

Day 14 Thursday

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas ruled Galilee in Jesus' time. He succeeded his father, Herod the Great, and served as tetrarch (appointed by the emperor Augustus to rule over one quarter of his father's kingdom) from 4 B.C. until 39 A.D., almost exactly the lifetime of Jesus. Yet there is relatively little about Antipas in the Bible.

Herod Antipas is known mostly as the Herod for whom Salome danced and who ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded.

By most standards, he was just an ordinary, local, Jewish ruler, but two incidents during his reign secured him a high place in the history books. First, he killed John the Baptist.

This incident is recorded by the Jewish historian, Josephus, as well as by the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Next, he met with Jesus, whom Pilate sent to him. This encounter is recorded only by the Gospel of Luke.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Herod Antipas was also a “shadow of death” over Jesus. In these accounts, Antipas and the “Herodians” (possibly Herodian officials or adherents) saw Jesus as a threat to be eliminated (see Mark 3:6; Luke 13:31; Matt 14:2).

However, it is not stated exactly why Jesus was a threat. As a matter of fact, the Gospel of Luke builds up tension between Antipas and Jesus marked by equal fascination and rejection (see Luke 9:9 vs. Luke 13:31-32). When they finally meet in Jerusalem during the trial of Jesus, an almost absurd scene evolves. First Antipas is said to be “exceedingly glad” to see Jesus, since for a long time he had hoped to see him perform a miracle. But when Jesus remains silent, the excitement turns to contempt and mockery.

Antipas finally dresses him in a bright, shining robe and sends him back to Pilate, the Roman governor, who sent Jesus to Antipas in the first place when Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee. Perhaps not surprisingly, scholars disagree on how to interpret Luke's view of Antipas's role in the execution of Jesus. Was his mockery and dressing of Jesus a sign of condemnation or acquittal? Antipas is remembered as one among those responsible for the execution of Jesus (Acts 4:27).