

John the Baptist according to Josephus

Jewish Antiquities XVIII, v. 1-2 (109-119)

(Loeb Edition, volume IX)

The Background

(V.1) [109] In the meantime, a quarrel, whose origin I shall relate, arose between Aretas, king of Petra, and Herod. The tetrarch Herod had taken the daughter of Aretas as his wife and had now been married to her for a long time. When starting out for Rome, he lodged with his half-brother Herod, who was born of a different mother, namely, the daughter of Simon the High Priest. [110] Falling in love with Herodias, the wife of this half-brother--she was a daughter of their brother Aristobulus and sister to Agrippa the Great--he brazenly broached to her the subject of marriage. She accepted and pledged herself to make the transfer to him as soon as he returned from Rome. It was stipulated that he must oust the daughter of Aretas. [111] The agreement made, he set sail for Rome. On his return after transacting his business in Rome, his wife, who had got wind of his compact with Herodias, before any information reached him that she had discovered everything, asked him to send her away to Machaerus, which was on the boundary between the territory of Aretas and that of Herod. She gave no hint, however, of her real purpose. [112] Herod let her go, since he had no notion that the poor woman saw what was afoot. Some time earlier she herself had dispatched messengers to Machaerus, which was at that time subject to her father, so that when she arrived all preparations for her journey had been made by the governor. She was thus able to start for Arabia as soon as she arrived, being passed from one governor to the next as they provided transport. So she speedily reached her father and told him what Herod planned to do. [113] Aretas made this the start of a quarrel. There was also a dispute about boundaries in the district of Gabalis. Troops were mustered on each side and they were now at war, but they dispatched others as commanders instead of going themselves. [114] In the ensuing battle, the whole army of Herod was destroyed when some refugees, who had come from the tetrarchy of Philip and had joined Herod's army, played him false. [115] Herod sent an account of these events to Tiberius. The latter was incensed to think that Aretas had begun hostilities and wrote Vitellius to declare war and either bring Aretas to him in chains, if he should be captured alive, or if he should be slain, to send him his head. Such were the instructions of Tiberius to his governor in Syria.

(V.2) [116] Τισὶ δὲ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐδόκει ὀλωλέναι τὸν Ἡρώδου στρατὸν
ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μάλα δικαίως τιννυμένου
κατὰ ποινὴν Ἰωάννου τοῦ ἐπικαλουμένου βαπτιστοῦ.

[117] Κτείνει γὰρ δὴ τοῦτον Ἡρώδης ἀγαθὸν (ἄγριον) ἄνδρα
καὶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις κελεύοντα ἀρετὴν ἐπασκοῦσιν καὶ τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους
δικαιοσύνη καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εὐσεβεία χρωμένοις βαπτισμῶ συνιέναι·
οὕτω γὰρ δὴ καὶ τὴν βάπτισιν ἀποδεκτὴν αὐτῶ φανείσθαι
μὴ ἐπὶ τινων ἀμαρτάδων παραιτήσῃ χρωμένων,
ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἀγνεία τοῦ σώματος,
ἅτε δὴ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιοσύνη προεκεκαθαρμένης.

[118] Καὶ τῶν ἄλλων συστρεφομένων,
καὶ γὰρ ἤρθησαν ἐπὶ πλείστον τῇ ἀκροάσει τῶν λόγων,
δείσας Ἡρώδης τὸ ἐπὶ τοσόνδε πιθανὸν αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις
μὴ ἐπὶ στάσει τινὶ φέροι,
πάντα γὰρ ἐώκεσαν συμβουλῇ τῇ ἐκείνου πράξοντες,
πολὺ κρεῖττον ἡγεῖται πρὶν τι νεώτερον ἐξ αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι
προλαβὼν ἀνελεῖν τοῦ μεταβολῆς γενομένης
μὴ εἰς πράγματα ἐμπεσὼν μετανοεῖν.

[119] Καὶ ὁ μὲν ὑποψία τῇ Ἡρώδου δέσμιος εἰς τὸν Μαχαιροῦντα πεμφθεὶς
τὸ προειρημένον φρούριον ταύτῃ κτίννυται.
τοῖς δὲ Ἰουδαίοις δόξα ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ τῇ ἐκείνου τὸν ὄλεθρον
ἐπὶ τῷ στρατεύματι γενέσθαι τοῦ θεοῦ κακῶσαι Ἡρώδην θέλοντος.