

# Matthew 14:1-13: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew chapter 14 verses 1 to 13 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. Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. Matthew 14 begins with the story of the death of John the Baptist, but it's introduced in a surprising way.

Herod hears word of Jesus' miracles and actions, and then wonders whether John the Baptist has been brought back to life. Then we hear the story of the death of John the Baptist, after which Jesus responds to hearing the news of the death of John the Baptist.

[ 1 : 35 ] It's an interesting way to tell us the story. It highlights the theme of resurrection. Jesus is John the Baptist raised up again. And here we might think of the story of Elijah and Elisha, as the ministry of Elisha continues from the ministry of that of Elijah.

Elisha is anointed with the spirit of Elijah. He has the double portion of the spirit of Elijah and continues his ministry, completing it. Likewise, with John the Baptist, his ministry is a ministry of the desert that is completed by the ministry of Christ in the land.

There are other themes of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha that are in play here. Themes of widespread rejection, but also of a remnant. John the Baptist's story is very similar to that of Elijah. They're both people of the wilderness. They're both dressed in similar garments. John the Baptist is one who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. He's the Elijah that is to come.

And in all of these ways, there is an association between those characters. But here we have a story that brings out further associations. The story of Elijah and 1 Kings is dominated by a conflict with King Ahab and his manipulative wife, Jezebel.

[ 2 : 47 ] And here we have a similar pair, Herod and his wife Herodias, who are in conflict with John the Baptist. Once again, there's a manipulative wife who's trying to spur her husband on to destroy the prophet.

There's a further aspect of Old Testament background that might come to our mind at this point. It's a story that has two key women who influence their husbands greatly. In that story, Ahasuerus, the king, offers up to half his kingdom to the woman who pleases him, Esther.

Herod does the same thing. Once again, it's at a feast. And Herodias is like an anti-Mordecai to her daughter, who's an anti-Ester. She's someone who represents the polar opposite of Esther.

The character of Herodias might also remind us of Zeresh, who spurred Haman on in his attempt to kill Mordecai, the man who wouldn't bow to him. In Esther chapter 5, verses 9, we read, And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart.

But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh.

[ 4 : 01 ] And Haman recounted to them the splendour of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honoured him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king.

Then Haman said, Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast. This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. It's a very similar dynamic that's playing out here. Haman, we should remember, is an Agagite, a descendant of Agag, and a descendant of Amalek.

Amalek sought to kill the Jews, and Herod is an Idumean, a descendant of Edom, like Amalek. And maybe there's a connection between their two characters. The descendant of Esau is trying to kill the descendant of Jacob.

[ 5 : 07 ] A question to consider. Jesus' response to the news of the death of John the Baptist is to withdraw and to go to a desolate place by himself.

Why do you think he responds in such a manner? Why do you think so