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## **The Life and History of Herod the Great.**

**(From the Encyclopaedia Britannica)**

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

# The Life and History of Herod the Great.

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## HEROD THE GREAT

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Herod the Great was born in 73 BC, he was appointed king of Judaea (37–4 BC) and died March/April, 4 BC, Jericho, Judaea. Herod was born in southern Palestine; his father, Antipater, was an Edomite (an Arab). Herod was a man of great influence and wealth, he built many fortresses, aqueducts, theatres, and other public buildings and generally raised the prosperity of his land, but in his later years he became the centre of political and family intrigue. The New Testament portrays him as a tyrant, into whose kingdom Jesus of Nazareth was born.

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## HEROD A PRACTICING JEW

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Herod was a practicing Jew of Arab origin on both sides. When Pompey (106–48 BC) invaded Palestine in 63 BC, Antipater supported his campaign and began a long association with Rome, from which both he and Herod were to benefit. Six years later Herod met Mark Antony, whose lifelong friend he was to remain.

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## JULIUS CAESAR

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Julius Caesar also favoured Herod's family he appointed Antipater procurator of Judaea in 47 BC and conferred on him Roman citizenship, an honour that descended to Herod and his children. Herod made his political debut in the same year, when his father appointed him governor of Galilee. Six years later Mark Antony made him tetrarch of Galilee. In 40 BC the Parthians invaded Palestine, civil war broke out, and Herod was forced to flee to Rome

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## HEROD KING JUDEA AND MARIAMNE

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the senate in Judea nominated Herod king of Judaea and equipped him with an army to make good his claim. In the year 37 BC, at the age of 36, Herod became unchallenged ruler of Judaea, a position he was to maintain for 32 years. To further solidify his power, he divorced his first wife, Doris, sent her and his son away from court, and married Mariamne, a Hasmonean princess, although the union was directed at ending his feud with the Hasmoneans, a priestly family of Jewish leaders, he was deeply in love with Mariamne.

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## CLEOPATRA QUEEN OF EGYPT

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Cleopatra the queen of Egypt was Antonys' mistress. During the conflict between the two triumvirs Octavian and Antony (the heirs to Caesar's power), Herod supported his friend Antony even though Antony's mistress, Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, used her influence with Antony to gain much of Herod's best land. After Antonys' final defeat at Actium in 31 BC, Herod frankly confessed to the victorious Octavian which side he had taken, Octavian, who had met Herod in Rome, knew that he was the one man to rule Palestine as Rome wanted it ruled and confirmed him king, Octavian, also restored to Herod the land Cleopatra had taken. Herod became the close friend of Augustus' great minister Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, after whom one of his grandsons and one of his great-grandsons were named, both the emperor and the minister paid him state

visits, and Herod twice again visited Italy. Augustus gave him the oversight of the Cyprus copper mines, with a half share in the profits, he twice increased Herod's territory, in the years 22 and 20 BC, so that it came to include not only Palestine, but parts of what are now the kingdom of Jordan to the east of the river and southern Lebanon and Syria, he had intended to bestow the Nabataean kingdom on Herod as well, but, by the time that throne fell vacant, Herod's mental and physical deterioration made it impossible.

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## **HEROD'S FORTRESSES AND CITIES**

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Herod endowed his realm with massive fortresses and splendid cities, of which the two greatest were new, and largely pagan, foundations. The port of Caesarea Palaestinae on the coast between Joppa (Jaffa) and Haifa, which was afterward to become the capital of Roman Palestine; and Sebaste on the long-desolate site of ancient Samaria. In Jerusalem he built the fortress of Antonia, portions of which may still be seen beneath the convents on the Via Dolorosa, and a magnificent palace (of which part survives in the citadel)

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## **HEROD'S TEMPLE**

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Herod's temple: was his most grandiose creation which he wholly rebuilt. The great outer court, 35 acres (14 hectares) in extent, is still visible as Al-Haram ash-Sharif, he also embellished foreign cities—Beirut, Damascus, Antioch, Rhodes—and many towns.

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## **HEROD AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES**

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Herod patronized the Olympic Games, whose president he became. In his own kingdom he could not give full rein to his love of magnificence, for fear of offending the Pharisees, the leading faction of Judaism, with who he was always in conflict because they regarded him as a foreigner.

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## **HEROD PROTECTOR OF JEWS**

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Herod undoubtedly saw himself not merely as the patron of grateful pagans but also as the protector of Jewry outside of Palestine, whose Gentile hosts he did all in his power to conciliate.

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## **MENTAL CRUELNESS**

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Unfortunately, there was a dark and cruel streak in Herod's character that showed itself increasingly as he grew older, his mental instability, moreover, was fed by the intrigue and deception that went on within his own family.

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## **HEROD'S MURDEROUS JEALOUSY AND MARIAMNE**

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Despite Herod's affection for Mariamne, he was prone to violent attacks of jealousy; his sister Salome (not to be confused with her great-niece, Herodias' daughter Salome) made good use of his natural suspicions and poisoned his mind against his wife in order to wreck the union. In the end Herod murdered Mariamne, her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother, a woman of the vilest stamp who had often aided his sister Salome's schemes. Besides Doris and Mariamne, Herod had eight other wives and had children by six of them.

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## HEROD'S CHILDREN

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Herod had fourteen children. In his last years he suffered from arteriosclerosis, he had to repress a revolt, became involved in a quarrel with his Nabataean neighbours, and finally lost the favour of Augustus. He was in great pain and in mental and physical disorder and altered his will three times and finally disinherited and killed his firstborn, Antipater.

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## THE SLAUGHTER OF INFANTS

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The slaying, shortly before his death, of the infants of Bethlehem was wholly consistent with the disarray into which he had fallen. After an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, Herod died. His final testament provided that, subject to Augustus' sanction, his realm would be divided among his sons. Archelaus should be king of Judaea and Samaria, with Philip and Antipas sharing the remainder as tetrarchs. (Taken from Stewart Henry Perowne 1994-2002 Encyclopedia Britannica).

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## THE FEAST OF HOLY INNOCENTS

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The Feast of Holy Innocents, which commemorates the massacre of the children is also called Childermas, or Innocents' Day festival celebrated in the Christian churches in the West on December 28 and in the Eastern churches on December 29 commemorating the massacre of the children by King Herod in his attempt to kill the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:16–18).

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## THE FIRST MARTYRS

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These children were regarded by the early church as the first martyrs, but it is uncertain when the day was first kept as a saint's day, at first it may have been celebrated with Epiphany, but by the 5th century it was kept as a separate festival, in Rome it was a day of fasting and mourning. It was also one of a series of days known as the Feast of Fools, and the last day of authority for boy bishops, parents temporarily abdicated authority, in convents and monasteries the youngest nun and monk were allowed to act as abbess and abbot for the day. These customs, which mocked religion, were condemned by the Council of Basel (1431). In medieval England the children were reminded of the mournfulness of the day by being whipped in bed in the morning; this custom survived into the 17th century, the day is still observed as a feast day and in Roman Catholic countries as a day of merrymaking for children.

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## HEROD AND OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

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Herod came from the region of Idumaea which means he was an Edomite (Edom translated into Greek becomes Idumaea). In Genesis chapter twenty-five Rachael (Isaac's wife) is told that the two sons in her womb will become two great nations, and that those two nations will be in conflict with each other, and the older son will serve the younger son. Rachael gave birth to Esau and Jacob whose name was changed to Israel and from who came twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel who form the nation of Israel. Esau was born first. Elsewhere in the Bible he is called Edom (meaning red) when translated into Greek Edom becomes Idumaea (the offspring of Edom are called Edomites). The Old Testament prophecies paint a picture of the Edomites and the Israelites in constant conflict. Many of the Old Testament prophecies are directed against the Edomites because of their harsh treatment of Israel. The

entire book of Obadiah is written against the Edomites and predicts the demise of the nation. Some scholars think that Herod, as an Edomite, would have been aware of these Scriptures and others that prophesy a king coming out of Israel who will conquer the descendants of Esau. If this speculation is true perhaps part of Herod's paranoia was the result of his fear that these prophecies were coming true in the birth of Jesus. Perhaps that is why he insisted on murdering all the male children in and around Bethlehem who were near Jesus in age.

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## TWO KINGS AND TWO KINGDOMS

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### **One king ruled by:**

- The banners and might of his legions.
- The sword and the shield.
- Power and control.
- Oppression and bondage.
- Selfish ambition and lust for world dominance.

### **The other King ruled by:**

- A cross and a tomb.
- Love and freedom.
- Liberation and humility.

Jesus birth brought into the world a different power, a different system, a different glory and a different way to peace. The message of the cross forces us to choose who is our king and our lord? Do we give our allegiance to the secular kings of our time or dare we embrace the King of God's Kingdom.

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## SUMMARY

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Herod the Great was a Roman-appointed king of Judea (37–4 BC), He raised the prosperity of his land and Jesus was born into his kingdom. He was a practicing Jew, of Arab origin, Mark Antony, was his lifelong friend and made Herod tetrarch of Galilee; Julius Caesar also favoured the family. In 37 BC, at the age of 36, Herod became the unchallenged ruler of Judea and was tetrarch of Galilee for 32 years. He divorced his first wife, Doris, married Mariamne and had 9 wives and 14 children.

Cleopatra Queen of Egypt gained much of Herod's best land, but later Rome wanted Palestine ruled and confirmed Herod as king and restored the land Cleopatra had taken back to him. His most grandiose creation was the temple, but he was always in conflict with the Pharisees, he saw himself as the benefactor of grateful pagans and also as the protector of all Jewish people. He had a dark and cruel streak and was prone to violent murderous attacks of jealousy he unsuccessfully attempted suicide as his mental and physical health deteriorated. He murdered Mariamne (the wife he loved) her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother, his firstborn, Antipater and the infants of Bethlehem. His killing of the infants of Bethlehem became known as the feast of Holy Innocents, the early church regarded the children as the first martyrs.