

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

I. Jesus' Third Tour of Galilee and its Aftermath

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #109

2. The Death of John the Immerser

MK 6.14-29 (Parallel Texts: MT 14.1-12; LK 9.7-9)

(14) ^MKing Herod heard about what was happening on Jesus' third tour, for Jesus' name had become well known. ^LAnd he was very perplexed, ^Mfor some were saying, "John the Baptist is alive, having been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

(15) Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

(16) But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" (17) For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. (18) For John kept on saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

(19) So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and persisted in wanting to kill him. But she was not able to do so, (20) because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. ^{MT}When he would have otherwise killed John, he was scared to do so because of the multitudes, for they believed that John was a Prophet. ^MEvery time Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he loved to listen to him.

(21) Finally the perfect opportunity came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. (22) When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she greatly pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."

(23) And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

(24) She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

(25) At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter...right now!"

(26) The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. (27) So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

The man went, beheaded John in the prison, (28) and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.

(29) On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb, ^{MT}and they went and told Jesus.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

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	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Machaerus
Timeline	Late March (Month 26)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	I. Jesus' Third Tour of Galilee and its Aftermath
Title	2. The Death of John the Immerser

COMMENT:

As we noted in the previous reading, the gospels do not give us details about the roughly six months of Jesus' ministry on his third and final tour of Galilee. However, the five events that closed the campaign are presented in great detail. These are:

- (1) the death of John the Immerser
- (2) the withdrawal of Jesus and the twelve to the east side of the Sea of Galilee for a time of debriefing and rest
- (3) the feeding of the 5000
- (4) Jesus walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee in another night storm
- (5) Jesus' "Bread of Life" Discourse in the Synagogue at Capernaum

The beheading of John the Baptizer was a major event that occurred at the close of the third tour, and served as the catalyst for Jesus to gather the twelve together again. The death of John, a true prophet, sent shock waves throughout the entire region of Palestine. It must have deeply impacted Jesus as well, for he lost his strongest supporter on earth, and he could not help but be reminded of his own upcoming death through John's martyrdom.

We should note that the "King Herod" mentioned here was one of the four sons of the Herod who was reigning at the birth of Jesus 32 years earlier. Historians aptly called their father "Herod the Great," because he was a powerful politician and shrewd ruler. The four sons who divided up their father's realm among them after his death were all much lesser men, of little influence in history, other than Herod Antipas' association with Jesus.

There are several reasons why the Immerser's martyrdom was given such extensive coverage by the gospel writers. First, it provided a hint of what was coming for Jesus himself. Many of the prophets of Jewish history were martyred by their peers. Now, after four hundred years, when a universally acclaimed prophet arose again in Israel, he too was killed. The possibility of Jesus-- who was much more than just a prophet-- also being martyred was a real probability, based upon what happened to John.

The death of John therefore prepares us for the death of Jesus in the narrative. The cheap, shameful manner of John's death also prepares us for the much greater travesty of Jesus' death.

Herod's hypocrisy and sinfulness are highlighted by this account. Here was a man so vain that he feared to kill John because of the opinion of the multitudes, who considered John to be a prophet. Herod's vanity caused him to make a foolish promise to a young girl because she danced for him in a sensuous way. He was afraid to break that promise because the leading men of the region heard him make it, and he could not be demeaned in their eyes. Herod kept his word because he feared what men would say. Vanity!

Yet, when John confronted him with the Scriptures, which condemned his marriage to Herodias when she was still married to Herod's brother, he had no fear of God whatsoever, and openly flaunted his disobedience by retaining Herodias as his wife. More vanity.

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Herod was morally bankrupt, a pleaser of men and women but not God, and a hypocrite who kept his word for all the wrong reasons. Such a man was the reason for the death of God's faithful prophet, John the Immerser. All this matters because this same Herod was also involved in the trial and death of Jesus one year later. If the beheading of John the Immerser was unjust and morally reprehensible, how much more the death of the sinless Lamb of God?

All of the Jewish and Roman leadership who banded together with this King Herod to kill Jesus are thus shown to be of the same moral character and judgement as Herod. They were all evil men, inspired by the prince of evil, even as Herod was.

APPLICATION:

In spite of the evil and repugnancy of the circumstances of the death of John the immerser, and ultimately of Jesus himself, God reigned sovereignly over it all, and used evil to accomplish his perfectly good, saving purpose. Since God "worked all things together for good" in the death of Jesus, we can be sure he will do the same thing in our lives as well.

God works out his good and perfect will in spite of a rebellious, sinful, and fallen world. This is the sovereign God we believe in and serve, even when we also end up martyred, or suffering loss because of our love for him. This was the lesson Jesus had just taught the apostles in his MT 10 training session.

When is the last time you suffered unjustly because of your love for God?

Did he not fill you with grace to endure it joyfully?

Are you ready for the next round of sacrifices? What steps do you need to take to increase your readiness?