

Outline

1. Herod persecutes the church
 1. Kills James
 2. Imprisons Peter and intends to kill him
2. Peter freed
 1. Given to four squads of soldiers
 2. Chained to two soldiers
 3. Angel frees Peter, to Peter's own disbelief
3. Peter goes to Mary's house
 1. Many had gathered to pray for Peter
 2. Rhoda hears him knock, but leaves him outside
 3. He tells how he was freed and asks that others be told
 4. Soldiers put to death
4. Herod's death
 1. Leaves for Caesarea
 2. Citizens of Tyre and Sidon flatter him by calling him a "god"
 3. Is immediately stricken and dies
5. Saul & Barnabus return
 1. Their jobs as messengers was complete
 2. They return to Antioch with John Mark.

Commentary

Herod figures prominently in Acts 12. It is, therefore, important that we understand which Herod that we're discussing.



Herod the king here mentioned is Herod Agrippa I., grandson of Herod the Great, and son of Aristobulus and Bernice. During the reign of Tiberius he

“

resided at Rome, in alternate favour and disgrace, sometimes banished, sometimes a prisoner, sometimes a guest at the imperial court. He was a great friend of Caius Cæsar Caligula, and, on his succeeding to the empire on the death of Tiberius, was promoted by him to the tetrarchy of Herod Philip, with the title of king. He was further advanced three years afterwards to the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas; and, on the accession of Claudius to the throne, Judæa and Samaria were added to his dominions, which now comprised the whole kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great. Agrippa, in spite of his close intimacy with Drusus, Caligula, Claudius, and other Roman magnates, was “exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country, not allowing a day to pass without its appointed sacrifice;” and he had given proof of his strong Jewish feeling by interposing his whole influence with Caligula to prevent his statue being placed in the holy of holies. This spirit accounts for his enmity against the Church (Spence-Jones, 378).

This gives us some idea behind Luke’s statement that Herod “stretched out his hand to harass some from the church” (Acts 12:1) and then continued his persecution of Christians when he saw “that it pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:3).

Luke gives no indication of the reason why James and Peter were arrested. It may, however, be somewhat safely assumed that what we witness here is merely Herod taking up the persecution started with the stoning of Stephen.

Concerning the conditions of Peter’s imprisonment, A. T. Robertson says:

“

Four soldiers in each quaternion (τετραδιον [tetradion] from τετρας [tetras], four), two on the inside with the prisoner (chained to him) and two on the outside, in shifts of six hours each, sixteen soldiers in all, the usual Roman custom. Probably Agrippa had heard of Peter’s previous escape (Acts 5:19) and



so took no chances for connivance of the jailors. (Robertson)

The Greek word πάσχα (pascha) is found 29 times in the New Testament. In the KJV, it is translated 28 times as “Passover” and 1 time as “Easter” (Strong). Most modern versions have reverted back to “Passover” in this verse. By this time it would have had reference to a feast which lasted 8 days, encompassing both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So, Herod’s intent was not merely to keep Peter in prison overnight. Rather, some days would have gone by.

Peter’s response to his release likely indicates that he knew both that his brethren were praying for him and that they were doing so at Mary’s house.

Roman law subjected a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape to the same penalty as the escapee would have suffered. Thus, the guards were put to death.

Herod speaks well and is glorified as a deity. He perishes in very short order. In contrast, “the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

Thought questions

Consider the following thought questions:

1. How difficult do you think it would have been for Herod to arrest James and Peter?
2. Why would God deliver Peter rather than allow him to be killed?
3. Why did those at Mary’s house declare that Rhoda was “mad?” (Acts 12:15)
4. Where do you think that Peter went when he departed? (Acts 12:17)
5. What can you discover from other sources about the death of Herod?