

Matthew 14:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

Analysis

'And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.' The murder proceeds: Herod 'sent' (πέμψας/pempsas) an executioner, and John was 'beheaded' (ἀπεκεφάλισεν/apekephalisen) in prison. The terse statement underscores the horror: God's prophet, greatest human born (Matthew 11:11), executed to satisfy adulteress's revenge and weak king's pride. John's ministry ended not with prophetic triumph but martyrdom. Reformed theology sees this as pattern for faithful witness: often God's servants suffer rather than succeed worldly-speaking. John fulfilled his mission—preparing way for Jesus—yet his reward was prison and execution. This demonstrates that faithfulness to God doesn't guarantee earthly prosperity, safety, or success. Rather, faithful witness often provokes persecution (Matthew 5:10-12, 2 Timothy 3:12). John joins long line of martyred prophets (Hebrews 11:36-38), with Jesus Himself as ultimate example. The verse challenges prosperity gospel: John did everything right, yet suffered violent death. God's purposes include righteous suffering, not just blessing.

Historical Context

Beheading was Roman execution method for citizens, considered less degrading than crucifixion. John's execution occurred at Machaerus fortress where Herod's birthday celebration took place (Josephus, Antiquities 18.5.2). The prison and banquet hall were in same complex, enabling quick execution. John's beheading fulfilled type of martyred prophet: Elijah escaped Jezebel's murderous intent, but John—greater than Elijah (Matthew 11:14)—didn't escape Herodias. Jesus later used John's fate to predict His own (Matthew 17:12). Early church father Tertullian

noted that Herodias's daughter later died when ice broke beneath her, severing her head—poetic justice if historically accurate. John's martyrdom became paradigmatic for Christian martyrs: Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, and countless others who chose faithfulness unto death over compromise for safety. Hebrews 11:35-38 honors those 'of whom the world was not worthy' who suffered martyrdom. Reformation and subsequent persecution produced many who exemplified John's pattern: Tyndale, Hus, Bonhoeffer, countless unnamed believers.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does John's martyrdom challenge expectations that faithful obedience guarantees earthly prosperity and safety?
2. What does it mean to be faithful unto death, and how do believers prepare for persecution that may end in martyrdom?
3. How should churches honor and learn from martyrs past and present who chose faithfulness over compromise?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	πέμψας	ἀπεκεφάλισεν	τὸν	Ἰωάννην	ἐν	τῇ	φυλακῇ
And	he sent	and beheaded	G3588	John	in	G3588	the prison
G2532	G3992	G607		G2491	G1722		G5438

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 17:12 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

