

# Herod the Great

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Herod I, also known as **Herod the Great**, was a Roman client-king of Judaea (c. 74 BC - March 4 BC in Jerusalem). The details of his biography can best be gleaned from the works of the 1st century AD Jewish historiographer Josephus. To the majority of non-specialist Christians Herod is best known from the Gospel according to Matthew that gives in chapter 2 an account of the events leading up to and including what subsequently has come to be referred to by Christians as the Massacre of the Innocents, of which however no mention in other contemporary sources has come down to us.

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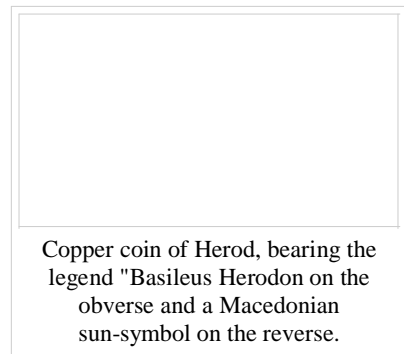
## Biography

Herod the Great arose from a wealthy, influential Idumaeen family. The Idumaeans, successors to the Edomites of the Hebrew Bible, settled in Idumea, formerly known as Edom, in southern Judea. When the Maccabean John Hyrcanus conquered Idumea in 130-140 BC, he required all Idumaeans to obey Jewish law or to leave; most Idumaeans thus converted to Judaism.

Herod identified himself as Jewish, although according to the Law he was not. For he was the second son of Antipater the Idumaeen, founder of the Herodian dynasty, and his wife Cypros, a princess from Petra in Nabatea (now part of Jordan). The family rubbed shoulders with the greats in Rome, such as Pompey, Cassius, and in 47 BC his father was appointed Procurator over Judea, who then appointed his son governor of Galilee at the age of 25.

After his father was poisoned in 43 BC, allegedly by a tax-collector, Herod had the murderer executed. After returning from a campaign, he was offered the betrothal to the teenage princess Mariamne (sometimes spelled Mariamme) from the Hasmonean dynasty who were the titular rulers of Judaea. As he was already married, he banished his first wife Doris and her 3 year old son, also named Antipater, and married Mariamne.

In 40 BC Antigonus and the Parthians invaded Judea, and Herod fled Jerusalem to Rome for the first time. There he was titled King of Judaea by Mark Antony.



## 30s BC

39 BC-37 BC War against Antigonos. After the winning of Jerusalem and victory over Antigonos, Marc Antony executes Antigonos.

36 BC Herod makes his 17 year old brother-in-law Aristobulus III of Judea high priest, fearing that the Jews would appoint Aristobulus "king of the Jews" in his place.

35 BC Aristobulus drowns at a party. Historians claim there is insufficient evidence against Herod for his death.

32 BC Start of the war against Nabatea, with victory one year later.

31 BC strong earthquake in Judea. Octavian defeats Mark Antony, so Herod switches allegiance to Octavian, later Augustus.

30 BC Herod was then shown great favour by Octavian who at Rhodes confirms him as King of Judaea.

## 20s BC

29 BC Josephus writes that Herod had great passion and also great jealousy concerning his wife Mariamne. She learns of Herod's plans to murder her, and stops sleeping with him. Herod puts her on trial on a trumped-up charge of adultery. His sister Salome (not Herodias's daughter Salomé) was chief witness against her.

Mariamne's mother made an appearance and incriminated her own daughter. Historians say her mother was next on Herod's list to be executed and did this only to save her own life. Writings state that Mariamne was calm and serene at her execution at the age of 25 years, having given birth to 5 children in 7 years.

Alexandra, Mariamne's mother, then made a bid for power, declaring herself Queen and stating that Herod was mentally unfit to serve any longer. Josephus wrote that this was Alexandra's strategic mistake and Herod executed her without trial.

28 BC Herod executed his brother-in-law Kostobar (husband of Salome, father to Berenice) for conspiracy. Large festival in Jerusalem, as Herod had built a Theatre and an Amphitheatre.

27 BC An assassination attempt on Herod is discovered in time. To honour Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus (Augustus) Herod rebuilds Samaria and renames it Sebaste.

25 BC After a great drought there is hunger and epidemics. Herod imports grain from Egypt and starts an exemplary aid programme. He also waives a third of the taxes.

23 BC Herod builds a palace in Jerusalem and the fortress Herodian in Judaea. Herod marries his third wife, also named Mariamne, the daughter of high priest Simon.

22 BC Building starts on Caesarea Maritima and its harbour. From the Romans he obtains the regions Trachonitis, Batanaea and Auranitis under his rule.

Circa 20 BC Expansion starts on the Second Temple.

## 10s BC

Circa 18 BC Herod travels for the second time to Rome.

14 BC Herod supports the Jews in Anatolia and Cyrene. Owing to the prosperity in Judaea he waives a quarter of the taxes. He argues with his sons.

13 BC Herod makes his firstborn son Antipater (his son with Doris) first heir in his will.

12 BC Because Herod suspects both his sons (from his marriage to the first Mariamne) Alexandros and Aristobulos of threatening his life, he takes them to Aquileia to be tried; but Augustus is able to reconcile the three. Herod supports the financially strapped Olympic Games and ensures their future. Herod amends his will so that Alexander and Aristobulos rise in the royal succession, but Antipater would be higher in the succession.

Circa 10 BC The newly expanded temple in Jerusalem is inaugurated. War against the Nabateans.

## 0s BC

9 BC The inauguration of Caesarea Maritima is a marvellous spectacle with a festival. Owing to the course of the war against the Nabateans Herod falls into disgrace with Augustus. Herod again suspects Alexander intends to kill him.

8 BC Herod accuses his sons from the first Mariamne of high treason. Herod is reconciled with Augustus, which also gives him the permission to proceed legally against his sons.

7 BC The court hearing takes place in Berytos (Beirut) before a Roman court. Mariamne's sons are found guilty and executed. Now the succession is changed so that Antipater is the exclusive successor to the throne. In second place the succession incorporates Herod Philip, the son from the second Mariamne.

6 BC Herod proceeds harshly against the Pharisees, who had announced that the birth of the Messiah would mean the end of his rule.

5 BC Antipater is brought before the court charged with intended murder of Herod. The sentence must first be approved only by the Roman emperor. Herod makes his son Herod Antipas from his 4th marriage with Malthace as his successor. Herod is seriously ill.

4 BC Young Torah-students smash the golden eagle over the main entrance of the Temple of Jerusalem after the Pharisee teachers claim it is a Roman symbol. Herod arrests them, brings them to court, sentences and punishes them. The emperor Augustus approves of the death penalty for Antipater. Herod executes his son.

As he has just executed his sole heir, Herod again changes his will: Archelaus (from the marriage with Malthace) will rule as King over the Herod's entire kingdom, while Antipas (from Malthace) and Philip (from the fifth marriage with Cleopatra of Jerusalem) as Tetrarchs over Galilee and Peraea, also over Gaulanitis (Golan), Trachonitis (Hebrew: Argob), Batanaea (now Ard-el-Bathanyeh) and Panias.

Herod died at the end of March, or early April of 4 BC. As Augustus does not confirm his will, no one gets the title of King. However, the three sons do get the stated territories.

## Date of Herod's death

Some chronologers hold that he died in the year 5 or 4 BC. Their chronology is based to a large extent on Josephus' history. In dating the time that Herod was appointed king by Rome, Josephus uses a "consular dating" whereby Josephus locates the event as occurring during the rule of certain Roman consuls (Onischuk note-Consular Dating was highly variable and therefore inaccurate - see Julian Calendar and Anno Domini). According to this, Herod's appointment as king would be in 40 BC, but the data of another published Roman historian, [[Appianos] - book "Appianos Romaika" (Appian's Roman History) published 2nd Century AD], would place the event in 39 BC. By the same method Josephus places Herod's capture of Jerusalem in 37 BC, but he also says that this occurred 27 years after the capture of the city by Pompey (which was in 63 BC). (Jewish Antiquities, XIV, 487, 488 [xvi, 4]) Josephus's reference to that latter event would make the date of Herod's taking the city of Jerusalem [[36 BC] -- Appianos [35BC]]. Now, Josephus says that Herod died 37 years from the time that he was appointed king by the Romans, and 34 years after he took Jerusalem. (Jewish Antiquities, XVII, 190, 191 [viii, 1]) This might indicate that the date of his death was 2 BC or perhaps 1 BC

using Josephus's consular dating, whereas Appianos would place the date at 1 BC or Zero BC.

According to Josephus, Herod died not long after an eclipse of the moon and before a Passover. (Jewish Antiquities, XVII, 167 [vi, 4]; 213 [ix, 3]) Since there was a PARTIAL eclipse on March 11, 4 BC. (March 13, Julian), some have concluded that this was the eclipse referred to by Josephus.

However, there was a total eclipse of the moon January 9-10, Zero BC, about three months before Passover, which would give a logical sequence of events [Onischuk]. When we consider the Annunciation of Christ (see Anno Domini) occurred March 25th, just after Christ's Birth, it is possible that Christ was born in late February-early March, during Pisces zodiacal period, followed by Passover. Two of the earliest symbols of Christianity were the symbol of the Ark, and zodiacal symbol of Pisces the Fish.

Another line of calculation centres around the age of Herod at the time of his death. Josephus says that he was about 70 years old. He says that at the time Herod received his appointment as governor of Galilee (which is generally dated 47 BC), he was 15 years old; but this has been understood by scholars to be an error, 25 years evidently being intended. (Jewish Antiquities, XVII, 148 [vi, 1]; XIV, 158 [ix, 2]) Accordingly, Herod's death occurred in 2 BC or 1 BC whereas Appianos would place it at 1 BC or Zero BC Christian Era.

[Onischuk] also notes other possible sequences of events. Another total eclipse of the moon occurred July 17, 1 BC, which could have marked King Herod's death. Before this, from February 1 BC to May 1 BC there was 3 months of a "Guiding Star" due to a near-conjunction of Jupiter-Regulus that was highly visible in the night sky [Onischuk-[www.parkfoto.com](http://www.parkfoto.com)]. This was followed by Jupiter & Venus conjunction in June 17-18 of 1 BC, which may have been interpreted by astronomer-priests as the sign of the birth of Christ when the blazing "star" of the pagan Gods Jupiter (King of pagan Gods) & Venus (Goddess of Fertility) were merged in the heavens, home of pagan Gods. The annunciation could then have been delayed until March of Zero BC, on or near the spring solstice, an important time when all royalty, especially Kings, were announced for birth, so as to rightfully inherit the spirits of their ancestors and kingly predecessors during the springtime spiritual resurrection of all life [Knight&Lomas-The Hiram Key,1999]. Alternatively, it is also possible that due to the variable length of years of the Roman Consular calendar, that the perception of Josephus [not necessarily an astronomer] was that Passover was about to occur - this theory is supported by the unseasonal weather reported in the Bible, where fruits are found growing out of season - probably based on the same time shifted perceptions given by variable length years of Consular Calendars.

Herod's date of death also indicates the latest time at which the birth of Jesus of Nazareth could have occurred. Herod's death is now established to have occurred at the latest in 0 BC [Appianos/Onischuk], and because Jesus was born AFTER Herod died, the traditional day of Jesus' birth is questionable, but the year zero to mark the beginning of the Christian Era correlates exactly with the original Julian Calendar, observations of Josephus, Roman Consular calendar year correction by Appianos, and Daniel Onischuk theories supported by verifiable astronomical data.

## Marriages and Children

### 1. married Doris

- Son Antipater, executed 4 BC

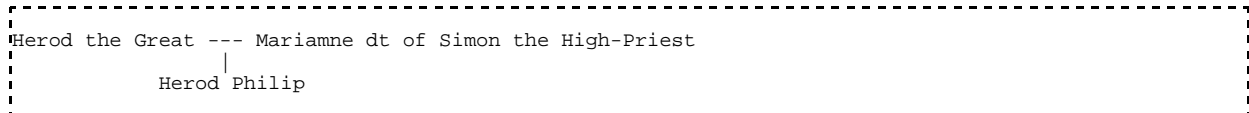
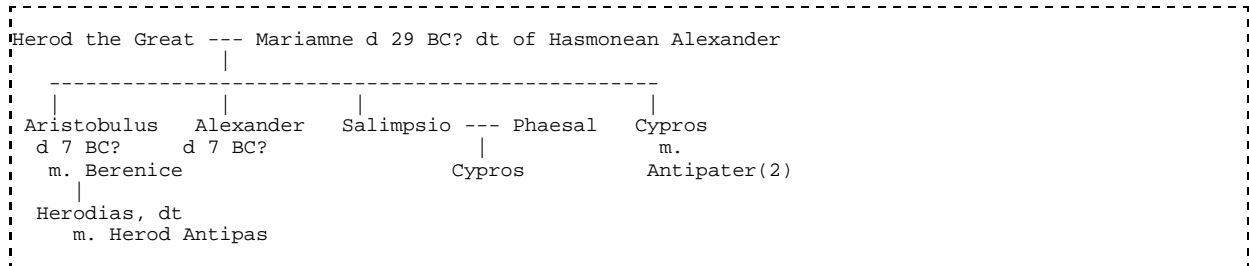
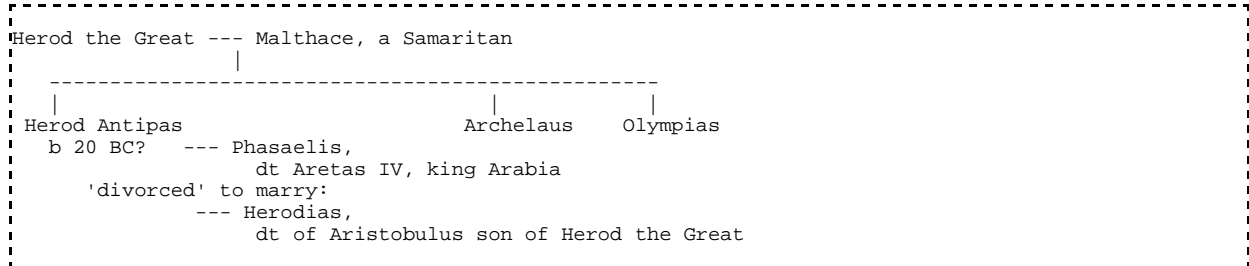
### 2. married Mariamme (I.) - daughter of Hasmonean Alexandros

- Son Alexandros, executed 7 BC
- Son Aristobulos, executed 7 BC
- Daughter Salampsio
- Daughter Cypros

### 3. married Mariamme (II.) - daughter of High-Priest Simon

- Son Herod





- *Antipater(2) was son of Joseph and Salome*
- *Note: dates with ? need verifying against modern findings*

## Achievements

Herod has entered posterity as a ruthless ruler and on account of his cruelty, not least to close members of his own family; but he was also an able and far-sighted administrator who helped in building the economic might of Judaea, founding cities and developing agricultural projects, his most famous and ambitious project having been the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem to the most beautiful in its time in order to ingratiate himself with the many of his subjects who were Jews by descent.

Some of Herod's other achievements include: the rebuilding the water supplies for Jerusalem, rebuilding the Palace in Jerusalem, refurbishing the boundary fortresses such as Masada, and creating new cities such as Caesarea Maritima and Herodion. From the extraction of asphalt from the Dead Sea, he shared with Cleopatra the monopoly on its important use in ship building. He leased copper mines on Cyprus from the Roman

emperor. He had a dominant position in the production of bronze, using British tin.

## Herod in the New Testament

*See main article Massacre of the Innocents*

Herod the Great plays a minor role in The Gospel according to Matthew (ch. 2), which describes an event known as the Massacre of the Innocents.

Shortly after the birth of Jesus, Magi from the East visit Herod to inquire the whereabouts of "the one having been born king of the Jews", because they had seen his star in the east [ see [www.parkfoto.com](http://www.parkfoto.com) - myths & science - immaculate conception ] and therefore wanted to pay him homage. Herod, who is himself King of Judea, is alarmed at the prospect of the new-born king usurping his rule.

Herod is advised by the all the assembled chief priests and scribes of the people that the Prophet had written that the "Anointed One" (Grk. *ho christos*) is to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Herod therefore sends the Magi to Bethlehem, instructing them to search for the child, and that, when they find him, they should "report to me, so that I too may go and worship him". However, after they find Jesus, the Magi are warned in a dream not to report back to Herod. Similarly, Joseph is warned in a dream that Herod intends to kill Jesus, so Joseph and his family flee to Egypt in order to escape Herod. When Herod realizes he has been outwitted by the Magi, he gives orders to kill all boys of the age of two years and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity.

It should be noted, however, that the historical accuracy of this event is in question, since the author of the Gospel of Matthew may have had a religious motivation for presenting such events, and neither the other canonical gospel accounts nor any other document from the period makes any reference to such a massacre.

Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas (who is also called Herod) is even more prominently featured in the New Testament for his role in Jesus's arrest and execution.

## After Herod's death

After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided between three of his sons, namely Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip, who however ruled only as tetrarchs rather than kings.

## References and External Links

- BBC Manchester/Discovery channel production broadcast 2004 March 14
- Family trees ([http://www.bible-history.com/herod\\_the\\_great/HERODGenealogy\\_Chart.htm](http://www.bible-history.com/herod_the_great/HERODGenealogy_Chart.htm))
- extract Britanica Vol 5 page 879 (<http://www.theos-l.com/archives/199608/tl00049.html>)
- Encyclopedia.com (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/H/Herod.asp>)
- Outline of Great Books Volume I - King Herod ([http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public\\_html/Outline\\_of\\_Great\\_Books\\_Volume\\_I/kingherod\\_cc.html](http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Outline_of_Great_Books_Volume_I/kingherod_cc.html)) : extracts from the works of Josephus
- Timeline 49 to 1 BC ([http://din-timelines.com/bce0049-0001\\_timeline.shtml](http://din-timelines.com/bce0049-0001_timeline.shtml))

Preceded by: <b>Antigonus</b>	<b>King of Judaea</b> 37–4 BC	Succeeded by: <b>Herod Archelaus</b>
	<b>Ruler of Galilee</b> 37–4 BC	Succeeded by: <b>Herod Antipas</b>
	<b>Ruler of Batanea</b> 37–4 BC	Succeeded by: <b>Herod Philip</b>

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