

Matthew 14:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

Analysis

'For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.' Matthew explains why John the Baptist was imprisoned: Herod Antipas imprisoned him because John condemned Herod's adultery with Herodias. The phrase 'his brother Philip's wife' (τῆς γυναικὸς Φιλίππου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ/tēs gynaikos Philippou tou adelphou autou) identifies the sin: Herod married his brother's wife while his brother was still alive—violating Leviticus 18:16, 20:21. John the Baptist, like Old Testament prophets, courageously confronted royal sin despite personal danger. Reformed theology honors this prophetic boldness: faithful witnesses speak truth to power regardless of cost. John's imprisonment demonstrates the cost of faithful witness. His courage contrasts with court chaplains who flatter powerful patrons. This verse also reveals Herodias's character: vengeful, manipulative, willing to destroy anyone who threatened her position. She'd eventually orchestrate John's execution (v.6-11). The account reminds believers that faithful witness may result in suffering, but truth must be proclaimed nonetheless.

Historical Context

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled Galilee and Perea (4 BC-39 AD). During a visit to Rome, he seduced Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (not Philip the tetrarch but another half-brother). Both divorced their spouses and married—scandalous even by Roman standards, blatantly unlawful by Jewish law. John the Baptist publicly condemned this adultery (v.4), enraging Herodias. Josephus

(Antiquities 18.5.2) confirms John's imprisonment at Machaerus fortress near the Dead Sea. Herod feared John's popularity (v.5, Mark 6:20 adds Herod was intrigued by John), so he imprisoned rather than immediately executed him. This temporary solution satisfied neither Herodias (who wanted John dead) nor John's followers (who wanted him freed). The imprisonment probably lasted over a year, during which John sent disciples to Jesus (Matthew 11:2-3). Ancient world rarely saw prophets confronting kings; those who did often died. John continued Elijah's pattern (1 Kings 21:17-24) of fearlessly declaring God's judgment on royal sin.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does John's confrontation of Herod teach about the responsibility to speak truth to powerful people despite danger?
2. How do you balance wisdom (not courting needless trouble) with prophetic boldness (declaring truth regardless of cost)?
3. What contemporary sins in powerful institutions or leaders require prophetic confrontation from faithful Christians?

Interlinear Text

Ὁ	γὰρ	Ἡρώδης	κρατήσας	τὸν	Ἰωάννην	ἔδησεν	αὐτοῦ·
G3588	For G1063	Herod G2264	had laid hold G2902	G3588	on John G2491	and bound G1210	him G846
καὶ	ἔθετο	ἐν	φυλακῇ	διὰ	Ἡρωδιάδα	τὴν	γυναῖκα
and G2532	put G5087	him in G1722	prison G5438	for G1223	Herodias' G2266	G3588	wife G1135
Φιλίππου	τοῦ	ἀδελφοῦ	αὐτοῦ·				
Philip's G5376	G3588	brother G80	him G846				

Additional Cross-References

Mark 6:17 (References John): 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.

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

Mark 6:22 (Parallel theme): And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

Mark 6:19 (Parallel theme): Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:

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