

Luke 3:19-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-3/luke-319-20/>

Luke narrates the fate of John the Baptist and tells why he was imprisoned by Herod.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 14:3-5 and Mark 6:17-20.

Luke tells us of John's fate:

But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things Herod had done, Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison (v. 19-20).

The reason *Herod the tetrarch* had *John* arrested, bound, and put in *prison* was *because of a woman—Herodias*. Before continuing, it would be beneficial to untangle the intertwining branches of the Herodian dynasty.

The half-Jewish Herod the Great (72 BC – 4 BC) was the official King of the Roman province of Judea. He was ruthless and cruel. Not only did he order the slaughter of Bethlehem's male infants in an attempt to kill the newborn Messiah (Matthew 2:16), he also had two of his sons, Aristobulus IV and Alexander strangled to death in 7 B.C. on the suspicion that they were trying to claim his throne. Herod the Great had several wives and many children. When he died, the Romans shrewdly divided his "kingdom" and reorganized it among his offspring. The more dispersed the local authority of their puppet rulers, the better for Rome.

Herod the Great's son, Archelaus (23 B.C. – 18 A.D.) inherited the district of Judea from his father (Matthew 2:22). Archelaus was later deposed by Caesar Augustus in 6 A.D. and died in exile. At that time Judea and Samaria were placed under the direct supervision of Roman governors. Pontius Pilate, who governed these provinces during the time of Jesus's ministry, was the fourth Roman to hold this office, which he held from 26 A.D. – 36 A.D.

Herod Antipas (the tetrarch) (20 B.C. – 39 A.D.) was the son of Herod the Great, and the brother of Archelaus. Upon his father's death he was granted the provinces of Galilee and Perea at age sixteen. This is the *Herod* who had *John* the Baptizer executed (Matthew 14:1-12).

Philip (27 B.C. – 33 A.D.) was *Herod Antipas's* half-brother and was the son of Herod the Great. Initially he was his father's sole heir, but he was left out of the will in favor of Archelaus and Antipas and another half-brother, also named Philip the tetrarch (26 BC – 34 AD). Philip the tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis (Luke 3:1) married his niece Salome who, in Matthew 14:6, erotically danced and pleased *Herod Antipas*. The disinherited Philip (the Philip pertaining to these events) was the husband of his niece *Herodias*, the daughter of the executed Aristobulus IV.

Herodias (15 B.C. – 39 A.D.) was the wife of her uncle Philip and the granddaughter of Herod the Great through his son Aristobulus IV who was executed by his father in 7 B.C. *Herodias'* marriage with Philip produced a daughter, Salome. Later, *Herodias* divorced her uncle Philip in order to marry her uncle *Herod the tetrarch*. Thus, *Herodias* was the niece, ex-sister-in-law, and wife of *Herod the tetrarch*.

Luke tells us that the main reason *Herod locked John up in prison* was because *Herodias, his brother's wife reprimanded him*. Besides speaking specifically to *Herod*, *John* had already delivered bold rebukes to the crowds (Luke 3:7).

Matthew and Mark explain why *Herodias reprimanded Herod* (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-28).

The reason why *Herodias* hated *John* the Baptist was because *Herod was reprimanded by him*, saying, "It is not lawful for you to have her [as your wife]" (Matthew 14:4). *Herod* and *Herodias'*s marriage was unlawful for two reasons. First, it was forbidden to marry a blood relative (Leviticus 18:6). *Herodias* was the daughter of *Herod's* brother Aristobulus IV. And second, it was unlawful to marry your brother's wife (Leviticus 18:16). *Herodias* had no concern for the law, but she did take offense at being called out and made a scandalous example by an eccentric prophet. She wanted him dead (Mark 6:24). Matthew and Mark both reveal that *John* was eventually executed at the behest of *Herodias* and her daughter (Matthew 14:8-11; Mark 6:24-27) after *Herod's* niece/step daughter erotically danced for him.

Luke's account of *John* the Baptizer ends after he is *locked up in prison*. He does not go into further detail of his fate like the accounts found in Matthew and Mark.

From this point forward, Luke exclusively focuses on Jesus, who is the main figure of his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). The first three chapters of Luke effectively function as a long prologue which:

1. States the author's intent (Luke 1:1-4)
2. Details John the Baptist's (the Messianic forerunner) conception, birth, and upbringing (Luke 1:5-25; 57-80)
3. Details Jesus's (the Messiah and main figure) conception, birth, and upbringing (Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-52)
4. Describes the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20)
5. Describes Jesus's baptism and genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:21-38)

The remainder of Luke's Gospel (Luke 4-24) focuses on the events and teachings surrounding Jesus's earthly ministry.

In light of Luke's intent, it seems to make sense that Luke is concluding the thread of *John* rebuking different groups of people during his time preaching in the wilderness. Because *John*

also *reprimanded Herod*, Luke finishes this thread with the consequences *John* receives for bringing his actions to light. In the following verses, Luke returns to his main message of the public ministry of Jesus, the Messiah.

Biblical Text

¹⁹ But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, ²⁰ Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.