

## Removing the Anonymity of Two King James Version Bible Characters

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Two names associated with Bible characters are largely cloaked in anonymity. One is purely fictitious, while the other is historical. Although neither name is mentioned in the King James Version of the Bible, by consulting the Spirit of Prophecy as well as historical and other reference works, we happily may bring the two characters out of the darkness of anonymity into the light.

### Dives

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), the King James Version does not give the rich man’s name, only that of the poor man. Seventh-day Adventist commentators have tried to account for this as follows:

The translation of the Gr. *plousios*, “rich,” by the Latin *dives* in the Vulgate, has given rise to the popular tradition that the man’s name was Dives [DĪ-vēz]. A variety of names appear in various other versions, probably as a result of the feeling that if the poor man of the parable was named, the rich man should be also (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 831.4).

In the definition and etymology of the proper noun Dives, even the current (11<sup>th</sup>) edition of Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary seems to support this view, indicating that it is “misunderstood as a proper name,” while dating its first known use clear back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. But, whether traditional lore or not, we point out that Ellen G. White twice used the name in her explication of the parable. As such, it does no violence to the text to understand the parable as popularly accepted for a great many years, and probably also by the Lord’s messenger:

The parable of **Dives**, the rich man, and Lazarus, the poor beggar who feared God, is presented before the world as a lesson to all, both rich and poor, as long as time shall last. **Dives** is represented as lifting up his eyes in Hell, being in torments, and seeing Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom,—“he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented (Ms 6, March 20, 1891, in *The Southern Work*, p. 12.1). (Note: All bolding throughout this essay is mine.)

White’s second reference to this fictitious rich man reads: “Shall those who claim to be sons and daughters of God feel perfectly at liberty to enjoy the good things of this life, as did **Dives**, making no use of that which God gave to be used in carrying out His purposes?” (*Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1900, para. 3).

## Salome

This brings us to the matter of Salome (sə-LO-mē, sə-LO-mā), who, like Dives, is not named in the King James Version. Her story occurs in Matthew 14:3–11 and Mark 6:17–28, where she is the unnamed half grandniece of Herod Antipas the Tetrarch of Galilee. She was the daughter of Herod's illicit wife/half niece Herodias and the unwitting accomplice in her mother's nefarious scheme to get rid of John the Baptist. (Herodias's first husband, Philip was Herod's half brother. She divorced Philip, while Herod divorced his wife; thus both parties divorced living spouses to marry another, making themselves adulterers in the process.) Ellen White adds much helpful detail to the dramatic account of savagely inhuman cruelty in her original comments on this incident:

Herod's purpose to release John from prison was delayed from time to time through fear of displeasing Herodias, who was determined he should be put to death. While Herod was delaying, she was active, planning the most effectual manner to be revenged on the prophet John, because he had ventured to tell Herod the truth, and reprove their unlawful life. Herodias was acquainted with the character of Herod, and she knew that her best course to accomplish her purpose was through the gratification of intemperate appetite. She knew that although Herod kept John in prison, he designed to release him, for he honored and feared John, because he believed him to be a true prophet of God. John had made known to Herod the secrets of his heart and life. The reproofs he had given him, had struck terror to his guilty conscience.

In many things Herod had reformed his dissolute life. But the use of luxurious food and stimulating drinks was constantly enervating and deadening the moral as well as the physical powers, and warring against the earnest appeals of the Spirit of God, which had struck conviction to the heart of Herod, arousing his conscience to put away his sins. Herodias was acquainted with the weak points in the character of Herod. She knew that under ordinary circumstances, while his intelligence controlled him, she could not obtain the death of John.

She had tried, but unsuccessfully, to gain the consent of Herod to have John slain. Her revengeful spirit was at work to accomplish her inhuman design by strategy. She covered her hatred as best she could, looking forward to the birthday of Herod, which she knew would be an occasion of gluttony and intoxication. Herod's love of luxurious food and wine would give her an opportunity to throw him off his guard. She would entice him to indulge his appetite, which would arouse passion and lower the tone of the mental and moral character, making it impossible for his deadened sensibilities to see facts and evidences clearly, and make right decisions. She had the most costly preparations made for feasting, and voluptuous dissipation. She was acquainted with the influence of these intemperate feasts upon the intellect and morals. She knew that Herod's indulgence of appetite, pleasure, and amusement would excite the lower passions, and make him spiritless to the nobler demands of effort and duty.

The unnatural exhilaration which intemperance gives to the mind and spirits, lowers the sensibilities to moral improvement, making it impossible for holy impulses to affect the heart, and hold government over the passions, when public opinion and fashion sustain them. Festivities and amusements, dances, and free use of wine, becloud the senses, and remove the fear of God.

Herodias had prepared everything within her reach, which would flatter his pride and vanity, and indulge his passions. “And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; 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, unto the half of my kingdom.”

As Herod and his lords were feasting and drinking in the pleasure saloon or banqueting hall, Herodias, debased with crime and passion, sent her daughter, dressed in a most enchanting manner, into the presence of Herod and his royal guests. **Salome** was decorated with costly garlands and flowers. She was adorned with sparkling jewels and flashing bracelets. With little covering and less modesty she danced for the amusement of the royal guests. To their perverted senses, the enchanting appearance of this, to them, vision of beauty and loveliness charmed them. Instead of being governed by enlightened reason, refined taste, or sensitive consciences, the lower qualities of the mind held the guiding reins. Virtue and principle had no controlling power.

The false enchantment of the dizzy scene seemed to take away reason and dignity from Herod and his guests, who were flushed with wine. The music and wine and dancing had removed the fear and reverence of God from them. Nothing seemed sacred to Herod’s perverted senses. He was desirous to make some display which would exalt him still higher before the great men of his kingdom. And he rashly promised, and confirmed his promise with an oath, to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she might ask. “And she went forth and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked saying, I will that thou give me the head of John the Baptist.”

Having obtained so wonderful a promise, she ran to her mother, desiring to know what she should ask. The mother’s answer was ready, The head of John the Baptist in a charger. **Salome** at first was shocked. She did not understand the hidden revenge in her mother’s heart. She refused to present such an inhuman request; but the determination of that wicked mother prevailed. Moreover, she bade her daughter make no delay, but hasten to prefer her request before Herod would have time for reflection, and to change his mind. Accordingly, **Salome** returned to Herod with her terrible petition, “I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.”

Herod was astonished and confounded. His riotous mirth ceased, and his guests were thrilled with horror at this inhuman request. The frivolities and dissipation of that night cost the life of one of the most eminent prophets that ever bore a message from God to men. The intoxicating cup prepared the way for this terrible crime.

“And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel, and the damsel gave it to her mother.”—*The Review and Herald*, March 11, 1873, paras. 3–10.

Four years after her original iteration of this story of Salome’s performance in its overarching context, Ellen White expanded the account into an even more vivid portrayal of the details, prepared as part of *The Spirit of Prophecy* volumes:

Herod’s purpose to release John from prison was delayed from time to time through fear of displeasing Herodias, who was determined he should be put to death. While he was delaying, she was active, planning how to be revenged in the most effectual manner on the prophet, because he had ventured to tell the truth, and reprove their unlawful life. She knew that although Herod kept John in prison, he designed to release him, for he honored and feared him, and believed that he was a true prophet of God. John had made known to Herod the secrets of his heart and life, and his reproofs had struck terror to the guilty conscience of the king.

In many things Herod had reformed his dissolute life. But the use of luxurious food and stimulating drinks was constantly enervating and deadening the moral as well as the physical powers, and warring against the earnest appeals of the Spirit of God, which had struck conviction to the heart of Herod, arousing his conscience to put away his sins. Herodias was acquainted with the weak points in the character of Herod. She knew that under ordinary circumstances, while his intelligence controlled him, she could not compass the death of John.

She had tried, but unsuccessfully, to gain the consent of Herod to have John slain. Her revengeful spirit was at work to accomplish her inhuman design by strategy. She knew that the only way to accomplish her purpose would be through the gratification of the king’s intemperate appetite. So she covered her hatred as best she could, looking forward to the royal birthday, which she knew would be an occasion of gluttony and intoxication. The king’s love of luxurious food and wine would give her an opportunity to throw him off his guard. She would entice him to indulge his appetite, which would arouse passion of the baser order, subvert the finer sensibilities, produce a recklessness of consequences, and an inability to exercise his proper judgment and decision.

She was acquainted with the effect of these carnivals upon the intellect and morals. She knew that the unnatural exhilaration of the spirits induced by

intemperance lowers the moral standard of the mind, making it impossible for holy impulses to enter the heart and govern the excited passions, that festivities and amusements, dances, and free use of wine, cloud the senses, and remove the fear of God; therefore she prepared everything to flatter his pride and vanity, and indulge his passions. She made the most costly preparations for feasting, and voluptuous dissipation.

Herodias had prepared everything within her reach, which would flatter his pride and vanity, and indulge his passions. “And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; 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, unto the half of my kingdom.”

When the great day arrived, and the king with his lords was feasting and drinking in the banqueting hall, Herodias sent her daughter, dressed in a most enchanting manner, into the royal presence. **Salome** was decorated with costly garlands and flowers, sparkling jewels and flashing bracelets. With little covering and less modesty she danced for the amusement of the royal guests. To their perverted senses, she seemed a vision of beauty and loveliness, and charmed away the last remnants of self-respect and propriety. Instead of being governed by enlightened reason, refined taste, and sensitive consciences, the baser qualities of the mind held the guiding reins. Virtue and principle had no controlling power.

The mind of Herod was in a whirl. His faculties were confused, judgment and reverence were dethroned. He saw only the hall of pleasure, with his reveling guests, the banquet table, sparkling wine and flashing lights, and the young girl in her voluptuous beauty dancing before him. In the recklessness of the moment he was desirous to make some display which would exalt him still higher before the great men of his kingdom; and he rashly promised, and confirmed his promise with an oath, to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she might ask.

The object for which she had been sent into the royal presence was now gained. Having obtained so wonderful a promise, she ran to her mother, desiring to know what she should ask. The mother’s answer was ready—the head of John the Baptist in a charger. **Salome** was shocked. She did not understand the hidden revenge in her mother’s heart, and at first refused to present such an inhuman request; but the determination of the wicked mother prevailed. Moreover, she bade her daughter make no delay, but hasten to prefer her request before Herod would have time for reflection. Accordingly, **Salome** returned to Herod with her terrible petition: “I will that thou give me by and by, in a charger, the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.”

Herod was astonished and confounded. His riotous mirth ceased, for his guests were thrilled with horror at this inhuman request. An ominous silence settled

down upon the scene of revelry. The king, though drunken and confused, endeavored to summon reason to his aid.

He had been exalted for constancy and superior judgment, and he did not wish to appear fickle or rash in character. The oath had been made in honor of his guests, and had one of them offered a word of remonstrance against the fulfillment of his promise, he would gladly have saved the life of John. He gave them opportunity to speak in the prisoner's behalf. They had traveled long distances to the mountains in the wilderness to listen to his powerful discourses, and they knew he was a man without crime, and a prophet of God. Herod told them if it would not be considered a special mark of dishonor to them, he would not abide by his oath.

But though at first they were horror-stricken at the unnatural demand of the girl, they were so far intoxicated that they sat in silent stupor, without reason, reverence, or thought. Though they were invited to release the monarch from his oath, their tongues were dumb. No voice in all that company was raised to save the life of an innocent man, who had never done them harm. Herod, still under the delusion that, in order to maintain his reputation, he must keep an oath made under the influence of intoxication, unless formally released from it, waited in vain for a dissenting voice, but there was none. The life of God's prophet was in the hands of a company of drunken revelers. These men occupied high positions of trust in the nation, and grave responsibilities rested upon them, yet they had gorged themselves with dainty food, and added drunkenness to surfeiting, until their mental powers were enervated by the pleasure of sense, their brains turned with the giddy scene of music and dancing, and conscience lay dormant. By their silence they pronounced the sentence of death upon the anointed of the Lord, to gratify the horrible caprice of a wicked woman.—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, pp. 76.1–80.0.

In her classic biography of the life of Christ, published in 1898, Ellen White further refined but also shortened the Salome account with its character study corollaries:

Herod believed John to be a prophet of God, and he fully intended to set him at liberty. But he delayed his purpose from fear of Herodias.

Herodias knew that by direct measures she could never win Herod's consent to the death of John, and she resolved to accomplish her purpose by stratagem. On the king's birthday an entertainment was to be given to the officers of state and the nobles of the court. There would be feasting and drunkenness. Herod would thus be thrown off his guard, and might then be influenced according to her will.

When the great day arrived, and the king with his lords was feasting and drinking, Herodias sent her daughter into the banqueting hall to dance for the entertainment of the guests. **Salome** was in the first flush of womanhood, and her voluptuous beauty captivated the senses of the lordly revelers. It was not customary for the ladies of the court to appear at these festivities, and a flattering compliment was

paid to Herod when this daughter of Israel's priests and princes danced for the amusement of his guests.

The king was dazed with wine. Passion held sway, and reason was dethroned. He saw only the hall of pleasure, with its reveling guests, the banquet table, the sparkling wine and the flashing lights, and the young girl dancing before him. In the recklessness of the moment, he desired to make some display that would exalt him before the great men of his realm. With an oath he promised to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she might ask, even to the half of his kingdom.

**Salome** hastened to her mother, to know what she should ask. The answer was ready,—the head of John the Baptist. **Salome** knew not of the thirst for revenge in her mother's heart, and she shrank from presenting the request; but the determination of Herodias prevailed. The girl returned with the terrible petition, "I will that thou forthwith give me in a charger the head of John the Baptist." Mark 6:25, R.V.

Herod was astonished and confounded. The riotous mirth ceased, and an ominous silence settled down upon the scene of revelry. The king was horror-stricken at the thought of taking the life of John. Yet his word was pledged, and he was unwilling to appear fickle or rash. The oath had been made in honor of his guests, and if one of them had offered a word against the fulfillment of his promise, he would gladly have spared the prophet. He gave them opportunity to speak in the prisoner's behalf. They had traveled long distances in order to hear the preaching of John, and they knew him to be a man without crime, and a servant of God. But though shocked at the girl's demand, they were too besotted to interpose a remonstrance. No voice was raised to save the life of Heaven's messenger. These men occupied high positions of trust in the nation, and upon them rested grave responsibilities; yet they had given themselves up to feasting and drunkenness until the senses were benumbed. Their heads were turned with the giddy scene of music and dancing, and conscience lay dormant. By their silence they pronounced the sentence of death upon the prophet of God to satisfy the revenge of an abandoned [i.e., wholly free from restraint] woman.—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 220.5–222.0.

The King James Version does mention a Salome in Mark 15:40 and 16:1, but this woman was a follower of Jesus and seems certain not to have been the same person as the unfortunate character we have just described. It seems every bit as certain that had our Salome become a follower of Jesus, the Bible surely would have recorded such an extraordinary fact. History, however, does know the name of our Salome from the writings of Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in which he mentioned her name and provided some detail about her family relations (*Antiquities* xviii.5.4).

These twin investigations into Scripture have proven to be challenging, yet they have also made the Bible accounts literally take on new life by adding real flesh and bones to what previously had been a pair of mere gossamer character images.