

Herod and Peter.

MAY 20.

ACTS XII: 1-17.

Golden Text, Ps. 34: 7.

WHILE Paul and Barnabas are preaching at Antioch and receiving contributions for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Herod is bent on exterminating the Christians. *Herod Agrippa I.* was grandson of Herod the Great, clever, pompous, crafty, and licentious. His short reign, from A.D. 37-44, was stained by many acts of cruelty. His impety cost him his life. He died miserably, v. 23. V. 1. *Stretched forth his hand*—exercised his arbitrary authority. *To vex*—"afflict," R. V. *Certain*—those who were taking the lead in the church. V. 2. *James*—the elder, the only one of the twelve (not to mention Judas) whose death is mentioned in scripture. The record is very brief, and fulfils the prediction in Matt. 20: 23. *With the sword*—He was beheaded by Herod's orders, not by decree of the council which would have condemned him to be stoned. *Because it pleased the Jews*—what will some men not do for popularity? *Peter*, no longer ashamed to own his Lord, was specially obnoxious, because he faithfully rebuked prevailing vice. *The days of unleavened bread*—the eight days of the Passover feast. But for the proprieties of Jewish ritual Peter would have lost his head too. V. 4. *Quaternions*—four detachments of four men each, who relieved each other during the four watches of the night. Extra precautions on account of his previous escape, ch. 5: 23. V. 5. The disciples, utterly helpless, turned to the Lord in united and earnest prayer, Ps. 34: 7. V. 7. There are many instances in both the Old and New Testament of the ministration of angels, Gen. 16: 7, 9; 19: 1; 22: 11; Matt. 4: 11; Luke 2: 9. V. 8. The details given are a guarantee for the reality of the facts. It was no mere dream. *Gird thyself*—no time for arranging his toilet, and no need, for he had lain down on the prison floor in his clothes, save the outer cloak, which now served for his coverlid, and his sandals which were easily adjusted. Vs. 9, 10. Wardens—the *first*, were the two to whom he was chained, the *second*, the two who mounted guard at the door of the cell. V. 11, 12. The reality flashes upon Peter that he is again miraculously saved from his enemies. He goes to the well known house of Mary, *cousin* of Barnabas, see R. V. on Col. 4: 10. *John*, called Mark, author of the second gospel. V. 13-15. "Who's there?" asked *Rhoda*. "A friend," replies Peter. In the excitement of the moment she runs to tell the disciples before letting him in. "Too good news to be true," say they all. It must be his guardian angel, or his ghost; Believing prayer has won a notable victory. Precisely *how* the thing was done matters not. Their prayers are answered, and Peter is safe. In every time of need the Christian's true attitude is earnest, definite, unceasing prayer, believing that God hears and will answer in His own way and at His own time. The early church at Jerusalem was a praying church.

Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus.

MAY 27.

ACTS XIII: 1-12.

Golden Text, Acts 13: 2.

BEGINNING with this chapter Luke treats almost exclusively of Paul and his work among the Gentiles. After Peter's release Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem to Antioch where they remained some years. But now they are to enter upon a wider sphere with the definite purpose of spreading Christianity throughout the world. V. 1. The Church at Antioch, now about ten years old, was already large; so strong that it could afford to spare some of its ministers. The persons named were *among* the prophets and teachers, i.e., those by whom the work was carried on. Barnabas was the ruling spirit at Antioch. Little is known of the others excepting that *Lucius* was a kinsman of Paul, Rom. 16: 21. V. 2. *As they ministered*—in the act of conducting divine service. *Fasted*—Fasting, in the sense of abstaining from food, is not enjoined in the New Testament. Our Lord, indeed, frequently discountenances it as savouring of self-righteousness. The fasting referred to here and elsewhere in connection with apostolic practice was not of the nature of penance, but rather a state of such intense earnestness as rendered them oblivious to hunger for the time being, Ch. 10: 10; 14: 23. In connection with prayer, it means a reserve in regard to every kind of fleshly indulgence or luxury, see Isa. 58: 3, 5, 6, 13. *Separate me*—set apart in an orderly manner for the special work of the ministry. *Barnabas and Saul*—The very best men in the church are the men to employ for foreign missions. V. 3. Paul had already been "called" by God to become a missionary, Gal. 1: 15, 16; Acts 22: 21; and now he is formally ordained as such by the Presbytery. *Sent them away*—on their first great missionary journey. The same obligation rests on the Church now to send the gospel to the heathen. V. 4. *Seleucia*—the seaport of Antioch, 16 miles west. To *Cyprus*—Barnabas knew well how much his countrymen stood in need of evangelization, and with assistants like Paul and Mark he hoped to do them good. V. 5. *Salamis*—the capital of Cyprus, where many Grecian Jews met to whom they preached in the synagogue. V. 6. *Paphos*—on the western side of the island, 100 miles from Salamis. *Borjesus*—"Son of Jesus" or Joshua, "Bar," corresponding to the Celtic "Mac." Impostors of this kind were numerous, who traded upon the credulity of the people and profited by their superstitions. V. 7. *The deputy*—or Roman Governor. *A prudent man*—of a candid and enquiring mind, who would hear the missionaries for himself. V. 8. *Elymas*—"the magician," as Barnabas called himself. *Withstood them*—feeling that if the deputy listened to the new comers his occupation would be gone, see ch. 19: 24-27. Vs. 9-11. *Then Saul*—From this time forth he becomes the central figure in the history of the church, his name is changed to Paul, and Barnabas takes a subordinate position. With stern rebuke he silences the sorcerer.