

Why was John the Baptist beheaded?

According to Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29, Herodias, the wife of King Herod Antipas, was responsible for persuading her husband to behead John the Baptist.

More than once, John the Baptist had rebuked King Herod for divorcing his wife and marrying his niece Herodias, who had been his brother Philip's wife. Philip was still living, and both Philip and Antipas were uncles to Herodias—for several reasons, then, Herod's marriage to Herodias was a violation of God's law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). Herodias seethed with anger toward John the Baptist because he dared to speak out, and, to appease his wife, Herod had the prophet thrown into prison. As a powerful Roman ruler, Herod could have had John the Baptist executed, but he respected John as a righteous man who spoke the truth and decided not to put him to death. Herod was intrigued by John and liked to hear him speak. In contrast, Herodias loathed John and wanted him dead (Mark 6:17-20).

Ultimately, Herodias's hate-filled grudge against John the Baptist was the reason he was beheaded. Mark 6:19 states, "So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him." The idea in the original Greek language is that Herodias actively sought John's death. Biding her time, Herodias waited for a chance to act.

Seizing the opportunity of Herod's birthday party, Herodias set about her plan to have John the Baptist put to death. At the banquet, Herodias's daughter, whom tradition names Salome, performed a provocative dance designed to arouse her audience with lust. Herodias's daughter's performance greatly pleased the king and his guests. Herod told the girl, "Ask me for anything you like and I will give it to you . . . up to half my kingdom!" (Mark 6:22-23, NLT). With these words, King Herod flaunted his generosity and

greatness before his guests, but soon he would deeply regret this vow.

Herodias's daughter went and asked her mother, "What should I ask for?" Queen Herodias replied, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist!" (Mark 6:24, NLT). Not skipping a beat, the girl hurried back to Herod and said, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter" (verse 25). Evidently, her cruelty matched her mother's.

Unable to take back his hastily uttered oath, the king granted the girl's wish. He dispatched his executioner to the prison where John the Baptist was beheaded. The soldier returned to the banquet with John's head on a platter and presented it to the girl, who, in turn, gave it to her mother (Mark 6:26-28). Later, John's followers retrieved his body and buried it (verse 29).

John the Baptist was beheaded to satisfy Herodias's bloodthirsty hatred. Just as Elijah was hated by Queen Jezebel, so the one who came in the power and spirit of Elijah was hated by Queen Herodias. Employing cunning powers of manipulation and degrading her own daughter, she got what she wanted from her husband, inciting his lust and using his desire to please his guests. She succeeded in silencing her critic, at least outwardly. Later, King Herod was troubled by his guilty conscience, and, when He heard of Jesus Christ's miracles, he worried that Jesus was actually John the Baptist risen from the dead (Mark 6:14-16)!