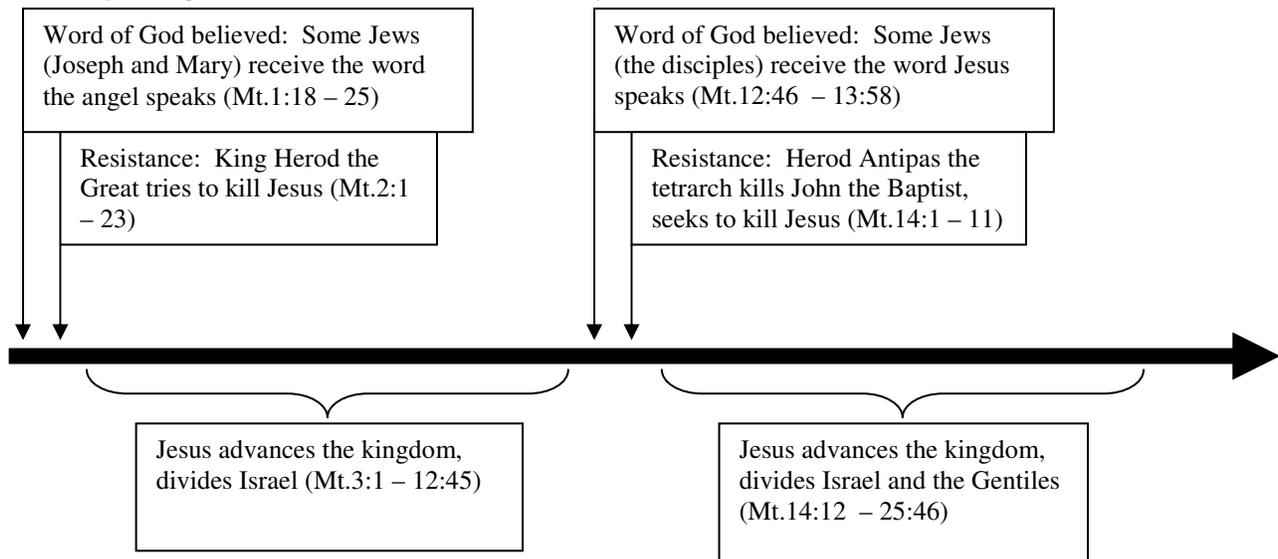


Matthew 14:1 – 12

^{14:1} At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, ² and said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’ ³ For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. ⁴ For John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ ⁵ Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. ⁶ But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, ⁷ so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸ Having been prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.’ ⁹ Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 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. ¹² his disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

Literary Background: Patterns in Matthew’s Storyline



Cultural Background

- Recall that Jesus has just given the seven parables about how the kingdom grows, based on receiving ‘the seed’ of his word (Mt.13).
- Who is Herod? Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who tried to murder the infant Jesus (Mt.2). Herod the Great divided his kingdom upon his death in 4 BC. Herod Antipas ruled as tetrarch (ruler of ‘a fourth’) the region called Perea (northeast of the Dead Sea) and the Galilee area under the Roman Empire. Early in his reign, Herod Antipas married his first wife Phasaelis, the daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea, his neighbor to the east of Perea. However, on a visit to Rome he stayed with his half-brother Herod Philip I and there fell in love with Philip’s wife, Herodias, granddaughter of Herod the Great and Mariamne I and therefore also Herod Antipas’ niece. The two agreed to marry each other, after Herod Antipas had divorced Phasaelis. Since these negotiations took some time, Aretas’ daughter learned about the plan. She asked permission to travel to the frontier fortress of Machaerus, where Nabatean forces escorted her to her father. Relations between Antipas and Aretas soured and they fought a war in 36 AD. According to some the official marriage of Antipas and Herodias took place in 34 AD, after the death of Philip, but contemporary records – Josephus and the Bible – place it before Philip’s death, probably in 27 AD.
- John the Baptist condemned the marriage for being both incestuous and adulterous, against Jewish law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21; cf. Lev.18 and 20).

Questions

1. Why is this story even here?
 - a. Literary symmetry: Herod the Great tried to kill Jesus as an infant out of fear. Now his son Herod Antipas killed John the Baptist and fears that Jesus is John the Baptist version 2.0. There is continuity in terms of the political threat to Jesus, and Jesus' threat to political power.
 - b. Foreshadowing: Somehow Herod Antipas believes in resurrection of some sort. This is a hint of Jesus' resurrection in Mt.28.
 - c. Negative Example: Jesus has just given the parable of the four soils, and other parables about how the kingdom of heaven is spreading.
2. Let's expand on the role of Herod Antipas as a Negative Example. What kind of person is Herod Antipas? How can you tell?
 - a. Fearful and maybe a little superstitious: he thinks that John the Baptist has risen from the dead, he fears divine vengeance
 - b. Sensual and driven by his desires: he broke his marriage even though it was politically important and cost his people a war; he chose an unlawful, incestuous marriage with his niece; he enjoyed the dancing of his stepdaughter which was probably erotic
 - c. Spontaneous, unthinking: he made a very rash vow to give 'whatever' his stepdaughter wanted
 - d. Driven by his public image and desire to please his wife Herodias, and maybe others who are also sensual, spontaneous, etc.: his desire to keep his vow in front of all his guests
3. How is Herod's response to John the Baptist a negative illustration of those parables?
 - a. Recall the parable of the four soils, in Mt.13:1 – 23. He is certainly not good soil! He does not receive the word into himself.
 - b. In him, the seed is choked off by desires for sex and power.
 - c. If we are that way, why would it prevent us from receiving Jesus' word?
4. What do you think about John the Baptist's call to Herod Antipas to repent?
 - a. Pretty bold! No compromising a message for the office or political power of Herod Antipas.
 - b. Pretty costly! It cost John his freedom and then his head.
 - c. What would John the Baptist say to Newt and Calista Gingrich? Here's some background on them. Republican Newt Gingrich's began an adulterous relationship with Callista when he was still married to his second wife Marianne Ginther. After Marianne reportedly refused to grant Newt an 'open marriage,' Newt finalized his divorce from her. He married Callista four months later. It is unclear to me why Newt Gingrich's third marriage (not to mention his second marriage, which also began with adultery) should qualify as a 'marriage' by Jesus' definition (Mt.19:3 – 12) or John the Baptist's definition. Yet Christians of all stripes have tended to simply overlook that fact.
 - d. How many of us would say to Newt Gingrich, 'Well, just don't cheat anymore, and don't leave Callista, and I'll overlook the past'? We are very used to accommodating other people's sin. But notice that John the Baptist does not accommodate Herod Antipas's sin. He just says, 'Leave her. You can't have that sexual relationship, at all, in any form.'
 - e. Is there an aspect of Jesus' teaching that would be hard for you to accept? Why?
5. What is this story hinting at? What's going to happen to Jesus?
 - a. Jesus is going to challenge someone in high political power, maybe Herod Antipas.
 - b. Herod or someone is eventually going to arrest Jesus and kill him.
 - c. Jesus will be resurrected!