

Herod's Worms

Acts 12:21-13:1

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." 23 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. 24 But the word of God continued to increase and spread. 25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. NIV

Acts 12:23

[And was eaten of worms] Whether this was the morbus pedicularis, or whether a violent inflammation of his bowels, terminating in putrefaction, did not actually produce worms, which, for several days, swarmed in his infected entrails, we cannot tell. It is most likely that this latter was the case; and this is at once more agreeable to the letter of the text, and to the circumstances of the case as related by Josephus.[And gave up the ghost.] That is, he died of the disorder by which he was then seized, after having lingered, in excruciating torments, for five days, as Josephus has stated. Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great died of the same kind of disease. See the observations at the end of Acts 1 relative to the death of Judas(from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Biblesoft)

Acts 12:23

And immediately the (or 'an') angel of the Lord smote him, because, [anth' (NT:473) hoon (NT:3739)] he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. The medical precision of the phrase here employed to describe Herod's disease [genomenos (NT:1096) skooleekobrootos (NT:4662)] - in which it has the advantage of Josephus'-has been often remarked on, as coming naturally from "the beloved physician." It is remarkable that this Herod's grandfather, Herod the Great, died of the same horrible disease. Josephus' account of Herod's death (Ant. xix. 8. 2) strikingly confirms that of our historian. According to him, Herod was at Caesarea (as Luke represents him to be), presiding over the games in honour of Caesar. On the second day of the games, the theater being filled to the ceiling, Agrippa entered at daybreak, clothed in a robe all worked throughout with silver, on which the rays of the morning sun alighting, he appeared as if all irradiated with glory: voices here and there saluted him as a god; and on his making an oration to them, they shouted, We have taken thee for a man, but henceforth we recognize in thee a god! The king rebuked them not, nor showed any displeasure at this impiety; but after awhile, looking up, he saw an owl perched on a rope over his head, and immediately, taking this for an ill omen, he was filled with remorse, and seized with violent pain in his bowels, exclaiming to his friends, Your god is already

come to his life's end, and he whom you saluted immortal is going away to die. To such a height did the pain rise, that he had to be carried hastily into the palace, where, after five days' torture, he expired in his fifty-fourth year. The slight difference between this account and Luke's tends only to confirm the accuracy of it.

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Acts 12:20-25

(2.) It was no more than a worm that was the instrument of Herod's destruction: He was eaten of worms, *genomenos skolekobrotos*-he became worm-eaten, so it must be read; rotten he was, and he became like a piece of rotten wood. The body in the grave is destroyed by worms, but Herod's body putrefied while he was yet alive, and bred the worms which began to feed upon it betimes; so Antiochum, that great persecutor, died. See here,[1.] What vile bodies those are which we carry about with us; they carry about with them the seeds of their own dissolution, by which they will soon be destroyed whenever God does but speak the word. Surprising discoveries have of late been made by microscopes of the multitude of worms that there are in human bodies, and how much they contribute to the diseases of them, which is a good reason why we should not be proud of our bodies, or of any of their accomplishments, and why we should not pamper our bodies, for this is but feeding the worms, and feeding them for the worms.

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

See Josephus "The Antiquities of the Jews" Book XIX; chap. VIII; 2