

# THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

## The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

### STUDY ONE

## The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading

*Matthew 14:1–13*

*Some passages of Scripture are very encouraging, others are shocking. This is one of those. In fact, the scene becomes so evil you'll almost feel like you need a shower after you've read the passage. There are, however, four lessons that I hope you will never forget because they tie in perfectly with our lives—this day, and at this time.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HO doesn't like a joyous birthday party? Big balloons, fun foods, colorful cakes, and smiles on every face. Then, if it's your own, there's the thrill of ripping off the crinkling paper to find a white box with who-knows-what inside. Perhaps a shiny silver watch or that new book you've been wanting. It's a cheerful time for laughter and rejoicing.

For that reason, we find it shocking that the day of Herod Antipas' birthday party, meant to be a happy celebration of life, quickly turned into a horrific scene of corruption and death. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll join Matthew as he takes us into the palace halls on a day that began with feasting, dancing, and gift-giving, but quickly took a tragic twist.

The twist occurred when Salome gave her stepfather, Antipas, a scandalous dance before all the partygoers, which pleased him so much that he promised to give her anything. Herodias, Salome's mother, then told her to ask for the strangest of all gifts: the head of John the Baptizer on a platter. Of all that Herodias and Salome could have requested, why the death of John?

We'll explore that question and more in this extremely dark but thoroughly instructive story given to us in Matthew 14:1–13.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

**The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading**

*Matthew 14:1–13*



**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Before we look at this passage, take a moment to ask God to guide you in your study today:

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of grace You've given me through Your Son Jesus Christ. Thank You also for the gift of Scripture which helps me know You better. As I read Your Word today, give me ears to listen to what You have to say and eyes to perceive how it applies to my life. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*



**TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

This study marks a new part of our series. The first group of studies, on Matthew 1–7, brought us the arrival of Jesus, the promised King. Next, we carefully studied Matthew 8–13 to gain insights into Jesus' kingdom.

In this section on Matthew 14–20, we'll take a close look at the King's ministry, at the one who "came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Before we dive into today's passage, let's get a bird's-eye view of the whole book by reviewing Pastor Chuck Swindoll's helpful chart on Matthew below.

**MATTHEW**

	<b>Announcement and Arrival of the King</b> Main Emphasis: His Credentials Birth Baptism Temptation  CHAPTERS 1–4	<b>Proclamation and Reception of the King</b> Main Emphasis: His Message Sermon on the Mount Miracles Discourses Parables  CHAPTERS 5–15	<b>Opposition and Rejection of the King</b> Main Emphasis: His Suffering and Death Spread of opposition Preparation of disciples Final predictions Crucifixion  CHAPTERS 16–27	<b>Resurrection and Triumph of the King</b> Main Emphasis: His Conquest God's power Great Commission  CHAPTER 28
<b>The King</b>	His identity: Israel's promised King		His destiny: "Crucify Him!"	
<b>Scope</b>	Teaching the vast multitudes		Teaching the Twelve	
<b>Location</b>	Bethlehem and Nazareth	Ministry in Galilee		Ministry in Judea
<b>People's Reaction</b>	Increased popularity		Increased hostility	
<b>Theme</b>	Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.			
<b>Key Verses</b>	16:16–19; 28:18–20			
<b>Christ in Matthew</b>	Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the prophecies, promises, types, and expectations of the Old Testament Scriptures (16:16–19; 28:18–20).			

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## The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading

*Matthew 14:1–13*

By this point in Matthew's gospel, the cost of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is getting clearer and clearer. Previously in Matthew 13:53–58, we witnessed how Jesus faced rejection by His hometown and by some in His own family. Now, we will read about John facing an even more costly rejection. With this context in mind, *let's start making observations!*



### Observation: Adultery, Revenge, Murder

Pastor Chuck's approach to studying the Bible in *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* follows four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.<sup>1</sup> By observing the passage, we answer the question, "What does the passage say?"

Read *Matthew 14:1–13*, and write down some observations that jump out to you. List the key characters and briefly sketch the sequence of events.

While some Bible translations refer to Herod as "the Tetrarch," we know his birth name as Antipas. He was the son of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus at the beginning of Matthew's gospel (see *Matthew 2:1–9, 16*). As for John the Baptizer, we last learned of his whereabouts in *Matthew 11:1–2*. Where was he at that time?



## **The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading**

*Matthew 14:1–13*

In Matthew 14:1–13, Matthew used a storytelling technique to reintroduce John the Baptizer. It's found in the temporal connection between verses 1–2 and 3–13. How do those two sections relate to each other? (Hint: check the beginning of 14:3.)

In verses 3–12, we look at the Herod family tree with all its twisted branches. Herod the Great had many sons: Herod Antipas and Philip are the two brothers mentioned in this passage. Another brother had a daughter named Herodias, whom Philip married, and Philip and Herodias had a daughter, whom we met in the introduction, named Salome.

Antipas and Herodias were obsessed with each other, though, so they divorced their spouses and got married. See page 299 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 1–15* to see a visual representation of these convoluted relationships.

According to [Matthew 14:3–5](#), why was John in prison?



## The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading

*Matthew 14:1–13*

Don't forget verse 13, which tells us about the hero of our story. How did Jesus respond when He heard the news about John?

*The story is captivating, while also treacherous, as it unfolds the extensive addiction of growing sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

These observations help us understand the horror of the events that took place at Antipas' birthday party. But what is the significance of this strange story? Let's answer that question in the next step: interpretation.



### Interpretation: Fearful Responses

During interpretation, we use the observations we've made to help us answer the question, "What does this passage mean?"

During Jesus' ministry, people often confused Him with John the Baptizer (see [Matthew 16:13–16](#)). Using your Bible study [resources](#) and Pastor Chuck's commentary, explore why Herod Antipas refused to believe that Jesus was the one performing these miracles.

In verse 6, Matthew wrote that Salome's dance "pleased" Antipas. The Greek word used here often described a gift so pleasing that it demanded reciprocation. This "you-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-yours" mentality was an essential element of this culture.



## The Strangest of All Gifts: A Beheading

*Matthew 14:1–13*

Antipas knew he had to return a favor to Salome, and if he broke his public vow, he would lose the respect of his guests. Respect was everything to Antipas. Why did killing John create a problem for Antipas?

*For fear of what others may say or think, Herod sealed his own fate, not John's.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Who was the mastermind manipulator of our story? What lesson do you think Matthew wants to teach us through this person?

Now that we have a good understanding of the wickedness found deep in the roots of the Herod family tree, let's turn to another book of the Bible to see what else we can learn about Antipas.



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*Matthew 14:1–13*



### Correlation: Getting into the Mind of Herod Antipas

Mark's gospel tells this same story but from a slightly different perspective. Read [Mark 6:14–29](#), and write down the additional details Mark includes about Herod Antipas (see especially 6:19–20). How do these details clue us in even more deeply into the mind and motivation of Antipas?

So what does this bizarre story, one you'd scarcely expect to find on the pages of God's Word, have to teach us about following God today?



### Application: The Awful Effects and Tragic Consequences of Sin

Pastor Chuck carefully and prayerfully crafted four applications based on Matthew 14:1–13.

1. *How dangerous is revenge, how wrong is holding a grudge!* Herodias manipulated Antipas so John would die for confronting her sin.
2. *How powerful is peer pressure!* Antipas would have done anything to maintain the respect of his peers, getting even more tangled in sin's net—all for fear of losing face.
3. *How treacherous is rationalization!* John had done nothing to Salome, but she requested his head because her mother gave seemingly good reasons for otherwise grisly behavior.
4. *How addictive is sin!* The Herods knew the tragic consequences of their actions, but they sinned more and more, falsely hoping they could keep their filthy secrets concealed.



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*Matthew 14:1–13*

*How awful are the effects of sin!* It's good to let these four points sit with us. Think them over. Let them even induce some healthy fear. Which of the four do you find most pertinent in your life? Is it because you feel your flesh tempted toward that behavior or because you're bearing the brunt of another's sin? Reflect on it. Pray about it. Write your answer below.

*And we must remember how addictive sin is. If I cultivate a taste for it, where it becomes to me secretly delicious . . . I'm a goner. I'm finished. Guard against it!*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Each day we face a decision. Will we confront our sin? Or will we try to cover it up with more sinning? Antipas tried to hide his sin, and it only heaped more guilt and more shame and more fear upon his soul. God, however, calls us toward a better path. Our loving Father invites us to confess our sins so we can receive forgiveness and walk daily with Him in newness of life.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, it is easy for me to look down on others because of their sin, but I know that I can just as easily be caught in sin's addictive cycle. Thank You for offering me forgiveness through Jesus Christ. I ask You to reveal the hidden sins in my life so I can turn from them, run to Your loving embrace, and live in victory. I ask these things in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.*

### ENDNOTE

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.

