

## BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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### MT. 14 JOHN'S DEATH; MULTIPLICATION OF LOAVES, WALKING ON WATER



After Christ finished His parables, the Bible records, "When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?' So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Mt. 13:54-58).

We see here how a person's disbelief can affect God intervening in his life. Even Christ was limited in what He could accomplish in His hometown.

Next, we have a detailed description of Christ's family. He was the son of Joseph the carpenter, and in Mr. 6:3, it mentions Jesus was also a carpenter. Yet the word "carpenter" actually means a craftsman, working with wood, metal and stone. Robertson comments, "Evidently since Joseph's death, He had carried on the business and was 'the carpenter' of Nazareth. The word *tekton* comes from *tekein*...to beget, create, like *techne* (craft, art). It is a very old word, from Homer down. It was originally applied to the worker in wood or builder with wood like our carpenter. Then it was used of *any artisan or craftsman in metal, or in stone as well as in wood and even of sculpture.*"

Jesus had four half-brothers named here and at least two half-sisters (in plural), since Joseph was really not His father, but it was God the Father.

While Jesus was in Nazareth, He was told of the atrocious murder of John the Baptist. We read, "At that time Herod the tetrarch (governing a fourth of the country) heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.' For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was

celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter.' And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus" (Mt. 14:1-12). Notice now how accurate the biblical story is when compared with other historical sources.

William Barclay notes, "Josephus also tells the story of the death of John: 'Now when many others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who *feared* lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it was too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner out of Herod's *suspicious temper* to Machaerus and was there put to death" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18:5.2).

Barclay continues, "The facts were quite simple. Herod Antipas was married to a daughter of [Aretas] the king of the Nabatean Arabs. He had a brother in Rome also called Herod...Philip. This Herod who stayed in Rome was a wealthy private individual, who had no kingdom of his own. On a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas *seduced* his brother's wife, and *persuaded her to leave his brother and to marry him*. In order to do so he had to put away his own wife...In doing this, apart altogether from the moral aspect of the question, Herod broke two laws. He divorced his own wife without cause, and he married his sister-in-law, which was a marriage, under Jewish law, within the prohibited relationships. Without hesitation John rebuked him. It is always dangerous to rebuke an eastern despot, and by his rebuke John signed his own

death warrant. Herodias...was the ruination of Herod in every possible sense...she was stained by a triple guilt. She was a woman of loose morals and of infidelity. She was a vindictive woman, who nursed her wrath to keep it warm, and who was out for revenge, even when she was justly condemned. And--perhaps worst of all--she was a woman who did not hesitate to use even her own daughter to realize her own vindictive ends.

"Herodias' daughter, Salome, must have been young, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years of age... Here was a royal princess who acted as a dancing-girl. The dances which these girls danced were suggestive and immoral. For a royal princess to dance in public at all was an amazing thing. Herodias thought nothing of outraging modesty and demeaning her daughter, if only she could gain her revenge on a man who had *justly rebuked her*.

"Herod's action was *typical of a weak man*. He kept a foolish oath and broke a great law. He had promised Salome to give her anything she might ask, little thinking what she would request. He knew well that to grant her request, so as to keep his oath, was to break a far greater law; and yet he chose to do it because *he was too weak to admit his error*. He was *more frightened* of a woman's tantrums than of the moral law. He was *more frightened* of the criticism, and perhaps the amusement, of his guests, than of the voice of conscience. Herod was a man who could take a firm stand on the wrong things, even when he knew what was right; and *such a stand is the sign, not of strength, but of weakness*.

"The result of his seduction of Herodias and his divorce of his own wife, was that Aretas, the father of his wife, and the ruler of the Nabateans, bitterly resented the insult perpetrated against his daughter. He made war against Herod, and heavily defeated him. The comment of Josephus is: "Some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist" (Antiquities of the Jews, 18. 5. 2). Herod was in fact only rescued by calling in the power of the Romans to clear things up....The years went by and Caligula came to the Roman throne. The Philip who had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Ituraea died, and Caligula gave the province to another of the Herod family named Agrippa; and

with the province he gave him the title of king. The fact that Agrippa was called king moved Herodias to *bitter envy*. Josephus says, "She was not able to conceal how miserable she was, by reason of the envy she had towards him" (Antiquities of the Jews, 18. 7. 1).

"Herod prepared to set out to Rome [hoping to be named king]; but Agrippa sent messengers to forestall him with accusations that Herod was preparing treacherously to rebel from Rome. The result was that Caligula believed Agrippa's accusations, took Herod's province from him, with all his money, and gave it to Agrippa and banished Herod to far off Gaul to languish there in exile until he died. So in the end it was through Herodias that Herod lost his fortune and his kingdom, and dragged out a weary existence in the faraway places of Gaul. If ever there was proof that sin brings its own punishment, that proof lies in the story of Herod [Antipas]. It was an ill day when he first seduced Herodias. From that act of infidelity came the murder of John, and in the end disaster, in which he lost all, except the woman who loved him and ruined him" (Daily Study Bible).

The Bible continues, "When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food. But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish.' He said, 'Bring them here to Me.' Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Mt. 14:13-21).

With the death of John the Baptist, Jesus was more alone than ever and needed time alone to

rest and pray. Yet the multitudes would not quit following him. Instead of becoming irritated, he saw their need and had compassion on them, healing those that were sick. It was late in the evening and His disciples got desperate because the huge crowd grew hungry and wanted to disperse them so they could go buy some food. But Christ was about to teach them a lesson about what He could do. He told them to feed the crowd, which with around 5,000 men meant there were probably, counting the women and children well over 10,000. The disciples were dismayed, for they didn't even have enough to feed the twelve! Yet, Christ told them to seat them, and in the account in Mark, it mentioned they were seated by fifty or a hundred per group (Mark 6:40). Then He blessed the food. The typical thanks for the food in those days was, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." Then the disciples distributed the measly food and to their astonishment, more kept coming out of the baskets until all were fed and there were enough scraps to fill 12 baskets! In the account by John it says the people were so impressed with the miracle they wanted to make Jesus the king of Israel right then and there (John 6:15). Yet Jesus knew it was neither the time nor the place to be the king over all Israel. That would have to wait.

So He again withdrew, this time leaving His disciples behind and instructing them where to go in their boat. We read, "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was

boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God'" (Mt. 14:22-33).

Barclay mentions about Peter, "There is no passage in the New Testament in which Peter's character is more fully revealed than this. It tells us three things about him.

"(1) Peter was given to acting upon impulse and without thinking of what he was doing. It was his mistake that again and again he acted without fully facing the situation and without counting the cost. He was to do exactly the same when he affirmed undying and unshakable loyalty to Jesus (Matt 26:33-35), and then denied his Lord's name. And yet there are worse sins than that, because Peter's whole trouble was that he was ruled by his heart; and, however he might sometimes fail, his heart was always in the right place and the instinct of his heart was always love.

"(2) Because Peter acted on impulse, he often failed and came to grief. It was always Jesus' insistence that a man should look at a situation in all its bleak grimness before he acted (Luke 9:57-58; Matt 16:24-25). Jesus was completely honest with men; He always bade them see how difficult it was to follow Him before they set out upon the Christian way. A great deal of Christian failure is due to acting upon an emotional moment without counting the cost.

"(3) But Peter never completely failed, for always in the moment of his failure he clutched at Christ. The wonderful thing about him is that every time he fell, he rose again; and that it must have been true that even his failures brought him closer and closer to Jesus Christ. As has been well said, a saint [or church member] is not a person who never fails; it is a person who gets up and goes on again every time he falls. Peter's failures only made him love Jesus Christ the more.

So Peter is an example of what God can do if one genuinely gives himself to Him. God looks at the heart, and if the heart is right, God can supply the rest. As we can see from his epistles, Peter did overcome these weaknesses of character.