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A Godless King (Herod)

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THE PHYSICAL BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST A GODLESS KING (HEROD)

THE HEROD THE GREAT FILE

STATISTICS ON HIS LIFE

Father: Herod Antipater

Spouses: Doris, Mariamne I, Mariamne II, Malthace, Cleopatria

Sons: Herod Archelaus (Mt. 2:22); Herod Antipas (Mt. 14:1-12); Herod Philip (Mt. 14:3)

First mention: Matthew 2:1

Final mention: Matthew 2:19

Meaning of his name: "Seed of a hero"

Frequency of his name: Referred to nine times

Biblical books mentioning him: One book (Matthew)

Occupation: King over Israel

Important fact about his life: He was the king who attempted to murder the infant Jesus.

STORY OF HIS LIFE

The life of this powerful Judean ruler can be summarized as follows:

- **Herod the Builder**

It is generally agreed by historians that he was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, builder of the ancient world! He was given the title King of the Jews by the Roman authorities. Herod ruled for over thirty years (from 37 to 4 B.C.).

- A. He built many hippodromes, amphitheatres, and pagan temples in various cities.
- B. Many old cities were refounded and new cities were constructed.
- C. He rebuilt Samaria.
- D. He rebuilt Strato's Tower on the coast of the Mediterranean and a large artificial harbor in Caesarea.
- E. He built race courses for both men and horses.
- F. He built a royal palace for himself in Jerusalem and a magnificent one on Masada.
- G. Herod owned a monopoly over the extraction of salt from the Dead Sea.

H. But by far his most notable construction was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem!

Josephus, the Jewish historian, writes:

To conciliate the Jews, who had been alienated by his cruelties, he with much address proposed to reconstruct their ancient temple which Solomon had originally built, though it has been shrewdly suspected that he entertained the sinister motive to possess himself of the public genealogies collected there, especially those relating to the priestly families, unto whom they were of paramount importance and interest. It is said that he thereby hoped to destroy the genealogy of the expected Messiah, lest he should come and usurp his kingdom. However that may be, he endeavored to make the Jewish nation understand that he was doing them a great kindness without cost to them, and he promised that he would not attempt to build them a new temple, but merely restore to its ancient magnificence the one originally built by David's son. For the restoration made by Zerubbabel upon the return of Israel from the captivity of Babylon seems to have fallen short in architectural measurement, in height some sixty cubits, and the whole was becoming marked with decay. To this end Herod took down the old temple to its very foundations, and engaged one thousand wagons to draw stones and ten thousand skilled workmen to teach the priests the art of stonecutting and carpentering.

The temple proper which he erected was one hundred cubits in length and twenty cubits in height. It was constructed of white stone, each one being twenty-five cubits long and eight in height. Surmounting this structure was a great white dome adorned with a pinnacle of gold, suggestive of a mountain of snow as seen from afar.

The Jewish tradition holds that the temple itself was built by the priests in one year and six months, when they celebrated its completion with Jewish feasts and sacrifices; but that the cloisters and outer enclosures were eight years in building. However that may be, additions were made continuously from year to year; so that though Herod began the rebuilding in 20 B.C., as a whole it was literally true that the temple was built in forty and six years, when the Jews so asserted to Jesus (John 2:20).

But the end was not yet, for the work was really continued until A.D. 64, just six years before the final destruction of the temple (Ant. XV. Ch. 11).

- **Herod the Brutal**

His barbaric cruelty in the first century may be favorably compared to those done by the murderous Russian dictator, Joseph Stalin, in the twentieth century!

Not only were there any number of victims involved, but also various methods of killing them as ordered by Herod.

Authors O'Reilly and Dugard observe:

He has ordered deaths by hanging, stoning, strangulation, fire, the sword, live animals, serpents, beating, and a type of public suicide in which victims are forced to hurl

themselves off tall buildings! (*The Killing of Jesus*, Henry Holt and Company: New York, p. 13)

In addition to the above, consider:

- A. He tried to murder anybody who even remotely seemed to threaten his throne.
- B. He killed his favorite wife Mariamne (one of his ten wives), her mother, and three of his sons.
- C. He murdered his son Antipater just five days before his own death.
- D. He replaced Jewish high priests with pagan priests from Babylon and Alexandria.
- E. He levied unbearable taxes upon the people.
- F. This cruelty prompted Caesar Augustus to say, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son."
- G. Realizing people would rejoice and celebrate his death, Herod ordered a large number of nobles among the Jews to be killed on the day of his death so there would be grievous sorrow rather than great celebration.
- H. On May 7, 2007, an Israeli archaeologist from Hebrew University, led by Ehud Netzer, announced he had discovered Herod's Temple.

- **Herod the Broken**

King Solomon once observed:

" . . . the way of the transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

The final years of Herod's life provides graphic if not morbid proof in regard to these words. Again, to quote from O'Reilly and Dugard, who imagine Herod gazing out of a palace window toward Bethlehem, anxiously awaiting from soldiers that his command to murder all male babies two years and under had been done. These two men write:

Herod sighs. Back in his youth, he would never have stood in a window and worried about the future. A great king and warrior such as he would have ordered that a bridle be thrown over his favorite white charger so that he might gallop to Bethlehem and murder the child himself. But Herod is now a man of sixty-nine. His massive girth and incessant medical problems make it physically impossible for him to leave his palace, let alone mount a horse. His bloated face is wreathed in a beard that extends from the bottom of his chin to just below his Adam's apple. On this day, he wears a royal purple Roman-style mantle over a short-sleeved white silk tunic. Normally Herod prefers soft leather leggings that have been stained purple. But today even the gentlest bristle of fabric against his inflamed big toe is enough to make him cry out in pain. So it is that Herod, the most powerful man in Judea, hobbles through the palace barefoot.

But gout is the least of Herod's ailments. The king of the Jews, as this nonpracticing convert to the religion likes to be known, is also suffering from lung disease, kidney

problems, worms, a heart condition, sexually transmitted diseases, and a horrible version of gangrene that has caused his genitals to rot, turn black, and become infested with maggots—thus the inability to sit astride, let alone ride, a horse. (Ibid., pp. 11-13)

By the way, this was but the first of many occasions when Satan attempted to kill Jesus. These were:

- A. After His sermon in Nazareth (Lk. 4:28-30)
- B. After He claimed to be greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:57, 58)
- C. After He claimed to be God (Jn. 10:31-33)
- D. After relating the parable of the sower and the seed (Mk. 4:36-38; Mt. 8:23, 24)
- E. After raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:53)
- F. While He was in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-34; Lk. 22:44)
- G. During His scouring (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Jn. 19:1)

It is a well-known fact that scourging a prisoner sentenced for crucifixion, was not only a judicial act of punishment, but also an attempt by the soldiers to kill the victim, thus saving them the unpleasant act of dragging him to the place of execution and their placing him on the cross. And humanly speaking, they almost succeeded! Note Isaiah's prophecy concerning this event—

"Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness" (Isa. 52:14, NIV).

In fact Jesus was so weak He was unable to carry the cross!

"Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus" (Lk. 23:26).

All the above goes to show just how desperate Satan was in attempting to keep the Savior from dying on the cross!

- H. One final observation: Is there anything more terrible to be said about Herod? There is indeed. Consider—

This ruler and one of his offspring, Herod Antipas, were the only father and son in history who were the mortal enemies of Jesus Christ!

1. One unsuccessfully attempted to murder Him.
2. The other successfully attempted to mock Him (Lk. 23:6-11).

REFLECTIONS FROM HIS LIFE

My soldiers tell me they took another route home. Mark my word, when I locate and kill that miserable little infant they called the King of the Jews, those traveling astronomers will suffer my wrath also! In fact, the Jewish leaders who sent them to Bethlehem in the first place deserve

to be punished! What a country to be ruler over! I mean, where else would a powerful monarch feel threatened by a silly story about a star and a baby king? (Mt. 2:2-6, 12)

The report has just reached me. All those male babies in Bethlehem have been killed. Good! Wait a minute! What do you mean, with one exception? Curses! I'm told a carpenter, his wife, and his infant son escaped to Egypt! Could he be the one? Ridiculous! The whole story is absurd in the first place! And yet . . . (Mt. 2:14, 16)