

6. John's body is buried by his disciples and Jesus is informed.
- II. JESUS FEEDS 5000, WALKS THE WAVES, STILLS STORM
(Mt. 14:13-33; Mk. 6:31-52; Lk. 9:11-17; Jn. 6:1-21)
- A. Jesus' Problem: need for privacy amid great excitement
 - B. Jesus' Plan: withdrawal from population centers
 - C. Jesus' Provision: feeds 5000-plus crowd
 - D. Jesus' Prayers: almost all night with the Father
 - E. Jesus' Powers: sees disciples' struggles in the storm, walks on the water and calms the storm, after empowering Peter also to walk on sea
 - F. Jesus' People: Peter and the others
- III. JESUS HEALS THE SICK OF GENNESARET (Mt. 14:34-36; Mk. 6:53-56)
- A. The depth of the need
 - B. The trusting humility of approach
 - C. The simplicity of His method
 - D. The completeness of His results

Section 33

JESUS HEARS OF THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Parallels: Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)

TEXT: 14:1-13a

1 At that season Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, 2 and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore do these powers work in him. 3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. 5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. 7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. 8 And she, being put forward by her mother, saith, Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist. 9 And the king

was grieved; but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat with him, he commanded it to be given; 10 and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. 12 And his disciples came, and took up the corpse, and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

13 Now when Jesus heard *it*, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart: . . .

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How do you explain this apparent presence of conscience in a man who had, apparently without conscience, been willing to follow the demands of his lust in order to marry his brother's wife after divorcing his own (if, in fact, he actually succeeded in divorcing her!)?
- b. Why do you suppose Herod linked the activity of Jesus with the person and ministry of John the Baptist? Had John worked any miracles? Had Jesus thundered great judgments upon Herod? From news about Jesus, then, how could the king logically be drawn to suppose that John had arisen from the dead?
- c. With so many personal spies at his service, how could Herod be so ignorant about Jesus as to confuse Him with John the Baptist?
- d. How do you explain the two apparently contradictory reports about Herod's attitude regarding John the Baptist:
 - (1) "And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people . . ."
 - (2) "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly." (Mark 6:20)
 How could both statements be true?
- e. Why should Herod, the powerful ruler of Galilee and Perea, fear the multitude of common people so much that he dared not put John to death?
- f. How would you analyze the difference in attitude toward John shown by Herod and by Herodias? Why did their attitudes differ?
- g. Do you think Herodias plotted the death of John, caused Salome to dance before Herod, thus luring him into the rash oath that would make possible the demand for John's death? Or did Herodias merely seize an unexpected opportunity suddenly presented to her

- by the puzzled daughter's request? What is your opinion?
- h. Once Herod had made the oath before God and before those men present, did he have to keep it, even if it meant he must commit a crime to maintain his word? What were the moral alternatives open to Herod when Salome returned with her criminal request? Be careful; God regards the breaking of an oath as sin.
 - i. Luke (9:9) reports that from the moment that Herod began to hear the reports about Jesus, "he sought to see Him." Why would Herod, wicked as he was, desire to have opportunity of audience with Jesus? How do you think Herod would go about seeking to see Him? Publicly? Privately?
 - j. Why did John's disciples, after the burial of their teacher's body, go and tell Jesus?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At that time Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, heard about the fame of Jesus, the miracles and ministry of His Apostles as they went through the villages of Galilee preaching the gospel that men should repent. Jesus' name had become well-known, so the king heard about it and all that was going on. This left him perplexed, because it was whispered by some that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. Others suggested, "It is Elijah." Still others affirmed that either one of the old prophets or one like them had risen. But when Herod himself heard it, he said to his men, "This is John the Baptist, whom I beheaded: he has been raised from the dead. That is why these wonderful powers are at work in him. But who is this man about whom I hear such news?" Herod began seeking to see Jesus.

Earlier, Herod himself had sent men to arrest John. They bound him and locked him in prison. Herod did this for Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for he had married her. John kept saying to Herod, "It is not right for you to take your brother's wife!"

Now Herodias held a grudge against John and longed to kill him, but she could not, since Herod respected John, knowing him to be a righteous and godly man. So Herod protected him from harm. Whenever he heard him preach, he was deeply disturbed and yet he listened gladly to his messages. Ironically, though he wanted to put John to death; Herod feared the masses, for they considered John to be a prophet of God.

But an opportunity came when Herod's birthday arrived. Herod gave a banquet for his court officials, military officers and leading Galileans. When Herodias' daughter, Salome, came in and danced before the company, she pleased Herod and his guests.

Then the king promised the little girl with an oath, "Ask me for anything you desire, and I will grant it,—even half of my kingdom!"

Then Salome went out to ask her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

Herodias said, "The head of John the baptizer!"

So, prompted by her mother, she came in immediately, rushing up to the king, requesting, "I want you to give me here at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter!"

The king was exceedingly sorry. However, because of his oaths made in the presence of his guests, he did not want to break his word to her. So he commanded it to be given. Without delay the king ordered an executioner to behead John and bring his head. The soldier went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl. She, in turn, presented it to her mother.

But when John's disciples heard about his murder, they came, took his corpse and buried it in a tomb. Then they went to inform Jesus. So when He heard the news, He withdrew from the Capernaum area to a lonely deserted area on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

SUMMARY

The guilt-ridden conscience of Herod Antipas began to plague him more severely when he mistook the reports about Jesus' miracles and ministry for the resurrection of John the Baptist whom the king had murdered. At an earlier period John's fearless preaching directly struck the public image of both Herod and Herodias. Consequently, neither could forbear from silencing this voice of God in the land, accusing them of gross incest and adultery. Herodias wished to murder John; Herod, however, preferred only to imprison him, since the tetrarch himself highly respected the prophet. However, a thoughtless oath at a public dinner party cost Herod his desire to protect the Baptist. Ignoring all conventions, Herodias demanded the head of the great prophet be brought immediately on a charger. Herod gave the fatal order, preferring to commit murder than repent of his oath. Faithful disciples of John buried his headless corpse and reported the horrible facts to Jesus.

INTRODUCTION:

WHY DID MATTHEW INCORPORATE THIS ACCOUNT?

As with our other attempts to capture the organization and direction of Matthew's thought, so here too we ask how this narrative *as it is organized and set in this place* would have been intended to affect the original readers, and, thus, how it reveals the genius of the Holy Spirit who inspired Matthew so to order it. The striking chronological order within the narrative itself draws attention to itself:

3. Herod hears about the fame of Jesus and attributes the phenomena to a resurrected John the Baptist.
1. Herod imprisoned John for his accusations relative to Herodias.
2. Herod assassinated John against his own conscience.

Whatever motive may be attributed to Matthew for his inserting it at this point in his narrative in precisely this order, must be attributed to Mark also. Luke, on the other hand, having already spoken of John's imprisonment at an early point in his gospel, described as the capping climax of Herod's wickedness and the eventual conclusion of John's work (Lk. 3:18-20), does not inform us of the circumstances surrounding his murder, limiting himself to cite Herod's words: "John I beheaded . . ." (Lk. 9:9) from which we are to intuit what Matthew and Mark describe in their historical flash back. Their use of this literary device is completely legitimate and nicely changes the pace of simple chronological reporting. Still, the puzzle remains: why did they both use it here?

1. Was it, as González-Ruiz (*Marco*, 136) believes? (It was) to emphasize the ridiculous attitude of that controversial monarch who was partly slave to his passions and partly interested in the austere figure of the Baptist. In the final analysis, that Herod was more consistent with himself than the orthodox Pharisees who collaborated with him while faking an extreme moral dignity. While this latter observation is a reasonable psychological consideration, it is doubtful that Matthew or Mark is merely moralizing about wicked kings in the style of a Josephus. Their purpose is to present and expound Jesus of Nazareth.
2. Or, was González-Ruiz (*ibid.*) right to point out that this passage, as read originally, establishes the theological independence of

Christ's movement from that of John, by recording the liquidation of John and the scattering of his group, in order thereby to show that the congregation created by Jesus was completely new, while, at the same time, preserving the high honor of the martyred prophet? This would tend to discourage any who were tempted to seize upon John's style of piety as somehow normative for Christianity and canonize John himself as a representative Christian, when, as a matter of fact, John's work ended tragically before Jesus established His Kingdom. (Cf. Ac. 18:24—19:7; cf. the Mandaean, or Sabian, Ebionites, who, while other Ebionites revered Peter the Apostle, glorified John the Baptist. See Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, 433, 434.) Perhaps the Essenic Ebionites, forced by the facts Matthew here states, could not adopt John as their saint, notwithstanding his ascetic life style. But because these tendencies did not mature until the late first and second century, some might doubt that their rebuttal were our Gospel authors' purpose. However, this would be no hindrance to the Spirit's foresight to see any future tendency where previously given information could forestall it. Besides, who today could say how many disciples of John had difficulty swinging into line behind Jesus after the demise of their master?

3. Since Matthew and Mark intend to glorify the Christ, they have omitted the circumstances of His forerunner's death until this point, because those facts were relatively less important. Now, however, in their analysis of Jesus Christ, they must picture, in addition to the religious opposition to Him, the political risks also. Further, because Herod's treacherous interest in Jesus is but another limitation of His freedom of movement from this historical moment forward, hence part of the explanation of Jesus' decisions, and because Herod's curiosity arises out of a historical fact of special interest to godly admirers of John, this is a convenient point at which to connect those otherwise disparate notes.
4. There is a lateral psychological effect of postponing any direct mention of John's martyrdom until exactly this point, when it could have been recorded earlier. The assassination of John, the great forerunner of Jesus, at the hands of impious men is but an ominous warning of what would happen to the Lord Himself just a little over a year later. Now, if this retelling of John's heroic end prepares the reader for the suffering of Jesus, a fact which the original readers probably already knew, the psychological impact of the entire episode must be another: if Jesus left John unavenged, either by miraculous intervention or revolutionary

uprising against world evil, and if Jesus Himself had to undergo such brutal opposition of sinners against Himself before arriving at His glorious goal, what must be the lot of any genuine disciples who cast their hope on Jesus? Whatever they may have seen in Him up to this point, they must recognize the unwelcome reality that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and being deceived." (Cf. 2 Ti. 3:12) In this sense, then, this episode is a telling example of the kind of coexistence in the world between "the sons of the Kingdom" and "the sons of the evil one," as that concept was communicated by the Parables in Matthew's Chapter Thirteen.

5. Plummer (*Matthew*, 199), too, feels that this insertion needs explanation:

So detailed a narrative of John's death would not have been given merely to explain the craven fear of Antipas that Jesus was the murdered Baptist risen from the dead. The story of John's end is required to complete the account of his message to the Messiah and to illustrate the Messiah's eulogy of him (11:2-19); and as the one narrative begins with a message carried by John's disciples from Machaerus (11:3), so the other narrative ends with one. (14:12)

To conclude, perhaps a combination of these various factors may have decided this notable literary side-trip into a Herodian dinner-party.

NOTES

A. HEROD'S OPINION OF JESUS

(Mt. 14:1, 2; Mk. 6:14-16; Lk. 9:7-9)

1. Herod hears about Jesus

14:1 **At that time**, does not refer strictly to the events mentioned in chapter 13, but more generally to the wide-ranging, intensive evangelistic activities of Jesus and His Apostles in Galilee, before the crisis and collapse of His popularity near the beginning of Jesus' third year of ministry. (Cf. Mt. 14:13—15:21; Jn. 6 all) Mark and Luke connect this event directly with the mission of the Twelve in Galilee which Matthew recorded in chapter 10:1—11:1. (Cf. Mk. 6:7-14; Lk. 9:1-7) *Herod Antipas, the tetrarch*, loosely called "king"

by courtesy, not by right (see on 14:9), ruled only Galilee and Perea from his capital at Tiberias on the Lake of Galilee. In fact, it was Herodias' ambitious urging him to convince the emperor Caligula to recognize Herod officially as "king" that precipitated his ruin. (*Ant.* XVIII, 7, 2; *Wars*, II, 9, 6) If it be thought puzzling that the Synoptic authors should spend even one line on this weak, minor ruler of Palestine, let it be recalled that THIS Herod was, by a quirk of history, to become one of the judges of Jesus Christ. (Lk. 23:6-12; Ac. 4:27. See also introductory note 3 above.)

Herod heard the report concerning Jesus and "all that was done" (Lk.), "for his name had become known" (Mk.). He was actually hearing of the expanded evangelistic power of Jesus' multiplied preaching force represented by the six two-man teams, but the undeniable result of their magnificent work is not self-glorifying, because the attention of all Galilee—and, consequently, that of Herod,—is concentrated only on Jesus. Their mission, their labors and their attitude unselfishly held up "the name of Jesus" before Israel! *Herod heard the report*, because he would not himself go hear the itinerate Galilean rabbi, and had to depend upon the intelligence reports. He had to depend upon reports, also because Jesus deliberately avoided Herod so as not to precipitate the crisis of the cross before He had enjoyed sufficient opportunity for the training of the Twelve. The vices and vexations of court life and the uncertainties of Middle-East political relations would have more than filled Herod's major attentions, leaving minor religious figures and movements relatively in the background of his mind until their importance threatened his tranquility. Perhaps Herod's absence from Galilee on trips to Rome and his preoccupation with the war with the vindictive Arabian king, Aretas, would explain much of Herod's ignorance about the exact identity of Jesus.

2. Herod's interpretation of the news

14:2 **Herod said to his servants . . .** How did Matthew, or any of Jesus' disciples, supposedly far removed from any connection with Herod's corrupt court, learn that Herod was making these presumably private, self-incriminating observations? Is it possible that Chuza, Herod's steward, overheard it and reported the conversation to his wife, Joanna? (Lk. 8:3) And did she pass the word directly to the Lord? Or did this entire scene come through Manaen, Herod's foster-brother (*sunτροφος*, also rendered "familiar friend"), who later became

a noted teacher and prophet in the Antiochean church? (Cf. Ac. 13:1) *His servants (tois paisin autoû)* are his courtiers. (In 1 Macc. 1:6, 8 *païs* means the generals of Alexander the Great; cf. Gen. 41:10, 37f; 1 Sam. 16:17; 18:22-26; 22:7ff, 17; 2 Sam. 3:38; 10:2; 12:15-21; 15:21, 34; Jer. 36:31; 37:2) He is not merely chatting with his household servants (*doûloi, oikétai* or other); rather, he is taking counsel with responsible men in his court.

This is John the Baptist . . . risen from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him. However wicked Herod may have been, he could not shake himself free from his own presuppositions nor his conscience. Resurrection from the dead was a fact of Old Testament history. Was Herod perhaps troubled by Jewish history of the apparition of the prophet Samuel to King Saul with the message of doom? (Cf. 1 Sam. 28:8-19) Was he troubled by reports of resurrections reportedly done by Jesus Himself at Nain just 15 miles southwest of Tiberias, or up at Capernaum 6 miles north of his capital? (Cf. Lk. 7:11-17; Mt. 9:18-26) Further, his own admission of John's prophetic greatness, when combined with a not totally unfounded fear of God's vengeance, may have pushed him to conclude tentatively that God, in fact, resurrected His great prophet.

Was Herod himself sympathetic to the Pharisean views? (Cf. Ac. 23:8) Edersheim sees the Herodian party as combining strict Pharisaic views with devotion to the reigning family. (*Life*, I, 240) But Jesus seems to distinguish the influence of Herod from that of the Pharisees and probably also that of the Sadducees. (Cf. Mt. 16:6, 11, 12; Mk. 8:15) Other commentators, perhaps harmonizing these texts cited, see Herodianism as essentially Sadducean religiously. If so, Herod's Sadduceism, which technically denied the resurrection from the dead, melted before the glaring sun of his own conscience.

While John had done no miracles during his ministry (Jn. 10:41), so powerful must have been the effect of his life and work that the tetrarch has no difficulty believing that so mighty a prophet should be risen and now working miracles too. It is unnecessary here to superimpose the idea supposedly prevalent "among the ancients that departed spirits were endowed with superhuman powers," or that "Herod therefore supposed that the risen John had brought these powers with him from the spirit world." (McGarvey, *Fourfold Gospel*, 370) Rather, if Herod's understanding of God had been at all sharpened by John's preaching (Mk. 6:20), then the ancients'

views may have had no bearing at all on Herod, since he could have truly imagined that God would raise and empower John. His actual deduction about Jesus is: "This is John . . . risen from the dead." Nor is it necessary to ascribe to him a belief in the transmigration of souls (from John to Jesus), since he is simply confused, having never seen Jesus, as had, for example, some of his own courtiers, as their arguments imply. (Mk. 6:15; Lk. 9:8)

These powers are at work in him. Plummer (*Matthew*, 201) rightly sees that "all these conjectures about Jesus are indirect evidence of the reality of His miracles." In fact, all that Herod heard "of all that was done," "Jesus' name" and "fame," can point to nothing less than the mighty miracles which were characteristic of the ministry of the great, ancient prophets. In fact, the counsellor's conjectures would have been meaningless, had His miracles not been of such character that their first reflex explanations of the phenomena should be "It is Elijah," "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old!"

3. Others' opinions

While Matthew briefly reports only Herod's views, Mark and Luke relate the ignorant suggestions of his courtiers stabbing at an explanation of the marvel. They reject Herod's view, because they, having perhaps seen and heard both John and Jesus, would not confuse the two. So they seek another explanation.

4. Herod's desire to see Jesus

Herod's tormented conscience refused their comforting logic only partially, because Luke reports him as musing: "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" At this point Herod began seeking to see Jesus (Lk. 9:9), a fact of significance, because the suspicious king's sinister interest is now directed fully at Jesus. Perhaps it was to apply tests that would have settled in his own mind this tormenting question of identity. After all, the trouble he had suffered earlier was supposedly concluded with John's assassination, but here was an as yet unidentified person who is bringing the whole question to life again. Was his guilty conscience yearning merely to identify Jesus?

On the other hand, did the ghost of John rise in Herod's mind, not because of a superstitious dread, but rather because he desired that the Baptist rise again? What a relief it would have been to Herod

were John alive again! Trapped into slaying him, John's murderer must have been haunted by the deed. The news about Jesus may have temporarily awakened that vain, impossible desire to right what had been done. But, since Jesus was not John, Antipas remained an unpardoned murderer with no way out, but to repent. When a man refuses to be ruled by God, he begins to be ruled by tyrants a thousand times worse, even though they be but the ghosts of his own imagination.

While Luke 9:9 seems to point to some definite endeavor to get to see Jesus, it is to be doubted that Herod himself would stoop to wandering about among the multitudes to hear Him—unless he were so desperate as to attempt something incognito. Was he hoping that the Lord would visit Tiberias so that, without too much trouble, the encounter with Him could be arranged? If so, the silence of the Gospels regarding any such visit to Tiberias on the part of Jesus suggests that Herod kept waiting in vain until the very end, because Jesus, fully aware of the king's treachery, deftly avoided all contact with him until the Last Week trials. (Study Jesus' movements after the crisis and collapse of the Galilean ministry: Mk. 7:24, 31; 8:13-15, 27; 9:30; Lk. 13:31ff; 23:7-12)

B. THE HISTORICAL FLASH BACK: THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JOHN

1. John imprisoned by Herod to appease Herodias

14:3 **For Herod had laid hold on John.** (Mt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14; Lk. 3:19, 20) The Synoptics clearly link John's arrest with the general period following Jesus' baptism and before He moved from Judea to Galilee. John (3:22-30) pictures the Baptist as free to evangelize in the Aenon-Salim area until Jesus' trip to Galilee through Samaria. (Jn. 4) From this point John disappears into Herod's prison whence he sent his last recorded message to Jesus. (Mt. 11:2ff) The apparently easy access enjoyed by his disciples is explicable on the basis of Herod's own capricious attitude. (Mk. 6:20; see also on Mt. 14:12.)

WAS JOHN EVER AT MACHERUS FORTRESS?

Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) locates John's prison as in the castle

at Macherus, 20 miles southeast of Jericho on the east of the Dead Sea, about 100 miles southeast of Galilee. Several supposed discrepancies in this construction of the events have been noticed. (Cf. Kraeling, *Rand-McNally Bible Atlas*, 385; also *ISBE*, 1959a)

1. Josephus himself affirms (*ibid.*, 5, 1) that "Macherus . . . is a place on the borders of the dominions of Aretas and Herod . . . Macherus . . . was subject to her father," Aretas. But Aretas the Nabatean king is the outraged father ready to make war against Herod for the insult of discarding Aretas' daughter in favor of Herodias. Although the fortress was in the territory inherited by Herod Antipas from his father, Herod the Great, having actually been fortified by the latter (*Wars*, VII, 6, 1-2), it may have been held by Herod and Aretas conjointly by some unrecorded agreement. Thus it may have been in Aretas' hands when his daughter fled to him there before Herod was aware that she had already privately learned of his infidelity to her in favor of Herodias. Consequently, John the Baptist who piqued Herod for his stern denunciations of this infidelity would not have been imprisoned in a castle that AT THAT MOMENT was subject to the embattled father, Aretas!
2. The birthday party to which the principle men of Galilee were invited would probably have been held, not 100 miles to the south of their Galilean homes, but most likely at Tiberias, Herod's capital on the Lake of Galilee.
3. Further, there is no hint in the Gospel story that any significant time elapsed between Herod's order to execute John and the actual presentation of his head on a platter as requested by Herodias and Salome, i.e., time required to send a soldier from Galilee down to Macherus to return with John's head.

ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS

1. Josephus can make mistakes, but the alleged error of his placing Macherus in Aretas' dominion while affirming that Herod beheaded John at Macherus, as if the castle were under his own influence, is an affirmation that he makes within two consecutive paragraphs. (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 1-2) The close proximity of the two expressions which supposedly create so glaring an error would represent an unusual inadvertence on

the part of Josephus, or else it would be a historical fact so obvious to him that he saw no need to clarify what appears to us to be a discrepancy. The quirks of reality are often stranger than can be invented.

Aretas apparently did not himself live at Macherus, but in Arabia, because Josephus affirms that his daughter, to anticipate Herod, made as if she were going to Macherus, but upon her arrival there, she just kept traveling until "she soon came to Arabia . . . and she soon came to her father, and told him of Herod's intentions."

The solution may be that, though Macherus was officially within Aretas' jurisdiction, it may have been available by special treaty to Herod by virtue of his marriage to Aretas' daughter. If such an agreement provided for common access, then until Aretas declared war on Herod (shortly after John's death?), Herod could use the Macherus castle as if it were his own. (Study the relation of his grandfather, Antipater of Idumea, with the Arabians: *Wars*, I, 8, 9)

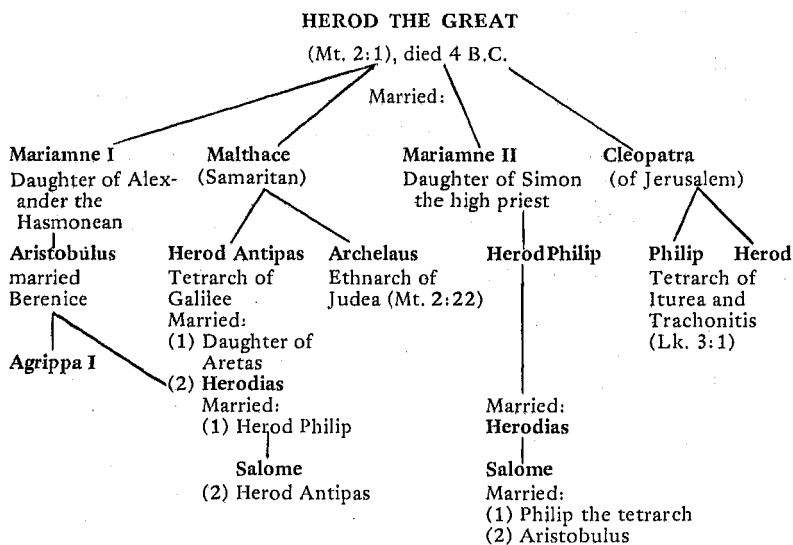
Was Herod, even at the time of John's murder, living in this border fortress to direct the war with his offended former father-in-law, Aretas?

2. What if Herod, in a gesture of personal bravado, paid the round-trip travel expenses of his Galilean princes clear down to Macherus just to combine a military and political visit to that castle, and, while there, to celebrate his birthday with a feast?
3. The assumption that time would be required for the executioner of John to travel from Galilee to Macherus to behead him and return is eliminated by the above-mentioned considerations.
4. If Edersheim (and others, see on 14:6) is right in thinking that the banquet in our text is not merely a birthday party, but rather a grand feast celebrating Antipas' accession to the tetrarchy, such a trip from Galilee to Macherus as that demanded by the facts related by the Evangelists and Josephus, would not at all be unfitting.
5. Since the very war with Aretas was not merely over Herod's repudiation of Aretas' daughter, but also a border dispute with a king who lived at Petra (*Ant.*, XVIII, 5, 2-3), where could Herod better pursue his battle plan than from a fortress on the Nabatean frontier about 88 miles from Aretas' capital? What

more logical headquarters could he find where he could gather "his courtiers, officers and leading men of Galilee" to counsel him in the prosecution of the war?

Despite the conjectures, the hypothesis of Josephus' credibility is the better, because the above suggestions show a possible harmonization of the Gospel accounts and Josephus, thus helping us better to visualize the situation and assure ourselves of the Evangelists' accuracy in describing John's death as a historical fact.

For the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." A simplified version of the Herodian family tree will show the relationships on which John's charge was based:



Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4) explodes:

Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod [Philip], son of Herod the Great, who was born of Mariamne, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth, Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our

country, and divorce herself from her husband, while he was alive and was married to Herod [Antipas] her husband's brother by the father's side; he was tetrarch of Galilee; but her daughter Salome was married to Philip, the son of Herod, the tetrarch of Trachonitis.

The bracketed additions to Josephus' text are by the translator Whiston, wisely added because of the multiple confusions created in Herod the Great's family by the latter's using the same name to name different people. Negative critics could accuse the Synoptic authors of a historical blunder wherein they seem to confuse Philip the tetrarch for the first husband of Herodias, when in reality he later became her son-in-law. In this case Matthew and Mark would be guilty of confounding the Herod of Rome, mentioned by Josephus, with his half-brother, Philip the tetrarch of Trachonitis, as well as of making the latter Herodias' husband. But Whiston's additions are perfectly justifiable for the reasons collected by Edersheim (*Life*, I, 672, note 2):

1. Among the eight sons of Herod the Great, three are also named Herod. Of only one, i.e., Herod Antipas, do we know the second name. It is not very probable that the other two did not also have some distinguishing name. While Josephus speaks of both Herodias' first and second husbands as simply "Herod," the Evangelists use only the distinctive name of the former: "Philip."
2. Herod the Great must have named two sons "Herod Philip" by different mothers, which, though problematic, is not impossible, because:
 - a. He had two sons named "Antipas," or "Antipater," sons of different mothers, Doris and Malthace. "Antipas" may be a short form of "Antipater." (See Arndt-Gingrich, 75; cf. *Ant.* XIII, 14, 1!)
 - b. He had two wives of the same name: Mariamne.

While as yet non-Biblical historical documentation is lacking to prove that Herodias' first husband was named "Philip," as the Evangelists affirm, the above-mentioned considerations definitely lift the Gospel narratives above the suspicion of inaccuracy levelled at them by the detractors. There is no confusion in the Gospel narrative over the identity of Herodias' first husband, as some critics allege, (Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 35) In fact, the "Philip" in question here is never termed "the tetrarch," as is his half-brother

in Lk. 3:1. Thus, Matthew and Mark are as knowledgeable as Josephus on this point. (Contrast Emil Kraeling, *Bible Atlas*, 385.)

On the basis of the foregoing it is now possible to see why John charged: **It is not lawful for you to have her.** The legal points in his accusations are two:

1. **INCEST:** as discernible from the genealogical chart above, the relation of consanguinity between Antipas and Herodias was within the forbidden limits, because she was his own step-niece, being the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus. (Cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21) The only exception to these laws was the levirate marriage in the event of the death of a childless brother. (Dt. 25:5ff) However, Herodias had already borne one daughter to Philip, i.e., Salome, moreover Philip himself was still alive. The crime, then, is incest. Farrar notes (*Life*, 296, note 2):

Even the Romans regarded such unions with horror; and never got over the disgust which the Emperor Claudius caused them by marrying his niece Agrippina; but they were almost the rule in the Herodian family.

2. **ADULTERY:** Herodias' husband and Herod's wife, daughter of Aretas, were both still alive. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 1-2) John interpreted the marriage institution as did Jesus. (Mt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Lk. 16:18; Mk. 10:11, 12) In fact, Mark's version (6:18) clearly quotes John as labelling Herodias as "your brother's wife," as also Lk. 3:19. Even though Herodias succeeded in divorcing her husband, Philip (or Herod) of Rome, it appears that Herod Antipas himself had not been able to effect his divorce from Aretas' daughter, because she outwitted him before he could legitimize his separation from her. But that annoying detail did not hinder the lusty tetrarch from taking up his adulterous-incestuous union with Herodias in open defiance of truly Jewish sensibilities.

These particular charges, added to the other public rebukes of Herod's misdeeds (Lk. 3:19), blew the safety valve by exposing the tetrarch and his lover as common sinners before the Jewish law. Herod Antipas himself had not a drop of Jewish blood in his veins, being the son of Herod the Great, a pure Idumean (*Ant.* XIV, 7, 3 also 15, 2), and Malthace, a Samaritan woman (*Wars*, I, 28, 4). Whereas the Idumeans "submitted to the use of circumcision, and the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this

befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews" (*Ant.* XIII, 9, 1), yet the Herods could be reproached for being but "an Idumean, i.e., a half Jew" (*Ant.*, XIV, 15, 2). John's attack is legally based on the Mosaic legislation to which the Idumean Herods never gave anything but the most distant attention. But the very Jewishness of John's rebuke can easily be construed as a political threat, because it exposes Antipas' unwillingness to be governed by those laws to which truly JEWISH kings must submit.

14:4 For John kept saying to Herod (*élegen*) on what occasions? Is the direct statement, "It is not lawful for you to have her," a summary of the Baptist's message addressed to Herod's face? While the Gospels do not affirm that John uttered this blistering condemnation either in the wilderness before the approving multitudes or in the audience of the tetrarch himself, it would seem more consonant with John's known character to envision him fearlessly denouncing the prince personally. He had not feared to expose the hypocrisy and iniquity of the religio-political power-bloc at Jerusalem. His single-minded fearlessness and sense of right and duty probably drove him to encounter Herod head-on.

2. Herodias tries to avenge herself against John.

Mk. 6:19: "And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him, but she could not for Herod . . . kept him safe." Accustomed to the self-importance of the royal house, the grandeur of Rome and the broadening of travel, Herodias was not about to permit a brassy-voiced backwoods revivalist to call her—even by implication—an incestuous adulteress! While as fully pagan as Herod, she apparently had less conscience. Stung by John's condemnation, she took it as a personal affront, flew into a terrible rage, screaming fiercely her hatred and demanding John's execution.

She is under stress not only because of John's publicly denouncing her as an adulteress. She is also menaced, because if she must return to her first husband, or at any rate, leave Herod, to whom she has attached her ambitions, these very ambitions must be immediately relinquished, and her personal struggle for supremacy must begin all over at a time when she sees herself beginning to arrive at her goals. Quite insecure since her childhood, being the orphaned daughter of Aristobulus who was murdered by her grandfather, Herod the Great, murderer of her grandmother, Mariamne I, she had been married to her half-uncle, Herod Philip, only son of Herod the Great

and Mariamne II, even before she was of age. (*Ant.* XVII, 1, 2) This would have guaranteed the throne to her husband in the event of the unforeseeable death of Antipater, the heir apparent, because Herod the Great's will set Herod Philip as next in line. (*Ant.* XVII, 3, 2) Unfortunately for Herodias, Herod Philip's mother, Mariamne II, was caught in a plot to murder Herod the Great, for which the latter "divorced her, and blotted her son out of his testament." (*Wars*, I, 30, 7) Herodias thus found herself married to a Herod, who, however wealthy (*Ant.* XVII, 8, 1; 11, 5), had become just another private citizen who could not even boast a portion of a semi-royal position. Now that she is finally enjoying her first ladyship, i.e., married to Antipas, John's righteous sentence threatens to snatch it from her. No wonder she was nervous!

Lest our self-righteousness blind us to the "Herodias" in our own spirit, have we never felt the same bitterness and anger toward someone who challenged our goodness and rebuked us for some cherished sin? Our mere shock at committing murder to turn off the embarrassing accusation must never blind us to what the Lord thinks about our hatred and desire for revenge, since the spirit behind both is essentially the same, and will be judged accordingly. (See on Mt. 5:21, 22.)

"Herodias . . . wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod . . . kept him safe." Did Herod's self-estimate of his own goodness grow in direct proportion to his effectiveness in blocking Herodias' agitated urging? Did he satisfy himself for yielding to one temptation (to live with her) by reminding his conscience that he did not yield to the other (to surrender John to her)? Was this his attempt to bargain with Divine Justice?

3. Herod's mixed motives blocked any effective action.

14:5 And though he wanted to put him to death he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. Herod makes an interesting character study because of the contradictory elements that constitute his personality:

1. Sheer political expediency demanded the death of an enemy so dangerous to the crown as John, and yet extraordinary measures must be taken to avoid public displeasure on the part of a nation conscious of the divine call and the righteousness of that enemy's accusations. Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) writes:

. . . Herod . . . feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late.

Herod feared the nationalistic Zealots, because of his collaboration with Rome; he feared the Romans because his tenuous power depended upon their good grace as long as he preserved order in his realm; therefore he feared John, because the latter could easily, by inciting the Zealots and others of Herod's political enemies, dynamite everything Herod had so laboriously constructed. In fact, but for the refusal of Jesus to head such an insurrection after John's murder, Herod would have quite probably faced the violence of civil war, precisely **BECAUSE** he murdered John! (Jn. 6:15; Mt. 14:12, 13) Ironically, from a purely self-serving political standpoint, to eliminate John meant political suicide for Antipas! The notorious scarcity of genuine prophets in Israel for centuries made it a particularly serious matter to manacle, much less murder, this rare man. Further, the Herods in general, primarily because they were merely tolerated Idumeans, had followed a very astute policy of seeking to ingratiate themselves with the Jewish people. To hinder this holy man, from the people's standpoint, meant to outrage public opinion and reverse the pacifying policy to a most dangerous degree.

Note a similar mental block in the minds of the Jewish authorities when Jesus quizzed them about John's authority: "If we say, 'From men,' we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold John to be a prophet . . ." (Mt. 21:26) Fear of public opinion, more than fear of God, keeps men from acting consistently with their real views, reducing them to moral cowards and hypocrites.

Matthew's statement of Herod's murderous intention toward John may reflect Antipas' original reflex action before actually hearing John on numerous occasions and, because of which preaching, mellowed for the other motives mentioned by Mark (6:20):

2. "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man," despite his own political conviction demanding his death.

What a contrast: the ragged prisoner in Herod's presence stood free and uncondemned by a holy God, while the richly-robed monarch himself grovelled in his own moral filth in the presence of the same God John so valiantly proclaimed! Herod feared John, because he feared John's God. In fact, John made his God so real to the vile tetrarch that the latter could not but bow his crowned head in awesome respect at the unsullied sincerity and unrelenting courage of the prophet. He possessed not even the suspicion of a defense against the truth of John's accusations. Herod was conscious that before him stood a MAN whose soul was honed razor-sharp by constant communion with God, a man who knew precisely what he thought and where he was going, and for whom the reality of righteousness was his daily bread. Here stood a mighty rock of a man whose moral power laughed at all the waves of shame and insults beating helplessly against him, whom the threats of imprisonment and death could not shake and the bribes of office, wealth and glory could not buy. Herod's court was filled with enough "reeds shaken by the wind," time-serving, self-seeking "men clothed in soft raiment," who pliantly bent morality and truth whenever Herod willed. But here is a giant of a man who is not afraid to live the life of the living God in the presence of dying men, and the tetrarch could not but admire this rare specimen. Though Antipas pile up defense upon defense against the fore-runner's message, no vindication could satisfy even the corrupt tetrarch himself, because he sensed that he had at last come face to face with reality itself, the truth of God incarnate in one single man who would not budge. Either Antipas must surrender to God and to John, or . . .

- Whereas Mark mentions only Antipas' conviction that John was a righteous and holy man, it is evident, from Antipas' surmise about Jesus, that the former considered John to be the kind of man from whom not even the performance of miracles to almost any extent—even his resurrection from the dead—might not be reasonably expected. Either Antipas too sees John as a prophet of God, which is more likely, or his surmise about Jesus reveals a paganish superstition, which is not altogether unlikely either.
3. "Herod kept him safe" (Mk. 6:20) probably includes the ideas involved in the alternate textual reading included in the KJV: "he did many things," now corrected to "he was much perplexed" (the difference between *epoiei* and *ēpōrei* in the next phrase). The verb *sunteréo* means not only "to protect, defend against harm,"

contextually pointing to protective custody from Herodias' murderous clutches, but also "to keep in mind; be concerned about," and "to hold or treasure up (in one's mind, memory)." This latter significance suggests that he treated John with respect and a kindness limited to their respective positions and circumstances. It appears, thus, that Herod's official stand on John collided with his personal concern. Whereas he must officially silence that embarrassingly public accusation that menaced his throne, yet, once John was securely locked in Herod's dungeon, the king could safely be generous with him whom he really respected. But Herod was unwilling to do the one thing that would free him from his guilty conscience: break with his beloved sins and Herodias. Did he hope that such kind treatment shown John could atone for his adultery, or be substituted for doing the very thing God demanded of him? But in the long view, what became of the king's solicitous carefulness for the wilderness preacher, his eager listening to his message? The inadvertence of an unguarded moment and a rash promise wiped it all out! And even later, his alarmed conscience, shaken by news about Jesus, did not lead to any deep repentance either.

4. "When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly." (Mk. 6:20b) Herod's perplexity was caused, on the one hand, by his unwillingness to make a break with the luxury and licentiousness he desired, and, on the other, by his consciousness of the rightness of John's denunciations and his fear of God's wrath. The word rendered "perplexed" (*aporèò*) beautifully sketches his embarrassment, uncertainty and mental inability to resolve his dilemma. Here is a man whose will is completely blocked in the presence of clear-cut choices, because of the contradictory demands of his desires.
 - a. "He heard him gladly," perhaps because John was a link with a better past. Herod too had been a boy once, trying to make sense out of the world, and had perhaps set higher ideals for himself than were common among the corrupt Herodian courts. Later, gradually slipping and finally plunging to the hilt in the powerful vices which his unique position offered him, and even now, compromised completely by his incestuous paramour, he cannot shake that lingering appreciation for integrity, principle and the service of God in the life of another young man who made it.
 - b. "He heard him gladly" perhaps for a more sinister reason. Did

Herod frankly enjoy the verbal beatings John gave him? That is, because of the vicarious punishment he received thereby, did he actually like to hear his sins aired and condemned? His guilty conscience would not let him rest, but his desires would not let him repent either. Is it possible that the more John leveled his fiery denunciations at Herod, the happier Herod could feel psychologically? Naturally, since this type of catharsis does not lead to repentance and restitution, the temporary feeling of psychological cleansing lasts only until the whole scene is forgotten under the rush of other interests, other lusts, which, in turn, bring on the felt need for another "blistering" by John's fearless declaration of divine truth and righteousness. In this sense, Herod NEEDED John, keeping him on call for his private catharsis.

(Compare the mixed motives of another ruler and his preacher. Acts 24:24-27, Paul and Felix)

4. At his public birthday celebration Herod rashly vowed anything to Herodias' daughter, Salome.

14:6 But when Herod's birthday came (*genesiois de genoménous toû Herôdou*), the tetrarch "gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee." (Mk. 6:21) Some, with Edersheim (*Life*, I, 672), doubt that what is involved here is a simple birthday party for a few choice guests. They think it, rather, the anniversary of the death of Herod the Great and, consequently, the anniversary of the accession of his son Herod Antipas to the tetrarchy. The debate revolves around the word *genésia* and the probabilities of Herod's character; the outcome of the discussion strengthens the Gospels' position.

Genésios, according to Rocci, 381, refers either (in the neuter plural as in our case) to "the anniversary date of the death of a parent," or to "the feast for the anniversary of the birth," but in Mt. 14:6 Rocci prefers "birthday." Arndt-Gingrich (153) also think it means "birthday celebration," but point out that "*genésia* earlier . . . meant a commemorative celebration on the birthday of a deceased person." Vine (*Expository Dictionary*, 128) notes that the interpretation "the day of a king's accession . . . is not confirmed in Greek writings." The irrelevance of this latter remark is illustrated by the fact that we are not dealing

only with Greek writings as such, but with Jewish Greek of the LXX (cf. Gen. 40:20) as well as the Jewishness of both our Gospels and of the situation described. Edersheim (*ibid.*) cites the Rabbinic equivalent in Abod.Z. 10a where *Yom Ginuseya* is expressly and elaborately shown to be the day of accession. He further shows that "the event described in our text certainly took place *before* the Passover, and this was the time of Herod's (the Great) death and of the accession of Antipas."

It is impossible to establish the likelihood of the celebration of Herodian birthdays, because of the unpredictability of the human personality, and because Herod, with perfect consistency, could be deliberately affecting imperial manners where he could manage it. Plummer (*Matthew*, 202, note 2) cites Origen as arguing that birthday celebrations are wrong, affirming that "we find in no Scripture that a birthday was kept by a righteous man." Pharaoh and Herod Antipas are the two examples he offers, a fact which argues that Origen translated *genésia* "birthday" rather than "accession day."

The foregoing conclusionless debate only demonstrates the probable authenticity of the Evangelists' narrative against any who would question their veracity by doubting that Herod would drag his courtiers clear to Macherus for a little birthday party. Further, as suggested above ("Was John ever at Macherus?"), the tetrarch and his court may have been at Macherus, as Josephus informs us, on quite other business than birthday parties, in which case, Herod may have wished to combine several things together by uniting the celebration of his accession to the throne (or his birthday) with the presence of his courtiers and generals at his southernmost military post.

Mark notes that the opportunity Herodias had so diligently sought, came. While Herod dallied, wavering between the threatenings of his conscience and the satisfaction of his desires and the day-to-day prosecution of his reign, Herodias singlemindedly plotted the venting of her rage. Was it at her insistence that Herod should give a banquet on his birthday? Did she draw up the list of big names to invite as witnesses of her vendetta, choosing men whose doubtful moral fiber could be counted upon not to quail at murder? Did she groom Salome for her chorus-girl act so as to entice some rash promise from Herod? Did she leave Salome deliberately uncoached as to what to request, or was this feigned unpreparedness also part of the act? Josephus' attitude toward Herodias describes her as an ambitious plotter, fully

capable of managing from offstage every move in the scene the Gospels describe here. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 7 1-2; *Wars*, II, 9, 6) Or, did Herodias merely seize an unexpected opportunity suddenly thrust into her hands by the puzzled request of her daughter? Her quick-wittedness to grasp this unparalleled opportunity is certainly the deliberately sought outlet for months of frustrated revenge.

The daughter of Herodias danced in the midst and pleased Herod.

The girl, Salome, was also daughter of Herod Philip of Rome, apparently brought along with Herodias when the latter divorced her husband for Antipas. (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4) The attentive reader of the Greek in Mk. 6:22 will notice what seems to be a mistake on Mark's part:

1. With the reading *autoû* in the text, the girl is described as Herod's daughter: "his daughter came in." In verse 24 she is correctly described as Herodias' daughter, whom Josephus identifies as step-niece of Antipas. But Mark makes no blunder here, because, in the wider Jewish usage, any younger female relative may be called "daughter," or else, because, by virtue of Herod's illicitly contracted marriage to Herodias, Salome became the "daughter" of Herod.

However, Metzger (*A Textual Commentary*, 89f) believes that according to this reading the girl is herself named Herodias, i.e., *Herodiados* is taken as an appositive genitive with "daughter," thus naming her "Herodias." However, in light of the historical and contextual difficulties such a translation causes, it is better to consider *Herodiados* to be a genitive of origin or relationship, thus identifying Herod's unnamed "daughter" as "of Herodias," without naming her. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, *Grammar*, Sect. 162, 168) The interpretation would be stronger, however, had Mark added the article *tês* before *Herodiados*, but such a solecism as the text now stands might not overly trouble a Hebrew writing in Greek as he constructs this concatenation of genitives with different meanings.

2. With the reading *autês tês*, however, the situation becomes more picturesque and significant: "the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced." This reading draws instant attention to the shocking lowering of this girl of rank who thus displays herself in this dance. However, the former textual variant must not be ignored, because of the strength of its external attestation.

The daughter of Herodias is described later (14:11) as a "girl" or *korasion*, a diminutive form of *kōre*, "a girl; maiden; virgin," or even a "married daughter, or bride," hence *korasion* would indicate "a little girl, a child." (Rocci, 1073) Nevertheless, we have no way of ascertaining her exact age, nor, on that basis, what kind of dance she did, nor, on the basis of this, how *she pleased Herod and his guests*. Various commentators have pictured, not impossibly, a luscious teenager doing something like an Egyptian belly dance. However, is it possible that we have a mere child doing some more innocent presentation particularly well, who rightfully deserves the applause she received? Then, after taking her bows, did she wiggle into her new daddy's arms for a kiss of approval and the promise of some future bauble? It is psychologically possible that Herod in his (drunken?) exuberance would have made just such a promise to this child just to see if her young mind were as keen as her ability to perform. This, if it turns out as Herod desires, would become one more way of showing off Herodian pride, since she is his grand step-niece. Unsuspecting the outcome, Herod may even have thought her taking counsel with her mother a mark of maturity.

14:7 **So that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask**, to which he rashly added: "even half of my kingdom." (Mk. 6:23) Is Herod's swaggering manner a conscious imitation of real emperors? (Cf. Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2; 1 Kg. 13:8)

About this same period, Caligula was making this same kind of patronizing promise to Antipas' step-nephew, Agrippa I, at Rome. On that occasion, too, Caesar felt he could not back down from his promises, because of so many witnesses to his promises. See *Ant. XVIII*, 8, 7.

The inconsiderateness of these oaths, however often repeated for emphasis (cf. "oaths" 14:9), becomes apparent from the fact that they were never made with that seriousness of purpose, that consciousness of God and that appreciation of truth and righteousness that must always accompany a proper oath. (See on 5:33-37.) Otherwise, when confronted with such a request as Herodias demanded, which took such unfair advantage of the broad terms of his promise and oaths, he would not have been caught so completely off guard.

5. Herodias requires John's murder which Herod reluctantly orders.

14:8 **Prompted by her mother** summarizes a short, behind-the-

scenes conversation narrated by Mark: "She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the baptizer.' And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.'" The words "at once . . . here on a platter" point to the nearly immediate possibility of instant compliance with her request, hence to the nearness of John's prison.

This gesture of asking her mother is absolutely no indication of Salome's chronological age, since psychological subjection to an ambitious, domineering mother is possible from the cradle to the grave. It is perfectly natural for a little girl to ask her mother, but it may also have been perfectly natural for a *Salome* to suffocate her own desires in favor of a *Herodias'* ambitions. Agreed, she was not mature enough to make her own decisions, but what does THAT tell us about her age?

14:9 **And the king was (Mark: exceedingly) sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given.** Did Herod's oaths really obligate him to grant this criminal request? No, he had two valid options:

1. The actual request made was not contemplated in the oath-covered promise. Despite the exceedingly general nature of his promise, he might honorably have declared that his generosity implied, so necessarily that it needed not be expressed, an intention to give her an expensive gift, or at any rate, what was lawful and proper. So, when she demanded that a crime be committed, the oath was no longer valid and his obligation to keep it ceased.
2. Even if all the men present had objected that the very generality of his promise should be interpreted to include even this request, Herod Antipas could have REPENTED of his oath. An oath is a solemn promise guaranteeing the seriousness and certainty of its fulfillment because of man's awareness of God's presence to witness the affirmations. But this very awareness of God's concern in the transaction must remind the swearer of God's interest, not only in the validity of human promises, but also in the sacredness of human life. Ethically, the choice between the murder of an innocent victim of an adulteress' revenge and the possible embarrassment because of a broken oath, should have been easy to solve on the basis of moral priorities. But this awareness of God and this sense of ethical priorities was notoriously absent in the case of Antipas. From this standpoint his oath and what it should

have stood for was better honored by being broken than by being kept. To have repudiated the hasty oath would not have been sin, but repentance. If the oath must be considered valid, repentance was his only way out, but it was a way out! (Lev. 5:4, 5) Despite John's preaching, Herod had so long followed a pattern of refusal to repent that, now when he needs desperately to respond better to this crisis of conscience, he cannot. Though his conscientious awareness of John's righteousness, holiness and innocence threw him into deep grief (*perilupos genōmenos, lupethis*), other factors blocked any effective decision to repent of his oaths.

Herod is an example of the supposed "necessity" for sinning. Though stricken with a feeling of grief at what necessity made him do, he felt the apparent validity of his reasons: "For the sake of his oaths . . ." But these are the justifications of a man whose conduct was governed, not by the unchanging ethical principles of right and wrong, but by a vague sense of honor and a flexible, dubious conventionalism derived from his own profligate society and its traditional customs. So, the snare which entrapped Antipas was of the flimsiest quality, because he could have repudiated his oaths, and because he knew he was gratifying a cruel hatred with which he did not really agree.

Herod's conscience was dead to real crimes like adultery, incest and murder, but supersensitive to the point of scrupulousness about a broken oath! What moral blindness to uphold a dubious point of honor at the expense of elementary justice!

The second factor blocking Herod's decisive refusal of so wicked a request is his guests. *His oaths and his guests*, as factors, must be taken together, because of the unspoken social pressure these witnesses supplied. His oaths had not been spoken in a vacuum nor merely for the sake of Salome. He intended to impress *his guests* and now their very existence pressured him, as if they said, "Can Herod's word to any of us be trusted, if here in his presence he breaks his most solemn oaths?" The king's fear of being disgraced in their presence proves that both his oaths and Salome's request were heard by the entire group. The moral immobility of each single guest at this sudden turn of events which unavoidably involved the life or death of God's prophet, is the more eloquent against them, because of their unpreparedness to impede the tragic conclusion of a merry feast brought on by Herod's cowardly acquiescence. It is unfair to believe that all the guests were cutthroats, because the politician in

Herod may have invited some reasonably good men for political "window dressing." Even Herod himself had balked at killing John before this. But in these few seconds after Salome delivered her mother's demand, no voice of protest, no remonstrating with the tetrarch to repent of his oath, is recorded. How mistakenly Herod read the thoughts of the most reflective among them: "Let Herod show us by royal example for once the high regard with which the life of an innocent private citizen in his realm is to be regarded! Even at the doubtful cost of temporary embarrassment! Let the king repent of his oath, refuse the iniquitous request, spare the life of God's prophet, and his kingdom may stand forever!" Nevertheless, the order was given and executed before they reacted, and a valiant, innocent victim lay dead because of this inaction. Would Herod have repented of his oaths, had but one or two brave men stood up to defend John? (Contrast Eph. 5:3-18; cf. Jer. 26 all; 36:25; 1 Sam. 14:43-46.) Certainly it was too much to hope that Herod himself should have correctly read the thoughts of any men of character in the group, for how could a man, so habitually insensitive to other people, hope to understand their deepest thoughts at a crisis like this? Or, on the other hand, did those guests, with their consciences deadened and reflexes slowed by wine, actually express their insistence that he maintain his oaths? The monstrousness of his distorted ethic is well-measured in Edersheim's exclamation (*Life*, I, 674):

Unfaithful to his God, to his conscience, to truth and righteousness; not ashamed of any crime or sin, he would yet be faithful to his half-drunken oath, and appear honourable and true before such companions!

Mark (6:26) underlines another deciding factor that tipped the scales in Herod's mind: "He did not WANT to break his word to her." (*ouk ethélesen athetêsai*) His desires, or wishes, conspired against his conscience, will and intelligence, and because he was accustomed to do whatever he wished, he simply did what instinctively seemed most natural to him. He could have repented, objected and refused, but he did not want to.

What irony: some men defy the blazing judgment of an angry God rather than face a snicker from an unpredictable crowd, or a tongue-lashing from their women! Herod was just another weakling like Ahab, who although they recognized the divine mission in God's prophets, John or Elijah, and gestured with the pride of a Xerxes,

meeily folded before those vicious wretches, Jezebel and Herodias, to whom they were slaves!

14:10 **he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.** What a dainty dish to set before the king! Yet from that platter the now lifeless eyes of the holiest man Herod had ever known stared at him. Sinners like Herodias and her dancing daughter seemed momentarily to have conquered by silencing the prophet's voice, but too late. John had already indicted them of evil, already thundered the judgment of the living God in their hearing. Already their consciences had been warned. John had won, because by lifting his head, they only hurled him into the presence of his Vindicator and their Judge!

Ironically, their crime precipitated the very security crisis Herod and Herodias had hoped to avoid, because to their publicly condemned adultery is now added the infamy of murdering a popular holy man.

6. John's body is buried by his disciples and Jesus is informed.

14:12 **And (Mark: when the disciples heard of it) his disciples came and buried it (Mark: in a tomb). And they went and told Jesus.** When John's followers heard of it, who told them? Was Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3) also present at that fatal banquet and a horrified witness to the scene when John's disembodied head was presented to the tetrarch? Was he the contact in the Herodian bureaucracy through whom John's disciples could be assured of access to their master in the dungeon? It is not unlikely, because Herod needed not only fawning pawns who would bend truth and righteousness at his demand, but also a few dependably upright, godly men to whom he could entrust the administrative oversight of his affairs. Where would he have been able to find a more faithful manager than among those men with ability who possessed the undoubted character of a John the Baptist? Was Chuza perhaps a disciple of John, whose wife had already swung over to Jesus, and whose own sentiments agreed with everything John stood for? If so, he may have moved rapidly and certainly to contact other godly men to come to prepare the corpse for a proper burial "in a tomb." Did Chuza, himself a conspicuously wealthy man, provide the tomb, in somewhat the same way Joseph of Arimathea offered his for the entombment of the Lord? Too many unknown factors prohibit any

certainty. In fact, perhaps even the remorse of Herod himself played some role here too, facilitating the burial.

Then went and told Jesus: why?

1. They have no decent alternative. While some disciples of John had chosen previously not to follow Jesus in order to remain loyal to their master (see notes on Mt. 9:14-17), now they have no other option to their dark despair and heartbreak but to seek Him out who was now their last hope. This significant choice to go to Jesus throws light upon John's attitude toward the Lord. When he received the Lord's answer to his impatient question, apparently he was satisfied. (Mt. 11:2-7) This contentment with Jesus was communicated to his disciples and in their blackest day they turn to Him.
2. Did they go to Jesus to prod Him into action? In the same way John had sent to Jesus, hoping He would do something immediate about the wretched state of the nation, perhaps these disciples go to the Lord, hoping He might be more ready to do something about John's death. If He had not hurried the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom when the Baptist had challenged Him earlier, perhaps John's tragic end would shock Him into instant action. Would He raise John from the dead, as He had others?
3. Did these disciples believe that the Messiah's kingdom must automatically mean the overthrow of Herod's? Does their move indicate a positive political switch of allegiance from their late master, and a readiness to crown Jesus their king in order to revolt politically against Herod? Were these very disciples of John among those who fomented the grassroots movement to proclaim Jesus the Messianic Sovereign? (Jn. 6:14, 15) What a task Jesus must have had to cool their bitterness and calm their demands for revenge! As righteous Judge of the world and grateful Kinsman and Friend of the great martyr, in this case He could sympathize perfectly with the rightness of vengeance. But here Jesus could not violate His own priorities by turning aside from His goal to save the world, in order to satisfy a definitely secondary priority, that of avenging John.
4. Or did they hurry to warn Jesus who was even then evangelizing in Herod's Galilee, lest He too fall by the butcher's sword? The reality of the danger to the Lord is measured by His instant move to push His popularity to its logical climax and collapse, and subsequently, by His constant movement to outmaneuver His enemies.

5. Whatever their specific motive, they probably felt that Jesus would be understanding in their grief.

14:13a **Now when Jesus heard it, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart.** What a blow against truth and righteousness had been struck: the voice of the Messiah's forerunner and the message of this great prophet had just been forever silenced on earth! This tragedy was not altogether unexpected, since Jesus had forewarned His disciples that all who would be faithful to God may expect similar rejection. (Mt. 5:10-12; 10:14, 16-39) But this is a personal loss to Jesus: His cousin, John, has just been mercilessly chopped down in a tyrant's dungeon! (Cf. Lk. 1:36)

When Jesus heard it, He had been evangelizing mainly in Galilee west of the Jordan, as were also His disciples. (See on 14:1.) If John was decapitated in the Macherus prison, several days would have elapsed before common travelers could have brought the news the 100 miles from that fortress east of the Dead Sea to central Galilee. *When Jesus heard it*, He withdrew? The disciples of John, Jesus' own followers, and a shocked nation were impatient for Jesus to denounce that dastardly deed in a declaration of holy war against all wickedness in government and religion. But Jesus is deliberately silent, as far as His official, public pronouncements go. Nothing more striking, nothing more out of step with human politics, could be imagined. Nevertheless, here is written the patience, meekness and wisdom of the Son of God who must firmly resist the almost overwhelming temptation to turn aside from His unique mission, in order to avenge His beloved herald. And yet this silence, so frustrating to those who expected decisively crushing vengeance from the Lord, is the divine self-government that keeps God from bludgeoning every sinner instantly whenever he tramples truth and mercy underfoot. There must be time to repent. If the Apostles and disciples are going to "be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them" (Mt. 10:18), this moment of mercy offered the highest authorities in the land must not be snatched away from them by hasty vengeance, no matter how justified. But the silence of God, seen here in Jesus Christ, must not be mistaken for apathy, because His silence is but that ominous quiet that precedes the violent firestorm of divine justice that must finally break over sinful men. Jesus, further, understood perfectly the principle of escalation: to become even distantly embroiled in a holy revolt against Herod must necessarily enflame to fever pitch the emotions of the nation to the

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King Herod Antipas	A KING AND HIS PREACHER John the Baptist	Herodias
<p>A. A Guilty King</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. His conscience was awakened by another voice of righteousness proving that God's voice could not be stilled by murdering His prophets. 2. Awakened by a nearly forgotten remorse over John's murder. <p>B. A Weak-willed Adulterer</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divorced own wife without just cause (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 5, 1) 2. Seduced and married his brother's wife 3. Beguiled by Salome's dancing 4. Feared John (<i>Mk.</i> 6:20) 5. Fear the people (<i>Mt.</i> 14:5) 6. Feared official scorn (<i>Mt.</i> 14:9; <i>Mk.</i> 6:26) <p>C. Openly Confused and Confusing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Herod desired John's death but feared men 2. Herod feared John 3. Herod protected him 4. Herod heard him gladly although much perplexed 5. A rash, foolish oath: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Made in haste in dubious circumstances to a dancing girl while himself perhaps half-drunk 	<p>A. A Fearless Preacher</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not only before the nation of Israel, making holiness a way of life among a degenerate people. 2. But also before the King <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. No soft, easy sermons b. Rather, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife!" <p>B. A Strong and Righteous Man</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By Jesus' estimate (<i>Mt.</i> 11:11) 2. Even in Herod's eyes (<i>Mk.</i> 6:20) 3. Afraid of no one but God 	<p>A. A Vindictive Woman</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Justly condemned for her incestuous adultery. 2. Out for revenge on John. 3. Cared not what measures she took. <p>B. A Woman of Loose Morals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not satisfied with own husband, 2. Accepted Herod's advances and hand in marriage (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 5, 4) 3. Unrelenting murderess of John <p>C. Openly Corrupt and Corrupting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Corrupted Herod further after immoral beginning 2. Corrupted her own daughter for her own nefarious purposes: <p>(assuming her majority)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Salome, shameless like her mother. b. Danced, though improper for a princess so to expose herself, c. Collaborated with her mother.

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<p>King Herod Antipas</p> <p>b. Could have been broken by repentance but kept to avoid scorn.</p> <p>D. A Bitter Remorse</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The king was exceedingly sorry, but did not repent. 2. The king lost last voice of God, since Jesus would not speak to him but once, and then through Pharisees. (Lk. 13:31) 3. The king lost all but the woman who ruined him. (Ant., XVIII, 7; Wars, II, 9, 6) 	<p>A KING AND HIS PREACHER</p> <p>John the Baptist</p> <p>D. A Glorious Martyrdom</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not only preceded Jesus in life, but also in death. 2. Also preceded Him into the regions of light where God awaited this faithful prophet! 	<p>Herodias</p> <p>though it meant murder.</p> <p>D. A Disgraced Consort</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Her high-vaulting ambition overreached itself: jealous of the glittering kingship of Agrippa I, she pushed Antipas to seek the title "king." A suspicious Caligula banished Antipas. 2. Herodias faithfully followed Herod into exile, (Ant., XVIII, 7; Wars, II, 9, 6)
<p>A KING AND HIS LORD</p>		
<p>Herod's Attitude Toward Jesus</p> <p>A. Avid Curiosity (Lk. 9:9; 23:8)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perhaps to hear the more humane message of Him who was the opposite of John (cf. Mt. 11:18, 19) 2. To see miracles (Lk. 23:8) 3. To have a new confessor? 	<p>Jesus' Attitude Toward Herod</p> <p>A. He left Herod's curiosity forever unsatisfied.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By apparently shunning Tiberias altogether 2. By refusing to do miracles for Herod. <p>B. He eluded Herod's opposition</p> <p>Morgan (Matthew. 187): "He passed with quiet dignity out of the reach of the man, left him to his terror, his fear and his frenzy; abandoned him."</p> <p>C. He never feared Herod</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Neither his influence (Mk. 8:15) 2. Nor his power (Lk. 13:32, 33) <p>D. He rejected Herod permanently by leaving him to his own self-appointed doom.</p>	<p>B. Fear of Jesus' Influence, Covert Hostility</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did he use the Pharisees? Lk. 13:31 2. His fear was due to the popular influence of Jesus' ministry. <p>C. Totally Frustrated (Lk. 23:7-12)</p> <p>Herod was totally helpless before a Man who had no fear of him and who knew that Herod could not kill Him.</p>

point of violent explosion and national upheaval and, at the same time, involve Rome by whose grace Herod ruled. In the certain war, any hope of establishing a spiritual kingdom on earth would be completely wiped out. In short, it would be totally self-defeating. For the sequel, see the next section which flows directly out of this one.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the intensity of the impression made upon Herod by Jesus' miracles.
2. How long did John the Baptist's ministry continue?
3. When did he preach to Herod? Publicly in the wilderness or privately before Herod himself?
4. Why was John imprisoned? When? i.e., what other major incident(s) helps to coordinate our data and establish this general period? Where was he imprisoned, and where do we learn this detail? How long was he in prison?
5. What message did he send to Jesus while he was in prison? How did Jesus answer it?
6. When, how and why was John killed?
7. How many miracles did John the Baptist perform? List them.
8. Which of the Herods killed John? What is a "tetrarch"? In what sense was he called a "king"?
9. Explain how Herod could be so ignorant about Jesus. Then explain how Jesus' name could have become known to Herod.
10. Explain why Herod could feasibly expect John to rise from the dead. Would Herod have believed in life after death, if, as some believe, he were a Sadducee?
11. Who was Herodias? What was her character? What was her role in this drama? Who was "Philip" her former husband, i.e., what was his exact relation to Herod Antipas? Why was this marriage to Antipas unlawful?
12. Who were the guests at the birthday dinner party of Herod?
13. List the OT passages that Herod could have cited for repenting of his oath.
14. State whatever principles of right and justice apply to Herod's case, that should have caused him to break his oath rather than keep it in this case.
15. What happened to the body of John after he was beheaded?

16. What does the action of John's disciples after John's death indicate about the relations between John and Jesus, especially after John had sent Him the great question about Jesus' Messiahship?
17. According to the Synoptics, where were Jesus and His Apostles when word came of John's murder? What were they doing? How did Jesus react publicly to the news?
18. Much intimate detail of Herod's private life is reported in this section. Where could the Apostles and Jesus have learned this information, without making use of special inspiration that would reveal these otherwise unknown facts?
19. Luke (9:9) reports Herod's desire to see Jesus. When and where was this desire fulfilled?

Section 34

JESUS FEEDS THE 5000 AND WALKS UPON THE WAVES

(Parallels: Mark 6:30-52; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-21)

TEXT: 14:13-33

13 Now when Jesus heard *it*, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart: and when the multitudes heard *thereof*, they followed him on foot from the cities. 14 And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. 15 And when even was come, the disciples came to him, saying, The place is desert, and the time is already past; send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food. 16 But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat. 17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. 18 And he said, Bring them hither to me. 19 And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 20 And they all ate, and were filled: and they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And they that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

22 And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send