

Mark 6:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.

Analysis

But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. Herod's tormented conscience fixates on one interpretation despite various theories circulating. 'When Herod heard thereof' (ἀκούσας ὁ Ἡρώδης, akousas ho Hērōdēs) indicates continuing reports of Jesus' ministry reached him. Unlike others' speculation, Herod pronounced with certainty: 'It is John, whom I beheaded' (Ὁν ἐγὼ ἀπεκεφάλισα Ἰωάννην, Hon egō apekephalisa Iōannēn). The personal pronoun 'I beheaded' (ἐγὼ ἀπεκεφάλισα) emphasizes his direct responsibility—he couldn't escape guilt by blaming others (though the execution resulted from complicated circumstances, vv. 17-28).

'He is risen from the dead' (οὗτος ἠγέρθη, houtos ēgerthē) expresses Herod's superstitious dread—not theological belief in resurrection but guilty fear of supernatural retribution. This demonstrates how unregenerate conscience, while unable to save, torments with guilt. Herod experienced remorse (emotional regret) but not repentance (transformative turning to God). His fear didn't produce faith, just anxiety. Reformed theology distinguishes between worldly sorrow (producing death) and godly sorrow (producing repentance unto salvation, 2 Corinthians 7:10). Herod exemplifies the former—guilt without grace, conviction without conversion, fear without faith.

Historical Context

Beheading (ἀποκεφαλίζω, apokephalizō) was Roman execution method, typically reserved for citizens (non-citizens were crucified). John's execution at Machaerus fortress was Herod's decision, though he ruled under Roman authority. Josephus confirms Herod feared John's popularity might spark rebellion, adding political motive to Mark's account of Herodias's grudge (Antiquities 18.5.2). The belief in resurrection wasn't universal first-century Judaism—Sadducees denied it while Pharisees affirmed it. Herod's statement about John rising reflects not orthodox resurrection theology but popular superstition about ghosts or revenants. Ancient Mediterranean cultures widely believed in restless spirits of murdered persons returning to haunt killers. Literature from the period contains numerous ghost stories and supernatural revenge narratives. Herod's conscience, though seared by compromise, remained active enough to torment him—demonstrating that general revelation and natural law written on hearts (Romans 2:14-15) create guilt even without special revelation. Early church fathers used Herod as example of hardened heart that experiences conviction without conversion—warning against persistent sin that calms conscience through repeated compromise.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Herod's guilty conscience without repentance illustrate the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow leading to salvation?
2. What does Herod's torment despite his power and position teach about sin's inability to deliver promised pleasure and peace?

Interlinear Text

ἀκούσας	δὲ	ὁ	Ἡρώδης	εἶπεν,	ὅτι	Ἦν	ἐγὼ
heard	But	G3588	when Herod	thereof he said	whom	G3739	I
G191	G1161		G2264	G2036	G3754		G1473
ἀπεκεφάλισα	Ἰωάννην	οὗτος	ἐστιν·	αὐτὸς	ἠγέρθη	ἐκ	
beheaded	John	It	is	he	is risen	from	
G607	G2491	G3778	G2076	G846	G1453	G1537	
νεκρῶν							
the dead							
G3498							

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