

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

**John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.**

Forty-Seventh Week - Third Day

### DEATH OF HEROD-AGRIPPA

*"Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there. Now 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 country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:18-24).*

There was great consternation in the prison the next morning when it was found that Peter was absent. It would seem as if the guards had been thrown into a deep sleep, seeing that they had not been awakened by any of the circumstances that occurred; for had they been cognizant of these but passive through terror, they would not have been so much surprised "as soon as it was day."

Herod was in high wrath when he heard that Peter had disappeared despite the precautions he had taken. He caused a diligent search to be made for him, and when no trace of him could be found he questioned the soldiers. Finding that they could not, or, as he perhaps supposed, would not throw any light on the matter, he ordered that they should be put to death. In ancient times it was generally regarded as a capital offense for a prisoner to escape, and it must have seemed clear that in this case the guards either had been asleep at their post or had taken part in effecting Peter's escape. Herod most likely inclined to the latter.

Afterward Herod proceeded to Caesarea. Since the completion of the great works and public buildings that his grandfather had established there, it had become the political metropolis of the country. Soon after his arrival a grand commemoration was held in honor of the emperor, the precise occasion of which we do not know. A large influx of the great and noble made their way to Caesarea arrayed in the gorgeous garments of the East; and the theater built by the elder Herod must have presented a splendid sight with them sitting on its stone seats rising tier above

tier in the open air. Here the usual games were celebrated, such as gladiatorial combats and the like. Herod-Agrippa had contracted a taste for these savage sports when at Rome, and had introduced them into Judea. The stricter Jews had a creditable dislike of these sports; but here in Caesarea, where a very large proportion, if not a majority, of the inhabitants were Greeks, there was never a lack of spectators to fill the theater.

On the second day Herod appeared in the theater attired in extraordinary splendor. It was his intention, before the games commenced, to hear from the ambassadors who came from Tyre and Sidon. These anciently renowned and still thriving cities were not in the king's own territory, but they enjoyed some share of independence under the Romans. As their domains were small and all their attention was given to manufacture and commerce, they depended almost entirely upon Herod's territory for the requisite supplies of corn and other agricultural produce. Their country, in fact, as the sacred historian remarks, was "nourished by the king's country." It was therefore of the utmost importance that they should be on good terms with him. But they had, from some cause or other, incurred Herod's deep displeasure. In order to put an end to the threatened evils or those already incurred, they traveled to Caesarea. Here they obtained a public audience with the king, having first made a friend of Blastus the king's chamberlain--no doubt by means of a handsome gift.

Josephus informs us that the king's dress on this day was of silver tissue, which shone with a brilliant radiance in the morning sun. The effulgence was probably heightened by numerous splendid jewels. At this day, as in ancient days, the kings of Persia appoint such an hour as will best enable them, when receiving ambassadors, to display in full sunshine the dazzling brilliance of their jeweled garments. It is on record that the title, "He of the resplendent raiment," was added to the name of one monarch because his regal ornaments, glittering in the sun's rays, so dazzled the eyes of the beholders that they could scarcely endure the brightness, and some courtiers professed their inability to distinguish between the person of the monarch and the great luminary of day.

Arrayed in such royal apparel, Herod took his place upon his high seat in the theater. He proceeded to make a speech, most likely concerning the matter brought by the Tyrian embassy. Just as he concluded speaking, the rays of the morning sun played upon his royal garb and gave a most dazzling appearance; and on seeing this, the heathen courtiers and Tyrian ambassadors raised a shout hailing him as a god! Herod accepted this homage, or at least did not repel it. As a Jew, however, he should have repelled it with horror and indignation. Of all who ever accepted such adulation none was so guilty as Herod, for he knew the truth--that there is but one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that He is a very jealous God who will not give his glory to another. Of this he was instantly reminded, for "immediately the angel of God smote him, because he gave not God the glory." Herod was seized with horrid torments in the intestines; and he who had just been greeted as a god was borne forth in all his splendid raiment amid groans and cries and tears, declaring that he had received his death stroke and acknowledging the hand of God in his punishment. Herod survived five days in extreme torture, being "eaten of worms," and then died a horrid and loathsome death.