

Who was Herodias in the Bible?

Herodias in the Bible is notorious for being the woman who desired John the Baptist's head on a platter. She was the unlawful wife of the tetrarch Herod Antipas and had formerly been the wife of Herod's brother, Philip. As the granddaughter of Herod the Great, Herodias was herself a niece to both of her husbands, Philip and Antipas.

Herodias is the feminine form of Herod, which functions somewhat as a title for members of the Herodian dynasty. Historians indicate that Herod Antipas and Herodias had an affair of sorts while her husband Philip was visiting Rome. Herodias then agreed to leave her husband in order to become Herod Antipas's wife. Whether it was motivated by lust or was simply a power play, the new marriage was not honorable, and John the Baptist publicly denounced their adultery (Matthew 14:4). Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted him to be executed (Mark 6:19). Herod put John in prison for Herodias's sake (Matthew 14:3) but did not put him to death in part because he was afraid of the people, who believed John was a prophet (Matthew 14:5). Herod also seemed to believe that John was a righteous man and, though "greatly puzzled" by the things John said, "liked to listen to him" (Mark 6:20).

"Finally the opportune time came" (Mark 6:21) for Herodias to exact her revenge on John. During Herod's birthday celebration, Herodias's daughter danced for the king and his guests, pleasing Herod so much that he promised the girl whatever she asked (Matthew 14:6-7). After consulting with her mother, the girl asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter (Matthew 14:8). Herod was sorry and distressed over being put in this quandary, but, because of his vow and the guests, Herod had John beheaded in prison (verse 10). The prophet's head was brought to the daughter of Herodias, who gave it to her mother (verse 11).

The Bible does not tell us much about Herodias, but her actions recorded in the Gospels show her to be an immoral, bitter, and manipulative woman. John the Baptist was right to warn the tetrarch and his wife of their wicked ways, and Herodias had plenty of opportunity to repent. Rather than choose the path of life, Herodias hardened her heart and plotted John's execution—as if silencing the truth-teller could remove her guilt. In this way, Herodias became like Jezebel, who stridently opposed Elijah, in whose power and spirit John had come (see Luke 1:17; 1 Kings 19:2).