40–4 BC Herod the Great (King of the Jews)

rise to power
Herod’s father, Antipater (a Jew of Idumea descent), had attained a position of great influence in Judaea and was appointed procurator of Judaea by Julius Caesar in 47 BC. Antipater appointed 25 year old Herod (his second son) to the position of military prefect of Galilee. Herod did so well in suppressing rebellions (probably disgruntled Jews who supported the Hasmonean Dynasty) that the Roman governor of Syria made him military prefect of Coele-Syria. In 43 BC, following the chaos caused by Antipater offering financial support to Caesar’s murderers, Antipater was poisoned. Herod, backed by the Roman military, executed the murderer. At this time, Antigonus (a Hasmonean) tried to take the throne from his uncle, Hyrcanus. Herod successfully defeated him. In 42 BC, Herod convinced Mark Antony and Octavian that he was on their side, though his father had supported Cassius and Brutus. Thus, Rome appointed Herod to tetrarch of Galilee. In 40 BC Antigonus tried to take the throne again, this time with the help of the Parthians, and succeeds. Herod fled to Rome where he was elected by the Roman Senate to the title, “King of the Jews.” It took Herod three years but in 37 BC he successfully conquered Judea and captured Antigonus (Mark Antony executed him). This marks the official end of the Hasmonean Dynasty (begun with Mattathias and his sons, especially Judas Maccabeus) and the beginning of the Herodian Dynasty (see chart). He was a clever politician who survived many struggles for power and was known for secret police, curfews, and high taxes. He also gave out free grain and clothes in when crises arose.

religious affiliation
Herod was an Idumean (Old Testament Edom). A hundred years earlier John Hyrcanus had conquered the region and forced them to convert to Judaism or leave. Many considered Herod to be a half Jew because of he was not actually descended from Israel. Though in public situations Herod identified himself as a Jew many saw through this façade. He had a strong affinity to Greco-Roman culture. He was a friend of Rome and ruled Judea for the Empire.

politicking with Rome
Herod closely watched the political scene in Rome. Perhaps he had learned this from his father who switched from supporting Pompey (a Roman general who supported the Senate) to Julius Caesar. Though his father had switched to support the murderers of Julius Caesar, Herod was able to convince Rome that he was a supporter of Mark Antony. Then when Octavian (also called Augustus) defeated Mark Antony, Herod successfully switched allegiances again. In 30 BC Herod was officially confirmed as King of the Jews by Octavian at Rhodes.

politicking with the Jews
Herod married Mariamne I (granddaughter of the former High Priest Hyrcanus II) in order to give his reign some legitimacy and provide an heir that would be more accepted by the Jews. In 36 BC Herod appointed his 17 year old brother in law, Aristobulus III of Judea to be the high
priest (for fear that he may be a rival to king otherwise). In 25 BC he began brought in grain from Egypt and worked to alleviate the hunger and disease resulting from a massive drought (he also waived 1/3 of the taxes). However, nothing Herod did, including the rebuilding of the Jewish temple could endear him to his Jewish subjects. They always remembered that he was of Edomite descent, held him in low esteem for his obvious friendship with Rome, despised him for erecting temples to pagan deities elsewhere, and above all resented him for wiping out the Hasmonean family.

building projects
He worked on water supplies and built a theatre, an amphitheatre, and a palace in Jerusalem. He built the fortresses Masada and Herodium (see picture below of each. He founded new cities such as Caesarea. He rebuilt Samaria in honor of Augustus and called it Sebaste (Latin Augustus in Greek is Sebastos). He also rebuild the Antonia fortress (named after Mark Antony). However, his most well known building project was the renovation of the Temple in Jerusalem (begun in 19 BC or 20). He employed 1,000 priests as masons and carpenters for the project. The temple was an ornate structure, constructed using white marble and parts were overlaid with gold and jewels. It was done within a year and half though the outer buildings and courtyards were continued to be worked another eighty years.

other brutalities
His excessive brutality was condemned by the Sanhedrin. He is known in the New Testament in Matthew 2 for his massacre of the infants of Bethlehem in response to the arrival of the Magi of the East. Just before his death, he ordered a number of leading Jews to be slaughtered, so that although there would be no mourning over his death, at least there would be mourning at his death. (The order was never carried out).

killing of rivals
In 35 BC he ordered to have Aristobulus III (his brother-in-law) drowned at a party. In 29 BC Herod had planned to murder his wife Mariamne I but she found out and stopped sleeping with
him. He put her on trial for adultery and using the testimony of her mother, Alexandra, he had her executed. Meanwhile Alexandra declared herself Queen by stating that Herod was mentally unfit. Herod executed her without trial. In 28 BC, Herod executed his brother-law Kostobar for conspiracy. In 12 BC Herod suspected both of his sons from Mariamne I (Alexander and Aristobulus) for conspiracy and had them tried. Augustus reconciled the three. Then in 7 BC Herod again brought his sons through Mariamne I to court for conspiracy and they were executed. In 5 BC, Herod charged Antipater, another of his sons, was with intending murder him and he was executed with the approval of Augustus in 4 BC. Augustus is recorded saying that it was better to be Herod’s pig than his son (Herod ate kosher). His sons Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip divided up their father’s kingdom among themselves when Herod died in 4 BC.

The Herodian Dynasty

_Herod Archelaus (4 BC to AD 6)_
He was the son of Herod the Great and ruled over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. He was the eldest son of Herod and had the worst reputation of them all. He offended the Jews by marrying Glaphyra, the widow of his half-brother Alexander. He was so cruel that when Joseph came back from Egypt he decided to settle in Nazareth of Galilee than to return to Bethlehem. In fact, he misruled the region so badly that a deputation of Judean and Samaritan aristocracy at last went to Rome in order to warn Augustus that there would be a revolt if he did not remove Archelaus. Archelaus was banished in AD 6. The area of Judea was then under direct Roman control through procurators.

_Herod Philip (4 BC to AD 34)_
He was the son of Herod the Great and ruled over Iturea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Auranitis, and Batanea. He married Salome and Herodias. He rebuilt Panias as Caesarea Philippi and Bethsaida as Julias. His rule was generally peaceful until his death.

_Herod Antipas (Herod the Tetrarch in Luke 3.19) (4 BC to AD 39)_
He was the son of Herod the Great and ruled over Galilee and Perea. He was the most successful of Herod’s sons and was a great builder. He built Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee in AD 22. He divorced his wife, Aretas IV, and married his half-brother Philip’s wife, Herodias. John the Baptist condemned him for this and was arrested (and eventually was beheaded). Jesus called Antipas, “that fox” (Luke 13.32) and later stood before this Herod in trial (Luke 23.7-12) when Pilate discovered Jesus was a Galilean (having grown up in Nazareth). He was denounced to the Emperor Caligula by his nephew (Herod Agrippa) as a conspirator. This resulted in Antipas’ exile and the loss of his tetrarchy in AD 39.

_Herod Agrippa I (Herod the King in Acts 12.1) (AD 37 to 44)_
He was the grandson of Herod the Great. After the execution of his father in 7 BC he was brought to Rome and was in close association with the imperial family. He offended the Emperor Tiberius and was imprisoned for a year and was released by Caligula from whom he received the title king of the north east territories of Palestine. When Antipas was exiled, Agrippa was given his territories. Then when Claudius became emperor (in AD 41) he augmented Agrippa’s kingdom by giving him Judea and Samaria. In the end his kingdom was roughly the same size as Herod the Great. He was looked upon favorably by the Jews because
his grandmother was a Hasmonean (Mariamne). He executed James the son of Zebedee and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12.1-19). He died suddenly at the age of 54 as described in Acts 12 and by Josephus (Antiquities 19).

**Herod Agrippa II (AD 50 to 90s)**
He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and son of Herod Agrippa I. He was too young to take the throne of his father in AD 44. He was raised in Rome during the reign of Claudius. Around the year AD 50 Claudius appointed him king of Chalcis in Lebanon and gave him the right to appoint the high priest in Jerusalem. He later gained northern Galilee. Then under Nero, he gained southern Galilee and Perea. He was heavily influenced by his sister Berenice who lived with him. Procurator Festus heard Paul’s defense (Acts 25-26) and asked for Herod Agrippa II’s advice. He first tried to reconcile the Jews with Rome when the revolt began in AD 66 but when it came down to it, sided with Rome and supported them with troops. This won him even larger territory when Jerusalem was destroyed. His reign lasted into the 90s.
First Century Roman Emperors

*Julius Caesar (49-44 BC)*
He played a key role in transforming the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire. He led his troops across the Rubicon in 49 BC and ignited a civil war which he would come out on top of. After he galvanized control he was assassinated by Marcus Junius Brutus and a group of senators who wanted Rome to return to a Republic (44 BC). However, another civil war resulted and Julius Caesar’s adopted heir, Gaius Octavius, was successful in regaining the position of emperor.

*Augustus (Octavian) (27 BC – AD 14)*
Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus. The census connected with Jesus’ birth location was given under Augustus. Also, the imperial cult really got going under Augustus whose name means “the illustrious one.”

*Tiberius (AD 14-37)*
Jesus’ entire public ministry occurred during the reign of Tiberius. According to Luke 3.1, John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.

*Caligula (AD 37-41)*
He demanded that he be worshiped and even ordered to have a statue of himself to be put in the temple at Jerusalem. He died before the order was carried out.

*Claudius (AD 41-54)*
He expelled the Jewish residents of Rome for civil disturbance. Aquila and Priscilla (tent makers from Rome) were expelled at this point and moved to Corinth (Acts 18.2).

*Nero (AD 54-68)*
He persecuted Christians viciously and blamed them for the fire he started in Rome (he did it in order to implement his new city plan). According to Tacitus, “Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians…They were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44). Peter and Paul are believed to have died in Rome during the reign of Nero.

*Vespasian (AD 69-79)*
He was the general in charge of quelling the Jewish revolt. He returned to Rome to become emperor and appointed his son, Titus, to complete the military task and destroy Jerusalem (including the temple) in AD 70.

*Titus (AD 79-81)*
He carried on a controversial relationship with the Jewish Queen Bernice of Cilicia. He was known for completing the coliseum in Rome. He was emperor in AD 79 when Mount Vesuvius erupted. He died of a fever in AD 81.
Domitian (AD 81-96)
He was Titus’ little brother and reigned for 15 years, the longest since Tiberius. He was a ruthless and efficient and was likely the emperor during the writing of the book of Revelation.

Roman Governors
Procurators were men whose job was to govern territories for Rome. Many times Rome would work through kings to govern certain areas, but in other cases they used procurators. Their job was to keep the peace and collect the taxes.

Pontius Pilate (AD 26-36)
According to Philo, Pilate was unbending, harsh, greedy, and cruel. Josephus tells of three confrontations between Pilate and the Jews that support this description. (1) Soon after Pilate took office he had his legions bring their military standards, which included images of the emperor Tiberius, into Jerusalem. The Jews hated the standards because they saw in them a gross violation of their law (no graven image, etc.). A delegation of Jewish leaders protested to Pilate in Caesarea. Pilate ignored them for three days but when they said they would rather die than go home with the standards in place, Pilate yielded (not wanting to kill so many). (2) He used funds from the Temple to build an aqueduct to Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Jerusalem rioted and Pilate had his soldiers disguise themselves and mingle with the crowd. At a prearranged signal they began beating the crowd with clubs. (3) Later in his term, Pilate put shields onto Herod’s palace (in Jerusalem) with the name of Tiberius on them. The people sent a petition to Tiberius who ordered them to be removed and put in Caesarea. Furthermore, an account is mentioned in Luke 13 in which Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. Pilate sat in judgment on Jesus (probably one of many he judged that day). The gospels show that Pilate was not convinced by the Jewish leaders that Jesus was guilty but yielded to them in the end when they threatened to tell Caesar. He was the one who ordered the execution.

Antonius Felix (AD 52-60)

Porcius Festus (AD 58-62)
Also, Heard Paul’s case in Acts 24-25.

Gessius Florus (AD 64-66)
He raided the temple treasurer and this ignited the Jewish revolt of AD 66-74.

AD 66–74 Jewish Revolt
In AD 70, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Roman General Titus. The last hold out of the Jewish rebellion was in Masada, a fortress on the west side of the Dead Sea. There the last rebels and their families (936 people) committed mass suicide just before the Romans entered.
AD 132–135 Jewish Revolt (again)
Emperor Hadrian erected a temple to the Roman god Jupiter where the Jewish temple used to be. He also prohibited the rite of circumcision. This led to another Jewish revolt under the leadership of Bar Kokhba, hailed by Rabi Akiba as Messiah (renamed to Bar Kosiba). The Romans crushed the uprising in AD 135 and rebuilt Jerusalem as a Roman city. Jews were banned from entering it.