

Claudius the God by Robert Graves

Footnotes

(1) I once read somewhere--I forget where--that Robert Graves was stung by criticisms that he had only just copied Suetonius in *I, Claudius*. So in the introduction to *Claudius the God*, Robert Graves fired back by listing all the ancient sources he had consulted in writing the narrative. And sure enough, when I opened up *Claudius the God*, I found this was true. Robert Graves does indeed use his author's introduction to fire back at critics and list all his sources.

(2) There's actually a few different people named Herod in the New Testament, so this can get confusing. Herod the Great is the one responsible for [the Bethlehem Massacre in the Gospel of Matthew](#). Herod Antipas is the one who killed John the Baptist, and also the one who shows up in the trial of Jesus. Herod Agrippa is the Herod in the book of Acts--the Herod who kills James, imprisons Peter, and then gets struck down by God and eaten by worms. In the novel, Robert Graves does provide some background on this for the reader, and gives a family tree so you know which Herod is which.

(3) Speaking of Herod Agrippa in the book of Acts, I'm going to go on a small digression here to talk about something that always used to confuse me from back in my Sunday School days. In Acts 12, Herod Agrippa is responsible for killing James Son of Zebedee. James is actually the only one of Jesus's disciples to get killed in the pages of the New Testament. (The tradition of the martyrdom of the rest of the disciples comes from Church tradition, not the New Testament.) And, according to the synoptic Gospels, James is one of the 3 most important disciples--the famous trio of Peter, James and John.

And yet, in the book of Acts, James just gets killed off suddenly and unceremoniously.

Acts 12

1. About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.
- 2 He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.
- 3 After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also...

And then the rest of the chapter goes on to talk about the imprisonment of Peter. James's death is barely mentioned, and to the extent it is mentioned, it's only as a brief set-up to Peter's imprisonment. And it's not like the author of Acts couldn't do big death scenes when he wanted to. Stephen gets a huge death scene in Acts 6,7, and 8. And Stephen wasn't even one of the disciples.

Does anyone know what's going on here? Is there an explanation for this, or is this just one of those weird things about the Bible?

(4) Actually given how big a part Herod Agrippa played in the Julio-Claudian family, it is a bit strange he never popped up in the previous novel *I, Claudius* and only appears out of nowhere in *Claudius the God*. The narrator tries to cover for this by saying that he waited until the second volume to tell Herod's story because they didn't want to break the dramatic unity of it. However one suspects that Herod's absence from the first novel was just an oversight on the part of Robert Graves. The BBC miniseries version corrects this by inserting a young Herod Agrippa into the beginning parts of Claudius's story.