

Judea Under Roman Rule

63-4 BC

63 BC: The Roman Conquest of Jerusalem

Roman General Pompey Magnus (Pompey the Great) had gained charge over the Mediterranean region for Rome. In the vacuum left by the dead Seleucid empire, Rome moved in and established client states across Asia Minor all the way to Syria. In mid-64 BC, Pompey created the new Roman province of Syria, which bordered the Hasmonean kingdom to the south.

Pompey dispatched a tribune (Aemilius Scaurus) to Jerusalem in September 64 BC to deal with the Jewish Civil War. John Hyrcanus II was in the middle of a siege of the temple. Scaurus sided with Aristobulus and ordered Hyrcanus' troops to disperse. He departed back to Syria. In early spring 63 BC, Pompey brought his Roman legions south and demanded Aristobulus turn over some of the fortified cities like Pella and Scythopolis. These cities were vitally important to the Jews as economic centers on vital trade routes. The Jews had initiated a program of forced allegiance to Jewish customs, culture, and religion, and if he ceded control of these places, the Gentile culture could make a rebound. Aristobulus determined to hand over the cities to Pompey, but his supporters refused. Pompey took Aristobulus into custody and headed for Jerusalem.

Instead of going through another siege, the residents of Jerusalem opened the gates to Pompey. He occupied the residential parts of the city and began to besiege the temple area, where the supporters of Aristobulus were. For three months, those inside the temple held out. In June, Roman troops breached the temple's northern wall, rushed into the temple area on the Sabbath day, and killed hundreds of people. Pompey took down the entire northern wall of the temple. He then took a small group with him and entered into the holy of holies. This ritually desecrated the temple and formally reduced the Jewish state to a conquered possession of Rome.

Under the leadership of Hyrcanus, the surviving priests were allowed to cleanse the temple, a necessary ritual to restore its sanctity. Pompey's entry into Jerusalem was not welcomed by its residents; they opened the city gates to avoid further suffering, despite their reluctance. Pompey's actions introduced the harsh reality of Roman imperialism, causing damage to the sacred aspects of Judaism and disrespecting the temple's inner sanctum—a sacrilege deeply offensive to the Jewish people. Although he refrained from looting the temple and Jerusalem did not face utter destruction or a crisis on the scale of Antiochus IV's reign, Pompey's disregard for Jewish independence and sensibilities was evident. He pursued personal glory and influenced Roman policy to benefit himself, showing little consideration for the cultural and religious significance of his actions to the Jewish community.

Judea Under Roman Control

Following Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, the Hasmonean kingdom became a Roman client state, ending its sovereignty. Pompey reinstated John Hyrcanus II as the high priest, mirroring a foreign influence over the priestly office not seen since 152 BC, but he was stripped of his royal title, marking the end of the Hasmonean reign.

Pompey's actions significantly reduced the Jewish state's territorial and economic power. He freed cities previously conquered by the Hasmoneans and severed the Jewish state's control over major trade routes. He removed the coastal plain and major cities from Jewish governance and integrated them into the Roman sphere as client states or part of new administrative structures like the Decapolis. This reconfiguration confined the Jewish state to a smaller region, renamed Judea by the Romans.

The economic impact of losing key ports and trade routes was significant, diminishing the Jewish state's economic power but not rendering it nonviable as a Roman tributary. The introduction of the Roman silver denarius and the arrival of tax collectors further integrated Judea into the Roman economic system, leading to a substantial transfer of wealth. Wealthy landowners, including some Jewish tax collectors whom their peers resented, benefited at the expense of the poorer classes, leading to increased land consolidation, dispossession, and a rise in day laborers and slavery among those unable to pay taxes or rents. This period saw a profound shift in the socio-economic landscape of Judea, reflecting the harsh realities of Roman rule and the end of Jewish autonomy, likened to a new form of Babylonian captivity driven by the perceived failings of Jewish leadership.

The Development of Judaism

In response to Hasmonean leadership's undermining of national sanctity and Roman occupation, the Pharisees intensified efforts to spread their interpretation of holiness across the Jewish state, adopting two main strategies. Firstly, they aimed to maximize their influence within the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, capitalizing on vacancies left by Sadducees who died supporting Aristobulus II against the Romans. The Pharisees succeeded in filling these gaps, especially after the death of Simeon ben-Shetach, the Sanhedrin's president and uncle to High Priest John Hyrcanus II, when the leadership passed to Pharisee Judah ben-Tabbai.

Secondly, the Pharisees focused on education, creating schools to instill their values directly into the youth, thereby circumventing the need for foreign educational systems. This was inspired by the models of the Greek gymnasium and philosophical traditions but was adapted to emphasize Jewish scripture, particularly the Torah, over Greek literature or physical education. This educational push aimed to build religious devotion and covenantal fidelity, increase literacy, and potentially improve socio-economic conditions despite the primary focus on scriptural study. This strategy was seen as a means to prevent further covenantal breaches and divine judgment, particularly during significant social and economic disruption following the Roman conquest. Through these schools, the Pharisees hoped to strengthen religious awareness and ensure the transmission of their brand of fundamentalist Pharisaic teaching across the Jewish state.

The Pharisees established schools to nurture a devout Jewish class committed to piety and prepared to lead within their communities as "saints" or "sons of the commandment." This educated group was envisaged to include future leaders and Pharisees who would uphold an ultra-conservative perspective within the Sanhedrin and the broader society.

However, labeling these educational initiatives as a public school system would be exaggerated. The schools were more sporadic and renowned for individual teachers rather than as a widespread phenomenon. While they may have contributed to a modest increase in literacy, most of the population remained uneducated, derogatorily termed "people of the land" by the Pharisees. These schools needed more central funding, with economic constraints limiting widespread participation. Teachers, often impoverished themselves, usually taught seasonally due to other work commitments, and the curriculum varied with each teacher, though scripture study was a consistent focus.

The Pharisees' schools helped proliferate Pharisaic interpretations of the Torah and contributed to a more literate society to some extent. Rituals for purity gained prominence, reflecting the Pharisees' literal interpretation of the Law. The schools also fostered a new generation of teachers and law interpreters, increasing the Pharisees' socio-political influence. Jesus, despite his criticism of the Pharisees' Oral Law, engaged with this educational system, indicating its significance in Jewish society.

Teachers attracted disciples for further education, similar to Greek philosophical mentorship, with the expectation that these disciples would continue their traditions. The emergence of synagogues as multifunctional spaces for education, debate, and worship indicates the schools' integration into Jewish religious life, showing their role in educating the youth and serving as community centers. This dual function of the synagogue facilitated the spread of Pharisaic teachings and practices throughout Palestine.

Godfearers and Converts

Jewish teachings on divine revelation and discourse became evident, especially in the educational and communal settings of the school synagogues. These spaces made Judaism more visible to Gentiles and showcased Jewish wisdom and ethics as models of the virtuous life, appealing to philosophically inclined Greeks.

Many Gentiles were drawn to Judaism's philosophical and ethical dimensions, participating in synagogue discussions and appreciating the monotheistic worship of Yahweh over the unpredictable gods of Greek mythology. While only a few became proselytes through circumcision, most admired Judaism's ethical teachings and monotheism, earning the designation "Godfearers." Despite not being fully integrated into the Jewish community, these individuals often had a profound understanding of Jewish scriptures and were respected as righteous gentiles.

The presence of Godfearers in synagogues became a significant factor in the spread of Christianity among Gentiles in the first century. Early Christian preaching appealed to many Godfearers, who found the new faith's inclusivity and rejection of the necessity for Gentiles to adopt Jewish customs compelling. This contributed to forming a culturally diverse early Christian church, predominantly gentile in

composition. The role of Godfearers in this transition highlights their importance as a bridge between Jewish and early Christian communities, facilitating Christianity's growth and cultural adaptation.

The Dynasty of the Herods

By 47 BC, John Hyrcanus II had been relegated to the Jews' moral and ceremonial leader. Antipater became Procurator over Judea. He appointed his oldest son, Phasael, as governor of Jerusalem. His younger son, Herod, was appointed over Galilee. Antipater was pivotal in transforming Judea from an embattled independent kingdom into a Roman client state. His charm and skills made him invaluable, first to Salome Alexandra and subsequently to the dispirited John Hyrcanus II. Antipater's cosmopolitan nature allowed him to seamlessly blend with various cultures—acting as a Jew among Jews, a Nabatean among Nabateans, a Greek among Greeks, and a Roman among Romans. This adaptability ensured his survival and prominence in the shifting political landscape. His roles spanned politician, diplomat, financier, military commander, builder, and eventually, dynasty founder. As Procurator, Antipater's authority surpassed the high priest's, a testament to his strategic positioning rather than a desire to overshadow Hyrcanus. Whether his actions stemmed from loyalty to the Hasmoneans or pragmatic politics remains unclear. Nonetheless, Antipater was a tireless political figure who passed on his characteristics and strategic advantages to his sons, setting the stage for them to exploit Roman divisions and Jewish fatigue.

Herod's rise to power over the Jews is a tale of political savvy, Roman patronage, and military strategy. Initially, he was a regional administrator under his father, Antipater, who had positioned the family as indispensable allies to Rome during the turbulent end of the Hasmonean dynasty. Herod capitalized on his father's connections and his marriage into the Hasmonean royal family to gain legitimacy and influence among the Jews.

His ascent was significantly bolstered by Roman support. After demonstrating his loyalty and utility to Rome, mainly through his military campaigns and suppression of dissent, Herod was appointed King of Judea by the Roman Senate, a position endorsed by Octavian (later Augustus Caesar) and Mark Antony. This move was instrumental in transitioning Judea from a semi-autonomous client kingdom to a territory directly influenced by Rome, with Herod as its ruler.

Herod's reign (37–4 BC) was marked by ambitious building projects, including the expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and efforts to Hellenize the region, often putting him at odds with the Jewish populace. Despite his unpopularity among certain Jewish groups due to his Idumean descent and his perceived impiety, his strategic marriages, political alliances, and brutal suppression of opposition solidified his control over Judea.

After the downfall of Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII in 30 BC, Herod met with Octavian (later Augustus) in Alexandria, where he regained territories previously given to Cleopatra. This expanded his realm to include vital Mediterranean ports and economic centers, eventually encompassing trade routes south of Damascus. Herod's kingdom thus surpassed the territorial size of the Hasmonean dynasty at its peak.

With revenues from these territories and a tax farming system, Herod became one of the wealthiest individuals in the Roman Empire, enabling him to support a sizeable royal court and undertake extensive



building projects. These projects integrated Greek and Roman architectural styles, clearly stating Herod's alignment with the Roman Empire and marking the era as a new age of prosperity and Roman influence.

Herod's constructions included palaces, fortresses, water infrastructures, and temples dedicated to Caesar Augustus. These reflected both his loyalty to Rome and his syncretistic embrace of Greco-Roman culture despite his nominal Jewish identity. This approach garnered favor with the Roman elite but alienated conservative Jewish factions. Among his notable achievements were the development of the fortress of Masada, the luxurious palace complex in Jerusalem, and the

transformation of Strato's Tower into the grand city of Caesarea Maritima with its impressive artificial harbor.

Herod also significantly contributed to developing other cities within and outside his kingdom, sponsoring gymnasia, theaters, and other public structures across the Eastern Mediterranean, enhancing his reputation as a generous patron in the Roman tradition. His support extended to the Olympic Games, securing his legacy as a significant benefactor of the Greco-Roman world and earning him honorary statues in Athens. Through these endeavors, Herod left a lasting impact on the physical and cultural landscape of Palestine and beyond, embodying the complex role of a Greco-Roman monarch within a Jewish kingdom.

Herod's legacy is complex; he is remembered for his architectural contributions and the economic prosperity during his reign, but also for his tyrannical rule and the biblical account of the Massacre of the

Innocents. His rule established the framework for the Herodian dynasty and significantly impacted Judea's cultural and political landscape, setting the stage for the tumultuous events of the 1st century AD.

Herod and the Jerusalem Temple

Herod's renovation of the Jerusalem temple complex is his most significant contribution to Judaism, marking his reign with an ambitious architectural project. Initiated in 19 BC, this comprehensive overhaul required extensive planning, including employing foreign architects and training priests in construction work due to their exclusive rights to build certain sections of the temple. The project, which started in earnest around 16 BC, saw the first phase—replacing the existing sanctuary—completed within eighteen months. The remainder of the inner complex was finished six years later, though construction persisted until 62 AD, offering sustained employment to thousands and bolstering Herod's reputation as a benefactor.

Herod expanded the temple precinct to 36 square acres, outstripping the combined size of significant Roman and Athenian landmarks. This expansion required massive construction efforts, including enormous retaining walls and the largest platform to date. The temple became accessible via several new entry points, leading to a gentile court adorned with mosaics and ritual baths, highlighting the temple's appeal to a broader audience beyond the Jewish community.

Significant features included the Royal Stoa and Solomon's Portico, places of commerce, teaching, and judicial proceedings, embedding Herod's royal ideology within the temple's architecture. The inner courts, elevated and exclusive to various Jewish groups, culminated in a sanctuary adorned with gold and white marble, its brilliance a testament to Herod's ambition to link his dynasty to the ancient legacy of David and Solomon and thereby legitimize his rule.

Herod's temple, while a marvel, symbolized his complex identity as a ruler—part Jewish, part Hellenistic, and wholly aligned with Roman interests. It served as a tourist attraction and a project that aimed to encapsulate Herod's syncretism and ambition, even as it played into the broader narratives of Jewish messianism and Roman patronage.

The temple's grandeur did little to mitigate the criticisms against Herod, who was seen by many as a foreign usurper and collaborator with Rome. Instead, it became a focal point for Jewish hopes of divine intervention and restoration, a sentiment epitomized by Jesus's teachings and the early Christian church's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, signaling a new era beyond Herod's architectural and political achievements.

Despite Herod's efforts to win favor, including leniency towards the politically neutral Essenes, the temple's reconstruction offered mixed outcomes. It renewed the Sadducees' political influence, previously diminished by the Pharisees. It aligned them closely with Herod's regime, yet it also underscored the deep divisions within Jewish society and the longing for a new Davidic age.

Herod and His Family

Herod the Great's family situation was intricate and fraught with drama, significantly impacting his rule and legacy. Born into an Idumean family that had converted to Judaism, Herod navigated the complex political landscape of Judea with a blend of strategic marriages, alliances, and, at times, ruthless decisions against his family members.

Herod's marital life was as complex as his political one. He had at least ten wives, through whom he sought to solidify alliances and strengthen his political position. His marriages to women from notable Jewish families, including the Hasmoneans, aimed to legitimize his rule over Judea, given his Idumean ancestry. However, these marriages often led to familial strife and suspicion.

One of Herod's most significant and tumultuous marriages was to Mariamne I, a member of the Hasmonean dynasty. While this marriage was politically advantageous, providing Herod with a link to the previous rulers of Judea

and thus more legitimacy, it also sowed seeds of discord within his family. Herod's love for Mariamne was matched by his suspicion and jealousy, which ultimately led to her execution on charges of infidelity and treason—a decision Herod reportedly regretted and mourned deeply.

Herod's relationships with his children were equally complex and troubled. His sons, Mariamne I, Alexander, and Aristobulus, were initially groomed for leadership but eventually fell victim to Herod's paranoia and suspicion. Accusations of plotting against him led to their execution. This pattern of suspicion and elimination of perceived threats within his own family continued with his eldest son, Antipater II (by his first wife, Doris), whom Herod also ordered to be executed just days before his death.

Herod's family dynamics were characterized by a cycle of favoritism, suspicion, and purges, driven by his desire to secure his throne and legacy. These internal family conflicts, coupled with Herod's ruthless suppression of any actual or imagined opposition, cast a shadow over his achievements as a ruler and builder. Despite his successful expansion of the Herodian kingdom, impressive architectural projects,

Wife	Date of Marriage	Children (date of birth)	Notes
1. Doris	ca. 49 BC	Antipater II (ca. 48 BC)	
2. Mariamne I	37 BC	Alexander III (ca. 36 BC)	
		Aristobulus IV (ca. 35 BC)	
		Son (ca. 33 BC)	Died in Rome ca. 23 BC (?)
		Salome (ca. 32 BC)	
		Cypros (ca. 31 BC)	
3. Niece	ca. 28 BC	—	Daughter of Herod's brother
4. Niece	ca. 27 BC	—	Daughter of Herod's sister
5. Malthace	ca. 26 BC	Olympias (ca. 25 BC)	Married her cousin Joseph, son of Joseph
		Archelaus (23 BC)	Ethnarch of Judea
		Antipas (ca. 19 BC)	Tetrarch of Galilee & Perea
6. Cleopatra of Jerusalem	ca. 25 BC	Herod (ca. 24 BC)	
		Philip II (ca. 21 BC)	Tetrarch of Iturea & Trachonitis
7. Mariamne II	ca. 23 BC	Philip I (ca. 22 BC)	Married Herodias (daughter of Aristobulus IV)
8. Pallas	ca. 21 BC	Phasael (ca. 19 BC)	
9. Phaedra	ca. 19 BC	Roxana (ca. 18 BC)	
10. Elpis	ca. 17 BC	Salome (ca. 16 BC)	

and efforts to modernize Judea, Herod's legacy is also marked by the bloodshed and tragedy within his household.

The impact of Herod's familial decisions extended beyond his reign, influencing the succession and stability of the Herodian dynasty. The deaths of his potential heirs led to uncertainty and disputes over his succession, contributing to the eventual decline of his dynasty. Thus, Herod's family situation not only reflects the personal tragedy of a ruler whose paranoia led him to decimate his household but also underscores the broader implications of such turmoil for the governance and future of Judea under Herodian rule.

The Eagle Affair (4 BC)

The Eagle Affair refers to a significant incident towards the end of Herod the Great's reign, around 4 BCE, involving two Torah scholars, Judas and Matthias (not to be confused with the Apostle Matthias). This event highlighted the growing tension between Herod and specific segments of Jewish society, particularly those opposed to Roman influence and Herod's attempts to Hellenize Judea.

The incident centered on Herod's decision to place a golden eagle—a symbol of Roman authority and Jupiter—above the main entrance of the newly renovated Second Temple in Jerusalem. To many devout Jews, the presence of this emblem in such a sacred context was an abomination, a blatant violation of Jewish laws against idolatry and graven images. It symbolized not only Roman domination but also Herod's disregard for Jewish religious sensitivities.

Judas and Matthias, among others, were incensed by this act. They interpreted it as a direct assault on their faith and an intolerable imposition of pagan symbols upon their place of worship. Seizing upon Herod's deteriorating health and anticipating his imminent death, they incited their students to remove and destroy the eagle. This act of defiance was a clear statement against Romanization and Herod's policies.

The response from Herod, despite his failing health, was swift and brutal. Judas, Matthias, and their followers were arrested. In a public demonstration of his authority and intolerance for dissent, Herod had them burned alive. This harsh punishment was a stark warning to anyone who might challenge his rule or the Roman presence in Judea.

Herod's Death 4 BC

The death of Herod the Great in 4 BC marked the end of an era in Judean history and the beginning of a tumultuous period of transition and fragmentation for the region. Herod's death was preceded by intense family drama, political maneuvering, and widespread anticipation among the Jewish population for change, given Herod's notorious rule characterized by outstanding architectural achievements and brutal tyrannical measures.

In his final years, Herod suffered from a painful and debilitating illness, often identified by historians as chronic kidney disease combined with Fournier's gangrene, based on descriptions from the historian Josephus. His condition led to intense paranoia and further violent outbursts against perceived threats,

including the execution of his son Antipater II just days before his death. Herod had already killed two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, and his beloved wife, Mariamne I, among others, due to suspicions of a conspiracy against him.

As Herod's health declined, his concern for maintaining control over Judea after his death led him to change his will multiple times, ultimately dividing his kingdom among his remaining sons. Archelaus was appointed ethnarch over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; and Philip was made tetrarch of the regions to the northeast.

Herod's death was reportedly met with relief by many Jews, who had seen his reign as oppressive and contrary to Jewish religious laws and traditions. According to Josephus, Herod, aware of the likelihood that his death would be celebrated, ordered the arrest of numerous prominent Jewish leaders and commanded that they be killed upon his death to ensure that mourning would mark his passing. This order, however, was not carried out after he died.

Herod died after a 37-year reign, leaving behind a legacy of architectural magnificence, including the expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and a kingdom that, although more politically stable and economically prosperous than ever during the Hasmonean dynasty, was deeply divided. His death led to immediate unrest and uprisings, as his sons lacked his political acumen and the respect (or fear) he had commanded, both from the Jewish populace and from Roman authorities. Archelaus' rule, in particular, was marked by brutality and incompetence, and he was deposed by the Romans in 6 AD, leading to the direct Roman administration of Judea.

Herod's death thus not only ended his complex and controversial reign and set the stage for the increased Roman intervention in Judean affairs, culminating in the Jewish-Roman wars and the profound transformation of the region in the following centuries.

The Aftermath of Herod's Death

The aftermath of Herod the Great's death in 4 BC was marked by political instability, territorial realignment, and the beginning of direct Roman intervention in Judean affairs. Herod's last will divided his kingdom among three of his surviving sons, leading to uncertainty and transition that significantly impacted the region's political landscape.

Division of the Kingdom: Herod's kingdom was divided as per his last will, ratified by Augustus Caesar. Archelaus received Judea, Samaria, and Idumea as ethnarch; Herod Antipas was made tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; and Philip became tetrarch of the northeastern territories, including Iturea and Trachonitis. This division aimed to maintain Herodian rule across these regions under the oversight of Rome but led to varied governance styles and effectiveness.

Unrest and Uprisings: Herod's death ignited immediate unrest among the Jewish population, who saw an opportunity to challenge the Herodian and Roman status quo. The transition of power was not smooth, with several revolts erupting across the territory. In particular, Archelaus faced opposition in Judea and Samaria, which was marked by violence during Passover in Jerusalem, which he suppressed harshly.

Roman Intervention: The instability and Archelaus's inability to control his domain effectively led to his deposition by the Romans in 6 AD. Judea was then transformed into a Roman province, directly governed by Roman prefects or procurators. This shift significantly increased Roman influence in the region, setting the stage for further tensions and the eventual Jewish-Roman wars.

Economic and Administrative Continuity: Despite the political upheaval, the financial and administrative systems established under Herod, including extensive building projects and enhanced Judea's infrastructure, continued under his sons. Herod Antipas and Philip, in particular, could rule peacefully and continue their father's work in their territories.

Herodian Dynasty's Decline: Although Herod's sons managed to retain control of their territories for some time, the division of the kingdom and subsequent events highlighted the beginning of the dynasty's decline. The direct Roman rule in Judea and the varying success of Herod's sons in maintaining control foreshadowed the diminishing influence of Herod's lineage.

Cultural and Religious Impact: The changes following Herod's death also had significant cultural and religious implications. The expansion of Roman influence accelerated the Hellenization of the region. At the same time, Jewish religious leaders and groups, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, navigated the new political landscape to maintain their influence and practices. The period also saw the growth of messianic expectations and the rise of movements like the Zealots, who sought to resist Roman domination.

For Discussion

1. How did Pompey the Great's actions and the Roman Empire impact the political landscape and autonomy of the Jewish state in the late 1st century BC?
2. Discuss the implications of Pompey's decision to desecrate the Holy of Holies. What does this reveal about Roman attitudes towards local religions and sacred spaces?
3. Analyze the economic consequences of Rome's conquest of Jerusalem on the Jewish state, especially the loss of critical economic centers and trade routes.
4. How did the Pharisees' strategies for spreading their interpretation of Judaism reflect their response to Roman rule and Hellenistic influences?

5. Evaluate the significance of education and the establishment of Pharisaic schools in maintaining Jewish identity and religious practices under Roman domination.

6. Consider the role and impact of Godfearers in the spread of Christianity in the 1st century. What does their presence in synagogues tell us about the interaction between Jewish and Gentile communities?

7. Discuss the effects of Herod the Great's architectural projects on Judean society and its relationship with Rome, particularly the renovation of the Second Temple.

8. How did Herod's family dynamics, including his marriages and treatment of his sons, reflect his reign's broader political tensions and challenges?

9. Analyze the significance of the Eagle Affair as an act of resistance against Herod's and Rome's religious impositions. What does it reveal about Jewish sentiments towards Roman rule and Hellenistic culture?

10. Reflect on the immediate aftermath of Herod's death, including the division of his kingdom among his sons. How did this transition period set the stage for future conflicts and the eventual direct Roman rule over Judea?