

## Acts 12 John Karmelich

1. Chapter 12 is only 25 verses, but it packs a wallop.
  - a) It is one of the best chapters in the Bible on the power of prayer.
  - b) How many people here would like a more effective prayer life?
    - i) Some clues about answered prayer come in this chapter.
2. Here is a summary of Chapter 12:
  - a) Vs 1-3 is about King Herod killing James the apostle and persecuting the Christians.
    - i) There are 4 “Herod’s” and 3 “James” in the Bible.
    - ii) A little later I’ll explain which Herod and which James the Bible is covered in Chapter 12.
      - a) There are actually 2 James’ mentioned in Chapter 12.
    - iii) There are 3 “James” in the Bible. We’ll talk about each later.
    - iv) King Herod was in “cahoots” with the Jewish religious leaders to persecute Christians.
      - a) The Jewish leaders wanted to stop the growth of Christianity.
      - b) Herod wanted to please the Jewish leaders as he was the governor.
  - b) Verses 4-11 is about Peter being arrested by Herod and an angel sets him free.
    - i) Peter was arrested and chained to 2 guards.
    - ii) An angel sets him free without the guards realizing it.
    - iii) The angel leads Peter out of the prison into the streets of Jerusalem
    - iv) Peter then goes to the house where some disciples are staying.
  - c) Verses 12-18 is about the reaction of the disciples to seeing Peter released from jail.
    - i) These disciples were praying for Peter but were shocked when Peter actually showed up at the door.
  - d) Verses 19-23 are about the reaction of King Herod (to Peter) and Herod’s death.
    - i) King Herod discovers the prisoners were set free and punishes the guards.
    - ii) Verses 21-23 record how he died.
      - a) We’ll talk later why that is significant to this story.
  - e) The last two verses are epilogue statements
    - i) Verse 24 is the conclusion of the events of Chapter 12
    - ii) Verse 25 is a “bridge-verse” which leads to the events of Chapter 13.
3. As a Christian, there is nothing to get us on our knees like a good disaster.
  - a) It is one thing to pray when things are going well, and life is fine.
  - b) But when things are going rough, and the world is falling apart around you, that is when people turn to serious prayer.
    - i) In this chapter, the local king is trying to kill Christians!
      - a) You think you have problems?  
Try believing in Jesus when it is a capital crime!
    - ii) For most of Christian-history, true believers in Jesus have had to suffer persecution for their believes. Praise God for this country and what it stands for. If you know world history for the last 2,000 years, you know how unique living in the United States is in terms of freedom of religion and freedom from persecution.
4. What we tend to forget as Christians is that we are at war.
  - a) Peter said, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1st Peter 5:8 NIV)
  - b) “If you don’t believe the devil is real, try opposing him for awhile” Chuck Missler
  - c) Satan’s goal is the slow down the spread of Christianity.

- i) Satan's time on earth is fixed. There are a specific number of believers that will become Christians, and then God says, "Go get them".
    - ii) This is taught in Romans 11:25.
    - iii) Satan, who is trying to delay that number as long as possible, is doing everything in his power to slow down the growth of Christianity.
    - iv) Thus, he persecutes Christians.
    - v) God designed it this way. It keeps us dependent upon God.
    - vi) Its like having kids in college. If you give them all the money they need, they'll never call. If you give it to them a little at a time, at least they stay in contact! God, in a sense, is keeping us in contact via his motivational plan.
  - d) If you are currently not being persecuted,
    - i) Stop and ask yourself "Am I involved with "the fight" for Christianity?
    - ii) Also, you may be having an effective prayer life where God is protecting you.
    - iii) This is why I ask my audience to always be in prayer for me, as well as your local pastor! Pray regularly for those who minister to you.
  - e) Remember every morning to pray the prayer of Ephesians 6:12-18
    - a) This is the "armor of God".
    - b) The only offensive weapon in that list is prayer!
    - c) "Prayer" is the heavy artillery in spiritual warfare.
    - d) "Fervent" prayer was responsible for rescuing Peter out of prison.
    - e) Before James died, there is no mention of any prayer.
      - (1) There is the possibility "lack of prayer" may have been responsible for James' death.
5. 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 have this chapter here about events in Jerusalem?
    - 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 later in Acts. For now, let's just focus on the chapter at hand.
6. Chapter 12, Verse 1: It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.
- a) Imagine being a Jewish Christian at this time.
    - i) Saul is no longer persecuting the church.
    - ii) The church is probably growing strong. No major harassment.
    - iii) Now, all of sudden, the king, is arresting and persecuting Christians?
    - iv) What do we do?
    - v) The same thing that we should be doing when we hear about Christians being persecuted around the world.
      - a) 1<sup>st</sup> Pray.
      - b) 2<sup>nd</sup>, if possible, stand up and do something about it.
 

If I had to state one of the biggest faults of Christians is that we don't do enough to stand up for others being persecuted for their beliefs. That's a whole topic unto itself, but I'll save it for another day.
  - b) Back to the Verse. Here we have this guy, King Herod, persecuting Christians. 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 were *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.

7. Which leads to Verse 2: He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

<sup>3</sup> 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.
  - i) Next he had Peter arrested. We’ll talk more about Peter in a minute.
- b) First, let’s talk a little about James. If you think keeping track of all the Herod’s is tough, try keeping all of your “James” straight! ☺
- c) There are at least 3 significant people in the New Testament named James.
  - i) This James is one of the 12 original disciples.
  - ii) He is the brother of the Apostle John (not John the Baptist), who wrote Gospel of John and 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John and Revelation.
  - iii) There was another of the 12 disciples called James the son of Alphaeus, in Matthew 10:3. He is also referred to “James the less”, in Mark 15:40.
    - a) Little else is said about this disciple.
  - iv) 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.
    - a) That James is mentioned in Verse 14 of this chapter, and we’ll talk more about that James when we get there.
- d) 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.

- i) In Matthew 17 and other places Jesus went up to a “high mountain” where he changed appearances. There Moses & Elijah spoke with him.
    - a) Only Peter, James and John were there.
  - ii) In Mark 5, Jesus raised from the dead a daughter of a synagogue leader.
    - a) Only Peter, James and John were there.
  - iii) In Mark 13 and other places, Jesus gave a private talk about the end-times.
    - a) Only Peter, James and John spoke to him.
  - iv) In Mark 14, the night before Jesus was arrested, Jesus spent the night in prayer.
    - a) Only Peter, James and John were there.
  - v) The point is don’t read the death of James lightly. He was one of the “big three” of the 12 disciples.
  - vi) In Matthew 20:22-23, Jesus predicted that both James and his brother John would be martyred for their faith. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup” meaning they will suffer a painful death like Jesus.
    - a) 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) If you’ve read the whole chapter, you know that the church prayed feveratly 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) Maybe they didn’t know he was arrested and killed until after the event.
  - iii) 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.
- f) So why did God call James home? We don’t know.
- i) Maybe it was to get the church to focus more on prayer. We don’t know.
  - ii) One of the great mysteries is why God allows some people long lives and others don’t.
    - a) We, as Christians, simply have to accept the sovereignty of God and accept his plans for our lives.
    - b) The difficult part for us to accept is that God has a purpose for our lives.
    - c) We can and should grieve over such losses, but the eternal perspective should give us some comfort.
8. Let’s re-read Verse 3: When he (King Herod) saw that this pleased the Jews (i.e. kill James), he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- a) When you read “The Feast of Unleavened Bread”, the translation is different in different Bibles.
    - i) Some translations say “Passover season” and the King James says “Easter”.
  - b) To help you understand this term, think of the American expression “the Holidays”.
    - i) In America, we refer to Christmas and New Years as “The holidays”.

- c) The same principal is applied here. Jews have 7 holidays ordained by Moses. Three run together in the spring, one is by itself, and there are 3 in the fall.
    - i) The 3 Jewish spring festivals, that run together, Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread and Feast of Firstfruits, are collectively referred to as “Passover Season”, or “Feast of Unleavened Bread”, depending upon the writer.
    - ii) So the term Feast of Unleavened Bread refers to all 3 spring Jewish holidays, including Passover.
9. Back to Peter’s arrest, Verse 4: After arresting him (Peter), he (Herod) 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) Herod decided to wait until after Passover to kill Peter? Why ?
    - i) Herod probably wanted to do a big public trial & execution after the holidays.
    - ii) During Passover, everybody is busy preparing meals. It is not a holiday for collective gathering in the temple.
    - iii) Herod, evil as he was, wanted to wait for the crowds to gather on the next Sabbath at the temple so he could make a big display of the death of Peter.
  - 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 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. Herod 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) Herod probably thought, oh, they escaped last time. The guards probably fell asleep and Peter got the keys. I won’t let that happen again, I’ll double the guards.
      - b) It was inconceivable to Herod that God is in charge, he thought, “All I have to do is try harder”, and I can stop Christianity by killing Peter.
10. Verse 5: So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
- a) OK, the church lost James. Now Peter was in jail like last time.
    - i) Last time, in Chapter 5, an angel sprung the apostles out of jail.
    - ii) Now that James was killed, I suspect this prayer-team had their doubts.
  - b) Notice Verse 5 says that they were praying *earnestly* for Peter. 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 5-9 and Luke 18, Verses 1-8. Both are parables teaching the value of *persistence* prayer.
      - c) My favorite is from Luke 11. To paraphrase, Jesus said, “A man knocks on your door at 3 am and asks for two loaves of bread. You say “hey, its

3 in the morning, come back tomorrow and I'll take care of you. The guy keeps knocking. Finally, you get out of bed, and give him what he wants just to get rid of him.

d) Jesus ends that story with "'So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11:9 NIV)

(1) I'm not exactly sure *why* God responds to persistent prayer, other than he loves us and wants the best for us.

(2) Again, it is also a matter of praying for *his* will, not our will.

(3) God's will was for Peter to get out of prison. God responded to the persistent prayers of his children to grant that request.

11. 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. <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.

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 jail cell 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? Sheer 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. (The verse is in the appendix of this chapter.)

b) He probably thought, "Well, this is it. Jesus said I would die a cruel death and this is it. Also, this is Passover season and Jesus was crucified on Passover. I might as well accept it. Lord, I'm coming to see you tomorrow". I can sleep comfortably now, knowing my fate.

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.

(1) Peter probably prayed to not be arrested. Didn't work.

(2) Peter probably prayed for his release for days. Didn't work.

(3) Peter probably witnessed to the guards. Didn't work.

(4) Nothing. Peter hit acceptance. Now God can work.

b) Another thing we tend to forget is God's power over the material world.

i) The first verse of the Bible says "God created the heavens the earth."

a) If you can handle that verse, you can handle any miracle in the Bible.

b) It is God's creation. If God wanted the chains off of Peter, no problem.

c) This angel probably snapped his finger, and the locks fell off the chains.

d) The angel probably put all the guards to sleep.

ii) Actually, God himself is responsible for all this. Angels are just messengers.

iii) 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 that “the” Angel of the Lord is Jesus himself *prior* to his birth.

- i) 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!

12. 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.

- 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.

13. 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.
    - a) Remember that Peter is still a wanted man.
  - ii) The application to us, if it not clear from God what he wants us to do next, do the “logical” thing! In this case, that means run!

14. 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. <sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl 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."

- 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 were 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) I take a lot of comfort in this story.
    - i) The disciples didn't *expect* God to answer their prayers. At least not in a way they expected. Despite this "lack of expectation", God answered their prayers anyway.
    - ii) Just because they lacked the faith to believe Peter was at the door, that didn't stop God from actually answering their prayer in the first place!
      - a) That alone is a comforting thought.
    - iii) There are churches that teach "name it and claim it"
      - a) All we have to do is "have faith" and God will answer any prayer we throw at him.
      - b) Well here, God answered a prayer that they didn't have enough faith to believe in. Yet despite their lack of faith, God still answered the prayer.
  - f) 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".
    - i) Therefore, for the sake of our own stress levels, we *all* (myself included) to praise God *in advance* for answering our prayers.
    - ii) God may not respond the *way* we want, but He *does* respond in a way that is best for everyone.
    - iii) This is why in the Lord's Prayer, the word for father, Abba means "daddy". We look to a loving, all-knowing father who knows what is best for us in every situation.
15. 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. <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 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) In Verse 17, Peter told them to be quiet, probably out of safety.
  - c) When Peter said "Tell James and the brothers", he is 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.
    - iii) This is speculation on my part, and some of my commentaries.
  - d) 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".
  - e) 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. (Galatians 2:11)
    - a) (Source for "i. & ii: Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia).
- 16. 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.<sup>19</sup> 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) 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.
- 17. Verse 19(b), continued: Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while.<sup>20</sup> 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.
- 18. Verse 21: On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.<sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."<sup>23</sup> 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)
        - (1) Herod knew enough about the Jewish religion to believe there is one “true God”. Herod’s problem was that he didn’t give God the credit for his rise to power.
  - 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)
19. Verse 24: But the word of God continued to increase and spread.
- i) Personally, I think when Luke wrote this verse, he had his fist in the air in triumph.
  - ii) Despite the evil of Herod, the Word of God continued to increase and spread!
  - iii) All through history, people have made attempts to thwart the Gospel? Despite persecution, death sentences, torture, ridicule, satire, this verse says it all:
    - a) But the word of God continued to increase and spread.
  - iv) 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. Despite every method imaginable, the worked of God moves on.
- b) 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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)

20. 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 mentions “John, who is also called Mark” was the author of the Gospel of Mark.

i) I think they called him Mark as to not get him confused with all the “John’s” running around there.

ii) If you remember, John-Mark is also mentioned in Verse 12. When all the disciples were praying, they were praying in John-Mark’s house.

iii) We also know is the cousin of Barnabus (Colossians 4:10)

iv) This is the guy who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

v) Most commentators believe Mark got most of his information from Peter.

Mark’s gospel is often nicknamed “Peter’s Gospel”, as it is from his perspective.

b) 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.

c) 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.

d) If you remember the last chapter, there was a prophecy about a famine in Jerusalem. Barnabus 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.

21. Well, that’s a wrap for this week. 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.

22. 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”

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Appendix. Josephus' account of the Death of Herod

From Josephus's book "Antiquities of the Jews"

(Josephus was/lived in, a 1<sup>st</sup> 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]).

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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.

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"Bonus Material" © Here is a hand out that goes with this lesson.  
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## Notes for Acts - Chapter 12 “The Power of Prayer”

### A Summary of Chapter 12:

- Verses 1-3 is King Herod killing James the apostle and persecuting the Christians.
  1. There are 4 “Herod's” and 3 “James” in the Bible. The notes below talks about each one.
  2. King Herod was in “cahoots” with the Jewish religious leaders to persecute Christians.
- Verses 4-11 is about Peter being arrested by Herod and an angel sets him free.
  1. Peter was arrested and chained to 2 prisoners.
  2. An angel sets him free without the guards realizing it (asleep?)
  3. The angel leads Peter out into the streets.
  4. Peter goes to the house where some disciples are staying.
- Verses 12-18 is about the reaction of the disciples to seeing Peter released from jail.
  1. These disciples were praying for Peter but were shocked when Peter was at the door.
- Verses 19-23 is about the reaction of King Herod and the death of King Herod.
  1. King Herod discovers the prisoners were set free and punishes the guards
  2. Verses 21-23 records how he died.
- Verses 24-25 is two “epilogue” statements.
  1. Verse 24 talks about the growth of the church after Herod's death.
  2. Verse 25 is a “bridge-verse” about Paul that leads to the events of Chapter 13.

### Introduction – We are at war. What do we do about it?

- Peter said, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1st Peter 5:8 NIV)
- If you don't believe the devil is real, try opposing him for awhile “Chuck Missler
- There is a “fixed” number of people who will become Christians before Jesus returns (As taught in Romans 11:25)
- Satan attacks us to *delay* the spread of Christianity and Jesus' return, thus persecution.
- God designed it that way to keep us close to him!

### Verse 1 – Who is “this” King Herod as spoken of in Chapter 12? There is more than one Herod:

- 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).
- There was Herod “Antipas”, a son of Herod the Great, who was the one who had John the Baptist killed. (Mark 6:27, et.al.).
- Here we have a grandson of Herod the Great: Agrippa I.
  - He grew up in Rome. Had a reputation as a playboy, and later, a ruthless, evil man.
  - His “buddies” in Rome set him up in power.
  - The #1 job of a Roman officer is “keep the peace”.
  - He befriended the Jewish leaders who were interested in stopping Christian growth.
- In Acts 25, we have *his* son, Agrippa II. Paul stands trial before Agrippa II.

### Verse 2 – James is killed. Who is “this” James? There is more than one James in the Bible.

- This James is the brother of John, who wrote Gospel of John, etc. He is one of the “12”.
- There was another of the “12” named James the son of Alphaeus, (Matthew 10:3), also referred to “James the less”, (Mark 15:40). Little else is said about this disciple.
- 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. “This” James is mentioned in Verse 17.
- Of the 12 disciples, 3 were the “inner circle”: This was Peter, James and his brother John.

## Notes for Acts - Chapter 12 (cont.)

Verse 2 – The death of James. Jesus “hinted” that James would die from persecution:

- ...Jesus said to them. "Can you (James/John) drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup...(Mat. 20:22-23, NIV)
- When Jesus said “this cup I’m going to drink”, it refers to violent death (See Mark 14:36)

Verse 5 – While Peter was in jail, the church was praying for Peter “earnestly”.

- Other translations say “without ceasing” (KJV) or “constant prayer” (NKJV)
- The New American Standard has “fervently”, which I think sums it up best.
- “Earnestly” 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.
- “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16b NKJV)
- 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.

Verse 6 –Peter is in jail and an angel comes to spring him.

- Jesus told Peter that he would be martyred for his faith
- I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (John 21:18-19 NIV)

Verse 12-16 – Christians pray for Peter. When Peter is at the door, they don’t believe it!

- There is a lesson to learn about prayer. Despite their “lack of faith” in God to answer the prayer, God answered it anyway.
- The mistake we make is we think our prayers aren’t answered because “we didn’t pray hard enough”. This lesson, and the Bible, does not teach that.

Verse 17 – When Peter spoke to the disciples, he said “Tell James”. Which James is this?

- This is James, the half-brother of Jesus, who became the leader of the Jerusalem church.
- (Matthew 13:55 NIV) "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Judas, a.k.a. Jude, who wrote Book of Jude)
- Paul said after Jesus was resurrected, “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, (1 Cor. 15:7 NIV) “All means all”. This James refers to Jesus’ brother James, then Jesus appeared to all the apostles..

Verse 17 –Peter “disappears” until Chapter 15.

- Commentators speculate Peter fled for his life.
- He may have hidden in Antioch, where Christians could “hide” him. Paul was in Antioch at this time and writes of an encounter with Peter. (See Galatians 2:11).

Verse 21 –Death of Herod

- The crowd in the public arena was yelling at Herod “The voice of a god and not of man”
- The Jewish Historian Josephus writes about this event (Antiquities. XIX, 343-50 [viii.2]).
- God will not share his glory with another. “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)

Verse 12 and 25 –Who is John-Mark?

- He is the cousin of Barnabus (Colossians 4:10)
- He wrote the Gospel of Mark.