

Herod the King 37-25 B.C.

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During this period we will be looking at the time from Herod's accession as king in 37 B.C. to the execution of his favorite wife Mariamne, and finally the death of the sons of Babas, in 25 B.C., when the last heir of the Hasmonean family was executed.

While Herod was king he had many powerful opponents, namely the Pharisees, the ruling class, the Hasmonean family, and Cleopatra.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees never liked the fact that Herod was the king of Judea, mainly because he was an Idumaeen, a half Jew, and a friend of the Romans. One of the problems that Herod always faced when dealing with the Pharisees was their tremendous popularity with the people. They were well-respected and considered very holy. But King Herod had his ways of dealing with the population. Whoever opposed him he quickly punished, and those who were his friends he rewarded with favors and great honors.

The Ruling Class

The second group of powerful opponents to King Herod were the aristocratic followers of Antigonus. King Herod dealt with them harshly and one time **he executed forty five** of the most wealthy and most prominent members of this class. He seized their possessions and replenished his treasury which had been depleted because of all of his bribes.

The Hasmonean Family

The third group of his powerful opponents were the family of the Hasmoneans. **His mother-in-law, Alexandra, was the main source of most of his problems.**

During this time Hyrcanus had returned from Parthian exile, yet he was mutilated and thus could not serve as high priest. Herod needed someone to replace Hyrcanus as high priest. Herod was a half Jew and therefore he could not serve as high priest.

He desired to choose a nonthreatening member of the Zadokite family, who were thought to have descended from Aaron, so he chose Ananel (Hananiel), a priest of the Babylonian exile.

Alexandra, Herod's mother-in-law, was insulted and considered it an intrusion on the Hasmonean line and only the rightful heir could serve as high priest, her sixteen-year-old son Aristobulus, the brother of Mariamne. She wrote to Cleopatra to persuade Marc Antony to force Herod to appoint her son Aristobulus as high priest. Herod immediately removed Ananel, which was unlawful because the high priest was to remain in office for his whole lifetime, and made Aristobulus high priest at 17 years old in 35 B.C.

Alexandra was finally happy but her happiness would be short-lived. King Herod did not trust her and so he had her watched very closely. Alexandra, knowing that she was being watched, accepted an invitation by Cleopatra to escape with her son and flee to Egypt. King Herod heard that she was making an escape with her son and allowed them to carry it out so that he could catch them in the act. At this time he chose to overlook the offense.

Killing Young High Priest Aristobulus

At the feast of Tabernacles people were showing great affection for Aristobulus, the officiating high priest. Herod considered this a threat and was determined to get rid of this potential rival. After the feast concluded, when Herod was invited by Alexandra to a feast at Jericho, Herod made a plan. He would act friendly to her and Aristobulus and invite them to go swimming since it was a hot day. He then bribed some men to play sports together in the water and drown Aristobulus by accident. King Herod rose up when this happened and made extreme lamentation. He then arranged the most magnificent funeral and he was not suspected in the least, by anyone except by his mother Alexandra, who decided to devote her life to revenge.

Herod's Trial

She informed Cleopatra of the murder. Cleopatra persuaded Marc Antony to call Herod to give an account for his actions. King Herod had no choice but to go and stand before Marc Antony and face possible death. Herod asked his uncle Joseph to keep watch over Mariamne during the time that he would answer to Marc Antony. Herod told Joseph in private that if he should be executed, that he was to kill Mariamne, because he did not want her to become someone else's lover.

When Herod appeared before Marc Antony he bribed him and gave an eloquent defense for his actions. **When Herod returned, Joseph's wife Salome (Herod's sister) accused Joseph of having unlawful intercourse with Mariamne.** When Herod questioned Mariamne she denied everything and he believed her. But somehow she learned about the secret command that Herod had given Joseph, and Herod found out and became outraged and executed Joseph without a trial in 34 B.C. He also had Alexandra bound in chains and put in prison, blaming her for all of his troubles.

Cleopatra

The fourth powerful opponent of King Herod was Cleopatra. As we just saw in the situation with Alexandra and how she went to Cleopatra, who in turn, reported everything to Marc Antony, Herod had serious problems with Cleopatra.

Because of her relationship with Marc Antony her territory was increasing greatly. After his expedition against Armenia in 34 B.C. she persuaded him to give her all of Phoenicia, the coast of Philistia south of the river, a portion of the Arabia, and the district of Jericho with its balsam plantations and many palm trees. The area of Jericho was Herod's most fertile portion of land in his whole kingdom. It is interesting that every time Cleopatra visited her territories King Herod received her with celebration, although he despised her. Whenever she made attempts to trap him he would never give in.

When the famous civil war broke out between Marc Antony and Octavius (later Augustus) Herod desired to take the cause of Marc Antony and help him in any way that he could. Cleopatra persuaded Marc Antony to order King Herod to go and fight against Malchus, the Arabian king. Malchus was late on his tribute and Cleopatra wanted him punished. But it was obvious that her real intent was that they would weaken each other or hopefully kill each other. This way she could easily overcome either of them.

Herod did as Marc Antony ordered him and fight against Malchus. When Herod had achieved the initial victory over the Arabs, Cleopatra came and gave help to the Arabians which resulted in Herod's defeat.

In 31 B.C. a great earthquake happened in Herod's territory which killed over 30,000 people. At this time Herod made attempts to negotiate with the Arabs and sent an envoy to Arabia to make peace. When they arrived the Arabs slew them. When Herod heard what had happened he immediately gathered his army and attacked the Arabs and defeated them, he then returned home.

Herod and Octavius

On September 2nd, 31 B.C. Marc Antony was defeated by Octavius at the Battle of Actium. This was devastating to Herod. He knew that he would answer ultimately to Octavius for everything. Herod then made a shrewd move, he murdered Hyrcanus II and accused him of plotting with the king of the Nabateans. This would eliminate any possible rival who might rule in Judea, and his hopes were that somehow Octavius would allow him to remain as the ruler of Judea.

In the spring of 30 B.C. Herod set out to meet with Octavius in Rhodes. But before he left he gave instructions to two of his friends that if he were to be executed they were to kill Alexandra and Mariamne, so that his sons and his brother Pheroras would rule in his place.

When King Herod arrived in Rhodes to stand before Octavius he played his part well. He admitted right away that he was a loyal friend of Marc Antony and that he did not fight against Octavius because of his war against the Arabs. His argument to Octavius was that if he was loyal to Marc Antony then his loyalty would benefit Octavius. Octavius allowed Herod to remain as the ruler of Judea. Herod returned home.

Later that year, in the summertime, Octavius came to the coast of Phoenicia on his way to Egypt. Herod met him and greeted him at Ptolemais with great celebration and a gift of 800 talents and supplies for the Roman soldiers during that hot season. Octavius was delighted.

In August of 30 B.C. Octavius marched through Egypt and it was at this time that Marc Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. When Herod heard this he came to Egypt to congratulate Octavius. Octavius gave him the title of king and returned to him not only

Jericho, but also Gadara, Hippos, Samaria, Gaza, Anthedon, Joppa, and Straton's Tower (later became Caesarea). Herod had definitely been given much.

The Death of Mariamne

Herod enjoyed the so-called success of his kingdom, but things in Judea were far from peaceful. While he was at Rhodes, Mariamne had found out from one of Herod's friends named Soemus that Herod gave the order for her to be killed if he was executed.

Therefore when Herod returned she was bitter toward him. Herod was very aware of all these things. His sister Salome and their mother Cyprus had always hated Mariamne and they began to spread slanderous stories about Mariamne in order to fill Herod with rage and jealousy. Herod did not listen to the stories.

Salome bribed Herod's cup-bearer to say that Mariamne had prepared some sort of love-potion for the king. When King Herod heard this he desired to know what sort of potion this was. He tortured the cup-bearer and found out nothing about the potion, but he did find out that Mariamne despised him for wanting to put her to death if he was executed. Herod immediately realized that his friends had betrayed him and he ordered them to be executed immediately.

Herod never really wanted to put Mariamne to death while he was alive, and Herod would not kill her but had her put in prison. Because of all this his emotions were so stirred that Salome took advantage of and somehow persuaded King Herod to have her finally executed.

Josephus describes that Herod was never the same after Mariamne's death:

"For he would frequently called for her, and frequently lament for her in a most indecent manner."

Herod had gotten very sick to the point of death and Alexandra began to plot how that when he died she could secure the throne. When she had begun to make plans, they had been reported to King Herod and he immediately had her executed.

The Death of the Last of the Hasmoneans

After a long period of depression over Mariamne, Herod began his bloodshed once again and executed the last of the male relatives of Hyrcanus, anyone who could dispute his occupancy of the throne.