

Acts 12 - John Karmelich

1. In chapter 12, we are going to focus on battling our enemies.
 - a) We'll learn what to do, and not to do when battling enemies.
 - b) First of all, we're at war whether you like it or not.
 - c) Well, you say, "I'm not even mad at anybody right now." Wrong war!
 - d) Like it or not, we're at war. This is about a spiritual battle. Paul said it best:
 - i) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12 NIV)
 - ii) Just because we're at war, doesn't mean we have to panic, or even worry.
 - a) The victory is already won.
 - b) Read the last chapter of the Bible: We win! ☺
 - c) "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1st Corinthians 15:57 NIV).
 - e) If you've read the chapter, this sounds confusing. What do the events of this chapter have to do with spiritual warfare? Well, glad you asked!
 - i) Chapter 12 deals with the *persecution* of the church. The church was growing. That growth was upsetting evil, spiritual forces. Thus, chapter 12 deals with their counterattack, and God's counter-counter attack; spiritual warfare!
 - a) What we learn from Chapter 12 is the *victory* is already won. It is simply a matter of praying to God for his will to be done and daily putting on the "spiritual armor" that is stated in Ephesians Chapter 12.
 - b) If this is confusing, don't panic, just read further. ☺
 - f) Chapter 12 has 3 main events:
 - i) 1. The death of the apostle James, (notice no mention of prayer)
 - ii) 2. An angel rescuing Peter out of prison (lots of prayer prior to this event)
 - iii) 3. King Herod dying after the crowds yelled, "You're a god and not a man". (God answering prayers of stopping persecution).
 - g) In Ephesians Chapter 6, Paul lays out the "armor" we need in this spiritual warfare. To me, the most powerful weapon we have is prayer. (Ephesians 6:18)
 - a) "Prayer" is the heavy artillery of our defense system!
 - b) The "lack of prayer" may have been responsible for James' death.
 - c) "Fervent" prayer was responsible for rescuing Peter out of prison.
 - h) I also suspect that when the Christians were praying for Peter to be released from prison, they were probably also praying for God to stop King Herod from persecuting the Christians. Although God did not answer that prayer as fast as He rescued Peter, that prayer was answered.
 - i) "This vicious, cruel tyrant, before whom human life meant nothing, was suddenly removed from the scene, because of a people who were responsive to God and dependent upon him, and who cried out to him." Ray Steadman
 - ii) Although not stated, but implied, the Power of God was shown to be greater than the most powerful man in that territory at that time, which was King Herod. God was showing that he, and he alone is God. He, and he alone, is the one we need to be dependant upon, and therefore, He, and he alone is the one we turn to in our needs. God "wiped out" the King of the territory to show what happens to "false Gods."

2. Chapter 12 is also one of the last chapters to focus on the world of Jewish Christians. The remainder of the book is primarily about Paul and his witnesses to the Gentiles.
 - a) If you remember the previous 2 chapters, they were also about the "door opening" to the Gentiles. So why include this chapter?
 - i) Part of the reason is that to validate God has, is, and will not forget "his chosen people" in Israel. While most of Acts focuses on the Gentile-Christians, God still was doing a great salvation work through the Jewish Christians.
 - ii) As for "what is to become of the non-Christian-Jews, we'll take that up in Acts 15. For now, let's just focus on the chapter at hand.
 3. Chapter 12, Verse 1: It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.
 - a) One of the toughest things in the Bible is keeping your "Herod's straight".
 - i) There was a whole "dynasty" of Kings and people named Herod.
 - a) There was Herod "the Great", who was the one responsible for killing all the babies in Bethlehem after the time of Jesus birth. (Matthew 2:16).
 - b) There was Herod "Antipas", a son of Herod the Great, who was the one who had John the Baptist killed. (Mark 6:27).
 - c) Here we have a grandson of Herod the Great: Agrippa I.
 - ii) Here's a brief history of Herod Agrippa. (This is helpful to the story)
 - a) He grew up in Rome. History records him as a "rich playboy".
 - (1) Part of the reason was his father was a very paranoid man, and had most of his offspring killed out of fear of treason.
 - (a) Therefore, his mother sent him to Rome.
 - (b) Getting far in debt, he had to flee at one point for his life.
 - (2) This Herod "had friends in high places" in Rome.
 - b) When his father had died, the emperor Caligula gave him the northernmost territory of what is today modern Israel.
 - c) The next emperor, Claudius, was a childhood buddy of this Herod, and extended his governorship to all of the Israeli territory.
 - iii) Remember that Herod's family was *Edomites*, a "distant cousin" of Jews, but a different nationality. The Jews never liked, nor accepted the Herod dynasty.
 - iv) The "prime rule" of a Roman Governor, was "keep the peace at all cost."
 - v) This Herod (Agrippa) was a master politician.
 - a) He did whatever he could to win the Jews favor.
 - b) He did public works for the Jewish leadership.
 - (1) He "became a Jew", at least publicly and ceremonially.
 - (2) He managed to prevent Emperor Caligula's idea of putting a statue of himself in the Temple (luckily Caligula died soon after.)
 - vi) All right readers, thanks for bearing with me. Here's the key point:
 - a) To please the Jewish leadership, he would do *whatever they wanted* as long as it didn't involve overthrowing Rome, and Herod was ruthless to the enemies of the Jewish religious leadership.
 - b) Translation: Persecute the Christians to please the Religious leaders.
4. Which leads to Verse 2: He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.
 - ³ When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.
 - a) Herod was interested in "pleasing the Jews" (verse 3), and therefore had James killed.
 - b) If you think keeping track of all the Herod's is tough, try keeping all of your "James" straight! ☺

- i) There are at least 3 significant people in the New Testament named James.
 - a) James, the brother of John, one of the 12 disciples. This is "that" James.
 - b) Another was James the son of Alphaeus, (Matthew 10:3), also referred to "James the less", (Mark 15:40). He was another of the 12 disciples.
 - c) Then there is James, the half-brother of Jesus, who became one of the leaders of the Church of Jerusalem. He wrote the Book of James.
 - ii) The James were talking about here was not only a disciple, I would describe him as being part of "an inner circle of three". There are a few occasions where Jesus would call "Peter, James and John" to a separate event. Of the 12 disciples, these 3 were occasionally separated out for a higher task.
 - c) If you've read the whole chapter, you know that the church prayed fervently for Peter when he was arrested, but there is no mention of any prayer on James behalf? Why?
 - i) For starters, there may have been prayer, but it was just not recorded in the story. Maybe they did pray, but God's answer was no. God does answer *all* prayers made by believers. Sometimes, the answer is no.
 - ii) Another theory is that the Christians were a little smug. If you remember the last time the apostles were put in jail, in Acts Chapter 5, an angel let them out.
 - a) Maybe the disciples just figured "OK, God, you got an angel to get them out last time, he'll do it again. We, the disciples don't have to pray about this one.
 - b) That is the mistake. We assume that the way God works *yesterday* is the same way God is going to work *today*. Perhaps people were praying for the disciples in Acts 5, but not this time.
 - c) God does desire to do a great work, but *he wants us involved*. The way *we* get involved is for us to pray *for his will to be done*. The book of James (again different guy) makes that clear in James 4:2:
 - (1) "Yet you do not have because you do not ask."
 - d) An interesting note is that Jesus "hinted" that both the disciples James and John would have a violent death the same way Jesus did. In Matthew 20:21, the mother of James and John asked if "these two sons of mine could sit one on your right hand, and one on your left in your kingdom" (NKJV). Jesus didn't look at the mother, but looked at James and John themselves, who were present. He stated it is the father, not the son who decides our rewards in heaven (literally "whom will sit on My right hand...").
 - i) In Matthew 20:23, Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup" meaning they will suffer a difficult death like Jesus.
 - ii) As to James brother John, his death is not recorded in the Bible. Early historians do tell stories that John, while late in life, did also die a horrible death.
 - e) Another thing to accept, difficult as it is, is the sovereignty of God and accept his plans for our lives. The difficult, but necessary part for us to accept is that God has a purpose. We can and should grieve over such losses, but the eternal perspective should give us some comfort.
5. Rest of Verse 3: This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- a) Some translations say "Passover season" and the King James says "Easter".
 - b) In America, we refer to Christmas and New Years as "The holidays".
 - c) The same principal is applied here. The 3 Jewish spring festivals, that run together, Passover, Feast of Unleaven Bread and Feast of Firstfruits, are collectively referred to as "Passover Season", or "Feast of Unleaven Bread", depending upon the writer.

6. Back to Peter's arrest, Verse 4: 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.
- a) Why did Herod want to wait until after Passover?
 - i) Herod probably wanted to do a big public trial & execution after the holidays.
 - b) The verse says "four squads of four soldiers each". What does that mean?
 - i) Normally, for a prisoner, a guard is chained to the prisoner. Another was nearby, or also chained, therefore the ratio was two guards to a prisoner.
 - ii) Peter was "double guarded", with four guys chained to him (or two chained, and two on watch.
 - iii) Either way, Peter was not about to escape, at least not without God intervening!
 - iv) The "four squads" probably referred to four shifts, to give the guards a break.
 - c) Why so many guards?
 - i) Herod remembered how the apostles escaped last time. He figured by "doubling the guards", whatever happened last time, won't happen again. (Isn't it amazing what people will do when they refuse to accept the power of God?!)
 - a) OK, the church learned their mistake for (assumedly) not praying for James. This time they were praying *earnestly* for Peter.
 - b) There's a lesson for our prayer life: "Earnestly".
 - i) Other translations say "without ceasing" (KJV) or "constant prayer" (NKJV)
 - ii) The New American Standard has "fervently", which I think sums it up best.
 - a) That doesn't mean we sweat more, or yell louder or cry over our prayers. This means we pray as to expect action on God's part.
 - iii) There are scriptures that support the idea of *persistence* prayer is beneficial in receiving an answer from God.
 - a) "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."
(1) (James 5:16b NKJV)
 - b) Jesus taught the same thing in Luke 11 verses 5-8 and Luke 18, Verses 1-8. Both are parables teaching the value of *persistence* prayer.
 - c) I can't give you a great theological answer on *why* that is true, I simply accept that it is as fact.
 - d) If I had to guess, I would say it has something to do with God desiring a *relationship* with Him, and *persistent* prayer increases that relationship.
7. Verse 5: So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
- a) OK, the church learned their mistake for (assumedly) not praying for James. This time they were praying *earnestly* for Peter.
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8. OK, the big scene. Verse 6: 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. ⁷ 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.
- a) To me, the most amazing part of this whole thing to me is the fact that Peter was asleep. Personally, if I'm in a pitch-dark dungeon with 2 or 4 Roman soldiers chained to me, knowing *I was going to be be-headed the next day*, I might have a little insomnia! ☹
 - i) How was it Peter could sleep? Shear exhaustion? Doubt it.
 - ii) I suspect Peter had "acceptance". His buddy James was killed by Herod.
 - a) Jesus predicted that Peter would die a gruesome death, (probably crucifixion) in John 21:18.
 - b) He probably thought, "Well, this is it. Jesus said I would die this way. I might as well accept it. Lord, I'm coming to see you tomorrow".

- iii) The interesting thing to learn from this is that God often does his best and most miraculous work once we hit acceptance of a situation.
 - a) I have seen this happen many times in my life and the lives of my friends. I have read many testimonials to this fact.
 - b) God wants *total* dependence upon Him. Once we relinquish all our hope and trust to God, is when God does a great miracle.
 - c) The problem with us is that we *first* try every other available option before turning the situation over to God.
 - b) Another thing we tend to forget is God's power over the material world.
 - i) This angel just snapped his finger, and the locks fell off the chains.
 - ii) The angel probably put all the guards to sleep.
 - iii) Actually, God himself is responsible for all this. Angels are just messengers.
 - iv) We need to remember this in our prayer life. Nothing is impossible for God!
 - c) Also note that this was "an" Angel of the Lord, as opposed to "The" Angel of the Lord. "The" Angel of the Lord appears a number of times in the Old Testament and only once in the New, prior to Jesus being born. Many people, including myself, believe this is Jesus himself *prior* to his birth. (Remember that Jesus always was, is and will be. The time on earth he became "flesh" as well as God.) Bible scholars debate the issue of whether "the" Angel is Jesus or not. It's just one of those debatable issues where we won't know who's right until we get to heaven and ask!
 - d) On a side note, I've also heard this scripture used as a model of our old life of sin.
 - i) Before we knew Christ, we are 1) in the dark, 2) "chained" to sin/the world" and 3) no hope of new life. It is only Christ than can set us free!
- 9. 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.
 - a) This was such a shock to Peter; he was pretty much in denial about the whole thing.
 - b) Back in Chapter 10 Peter had a vision (The sheet with all the animals.) He probably thought this was just another vision. I think it was important for the angel to leave Peter at this point so Peter could accept what happened.
 - c) Remember that even with Peter on the outside, he was still a wanted man. He needed to sneak quietly back to some safe place.
- 10. Verse 11: Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."
 - a) Peter realized at this point it's not a dream. Peter's "acceptance" of his death now needed to change focus. God has other plans for Peter's life.
 - b) I talked earlier about "acceptance" of God's will. Often God will perform some sort of miracle once we have accepted his will *no matter what*. It is not guaranteed, and sometimes we just have to accept the situation *as* God's will. But if change *does* come, we need to meditate and pray on the "why" and what God has planned for us next. That is what Peter is doing here.
 - i) In the meantime, Peter better get running before he is spotted.
 - ii) The application to us, if it not clear from God what he wants us to do next, do the "logical" thing!

11. Verse 12: 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.¹³ Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door.¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"¹⁵ "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."
- a) To me, this is one of the funniest stories in the Bible.
 - b) Here is this prayer meeting. They're praying fervently "Oh, God, please save Peter. We don't want him to die! Please, Lord, save Peter."
 - i) Then Peter knocks at the door and says, "I'm here" to this girl Rhoda.
 - ii) Rhoda is so excited, she leaves Peter outside and tells the prayer group.
 - iii) The prayer group says, essentially to Rhoda, "Will you shut up girl, can't you see we're busy praying! You must see his angel or something!"
 - a) There's a cute joke I have to insert here. The name Rhoda means "rose". One of my favorite authors, Jon Curson, said of this passage: "Rose, you're a blooming idiot, ☺ sighed the believers. That can't be Peter, Don't you know he's in prison?"
 - c) I'm sure for *years*, as those Christians got together, they told this story with a good laugh at themselves and the circumstances.
 - d) This story has validity only because it is so human.
 - e) The application of course, is to *expect* answered prayers!
 - i) One of the mistakes we make as Christians is we worry, because we focus on the problem and not on God when we pray. God *always* answers prayers, but sometimes the answer is "no" or "wait". Therefore, for the sake of our own stress levels, we *all* (myself included) to praise God *in advance* for answering our prayers. God may not respond the *way* we want, but He *does* respond in a way that is best for everyone. This is why Jesus uses "father" or "daddy" as a model of our prayers. It is like looking to a loving, all-knowing father who knows what is best in every situation.
12. Verse 16, back to Peter outside the door: But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.¹⁷ 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 brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.
- a) It's a good thing Peter was as *persistent* in his knocking, as the prayer group was *persistent* in their prayers, or Peter might have been arrested again!
 - b) This story also gives good support that even though we as believers, deep down, don't expect God to answer our prayers, he does anyway. These people didn't expect God to respond, but he did anyway!
 - c) In Verse 17, Peter told them to be quiet, probably out of safety.
 - d) When Peter said "Tell James and the brothers", he is probably referring to James, the half brother of Jesus, who wrote the book of James.
 - i) James became the established leader in Jerusalem. I suspect Peter was more of a "roaming minister" based on the miracles of the past few chapters.
 - ii) Another possibility is that Peter *suspected* he might be killed due to the fact that
 - 1) he was the established leader
 - 2) Herod and the Jewish leaders wanted him dead
 - 3) Jesus predicted he would die a violent death.
 Peter may have named James as the administrative leader in Jerusalem.
 - a) This is speculation on my part, and some of my commentaries.

- e) Peter then left, mostly out of fear for his life.
 - i) Peter is only mentioned one more time in Acts, and that is in Chapter 15.
 - ii) "Church tradition" state that Peter died by crucifixion. He personally asked to be crucified upside down as "he did not deserve to be killed the same manner as our Lord".
 - f) Where did Peter go after this?
 - i) Early Roman Catholic tradition had Peter going to Rome, but none of the early Church leaders ever spoke of this in their writings. Even many modern Roman Catholic scholars abandon this teaching.
 - ii) Most likely, Peter fled and went to Antioch, the other city where the church was growing. It was a large city, with many Christians who would shelter Peter. There is a reference in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he had a mild rebuke of Peter for having a double-standard between Jewish and Gentile Believers, and that is the reason many suspect Peter was in Antioch
 - a) (Source for "i. & ii: Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia).
13. The story now moved back to the prison, and Herod's discovery of what happened. Verse 18: In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.
- a) Every now and then Luke's writing style of a "big" event uses the word "small".
 - i) Here he says "no small commotion" as a flippant exaggeration of the event.
 - ii) There are a few more (Acts 15:2, 19:24, 27:20). There's not much spiritual application to that fact; it was just interesting to note Luke's style.
 - b) By Roman law, if you were a prison guard, and your prisoner escaped, the guard had to suffer the prisoner's sentence.
 - i) For example, if a prisoner got 5 years and he escaped, the guard got 5 years.
 - ii) A death sentence for the prisoner and he escaped? Death for the guards.
 - c) Was it cruel on God's part to allow these guards to be killed as "innocent bystanders"?
 - i) Possibly, from our point of view. We'll notice later that God sentences Herod to die a horrible death soon afterwards. Part of that may be a punishment for this particular sin.
 - ii) We have to keep the eternal perspective in mind. God allows these types of things for "the big picture". If they were not killed, critics would doubt the validity of the story because it did not "jive" with Roman law.
 - a) We have to remember that God will judge people *fairly* for their sins.
14. Verse 19(b), continued: Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. ²⁰ He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.
- a) Tyre and Sidon are two "city-states" north of Modern Israel. They were port cities known for trade. At this time in history they were dependant upon the Roman Empire as trading partners, and specifically the territory under Herod's reign.
 - i) Why was Herod quarreling with these people? We don't know. If I "know" Herod, it was probably over money/taxes between Tyre & Sidon, and a rival port-city of Caesarea.
 - ii) There is not much written in secular history to support what happened to Tyre and Sidon at this time. We simply have to take the scripture at face value. The story *is* validated in outside history based on what is about to happen to Herod.

- b) Luke includes this mostly as a "tie-in" to the next several verses. Without this section, the next section would not make sense.
15. Verse 21: On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.
- a) Why would the people shout "Voice of a god and not a man"
- i) Well, a little background history here.
 - ii) The writer Josephus also records this event. Josephus states that Herod wore a pure silver robe. The robe probably reflected the sunlight, giving a "glow" about him as the silver reflected the sunlight.
 - iii) There is also the possibility that the people of Tyre/Sidon were trying to "butter him up" to increase their trade relations.
- b) The modern application is the danger of taking credit for the blessings in your life.
- i) There is a modern expression called "self-made man".
 - ii) This is when a man says "I worked hard all my life, I built up my business, now look at all the good things I have accomplished. He has made himself his own god. God himself has a response to this:
 - a) "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)
 - b) I also take the view that God holds our leaders up to higher standards than he does others. All leadership is appointed by God (see Romans 13:1), and God does hold them accountable.
 - c) For God to see someone who was raised up to be a leader over *his people* praise himself as a God was too much, and thus God struck him down.
 - (1) Remember that Herod lived among the Jews and worshipped (albeit in a phony manner) at the Temple, he had enough knowledge where he should have known better.
- c) Why did God choose "worms" as a method of death of Herod?
- i) (Now there's a question you didn't expect! ☺)
 - ii) The best explanation I can think of is it has to do with stress.
 - iii) Think of the expression "sick to my stomach". When we worry, we get stressed, because we don't know the outcome of a situation.
 - iv) Did you know worrying is a sin? Worrying is the *opposite* of faith! It is a lack of trust in God. Jesus' lessons on this are clear. Matthew, Chapter 6, Verses 25-31 are good ones to meditate upon in times of worrying.
 - v) So what does this have to do with Herod? Didn't Herod die due to his ego?
 - a) Yes. The text is clear on this. But Herod also knew enough about Judaism to know to accept that praise was wrong. It "ate him up" on the inside. That is what sin does. It eats you up. Instinctively, you know its wrong, and the guilt "eats you up". That is why the 10 commandments are a model for happiness, not a model for salvation.
- d) As an appendix to this Bible study lesson, I copied the account of the 1st Century historian Josephus telling this story also mentions Herod dying.
- i) Josephus record matches Luke's record very well. There are some technical differences between the two versions of this event, but nothing to take away the validity of Luke's account. (For example, Luke did not mention there was a five-day gap before he died.)

16. Verse 24: But the word of God continued to increase and spread.
- a) What does this mean? What does this have to do with Herod dying?
 - b) This is about the *persecution*.
 - i) *Despite* the death sentence for believing in Jesus, the truth of the Gospel weights greater on people's heart than their lives.
 - ii) What is our life on earth in compared to eternity? People understood that. At the risk of their death, they were willing to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord despite the fact both the established religious leadership and the government were out to kill them.
 - iii) If you study church history, some of the greatest moments where the church has flourished has been under persecution. Ten Roman Emperor's persecuted Christians. The church flourished during those times. Today, Communist China punishes the church. Despite that, it has grown and flourished. Some people estimate there are more "true" Christians in China today than in the United States.
 - c) Satan is quite aware in his strategy against the church that persecution doesn't work. Satan's goal is to stop the spread of the Gospel. If persecution isn't working, he tries something else. When Constantine became emperor of Rome in the 4th century, he became a Christian. Constantine made Christianity "the official state religion."
 - i) Some historians believe it was more "bad than good", only because it started an era where the Gospel was compromised with secular events in order to get the general public to agree upon it. A strategy of Satan is often "If we can't persecute them, let's get them to compromise with the world."
 - a) For those who know the story of Balaam in the Book of Numbers, that is the same story. A King named Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. He refused, because he knew God was blessing them. However, in the end, Balaam "sold out" and told King Balak, "tell you what, get these people to compromise their lifestyle and God himself will no longer bless them. (Numbers 25:1, Revelation 2:14)
17. Last verse, 25: When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.
- a) This verse actually begins another topic, and in my mind, belongs in the next chapter. (Remember that the chapter breaks are added centuries later, and were not put in there by Luke the author.)
 - i) By itself, the verse is a "bridge" to Chapter 13.
 - b) The Book of Acts is often divided by commentators into 2 main sections. (They like to do things like that!)
 - i) Part 1 is Chapters 1-12. It focuses on the birth of the church, and its early growth phases to the Jews, Jewish converts and the beginning steps into the Gentile World.
 - ii) Part 2 begins with this verse and goes to the end of Chapter 28. The main character becomes Saul (Paul) and his 3 missionary journeys to the Gentiles.
 - c) If you remember the last chapter, there was a prophecy about a famine in Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem to delivery the money they had collected. Thus "they had finished their mission" is a reference to the money they had collected and delivered to the Apostles.
 - d) "John, who is also called Mark" was the author of the Gospel of Mark.

18. Well, that's a wrap for this week. Since I'm done a page early (boy, what's gotten into me lately! ☺), I have an appendix for those who are interested in some historical background. The appendix is Josephus' account of the death of Herod. It is interesting background in comparison to Luke's account in this chapter.
19. Let's pray: Father, we come to you in Jesus name, and bring these prayer petitions before you. Wee *fervently* come before your throne, knowing that you are always listening, and always answering our prayers, loving us like a true caring father. We thank you in advance for the glorious things you are going to do in our lives through these prayers and petitions. Our lives are in a spiritual battle, and we need to be aware of it, and we need to keep our prayers at the forefront of that knowledge. With that, we ask prayer for (fill in your request here). And all God's people said in agreement, "Amen"

Appendix. Josephus' account of the Death of Herod

From Josephus's book "Antiquities of the Jews"

(Josephus was/lived in, a 1st Century Jewish historian)

Quoting Josephus: After the completion of the third year of his reign over the whole of Judaea, Agrippa came to the city of Caesarea, ... [where] he celebrated spectacles in honor of Caesar. On the second day of the spectacles, clad in a garment woven completely of silver so that its texture was indeed wondrous, he entered the theatre at daybreak. There the silver, illumined by the touch of the first rays of the sun, was wondrously radiant and by its glitter inspired fear and awe in those who gazed intently upon it. Straightway his flatterers raised their voices from various directions--though hardly for his good--addressing him as a god. "May you be propitious to us," they added, "and if we have hitherto feared you as a man, yet henceforth we agree that you are more than mortal in your being." The king did not rebuke them nor did he reject their flattery as impious. But shortly thereafter he looked up and saw an owl perched on a rope over his head. At once, recognizing this as a harbinger of woes just as it had once been of good tidings [cf. Antiq. XVIII, 195, 200 (vi.7)], he felt a stab of pain in his heart. He was also gripped in his stomach by an ache that he felt everywhere at once and that was intense from the start. Leaping up he said to his friends: "I, a god in your eyes, am now bidden to lay down my life, for fate brings immediate refutation of the lying words lately addressed to me. I, who was called immortal by you, am now under sentence of death. But I must accept my lot as God wills it. In fact I have lived in no ordinary fashion but in the grand style that is hailed as true bliss." Even as he was speaking these words, he was overcome by more intense pain. They hastened, therefore, to convey him to the palace; and the word flashed about to everyone that he was on the very verge of death.... Exhausted after five straight days by the pain in abdomen, he departed this life in the fifty-fourth year of his life and the seventh of his reign (Antiquities. XIX, 343-50 [viii.2]).

From the Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia:

Differences between Luke's account and Josephus:

These two accounts of Herod Agrippa's death--that of Luke and that of Josephus--differ enough from one another that neither can be dependent on the other. Luke sets the scene by referring to a quarrel between the king and the people of Tyre and Sidon, whereas Josephus speaks of a festival in honor of Caesar--either the quinquennial games inaugurated by Herod the Great at the founding of Caesarea to honor Augustus (cf. War. I, 415 [xxi.8]) or a festival instituted by Agrippa to honor his patron Claudius. Josephus makes no mention of a delegation from Tyre and Sidon. Furthermore, Luke's account, though more concise, gives us the physical cause of Agrippa's death--his being "eaten by worms." On the other hand, the two accounts are so similar in outline that we may assume that we know in general how and when Herod Agrippa I died.