

Acts 12

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Tape #8101
Pastor Chuck Smith

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Herod the king was Herod Agrippa 1. The first Herod that we meet in the New Testament is Herod the great. And Herod the great confused things tremendously by having ten wives and children by these different wives. So that most of his sons were only half brothers because most of them were born from different wives. He had two wives, to confuse things a little more, by the name of Mariamme. The one Mariamme he seemed to love more than the other wives. However he thought that she was conspiring with her sons to overthrow him so he had her put to death along with two of her sons. He then felt remorseful and built a beautiful tower for her in Jerusalem. But his other wife, Mariamme had a son by the name of Aristobulus. Aristobulus had a son by the name of Herod Agrippa 1. He had a daughter by the name of Herodias. Now another son, Herod Antipas was the Herod who was called the tetrarch, because he was over a third part of the original Herod's kingdom. He had built the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee as his capital because he was ruling over that section of the country. He was there at the time of the ministry of Christ. He was the one who at the instigation of Herodias, his wife, beheaded John the Baptist.

Now Herodias had originally married another Herod, Herod Philip. However, when Herod Antipas was going to Rome, he stopped by and visited his half brother and fell in love with his wife, Herodias, who was also his niece. So he went on to Rome. When he came back she ran off with him. He married her. That is where John the Baptist got into trouble because he said you shouldn't have Herodias, you know, she is your brother's wife. It is wrong. So she held that against John the Baptist. At an opportune time she had John the Baptist's head delivered on a charger. But this Herod Agrippa then was the brother of Herodias. So there is a relationship there. Herod Agrippa was sort of a ner do well. He was educated in Rome. He lived a very extravagant life. He ran up a lot of debts in Rome. He finally came into disfavor with the ruling Caesar in Rome, who sort of banished him to an Idumean fortress called Malpha. There he became so despondent and discouraged that he contemplated suicide. But his wife talked to Herodias, the wife of Herod Antipas. So Herod Antipas gave him a job of inspecting the market places and gave him a salary. That went along well for a little while but then they got into a big argument. A public kind of an argument. Herod Agrippa then took off and went up to Syria where he had a school buddy who was sort of a ruler up there. Then they got in a big argument. So he headed back to Rome. While in Rome he became acquainted with Gains Caligua. He then though got in trouble because he was telling Gains Caligua that Tiberias who was the present emperor of Rome. He said he ought to relinquish the kingdom of Rome to you because you're much more skilled than he is. Well a servant heard that and reported it to Tiberias. So Tiberias had Herod Agrippa put in jail. Six months later Tiberias died and Caligua took over. He gave to Herod Agrippa I a gold chain. The weight of the chain was the same weight as was the chain that held him in prison. He also gave to him the rulership over a portion of Judea.

So he came back now to Judea with the title of king. King Agrippa. I mean King Agrippa 1. This made Herod Antipas angry and his sister Herodias was furious. So she pushed Antipas to go to Rome so he could get the title of king too.

Herod Agrippa heard that Antipas was going to Rome for this purpose so he sent messengers ahead with bad reports about him, so that when he came to Caligua to get the title of king, actually, he was banished. He lost his kingdom. It was given then with his properties to Herod Agrippa 1.

Now as Herod Agrippa came into power in Judea, he wanted to curry the favor of the Jews. He was a favorite of the Jews because he had made a study of the Jewish religion. He kept their holidays. That impressed them. Usually the Roman rulers were quite indifferent to the spiritual needs of the Jews. But not Herod Agrippa. Thus he was a favorite of the Jews. But to further his ingratiating from them, he, as

we have here in our text, stretched out his hand to harass some of the church. *2Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.* This is of course one of the sons of thunder, the sons of Zebedee. He was in the inner circle with Jesus. He, his brother John and Peter were chosen by Jesus for special occasions. When Jesus was transfigured, He took Peter, James and John into the high mountain. They were the ones that witnessed the transfiguration. When Jesus came to the house of Jairus, whose daughter had died. Jesus put all of the people out of the house, but He took Peter, James and John into the room when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Later on when Jesus was in the garden praying, the night that He was betrayed, He sent the disciples in one place and said, Tarry ye here. And He took Peter, James and John a little further. He put them closer to Him as He commanded them to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. So one of the three that was chosen by Jesus to be a part of the inner circle, he with his brother John and Peter. So Herod killed James with a sword. He beheaded him.

3And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Now according to the tradition, no one was to be tried or no one was to be put to death during the holiday of Unleavened Bread.

4So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, So he put Peter in prison and he delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers. Now a quaternion is four. So you might say today, four quartets. So there were sixteen soldiers who were given charge to watch Peter. They would work in shifts. And thus you have the four shifts, consisting of six hours in which the groups then would be replaced by another. Now as a general rule, and it was broken with Peter, the prisoner would be chained to his guard. His right hand to the guard's left hand. In Peter's case he was chained to two guards, one on either side. Then there was another guard at the door of the cell, another guard at the door of the ward of the prison. And thus there were four guards constantly on duty watching Peter, *intending to bring him before the people after Passover).* He intended to bring him after Easter. Now the word Easter is put there in the old King James by the English translators. In the Greek, it is after the Passover. But because there is a relationship between Easter and Passover, the translators used the word Easter, but that is not in the original Greek text. But after this Feast of Unleavened Bread, which in conjunction with the Feast of Passover and follows the Feast of Passover, seven days afterwards, he was intending to bring him after the feast because then they could legally again have a trial.

5Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. So how long he was in prison we don't know. Maybe a few days that he was there in prison, awaiting the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that he might be tried and of course, executed.

And when Herod was about to bring him out, (the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) that night Peter was sleeping bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. 7Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the Prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. 8Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals." And so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me. " 9So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. He thought he was dreaming. This is a vision, you know. And so he went out and followed him. 10When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. He got a block away and the angel departed. 11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people." I recognize that God has set me free. He has delivered me. Now it's interesting to me that God is not limited to methods. He can work and often does work by a variety of methods. I think it is dangerous for us to try to sort of formulize God. To develop methodology which we are so prone to do. It's so easy for us to get into a rut. This is the way God did it and so this is the way God does it! And we get caught in a rut. I think that that is one of the problems

with the church. I think that the church has been caught in a rut. That is speaking of the church in general. There are many churches that are still following the same form, singing the same hymns that they did two hundred years ago. Three hundred years ago. They are caught in a rut. And the only difference between a rut and a grave is the length and the depth. And thus the churches are dead! A dead formalism or ritualism. God works in a variety of ways. I think in each age God is very contemporary with the age in the way and the method by which He works. As we have seen God work, we have seen Him work in a very special way. And we have seen Him raise up a special style of worship. The worship music that we have. Now it seems that in every movement of God, the movement has had its own music that sorts of represented that period of time.

Martin Luther of course, was in an attempt to reform the church. His attempts at reformation failed because he was excommunicated from the church. He did not plan to start a new church. He was seeking to reform the old church. But it's hard to pour new wine into old skins! So Martin Luther was excommunicated. But not more than that, the church then decided to make war against the reformation movement. There were many horrible battles fought over the reformation. So the music of Martin Luther sort of expresses the militancy. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing! You know, I mean you get the power. The militant force that was there. He was criticized for the music that he wrote. He did write many hymns. But because they broke away from the chants, he was criticized. Because the music told stories. The music made sense. The words, thus he came under heavy criticism. But yet now, the music that he wrote which was reflective of that time, bonded him to the church. They became the traditional old hymns of the church.

Then Dwight Moody came along with his song leader, Ira Sanke. And Sanke introduced a whole new style of church music. A little more light and still very contemporary. In fact Sanke took a lot of the worldly tunes of his day and wrote Christian words to them. He got into an awful lot of trouble because he took worldly tunes and wrote Christian words to them, and thus there was a lot of criticism. But now those songs of Sanke are the old hymns of the church. And we revere them as the old hymns of the church.

Now we see a whole new form of music coming out of this movement of God. And one day they will say oh the good old hymns of the church as they sing some of our choruses which shook so many people today because of the contemporary nature of them. But in time they will be accepted as part of the whole history of the hymnology of the church.

God is not bound to methods. Later on God is going to release Paul and Silas from the Philippian jail. But rather than sending an angel to open the doors and escort them out. God's going to shake the walls down. He sends an earthquake. Shakes the walls down and Paul and Silas are released. So He is a God of variety. Don't try and put him in a box. He won't be confined to a box. And that is what really so often happens. I think that that's sort of the foundation of most denominations. This is how God moved when this denomination, this movement of God, was raised up. This is how God moved. This is the music that God used. And you get caught in a time warp. Because you think that this is how God moves. So God, help us to remain flexible. That we don't get into a time warp and in years to come, people will say, well Chuck Smith did it this way. Pastor Chuck says, well, forget him! Be open to what God wants to do. If He wants to have a new movement, if He wants to work in a new way, praise the Lord! And let's be open to the moving of God and the moving of His Holy Spirit, though it may break from the way it was when God first began the movement here.

So here is Peter, delivered from prison in a very interesting way, When Peter had come to himself. He was free out on the streets. *12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.* Now remember back in verse five, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. So he knew where Mary's house was. There are traditions that say that the Last Supper was at her house. She was the mother of John Mark. Mark, the author of the second gospel. The church was meeting in his mother's house. John Mark, later joined with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. However, half way through the first missionary journey, Mark got homesick and he decided to go home. So he left Paul and

Barnabas, who went on together over into Asia. Later when Paul and Barnabas got ready to go on their second missionary journey, Mark said, oh, I want to go with you! And he was the nephew of Barnabas. So Barnabas said fine. But Paul said, oh, no, no! He deserted us the first time. I don't want him to go now. Barnabas said, well, now he's different. He's grown up. He's matured. Come on let's take him. Paul said, no I won't take him, you know. So the contention between Paul and Barnabas was so great that they split fellowship. Barnabas took Mark and he headed off to Cyprus. Paul took Silas and they headed off into Asia minor.

Later on Paul is writing to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:11). And he said bring Mark with you. He's been of great help and comfort to me. So the breach that was created was healed and so Paul makes mention of Mark once more.

Now there at his mother's home in Jerusalem. They believe that Mark was only about twelve years old when Jesus was crucified. Mark's gospel has an interesting little insight that isn't in the other gospels. Mark's gospel (Mark 14:51) tells us that when Jesus was arrested in the garden, one of the soldiers grabbed a small lad who wriggled free leaving his coat or his robe in the soldier's hand and ran naked out of the garden. And Mark there was giving his own little personal experience of what happened to him. He was young, but loved to hang around. As there are those little boys that love to hang around the action. Mark was one of those and was there in the garden when Jesus was arrested. So he had a background in the things of the Lord from early youth.

13And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14When she recognized Peter's voice, because of gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15But they said to her, "You are beside yourself." They said to her, you're crazy! Now remember prayer was made constantly or without ceasing of the church unto God for Peter. He came to the house where they were praying for his release. There is a knock at the gate. A young girl goes to find out who is there and Peter said, it's me open up! She was so excited she forgot to open the gate. She just ran in and said, Peter's outside! And they said you're crazy! He's in jail.

I wonder if sometimes we put an over emphasis even on our faith as a necessity for answered prayer. Because obviously they didn't have faith! God works in sovereign ways His wonders to perform! And though there was a lack of faith in their prayers, still God answered the prayers. Have you ever been surprised when God answered your prayer? I have! I've prayed earnestly for things. And when God answered, wow! I can't believe it! And so they were.

Yet she kept insisting that it was so. Yes, it is! Peter is there! He really is! *So they said, "It is his angel. 16Now Peter continued knocking; and when he opened the door and saw him, they were astonished."* I love it that God gives us insight into the weaknesses of people as well as the strengths. So many times we look at men of God. Men that God has used. We think of them as kind a little above human. We think of them on some kind of a spiritual plateau that is impossible for us to reach. But God shows to us their frailties. God shows to us their imperfections. I believe He does that in order to encourage us that we might know that God can use imperfect people. Now I personally get great comfort reading about Peter. And realizing that God could use Peter. And if He could use Peter, then maybe He could use me! And so we are given insight into the flaws in order that we might be encouraged to realize that God uses plain, ordinary people to accomplish His purposes.

17But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the Prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren. " And he departed and went to another place. Now the James that he is talking about here has become a recognized leader in the early church. This James to whom Peter is referring, of course, is not James, the brother of John. He's already been martyred. But this is James, the brother of Jesus, who did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. And Jesus appeared to him. He became one of the leaders of the early church. This is the James that wrote the epistle of James. The practical epistle. So Peter said go tell these things to James and to the brethren. And he departed and went to another place.

Interestingly enough, this is sort of the end of the story of Peter in the Book of Acts except when the first church counsel was called in chapter fifteen to determine what part the law should play with the

Gentile believers, actually to determine whether or not you could be saved and be a Gentile. Peter does speak at the church counsel. There he recounts how God called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. And Peter suggested that they not put on them the yoke of bondage which neither we or our fathers were able to bear. Let's not try and put them under the law. We weren't able to handle it! But as far as anything more of Peter's story, we don't know. It's gone. This is the final account. He just went out to another place.

Now no doubt, he went into hiding from Herod Agrippa because you can be sure that a tremendous search was on for Peter. And thus he, no doubt, went in for a period of time into hiding from Herod Agrippa. We do know that Peter did go to the church at Antioch. Created a little problem with his vacillation. Paul had to deal with it as Paul tells us in Galatians. Tradition has it that he went to Rome. There is nothing to back up that tradition. The story of Rome where he was encouraged by the saints there to flee Rome because Nero was seeking him to crucify him. And as Peter was fleeing from Rome, according to the tradition, Jesus met him on the road. And said, "Quo Vadis", where are you going? Or Peter said to Jesus, "Quo Vadis" and Jesus said I'm going to Rome to be crucified again. And Peter took that as the fact that the Lord wanted Peter, there who identified with Jesus in death, and so Peter went back to Rome and was crucified. According to tradition, upside down, because he said he was not worthy to be crucified as his Lord! That's all tradition. There could be fact to part of it or to all of it. We don't know, but you can't, you know, the Scripture sort of ends here the account of Peter's ministry and Peter's life.

18Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. 19But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards (the keepers) and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there. He was angry. He ordered the guards to be put to death but that was Roman law. If you were given a prisoner to watch and if that prisoner escaped then you had to serve his sentence, which indicates that was Herod's intention to put Peter to death and thus those soldiers that were required to watch him took the sentence that would have been Peter's, and thus they were put to death.

20Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their court was supplied with food by the king's court. Now Herod Agrippa ruled over this area. He was in Caesarea, which is probably forty miles south of Tyre, but the people of Tyre and Sidon were nourished, that is they got their food from Israel. Israel to the present day is very fertile and supplies much of Europe with the fruits and the vegetables, especially in the winter season. Because in the area of the Jordan valley they grow fresh vegetables all year round. So the men of Tyre had come down to sort of placate Herod. To make up and to get things all in order again with Herod.

21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Now Josephus records this event. He tells us how that Herod came into the theater in Caesarea. He was wearing a robe that was made of silver. This robe there in the theater glistened in the sun and all of the people began to shout, "He is a god. He is a god." And Josephus tells us that he got stomach cramps and that five days later he died. That's the way history records this event. Here we are told he was in royal apparel. Now just a few weeks ago we were in the theater in Caesarea. The place where the very theater that was there at the time of Herod, the theater where he made this oration to the men of Tyre who acclaimed him as a god, as he was there in this royal silver apparel, glistening in the sun. And we read that the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" *23Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him,* So Josephus said he got stomach cramps. The Bible tells us what's behind it. The angel of the Lord smote him *because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.* Within five days he was dead.

24But (the little postscript to the chapter) the word of God grew and multiplied. You see he was attempting to wipe out the church. He was going to set himself against the work of God. He was going to curry the favor of the Jews by attacking the leadership, by putting to death the leadership of the church.

So he took one of the major leaders, James, had him beheaded. He saw that it was pleasing the Jews and so he put Peter in jail and was going to kill Peter also. And kill off the leadership and thus seek to destroy the church. But rather than the church being destroyed, the word of God grew and multiplied!

Jesus had told His disciples that He was going to build His church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. Here the gates of Hell were seeking to prevail against the church but instead of destroying the church as the result of these things, the word of God grew and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, Now this takes us back to chapter eleven. Barnabas and Saul were ministering in the church of Antioch, the Gentile church of Antioch. And they had taken up a collection for the poor brothers in Jerusalem. And so they had brought the money, the offering from Antioch, they had brought it to the church in Jerusalem to help them in their needs. And this was their ministry, having fulfilled the ministry, that is having delivered the money that they had collected for the church in Jerusalem, they returned back to Antioch *and the also took with them John whose surname was Mark.* So Barnabas took his nephew, John Mark, back to Antioch with them.

That then brings us up to chapter thirteen, where the first team was sent out, not from the church in Jerusalem, but from the church in Antioch. And from now on, the church in Antioch, Will become the main church of that time. 'The missionary activities and the spread of the gospel will no longer be from the church in Jerusalem but from the church in Antioch. And we will see that in our next lesson as we go into chapter thirteen.

Father, again we are thankful for the work of Your Holy Spirit in the church. And Lord, we just thank You for the variety of ways in which You work in people's lives. Thank You Lord for the way You have worked in our lives. And now, Lord, we pray that we might be open to the work of Your Holy Spirit. We thank you Lord for the way that You have worked in the past, but we realize, Lord, that You might want to do a new work and we want to be open to that. Lead us by Your Spirit. Direct us, Lord, as a church. We recognize that Jesus is the head of His body, the church. So, Lord, we are here to get instructions and orders from You. We are here to obey Your will. To do Your bidding. And so guide, Lord, in the ministry of this church. May we be, Lord, everything You want us to be. Your witness unto the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.