

Mark 6:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

Analysis

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. Mark begins the flashback explaining John's execution, revealing the moral corruption behind Herod's guilty conscience. 'Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John' (αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Ἡρώδης ἀποστείλας ἐκράτησεν τὸν Ἰωάννην, autos gar ho Hērōdēs aposteilas ekratēsen ton Iōannēn)—the emphatic 'himself' stresses Herod's personal responsibility. He arrested John, though later claiming reluctance to execute him (v. 26). 'Bound him in prison' (ἔδησεν αὐτὸν ἐν φυλακῇ, edēsen auton en phylakē) imprisoned the prophet who called for repentance.

'For Herodias' sake' (διὰ Ἡρώδιαδα, dia Hērōdiada) reveals the underlying issue: 'his brother Philip's wife, for he had married her' (τὴν γυναῖκα Φιλίππου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι αὐτὴν ἐγάμησεν, tēn gynaika Philippou tou adelphou autou, hoti autēn egamēsen). This was doubly sinful: adultery (marrying while his brother lived) and violation of Levitical law forbidding marriage to brother's wife (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). The exception (Levirate marriage, Deuteronomy 25:5-6) didn't apply since Philip lived. Herod's sexual sin, political power, and unwillingness to repent created explosive situation when confronted by prophetic truth.

Historical Context

The historical details are complex. Josephus identifies Herodias's first husband as Herod (son of Herod the Great by Mariamne II), not Philip the tetrarch. Scholars debate whether Mark erred or 'Philip' was this Herod's secondary name. Regardless, the marriage violated Jewish law: Herodias divorced her husband to marry his half-brother Herod Antipas, who divorced his wife (Nabatean king Aretas's daughter) to marry Herodias. This created international incident—Aretas later attacked Herod, defeating him. Jews viewed this defeat as divine judgment for John's execution (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.2). Herodias was ambitious, using marriage to gain power—Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea, more significant than her first husband's position. John the Baptist publicly condemned this marriage, applying biblical law to political leaders. This prophetic boldness invited persecution but demonstrated that God's word applies to all, regardless of rank. Early church fathers praised John's courage confronting powerful sinners, establishing pattern for prophetic ministry that speaks truth to power despite personal cost.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does John the Baptist's willingness to confront powerful sinners with God's law model the prophetic calling to speak truth regardless of consequences?
2. What does Herod's imprisonment of John rather than repenting reveal about how political power and sexual sin often combine to resist divine authority?

Interlinear Text

αύτὴν γὰρ ὁ Ἡρώδης ἀποστείλας ἐκράτησεν τὸν
her For G3588 Herod had sent forth and laid hold G3588
G846 G1063 G2264 G649 G2902

Ἰωάννην καὶ ἤδησεν αύτὴν ἐν τῇ φυλακῇ διὰ
upon John and bound her in G3588 prison for
G2491 G2532 G1210 G846 G1722 G5438 G1223

Ἡρῳδιάδα τὴν γυναῖκα Φιλίππου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αύτὴν
Herodias wife Philip's brother her
G2266 G1135 G5376 G3588 G80 G846

ὅτι αύτὴν ἐγάμησεν.
for her he had married
G3754 G846 G1060

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:2 (References John): Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

Matthew 4:12 (References John): Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;