

Mark 6:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

Analysis

And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison. The execution proceeds with tragic swiftness. 'Immediately' (εὐθέως, eutheōs) emphasizes no delay—the murder followed the request directly, allowing no time for reflection or intervention. 'Sent an executioner' (ἀποστείλας σπεκουλάτορα, aposteilas spekoulatora) uses Latin loanword speculator—Roman military term for special guard performing executions and intelligence work. This detail confirms Roman military involvement and Herod's Romanized court.

'Commanded his head to be brought' (ἐπέταξεν ἐνεχθῆναι τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, epetaxen enechthēnai tēn kephalēn autou) shows direct, business-like order. 'He went and beheaded him in the prison' (ἀπελθὼν ἀπεκεφάλισεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ, apelthōn apekephalisen auton en tē phylakē)—John died in prison, likely Machaerus fortress. The prophet who called Israel to repentance, who fearlessly confronted sin, who prepared the way for Christ, was silenced by political expediency and sexual sin. Yet his death wasn't defeat but martyrdom, witnessing to truth regardless of cost. Jesus later said no greater prophet existed than John (Matthew 11:11), whose faithfulness unto death exemplified the narrow way.

Historical Context

Machaerus fortress, located east of the Dead Sea in modern Jordan, was Herod's military stronghold and palace. Archaeologists have excavated the site, confirming its first-century occupation. The prison where John died was likely in the fortress's lower levels. Beheading (Roman execution method) was quicker and less painful than crucifixion—perhaps Herod showed this small mercy. The 'executioner' (speculator) was member of Herod's Roman-trained guard, not Jewish personnel. This military role included executions, interrogations, and bodyguard duties. Ancient sources (Josephus) confirm John's imprisonment and execution at Machaerus. The immediacy of the execution suggests it occurred during or shortly after the banquet—meaning the executioner traveled to the prison (if separate from banquet location) or John was held nearby. Church tradition holds that John's disciples retrieved and buried his body (v. 29), and his tomb became pilgrimage site. Various locations claim to hold his remains—Damascus, Jerusalem, Alexandria—though authenticity is debated.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does John's faithfulness unto death, even when it accomplished no immediate visible success, challenge modern Christianity's emphasis on measurable results and numerical growth?
2. What does John's martyrdom teach about the cost of prophetic ministry that fearlessly confronts powerful people's sins?

Interlinear Text

καὶ εὐθὲως ἀποστείλας ὁ βασιλεὺς σπεκουλάτωρα

And immediately sent the king an executioner

G2532 G2112 G649 G3588 G935 G4688

ἐπέταξεν ἐνεχθῆναι τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτὸν ὁ δὲ

and commanded to be brought head him and

G2004 G5342 G2776 G846 G3588 G1161

ἀπελθὼν ἀπεκεφάλισεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ

he went and beheaded him in the prison

G565 G607 G846 G1722 G3588 G5438

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