

Who Were The Rulers?

by Bill Crews

At the time Jesus was born at Bethlehem, **Octavius (“Augustus”) Caesar** was, as emperor, ruling over the whole Roman empire (Luke 2:1), and **Herod the Great**, the Idumean (a man of Idumea, an Edomite), was the local ruler over Palestine (Matthew 2:1). That Herod died a few years after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:19), and his territory was divided among some of his sons and one other man. **Archelaus**, his favorite son, was given Judea (and Samaria) (Matthew 2:22); **Antipas**, called simply “*Herod*” in the New Testament, was given Galilee (west of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee) and Perea (east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea); one of his sons named **Philip** was given the territory east of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. Along with **Lysanius**, who ruled over Abilene (a territory north of the area ruled by Philip) and who was not related to Herod the Great, these four men were called “*tetrarchs*” (“rulers of a fourth part”) and their territories “*tetrarchies*.” Please read Luke 3:1.

When Jesus was a teenager, Augustus died and was succeeded by **Tiberius Caesar**, who ruled until after the beginning of the Lord’s church. When John “*the Baptist*” began his ministry of preparing the Jewish people for Jesus, Tiberius was the emperor at Rome, **Herod (Antipas)** was the tetrarch of Galilee, **Philip** was the tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, **Lysanius** was the tetrarch of Abilene, and **Pontius Pilate** was the governor of Judea (Luke 3:1). What happened to Archelaus? After serving but a few years, he was removed from office for incompetence and cruelty A.D. 6. His territory was then placed under Roman governors or procurators, and Pilate was the fifth of these (**Coponius**, 6-10 A.D.; **Marcus Ambivius**, 10-13 A.D.; **Annius Rufus**, 13-15 A.D.; **Valerius Gratus**, 15-26 A.D.; and **Pontius Pilate**, 26-35 A.D.).

Luke 3:2 speaks of “*the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas*.” John 18:12 identifies Annas as the father-in-law of Caiphas, and refers to Caiphas as “*high priest that year*.” A few years later, in Acts 4:6, Annas is called “*high priest*.” Various local Roman rulers could and did remove Jewish high priests from office and install others in their stead. Actually, three others served between Annas and Caiphas (Annas, 7-21 A.D.; Ishmael, 21-22 A.D.; Eleazar, 22-23 A.D.; Simon, 23-25 A.D. and Caiphas, 25-36 A.D.). Although officially removed from office, Annas continued to be recognized and to exert his influence among the Jews. It was **Herod the Great** who sought to kill the young child Jesus (Matthew 2:16). It was **Herod Antipas** who had John the Baptist executed (Matthew 14:1-12) and who mocked Jesus during His trial (Luke 23:6-12). It was Herod Antipas who divorced his wife (the daughter of king Aretas, 2 Corinthians 11:32) and married Herodias who had divorced her husband Philip (Matthew 14:3; he was **not** Philip the tetrarch). When Jesus was arrested and bound in the garden of Gethsemane, He was taken for trial first to **Annas** (John 18:12-13, 19-24). Then He was taken to **Caiphas** who saw to it that He received a sentence of death (Matthew 27:57-68). It was **Pontius Pilate** whose permission was required for the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27).

The “*Herod*” of Acts 12 was **Herod Agrippa I** of history, a grandson of Herod the Great and brother of Herodias. The “*Agrippa*” of Acts 25-26 was **Herod Agrippa II** of history, son of the preceding and brother of both Drusilla (Acts 24:24) and Bernice (Acts 25:13). Perhaps this list of rulers will help you in your study of the New Testament.

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