

Focus Text

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.” And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.”

(Matthew 14:1–12, ESV)

Family Drama!

The scene shifts from Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth to a fortress at Machaerus, see the map below. John was saddened to be arrested, it’s sadly coming to the end of his earthly time. John objected to Herod Antipas’ marriage to Herodias because she was his brother’s wife. The mosaic law forbids a man to steal his brother’s wife. This brings shame to the family. Herod is the ruler of the region and was supposedly a God-fearing leader; however, Jesus refers to him as a fox. Herod hates John because John enjoys the people's favor, and his public disapproval is causing hardship for the ruler. Matthew pointed out that the Pharisees couldn’t. Stop John’s baptisms, even though they disapproved of the practice. John is well-loved by the people, yet he’s still rotting away in the prison cell.

3.22.26 Blessed 2026 “Beheaded” Matt 14:1-12

As we shift scenes, Herod’s birthday displays a gross scene. His own daughter is dancing to appease the men in the court. This would never be something God-fearing Jews would consider; this was a blatant affront to God and His people. Yet the scene takes us to the book of Ester where she prepares a great banquet, and in the throes of drinking, Xerxes I grants her a wish up to half of his whole Persian kingdom! One of the ways rulers would display their power was to grant wishes, implying their dominance over the region they governed. Herod, in being pleased by this dance, offers a wish to his daughter. Her mother, Herodias, has already been working in her ear. She has hoped in this moment to rid herself of John, because as long as people are listening to him, she will have a hard time gaining political power in the eyes of the people. Her daughter does what it asks and seeks the head of John.

Herod uses this moment to fulfill a long-awaited execution. Matthew has told us Herod hates John, and now would be the perfect moment to silence the baptizer and display his authority over the region. John is the spiritual hero who has been faithful to God with his whole life. Herod is the earthly king who has squandered his power for lust and enjoyment. And John’s head is brought to Herod on a platter.

Matthew then notes the platter arrives at Herodias’ door, symbolizing the completion of ridding Herodias of this troublemaker. John’s students, disciples, collected his body, laid him to rest, and informed Jesus that his cousin’s race had been won. The story ends sadly; it seems John has failed, and Herod is the one with true power. But in this Lenten season, we know that death is not the end of the follower of Christ; John has inherited his eternal life!

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is your brother’s nakedness.” **(Leviticus 18:16, ESV)**

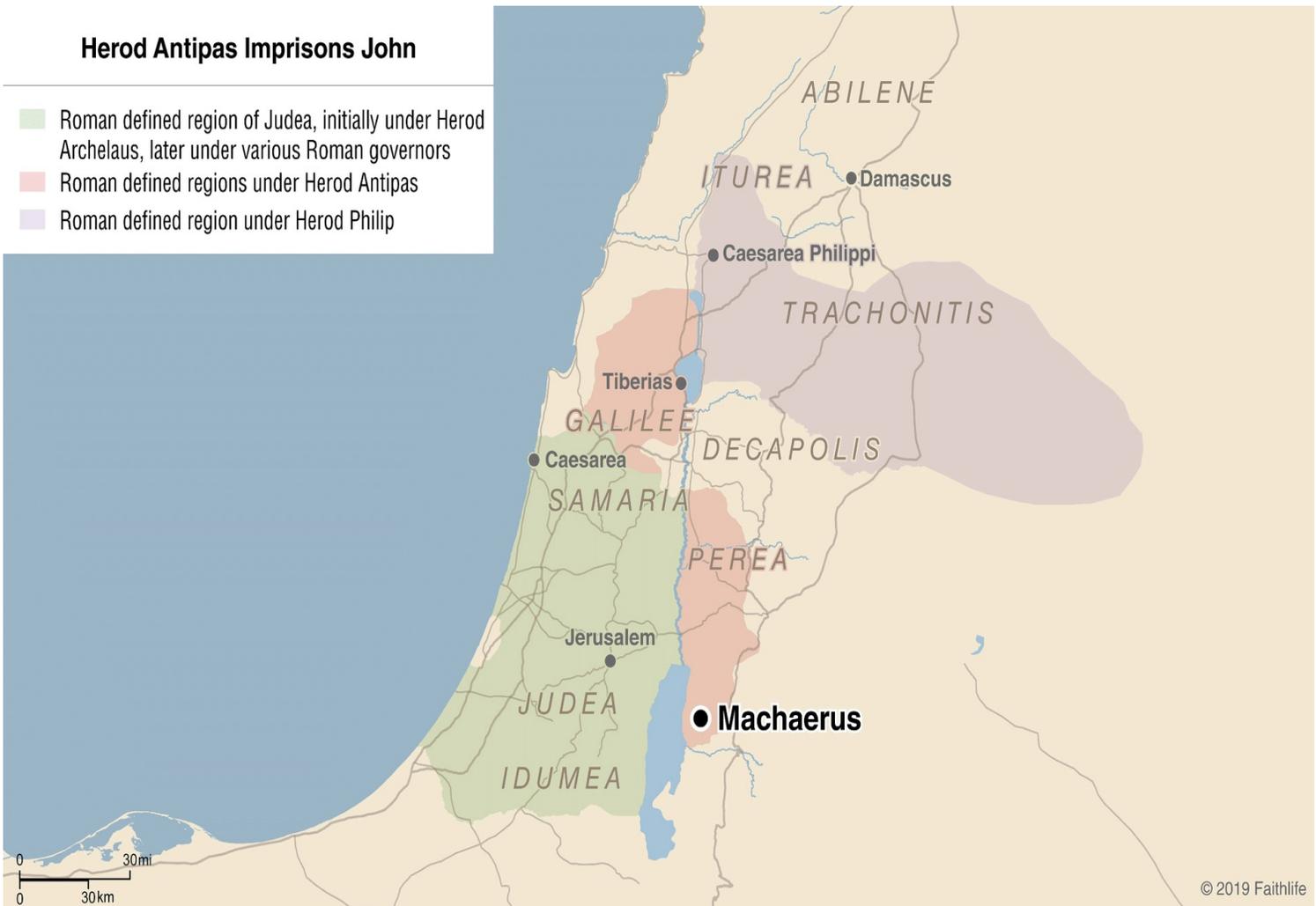
“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” **(Exodus 20:17, ESV)**

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“So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.” **(Esther 7:1–6, ESV)**

Herod Antipas Imprisons John

- Roman defined region of Judea, initially under Herod Archelaus, later under various Roman governors
- Roman defined regions under Herod Antipas
- Roman defined region under Herod Philip



Application

Faithfulness Period

John was willing to be faithful in every task God asked of him. He leaped for joy in the womb. He lived a pure, simple life. He called people to prepare for the Messiah, Jesus. He refused to back away from God’s commands even toward the ruler of Galilee. He went to Heaven, being known by the people as a man of deep faith.

This story seems sad in the temporary setting of its day, but in the backdrop of eternal life, John is held as a man of deep faith in God’s plan of salvation. He is Elijha, making the way for Jesus. It may have seemed like Herrod was the victor, but trust me, John won that battle.

This week, have a cornerman conversation. Has there been a temptation to go against God’s instruction for the sake of convenience? How have you overcome those obstacles? Encourage one another this week to keep going for the Lord! Amen.

Notes

“Herod Antipas governed two geographically separated Jewish territories: Galilee and Perea[1]. He rebuilt Sepphoris, which served as his capital until he relocated it to the newly constructed Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee[2], completing construction there around A.D. 25[2].

The beheading of John the Baptist took place at Machaerus, Antipas’ fortress in Perea—a walled palace with special quarters for political prisoners situated on a nearly impregnable rise deep in the hills[3]. Located east of the Dead Sea at the southern extremity of Perea on a promontory overlooking the Dead Sea[4], this remote fortress made an unusual venue for the royal birthday celebration. The guests—high officials, military commanders, and the wealthiest landowners from Galilee—had traveled to this frontier fortress-palace, possibly because Antipas was there to oversee strengthening his borders against the Nabataeans, who had been infuriated by his treatment of their king’s daughter[5].

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John was beheaded in Antipas’ fortress at Machaerus^[3], and tradition holds that the rock-hewn dungeon was beneath the splendid banquet hall where the nobility were entertained when the executioner was sent to bring the prisoner’s head^[6]. John’s disciples were granted his decapitated body and buried his remains, though the location remains unmentioned in both Gospel and Josephus accounts^[3].¹

“Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and Malthace, was the most frequently mentioned Herod in the New Testament, serving as tetrarch of Galilee and Perea beginning around 4 B.C.^[1] He began using the title “Herod the Tetrarch” in A.D. 6^[2], which is the designation Matthew uses in 14:1.

When his father died, a succession dispute with his brother Archelaus was resolved by Emperor Augustus, who divided the kingdom so that Antipas received the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea rather than the kingship.^[2] Antipas divorced his first wife, Phasaelis (daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea), to marry Herodias, who had been married to his brother Philip—a union that John the Baptist publicly condemned as violating Mosaic Law.^[1] This conflict led Antipas to imprison and eventually execute John the Baptist.
^[1]

¹ [1] Yohanan Aharoni et al., eds., *The Carta Bible Atlas* (Jerusalem, Israel: Carta Jerusalem, 2011), [170](#).

[2] Howard Frederic Vos, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), [402–403](#).

[3] Paul H. Wright, *Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2012), [167](#).

[4] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “[Machaerus](#),” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), [2:1373](#).

[5] Paul Barnett, *Mark: The Servant King*, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), [105](#).

[6] Howard F. Vos, “[Herod](#),” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill F. Unger and R.K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988). [See [here](#).]

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Jesus characterized Antipas as “that fox” ([Luke 13:32](#)), indicating he was a deceitful and shrewd ruler.^[1] During Jesus’s trial, Pilate sent Jesus to Antipas for questioning since Galilee fell under his jurisdiction, though Antipas mocked Jesus and returned him to Pilate without response.^[1] Eventually, Herod Agrippa I accused Antipas of treason against Rome, and Emperor Caligula banished both Antipas and Herodias to Gaul, where they died.^[1]²

“The Herodian court operated within a distinctly Roman cultural framework rather than adhering to Jewish conventions, which explains why a royal daughter would perform before a male audience—a practice that would have been considered improper in traditional Jewish society.^[1]^[2] The girl, identified as Salome by historical tradition, was likely quite young, described as a “koration” (a term for girls of marriageable age, possibly as young as twelve).^[1]

Regarding the nature of her performance, the search results push back against later interpretations. While commentators and artists have imagined various details about the dance, the Gospel accounts themselves leave its character to the reader’s imagination, and the text contains no explicit indication of an “atmosphere of wild abandon” or “lascivious” nature.^[1] The verb used to describe how the dance “pleased” Antipas and his guests emphasizes winning approval and accommodation rather than implying sexual arousal.^[1]

The crucial cultural element involves Antipas’s response. His extravagant oath to grant her anything up to half his kingdom parallels the language King Ahasuerus uses toward Esther, representing hyperbolic rhetoric rather than a literal offer.^[1] Drunken men frequently made exaggerated promises with no intention of fulfilling them, and even sober royalty commonly made extremely generous offers to display wealth or generosity.^[2]

² [1] Nancy S. Dawson and Eugene H. Merrill, [All the Genealogies of the Bible: Visual Charts and Exegetical Commentary](#), ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), [417](#).

[2] Titus Kennedy, [Archaeology and the People of the Bible: Exploring the Evidence for the Historical Existence of Bible Characters](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest Apologetics, 2026), [270](#).

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Herodias’s daughter acted strategically by consulting her mother, who understood what Antipas might actually grant—a request for John’s execution could be fulfilled immediately without significant loss to the tetrarch and would eliminate a family rival.^[2] The dance itself was thus the mechanism through which Herodias seized a political opportunity to remove the prophet who had condemned her marriage.”³

³ [1] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017), [2:145–146](#).

[2] Kim Huat Tan, *Mark: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), [80–81](#).