

# The Death of John the Baptist

Key Verse:  
**“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”**

1 John 3:15

Extra: How should Herod and Herodias have responded to Jesus words?

Level 5 lesson 9

## Read Mark 6:14-29

**Further reading: Matthew 14:1-12; and Luke 9:7-9**

Jesus once called John the Baptist the greatest prophet ever born. In our story today, we read of how this wonderful man was executed without committing any crime - simply to please an evil Queen. How could such a terrible thing happen?

### A BOLD STATEMENT

Perhaps you remember how King Herod had John imprisoned, because he had publicly rebuked him for his sin. Herod had married his brother Phillip's wife Herodias, thereby breaking God's seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14). John bluntly told Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Notice John did not say, "It is not wise, or appropriate for you to have her", but - "it is not lawful!" It is contrary to God's law. It is not right. People today don't like to be told what is right and wrong do they? They like to think they can choose or decide what is 'right for them'. But God is the one who ultimately determines what is right and wrong - not us. He is the final, absolute authority - and we are responsible to Him to obey.

This fearless, straight-talking no doubt annoyed King Herod, but it also infuriated the Queen! She pressured Herod to throw John into prison. She really wanted him killed, but Herod was not prepared to go that far. He knew John was a righteous and holy man, and he actually respected him highly. In his heart he knew that what John had said was the truth!

### A WICKED PLOT

However, wicked Queen Herodias was determined to get rid of John the Baptist somehow, and it wasn't long before her opportunity arose. To celebrate King Herod's birthday, a great banquet was held, to which all the important people in his kingdom were invited. It was a very extravagant occasion, no doubt, with much food and drink and raucous entertainment. At one point, the Queen sent in her daughter to dance before the King. The King was carried away by the girl's seductive display, and foolishly made an oath, swearing that he would give her anything she wanted - even up to half of his kingdom!

The girl went to her mother saying, "What shall I ask?" We can almost hear the hatred in Herodias' voice as she hissed, "The head of John the Baptist!" The girl returned to the King and said, "I want the head of John the Baptist!" The Queen's wicked plot had worked to perfection!

Herod now realised that he had acted foolishly and been 'set up' by the two women. He was terribly sorry, but what should he do? The whole crowd was waiting for his response. Should he behead John or break his promise? Of course, he should have admitted his terrible mistake in making such a foolish oath, and denied the Queen her evil request. But sadly, the King's pride was too great. He didn't want to look foolish in front of his friends - he was scared what they might think of him.

### A DREADFUL CRIME

So poor, weak Herod ordered an executioner to go to the prison; and John, an innocent, godly man, was beheaded. His head was brought to the girl, who took it to her mother. Some day they will all answer to God for this dreadful crime. Revelation 6:9, 10 speaks of "the blood of martyrs (like John the Baptist and countless others) crying out to God for justice." Herod, we know, had a terrible conscience about the terrible thing he had done, for the rest of his life. Verses 14-16 of our reading tell us that when he heard of Jesus and His mighty works, he exclaimed guiltily, "It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead!"

It is clear that he was a cowardly, sinful man. He feared Jesus, he feared John, he feared the multitude, he feared Herodias, he feared those at his dinner party. He illustrates perfectly the Scripture which says, "The fear of man brings a snare, but the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!" (Proverbs 29:25, Proverbs 1:7).

Our conscience must be enlightened by righteous knowledge, the knowledge of God's Word, to function accurately. How much better if Herod had listened to the voice of his conscience as it responded to the Word of God, brought by John. . We too, need to treat conscience as a friend, not as an enemy. Listen to its voice. When it worries you, don't stifle it - instead, confess and repent of your sin. You will find peace from its accusations as you trust in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from all sin.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was King Herod so fearful when he heard of the mighty works of the lord Jesus?

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2. Who is the final authority on what is right and wrong?

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3. What does conscience need to enable it to function accurately?

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4. Why did the plan of Herodias succeed?

.....

5. How would you describe Herod?

.....

My Name is ..... Age .....

# Feeding the Multitude

Key Verse:  
**“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe Him.”**

John 12:37

Extra: What could you offer the Lord Jesus, to be useful for His service & glory?

Level 5 lesson 10

## Read John 6:1-14

Further reading: **Matthew 14:13-21;**  
**Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17**

All day long the Lord had been followed by a great multitude of people, eagerly listening to His words of wisdom. Mark 6:34 tells us that the Lord felt so sorry for them; to Him they were like sheep without a shepherd to care for them. The four gospels all tell us there were about 5,000 men in this huge crowd, not counting women and children!

### A TREMENDOUS NEED

As evening approached, Jesus could see they were hungry and tired, and not wanting to send them away hungry, He mentioned this to Philip, to test his faith. Humanly speaking it was impossible, but Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do! Unfortunately, Philip’s answer betrayed his lack of faith, and showed that he thought nothing could be done. “Eight months wages is not enough to buy bread for them, so that everyone of them can have even a little,” he replied. This was a disappointing response. Philip had seen many great evidences of the Lord’s power, and he should have known that He who turned water into wine could have turned grass or stones into bread if He’d wanted to!

### THE NEED SUPPLIED

As the disciples looked uncertainly at each other, wondering what to do next, Andrew stepped forward with a suggestion. “There is a boy here,” he said, “with five loaves and two fish.” Faced with the size of the crowd, the enormity of the problem, and probably the strange stares of the other disciples, we can almost understand Andrew adding apologetically, “but what use are they among so many?” It did seem a bit ridiculous to even mention the boy’s food; it was after all, just one small boy’s lunch! How graciously the Lord responded! Quietly He instructed the disciples to seat everyone in an orderly manner, which they did. Soon the whole crowd was seated expectantly on the hillside, awaiting Jesus’ next move. The Lord accepted the lunch from the small boy and with a prayer of thanks to His Heavenly Father, began breaking the loaves into pieces and passing it out to His disciples to distribute to the crowd. He did the same with the fish, until the people

had eaten as much as they wanted and were no longer hungry.

The Lord then gave His final instruction, “Gather up all the ‘left-overs’ so that nothing is wasted.” This must have been quite a task, but eventually it was completed and we can imagine the disciple’s faces as they stared at twelve full baskets of food; far more than what they had begun with!

A wonderful miracle had been done before the people’s very eyes. Perhaps as many as 7,500 people had been well-fed from an original supply of only five loaves and two fish, with much more left over at the end than what was begun with at the start. How could such a thing happen?

### THE ONLY EXPLANATION

Scripture as always, doesn’t even attempt to explain how this occurred. Just as in the story of Creation and indeed all the other miracles Jesus performed, the facts are simply stated: the Lord, the Creator of all, was at work! Nothing more than this need be said. He who could command “light to shine out of darkness”, who could create something from nothing, was simply displaying His infinite power.

In each of His miracles, Jesus was loudly proclaiming, “I am not just a teacher, or a good man - I am GOD, the Almighty God of the universe! Will you believe in Me, put your faith in Me and follow Me?” We are each confronted with the same question today as we read and study this story. How will you respond?

### FURTHER LESSONS

There are other valuable things we can learn from this story. The Lord used the boy’s lunch; He used the disciples. He could have done it without them both. He is Almighty God, yet he chose to use people and their things as they were available. This seems to be a principle in Scripture which we observe in many areas. He wants to use you and me too, if we will make ourselves and our things available to Him for His service and glory.

Also, we can learn from Jesus’ example in giving thanks for our food, and not being wasteful with the supplies He gives us. He could have created endless supplies of food, yet He chose to collect up what had been leftover, no doubt to feed the poor or others in need. This is another important lesson for us, too.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Phillip’s answer reveal about himself?	.....
2. Had you been one of the disciples what would you have said?	.....
3. How was the multitude fed?	.....
4. What did the miracle show Jesus to be?	.....
5. Mention one lesson that Jesus’ action teaches us.	.....

# Walking on the Water

Key Verse:

**“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

Acts 2:21

Extra: Can you find another example in Scripture on Jesus’ power over nature?

Level 5 lesson 11

## Read Matthew 14:22-36

Further: Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21

As you can imagine, the people were impressed with what Jesus had done! They acknowledged Him as “that prophet that should come” and seemed ready to make Him their King (John 6:15). However, Jesus would not let them do this; He knew their hearts, that they were not really acknowledging him as God, but saw in Him a person with ‘magical’ powers who could perhaps lead them in their fight for freedom from the Romans. He knew too, that He had not come to be an earthly King at this time; He had come to die on the cross as the Lamb of God. So instead of accepting the adulation of the crowd and complying with their wishes, he sent them away to their homes.

### DISCIPLES IN DIFFICULTY

Then, although evening was approaching, He told the disciples to get in their boat and row to the other side of Lake Galilee where he would meet them later. While they were doing this, He went up into the hills nearby, to pray to His Father. It is interesting for us to note that Jesus often took time out from the ‘busyness’ of His life, to spend time in solitude, alone in prayer with His Heavenly Father. I often think, “if HE needed to do that, how much more do you and I?”

### A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE

Meanwhile, out on the lake, the disciples were having a real hard time making headway. A fierce wind was blowing strongly against them and the waves were now very big. They had been rowing for hours through the darkness but had only gone about 5kms - a third of the way across. Then, in the fourth watch (between 3am and 6am), the disciples had a terrifying experience. As they strained at their oars, suddenly through the gloom and howling wind, they saw a ‘ghostly’ figure approaching! It appeared to be walking on the water! As they peered into the darkness for another glimpse of this eerie figure, they saw that it really was walking on the water - and it was headed straight for them! Filled with awful dread, they began to scream in terror.

### A TIMELY RESCUE

Can you imagine the disciples’ relief, when through the darkness comes the familiar voice of Jesus, “Don’t be afraid. It’s Me!” v27. It seems though that they were not entirely sure. Peter, usually the first one to speak in situations like this, called back, “Lord, if it is You, tell me to come to You on the water!” Only Peter would think of such a thing! Jesus responded to this strange request with one word, “Come!”

Peter, to his credit, immediately stepped out of the boat on to the water and in complete faith, began walking on the water towards Jesus! However, any joy or amazement he may have experienced at his new ability, disappeared before he had gone very far! Looking at the huge waves all around him, he was suddenly afraid and began to sink.

Peter had taken his eyes off the Lord, and as he did so, his circumstances overwhelmed him. Even in his panic, however, he knew where to go for help; he knew who alone could help him. He immediately looked again to Jesus, “Lord - save me!” Jesus responded instantly, stretching out His strong hand to grab hold of Peter and bring him safely to the ship. What a lesson this is for us, if we are His disciples! As we journey over the ‘sea of life’ we too will frequently meet with difficulties and troubles which threaten to overwhelm us. However, like Peter, we will find that Jesus is always near when we need Him most.

### A TERRIFIC MESSAGE

As soon as Jesus was on board the ship another miracle took place. The wind stopped blowing and as the disciples gazed around in wonder, they found they were suddenly at their destination! Recognising that this was done by the power of our Lord, they came and worshipped Him, saying “Truly, You are the Son of God.” This is the point of the whole story. Some have read this story and scoffed in disbelief. Others, however well-intentioned, try to explain that perhaps Jesus was walking on a sand-bar or something, thereby denying Jesus’ deity. No! The disciples were eye-witnesses and arrived at the correct conclusion. Let us never waver from the same conviction of the disciples in the boat that night, “Truly, You are the Son of God!” That is why Jesus can reach out today still, to save all who will cry out to Him “Lord - save me!” In every circumstance, from every sin, for all eternity - Jesus is able to save!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why do you think the multitude could not be trusted?	.....
2. How did Jesus show that it was not ‘a spirit’ they saw?	.....
3. What caused Peter to begin to sink?	.....
4. What is the lesson for us in Peter’s short prayer?	.....
5. Who did the disciples say Jesus was?	.....

# The Bread of Life

Key Verse:

**“But seek first His (God’s) Kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

Matthew 6:33

Level 5 lesson 12

Extra: How do you live with an ‘eternal perspective’?

## Read Corinthians 15:1-20

Further: John 18, 19, 20

In our last study, Jesus sent His disciples across the lake, while He sent the multitudes away and spent time on His own in prayer. This crowd you’ll remember, wanted to install Him as their King, and it appears they were not ready to give up their plans so quickly. Noticing Jesus did not go with His disciples, they probably expected to find Him somewhere nearby the next day, but to their surprise they could find no trace of Him!

However, they soon learned that other boats had come to the place where they had been fed, and assumed that perhaps Jesus had crossed the lake in one of these. Determined to find Him, they set sail across the lake to Capernaum. Finding Him eventually, they asked, “Rabbi (Teacher), when did you come here?” (Probably in the back of their minds they were also wondering “HOW did you get here?”)

Jesus did not answer their question directly. As we considered in our last lesson, Jesus knew their hearts and that they only saw Him as someone who could fill their stomachs with food, and assist them with their earthly endeavours. They did not recognise Him as their Messiah. Perhaps disappointed at their shallow motives, Jesus chided them, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.”

### A BETTER BREAD

Of course, Jesus knew that we all need food, but He wanted these people to see something far more important. Instead of putting so much energy into seeking things for this life, no matter how important, He encouraged them to work for spiritual ‘bread’. By working in the fields or in their jobs, they could provide bread for themselves, but this ‘better bread’ was only available from Him! Hearing these words, they asked the natural question, “What must we do, to do the work God requires?” (v28). Listen carefully to the Lord’s important reply, “The work of God is this; to believe in the one He has sent!”

This remark went straight to their hearts! They knew now what Jesus was insisting on - that they acknowledge Him as their Messiah. Here their true estimation of Jesus is revealed. “What sign do you show then, that we may see and believe You?” they asked. Can you believe that?!! Just the day before, He had fed thousands of them with a few loaves and fishes; they had in fact, witnessed many miracles He had done and now they disbelievingly ask, “What sign do you show?”

### THE BREAD OF LIFE

It is plain that they were determined not to recognise His claims, just as so many people today. They went on to say, “Our fathers ate manna in the desert” (a reference to the time when God sent bread from heaven) - as if to say, “We ARE God’s children – He once had dealings with our forefathers! Are you greater than them? Are you claiming to be greater than our revered leader Moses?”

Without demeaning Moses in any way, Jesus cleverly replied, “It is not Moses (your father) who gives you true bread - it is My Father who gives you the true bread.” He then went on to describe the true bread as “the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” This sounded wonderful to the listening crowd. “Oh Lord, give us this bread!” they pleaded, keen for further blessing. Jesus’ reply was a great declaration about Himself, and brought them firmly back to the same point - that of His deity. “I am the Bread of Life,” He said, “He who comes to Me will never hunger and he who believes in Me will never thirst!”

Again they realised clearly what Jesus was saying, but were not willing to accept it. Despite this, Jesus went on to tell them that those given to Him by the Father *would* believe and receive the blessing of everlasting life. He (Jesus) would never cast them out!

What about you, friend? Are YOU willing to acknowledge Jesus Christ as God, and accept Him as Saviour and Lord? Are you ready to put your life in His hands? Many of you have, I know.

This lesson reminds us too, that as God’s children we need to have an eternal perspective on this life, “seeking first, the kingdom of God”, rather than expending all our energy for “food that doesn’t last.” How much better to have the eternal. ‘Bread of Life’!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why were the crowds seeking Jesus?

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2. What is the ‘work’ that God requires of us?

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3. What great declaration did Jesus make about himself?

.....

4. How do we receive the Lord Jesus, the ‘Bread of Life’?

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5. What special lesson did you learn from this study?

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