

THE DEMISE OF HEROD “THE GREAT” & HIS KINGDOM

REMEMBER:

- **JUL 8 BC-JUN 7 BC** – Caesar Augustus, as “Censor,” oversaw the 5-year census Roman citizens. More than likely, this was a census which he extended to all the inhabitants of the Roman world, causing Joseph & his wife Mary to travel to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-5).
- **6th Jewish Month [AUG/SEP] 8 BC** It is likely that Jesus was conceived during this time.¹
- **2nd Jewish Month [MAY] 7 BC** It is likely that Jesus was born during this time.²

7 BC **4th Jewish Month [JUL]** Jesus (40 days old) was likely dedicated by Mary & Joseph at Herod’s new (finished in 12 BC) Temple complex (Luke 2:22-39; cf. Leviticus 12). This is an important chronological marker, since the Magi could not have arrived in Jerusalem prior to this event, since Jesus’ family left the Jerusalem area in conjunction with their arrival.

6/5 BC Herod (68/69 yrs) had a major falling out with his younger brother, Pheroras (62/63 yrs), which began a chain of events that greatly unsettled Herod’s kingdom.

According to Josephus, there were four major women who controlled Pheroras’ life – his wife, his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law & Mariamne (II), Herod’s third wife (daughter of the High Priest Simon) & the mother of the second heir to the throne, Herod [Philip] (21/22 yrs).

Some of the Pharisees (who believed they had the gift of prophecy) told Pheroras’ wife that none of Herod’s sons would reign, but rather their sons would ascend to the throne. When Herod found this out (via his sister, Salome, who hated all four women) he brought the leaders of the Pharisees up on charges of treason & executed them.

Later, Herod ordered his brother to divorce his wife; which order Pheroras refused. So Herod banished the couple from Jerusalem, sending them into Pheroras’ tetrarchy in Perea for the remainder of Herod’s life.

Pheroras became sick & died shortly thereafter. Herod, grieved by his brother’s death, brought the body back to Jerusalem for entombment. Soon, a story arose that Pheroras had been poisoned. In pursuit of this rumor (by torture), Herod came to the conviction that Pheroras had been poisoned by his wife with a potion they had intended to use on King Herod.

Since he thought Mariamne might have known about this assassination plot, being an intimate friend of Pheroras’s wife, he immediately divorced her, removed her father from the High Priesthood (replacing him with Matthias, son of Theophilus) & blotted her son from his will as second heir.

Further investigation indicated that Herod’s first heir, Antipater (42 yrs), had provided Pheroras with the poison & that a backup poison had also been brought to Jerusalem by his arrangement.

¹ FROM A FOOTNOTE IN MY CHRONOLOGICAL COMPANION TO THE BIBLE REGARDING JESUS’ CONCEPTION: “This dating is based on my own research into the phrase “in the sixth month” as used in Luke 1:26. The Greek construction appears to be a technical reference to the 6th Month of the Jewish year, using definite articles with both the word “sixth” and the word “month.” In direct contrast, Luke 1:36 gives the current length of Elizabeth’s pregnancy as “the sixth month,” using no definite article whatsoever.

² FROM A FOOTNOTE IN MY CHRONOLOGICAL COMPANION TO THE BIBLE REGARDING JESUS’ CONCEPTION: “Clement’s Stromata 1.21 (written in Alexandria around 200) references the conviction of some that Jesus was born on either 24 or 25 *Pharmuthi* (the 8th Egyptian month) or 25 *Pachons* (the 9th Egyptian month). At the time of Jesus’ birth, these dates occurred in mid-April and mid-May, respectively, the latter being exactly where a conception date in the Jewish 6th Month would place it. It is interesting to note that the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 5.13 (written after the Stromata, but before the 6th Century) orders that the birthday of Christ be celebrated on the 25th day of the 9th (presumably Jewish) month – in my estimation a misapplication of the earlier Egyptian date. Since 9*25 in the Exodus-based Jewish calendar almost always falls during the Roman month of December, it was only one more, small step to our modern celebration of 25 December.”

5 BC After becoming convinced of his guilt, Herod recalled Antipater to Jerusalem from Rome, without betraying his intentions to put him on trial for plotting *patricide*. Once in Jerusalem, Antipater was tried before the new Roman proconsul of Syria, Varus. After the conviction, Herod wrote to Caesar Augustus regarding the matter, seeking special permission to execute his eldest son.

Herod also requested that his sealed will be returned to him from Rome for alteration. In his new will he expressed his desire that his 15-year old son, Herod Antipas, son of Malthace the Samaritan, be proclaimed as the next “King of the Jews.” For some reason Herod did not apparently consider his two slightly older sons, Archelaus or Philip, to be a good choice as the new king.

2nd Jewish Month [MAY] Jesus would have turned 2 years of age. It is highly likely that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem around this time, adding further fire to Herod’s blazing paranoia.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

Matthew 2:1-3 (NASB95)

Religious Jews were expecting the birth of Messiah at any time.³ Herod quickly ascertained that this Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. He therefore instructed the Magi to let him know where the child was, so that he could pay his respects.

At God’s command, the Magi never reported back to Herod the exact location of the child & Joseph immediately removed his family to Egypt, where there was a huge Jewish population. When he realized the Magi had chosen not to return to him, Herod used the information he’d carefully gathered from them in order to estimate the age of the child as being about two years or younger. He subsequently had the infant boys within that age range living in & around Bethlehem killed.

4 BC [MAR] There were two extremely popular teachers of the Law in Jerusalem at this time.

There were two men of learning in the city [Jerusalem], who were thought the most skillful in the laws of their country, and were on that account held in very great esteem all over the nation; they were, the one Judas, the son of Sepphoris, and the other Matthias, the son of Margalus. There was a great concourse of the young men to these men when they expounded the laws, and there got together every day a kind of an army of such as were growing up to be men.⁴

When a rumor arose that Herod was dead, Judas & Matthias ordered their students to tear down a huge golden eagle which Herod had erected above the eastern gate leading into the Temple courtyard.⁵ This happened in the middle of the day. Forty of the men, plus their two teachers, were arrested by Herod’s security forces and brought before the king for trial. He condemned them to death & sent them to Jericho for execution.

³ Daniel 9:24ff specified a countdown to the Messiah’s arrival. Since that countdown would run out in about 40 years, the Messiah’s birth had to be imminent.

⁴ Wars 1.23.1.

⁵ It is interesting to note that, according to Josephus, a priest & a Pharisee, the Jews of his day believed that God forbade the making of any image & not simply images specifically intended for worship.

4 BC **12*13 [SUN/MON 11/12 MAR]** Herod assembled all the leading Jews together into the theatre at Jerusalem where he reminded them of all his works (especially of his major renovation of the Temple). He told the assembly that he considered the vandalism of the eagle, which had been dedicated to God, as sacrilege. The leaders disavowed the actions of the students out of fear that Herod might extend his wrath to them also.

Herod removed Matthias, son of Theophilus, from the High Priesthood (for not keeping proper control of the Temple) & replaced him with Joazar, son of Boethus.

The forty students & the two teachers were executed at Jericho.

12*14 [MON/TUE 12/13 MAR] A partial eclipse of the moon occurred.⁶

12*? [MAR] Now, in order to deal with the effects of his terminal disease, Herod left Jerusalem for the last time. Therefore, the visit of the Magi had to occur before this date, since they met with him at the capital city.

“After this, the distemper seized upon his whole body, and greatly disordered all its parts with various symptoms; for there was a gentle fever upon him, and an intolerable itching over all the surface of his body, and continual pains in his colon, and dropsical tumors about his feet and an inflammation of the abdomen,—and a putrefication of his privy member, that produced worms. Besides which he had a difficulty of breathing upon him, and could not breathe but when he sat upright, and had a convulsion of all his members; insomuch that the diviners said those diseases were a punishment upon him for what he had done to the rabbis.

“Yet did he struggle with his numerous disorders, and still had a desire to live, and hoped for recovery, and considered of several methods of cure. Accordingly, he went over Jordan, and made use of those hot baths at Callirrhoe, which run into the lake Asphaltitis [the Dead Sea], but are themselves sweet enough to be drank.”⁷

[MAR] At Jericho, in his insanity, Herod plotted a means by which his death would be grieved.

“He then returned back and came to Jericho, in such a melancholy state of body as almost threatened him with present death, when he proceeded to attempt a horrid wickedness; for he got together the most illustrious men of the whole Jewish nation, out of every village, into a place called Hippodrome, and there shut them in.

“He then called for his sister Salome, and her husband Alexas, and made this speech to them:—‘I know well enough that the Jews will keep a festival upon my death; however, it is in my power to be mourned for on other accounts, and to have a splendid funeral, if you will but be subservient to my commands. Do you but take care to send soldiers to encompass these men that are now in custody, and slay them immediately upon my death, and then all Judea, and every family of them, will weep at it whether they will or no.’”⁸

⁶ This eclipse helps us pin down with certainty the year of Herod’s death (Antiquities 17.6.4).

⁷ Wars 1.23.5.

⁸ Wars 1.23.6.

4 BC [MAR] Around this time, a letter from Caesar Augustus arrived, giving permission for Herod to execute or banish Antipater. During a particularly painful bout of coughing, Herod tried to stab himself with a paring knife, but was prevented by an attentive cousin. In the emotional commotion which followed this suicide attempt, Antipater thought his father was dead & tried to bribe his jailor into releasing him. This was reported back to Herod, who immediately had him executed. Herod then changed his will to its final form.

- Archelaus (18 yrs) was to be declared “King of the Jews”
- Herod Philip (17 yrs) was to be declared Tetrarch of Ituraea, Gaulonitis, Trachonitis & Paneas
- Herod Antipas (15 yrs) was to be declared Tetrarch of Galilee & Perea⁹
- 1,000 talents (10 million drachmae)¹⁰ were designated for Caesar Augustus
- 500 talents (5 million drachmae)¹¹ were designated for dispersal to Augustus’ wife, Julius (daughter of Julius Caesar), their children & various friends and freemen
- 50 talents (500,000 drachmae)¹² were designated for his sister, Salome. He also gave her control of three key cities in central Judea.
- He bequeathed large amounts of money to his children as well.

[**Five days after Antipater’s execution**] Herod died. Salome & Alexas immediately released all those being held in the hippodrome, sending them back to their families unharmed.

4 BC [MAR] Before heading off to Rome in order to be confirmed as “King of the Jews,” Archelaus orchestrated a grand funeral for his father. During the seven day mourning period, he provided a funeral meal for the entire population of Jerusalem. He then acceded to requests from the crowd for a reduction in taxes, import/export tariffs and the release of certain prisoners.

[**MAR/APR**] After the public mourning for Herod was over, some the Jews began to demonstrate for the punishment of those who had assisted Herod in executing the men who had torn down the golden eagle. They also demanded the replacement of the High Priest appointed by Herod. These demonstrations continued right into Passover & the Feast of Unleavened Bread [**1*14-21 = TUE/WED 10/11 APR – TUE/WED 17/18 APR**].

When Archelaus attempted to diplomatically deny the protesters’ demands, the crowd threw stones at his representatives. When he sent a military tribune in with 600 troops in order to frighten the crowd, they stoned them too, killing several soldiers & seriously wounding the tribune. Archelaus therefore sent in all his soldiers, killing about three thousand protesters and completely disrupting the festival.¹³ He then headed off to Rome.

Right behind him came his younger brother, Antipas, who intended to petition Caesar that he be declared “King of the Jews” as his father’s previous will had indicated. Antipas was supported in his claim by his Aunt Salome, who accompanied him to Rome.

There was another Jewish delegation which went to Rome to petition that the Jewish kingdom be absorbed into Syria.

⁹ Luke 3:1 cites Philip & Antipas being in these very positions of authority when John the Immerser began preaching.

¹⁰ A drachma was roughly one day’s wage. In today’s economy, 10 million drachmae would be about \$1.48 billion.

¹¹ 5 million drachmae would be about \$740 million.

¹² 500 thousand drachma would be about \$74 million.

¹³ Is it any wonder why Joseph, returning from Egypt after the death of Herod, chose to take his family back to Nazareth, rather than live under the rule of Archelaus (Matthew 2:22)?

4 BC **[APR]** While Archelaus was gone, Jewish rioting at Jerusalem increased. This was due in very large part to meddling by Sabinus, the greedy procurator of Syria, who had begun taking a financial accounting of the kingdom in direct opposition to the instructions of his boss, Legate Varus.

At Pentecost [**3*8 = SAT/SUN 2/3 JUN**] tens of thousands of Jews invaded Jerusalem, not for worship, but for war. When some of them began sniping at Sabinus' troops from the top of the Temple porticoes, the soldiers set fire to them. In the chaos that followed, Sabinus' men illegally removed 400 talents [4 million drachmae]¹⁴ from the Temple treasury. Of course, this sparked even more rioting, not simply in Jerusalem, but all over the kingdom of the Jews.

Among the many rebellious movements which arose at this time was one led by Judas of Sepphoris in Galilee. He was the son of the gang leader, Ezekias, whom Herod had killed about 45 years before. Judas raided the royal palace in Sepphoris, arming his men and promoting himself as the true leader of the Jews. This man will play a very prominent part in the story later.

Legate Varus was forced to pacify the Jewish kingdom with two Roman legions. Once order had been restored, he left one legion in Jerusalem & returned to Syria, sending a report of his actions to Rome.

Meanwhile, at Rome, Caesar was considering how to deal with the Jewish kingdom.

- Archelaus was the eldest, but did not seem to have the moderate temperament.
- Antipas seemed to have a better temperament, but was only 15 years old.
- The anti-Herodian delegation at Rome had gained the support of many Roman Jews. According to Josephus, their chief complaint was that Herod had impoverished the religious Jews in order to extravagantly build up the cities where foreigners (and secular Jews) were living. They also feared that Archelaus, if given the kingdom, would rule by force, since he had already shown such a disposition before sailing off to Rome. Instead, they requested that Herod's former kingdom be absorbed into the Roman province of Syria & that a Roman procurator be appointed over it.

Caesar Augustus chose to adhere to the major details of Herod's final will. The only change he made was in granting Archelaus only the title of "Ethnarch" over Judea/Samaria/Idumea, with a promise that the title of "King" would come to him if his performance indicated he deserved such.

3 BC When Archelaus arrived back in Jerusalem, his first order of business was to remove Joazar, son of Boethus from the High Priesthood (because he had permitted the riots), replacing him with Eleazar, his brother. He then proceeded to become the epitome of a tyrant.

¹⁴ 4 million drachmae would be about \$592 million.

AD 6 **2nd Jewish Month [APR/MAY]** Jesus turned 12 years of age.

After ten years of rule, Archelaus (28 yrs) had proved himself so unfit for leadership, that his own family members & the leaders of his country begged Caesar Augustus to remove him from office. He was recalled to Rome, stripped of his wealth & banished to Vindobona (Vienna) on the northeastern frontier of the Republic/Empire.

Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was dispatched by Caesar Augustus as the new Legate of Syria. His first order of business was to take a complete financial evaluation of Archelaus' former ethnarchy and to absorb it into the province of Syria (cited in Luke 2:2). Quirinius was accompanied to Jerusalem by Coponius, the very first Roman procurator of Judea/Samaria/Idumea. Although the people grumbled about this turn of events, the High Priest Eleazar convinced them to cooperate.

However, Judas of Galilee (the man who had raided the Sepphoris palace) soon began stirring up the crowds against this direct taxation by Rome (cited in Acts 5:37). Judas died not too long afterward, but this marks the very beginning of the *Qanani*/Zealot direct tax resistance movement.

Before heading back to Syria, Quirinius removed Eleazar from the High Priesthood & replaced him with Ananus, the son of Seth, who did a much better job of keeping the Jewish crowds under control.¹⁵ This is the same High Priest Annas who would later (although no longer the official High Priest) be instrumental in the trial and condemnation of Jesus (John 18:13) & also at the trial of the apostles Peter & John (Acts 4:6).

AD 7 **PASSOVER/UNLEAVENED BREAD [1*14-21 = WED/THU 20/21 APR – WED/THU 27/28 APR]** This would have been the time of Jesus' visit to the Temple, when his mother & (adopted) father accidentally left him behind (Luke 2:41ff).

AD 9? **PASSOVER/UNLEAVENED BREAD [1*14-21 = SAT/SUN 30/31 MAR – SAT/SUN 6/7 APR]** Some Samaritans dumped several dead bodies in the Temple porticoes during the night, rending them unclean. This resulted in much tighter security (the complex gates were kept closed during the night) & in the banishment of all Samaritans from the Temple complex. This helps explain the very bad blood which existed between Jews & Samaritans (John 4:9).

¹⁵ It had now become the common practice for rulers to appoint/remove High Priests based on their ability to keep the public peace. This was the major concern of the Jewish rulers in their consideration how to deal with Jesus, as recorded in John 11:47-53.

THE DIVISION OF HEROD'S KINGDOM

- City
- Decapolis city
- Decapolis city (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- To Antipas
- To Archelaus
- To Philip
- To Salome
- Syrian province

