

Chapter 14

Herod Antipas (14:1–12) (Mark 6:14-16; Luke 9:7-9)

“As Ahab and Jezebel once opposed the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18–2 Kings 1), Herod and Herodias now oppose the prophet who comes “in the spirit of Elijah.””¹

There are several Herods in the New Testament “Herod the Great killed the children in Bethlehem; Herod Antipas killed John the Baptist; Herod Agrippa I killed the Apostle James; and Herod Agrippa II heard Paul’s appeal recorded in the book of Acts.”²

Jesus was likely born December 25 of 5 BC. On December 25 of 25 AD, he turned 30 years of age.

“*Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli,*” (Luke 3:23, ESV)

About 30 years of age almost certainly means soon *after* 30. Soon after beginning his ministry he comes for baptism. The baptizing period would have been in the summers. People would not have been out of their warm homes, sleeping in the open and having cold water poured on them in the winter months. Therefore, Jesus probably shows up for baptism around June of AD 26; he would have been crucified about April of 29 during Passover at the end of March or early April. His public ministry was probably from December 25, 25 A.D. to March-April of 29 A.D.

It is likely that Herod has John arrested before the next baptizing season began, and the politically unpredictable crowds begin to form, which would have been winter-spring of AD 27. John the Baptist is probably put to death a year later, the winter-summer of AD 28. This puts the material in Matthew 14 and following in about the last year of Jesus’ life.

Matthew 14:1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus,

At that time.... This phrase ties Jesus rejection at Nazareth with John’s rejection by Herod.

Herod.... “The “Herod” of this story is Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39, and thus the ruler of Galilee during Jesus’ adult life.”³ Herod the Great, his father, died at the end of March or early April in 4 BC.

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 65.

² Robert James Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (vol. Volume 9; Study Guide Commentary Series; Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 124.

³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 553). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

“Christ was born when Herod the Great was ruling. Herod’s son, Herod Antipas, was the ruler of Galilee and Perea, the territories in which Jesus and John the Baptist carried out most of their ministries. It was this ruler who beheaded John the Baptist and tried Christ just before his death.”⁴

tetrarch.... “Title of a class of Roman provincial officials. Tetrarchs were tributary princes who were not deemed important enough to be designated kings. The title was used in the Roman provinces of Thessaly, Galatia, and Syria. The origin of the title appears to have come from governors who ruled over a fourth part of a region or country, as was the case in Syria following the death of Herod the Great. By NT times, the etymological significance had diminished, however, so that the title merely designated secondary princes.”⁵

heard about the fame of Jesus.... He heard of his powers or miracles and this would have made him “concerned about the possible implications of Jesus’ announcement of the coming of a “kingdom of heaven.””⁶

Matthew 14:2 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.”

“Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.” (Luke 9:7–9, ESV)

“Herod’s misidentification of Jesus as John the baptizer risen from the dead suits the preceding misidentification of Jesus by his fellow townspeople (13:53–58).”⁷

Apparently, Herod was not the only one to think that Jesus was John the Baptist. Later, when Jesus asked who people thought he was, they answered,

“And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”” (Matthew 16:14, ESV)

The problem of identifying John with Jesus is that John *did no sign* and Jesus did so often.

“And many came to him. And they said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.”” (John 10:41, ESV)

⁴ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

⁵ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

⁶ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 553). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 63.

It was probable that Herod thought that the fact of this resurrection gave John power he did not possess earlier.

The Death of John the Baptist (14:3–12)

(Mark 6:16-29; Luke 3:19-20)

In the gospels, John' life is intertwined with Jesus' life.

“But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” (Luke 1:13, ESV)

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 3:1–2, ESV)

“John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16, ESV)

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” (Mark 1:9, ESV)

“Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.” (Matthew 4:12, ESV)

“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”” (Matthew 9:14, ESV)

“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples” (Matthew 11:2, ESV)

“For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,” (Matthew 14:3, ESV)

“But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” (Matthew 17:12–13, ESV)

“The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’” (Matthew 21:25, ESV)

Matthew 14:3 For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife,

put him in prison.... “He arrested John, put him in chains, and shut him up in a terrible, deep, and hot dungeon that formed part of the castle-palace at **Machaerus**.”⁸



⁸ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (vol. 9; New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 587.

Jesus learned of John the Baptist's arrest in 4:12. Jesus would have been in Perea at the same time. After John's arrest,

*"Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee."
(Matthew 4:12, ESV)*

Matthew 14:4 because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

For background on this story we read: "Now Herod Antipas, on a visit to Herod Philip, became infatuated with Herodias. The two illicit lovers agreed to separate from their present marriage partners—Herodias from Herod Philip; Herod Antipas from the daughter of Aretas, king of the Nabatean Arabs—and to marry each other. This was done. When John the Baptist heard about this he rebuked Herod Antipas. He did this repeatedly. There was good reason for the rebuke, for such a marriage was incestuous (Lev. 18:16; 20:21)."⁹

had been saying to him.... Herod Antipas claimed to be a Jew, this claim made him subject to Jewish law. Based on this fact, John spoke out rebuking him. In marrying his brother's wife, he broke the law. If he had been a Gentile, I doubt John would have had much to say.

It is not lawful.... "John was critical of the new marriage as violating OT law. It was not just the fact of divorce, but that the specific provisions of Lv. 18:16; 20:21 were being violated. What Herod had done was considered to be a form of incest within the family."¹⁰

Matthew 14:5 And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.

"What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." (Matthew 11:9, ESV)

"But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." (Matthew 21:26, ESV)

But there is more to this story for Herod had a degree of fear and respect for John as well.

"...for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly." (Mark 6:20, ESV)

⁹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (vol. 9; New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 587.

¹⁰ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 582). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Matthew 14:6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod,

“Herodias’s daughter by her former marriage, **Salome**, a girl between twelve and fourteen years of age ... danced before the king and his lords (v. 6). The dance may have been very sensual, but the text does not say so. The outrageous morals of the Herodians suggest it, as does the low status of dancing girls.”¹¹ “This must have greatly surprised everyone present because in this day and time dancing women were considered to be immoral. For a princess to dance before a group of drunken guests, particularly at this young age, must have been astonishing. The implication of the context is that it was a sensual dance instigated by her mother to win Herod’s approval.”¹²



Matthew 14:7 so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

“And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” (Mark 6:23, ESV)

whatever she might ask.... “It is perhaps best seen as a grandiose gesture made without too much thought, but with a background assumption that there would be unspoken constraints imposed by prudence, family loyalty, and culture.”¹³ Perhaps it was simply hyperbolic and as such, no one took it too seriously.

¹¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 338). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹² Robert James Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (vol. Volume 9; Study Guide Commentary Series; Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 125.

¹³ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 584). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

Matthew 14:8 Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.”

“And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not,” (Mark 6:19, ESV)

Matthew 14:9 And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given.

king.... In popular vocabulary, he was a king, however, to the Romans who appointed him to this office, he was a *tetrarch*.¹⁴

sorry¹⁵ [sad, grieved, distressed] Sorrow for sin does not equate to repentance of sin. Often it means sorry over the consequence of sin, not the actual sin.

his oaths and his guests.... “Oaths bind one solemnly to obligations which in this case are reinforced by the loss of face that would have been involved in renouncing the oath before one’s guests at dinner....”¹⁶

Clearly Herod was outflanked by his wife and did not have the character to put an end to her plotting. “Herodias comes across as the dominant personality in the story, and it may well be that her daughter’s dance was designed from the beginning to undermine Antipas’ defenses.”¹⁷

Matthew 14:10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison,

And then Herod and Herodias do the unthinkable, they murder the greatest of the prophets (Matthew 11:11).

“Decapitation (v. 10) though sanctioned by Greeks and Romans was contrary to Jewish law, which also forbade execution without trial.”¹⁸

Matthew 14:11 and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

¹⁴ *tetrarch* “A tetrarch, the ruler of a fourth part of a district or province. Later it became a common title among the Romans for those who governed any part of a province or kingdom subject only to the Roman Emperor.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁵ *sorry* *λυπέω* “① to cause severe mental or emotional distress, *vex, irritate, offend, insult*, ② to experience sadness or distress....” William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 604.

¹⁶ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 585). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

¹⁷ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 556). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹⁸ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 339). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



“The mother has her revenge for John’s criticism of her marriage.”¹⁹

“So John died, the last of the OT prophets (11:9, 13) who through persecution became models for Jesus’ disciples (5:11–12).”²⁰ This in itself may be one of the biggest reasons for Matthew telling this story—to prepare his own church for persecution.

Matthew 14:12 And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

“Matthew often finishes his longer narrative pericopes by returning to the opening theme (see on 12:45; 15:20)—Herod hears reports of Jesus (14:1); Jesus hears reports of Herod (v. 12).”²¹ “The two of them, the Baptist and Jesus, belong together for Matthew. They proclaim the same message, suffer the same fate, and have the same opponents.”²²

“Everything Jesus commands *against* in his Sermon on the Mount (5:17–48) contributes to the death of the Baptist at the palace: disrespect for the law of Scripture, bitter anger (of Herodias for John), lust, adultery, and oaths, and, most obviously, again especially by Herodias, revenge and hatred.”²³

¹⁹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 585). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

²⁰ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 339). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 339). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 307.

²³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 66.

“The following parallels between John’s passion and that of Jesus are to be observed:

John	Jesus
Herod the tetrarch was responsible for John’s death John was seized (κρατέω, 14:3)	Pilate the governor was responsible for Jesus’ death Jesus was seized (κρατέω, 21:46; etc.)
John was bound (δέω, 14:3) Herod feared the crowds because they held John to be a prophet (14:5)	Jesus was bound (δέω, 27:2) The chief priests and Pharisees feared the crowds because they held Jesus to be a prophet (21:46)
Herod was asked by another to execute John and grieved so to do (14:6–11)	Pilate was asked by others to execute Jesus and was reluctant so to do (27:11–26)
John was buried by his disciples (14:12)	Jesus was buried by a disciple (27:57–61)” ²⁴

Notice how Jesus parallels John’s death and his own.

“But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” (Matthew 17:12–13, ESV)

We ask, why did Matthew give us this story of John’s death? I think the reason is that chapter 14 is a division in Matthew’s story between the rejection of Israel in the prior chapters and a new focus on the death of Jesus in the coming chapters. This story of the forerunner’s death is the beginning of this new section. The story is now increasingly about Jesus death.

“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

²⁴ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 476.