tonight?**

**The night before I was scheduled for bypass surgery, the surgeon informed me that about 3% of patients don’t make it.**

**I kept wondering if I were among the three out of one hundred that don’t survive.**

**Perhaps you’ve read of the two preachers, who discussed their sleeping habits.**

**First minister:** “I worry so much, I can’t sleep at night and I have terrible nightmares.”

**2<sup>nd</sup> minister:** Not me, I sleep like a baby; I wake up every three hours and cry.”

**How can you wake up every three hours when you never go to sleep?**

**What were Peter’s chances of dying the next day?**

**Odds makers would have rated Peter’s survival chances as zilch—zip, zero.**



Sixteen soldiers guarded this high risk preacher; let Peter escape, they’ll pay with their lives.

**Peter neither fretted nor wept; he slept.**

With a chain on his left wrist connected to a soldier and a chain on his right wrist connected to another soldier, Peter slumbered. .

**An angel struck him on his side to awaken him, ordering him to put on his clothes and shoes.**

“Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” . . . Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.”

**It wouldn’t seem real, would it?**

The angel led Peter past the first and second groups of guards and the iron gate that led out of the prison.

“Suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches . . .’”

**How could Peter sleep soundly on a night most would have fretted, tossed, turned, pounded our pillow and maybe cried?**

**This introduces our second subject, Faith.**

When we hear about other’s faith, we often think, “I wish I had faith like that.”

**Good news:** “We can attain faith like Peter’s. He wasn’t born with faith.

## How do I know he didn't come by faith naturally?

Jesus and all the disciples were aboard a boat.

A furious storm arose on the lake.

Waves swept over their boat.

Jesus slept on a cushion in the stern.

“<sup>25</sup>The disciples (including Peter) awoke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ <sup>26</sup>He replied, ‘You of little faith; why are you so afraid?’”<sup>1</sup>



On the Mt. of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, Jesus’ “Face shone like the sun, and his clothes

became as white as the light.<sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’

<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.”<sup>2</sup>

You likely know how Peter denied Jesus three times at Jesus’ trial.

Courageous faith didn't come naturally to Peter.

Faith didn't flow in his veins.

Where did Peter find the faith to sleep soundly the night before his execution?

Peter became absolutely convinced of a truth. Luke’s Gospel tells how Peter examined the evidence at the tomb after Jesus’ resurrection: **The NIV translates Peter’s reaction as “wonder.”**

Peter wasn't merely assessing something.

In the gospels, the Greek word used here usually conveys astonishment you experience after you see a miracle.<sup>3</sup>

John’s Gospel tells Jesus’ numerous appearances after his resurrection.

**The Holy Spirit wanted the Apostles and us to be fully certain that God overcame death in Christ.**

As Peter wrote in his First Epistle:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you . . .”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 8: 25, 26 NIV

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 17:2-7

<sup>3</sup> See discussion of the Greek term θαῦμα in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII , pp. 27-42, article by Georg Bertram

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 1: 3-7 NIV



**Peter believed with all his heart and soul that even though Herod might end his life tomorrow, Jesus would raise him back to life when he's revealed on Judgment Day.**

**After stubbornly resisting it for years, Paul reached the same conclusion:**

“<sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,<sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”<sup>5</sup>

**Of two truths, the evidence convinced Peter, Paul, and all the Apostles beyond all doubt:**

- 1) That Jesus came back from the dead.**
- 2) That more surely than a farmer, who plants seed in the ground will harvest a crop in the fall, Jesus will raise all those who believe in him when he returns on the Last Day.**

**How strongly do you believe this great news?  
Do you trust God with tomorrow?**

**Our third and final word today; God's *justice*.  
Why did the Lord let James die early, perhaps at 30, and allow his brother John to live to 90?**

**I can only speculate**

**In Romans Paul dealt with the subject of God's dealings with Israel in history: (Rom. 11: 33, 34 NIV).  
He reached a point at which he declared:**

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! <sup>34</sup> Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”

**Recall trying to answer all the questions your three year old child asked?**

**As three year old kids must learn to trust their parents, adults must trust God.**

Gravity has never stopped operating;  
neither has God's concern for you and me.

**God bless you and keep you in Christ,  
and may we trust him more!**



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<sup>5</sup> | Corinthians 15: 1-8 NIV