



Chapter 14

Murder of John the Baptist and Feeding Five Thousand

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McGee Introduction: The movement in Matthew of the rejection of Jesus as King and His conflict with the religious rulers continues. This chapter reveals that events are moving to a crisis. John the Baptist is slain on the pretext that Herod must keep his oath. This is an overt act of antagonism toward light and right which must ultimately lay wicked hands on Jesus. Jesus withdraws in order not to force the wicked hand of Herod, for the hour of Jesus has not yet come.

The feeding of the five thousand is certainly the most important of the miracles of Jesus if we are to judge by the attention given to it by the gospel writers. It is the only miracle recorded by all the gospel writers.¹

Herod, Tetrarch

There are at least three generations of Herods in the New Testament, and from each generation there is at least two mentioned. Herod's family tree is unusual in that you have daughters that marry great uncles.

This is not Herod the Great found in Mt 2. He was Idumean, not Jewish. He was in power because of his politics with Rome. He undertook extensive building campaigns, Masada, etc.

When he died he was succeeded by Herod Archelaus, the Tetrarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. Then Philip of Trachonitis. Then Herod Antipas, the one we are discussing in this passage. The Tetrarch of Galilee and Paria. The fourth was another Philip, who was east of the Jordan (mentioned in Luke 3:1).

Herod Antipas was married to the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia. But being married to this Arabian daughter of an Arab King was sort of academic because he lived in open adultery with his brother Phillip's wife, Herodius. And that is what John the Baptist kept preaching against. Herod tried to silence him by throwing him in prison. Herodius had more ambitious plans, she wanted his head, literally! Her daughter, Salome, danced before the King. Apparently it was the style of the King at such occasions to grant a broad wish if he is pleased. Herodius had planned for this occasion. Salome requested (by the prompting of her mother) for the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter. Herod was upset because he did not want to do this for political reasons, but he had committed himself. Salome was married to her great uncle Phillip (mentioned in Luke 3).

Herod Antipas is succeeded by Herod Agrippa, he is the one that starts the Christian persecutions in Jerusalem. (Acts 12) He has a son that is also named Agrippa.

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:81). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Matthew 14:1

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,

[**Herod the king**] Herod Antipas' Herod the Great, son of Antipater (an Idumean) and Cypros (an Arabian woman). Antipater was made Procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar in 47 B.C. Herod was made governor of Galilee when he was 25 years old and was made king of Judea in 37 B.C. He rebuilt the Jewish temple (John 2:20). At his death in 4 B.C. his kingdom was divided. His son Herod Antipas reigned over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 (Luke 3:1-2). He killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1). Another son, Archelias, was made ruler of Judea and Samaria (Matthew 2:22). He is called "Philip" in Matthew 14:3. Philip was succeeded by Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 37. In A.D. 40 he took over all the original territory of Herod the Great. He is mentioned in Acts 12. He was succeeded by Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13; Acts 26:32).

[**tetrarch**] Greek: *tetrarches* (GSN-5076), from *tetartos* (GSN-5067, fourth, and *arche* (GSN-746), principality or ruler. A ruler over a fourth part of a country, but it came to be used of any governor.

Heard of the fame of Jesus—Jesus had been a considerable time engaged in the work of the ministry, and it may seem remarkable that he had not before heard of him. Herod might, however, have been absent on some expedition to a remote part of the country. It is to be remembered, also, that he was a man of much dissoluteness of morals, and that he paid little attention to the affairs of the people. He might have heard of Jesus before, but it had not arrested his attention. He did not think it a matter worthy of much regard.²

Matthew 14:2

And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.

John was highly esteemed now by the guilty, remorseful Herod.

This is John the Baptist—Herod feared John. His conscience smote him for his crimes. He remembered that he had wickedly put him to death. He knew him to be a distinguished prophet; and he concluded that no other one was capable of working such miracles but he who had been so eminent a servant of God in his life, and who, he supposed, had again risen from the dead and entered the dominions of his murderer. The alarm in his court, it seems, was general. Herod's conscience told him that this was John. Others thought that it might be the expected Elijah or one of the old prophets, Mark 6:15.

This is John the Baptist—Ὁν ἐγὼ ἀπεκεφαλίσσα, Whom I beheaded. These words are added here by the Codex Bezae and several others, by the Saxon, and five copies of the Itala.—See the power of conscience! He is miserable because he is guilty; being continually under the dominion of self-accusation, reproach, and remorse. No need for

² Barnes' Notes

the Baptist now: conscience performs the office of ten thousand accusers! But, to complete the misery, a guilty conscience offers no relief from God—points out no salvation from sin.³

He is risen from the dead—From this we may observe:

1. That the resurrection of the dead was a common opinion among the Jews; and
2. That the materiality of the soul made no part of Herod's creed.

Bad and profligate as he was, it was not deemed by him a thing impossible with God to raise the dead; and the spirit of the murdered Baptist had a permanent resurrection in his guilty conscience.

McGee: If this sounds superstitious to you, you are right. It *is* superstitious, but it is not the superstition of the Bible nor of Jesus nor of His apostles, nor is it the superstition of Christianity. It is the superstition of old Herod and also of other ignorant people of that day. Somebody says, “Well, of course, in our contemporary society we are not superstitious like that.” Aren't we? Notice how many people are following the horoscope and astrology charts. Also, religions of the Orient are having a tremendous influence in our modern culture. The human race is basically superstitious, my friend, and the minute you get away from the Word of God, you become superstitious. Even those who call themselves atheistic are turning to cults and “isms” and pagan religions, and we marvel that intelligent people could become involved in them.

The Person and the ministry of Jesus could not escape the notice of the king on the throne. Herod was a member of the family that you ought to look up in a good Bible dictionary. The whole family was a bunch of rascals and of the very darkest hue. They were the Mafia of the first century, and the Herod of this chapter was no exception.

The first several verses of this chapter are a flashback of what had already taken place. When Herod heard about the preaching of Jesus, he was immediately filled with fear and superstition. Herod had put John the Baptist to death, and he associated John with the Lord Jesus. Herod believed John had risen from the dead, and his fear changed to frenzy because he wanted to eliminate John altogether. Herod was a drunken, depraved, debased, weak man, and he was a killer. He had already murdered John, the forerunner of Christ, and he was prepared to murder the Lord Jesus Himself.

The following verses are part of the flashback describing the circumstances surrounding the death of John the Baptist.⁴

ESV: This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead. Herod Antipas's reaction at hearing of Jesus' ministry reveals a curious blend of theology and superstition, based partly on semi-pagan ideas of returning spirits.

³ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:82). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Matthew 14:3

For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

[**Herodias**] This infamous woman was both niece and wife to Philip and Herod, being the daughter of Aristobulus, son of Herod the Great. She first married Philip, her uncle, by whom she had Salome. Later she left him to live publicly with her brother-in-law, who had been married before to the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petra. Aretas made war on him and destroyed Herod's army, which Josephus says was judgment on him for murdering John the Baptist (Antiquities, Book 8, 2:5).

Philip, Herod's half brother, was another of Palestine's four rulers. His territories were Iturea and Tracoonitis, northeast of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 3:1). Philip's wife, Herodias, left Philip to live with Herod Antipas. John the Baptist condemned the two for living immorally (see Mark 6:17-18).

Notice that it says that Herod *had* laid hold on John—it was a past action. Herod had imprisoned John “for Herodias' sake.” Notice how Herod was influenced by others. Here it is by Herodias, and later on it will be by others. He was motivated like a politician. Everything he did was to gain the approval of others.

Spurgeon: Of course it was not lawful for him to take to himself his brother Philip's wife while Philip was yet living, and while his own wife was living also. While he was the guest of Philip at home, he became ensnared by Herodias; and the guilty pair, who in addition to their being already wedded, were by birth too near of kin for lawful marriage, came back to Galilee as if they were man and wife. It was bravely spoken of the Baptist when he bluntly said, "It is not lawful for thee to have her"; but the sentence cost him dear. Herod Antipas could bear to do the deed, but he could not bear to be told that he had committed an unlawful act. John did not mince matters, or leave the question alone. What was a king to him if that king dared to trample on the law of God? He spoke out pointedly, and Herod knew that he did so. Herod laid, hold on John, because John's word had laid hold on Herod.

The power of evil love comes out in the words, "for Herodias sake." This fierce woman would brook no rebuke of her licentiousness. She was a very Jezebel in her pride and cruelty; and Herod was as a puppet in her hands.⁵

Matthew 14:4

For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

John the Baptist's Ministry

John had heralded the coming of the King and had faithfully preached God's truth. Christ must increase, and he must decrease (Jn 3:30). Any Christian who is faithful to the Word

⁵ Spurgeon's Commentary

of God, as John was, will suffer persecution: The world is not the friend of the Christian. The world rejected the King and will also reject His messengers.

[not lawful for thee to have her] Not lawful because she was his niece and his brother's wife (Leviticus 18:6,16; Leviticus 20:21).

For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.—Here is an instance of zeal, fidelity, and courage, highly worthy of imitation. Plainness, mildness, and modesty, are qualifications necessary to be observed when we reprove the great. The best service a subject can render his prince is to lay before him, in the plainest but most respectful manner, what the law of God requires of him, and what it forbids. How unutterable must the punishment of those be who are chaplains to princes, or great men, and who either flatter them in their vices, or wink at their sins!⁶

For Herod had laid hold on John ...—See Mark 6:17-20; Luke 3:19-20. This Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was first married to Herod Philip, by whom she had a daughter, Salome, probably the one that danced and pleased Herod. Josephus says that this marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias took place while he was on a journey to Rome. He stopped at his brother's; fell in love with his wife; agreed to put away his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, King of Petraea; and Herodias agreed to leave her own husband and live with him. They were living, therefore, in adultery; and John, in faithfulness, though at the risk of his life, had reproved them for their crimes. Herod was guilty of two crimes in this act:

1. Of “adultery,” since she was the wife of another man.
2. Of “incest,” since she was a near relation, and such marriages were expressly forbidden, Lev. 18:16.⁷

JNTC: Yochanan, a true prophet, did not shrink from telling even the most highly placed what they least wanted to hear.

It violates the *Torah* (Leviticus 18:16, 20:21) **for you to have her as your wife**, literally, “for you to have her.”⁸

ESV: For Herod had seized John. Verses 3–12 are a historical flashback. Herod Antipas had fallen in love with **Herodias**, the wife of his half brother Herod Philip I (not the tetrarch Philip mentioned in Luke 3:1), even though both were married at the time. Herodias divorced Herod Philip I and Herod Antipas divorced his wife (the daughter of the Nabatean king, Aretas IV), and they were married. John the Baptist had publicly condemned Herod Antipas for his actions (**it is not lawful for you to have her**). Josephus reports that John the Baptist was imprisoned at Herod Antipas's fortress-palace called Machaerus (; cf. the description in), which was a fortress built atop a steep hill east of where the Jordan River flows into the north end of the Dead Sea. It had been fortified by the Hasmonean Jewish kings (2nd century b.c.), destroyed by the Romans (c.

⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary

⁷ Barnes' Notes

⁸ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 14:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

56 b.c.), and rebuilt as a palace by Herod the Great. Archaeological investigation has delineated the Herodian palace enclosure, including a cistern from this era.⁹

Matthew 14:5

And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

[he feared the multitude] Lived in misery because of his fear of the people and because of the torment of his conscience by the preaching of John. In the end he feared the people more than God, so killed John.

He feared the multitude—Miserable prince! who fears more to offend his people, than to sin against his God, by shedding innocent blood. When a man resists sin only by the help of human motives, he cannot long defend himself.¹⁰

Fourteen Rulers Offended by God's Servants (Dake)

1. Pharaoh offended by Abraham (Genesis 12:10-20)
2. Abimelech offended by Abraham (Genesis 20)
3. Abimelech offended by Isaac (Genesis 26:6-16)
4. Pharaoh offended by Moses (Exodus 10:24-29)
5. Balak offended by Balaam (Numbers 24:10-11)
6. Jeroboam offended by a prophet (1 Kings 13:4)
7. Ahab offended by Micaiah (1 Kings 22:6-28)
8. Namaan offended by Elisha (2 Kings 5:10-19)
9. Asa offended by Hanani (2 Chron. 16:7-11)
10. Joash offended by Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-22)
11. Uzziah offended by Azariah (2 Chron. 26:16-21)
12. Jehoiakim offended by Urijah (Jeremiah 26:20-24)
13. Zedekiah offended by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32:1-5)
14. Herod offended by John the Baptist (Matthew 14:3)

Yashanet: they counted him as a prophet.

What is a prophet? To many people, the word is associated with someone who predicts the future. Although this can be a part of a prophet's life, this is not represent what a Biblical prophet is all about. Nor should Biblical prophets be defined solely as bringers of messages of impending doom or calls for repentance, although they may have done that at times as well.

Interestingly, the first person in the Bible to be called a "prophet," is not one that people usually associate much with that title. That person is Abraham. God told King Abimelech:

⁹ ESV Study Bible

¹⁰ Adam Clarke's Commentary

Genesis 20:7 - *Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.*

As Scripture shows us, Abraham was best known for his intimacy with God and carrying out of God's will wherever he went.

The Hebrew word for prophet, is *Navie*, which may come from the root *Nava*, meaning "to flow," or "gush forth." This would imply that a prophet is also a "channel" for bringing spiritual power from God to bear on a certain situation.

Thus, we have God saying this to Moses about his brother:

Exodus 7:1 - *And the LORD said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.*

Many people associate Aaron (the prophet) being God's spokesman to Pharaoh. However, examining the account of the meetings with Pharaoh, we see that it was Moses that did the talking directly. Scripture does show us however, that it was Aaron that brought about the first miracles. Aaron acted as a prophet for Moses, being the "channel" for bringing down God's spiritual power.¹

All of the above should not blur the distinction between the "office" of prophet, which has a time and place in history, and the gift of prophecy, which we are told to seek after:

1 Corinthians 14:1 - *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.*

The "flow," or "gushing forth," of the will of God through a person, was promised by Yeshua:

John 7:38 - *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water¹¹.*

Matthew 14:6

But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

[**birthday was kept**] Either on the day of his birth or the day he began to reign. Both were counted as birthdays by kings (Hosea 7:5; 1 Samuel 13:1). Persian kings always granted requests that were presented to them during such entertainment (Esther 5:3; Esther 7:3).

The daughter of Herodias—That is, "Salome," her daughter by her former husband. This was a violation of all the rules of modesty and propriety. One great principle of all eastern nations is to keep their females from public view. For this purpose they are confined in a particular part of the house, called the harem. See the notes at Matt. 9:1-8. If they appear in public, it is always with a veil, so closely drawn that their faces cannot be seen. No modest woman would have appeared in this manner before the court, and it is probable, therefore, that she partook of the dissolute principles of her mother. It is also

¹¹ Yashanet.com

probable that the dance was one well known in Greece—the lascivious and wanton dance of the Ionics.

Jewish people did not normally celebrate birthdays in this period (Josephus declares celebrating birthdays forbidden). But though most Jews considered birthday celebrations a Gentile custom, the aristocracy evinced considerable Greek influence. At Herod's fortress Machaerus, men and women dined in separate halls, so Herodias would not have directly witnessed Herod's behavior toward her daughter Salome.¹²

Matthew 14:7

Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

[oath to give her whatsoever she would ask] It was common for such oaths to be given on such occasions.

He promised with an oath—This a foolish and wicked oath.

To please a wanton girl, the monarch called the eternal God to witness his willingness to give her half his kingdom, Mark 6:23. It seems, also, that he was willing to shed the holiest blood it contained. An oath like this it was not lawful to make, and it should have been broken. See Matt. 14:9.

ESV: When Herod's birthday came a great celebration was held in his honor at the palace at Machaerus. Herodias had her daughter (named Salome in Josephus,) perform a dance for Herod Antipas. She was only 12 to 14 years old, but in that debased setting it likely was a sensual dance, which pleased Herod.

Matthew 14:8

And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.

[before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger] What wickedness! This incestuous, bloody, adulterous, depraved mother! She was determined to rid herself and her husband of this troubler of conscience. Jerome says she was so wicked that, after gloating over the head of John, she drew out his tongue and pierced it with a needle.

[charger] Greek: *pinax* (GSN-4094), a wooden platter (Matthew 14:8,11; Mark 6:25,28; Luke 11:39).

Gentile ***Gentile**. Anyone who is not Jewish. In ancient Jewish parlance, this was often the equivalent of "pagan."

¹²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Mt 14:5). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger—The word charger formerly signified a large dish, bowl, or drinking cup: the Saxon has *a dish*, Tindal, *a platter*; any thing is better than charger, which never conveyed much meaning, and now conveys none. The evangelist says she was instructed before, by her mother, to ask the Baptist's head! What a most infernal mother, to give such instructions to her child! and what a promising daughter to receive them! What a present for a young lady!—the bloody head of the murdered forerunner of Jesus! and what a gratification for an adulterous wife, and incestuous mother! The disturber of her illicit pleasures, and the troubler of her brother-husband's conscience, is no more! Short, however, was their glorying!¹³

Matthew 14:9

And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

[king was sorry] Compare the sorrow of Darius (Daniel 6:14-16).

The king was sorry—He knew John to be a righteous man, and at first did many things gladly which John told him it was his duty to perform: Mark 6:20.

Nevertheless, for the oath's sake—The OATHS, he had probably sworn again and again—one sin begets many.

And them which sat with him at meat—Who were probably such as himself, and would have considered it a breach of honor if he had not fulfilled his sworn promise: he therefore commanded it to be given!

And the king was sorry. There might have been several reasons for this:

(1.) Herod had a high respect for John, and feared him. He knew that he was a holy man, and had "*observed* him," that is, regarded him with respect and veneration. He had done some things in obedience to John's precepts, Mark 6:20.

(2.) John was in high repute among the people, and Herod might have been afraid that his murder might excite commotion,

(3.) Herod, though a wicked man, does not appear to have been insensible to some of the common principles of human nature. Here was a great and most manifest crime proposed; no less than the *murder* of an acknowledged prophet of the Lord. It was deliberate. It was to gratify the malice of a wicked woman. It was the price of a few moments' entertainment. His *conscience*, though in feeble and dying accents, checked him. He would have preferred a request not so manifestly wicked, and that would not have involved him in so much difficulty.¹⁴

For the oath's sake. Herod felt that he was bound by this oath. But he was not. The oath should not have been taken. But *being* taken, he could not be bound by it. No oath could

¹³ Adam Clarke's Commentary

¹⁴ Barnes' Notes

justify a man in committing murder. The true principle is, that Herod was bound by a prior obligation, by the law of God, *not* to commit murder; and no act of his, be it an *oath*, or anything else, could free him from the obligation.

Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist, but he gave the order so that he wouldn't be embarrassed in front of his guests. How easy it is to give in to the crowd and to let ourselves be pressured into doing wrong. Don't get in a situation where it will be too embarrassing to do what is right. Determine to do what is right, no matter how embarrassing or painful it may be.

Matthew 14:10

And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

[And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison] After he had heard and obeyed many things John told him (Mark 6:20). John spent about 18 months in prison.

And he sent, and beheaded John. For the sake of these wicked men, the bloody offering, the head of the slaughtered prophet, was brought and given as the reward to the daughter and mother. What an offering to a woman! Josephus says of her, that "she was a woman full of ambition and envy, having a mighty influence on Herod, *and able to persuade him to things he was not at all inclined to.*" This is one of the many proofs that we have that the evangelists drew characters according to truth.

Matthew 14:11

And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.

[and she brought it to her mother] "Like mother, like daughter" is true here.

The sadistic, sad, and sordid account of what took place in that day reveals the type of society that existed then. John the Baptist was beheaded, and his head was given to the dancing girl on a platter! Human nature has not changed much. Lust and murder are part of contemporary society today.¹⁵

¹⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:82). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Matthew 14:12

And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

His disciples came, and took up the BODY—The HEAD was in the possession of Herodias, who, 'tis probable, took a diabolic pleasure in viewing that speechless mouth which had often been the cause of planting thorns in her criminal bed; and in offering indignities to that tongue from which she could no longer dread a reproof. Her character justifies every bad conjecture that can well be formed on this head: and St. Jerome positively says that, when she got it, she drew out the tongue, and thrust it through with her bodkin. On the whole we may observe:—

That the diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin. After so fatal an example as this, can we doubt whether balls are not snares for souls; destructive of chastity, modesty, and sometimes even of humanity itself; and a pernicious invention to excite the most criminal passions! How many on such occasions have sacrificed their chastity, and then, to hide their shame, have stifled the feelings of the human being and the parent, and, by direct or indirect means, have put a period to the innocent offspring of their connections! Unhappy mother, who exposes her daughter to the same shipwreck herself has suffered, and makes her own child the instrument of her lust and revenge! Behold here, ye professedly religious parents, the fruits of what was doubtless called in those times, elegant breeding and accomplished dancing! Fix your eyes on that vicious mother, that prostituted daughter, and especially on that murdered ambassador of God, and then send your children to genteel boarding-schools, to learn the accomplishment of DANCING! where the fear of God makes no part of the education.¹⁶

JNTC: Josephus reports in *Antiquities of the Jews* 18:5:1, that Herod Antipas was defeated in a war with Aretas, king of Arabia Petrea, and adds:

“Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when [many] others came to crowd about him, for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, [for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,] thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod’s suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God’s displeasure against him.” (*Antiquities* 18:5:2, William Whiston translation, 1682)¹⁷

¹⁶ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

¹⁷ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 14:12). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Spurgeon: The good man's followers did not desert their murdered leader: "his disciples came." The mangled corpse was surrendered to them; they reverently took up the body, and buried it. They were his disciples still, and his death was not the death of their faith. They did the only act of kindness then in their power to him whom they had followed. They regarded the headless trunk as being the last relic of John, and so they gathered about it, 185 and gave it honorable burial. But it is not said by the Evangelist that they buried John, but "they took up his body, and buried it", not him. The real John no man could bury, and Herod soon found that, being dead, he yet spake.

What remained for John's disciples but to go to their leader's Friend and Master, and tell him all the circumstances, and wait further orders? John had taught them well, since they went at once to Jesus when their teacher was dead.

When we are in a great trouble, we shall be wise to do our best, and at the same time tell the Lord Jesus all about it, that he may direct us further as to what we are to do. What a relief to tell Jesus! It was a painful story for him to hear; but he would be sure to impart consolation to these mourners; and in our case also he will send comfort.

Matthew 14:13

When Jesus heard *of it*, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard *thereof*, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

Jesus avoids the region of Herod the Tetrarch and stays in the region of Phillip. (Until the right time.)

[**Cities**] There were many cities around the Sea of Galilee.

[**departed thence by ship into a desert place apart**] Not through fear, but to continue His work. John was popular and a great public commotion was expected over this murder, so Christ withdrew to avoid commotion being charged to Him. He did not want to expose Himself unduly to His enemies before the time for Him to do so.

By a ship into a desert place. That is, he crossed the sea of Galilee. He went to the country east of the sea, into a place little inhabited. Luke says Luke 9:10 he went to a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. Matthew 11:21. A desert place means a place little cultivated, where there were few or no inhabitants. On the east of the sea of Galilee there was a large tract of country of this description-rough, uncultivated, and chiefly used to pasture flocks.

When Jesus heard of it, he departed, he went to a place of safety, he never threw himself unnecessarily into danger. It was proper that he should secure his life, till the time should come when it would be proper for him to die.

[**they followed him on foot out of the cities**] Followed the shore line on foot to the north end and to the east side of the sea in Bashan.

When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence—Had the blessed Jesus continued in that place, it is probable the hand of this impure female murderer would have been stretched out against him also: he withdrew, therefore, not through fear, but to teach his messengers rather to yield to the storm than expose themselves to destruction, where, from circumstances, the case is evidently hopeless.¹⁸

Yashanet: by ship into a desert place apart

The Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew has, "... *into the wilderness of Judea.*" This would make sense as the origins of both John and Yeshua's ministries are in this area.

ESV: Compassionate Healer and Supplier for Israel. Jesus begins his withdrawal from Galilee (vv. 13–14) and feeds the 5,000 (vv. 15–21)—the only miracle from Jesus' earthly ministry recorded in all four Gospels.

Matthew 14:14

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Jesus—was moved with compassion—Εσπλαγχνισθε, he was moved with tender compassion, so I think the word should in general be translated: see the note on Matthew 9:36. As a verb, it does not appear to have been used by any but ecclesiastical writers. It always intimates that motion of the bowels, accompanied with extreme tenderness and concern, which is felt at the sight of the miseries of another.¹⁹

Jesus sought solitude after the news of John's death. Sometimes we may need to deal with our grief alone. Jesus did not dwell on his grief, but returned to the ministry he came to do.

Jesus performed some miracles as signs of his identity. He used other miracles to teach important truths. But here we read that he healed people because he "had compassion on them." Jesus was, and is, a loving, caring, and feeling person. When you are suffering, remember that Jesus hurts with you. He has compassion on you.

Matthew 14:15

And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

[**evening**] Jews had two evenings: 3 p.m., time of the evening sacrifice, and 6:00, near sunset. This was the first evening, for in Matthew 14:23 the second evening on this day is mentioned.

¹⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary

¹⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary

Send the multitude away, that they may go—and buy—The disciples of Christ are solicitous for the people’s temporal as well a spiritual welfare: and he is not worthy to be called a minister of Christ, who does not endeavor to promote both to the uttermost of his power. The preaching of Christ must have been accompanied with uncommon power to these people’s souls, to have induced them to leave their homes to follow him from village to village, for they could never hear enough; and to neglect to make use of any means for the support of their lives, so that they might still have the privilege of hearing him. When a soul is either well replenished with the bread of life, or hungry after it, the necessities of the body are, for the time, little regarded.²⁰

Note that the disciples are attempting to advise Jesus what to do. Their advice was to send the people into the villages.

When it was evening. The Hebrew day, that is, the interval between dawn and darkness, was divided into three parts: morning, noon, and evening (Ps. 55:17). The Jews distinguished two evenings in the day: the first began about 3 P.M. and the second at sundown (see Ex. 12:6, lit., “between the evenings”). In this verse the first evening is meant, in verse 23 the second.

Matthew 14:16

But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

[give ye them to eat] Elisha multiplied bread for 100 men (2 Kings 4:42-43). Christ multiplied it twice for for many thousands (Matthew 14:21; Matthew 15:38; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:6-10).

The feeding of the five thousand is the one miracle which is recorded in all four Gospels. For that reason alone it is an important miracle.

It was as if the disciples had appointed themselves to the board of directors to tell the Lord Jesus what to do. But He said to them, “They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” It was an impossible command.

Matthew 14:17

And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

Having only five loaves and two fishes is typical of the sad state of the church in our day. Right now folk are saying that we need to send the multitudes away, that there are natural ways of caring for their needs. We send them to the psychiatrist for emotional help and to the government for physical relief. We do have spiritual bread to offer folk, although it may be only five loaves and two fishes, but the thing which is lacking is the power of the Lord Jesus. If we only had that power, we wouldn’t need to send the multitudes away.

²⁰ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

We fail to realize that the solutions today are not in government nor in human imaginations but in God. No wonder the church is powerless.²¹

Yeshua "replicates" a miracle by the great prophet Elisha, only to a far greater magnitude:

2 Kings 4:42-44 - *And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD.*

Matthew 14:18

He said, **Bring them hither to me.**

[**Bring them hither to me**] A command of authority (Matthew 17:17; Matthew 21:2).

Bring them hither to me—No creature of God should be considered as good or safe without the blessing of God in it. If thou have but even a handful of meal and a few herbs, bring them to Christ by prayer and faith, and he will make them a sufficiency for thy body, and a sacrament to thy soul. Let the minister of the Gospel attend also to this—let him bring all his gifts and graces to his Maker—let him ever know that his word can be of no use, unless the blessing of Christ be in it.²²

I love that response! He is the Lord, my friend, and He says to us, “Bring what you have to Me.” It is not what we have that counts with Him but actually what we don’t have. The question is: Are we willing to release whatever we do have and let Him be the One to direct us in the disposition of it?

Don’t get the impression that this little boy had five great big loaves of bread. They actually were little buns. There were over five thousand hungry people out there, and they had five little buns. This little boy had brought them—they were probably his lunch, and he could have eaten every bit of it. Five loaves and two small fish—and Jesus said, “Bring them hither to me.”²³

Spurgeon: He will have us yield up what we have: we are to make no reserve. We must hand all over to Jesus: "Bring them hither to me." He will accept what we bring: this is implied in the command to bring it. He will make a little go a long way: that which gets

²¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:83). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²²Adam Clarke’s Commentary

²³McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:83). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

to Jesus will reach the needy by the surest route. The shortest way to procure provender for perishing souls is to go to Jesus about them.

Matthew 14:19

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

[looking up to heaven] We have no record of Christ closing His eyes in prayer. Six times He prayed with them open (Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Mark 7:34; Luke 9:16; John 11:41; John 17:1).

Looking up to heaven—To teach us to acknowledge GOD as the Supreme Good, and fountain of all excellence.

[blessed] It was customary for Jews to give thanks to God at every meal (Matthew 15:36; Mark 6:41; Mark 8:6; John 6:11; 2 Cor. 10:16).

[brake] Bread was baked in thin cakes which had to be broken to be divided. To "break bread" means to eat food (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42,46; Acts 20:7; Acts 27:35; 2 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 11:24). Here we have a miracle of the creation of substance.

He blessed—The word God should, I think, be rather inserted here than the word them, because it does not appear that it was the loaves which Christ blessed, but that God who had provided them; and this indeed was the Jewish custom, not to bless the food, but the God who gave it.

However, there are others who believe the loaves are meant, and that he blessed them in order to multiply them. The Jewish form of blessing, or what we term grace, before and after meat, was as follows:—

BEFORE MEAT

ברוך אתה אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ

Baruc attah Elohinoo melec haolam hamotse lechem min
haarets

Blessed art thou, our God, King of the universe, who bringest bread out of the
earth!

AFTER MEAT

ברוך אתה אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barnuc Elohinoo melec haolam bore peri hagephen

Blessed art thou, our God, King of the universe, the Creator of the fruit of the
vine!²⁴

²⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary

And brake—We read often in the Scriptures of breaking bread, never of cutting it: because the Jews made their bread broad and thin like cakes, and to divide such, being very brittle, there was no need of a knife.

And he commanded the multitude to sit down. In the original it is *to recline* on the grass, or to lie as they did at their meals. The Jews never sat, as we do at meals, but *reclined*, or lay at length. Matthew 23:6. Mark and Luke add, that they reclined in companies, by hundreds, and by fifties.

“He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass.” Someone has called our attention to something interesting here which most of us would have passed by. In Mark’s account we are told that He made them sit down by companies or ranks, by hundreds and by fifties. These folk wore colorful clothing, and out there on the green grass they were seated probably by villages with each having its own distinct manner of dress. It must have been a thrilling sight to have seen this colorful group from the opposite hillside. They were probably wearing red, brown, blue, orange, and purple—probably a great deal of purple because purple dye was made in this area. It must have looked like one of those old-fashioned quilts. The Lord had them sit in order. The Lord did things orderly.

“And looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.” These fellows who had appointed themselves to the board of directors in telling the Lord Jesus what to do find themselves now as waiters, serving the crowd. And that is really to be the particular ministry of apostles, disciples, ministers, evangelists, and all Christians in our day. We are to *feed* the multitude. There are too many people in our churches who want to tell how it should be done and too few who are willing to *do* it. A preacher said to me, “In my church we have all chiefs and no Indians. Everybody wants to be the head of something, chairman of a committee, or in another place of leadership.” What the church needs is waiters to give out the Bread of Life, and the Bread is the Word of God. That’s our business. All believers should be waiters passing it out.²⁵

JNTC: Looking up toward heaven. Yeshua is reported in six places to have prayed with his eyes open (here; Mk 6:41, 7:34; Lk 9:16; Yn 11:41, 17:1). Jews generally do so today; Christians often pray with them closed. There is no command on the subject in the Bible. In an age when people are easily distracted, closing one’s eyes may help one to concentrate on God. On the other hand, those who choose to keep their eyes open have the Messiah as their model. The phrase, “toward heaven,” can also carry the secondary meaning, “toward God” (see 3:2N).

He made a *b.rakhah*. The Jewish-English phrase means “said a blessing.” The Greek here is *evlogeô*, “bless, speak well of”; elsewhere it is often *evcharistô*, “thank.” Although the text does not say so specifically, it is reasonable to suppose that he recited the customary *b.rakhah* (“benediction”; see 9:8N) which Jews have said for more than two thousand years before meals that include bread: *Barukh attah, Adonai Eloheynu*,

²⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:83). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Melekh-ha .olam, haMotzi lechem min ha .aretz (“Praised be you, *Adonai* our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth”).

Here are two points to note about Jewish blessings at meals. First, the blessing before the meal is short. A longer “Grace” (*Birkat-HaMazon*) is said after the meal. This seems sensible: one thanks God for something received; moreover, on a full stomach one can relax and express appreciation at length; but on an empty stomach, if the prayers become verbose, one’s mind easily descends from Heaven to the table. Second, the object of the blessing is God, not the food. It is unnecessary to say, as many Christians do, “Lord, bless this food to our bodies”; since food is already God’s blessing to us (Genesis 1:29, 9:3–4)! Rather, we thank him for providing it. See also below, 26:26–27&N.²⁶

Yashanet.com: he blessed, and brake

One of the common misconceptions is that Yeshua "blessed the food" (here, and at the "Last Supper," where it is said He "blessed the bread and the wine"). This is an incorrect understanding of what was being done, and has led to many unscriptural traditions (such as blessing of pets, cars, etc.) Some even teach that by "blessing" unkosher food, this makes it permissible to eat. What Yeshua did, and what Jews did and do today, is to bless God. The prayer *over the food*, is actually a prayer thanking God for his sustenance. A typical prayer Yeshua would have said (which is still said today), is:

Baruch attah Adonai, Elohenu Melech ha-Olam, haMotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Which may be translated (note who is being blessed):

Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the Universe, who brings bread from the earth.

Matthew 14:20

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

[baskets full] Many Jews were basket-carrying peddlers so there were always plenty of baskets in a crowd.

They did all eat, and were filled—Little or much is the same in the hands of Jesus Christ. Here was an incontestable miracle—five thousand men, besides women and children, fed with five cakes and two fishes! Here must have been a manifest creation of substance—the parts of the bread were not dilated to make them appear large, nor was there any delusion in the eating—for they all ate, and were all filled. Here then is one miracle of our Lord attested by at least five thousand persons! But did not this creation of bread prove the unlimited power of Jesus? Undoubtedly: and nothing less than eternal power and Godhead could have effected it.²⁷

²⁶ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 14:19). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²⁷ Adam Clarke’s Commentary

Twelve baskets full. The size of these *baskets* is unknown. They were probably such as travellers carried their provisions in. They were used commonly by the Jews in their journeys. In travelling among the Gentiles, or Samaritans, a *Jew* could expect little hospitality. There were not, as now, public houses for the entertainment of strangers. At great distances there were *caravansaries*, but they were intended chiefly for lodging-places for the night, and not to provide *food* for travellers. Hence in journeying among strangers, or in deserts, they carried *baskets* of provisions; and this is the reason why they were furnished with them here. It is probable that each of the apostles had one, and they were all filled. John 6:12 says that Jesus *directed* them to gather up these fragments, that nothing be lost: an example of economy. God *creates* all food; it has, therefore, a kind of sacredness; it is all *needed* by some person or other, and none should be lost.

I formerly thought that taking up the “fragments” meant that they picked up what we would call the garbage; that is, someone bit into a sandwich, then put it down when he saw a bigger one, and the half-eaten sandwich would be a fragment. However, I realize now that here were twelve baskets of bread and fish which were never touched. It is difficult for us who live in the midst of supermarkets to understand that many of the world’s population went to bed hungry last night. Most people in that day never knew what it was to have a full meal, but twelve baskets of food left over indicates that everyone had a full tummy.²⁸

Matthew 14:21

And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

This is the only precrucifixion miracle that is in all four Gospels. (Lk 9:10-17; Mk 6:30-44; Jn 6:1-14). There are very few events that are in all four. Why is this one included?

Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed over 5,000 people. What he was originally given seemed insufficient, but in his hands it became more than enough. We often feel that our contribution to Jesus is meager, but he can use and multiply whatever we give him, whether it is talent, time, or treasure. It is when we give them to Jesus that our resources are multiplied.

The text states that there were 5,000 men present, *besides* women and children. Therefore, the total number of people Jesus fed could have been 10 to 15 thousand. The number of men is listed separately because in the Jewish culture of the day, men and women usually ate separately when in public. The children ate with the women.

Five thousand men, plus women and children. Elisha, by a similar miracle of creation, fed one hundred people with twenty loaves of bread (2 Kings 4:42–44). Here Yeshua fed perhaps ten thousand with fewer loaves.

²⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:84). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Matthew 14:22

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

[constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away] They were either afraid to return to Herod's country during the expected commotion over John's death, or were unwilling to embark without Him, perhaps remembering the last experience of the storm on the sea (Matthew 8:23-26).

[straightway] is a word of urgency and swift movement. Matthew's record has a strange omission at the conclusion of the miracle of feeding the five thousand. He notes the urgency with which Jesus dismissed the multitudes and the haste in which He sent His disciples over the sea in the boat; however, he does not offer an explanation. John gives us the reason: "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:15). In view of the fact that Matthew is presenting that phase of the ministry of Jesus which has to do with His kingship, it may appear odd at first that he would ignore this attempt to make Jesus king. This is another evidence of the remarkable character of the claim of Jesus to be King. He is King by right and title. He will not become King by any democratic process. He is not "elected" King by the will of the people. He is King by the will of God. He will finally become King by force (see Ps. 2:8-9).²⁹

Matthew 14:23

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

He went up into a mountain apart, to pray—He whom God has employed in a work of mercy had need to return, by prayer, as speedily, to his Maker, as he can, lest he should be tempted to value himself on account of that in which he has no merit—for the good that is done upon earth, the Lord doth it alone. Some make this part of our Lord's conduct emblematic of the spirit and practice of prayer, and observe that the proper dispositions and circumstances for praying well are:

1. Retirement from the world.
2. Elevation of the heart to God.
3. Solitude.
4. The silence and quiet of the night.

It is certain that in this also Christ has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Retirement from the world is often a means of animating, supporting, and spiritualizing prayer. Other society should be shut out, when a soul comes to converse with God.³⁰

²⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:84). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁰Adam Clarke's Commentary

[alone] Alone with God in retirement from the world and in prayer and meditation, as He so often was (Mark 4:10; Mark 6:47; Luke 9:18,36; John 6:15). His private praying and conquest of Satan were the secret of His public power. It was by prayer that He received the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21). It was by continued prayer that He received fresh anointings of the Spirit for His daily work. He used the same methods to get and keep power that are required of believers (Luke 11:13; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:14; Acts 8:15; Ephes. 6:10-18; Jude 1:20-24).

Matthew 14:24

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

Did Jesus know that there was a storm coming? Jesus *made* the disciples go on the boat. One can infer that these experienced fishermen were reluctant to go to sea because they could see a storm coming.³¹

The Lord is in the mountains, in the place of prayer. The disciples are down on the Sea of Galilee in a storm and in darkness; they are in the place of peril. What a picture this is of our own day. Our Lord has gone on to the Father and is seated at the Father's right hand. We today are down here on a storm-tossed sea in the place of peril.

Matthew 14:25

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

[fourth watch] Just before dawn.

[fourth watch of the night] Jews divided the night into 3 parts of 4 hours each and Romans into 4 parts of 3 hours each. The 4th watch would be 3:00 to 6:00 in the morning.

The fourth watch—Anciently the Jews divided the night into three watches, consisting of four hours each. The first watch is mentioned, Lamentations 2:19; the second, Judges 7:19; and the third, Exodus 14:24; but a fourth watch is not mentioned in any part of the OLD Testament. This division the Romans had introduced in Judea, as also the custom of dividing the day into twelve hours: see John 11:9. The first watch began at six o'clock in the evening, and continued till nine; the second began at nine, and continued till twelve; the third began at twelve, and continued till three next morning; and the fourth began at three, and continued till six. It was therefore between the hours of three and six in the morning that Jesus made his appearance to his disciples.³²

[walking on the sea] A notable miracle. Never before had any man walked on water.

³¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Matthew, khouse.org

³² Adam Clarke's Commentary

Walking on the sea—Thus suspending the laws of gravitation was a proper manifestation of unlimited power. Jesus did this by his own power; therefore Jesus showed forth his Godhead. In this one miracle we may discover three:—

1. Though at a distance from his disciples, he knew their distress.
2. He found them out on the lake, and probably in the midst of darkness.
3. He walked upon the water.

Job, speaking of those things whereby the omnipotence of God was demonstrated, says particularly, Job 9:8, He walketh upon the waves of the sea: intimating that this was impossible to any thing but Omnipotence.³³

The fourth watch is the morning watch, from three in the morning until daylight. This is the time the Lord walked on the sea, going to His disciples. And I think that will be the watch in which He will come for us at the Rapture. Christ is the bright and morning star for the church, and He will take the church out of the world. We don't know the date of His coming. There are men who would have us believe that they know the time, but they don't know. However, I believe that we are in the fourth watch of the night.³⁴

Matthew 14:26

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

[**spirit**] Greek: phantasma (GSN-5326), a phantom. Only here and in Mark 6:49. Apparition by night has always been a superstition among all nations. To sailors it has always been a sign of shipwreck.

[**cried out for fear**] Scream, shriek with fear.

It is a spirit—That the spirits of the dead might and did appear, was a doctrine held by the greatest and holiest of men that ever existed; and a doctrine which the caviliers, free-thinkers and bound-thinkers, of different ages, have never been able to disprove.

This is the picture: Our Lord is up there on the mountain, and He sees the disciples in the storm, toiling and rowing, as Mark's record has it. Then He comes to them in the fourth watch. When they see Him, they say, "It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." Somebody is going to say, "Well, they were superstitious." Yes, there may have been a certain amount of superstition in them, but what would *you* think if a man came to you walking on the water? Many years ago over in Tennessee a fellow said, "I didn't believe

³³ Adam Clarke's Commentary

³⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:85). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

in ghosts either until I saw one!” And that is the position of the disciples. They had never seen a spirit before, but they think they are seeing one now!³⁵

Yashanet.com the disciples saw him walking on the sea

Evidently, Yeshua was in a state where He could be seen at night across the waters. This may be compared to his appearance when seen with Moses and Elijah, in Matthew chapter 17.

His return is described as being in such radiance as well:

2 Thessalonians 2:8 - *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:*

ESV: Ghost represents *phantasma*, a Greek term for spirit appearances or apparitions. The disciples may have thought an evil spirit was trying to deceive them.

Matthew 14:27

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

It is I; be not afraid—Nothing but this voice of Christ could, in such circumstances, have given courage and comfort to his disciples: those who are grievously tossed with difficulties and temptations require a similar manifestation of his power and goodness. When he proclaims himself in the soul, all sorrow, and fear, and sin are at an end.

ESV: It is I (Gk. *egō eimi*, lit., “I am”) may recall Yahweh's voice from the burning bush (Ex. 3:14), which when spoken now by Jesus provides assurance to the disciples of the Lord's presence in their midst as Savior (cf. Isa. 43:10–13).

Matthew 14:28

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

And Peter answered, etc. Here is an instance of the characteristic ardour and rashness of Peter. He had less *real* faith than he supposed; more ardour than his faith would justify: he was rash, headlong, incautious, really attached to Jesus, but still easily daunted, and prone to fall. He was afraid, therefore, when in danger, and, sinking, cried again for help. Thus he was suffered to learn his own character, and his dependence on Jesus: a lesson which all Christians are permitted to learn by dear-bought experience.

Peter was not putting Jesus to the test, something we are told not to do (Matthew 4:7). Instead he was the only one in the boat to react in faith. His impulsive request led him to

³⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:85). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

experience a rather unusual demonstration of God's power. Peter started to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the high waves around him. His faith wavered when he realized what he was doing. We may not walk on water, but we do walk through tough situations. If we focus on the waves of difficult circumstances around us without looking to Jesus for help, we too may despair and sink. To maintain your faith when situations are difficult, keep your eyes on Jesus' power rather than on your inadequacies.³⁶

Surgeon: Peter must be the first to speak; he is impulsive; and besides, he was a sort of foreman in the company. The first speaker is not always the wisest man. Peter's fears have gone, all but one "if"; but that "if" was working him no good, for it seemed to challenge his Master: "Lord, if it be thou." What a test to suggest: "Bid me come unto thee on the water"! What did Peter want with walking the waters? His name might have suggested that like a stone he would go to the bottom. It was an imprudent request: it was the swing of the pendulum in Peter from despair to an injudicious venturing. Surely, he wist not what he said. Yet we, too, have put our Lord to tests almost as improper. Have we not said, "If thou hast ever blessed me, give me this and that"? We, too, have had our water-walking, and have ventured where nothing but special grace could uphold us. Lord, what is man?

Matthew 14:29

And he said, *Come*. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

[he walked on the water] Peter actually walked on the water until he got his eyes off Jesus and on the storm. Looking at circumstances was the cause of failure.

Matthew 14:30

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

[boisterous] Greek: *ischuros* (GSN-2478). Translated boisterous once, but strong and mighty 24 times (Matthew 12:29; Luke 11:22).

[sink] Greek: *katapontizo* (GSN-2670), overwhelmed. Only here and in Matthew 18:6.

This is a lesson for you and me: We get the impression that while Peter looked at the Lord he was doing fine. Believing something and "*having faith*" are two different things. I can believe that the Lord will sustain me, I don't have faith until I actually step off. Faith has to do with believing coupled with *relying upon*, trusting. We get the impression that Peter looked around at his circumstances, then he starts to sink.

³⁶ Life Application Notes

Peter took his eyes off the Lord Jesus while he was walking on the water. When he began to sink, he prayed the shortest prayer in the Bible, "Lord, save me"! If Simon Peter had prayed this prayer like some of us preachers pray, "Lord, Thou who are omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent . . .," Peter would have been twenty-nine feet under water before he would have gotten to his request. Peter got right down to business, and you and I need to pray like that.³⁷

Yashanet.com: he was afraid; and beginning to sink,

Peter was no doubt an expert swimmer, being a fisherman by trade. Why was he so fearful when he went under water only a few feet from the boat? Evidently, the plain meaning (p'shat) of the text may not tell the full story.

There is spiritual connotation to the water, especially "the sea." In mystical Jewish literature, the "sea" is the spiritual realm. Sinking into the sea, as such, can be seen as a rapid deterioration of one's spiritual condition. (Something that occurred in Peter's life more than once, such as in Matthew 16:23 and Matthew chapter 26). Peter's cry as he was sinking was not for a lifeguard.

Matthew 14:31

And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?**

Why did he sink? Because of his doubt. Looking down caused him to doubt and the doubt caused him to lose power. Always remember Rom 8:28!

[caught him] To catch and hold him up while standing on water was another miracle.

[doubt] Greek: distazo (GSN-1365), to waver mentally. Only here and in Matthew 28:17. Not dipsuchos (GSN-1374), double-minded (James 1:8; James 4:8), or diakrino (GSN-1254), hesitate, doubt, and be at variance with one's self (Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:23; Romans 4:20; Romans 14:23; James 1:6; Acts 10:20; Acts 11:12). If one wants an answer to prayer he must not hesitate as to the lawfulness of the request; must not stagger over the greatness of the promise; must not say yes and no in his determination; and must not waver mentally as to the outcome.

Although we start out with good intentions, sometimes our faith falters. This doesn't necessarily mean we have failed. When Peter's faith faltered, he reached out to Christ, the only one who could help. He was afraid, but he still looked to Christ. When you are apprehensive about the troubles around you and doubt Christ's presence or ability to help, you must remember that he is the *only* one who can really help.

³⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:85). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Spurgeon: Our Lord delays not when our peril is imminent and our cry is urgent: "Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand." He first "caught him" and then taught him. Jesus saves first, and upbraids afterwards, when he must needs do so. When we are saved is the fit time for us to chasten ourselves for our unbelief. Let us learn from our Lord, that we may not reprove others till we have first helped them out of their difficulties. Our doubts are unreasonable: "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" If there be reason for little faith, there is evidently reason for great confidence. If it be right to trust Jesus at all, why not trust him altogether? Trust was Peter's strength; doubt was his danger. It looked like great faith when Peter walked the water; but a little wind soon proved it to be "little faith." Till our faith is tried, we can form no reliable estimate of it. After his Lord had taken him by the hand, Peter sank no further, but resumed the walk of faith. How easy to have faith when we are close to Jesus! Lord, when our faith fails, come you to us, and we shall walk on the wave.

Matthew 14:32

And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

[wind ceased] Another miracle. All these events further convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Yashanet.com: And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

Not only was Peter's condition calmed (verse 30) but so were the physical elements.

Psalm 65:8 - Who stillest the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples

Matthew 14:33

Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

One gets the impression that there may have been more than the 12 disciples in the boat.

[worshipped him] Christ accepted worship many times, proving His Deity (Matthew 2:2,11; Matthew 8:2; Matthew 9:18; Matthew 14:33; Matthew 15:25; Matthew 18:26; Matthew 28:9,17; Mark 5:6; Luke 24:52; John 9:38). If He had rejected worship, as one in Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9, it would have proved Him to be just another created being.

[Of a truth thou art the Son of God] Second time He was acknowledged by men as the Son of God (John 1:49). Demons also confessed it (Matthew 8:29; cp. Matthew 16:16; Matthew 27:54).

Matthew 14:34

And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

[land of Gennesaret] A fertile plain on the north shore of Galilee and west of Jordan about 4 miles long and 2 miles wide. It produced both temperate and tropical fruits.

The land of Gennesaret—It was from this country that the sea or lake of Gennesaret had its name. In this district, on the western side of the lake, were the cities of Capernaum and Tiberias.

Matthew 14:35

And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;

[knowledge of him] Recognized Him, and proved faith in His power by bringing the sick.

Matthew 14:36

And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

[hem] Greek: *kraspedon* (GSN-2899), a tassel of twisted wool (Matthew 9:20; Matthew 14:36; Matthew 23:5; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44). One was required at each of the four corners of the outer garment (Numbers 15:38-41; Deut. 22:12). Pharisees considered tassels special marks of sanctity and sought to enlarge them (Matthew 23:5). One thread of each tassel was to be deep blue to remind them of their duty to keep the law.

[whole] Greek: *diasozo* (GSN-1295), to be saved throughout or completely healed. It is used eight times and only of physical salvation (Matthew 14:36; Luke 7:3; Acts 23:24; Acts 27:43; Acts 28:1,4; 1 Peter 3:20). Not only whole, but "perfectly whole." This is the only way Jesus healed. Not one case is recorded of a partial healing. There may be such things, but this is because of partial faith, for the law of faith is: "According to your faith be it unto you" (note, [□]Matthew 8:13).

The people recognized Jesus as a great healer, but how many understood who he truly was? They came to Jesus for physical healing, but did they come for spiritual healing? They came to prolong their lives on earth, but did they come to secure their eternal lives? People may seek Jesus to learn valuable lessons from his life or in hopes of finding relief from pain. But we miss Jesus' whole message if we seek him only to heal our bodies but not our souls, if we look to him for help only in this life, rather than for his eternal plan

for us. Only when we understand the real Jesus Christ can we appreciate how he can truly change our lives.³⁸

Jewish men wore tassels on the lower edges of their robes according to God's command (Deut. 22:12). By Jesus' day, these tassels were seen as signs of holiness (Matthew 23:5). It was natural that people seeking healing should reach out and touch these. But as one sick woman learned, healing came from faith and not from Jesus' cloak (Matthew 9:19-22).

Yashanet.com: as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

The same was said about Paul's clothing. In fact even his garments had some kind of miraculous power about them (Acts 19:12). Unfortunately, due to a lack of grounding in God's Torah, many superstitions have emanated from these specific miracles. Instead of focusing on learning and doing the Torah (which conforms us to the image of God), people have resorted to creating and using everything from medals to "prayer cloths," in vain efforts to bring themselves "closer to God." Another more recent trend is the misuse of "Jewish things," such as the tallit (in both Christian and Messianic circles) for similar purpose.

ESV: recognized. There is no record of any prior ministry by Jesus in Gennesaret, but its people had certainly heard about him, knowing that even touching the **fringe of his garment** could bring healing.

³⁸ Life Application Notes