

Theology Matters: The Gospels

Session 1: Context

What was first century Israel like? Who were the main players of the day? And into what kind of world was Jesus born?

This first session will help us to understand the historical background of the gospels and give us fresh insights that will help us read the story of Jesus' birth in context.

Context: The Imperial Background

What was the world like around the time of Jesus?

Ruler	Dates of Reign
Julius Caesar	100 BC - 44 BC
The Second Triumvirate: - Mark Anthony - Marcus Aemilius Lepidus - Octavian	44 BC - 31 BC
Augustus	31 BC - AD 14
Tiberius	AD 14 - 37
Gaius Caligula	AD 37 - 41
Claudius	AD 41 - 54
Nero	AD 54 - 68

Context: Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine

8) Taxation

Head Tax (*tributum capitis*) – 1d per person per year
 Soil Tax (*tributum soli*) – Between 10-25%
 Merchandise Tax (*portoria*) – Approximately 2.5%
 (Asia) to 25% (Eastern Front)
 Estimates suggest that people may have been taxed
 up to 50-90%

1) Founded the Roman Empire in 27 BC.

'The boundaries of the Empire are equal to the
 boundaries of the Earth' (Diadorus)

2) Caesar's Comet (44 BC)

'A comet shone for seven successive days, rising
 about the eleventh hour, and was believed to be the
 soul of Caesar' (Suetonius)

7) Propaganda Slogans

'Caesar is Lord'

'Salvation is to be found in none other save
 Augustus, and there is no other name given to men
 in which they can be saved.'

3) 42 BC the senate declared:

Julius Caesar = *Divus Iulius*
 Caesar Augustus = *Divi Filius*

6) Pax Romana (27 BC – 180 AD)

Germanicus (15 BC – AD 19)
 Varus (5 - 3 BC)
 Titus (AD 79 – 81)

Caesar Augustus



5) Virgil on Augustus' Adventus

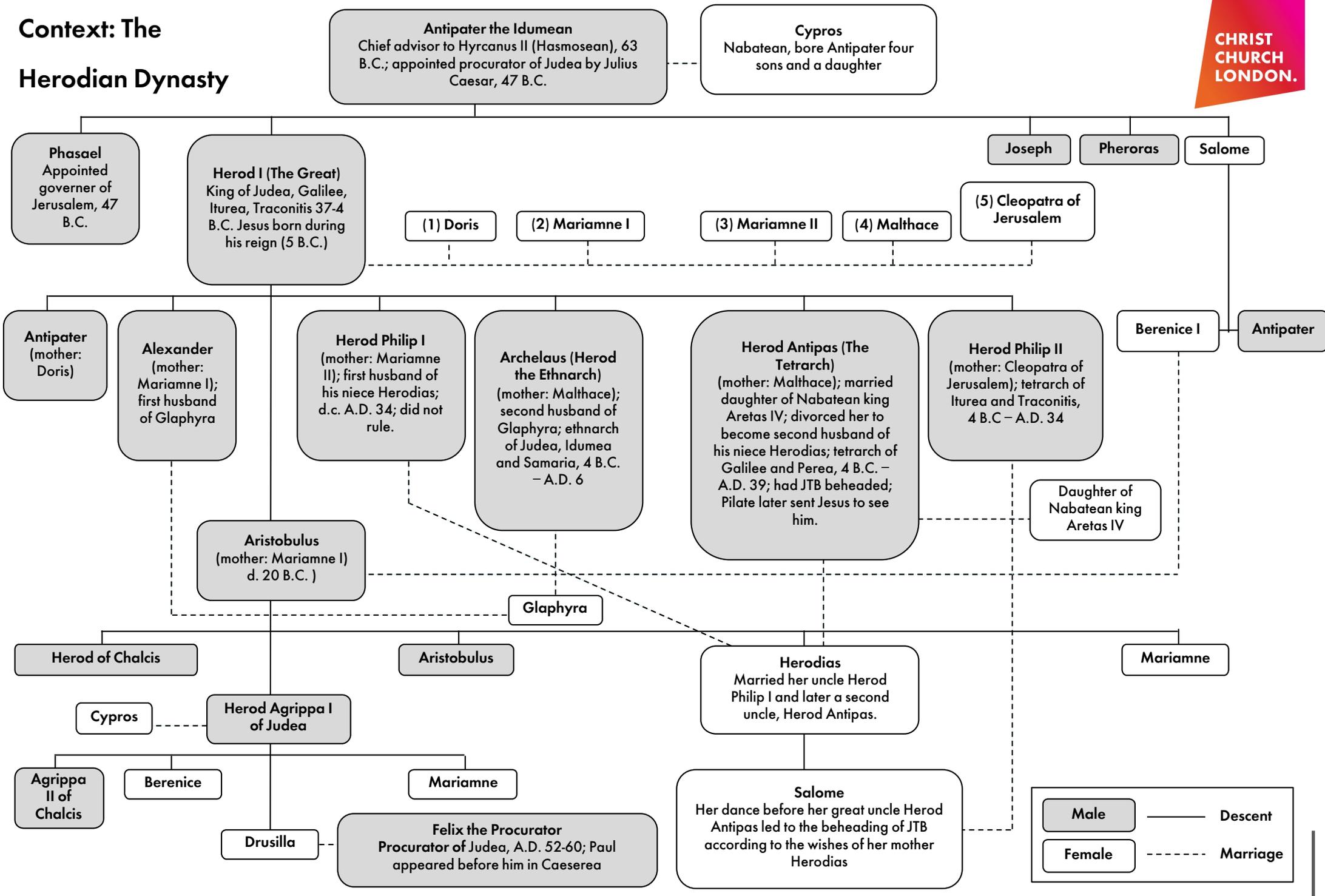
'This is the man, the one who has been promised again and again... the turning point of the ages has come.'

'The one who is to come will be the divine king of salvation.'

'He will annihilate the evil of the past and free the people from unceasing fear'

'He will establish a universal empire of peace and will lead in the golden age for the blessing of a renewed humanity'

Context: The Herodian Dynasty



Context: Herod the Great

Homicidal Tendencies!!

- Josephus, *Antiquities* 15
- His Mother-in-law
 - Costobarus: his sister's husband
 - The Sons of Babas
 - Aristobulus: the 16 year old 'high priest'
 - Mariamne: his wife
 - The priests in the Hippodrome

Background

Half Jewish / Half Edomite
Ruled from 37 – 4 BC
Had 11 wives and 43 kids!

Tribute to Caesar

- Taxes
- Statues
- Temples

'The people erect this monument to King Herod, Devout and Lover of Caesar, because of his virtue and benefaction.'



The Herodian Temple

'The king had erected over the great gate of the temple a large golden eagle, of great value, and had dedicated it to the temple. Now, the law forbids those that propose to live according to it, to erect images, or representations of any living creature. So these wise men persuaded their scholars to pull down the golden eagle.' (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.6.2)

Herod the Great

Architecture and Wealth

- Masada
- Herodium
- Caesarea Maritima
- Gyms, theatres and the Olympic games!

According to Josephus (*JW* 2.6.203) the total revenue of Herod's territories distributed after his death was 800 talents, the equivalent of 4.8m drachmae.

Context: Herod's Grand Designs



Masada

Herod built seven fortresses in the Judean desert, in addition to his palaces: Masada, Herodium, Cypros, Hyrcania, Alexandrium, Machaerus and Dow.

A legend said that David fled from Saul and hid in a cave in Masada. Herod decided to live there in luxury.

- The Eastern cliffs were 1,300 ft tall and the western ones, 300 ft
- The palace was three tiers high and was surrounded by a wall 4,300 ft long and 12 ft high
- It was marble tiled, with hot and cold baths.
- He build cisterns to gather rainwater and channels from Jerusalem to transport it. He stored enough water for 2,000 people

Herodium

'This fortress, which is some sixty stadia (7 miles) distant from Jerusalem, is naturally strong and very suitable for such a structure, for reasonably nearby is a hill, raised to a (greater) height by the hand of man and rounded off in the shape of a breast. At intervals it has round towers, and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone. Within it are costly royal apartments made for security and for ornament at the same time. At the base of the hill there are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, among other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in that place, is brought in from a distance and at great expense. The surrounding plain was built up as a city second to none, with the hill serving as an acropolis for the other dwellings. (Josephus, *War of the Jews*, 1.21.10)



Context: Herod's Grand Designs

Caesarea Maritima

- 165 acre city, built between 25-13 BC and dedicated to Caesar.
- It was the first artificial harbour in the ancient world and the biggest and most impressive.
- Water was provided by a 13 mile long aqueduct that ran along the coast and reached 20 feet high

It was "entirely rebuilt with white stone, and adorned with the most magnificent palaces, displaying here, as nowhere else, the innate grandeur of his character" (Josephus, *Ant* 1.21.5)



The Herodian Temple

- The foundations were double the size of Solomon's Temple
- The façade was covered with gold and the top was white marble, so that it shone when the sun hit it.
- The 'Herodian Stones' were around 10 x 10 x 80 feet and they used around 2.3 million of them.

'He who has not seen the temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building' (*b. B. Bat. 4a*)

Suggested Reading

Author	Title		
General Reading			
Bailey, Kenneth	<i>Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes</i>		
Bauckham, Richard	<i>Jesus and the Eyewitnesses</i>		
Beale, G.K. and Carson, D.A.	<i>Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament</i>		
Burridge, Richard	<i>Four Gospels, One Jesus?</i>		
Carson, D.A. and Moo, Douglas	<i>An Introduction to the New Testament</i>		
Fee, Gordon and Stuart, Douglas	<i>How to Read the Bible for all its Worth</i>		
Köstenberger, Andreas and Taylor, Justin	<i>The Final Days of Jesus</i>		
Leithart, Peter	<i>The Four</i>		
Wright, N.T.	<i>The New Testament and the People of God</i>		
	<i>Jesus and the Victory of God</i>		
	<i>The Resurrection of the Son of God</i>		
	<i>Simply Jesus</i>		
	<i>How God Became King</i>		
Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Carson, D.A. (EBC)	Lane, William (NICNT)	Bock, Darrell (NIVAC / IVPNTC)	Carson, D.A. (Pillar)
Morris, Leon (Pillar)	English, Donald (BST)	Morris, Leon (TNTC)	Morris, Leon (NICNT)
France, R.T. (NICNT)	Wright, N.T. (For Everyone)	Green, Joel (NICNT)	Witherington III, Ben