

Herod Antipas

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Introduction

Herod Antipas was the appointed leader of Galilee and Perea, which were parts of the Judea during the time of Jesus. He is a common name in Biblical stories regarding the beheading of John the Baptist and the crucifixion of Jesus. He is also known to have ruled the Roman provinces of Galilee and Perea from 4 BCE until he died in 39 BCE. In this paper, Herod's life, accomplishments, legacy, and portrayal in ancient sources will be explored.

Early Life and Death

Herod Antipas is believed to have been born in the south of modern-day Palestine during 21 BCE. He was the son of Antipater, who was the ruler of Judea, as appointed by Augustus. Antipas's mother was from Petra and was a noble (Bruce, 1963). He was raised Jewish and had close ties with the Roman Empire. Herod's father was of great influence in the region, and upon his death, his son inherited the kingdom. Herod Antipas had many siblings, and he was not his father's first choice of heir. The decision to give him the throne was made by the ruler of the Roman Empire, who had jurisdiction over Judea.

Herod ruled Galilee and Perea until 39 CE, when he was exiled to Gaul, modern-day France. He was exiled due to his poor governance and frequent breaking of wars that were threatening the kingdom (Bruce, 1963). He lost the war to his Nabataean neighbors, which made him lose favor with the Roman Emperor. It is believed that in his last days, he suffered from arteriosclerosis and a mental disorder. Herod tried taking his own life without success but shortly after died.

Herod's Nationality

Herod was born during the era when the Roman Empire had installed the Herodian dynasty to rule over various territories in the province of Judea (Bruce, 1963). Herod was born in Galilee and was raised Jewish, as his father had converted to the religion to gain the support of the Jews in the region. Herod was considered a Roman citizen as he was an appointed ruler who oversaw the interests of the empire in his kingdom (Bruce, 1963). He maintained a close tie with the Roman Empire and its rulers, even having his subjects pay taxes to Caesar. Although he was considered Jewish, Antipas maintained a relationship with Pagans and even Gentiles to navigate the cultural and religious tensions of the region. He acted as a mediator between the different religious groups to maintain his power and authority.

Accomplishments

Herod was the ruler of Galilee and Perea until his death. He had the title "Tetrarch" given to him by Augustus Caesar, Emperor of Rome. Herod is also referred to as "King" in many biblical verses. In Acts 12:1, Herod is referred to as king: "Now about time, King Herod stretched out his hands to oppress some of the assembly" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001). Herod was a ruler who was interested in modern buildings. He is accredited with restoring the city of Sepphoris, which was destroyed by fire. The city was only three miles from Nazareth. Herod built a new capital for his kingdom and named it Tiberias. The building had modern architecture with hot baths, a stadium, a sanctuary for prayers, and an ornate palace. The capital was named in honor of the Roman Empire's ruler by the name of Tiberius. The capital later becomes a rabbinic center for Jewish teaching and learning. Due to the history of the place being built on top of graves, it was considered impure, and many Jews refused to enter it. Despite the

backlash from the Jewish community, Herod was able to establish Tiberias as a thriving city. The cities became centers for trade and commerce, which enabled the kingdom to thrive. Herod built Antonia's fortress in Jerusalem. He also built a temple, which was considered among his greatest achievements.

During his reign as tetrarch, Galilee, and Perea, which were parts of the Judean province, thrived. Herod built roads and public buildings and improved the overall infrastructure of the regions. He also increased agricultural production, which led to further prosperity for the kingdom through population growth. Due to the prosperity of the region, many settlers and traders settled there, leading to further economic growth and development. He maintained a strong military presence, which helped deal with the constant raids. Herod was known as a ruthless ruler who even turned against his family when threatened. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Herod had at least 40,000 men in his army. To further maintain his reign and protect his kingdom, Herod collaborated with the Roman Empire, which assisted him with armies and equipment whenever he needed to protect his kingdom.

Although Herod's accomplishments were great, he was also tied to several negative ones. Herod is tied to his collaboration with Pontius Pilate and the execution of John the Baptist, which is his most infamous accomplishment, especially among Christians. He also divorced his first wife Phasaelis and married his brother's wife, Herodias.

Literary Evidence

In the New Testament, Herod is mentioned in the books of Luke, Matthew, and Mark as a complex and controversial leader. According to the Gospel books, Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee, which was under Judea Province during the time of Jesus' ministry. He is depicted as

a cruel leader who had no mercy on his subjects. In Matthew 14, it is mentioned that Herod used the excuse of his daughter's birthday wish to execute John the Baptist, whom he considered a threat to his kingdom. (Matthew 14:9–10, *English Standard Version Bible*, 2001) "The king was distressed, but because of his oath and his dinner guest, he ordered that her request be granted, and John was beheaded in the prison." Herod also played a big role in the prosecution of Jesus, although he knew he was innocent. He granted the wish of the people to witness Jesus being crucified. According to Biblical scholars such as Morten Horning Jensen, Herod's attitude toward Jesus was vague. Jensen (2012) points out that Jesus was born during the reign of Antipas and that his mission was still accomplished when he was the leader of Galilee. Herod's dislike for Jesus was drawn from the fact that he thought Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected. In Mark 3:6 it is stated that "the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodian against him, how to destroy him". This shows that there was a plot to kill Jesus by the Pharisees, aided by Herod, as they feared his influence.

A Jewish historian, Josephus, provided a detailed account of Herod Antipas's reign in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book XVII). Josephus portrayed Herod as a ruler who often clashed with the Jewish authorities. He described him as a ruler who was cruel and tyrannical. Josephus, in his book, describes what led to the execution of John the Baptist, which were escalated by his marriage to Herodias (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book XVII). The wife had a grudge against John the Baptist because he had criticized their marriage. Josephus also describes Herod's cruelty to the Pharisees who betrayed him, and he had them prosecuted.

Apart from biblical evidence, there is still archeological and literary evidence showing the reign and rule of Herod Antipas. The remains of the temple and its walls remain visible at Al-Haram al-Sharif (Hoehner, 2007). There are remains of the coins of Herod Antipas, as he was

allowed to mint his coins by the Roman Empire. The coins were of basic design, with palm branches and Greek inscriptions. Arthur L. Friedberg noted that the coins by Herod were basic as he didn't allow for the use of his image like previous leaders (Hoehner, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Herod Antipas was a significant figure in the history of Galilee and Perea during his reign. He was a ruler who inherited the region of Galilee and Perea from the Roman Empire after his father's death. He was an ambitious leader who built many palaces and temples. Despite his ambitious building projects and army strength, Herod I was described in the Bible as a flawed ruler who was cruel to his people. He was heavily criticized for his marriage to Herodias, which was seen as a moral transgression. The Bible, especially the Gospel books, provides detailed literary evidence of Herod's rule and his involvement in the beheading of John and the crucifixion of Jesus. Josephus, a Jewish historian, provided a significant account of Herod's life and reign. There is also written archeological evidence following the retrieval of various building sites, the temple, and Herod's coin.

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