

## HOW HEROD BECAME ROME'S "KING OF THE JEWS"

**47 BC** But not everyone was pleased with Herod's aggressive pursuits in Galilee. The Sanhedrin (controlled by Pharisees) objected to the lack of due process, since they taught that all capital cases had to pass through their court system before any Jewish criminals could be executed. The mothers of the dead Jewish gang-members came to Jerusalem and engaged in daily demonstrations within the Temple courtyard. Jewish community leaders (Pharisees) used the incident to convince Hyrcanus that Herod and his family were taking away from his royal authority.

"How long wilt thou be quiet under such actions as are now done? Or dost thou not see that Antipater and his sons have already seized upon the government, and that it is only the name of a king which is given thee? But do not thou suffer these things to be hidden from thee; nor do thou think to escape danger by being so careless of thyself and of thy kingdom; for Antipater and his sons are not now stewards of thine affairs; do not thou deceive thyself with such a notion; they are evidently absolute lords; for Herod, Antipater's son, hath slain Hezekiah and those that were with him, and hath thereby transgressed our law, which hath forbidden to slay any man, even though he were a wicked man, unless he had been first condemned to suffer death by the sanhedrin; yet hath he been so insolent as to do this, and that without any authority from thee."<sup>1</sup>

*Long story short* – Hyrcanus agreed that Herod could be put on trial for murder before the Sanhedrin, but made it clear that he expected the young man to be acquitted, as did Sextus Caesar of Syria.

On the advice of his father, Herod came to Jerusalem from Galilee with a security detail large enough to protect him from an unruly mob but not large enough to seem as if he were planning a coup attempt against Hyrcanus. When Herod arrived – looking quite regal, not the least bit humble at being summoned before the High Court on murder charges & surrounded by his security detail – the prosecution declined to present its case, presumably out of fear for their lives.

One of the Sanhedrin members chided the others that they were about to acquit a proud young man who "will one day punish both you and your king himself also."<sup>2</sup> When Hyrcanus, saw that these comments had clearly swung the Sanhedrin toward condemning Herod to death, he adjourned proceedings for the day & advised Herod to get out of town, since he would not be able to protect him from their verdict.

Herod went to Damascus, Syria, where he used his wealth and favorable impression with Sextus Caesar to gain appointment over southern Syrian (which included Samaria).

**46 BC** Eventually, Herod led his Syrian army back to Jerusalem, intending to avenge himself on the Sanhedrin & to remove the weak-willed Hyrcanus from power. Only the pleadings of his father & brother convinced him not to do so.

**15 MAR 44 BC** Julius Caesar was assassinated by Cassius & Brutus, because he considered him an enemy of the Roman Republic.

**44 BC** Cassius went to his Senate-appointed province of Syria in order to raise an army. He levied a tax of 700 talents upon the Jewish nation, which Antipater divided up over seven regions. Herod was the first to accomplish the collection of funds in Galilee. Cassius rewarded him with control over all of Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> Antiquities 14.9.3.

<sup>2</sup> Antiquities 14.9.4.

**43 BC**

There was a Roman civil war with the members of the “Second Triumvirate” (Octavian, Mark Anthony & Lepidus) on one side & Caesar’s assassins (Cassius & Brutus) on the other. Herod, as Cassius’ governor of Syria, was expected to provide materiel support for the war. In return, Cassius promised the title, “King of the Jews,” once the war was won.

A Jewish noble named Malichus poisoned Antipater the Idumean during this period. Josephus only has good things to say about Herod’s father, Antipater.

“And thus died Antipater, a man that had distinguished himself for piety and justice, and love to his country.”<sup>3</sup>

“He was a man, in other respects, active in the management of affairs, and one that recovered the government to Hyrcanus, and preserved it in his hands.”<sup>4</sup>

Herod wanted immediate vengeance for the poisoning, but was talked out of it by his older brother, who feared it would trigger a civil war among the Jews like that already taking place among the Romans. Herod complied for a while, but eventually wrote to Cassius, who already disliked Malichus & arranged for the Romans to take the man out.

The act occurred at Tyre, along the seashore, as Malichus & Hyrcanus, the Jewish High Priest & Ethnarch, were walking to a dinner party thrown by Herod. Hyrcanus fainted when some Roman soldiers suddenly stabbed Malichus to death; however, after he had recovered from the shock, he seemed satisfied that the assassination had been ordered by Cassius and not by Herod.

Felix, the brother of Malichus tried to get vengeance on the Herod & Phasaelus by taking over a number of Judean fortresses; among them Masada. He was soundly defeated.

The two brothers also had to fight off an attempted invasion by Antigonus, Hyrcanus’ nephew, who thought he should be the High Priest & Ethnarch of Judea rather than his uncle. Herod was particularly rewarded by Hyrcanus for his valor in this defensive of the kingdom by being invited to enter into a marriage betrothal contract with the High Priest’s granddaughter/grandniece.

“but when he was come to Jerusalem, Hyrcanus and the people put garlands about his head;”<sup>5</sup>

“When Herod had fought against these in the avenues of Judea, he was conqueror in the battle, and drove away Antigonus, and returned to Jerusalem, beloved by everybody for the glorious action he had done; for those who did not before favor him, did join themselves to him now, because of his marriage into the family of Hyrcanus; for as he had formerly married a wife out of his own country of no ignoble blood, who was called Doris, of whom he begat Antipater, so did he now marry Mariamne, the daughter of Alexander the son of Aristobulus, and the granddaughter of Hyrcanus, and was become thereby a relation of the king.”<sup>6</sup>

**OCT 42 BC**

Cassius & Brutus committed suicide after they lost the Battle of Philippi to Mark Antony.

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<sup>3</sup> Antiquities 14.11.4.

<sup>4</sup> Wars 1.11.4.

<sup>5</sup> Antiquities 14.12.1.

<sup>6</sup> Wars 1.12.3.

**41 BC** Herod was among those high ranking persons of the Middle East who presented themselves to Mark Anthony in Ephesus, paying their respects to the victor of the Roman civil war. He paid a large, unspecified sum of money to secure forgiveness for supporting the loser. Certain Jewish petitioners tried unsuccessfully to convince Mark Anthony to remove Herod & Phasaelus from their positions of authority within the Hyrcanus government.

The High Priest Hyrcanus sent ambassadors with a crown of gold for pretty much the same reason that Herod gave his gifts. He also requested that Jewish hostages & land taken by Cassius to insure their nation's compliance might now be returned. Mark Anthony issued several decrees very favorable toward Hyrcanus & the Jews, blaming all the recent turmoil upon Cassius & Brutus.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the year, while Mark Anthony was holding court in Antioch, Syria, Hyrcanus visited him. During this time, a party of 100 Jewish leaders once again petitioned Mark Anthony to remove Herod & Phasaelus from their positions of authority, leaving Hyrcanus to rule alone as Ethnarch. Mark Anthony responded by asking Hyrcanus whom he thought was best qualified to oversee Jewish affairs, to which he replied, "Herod & his friends." Mark Anthony immediately declared Herod & Phasaelus, Tetrarchs ("ruler of a fourth," a rank just beneath that held by Hyrcanus). When fifteen of the petitioners vehemently objected, Mark Anthony would have executed them, had not Herod intervened.

Not long afterward, a thousand Jewish protesters meet Mark Anthony at Tyre, demanding that Herod & Phasaelus be removed from authority. Mark Anthony ordered the protesters dispersed via violence. Herod & Hyrcanus tried in vain to convince the Jews to disperse before the soldiers arrived. Afterward Hyrcanus paid for the funerals for those killed & the medical treatment for those wounded.

**40 BC** After spending the winter in Egypt with Cleopatra VII, Mark Anthony returned to Rome to deal with tensions between himself and Octavian.

With Mark Anthony gone from the region, the Parthians (Persians) – sworn enemies of the Romans – invaded Syria. Antigonus, the nephew of Hyrcanus, promised the Parthians a thousand talents of silver & 500 women (to be captured during in the taking of Jerusalem) if he'd put him in the place of his uncle & very specifically, to kill Herod. He gladly complied, invading the Jewish lands the following spring.

**Pentecost** Hyrcanus, Phasaelus & Herod were preparing to defend Jerusalem against the invasion. Hyrcanus & Phasaelus were duped into leaving Jerusalem for a peace conference with the Parthians; they were seized as prisoners instead, while an agent of Antigonus attempted to poison Herod.

Seeing no hope of holding out, Herod & the Jews with him abandoned Jerusalem to the advancing Parthian forces, which thoroughly plundered it. When Antigonus arrived, Hyrcanus & Phasaelus were turned over to his custody. Josephus reported that Antigonus bit off a portion of his uncle's ear, to render him permanently unqualified to be High Priest.<sup>8</sup> Phasaelus, in chains, immediately bashed his own brains out against a nearby stone surface rather than give Antigonus a chance to torture him.

Herod made his way to Rome (via Arabia, Egypt & Rhodes), informing Mark Anthony all about developments in the Middle East.

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<sup>7</sup> Antiquities 14.12.3-5.

<sup>8</sup> Wars 1.13.8. Leviticus 21:16-24 outlined various prohibitions to priestly service; bodily disfigurement being one of them.

**40 BC** Herod (early 30's) went to the Senate to request that they, as an ally of the Jewish people, assist in ousting the pro-Parthian Antigonus & to support Herod's brother-in-law, as the new High Priest & Ethnarch of the Jews. Mark Antony & Octavian appealed to the Senators that it would be better to appoint the battle-hardened Herod as "King of the Jews," since a war with the Parthians was to be prosecuted.

"But when the senate was dissolved, Antony and Caesar went out of the senate house, with Herod between them, and with the consuls and other magistrates before them, in order to offer sacrifices, and to lay up their decrees in the capitol. Antony also feasted Herod the first day of his reign. And thus did this man receive the kingdom, having obtained it on the hundred and eighty-fourth olympiad, when Caius Domithis Calvinus was consul the second time, and Caius Asinius Pollio [the first time]."<sup>9</sup>

Coming to Jerusalem, Herod tried to convince the people to peacefully surrender the city, ejecting the Parthian-backed Antigonus in favor of himself, the Roman-appointed king.

"he gave orders that they should, in the first place, make proclamation about the wall, that he came for the good of the people, and for the preservation of the city, and not to bear any old grudge at even his most open enemies, but ready to forget the offenses which his greatest adversaries had done him; but Antigonus, by way of reply to what Herod had caused to be proclaimed, and this before the Romans, and before Silo also, said, that they would not do justly if they gave the kingdom to Herod, who was no more than a private man, and an Idumean, i.e., a half Jew, whereas they ought to bestow it on one of the royal family, as their custom was; for, that in case they at present bare an ill will to him, and had resolved to deprive him of the kingdom, as having received it from the Parthians, yet were there many others of his family that might by their law take it, and these such as had no way offended the Romans; and being of the sacerdotal family, it would be an unworthy thing to put them by."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Antiquities 14.14.4.

<sup>10</sup> Antiquities 14.15.2.

**40-37 BC** Herod spent several years cooperating with the Romans in dislodging the Parthians & their supporters from Jewish territory. One of the things he had to do was eradicate a Jewish gang of criminals which was operating out of some nearly inaccessible Galilean caves.

“but he made an expedition himself against those that lay in the caves. Now these caves were in the precipices of craggy mountains, and could not be come at from any side, since they had only some winding pathways, very narrow, by which they got up to them; but the rock that lay on their front had beneath it valleys of a vast depth, and of an almost perpendicular declivity; insomuch that the king was doubtful for a long time what to do, by reason of a kind of impossibility there was of attacking the place.

“Yet did he at length make use of a contrivance that was subject to the utmost hazard; for he let down the most hardy of his men in chests, and set them at the mouths of the dens. Now these men slew the robbers and their families, and when they made resistance, they sent in fire upon them, [and burnt them]; and as Herod was desirous of saving some of them, he had proclamation made, that they should come and deliver themselves up to him; but not one of them came willingly to him; and of those that were compelled to come, many preferred death to captivity.

“And here a certain old man, the father of seven children, whose children, together with their mother, desired him to give them leave to go out, upon the assurance and right hand that was offered them, slew them after the following manner:—He ordered every one of them to go out, while he stood himself at the cave’s mouth, and slew that son of his perpetually who went out. Herod was near enough to see this sight, and his bowels of compassion were moved at it, and he stretched out his right hand to the old man, and besought him to spare his children; yet did not he relent at all upon what he said, but over and above reproached Herod on the lowness of his descent, and slew his wife as well as his children, and when he had thrown their dead bodies down the precipice, he at last threw himself down after them.”<sup>11</sup>

**37 BC** Once the Parthians were beaten & the outlying Jewish regions under his control, Herod (mid 30’s) began a siege against Jerusalem. This siege was particularly effective since the Jewish Sabbatical Year had begun in the Fall of 38 BC & supplies on hand in the city therefore limited.

Herod chose this moment in time to consummate his marriage betrothal to Mariamne, the grand-daughter/grand-niece of Hyrcanus. [Herod & Mariamne were the parents of that later Herod who had John the Immerser beheaded & of Herod Agrippa I, who had the Apostle James beheaded.]

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<sup>11</sup> Wars 1.16.4.



2/3 NOV 37 BC

**7\*10 [Yom Kippur] (27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pompey entering Jerusalem)**

Herod, his Jewish/Syrian/Idumean army, together with his Roman allies were able to take Jerusalem after only a five-month siege due to the scarcity of city supplies that could be laid up during the Sabbatical Year (Fall 38-Fall 37).

“Now the multitude of the Jews that were in the city were divided into several factions, for the people that crowded about the temple, being the weaker part of them, gave it out that, as the times were, he was the happiest and most religious man who should die first. But as to the more bold and hardy men, they got together in bodies, and fell a robbing others after various manners, and these particularly plundered the places that were about the city, and this because there was no food left either for the horses or the men;”<sup>12</sup>

“This destruction befell the city of Jerusalem when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls at Rome, on the hundred and eighty-fifth olympiad, on the third month, on the solemnity of the fast, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befell the Jews under Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty-seven years’ time.”<sup>13</sup>

The non-Jewish military members immediately began to plunder the city of its public & private wealth, even attempting to enter the Temple shrine itself. Herod managed to stop this behavior by promising to pay each soldier a large cash bonus from his own treasuries in order to preserve the integrity of the Holy City.

Antigonus was transported to Antioch, Syria & beheaded by Mark Antony as an enemy of the Romans. Josephus believed that a bribe by Herod helped insure his execution. Antigonus was the last Hasmonean to rule over Judea.

“And thus did the government of the Asamoneans cease, a hundred and twenty-six years after it was first set up. This family was a splendid and an illustrious one, both on account of the nobility of their stock, and of the dignity of the high priesthood, as also for the glorious actions their ancestors had performed for our nation: but these men lost the government by their dissensions one with another, and it came to Herod, the son of Antipater, who was of no more than a vulgar family, and of no eminent extraction, but one that was subject to other kings. And this is what history tells us was the end of the Asamonean family.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Wars 1.18.1.

<sup>13</sup>Antiquities 14.16.3.

<sup>14</sup>Antiquities 14.16.4.

**37 BC**

Herod arranged for Hyrcanus to come back to Jerusalem from Parthia (where he had become the beloved leader of the Jewish population there) to appear as if he would assist in the leadership of the the country, adding an air of legitimacy.

Since Hyrcanus could no longer serve as High Priest (having been disfigured by Aristobulus), Herod also arranged for an old acquaintance of his, a priest named Ananelus, to come to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to serve in the position.

This did not go over well with Herod's mother-in-law, who wanted her young son, Aristobulus III (only in his mid-teens), to be declared High Priest. Alexandra wrote letters to Cleopatra VII, asking her to influence Mark Anthony (with who she was having a love affair) to convince Herod to appoint his brother-in-law to the priestly high office. At the prompting of a member of Mark Anthony's Syrian court, Dellius, who was on business in Jerusalem, she also had sketches drawn of her son & daughter to send to Mark Anthony with her request. This nearly backfired on her.

“Dellius also talked extravagantly, and said that these children seemed not derived from men but from some god or other. His design in doing so was to entice Antony into lewd pleasures with them, who was ashamed to send for the damsel, as being the wife of Herod, and avoided it because of the reproaches he should have from Cleopatra on that account; but he sent in the most decent manner he could, for the young man; but added this withal, unless he thought it hard upon him so to do.

“When this letter was brought to Herod, he did not think it safe for him to send one so handsome as was Aristobulus, in the prime of his life, for he was sixteen years of age and of so noble a family, and particularly not to Antony, the principal man among the Romans, and one that would abuse him in his amours, and besides, one that openly indulged himself in such pleasures as his power allowed him, without control.

“He therefore wrote back to him that if this boy should only go out of the country, all would be in a state of war and uproar; because the Jews were in hopes of a change in the government, and to have another king over them.”<sup>15</sup>

After a bit more nagging by his wife, Herod finally called a meeting of the Judean leaders, at which he slyly announced that his mother-in-law was conspiring with Cleopatra VII & Mark Anthony to have him replaced as “King of the Jews” with her teenage son. As he'd planned, Alexandra broke down in tears at this accusation, denying that she ever wanted to deprive Herod of the kingship, but only wished to secure the High Priesthood for her son. She apologized to Herod and promised to cause no more trouble. Herod accepted her public apology & appointed his young brother-in-law as High Priest.

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<sup>15</sup> Antiquities 15.2.6.