

Herod the Great, the King of the Jews 40 BC to 4 BC

Last time, we saw how Herod's life can be broken down into 3 phases:

1. Birth to Becoming King of the Jews: (73 BC to 40 BC) – Part I
2. Battle for Jerusalem and Builder of Judea (40 BC to 4 BC) – Part II
3. Brutal King to Broken Empire at Death (4 BC to 2 BC) – Part III

The Herodian Dynasty continues to AD 70 and the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

Summary of the Last Lesson: *We saw the rise of Herod.* He was born in Petra (73 BC) to an Edomite father (Antipater) and an Arabian mother. At the age of 10, Herod went to Jerusalem to live with his father who was the best friend of Hyrcanus II, having given the Hasmonean ruler shelter in his feud with his younger brother Aristobulus II. Antipater became the power behind Hyrcanus II, who had been appointed High Priest and "vassal king" by Roman general Pompei in 63 BC. Herod's big break came in 47 BC, when his father sent reinforcements from Jerusalem (Maccabean soldiers) to rescue Julius Caesar at Alexandria. Julius Caesar appointed Antipater as Procurator of Rome in Jerusalem, gave Antipater Roman citizenship, and exempted Antipater from Roman taxes. Antipater then appointed his son, Herod, as Roman military prefect of Galilee. In 44 BC, Caesar is assassinated. In 43 BC, Antipater is poisoned. A civil war breaks out in Rome, and as Rome is distracted, the new Parthian Empire in the East rises to power. In 40 BC, Parthia invades Jerusalem, replaces Hyrcanus II with Antigonus (son of Aristobulus II), and Herod removes his family from Jerusalem to Masada and goes to Rome to report on the Parthian invasion. The Roman Senate appoints Herod as King of the Jews. Herod must return to Judea and remove Antigonus from the throne.

40 BC – King Herod crowned "King of the Jews" by the Roman Senate while in Rome (December).

39 BC – Returning from Rome, Herod landed at Ptolemais and secured several parts of Galilee. Joppa was also taken after a siege. Then as soon as he was able, Herod went to Masada to rescue his family. The Judeans did not want an Idumean ruling them. They preferred the Hasmonean Antigonus, so Herod had to subjugate the Jews before he could rule. It would require another two years of hard fighting.

38 BC – Herod captured the rest of Galilee, and put his brother Joseph in control while he and some of his army went to northern Syria to help Antony who was battling some Syrian allies of the Parthians at Samosata. Soon after Herod had gone from Galilee, forces from Antigonus attacked Joseph, killing him. Galilee then rebelled against Herod, forcing him to come again to recapture it. But because he had helped Antony at an opportune time, Antony returned the favor and sent a sizeable Roman force (under Sosius) to help Herod. In the winter of 38-37 BC, Herod defeated the forces of Antigonus at Jericho, Isana, and Samaria, forcing Antigonus to take refuge in Jerusalem.

37 BC – Herod began the siege on Jerusalem in the spring. While his troops were busily engaged in that effort, *Herod took a brief trip to nearby Samaria to marry Mariamme, the Hasmonean princess, who eventually bore him two sons and two daughters.* Evidently Herod wanted to bring some semblance of legitimacy to his kingship over the Jews, so he married into the Hasmonean family, hoping it would turn popular hatred of him into acceptance. Mariamme was the granddaughter of Aristobulus II (her father's side), and Hyrcanus II (her mother's side). Herod eventually became fearful of the Hasmoneans.

37 BC – After a three or four-month siege, Jerusalem was finally taken in July of 37 BC. Herod was now master of all Judea. Antigonus surrendered to the Roman general Sosius, who took him in chains to Antony in Antioch. Then at the request of Herod, Antigonus was beheaded. This was the first time, supposedly, that the Romans had ever beheaded (capital punishment) a king. The Sanhedrin and the Jewish people in general were always friendly toward the Hasmoneans, so the Jews resented Herod for having Antigonus killed. Rome was now master of the West and the East.

BY WAY OF REVIEW – 47-37 BC – 12 Significant Events Pertaining to Herod.

- (1.) The visit of Julius Caesar to Judea to reward Antipater for helping him get free of the Egyptians,
- (2.) The appointment of Herod and Phasael as military prefects over Galilee and Judea respectively,
- (3.) The assassination of Julius Caesar (March 15, 44 BC),
- (4.) The civil war between Antony/Octavian versus Brutus/Cassius,
- (5.) The death of Antipater, father of Herod, by poisoning,
- (6.) The appointment of Herod and Phasael as Tetrarchs over Judea and Galilee,
- (7.) The Parthian invasion,
- (8.) The mutilation of the ears of Hyrcanus II by Antigonus (he bites his uncles' ears off),
- (9.) The rise to the throne of Antigonus (last of the Hasmoneans),
- (10.) The death of both Phasael and Joseph (brothers of Herod),
- (11.) The escape of Herod to Rome to receive crown rights for Judea,
- (12.) Herod's return to Judea to subjugate the territory under his control.

Herod Begins His Reign over Judea.

37 BC – Herod immediately took control of High Priestly appointments. Antigonus was not the last surviving Hasmonean heir to the throne. Mariamme's brother, Aristobulus III, was next in line. Hyrcanus II was still alive, but his ears had been mutilated (cf. Lev.21:17-23) by Antigonus so that he could never again serve as High Priest (40 BC). Herod was very much aware that the Hasmoneans were the rightful heirs to the Judean throne, and that he was an outsider. He wanted to establish his own new dynasty of kings over Judea, so he had no desire to put another Hasmonean in the High Priesthood, which was only one step away from his throne. So, Herod selected Hananel, a non-Hasmonean.

36 BC – Herod's unhappy mother-in-law (Alexandra, Miriamne's mother), pressured Herod to depose his first appointment to High Priesthood and install his 17-year-old brother-in-law Aristobulus III. Herod did, and the people fell in love with young Aristobulus III. Herod had Aristobulus III drowned at his palace swimming pool in Jericho. This effectively ended the Hasmonean rule of Judea. After the death of Aristobulus, Herod reinstalled Hananel to the office of High Priest, where he remained for six years.

35 BC – For the first six years of his reign Herod had to reckon with the ambitions of Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt, last monarch of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Cleopatra hoped to regain that control of Palestine which the first rulers of her dynasty had exercised, and anything that could weaken Herod's position was welcomed by her. Herod's position was delicate because of Cleopatra's relationship with Antony. When Aristobulus was drowned, Alexandra besought Cleopatra to do what she could to avenge his death, and Cleopatra persuaded Antony to call Herod to account. Herod was summoned to appear before Antony at Laodicea in Syria, but was acquitted of the charge of murder. Josephus said Antony was bribed (Jos. Antiq. 15.76 (15.3.8). Antony told Cleopatra "*one must not investigate too closely the official acts of a king, lest he ceases to be really a king.*" (Israel and the Nations, pp. 192-193). Herod killed Antigonus (beheaded him), had Aristobulus III (drowned), killed his uncle Joseph (35 BC), Mariamme's grandfather Hyrcanus II (31 BC), then Mariamme herself (29 BC), her mother Alexandra (28 BC), and the two sons of Mariamme (Aristobulus and Alexander – 7 BC), as well as Herod's oldest son Antipater by his first wife Doris (4 BC) – all on suspicions of treason and conspiracy. It was supposedly on the occasion of the execution of Mariamme's two sons that Augustus Caesar (who authorized their execution) made his famous play on words: "It is safer to be Herod's pig (Gk. *hus*) than his son (Gk. *huios*)."

31 BC – Battle of Actium – Octavian versus Antony and Cleopatra. Relations between Antony and Octavian finally reached a breaking point. Antony and Cleopatra's forces were defeated by Octavian in

the naval battle at Actium off the western coast of Greece. Antony and Cleopatra were able to escape and return to Egypt, but they knew Octavian would not be far behind. They both committed suicide.

31 BC – Herod goes to the island of Rhodes to convince Octavian that Herod’s allegiance was to Rome and not to a person (Antony). Octavian reconfirmed Herod's kingship over Judea.

30 BC – Herod goes to Egypt to visit Octavian, and there he was given all the territory which Cleopatra had taken away (Jericho, Hippos, Gadara, Samaria, Gaza, Anthedon, Joppa, and Strato's Tower). Antony had allowed Cleopatra to take those areas under her control, but Octavian now restored them to Herod. It was about this time that Herod began several building projects (see **Appendix 11**). It was also at this time that two leading rabbis – Hillel and Shammai – form two schools of rabbinical thought that lead to the formation of the Mishnah and Talmudic writings, the foundation for rabbinical Judaism after Biblical Temple Judaism came to an end in AD 70. We see allusions to the teaching of these two rabbis in the parables and discourses of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. The Golden Rule appears to be a positive restatement of one Hillel’s maxim: "Do not do to others what is hateful to yourself."

29 BC – When everything external had been cooled down by Herod, that was when things inside his household began to heat up. Herod's mother (Cypros) and his sister (Salome) worked against his wife (Mariamne) to accuse her of plotting against him. He must have taken the threat seriously, and it is easy to see why. Now that Mariamne's brother was dead, it left Mariamne as the rightful heir to the Judean throne. And Mariamne's mother Alexandra was still there behind the scenes manipulating Mariamne. Herod was always paranoid about plots to kill him or rob him of his throne, so it is not surprising that he had Mariamne executed in 29 BC, as well as her mother Alexandra one year later (28 BC).

27 BC – Octavian took on the title of Augustus (Highest) Caesar (in honor of Julius Caesar), and becomes the FIRST Emperor of Rome, ending the Roman Republic (cf. Luke 2:1). He reigns till Jesus is 18 (AD 14).

23 BC – Herod never lost his love for Mariamne, and five years after her death he found another lady with the same name whom he married. So that he could not be accused of marrying someone not high-born, he appointed her priestly father to the High Priesthood. His name was **Simon, son of Boethus**, who held the office for 18 years (23 to 5 BC). It was at this time that Herod began work on the Temple.

22 BC – From 22 BC down to his death in 2 BC (twenty years), Herod focused on four main activities:

- (1) Great building and fortification projects,
- (2) Keeping all his territory free of uprisings and paying their taxes,
- (3) pacifying the numerous squabbles between his in-laws and his relatives, and
- (4) executing anyone who was suspected of conspiring against him.

The Essenes (spiritual descendants of the Hasidim before them) had withdrawn from the Jerusalem Temple system and built their own conclave at Qumran, southwest of Jerusalem (the Dead Sea Scrolls). The Herodian Dynasty is very similar to the Hasmonean Dynasty which preceded it; wicked and violent.

7 BC – Herod's two sons by Mariamne (Aristobulus and Alexander) were accused by Antipater (the son of his first wife Doris) of a plot to kill Herod and seize his throne. Herod had his own boys executed.

4 BC – In the spring, John the Baptist is born

4 BC - In the fall, Jesus the Messiah is born.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)