

Who was Salome in the Bible?

There are two women named Salome in the Bible, but only one is mentioned by that name. One Salome was righteous; the other unrighteous.

The righteous Salome was the wife of Zebedee (Matthew 27:56), the mother of the disciples James and John, and a female follower of Jesus. This Salome was the one who came to Jesus with the request that her sons sit in places of honor in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20-21). She was also one of the women “looking on from a distance” when Jesus was being crucified—with her were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph and James (Mark 15:40). These same women were together on the third day after that, bringing spices to Jesus’ tomb to anoint Him. When they encountered the angel, who told them that Jesus was risen, they ran to tell the disciples the good news (Mark 16:1-8). Mark’s Gospel is the only one that mentions Salome by name.

The other, unrighteous Salome is not mentioned by name in the Bible, but we read about what she did in Mark 6. This Salome was part the Herod dynasty, and her family history was convoluted: Herod Antipas (the “King Herod” of Mark 6:14) had divorced his wife and married Herodias, who was the wife of his half-brother Philip (Mark 6:17). However, Herodias herself was the daughter of another of Herod’s half-brothers, Aristobulus, making her not only the wife but the niece of both Philip and Herod—and a sister-in-law of Herod. Salome was Herodias’s daughter through Philip. Thus, Salome was the daughter (and grandniece) of Philip and the step-daughter (and grandniece by marriage) of Herod; she was also both daughter and grandniece to her own mother. When Herodias came to live with Herod Antipas, Salome came with her. This royal family is significant in Bible history because it figures into the story of the death of John the Baptist. John the Baptist had publicly criticized King Herod for his divorce and remarriage to his

niece/sister-in-law, and Herodias was enraged. Herod Antipas had John thrown into prison to placate his wife/niece/sister-in-law, Herodias.

John the Baptist's fate was decided when Herodias's daughter (Salome) danced for Herod at his birthday banquet. Pleased with the girl's performance, Herod offered her a rash boon. Salome went to Herodias to ask her advice on what the gift should be, and Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Salome obediently asked Herod for this grisly gift, and, though the Bible says Herod was grieved, he honored his promise. John was beheaded in prison, and his head given to Herodias's daughter who took it to her mother (Mark 6:21-28). Though Salome is not mentioned by name in the biblical record, the historian Josephus tells us her name.