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March 10, 2024

## James Killed, Peter Imprisoned

**1Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his* hands to vex certain of the church.**

From Strong's Concordance, Greek to vex.

κακωσαι verb - aorist active middle or passive deponent  
kakoo kak-o'-o: to injure; figuratively, to exasperate -- make evil affected, entreat evil, harm, hurt, vex.

Stoning was the Jewish means of injuring/capital punishment so to have someone killed in another way was a symbol of a civil authority intervening in or at the request of the Jewish Religious Authority. There is no indication that Herod's even though he was of Jewish ancestry and a dedication Jew included going to the temple itself to bring sacrifices. That would likely not look good to the Roman Elites. In this case as well as that of the Lord's Crucifixion, the Jews instigated the matter and the Roman legal system. Usually based on some real or imagined breach of Roman Law. Roman authorities would carried out the execution on behalf or in line with the Jewish Elites wanted.

Herod here is Herod Agrippa grandson of Herod the Great.

From Pulpit Commentary about the ups and downs of Herod Agrippa.

*“During the reign of Tiberius he resided at Rome, in alternate favor and disgrace, sometimes banished, sometimes a prisoner, sometimes a guest at the imperial court”.*

More about Herod Agrippa and his friendship with Caligula from Pulpit Commentary:

*“Caius Caesar 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.”*

Herod Agrippa was the last Jewish King. He maintained his devotion to the Jewish Law and the sacrifices at the temple. It was this dedication to Judaism that caused him to side against Christianity and persecute Christians.

**2And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.**

This of course is James the brother of John the Apostle. Together Jesus called them the “sons of thunder”. They were apparently quite boisterous in their mannerisms which continued as they spread the Good News of Christ. That energetic nature they possessed may have been one of the reasons that James was singled out for beheading. There is a series of lost/found historical documents, (Clement of Alexandria) (non-Biblical) written about

the martyrs of Christianity. One such document is about the martyring of James. This from Pulpit Commentary in Strong's Concordance:

*“Eusebius relates an anecdote of his martyrdom, extracted from the lost work of Clement of Alexandria, called the Ὑποτυώσεις (or in Latin Adumbrations),*

**(Adumbration means making a faith resemblance of something)**

(my addition)

*which Clement professed to have received by tradition from his predecessors, to the effect that the informer who accused James was so struck with his constancy in confessing Christ before the judge, that he came forward and confessed himself a Christian too.”*

The story continues that after James's accuser was being led away with James that he asked James to forgive him. After only a moments hesitation James reportedly said; “Peace be unto thee” , kissed him and both were then beheaded.

This was a fulfillment of Jesus prophesy to James: James and John's mother who was Jesus Aunt asked that they both sit beside Jesus in Heaven.

***Matthew 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.***

**3**And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

The elite Jewish rulers were pleased to see the Roman Government under Herod behead James. Seeing their reaction to that execution it emboldened Herod to then grab Peter.

**4**And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

“Four quaternions” means four sets of four soldiers. Two soldiers would be with the prisoner 24/7. They would divide the 24-hour day up among them.

The term “Easter” here is perhaps not as precise as need be. This is a reference to the “Feast of Passover” which in Aramaic is “Pesach”, which is where the English word “Passover” derives. Passover lasted 7 days and this was likely intended to convey how long Peter was held. Herod would not allow trials or executions during the Passover period of 7 days.

We know it is the Passover because of the use of the term as an explanation (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) The Passover required the removal of all leaven from the homes of devout Jews and lasted for 7 days.

We get the Christian word “Easter” from the foundational word east or looking to the rising sun. It represented the Christian fact that the Son of God was Raised up on a specific day, Sunday the first day of the week, the first day of new life in Christ.

### **Peter Rescued**

**5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.**

The Church prayed tirelessly for their brother in Christ. They did not know what the Elites and King Herod would do with Peter, but feared he would meet the same fate as James had.

**6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.**

That strikes me as a high value prisoner; chained between to guard, with the additional guard at the door of his cell.

It also indicates that this was at the end of Passover, due to Herod now willing to bring Peter “forward” or to judgement.

**7And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.**

The chains (2) of them would go from each of Peter's hands to a hand on each guard. When the angel woke Peter, he removed the chains from Peter's hands (chains fell off from his hands). That would not disturb the sleeping guards as the chains were still attached to their wrists.

**8And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.**

Get dressed, get your shoes on and follow me. somnambulism

**9And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.**

There is a medical term called; "somnambulism", it means to "sleepwalk". The person is not fully conscious and is moving around in a state of semi consciousness. Peter according to vs 9 though he was having a dream as he maneuvered around and out of the prison.

**10When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went**

**out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.**

Based on the description of where Peter had to maneuver it is believed he was in the deepest part of the prison. He had to pass two guards or guards' positions to reach the main gate which opened at his approach. He was then deposited in a narrow street. At that point, the angel departed as he was now free of his captors.

**11And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.***

This was the point in time that Peter realized what was happening to him was not a dream or vision and he was not sleepwalking but was literally an escape prisoner. Free from the clutches of Herod and from what would have been the desire of the Jews to have him killed like James was.

**12And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.**

This Mary is likely a wealthy widow according to most commentaries. Her house was likely large and would be the place where the disciples would meet due to its size. John Mark is a cousin to Barnabas and accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their

first missionary journey. John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas on this journey after a dismal time in Cyprus (only one convert). Mark is also the author of the Book of Mark.

**13And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.**

Luke of course is the writer of the Book of Acts. Consider several things here. Luke gives us the name of a young slave girl who opened a door. The point is that Luke attested to his ability to investigate things thoroughly. I'd say to name the slave girl who opened the door to Peter as pretty thorough.

Secondly a slave girl who's only job was to answer a door. It was common practice to not open the door at night without ascertaining who it was and what they wanted. Especially for Christians living in Jerusalem. A night knock was not a welcome sound.

Thirdly, this slave girl's name has lived on for several thousands of years in the Bible of our Lord God.

**14And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.**

Being a good door keeper, she did not take it upon herself to open the door but to tell the others who was at the door. It

seemed so preposterous that Peter whom they all knew was held deep in the lairs of the Jerusalem prison would now be at the front door wanting in.

**15And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.**

This kind of sounds like fake news we are accustomed to today from all the talking heads when they don't know the facts they make stuff up. First the girl was "mad" insane, not trustworthy? Then they lit on the idea that well it must be Peter's angel that is outside knocking? Really!

**16But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened *the door*, and saw him, they were astonished.**

There may have been a little frustration in Peter as he was an escaped felon out in the street knocking on a door in the middle of the night and the folks inside were not responding well.

Finally, they opened the door and were astonished at his presence. An understatement.

**17But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.**

Peter had an agenda that needed to be carried out quickly. First, he would explain what happened to all of those at Mary's house. He would then go to find James to tell him what had happened and likely get some help escaping Jerusalem as he was undoubtedly a hunted man.

There is no shortage of controversy as to which James is spoken of here. We know it is not James the brother of John as he had been recently beheaded. The primary candidate is James the half-brother of Jesus. It is reported historically but not Biblically that James the half-brother of Jesus was called "James the Just" and was elevated to the first Bishop or leader of the Church in Jerusalem by several of the Apostles.

**18Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.**

This escape put these 16 soldiers who were to guard Peter in a bind with the King and their own higher ups. Simple question; where is your prisoner?

**19And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and *there* abode.**

Kings were notoriously not compassionate toward their soldiers failures. In this case, King Herod likely had his generals

investigate what had happened and then killed everyone who was involved. Remember the guards that were sent to guard Jesus' tomb. Things did not go well for them either.

But God. Earthly Kings and rulers are of the elite class and hold themselves to a lesser standard than they hold others. That lack of inspection can only lead to problems.

The following is not a chronological continuation of the previous events, Luke jumps to the demise of Herod but shows a connection between Herod's actions and the outcome of his life.

### **The Death of Herod**

**20And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's *country*.**

Tyre and Sidon to the north of Herod's kingdom of Palestine was under Roman rule. Herod did not like that nor the people. Blastus was somehow related to these folks in Tyre and Sidon, so he made an effort to convince King Herod to send wheat to his people.

**21And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.**

Herod's ego was of course fully engaged and thought it best to give a lengthy speech extolling the virtues of the himself.

**22And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.***

Herod got what he wanted and that was the over-the-top gratitude of this subjects, extoling him as a god.

**23And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.**

The demise of those who represent themselves as equals with God the Most High.

**24But the word of God grew and multiplied.**

Peter was free to help spread the Gospel. The Apostles and disciples were out doing the missionary work assigned them, and the Body of Christ was growing.

**25And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.**

John Mark, again the author of the Book of Mark. Went on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas which will be studied later.

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