

Herodias

The Woman Responsible for the Murder of a Preacher

Scripture Reference: Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:14-24; Luke 3:19, 20

Name Meaning: As a member of the Herodian dynasty, perhaps the most despicable dynasty history has known, the name Herodias is but the female form of Herod, the royal name for the political rulers during the time of Christ and the apostles. It was under the vile and cruel orders of the Herods that Jesus and His followers were often persecuted and punished. Herod means "heroic"-not very applicable to the Herodian family, the majority of whom, particularly Herodias, were more hellish than heroic.

Family Connections: Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, daughter of Hyrcanus. Her first husband was Philip I, son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, so she married her own uncle, by whom she had a daughter, Salome, whom she used to destroy John the Baptist. When Herod Antipas visited Rome, he was entertained by Philip and Herodias. Herod abducted his royal brother's wife. His own wife, an Arabian princess, was an obstacle to an illicit marriage, so he divorced her, and Herodias became queen in her stead, and with her daughter was installed in the palace. "The corroding immorality of Herod's race shows itself in his marriage with Herodias his brother's wife and the wanton offense thereby given to Jewish sensibilities."

Among the female characters in God's portrait gallery, surely Herodias stands out as one of the most vile and vicious. Amid the putrefying influence of the palace, however, there was one man who knew no fear, John the Baptist. Herod "feared" him and regarded him as "a just man" and whom "he heard gladly." Herod found music in the preacher's message until John sternly rebuked the king by saying of Herodias, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." But such a warning bell was to toll John's doom. For his faithful rebuke of Herod's sin, John was cast into prison, and the evil, scheming mind of Herodias began to work. She was stung by the arrow from the preacher's quiver and hated him for exposing her shame. "For Herodias' sake" he was imprisoned and thus the greatest of the prophets was sacrificed for this vicious and scheming woman. But the hatred of such an unsavory creature was more to be desired than her affection (Matthew 10:23; Luke 6:26). Herodias, with her conscience in turmoil because of her accuser, planned to silence John. She did not want Herod to listen too closely and constantly to John's forceful preaching. She feared her illegal husband-for her first husband was still alive-might repent, and her position as queen, imperiled.

Herodias knew Herod only too well. He easily succumbed to sensual excitement, and as his birthday drew near her foul design was hatched. On the day when drink freely flowed, Herodias used her own daughter to inflame Herod's passions. She was willing to sacrifice her child's modesty in order to bend Herod to her will. Herod was overcome by Salome's form seen through the flowing flimsy garment she wore, and influenced by the act of the dancing girl, he took a rash and foolish oath to give her whatever she asked, even to half of his kingdom. Approaching her mother, Salome said, "What shall I ask?" Without hesitation Herodias, the female hyena, replied, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist." Returning to Herod, Salome presented her demand, and Herod was extremely sorry at such a request. Yet, because of his oath's sake, he sacrificed the preacher whom he regarded as just and holy, and all because of his guilty love for a vile woman. No wonder he was smitten with fear when he heard of the fame of Jesus, thinking it was John the Baptist risen from the dead to torment his conscience further. One wonders how Salome felt when the gory dish of the preacher's head was handed to her?

Herodias' Old Testament counterpart was Jezebel. What Herodias was to Herod, Jezebel was to Ahab. Both Ahab and Herod were wicked, and in both cases the woman was more wicked. Both Jezebel and Herodias fostered hate that became deadly against a prophet of God. Jezebel hated Elijah and sought to kill him- Herodias hated John the Baptist, the New Testament Elijah, and succeeded in his murder. What was the end of Herodias? Since she was the source of Herod's sin, she also became the source of his shame. According to Josephus, Herodias' ambition was the ruin of Herod. Jealous of the power of Agrippa her brother, she prodded Herod to demand of Caligula, the emperor, the title of king. Agrippa saw to it that this demand was refused, and Herod was banished and ended his days in shame and exile. The pride of Herodias forced her to be faithful to her husband in the disgrace and misfortune she herself had caused.