12. Herod, King of the Jews
No pun intended, the transition had a lot to do with a Jewish princess. In this case it was a Hasmonean princess named Mariamne.

Some years before Aristobulus II and his son died rebelling against the Romans, the son Alexander and his wife Alexandra had two children; a son named Aristobulus III and a daughter named Mariamne.

When Herod became King, he had been betrothed to Mariamne. Since Mariamne’s father was a Hasmonean, even though a rebellious one, Herod hoped that this marriage would give him greater legitimacy in the eyes of those still faithful to the Torah. Herod waited until he became King before marrying Mariamne. Herod also made Mariamne’s brother, Aristobulus III, the High Priest in Jerusalem. A year later, he had him drowned while bathing in a river. It is said, however, that Mariamne was the true love of Herod’s life.
Herod the Great, born around 74 BCE, was the son of Antipater, an Idumean Jew and Cypros, a Nabatean. Herod had four siblings. Herod’s family became Jewish when his grandfather converted during John Hyrcanus’ reign as king. Since Herod’s mother was not Jewish, many of those he ruled did not consider Herod to be a true Jew.

You may recall that when Esau was cheated out of his birthright by Jacob, he went off to live with the people of Ishmael in Edom, from which Idumea draws its name. One could say that Esau’s kin, Herod, finally took back that birthright when he became King of the Jews. The Torah (Deut. 23) indicated the Edomites were to have a special status among the Jewish people.

“You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land. The children who are begotten of them shall enter into the congregation of the LORD in their third generation.”
What Did Herod Accomplish as King?

- Herod was named King around 41/40 BCE but he had to win the throne by defeating the Hasmonean rebel Antigonus. He accomplished that task in 37 BCE.

- Neither Josephus nor any other source that I could find mentioned whether or not his mother had converted to Judaism when she married Herod’s father, Antipater.

- Herod honestly tried his best to please both his Roman masters and his Jewish subjects. He also worked hard on his own behalf.

- In 31 BCE, a severe earthquake hit Jerusalem. After the earthquake, Herod began a rebuilding program that included a new market, an amphitheater, new building where the Sanhedrin could convene and a new royal palace. Most importantly, in 20 BCE he started to rebuild the Temple.

- There were other cities, such as Jericho and the city of Samaria where Herod ordered new buildings to be built. New fortresses in places such as Masada served the security of both the Jewish people and their king. Herod's crowning achievement was the construction of a splendid new port, called Caesarea Maritima in honor of the emperor (the harbor of the port city was called Sebastos, which means Augustus in Greek). It is said that Herod wanted Caesarea Maritima to be a new Alexandria.

- Naturally, all this building required tax money. When Roman taxes were added to Herod’s tax and the Temple tax, the people felt a harsh burden.
**Did Herod the Great Marry?**

Oh yes! Often!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doris</td>
<td>Antipater III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariamne I</td>
<td>Alexander, Aristobulus IV, Salampsio (d), Cyros (d)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mariamne II</td>
<td>Herod II (also called Herod Philip, 1\textsuperscript{st} Husband of Herodias)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malthace</td>
<td>Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Olympias (d)</td>
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<td>Cleopatra of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Philip the Tetrarch, Herod</td>
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<td>Palas</td>
<td>Phasael</td>
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<td>Phaidra</td>
<td>Roxanne (d)</td>
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<td>Elpis</td>
<td>Salome (d)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cousin (name unknown)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niece (name unknown)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

(d) = daughter, green=important but died before NT times red=played a direct /indirect role in the NT

Herod went well beyond the later exploits of Henry VIII of England and took ten wives to himself. He had children by eight of those wives. A number of these children play a role in the Christian New Testament.

Herod planned to have one of his sons succeed him as King, however, when he died, the Romans divided up his kingdom among several sons. A number of Herod’s descendants which are mentioned in the New Testament are simply called “King Herod”.
Why Were Herod’s First Three Sons Important?

- Herod’s first three sons were important because they demonstrated his cruelty. This is relevant when the question of the Slaughter of the Innocents is raised.

- Doris was Herod’s first wife. She was a commoner and probably also an Idumean. Herod had a son with Doris named Antipater (Antipater II), after Herod’s father.

- Herod divorced Doris sometime around 40 BCE to allow him to marry Mariamne I. Both Doris and Antipater II were sent into exile.

- Mariamne I (Miriam), a very beautiful woman and much beloved by Herod. Herod’s sister Salome, however, resented Mariamne and constantly plotted against her. After several incidents, Herod finally ordered Mariamne’s execution in 29 BCE. The execution of a Hasmonean princess was not well received by the Jewish people.

- Salome also resented Mariamne’s two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus IV. They had been raised in the Imperial Court in Rome and Salome considered them haughty. In 7 BCE, Herod had both strangled. The death of two Hasmonean princes caused Herod to be hated by a large portion of the Jewish people. The desire for a new king grew who would rid Judah of Herod and his Roman masters.

- Meanwhile Herod’s first wife, Doris, was called back from exile and her son Antipater II named the official heir to Herod’s throne. In 5 BCE, Antipater II, growing impatient, was charged with attempting to assassinate his father. He was found guilty and executed in 4 BCE just days before Herod the Great’s own death.
How Did The Roman Emperor React to These Executions?

It turns out that Herod was not only unpopular among his own people. A Roman author named Macrobius wrote a compendium of ancient Roman lore that he called the Saturnalia. In Book 2, Section 4, verse 11 of that book, Macrobius gives us an insight into Caesar Augustus’ opinion of Herod as he quotes the Roman Emperor saying the following about him;

“It is better to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son”

Since, like many of the elite of Rome at that time, Caesar Augustus commonly spoke Greek as well as Latin. There is a bit of a pun in that saying that comes across in Greek:

“It is better to be Herod’s hus (the Greek word for pig. It rhymes with goose) than Herod’s huios” (the Greek word for son pronounced hoo-yos)

The meaning, of course, is that as a Jew (at least a nominal Jew), Herod could not eat pork so any pig that belonged to Herod was safe. Not so safe were Herod’s sons, three of whom were condemned to death by their father.

Did Herod actually slaughter all the male children from 0-2 years of age in Bethlehem as the New Testament claims. There is no source other than the Christian Scriptures to verify that story. Was Herod bloodthirsty enough to do so? The Emperor of Rome seems to have thought so.
Was the Slaughter of the Innocents a Real Event?

Chapter Two of Matthew’s gospel tells us about the Slaughter of the Innocents. Herod the Great was so angry about being fooled by the Magi that he ordered all male children in Bethlehem under the age of two to be slaughtered. Many biblical scholars doubt the truth of this story saying that such an event would surely be noted by some other historical source such as Josephus.

But would it? Writer George Martin in his book, Scripture Footnotes: The Word of Jesus” believes that the “little town of Bethlehem” was a quite modest village during Jesus’ time. Estimates vary but a reasonable guess about the population would be about 800 people. If about a third of that population were children that would make about 240. If half of them were male, that would make about 120. If a quarter of them were under the age of two, that would make 30. This is still an unspeakable act of horror but, as we have seen, not one that is at all out of line for Herod. Sadly, given the times, it may not even have been remarkable enough to note in general historical records.

Also, assuming this story of the visit of the Magi is not simply a pious tale, it reveals to us an interesting fact. Most Christians seem to think that the Magi came to visit Jesus shortly after his birth but, if King Herod sought to kill all male children under the age of two, it is not unreasonable to think that the Magi made their visit during the time that Jesus was a toddler rather than a newborn.
How Large Was Herod’s Kingdom?

By Roman standards it was not large at all but by Jewish standards Herod’s kingdom was about as large as the original lands shared by Joshua among the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Once again having a Temple with a High Priest and Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem, it reminded many of the Kingdom of David and Solomon.

Herod’s Kingdom included Idumea, Judea and Samaria (the old divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah), the lands of Galilee, Perea and Trachonitis and Gaulanitis (today’s Golan Heights).

What Herod’s Kingdom also had, however, was a King who the people saw as half Jewish at best and one not even of the Hasmonean line of Jewish kings. The people longed for a true Jewish King of the line of David. Herod died in 4 BCE and his kingdom was divided among three of his sons.
How Did Herod’s Sons Share His Kingdom?

- **Herod Archelaus** ruled Idumea, Judea and Samaria as an Ethnarch. He was not given the title of King that his father had. He reigned from 4 BCE to 6 CE when he was replaced by Roman procurators for failing to keep the peace. He was exiled to Gaul. He died in 18 CE.

- **Herod Antipas** was named Tetrarch of the Galilee and Perea. He was the “King Herod” who ordered the death of John the Baptist. He participated in the trial of Jesus. He too was exiled to Gaul by Gaius (Caligula). The date of his death is uncertain.

- **Philip the Tetrarch** ruled the lands north of the Decapolis (10 independent cities). He died in 34 CE. He is not the Philip whose wife divorced him to marry Herod Antipas) involved in the Baptist’s death (Mark 6:17)

Note: An ethnarch is a ruler of a people (ethnos in Greek). A tetrarch, technically speaking, is a ruler of one fourth of a political region. The term was often used somewhat loosely.
How Many “King Herods” Lived in New Testament Times?

• Herod the Great (the original King Herod of the Visit of the Magi)
  - Began the work of restoring the second temple
  - Met the Three Wise Men
  - Ordered the slaughter of the innocents

• Herod Archelaus (called by his actual name in Matt:2:22, not really called ‘King Herod’)
  - Son of Herod the Great by Malthace and Tetrarch in Jerusalem
  - He was the new Herod that the Holy Family feared upon their return from Egypt
  - Herod Archelaus’ incompetence led to his replacement by a Roman procurator one of whom was Pontius Pilate (@26-36 CE)

• Herod Antipas (the ‘King Herod’ of John the Baptist and of Jesus’ trial)
  - Son of Herod the Great also by Malthace and Tetrarch in Galilee where Jesus lived and of Perea
  - Ordered the death of John the Baptist
  - Met Jesus before his execution then passed him on to Pilate

• Herod Philip (Herod II – Never really called ‘King Herod’)
  - Son of Herod the Great by Mariamne II
  - Herod II was fortunate enough not to be too political however…
  - Herod II was the Herod Philip mentioned in the Christian Scriptures when Herod Antipas divorced his own wife and encouraged the wife of Herod II (Herodias) to divorce Herod Philip. John the Baptist publicly condemned the union and was beheaded
Who Was Herod Agrippa?

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great and Mariamne I (via Aristobulus IV and Berenice). He was of the Hasmonean line.

He was named after Marcus Agrippa, a Roman statesman.

When Philip the Tetrarch died, Herod was given rule over Ituraea, Gaulanitis & Trachonitis.

When Herod Antipas was banished to Gaul, Agrippa was given rule over Galilee and Perea.

In return for his support of Claudius to succeed Caligula as Emperor, Claudius removed the Roman procurator from Idumea, Judea and Samaria and allowed Herod Agrippa to rule as king in Jerusalem from 41-44 CE. Herod Agrippa ruled over a territory as large as that of Herod the Great.

Herod Agrippa was the “King Herod” who ordered the death of the Apostle James in Acts 12. Since Herod Agrippa could claim both Herodian and Hasmonean lineage, he could be called the last Jewish King of Judea.
How Did Herod Agrippa Gain Such Power?

• Herod Agrippa’s rise to fame is a remarkable one. He grew up as a rather profligate young man in Rome. He was deeply in debt to a lot of important people. When Herod Philip died and Agrippa was given control of his territory, he suddenly became serious.

• Unlike his grandfather, Herod Agrippa was a Hasmonean like his grandmother, Mariamne I. He was also like his ancestor, John Hyrcanus, a faithful Jew who honored the Torah and encouraged Jewish customs and rituals among his people. As a result, Herod Agrippa was much loved by the Jewish during the brief time that he governed them (@37-44 CE, 41-44 CE as king). Perhaps he was too much loved for his own good.

• It is interesting to note that when Agrippa tried to strengthen the fortifications around Jerusalem, the Romans forced him to stop. When he tried to establish friendly relations with neighboring lands, the Romans suspected him of trying to forge potentially hostile alliances. Agrippa died at age 54 while attending Roman games in Caesaria.

Did Herod Agrippa die a natural death or was he killed, perhaps poisoned by the Romans? They seemed to be fearful of a popular king who could claim Hasmonean ancestry. They did not want a sudden rise of Jewish nationalism. It wasn’t long after Agrippa’s death that the Romans once again appointed procurators to govern all of the Jewish Kingdom
Who Was the Last of the Herodian Line?

- Herod Agrippa II (Agrippa II)
  - Son of Herod Agrippa I and brother of Berenice and Drusilla and great-grandson of Herod the Great
  - Named ruler of Chalcis (Lebanon) by Claudius in 50 CE at the age of 22
  - The new Roman Emperor, Nero, added Perea to the lands governed by Agrippa II in 54 CE. The fact that Perea was not governed by a Roman procurator during the Jewish wars (@66-70 CE) kept the region out of much of the conflict. This was important for Jewish Christians during those wars. More will be discussed about this in a later class
  - Agrippa II was the “King Agrippa” that Paul spoke with in Acts 25 and 26
  - Since Agrippa II sided with Rome in the Jewish wars his political position remained safe until his death in 93/94 CE
  - Herod Agrippa II was the last prince of the line of Herod to rule in the region
Can’t Tell the Herods Without a Scorecard

- **Herod the Great**
  
  Mentioned most prominently in Chapter 2 of Matthew’s gospel in the story involving the Magi and the Slaughter of the Innocents

- **Herod Archelaus**
  
  Mentioned briefly in Matthew 2:22 and said to be the reason that Joseph chose to go to Nazareth in Galilee rather than Jerusalem in Judah

- **Herod Antipas**
  
  Mentioned frequently in the Christian scriptures but most prominently in Chapter 6 of Mark and Chapter 14 of Matthew which tell the story of the death of John the Baptist. Mentioned again in Chapter 23 of Luke. Herod Antipas was the ruler in Galilee where Jesus lived. Pilate tried to pawn Jesus off on Antipas at Jesus’ trial

- **Herod Philip (Herod II)**
  
  This Herod was the husband that Herodias divorced so that she could marry his half-brother, Herod Antipas. He is mentioned in the same stories involving the death of the Baptist. He is often confused with Philip the Tetrarch, also a son of Herod the Great

- **Herod Agrippa (Agrippa I)**
  
  He was the Herod that is mentioned in Acts 12 as the King Herod who executed James the brother of John

- **Herod Agrippa II (Agrippa II)**
  
  He is the Herod who spoke with Paul in Acts 25-26
As We Transition From the Hebrew Scriptures…

Recommended Paid Course on the Hebrew Scriptures

The Old Testament
Amy Jill Levine
PhD from Duke University
Currently teaches at Vanderbilt University
http://www.thegreatcourses.com  Cource#653

Recommended Free Course on the Hebrew Scriptures

Open Yale Courses
RLST 145: Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)
Christine Hayes, The Robert F. and Patricia Ross Weis Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University

There is also an NT course available on this website

http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-145