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JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS BOOK XVI

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CHAPTER 11.

*How Herod, by permission from Cesar, accused his sons before an assembly of judges at Berytus : and what Tero suffered for using a boundless and military liberty of speech. Concerning also the death of the young men, and their burial at Alexandrium.*

1. [An. 6.] SO CESAR WAS NOW RECONCILED to Herod; and wrote thus to him; that “He was grieved for him, on account of his sons; and that in case they had been guilty of any profane and insolent crimes against him, it would behove him to punish them as parricides, for which he gave him power accordingly. But if they had only contrived to fly away, he would have him give them an admonition, and not proceed to extremity with them. He also advised him to get an assembly together, and to appoint some place near Berytus, which is a city belonging to the Romans; [19](#) and to take the presidents of Syria, and Archelaus King of Cappadocia, and as many more as he thought to be illustrious, for their friendship to him, and the dignities they were in, and determine what should be done by their approbation.” These were the directions that Cesar gave him. Accordingly Herod, when the letter was brought to him, was immediately very glad of Cesar’s reconciliation to him; and very glad also that he had a compleat authority given him over his sons. And it strangely came about, that whereas before, in his adversity, though he had indeed shewed himself severe, yet had he not been very rash, nor hasty in procuring the destruction of his sons; he now, in his prosperity, took advantage of this change for the better, and the freedom he now had, to exercise his hatred against them after an unheard of manner. He therefore sent and called as many as he thought fit to this assembly; excepting Archelaus: for as for him, he either hated him, so that he would not invite him; or he thought he would be an obstacle to his designs.

2. When the presidents, and the rest that belonged to the cities were come to Berytus, he kept his sons in a certain village, belonging to Sidon, called Platana, but near to this city; that if they were called he might produce them: for he did not think fit to bring them before the assembly. And when there were one hundred and fifty assessors present, Herod came by himself alone, and accused his sons; and that in such a way as if it were not a melancholy accusation, and not made but out of necessity, and upon the misfortunes he was under: indeed in such a way as was very indecent for a father to accuse his sons. For he was very vehement, and disordered, when he came to the demonstration of the crime they were accused of: and gave the greatest signs of passion,

and barbarity. Nor would he suffer the assessors to consider of the weight of the evidence: but asserted them to be true by his own authority, after a manner most indecent in a father against his sons: and read himself what they themselves had written. Wherein there was no confession of any plots or contrivances against him; but only how they had contrived to flee away; and containing withal certain reproaches against him, on account of the ill will he bare them. And when he came to those reproaches, he cried out most of all, and exaggerated what they said; as if they had confessed the design against him: and took his oath that he had rather lose his life, than hear such reproachful words. At last he said, that "He had sufficient authority both by nature, and by Cesar's grant to him; [to do what he thought fit.] He also added an allegation of a law of their country, which enjoined this, that If parents laid their hands on the head of him that was accused, the standers by were obliged to cast stones at him, and thereby to slay him. Which though he were ready to do in his own country and Kingdom, yet did he wait for their determination: that yet they came thither not so much as judges, to condemn them for such manifest designs against him, whereby he had almost perished by his sons means; but as persons that had an opportunity of shewing their detestation of such practices, and declaring how unworthy a thing it must be in any, even the most remote to pass over such treacherous designs [without punishment.]"

3. When the King had said this, and the young men had not been produced to make any defence for themselves, the assessors perceived there was no room for equity, and reconciliation. So they confirmed his authority. And in the first place Saturninus, a person that had been consul, and one of great dignity, pronounced his sentence, but with great moderation, and trouble; and said, that "He condemned Herod's sons: but did not think they should be put to death. He had sons of his own: and to put one's son to death is a greater misfortune than any other that could befall him by their means." After him Saturninus's sons, for he had three sons that followed him, and were his legates, pronounced the same sentence with their father. On the contrary, Volumnius's sentence was, to inflict death on such as had been so impiously undutiful to their father. And the greatest part of the rest said the same. Insomuch that the conclusion seemed to be, that the young men were condemned to die. Immediately after this Herod came away from thence, and took his sons to Tyre. Where Nicolaus met him in his voyage from Rome. Of whom he enquired; after he had related to him what had passed at Berytus; what his sentiments were about his sons; and what his friends at Rome thought of that matter. His answer was, that "What they had determined to do to thee was impious; and that however thou oughtest to keep them in prison; and if thou thinkest any thing farther necessary, thou mayst indeed so punish them that thou mayst not appear to indulge thy anger, more than to govern thy self by judgment. But if thou inclinest to the milder side, thou mayst absolve them; lest perhaps thy misfortunes be rendered incurable. And this is the opinion of the greatest part of thy friends at Rome also." Whereupon Herod was silent, and in great thoughtfulness; and bid Nicolaus sail along with him.

4. Now as they came to Cesarea, every body was there talking of Herod's sons; and the Kingdom was in suspence; and the people in great expectation of what would become of them. For a terrible fear seized upon all men, lest the ancient disorders of the family should come to a sad conclusion: and they were in great trouble about their sufferings. Nor was it without danger to say any rash thing about this matter; nor even to hear another saying it. But mens pity was forced to be shut up in themselves: which rendered the excess of their sorrow very irksome, but very silent. Yet was there an old soldier of Herod's, whose name was Tero, who had a son of the same age with Alexander, and his friend, who was so very free, as openly to speak out, what others silently

thought about that matter: and was forced to cry out often among the multitude, and said, in the most unguarded manner, that "Truth was perished, and justice taken away from men" while lies and ill will prevailed, and brought such a mist before publick affairs, that the offenders were not able to see the greatest mischiefs that can befall men." And as he was so bold, he seemed not to have kept himself out of danger by speaking so freely. But the reasonableness of what he said moved men to regard him; as having behaved himself with great manhood, and this at a proper time also. For which reason every one heard what he said with pleasure: and although they first took care of their own safety, by keeping silent themselves; yet did they kindly receive the great freedom he took. For the expectation they were in of so great an affliction put a force upon them, to speak of Tero whatsoever they pleased.

5. This man had thrust himself into the King's presence, with the greatest freedom; and desired to speak with him by himself alone; which the King permitted him to do. Where he said this; "Since I am not able, O King, to bear up under so great a concern as I am under, I have preferred the use of this bold liberty that I now take; which may be for thy advantage, if thou mindest to get any profit by it; before my own safety. Whither is thy understanding gone? and left thy soul empty? Whither is that extraordinary sagacity of thine gone, whereby thou hast performed so many and such glorious actions? Whence comes this solitude, and desertion of thy friends and relations? Of which I cannot but determine, that they are neither thy friends, nor relations, while they overlook such horrid wickedness in thy once happy Kingdom. Dost not thou perceive what is doing? Wilt thou slay these two young men, born of thy Queen, who are accomplished with every virtue, in the highest degree, and leave thy self destitute in thy old age; but exposed to one son; who hath very ill managed the hopes thou hast given him? and to relations, whose death thou hast so often resolved on thy self? Dost not thou take notice, that the very silence of the multitude at once sees the crime, and abhors the fact? The whole army and its officers have commiseration on the poor unhappy youths; and hatred to those that are the actors in this matter?" These words the King heard; and for some time with good temper. But what can one say? when Tero plainly touched upon the bad behaviour and perfidiousness of his domesticks, he was moved at it. But Tero went on farther; and by degrees used an unbounded military freedom of speech. Nor was he so well disciplined as to accommodate himself to the time. So Herod was greatly disturbed: and seeming to be rather reproached by this speech, than to be hearing what was for his advantage; while he learned hereby, that both the soldiers abhorred the thing he was about, and the officers had indignation at it; he gave order that all whom Tero had named, and Tero himself, should be bound, and kept in prison.

6. When this was over, one Trypho, who was the King's barber, took the opportunity, and came and told the King, that Tero would often have persuaded him, when he trimmed him with a razor, to cut his throat: for that by this means he should be among the chief of Alexander's friends, and receive great rewards from him. When he had said this, the King gave order that Tero, and his son, and the barber, should be tortured: which was done accordingly. But while Tero bore up himself, his son, seeing his father already in a sad case, and had no hope of deliverance, and perceiving what would be the consequence of his terrible sufferings, said, that "If the King would free him and his father from these torments, for what he should say, he would tell the truth." And when the King had given his word to do so, he said, that "There was an agreement made, that Tero should lay violent hands on the King: because it was easy for him to come when he was alone: and that if, when he had done the thing, he should suffer death for it, as was not unlikely, it would be

an act of generosity done in favour of Alexander.” This was what Tero’s son said; and thereby freed his father from the distress he was in. But uncertain it is, whether he had been thus forced to speak what was true; or whether it were a contrivance of his, in order to procure his own and his father’s deliverance from their miseries.

7. As for Herod, if he had before any doubt about the slaughter of his sons, there was now no longer any room left in his soul for it. But he had banished away whatsoever might afford him the least suggestion of reasoning better about this matter. So he already made haste to bring his purpose to a conclusion. He also brought out three hundred of the officers, that were under an accusation: as also Tero, and his son, and the barber that accused them, before an assembly; and brought an accusation against them all. Whom the multitude stoned, with whatsoever came to hand; and thereby slew them. Alexander also and Aristobulus were brought to Sebaste,<sup>9</sup> by their father’s command; and there strangled. But their dead bodies were, in the night time, carried to Alexandrium: where their uncle by the mother’s side, and the greatest part of their ancestors had been deposited.

8. (20) And now perhaps it may not seem unreasonable to some, that such an inveterate hatred might increase so much [on both sides,] as to proceed farther, and overcome nature. But it may justly deserve consideration, whether it be to be laid to the charge of the young men, that they gave such an occasion to their father’s anger, and led him to do what he did: and by going on long in the same way, put things past remedy, and brought him to use them so unmercifully. Or whether it be to be laid to the father’s charge, that he was so hard-hearted, and so very tender in the desire of government, and of other things that would tend to his glory, that he would take no one into a partnership with him; that so whatsoever he would have done himself, might continue immovable. Or indeed, whether fortune have not greater power than all prudent reasonings: Whence we<sup>10</sup> are persuaded that human actions are thereby determined before-hand, by an inevitable necessity, and we call her fate, because there is nothing which is not done by her. Wherefore I suppose it will be sufficient to compare this notion with that other, which attributes somewhat to our own selves; and renders men not unaccountable for the different conducts of their lives. Which notion is no other than the philosophical determination of our ancient law. Accordingly of the two other causes of this sad event, any body may lay the blame on the young men; who acted by youthful vanity, and pride of their royal birth; that they should bear to hear the calumnies that were raised against their father: while certainly they were not equitable judges of the actions of his life; but ill-natured in suspecting, and intemperate in speaking of it; and on both accounts easily caught by those that observed them, and revealed them, to gain favour. Yet cannot their father be thought worthy of excuse, as to that horrid impiety which he was guilty of about them: while he ventured, without any certain evidence of their treacherous designs against him, and without any proofs that they had made preparations for such attempt; to kill his own sons; who were of very comely bodies, and the great darlings of other men; and no way deficient in their conduct: whether it were in hunting, or in warlike exercises, or in speaking upon occasional topicks of discourse. For in all these they were skilful; and especially Alexander, who was the eldest. For certainly it had been sufficient, even though he had condemned them, to have kept them alive in bonds; or to let them live at a distance from his dominions, in banishment: while he was surrounded by the Roman forces, which were a strong security to him: whose help would prevent his suffering any thing by a sudden onset, or by open force. But for him to kill them on the sudden, in order to gratify a passion that governed him, was a demonstration of insufferable

impiety. He also was guilty of so great a crime in his elder age. Nor will the delays that he made, and the length of time in which the thing was done, plead at all for his excuse. For when a man is on a sudden amazed, and in commotion of mind; and then commits a wicked action; although this be an heavy crime; yet is it a thing that frequently happens. But to do it upon deliberation, and after frequent attempts, and as frequent puttings off, to undertake it at last, and accomplish it, was the action of a murderous mind; and such as was not easily moved from that which is evil. And this temper he shewed in what he did afterward: when he did not spare those that seemed to be the best beloved of his friends that were left. Wherein though the justice of the punishment caused those that perished to be the less pityed, yet was the barbarity of the man here equal: in that he did not abstain from their slaughter also. But of those persons we shall have occasion to discourse more hereafter.