



*Ministério Seara Ágape*  
*Estudo Bíblico Evangélico*

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/apalestinanotempodejesus.html>

**BIBLICAL TOPICS FOR STUDY – PALESTINE IN JESUS' TIME**

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We are going to talk a little bit about the government in Palestine at the time of Jesus, and some characters in the history of Israel at that time of humanity, including the Roman emperors and procurators. This biblical passage from Lk. 3: 1-6 brings some teachings for us: the human being remains the same throughout the ages, but had, has and will always have to bow before the power of God and His sovereign will, causing that all things work together for His great project. Man reaps what he sows: hatred and cruelty or love and mercy.

The text of Lk. 3: 1-6 says: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

1) One of the names mentioned by Luke is John the Baptist, son of Zechariah.

The ministry of John the Baptist is historically placed around 27 AD by some researchers (Jn. 2: 20 – Herod’s temple began to be restored in 19 BC). On the other hand, if we consider the count of Lk. 3: 1 (“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius”), John would have started his ministry around 28-29 BC. The reign of Tiberius covers the period 14-37 AD.

John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin and was considered by Him to be the last and greatest member of the prophetic succession, in addition to being compared by Jesus to Elijah: Lk. 16: 16; Matt. 11: 10-14; Matt. 17: 12-13. In fact, in Mal. 3: 1 and Mal. 4: 5-6 it had already been prophesied about John, who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah of Israel. John himself said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (Jn. 1: 23). He repeats the same words in the text of Luke written above.

According to the bible, John grew up in the desert, far from civilization, following the rules established for the Nazirites (consecrated to the Lord), for he was dedicated to the Lord for his whole life. He remained in the desert until the Holy Spirit began to use him as a prophet, announcing repentance among the people and preparing their hearts to

receive the Word through Jesus. His sermons were harsh and his words quite forceful, which shocked the most learned such as the Pharisees and scribes. John brought them certain confusion, for they thought he was the announced Messiah himself. However, he testified that he was only his forerunner (Matt. 3: 2-12; Lk. 3: 15-17; Jn. 3: 28). Through him, the people were baptized with the baptism of repentance and prepared to receive the truths of the kingdom of God through Jesus. He himself was baptized by His cousin in the Jordan River (Lk. 3: 21-22).

As a man of God, John exercised exactly what had been designed for Him: he preached repentance among the people, repeating what for centuries was accomplished through his brothers, the prophets. More than anything, his preaching was decisive for Israel to be delivered into the hands of the very Son of God who would make a new covenant with men, once and for all, so that it would no longer be broken. John the Baptist was arrested by Herod Antipas, and died beheaded. His head was given on a platter in the king's hands at the request of the daughter of Herodias, his sister-in-law, with whom he lived the relationship condemned by the prophet (Matt. 14: 1-12 and Mk. 6: 14-19).



According to Christian tradition, the birth of John the Baptist took place in the village of Ain Karem (In Hebrew, Ein Kerem or Ain Karem = 'Spring of the Vineyard');

in Arabic: 'Ein Kārem' or 'Ayn Karim' = 'generous spring'), southwest of Jerusalem. According to the bible, Mary went to look for Elizabeth and Zechariah in a town in the hill country of Judea (Lk. 1: 39-40). The distance between Jerusalem and Ein Karem was five miles or 8.05 km (a measure calculated by Emperor Theodosius in 530 AD).

Today, two churches with the same name (Church of St. John the Baptist) occupy this place. One of them is a Catholic church built in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the remnants of previous Byzantine churches and of the Crusaders. In this church we can see remains of an old mosaic floor and a cave where, according to Christian tradition, John the Baptist was born. It was converted into a stable by the Muslims for more than four centuries, until the Franciscans, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1674) managed to take possession of the place. Next to it there is a monastery. The other church is an Eastern Orthodox Church built in 1894, also on the remains of an ancient church. A modern church, the Church of the Visitation, was built in 1955 by an Italian architect, also on remains of an ancient church built against a rocky slope, southwest of the Church of St. John the Baptist. It may be a second location of John the Baptist's birth (according to some apocryphal books). It was built to honor Mary's visit to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, and according to Catholic tradition, it was there that Mary made her song of praise to God.



Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist and Church of the Visitation – wikipedia.org

In Nehemiah and Jeremiah (Neh. 3: 14; Jer. 6: 1), the city is called Beth Hakkerem (NIV) or Beth-haccherem (NRSV) or Bethhaccherem (KJV). The name Ein Kerem or Ain Karem seems to be recorded only after the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in 637 AD by the Rashidun Caliphate ('Well-Guided Caliphate') in the person of Caliph Umar (or Omar; reign: 634–644), although some previous reports mention a village called 'Enqarim', as the place of residence of Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife.





Ein Karem village – wikipedia.org – photo: Gila Brand

**2) Another name mentioned by Lucas is Lysanias:**

According to historians, the relationship of this Lysanias (tetrarch of Abilene, described in Luke) with Lysanias, king of Chalcis of Celesyria (around 40 BC), quoted by Flavius Josephus and Lucius Cassius Dio or Dio Cassius has not been clearly established. Dio Cassius was a notable Roman statesman and historian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and a member of the public service. He wrote about eighty books in twenty-two years, showing the history of Rome. Flavius Josephus, or simply Josephus, or Yosef ben Matityahu ('Joseph, son of Mathias', variant of Matthew) was a historian of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, descendant from a lineage of important priests (Hasmoneans) and kings. After becoming a Roman citizen, he became known as Titus Flavius Josephus. One of his great works describes the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus (son of the emperor Vespasian) in 70 AD.

Abilene was a plane region, a district located on the eastern face of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. Abilene, in the north, and Ituraea, in the south, formed the eastern border of Galilee. Ituraea is the Greek name for a mountainous region of Israel, a name that was used during the Hasmonean and Herodian and Roman periods. It seems that Abilene was in the territories of the tribe of Naphtali.

**3) The third name mentioned by Luke is Tiberius Caesar:**

Tiberius (Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar) was emperor of Rome from 14 to 37 AD. He was adopted son of Caesar Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus) who reigned in the period of 29 BC–14 AD. Augustus appointed Herod the Great, governor of Palestine at the time of Christ's birth.

Tiberius became part of the Roman imperial family when his mother, Livia Drusilla, at 19 years old and six months pregnant, divorced her father, Claudius Nero, and married Octavian, the future emperor Caesar Augustus. Tiberius' younger brother, Nero Claudius Drusus, was born three months after his mother entered the emperor's palace.

Tiberius began his career as a Roman tribune and organized the army, creating new legions. Then he became Praetor and consul. He was adopted by the Emperor Augustus,

and married his daughter Julia, the Elder. Later, with the death of his brother Nero Claudius Drusus and of Augustus, Tiberius ascended the throne as emperor and was one of the greatest generals of Rome. He refused to be worshiped as a god, as Augustus did, and withdrew a little from the government of the empire, avoiding the title of emperor as a precautionary policy in relation to the Roman Senate, for this gave the impression that he was restoring the Roman Republic. For this reason, he ended up giving the Senate greater power than he should have, becoming a weak emperor in matters of administrative decisions and bringing discontent to the people.

Despite his military achievements, he was reputed as a sad and gloomy ruler, a feature that was accentuated after the death of his son Julius Caesar Drusus in 23 AD (son of his first marriage to Vipsania Agrippina). His marriage to Julia did not leave a successor, for the only son died in childhood. He was also not happy with her because she cheated on him with other men. He was self-exiled from Rome and went to Capri, leaving the government in the hands of two praetorian prefects (Lucius Aelius Sejanus and Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro), but Sejanus was killed, accused of treason against the emperor. Tiberius adopted his grand-nephew, Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, also known as Caligula, who, together with the second praetorian prefect, Sutorius Macro, murdered the emperor (at the age of 77 at the time). According to historical sources, the timid character, cynical, embittered and suspicious of Tiberius caused many deaths not only in the Roman Senate but also among the poor people of the empire.

Caesar Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus – reign: 29 BC-14 AD), ordered that was built a temple in Rome dedicated to the “Divine Julius” (Divus Iulius – referring to Gaius Julius Caesar). The adoptive son of Augustus was Tiberius (Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar – 14-37 AD). Both allowed to be erected a single temple in their honor during their lifetimes. These temples contained not only the statues of the ruling emperor at the time and who could be worshiped in the manner of a god, but also were devoted to Rome (the city of Rome, in the case of Augustus, and to the senate, in the case of Tiberius). Both temples were located on the Asian side of the Roman Empire. The temple of Caesar Augustus was located in Pergamum, while Tiberius’ was in Izmir (Smyrna) and he did not allow another temple or statue in his honor anywhere else. He assured before the Senate that he would rather be remembered more for his actions than by the stones. But he permitted the construction of a temple in honor of his predecessor and adoptive father, the “Divine Augustus”, in Tarragona (current Catalonia, Spain), in 15 AD.

#### 4) Luke also refers to Pontius Pilate.

Pontius Pilate (Pontius Pilatus, in Latin), was a procurator in the Roman province of Judea between the years 26 and 36 AD. He was appointed by the emperor Tiberius. He took his wife with him (Matt. 27: 19) and was in charge of the occupying army stationed in Caesarea, composed of 120 cavalry men, 4 or 5 infantry cohorts (1 cohort was made up of 300 to 1000 soldiers). A detachment was in Jerusalem, in the Antonia Fortress. The Roman procurator had wide powers of life and death and could reverse the capital sentences issued by the Sanhedrin. He could also name the high priests, control the Temple and its monetary fund, including the garments of the high priesthood, which were given at religious festivals. According to the bible, he saw no crime in Jesus, but for many reasons favorable to him because of his post, he had him crucified.

Among other sacrileges and atrocities he committed, he ordered the death of a large number of Samaritans gathered at Mount Gerizim in 35 AD, because of a misunderstanding created by a Jewish agitator, who said that Moses had hidden sacred

vessels in that place. When the armed crowd reached that mountain, Pilate killed almost everyone. A delegation protested with his superior Aulus Vitellius Germanicus, governor of the province of Syria at the time; he became emperor in AD 69 and reigned for a short period of 8 months (the year of the four emperors). So Vitellius sent Pilate to Rome to apologize to the Emperor (Tiberius was at the end of his life and exiled on Capri willingly). In fact, when Pilate arrived, Caligula already reigned, and he didn't find favor with him. According to historical sources, he committed suicide in 37 AD (he was forced to commit suicide).

Another case reported by the historian Flavius Josephus in relation to Pilate is the one mentioned in Lk. 13: 1, about the Galileans killed by the governor. Possibly, they were the followers of Judas the Galilean (mentioned in Acts 5: 37), who led a revolt against the Romans in 6 AD because of tax collection, and who ended up founding the party of zealots. At the time of Pilate the party was strengthened, and he may have sent soldiers to destroy the zealots during the Passover sacrifice, for having instigated a revolt among the city's thousands of Jews during the feast, using as a pretext the fact of the Roman governor having used the temple money to build an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem, water that came from a spring 25 miles away from the city. This could be an explanation for the phrase 'the Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifice' (Lk. 13: 1). This episode is reported by two historians: Flavius Josephus and Eusebius. It has nothing to do with the pool of Siloam or the tower that fell on the eighteen men mentioned in Lk 13: 4. According to some theologians, the tower in Siloam was probably one of the towers of the city wall, near the pool of Siloam. However, nothing is known about this fall. There is no historical record of this.

#### 5) The evangelist then talks about the high priests Annas and Caiaphas.

Caiaphas (in Heb.: Yosef bar Kayafa, 'Joseph, son of Caiaphas'), was the Jewish high priest between 18 and 37 AD, appointed by the Roman procurator prior to Pilate, Valerius Gratus, who ruled Judea (15–26 AD) in the period of Emperor Tiberius. It was Caiaphas who participated in Jesus' trial at the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. Caiaphas found Jesus guilty of blasphemy for admitting to be the Son of God, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate did not get involved in matters of the Jewish religion, but he had to judge Jesus for the crime of treason for being called the king of the Jews. This was considered sedition against Rome.

Annas (Ananus ben Seth, 'Annas son of Seth' – 6-15 AD), was father-in-law to Caiaphas (Jn. 18: 13). He had great influence on his son-in-law's ministry. His five children also served as high priests:

- Eleazar ben Annas (16–17 AD) – In Acts 4: 6 the bible writes: 'Alexander' = 'helper of men', 'who defends or helps men' – could it be his Greek name? It is only known that 'Alexander' was a very common Greek name, which came up with Alexander the Great, trying to impose Hellenistic culture on conquered peoples, including Jews. The Greek form of Eleazar is 'Lazarus', which means 'God helped', 'God is a helper'. In Latin it is 'Lazarus'.

- Jonathan ben Annas (36-37 AD) – In Acts 4: 6 the bible writes: 'John' – probably the Greek form of his name. In Hebrew it is Yôñāthān or Yehôñāthān = 'the Lord has given us', 'the Lord has given', 'the gift of God' (Jehonathan). In Greek, Ioannes, Joannes (i.e. Jochanan, Yôhānān, John) = 'the Lord is gracious', 'grace', 'favor of God.'

- Theophilus ben Annas (37–41 AD)

- Mathias ben Annas (43 AD)

- Annas ben Annas (63 AD) – Annas the son, the youngest of the five brothers.

- Acts 4: 5-6: “The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.” [The prison of Peter and John for having cured the paralytic who stood at the entrance of the temple Gate called Beautiful].

In Acts 24: 1 the bible mentions the name of the high priest Ananias, during the judgment of Paul before Felix, the governor of Judea. This occurred around 58 AD. Paul was in the custody of Felix in Caesarea between 58 and 60 AD. This Ananias that the bible mentions may be the same that History reports with the name of Ananias son of Nebedeus, succeeded by another high priest named Jonathan, who exercised his ministry around 52-57 AD and, together with Antonia, mother of the emperor Claudius (41-54 AD), had an influence on the choice of Marcus Antonius Felix (52-60 AD).

**6)** Luke also mentions the name of Herod (Herod Antipas), son of Herod the Great, as well as the brother of Antipas: Philip. Let's study a little about Herod's dynasty and its government over Palestine (source: Wikipedia.org).

Herod (also known as Herod I or Herod the Great (73-4 BC) was a Roman Jewish Edomite, king of Israel between 37 and 4 BC (Matt. 2: 13; 16). Described as ‘a madman who murdered his own family and countless rabbis’, Herod is known for his colossal construction projects in Judea (such as the Masada Fortress) and other parts of the ancient world, in particular the reconstruction of the Temple that had been built in the time of Zerubbabel after the Babylonian exile. Herod the Great began the restoration of the temple in 19 BC, and after 46 years (Jn. 2: 20) it had not yet been completed. It ended in 64 AD, in the time of Agrippa, son of Herod Agrippa I. Herod was son of Antipatrus, an Idumaeen (or Edomite), placed by General Pompey as procurator of Palestine in 67 BC. His mother was called Cypros from Nabataea (an Arab tribe from Sinai later annexed by the Roman Empire in 106 AD). Herod the Great was buried in Judea, in a place called Herodium. Herodium (Latin: Herodium; Hebrew, herodion: הרודיון) is a circular hill 6.9 miles (11.1 km) south of Jerusalem in the Judean Desert (the actual distance is a little over 7.8 miles (12.5 km) and 5 km (3.1 mi) southeast of Bethlehem. It was a fortified palace built between 22–15 BC by Herod the Great, and where he was also buried in 4 BC. During the First Great Jewish Revolt, Jewish rebels hid there from the Roman legions, but were defeated in 71 AD.

Children of Herod the Great:

- Antipater II (46 – 4 BC) was the first son of Herod the Great, his only son by his first wife Doris. He received this name because of his paternal grandfather. Herod divorced her between 43 and 40 BC to marry Mariamne I, granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, the high priest. Then Doris and Antipater II were taken into exile. However, Herod called him back after the fall of Mariamne I (she was executed in 29 BC). In 13 BC, Herod made him his first heir in his will. After the execution of Alexander and Aristobulus, Antipater II remained the first heir, followed by Philip, his half brother. In 5 BC Antipater II was accused of intentional murder of his father Herod, and brought before the Roman governor of Syria, Publius Quinctilius Varus, who found him guilty. But the death sentence could only be approved by Caesar Augustus. He was found guilty, and his position as exclusive successor was given to Herod Antipas. Antipater II was executed and Herod Archelaus (son of Herod and Malthace) was made heir in his father's will as king over the whole kingdom of Herod, with Antipas and Philip (son of Cleopatra and Herod the Great) as tetrarchs over certain territories.

- Alexander, Aristobulus, Salampsio (daughter) and Cypros (daughter) = children of Herod and Mariamne (Mariamne I), whom he married around 40 BC. Mariamne I was granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, a high priest of the Hasmonean lineage. Mariamne I

was executed in 29 BC. Alexander and Aristobulus were educated in Rome, at the court of Caesar Augustus, and returned to Jerusalem around 12 BC. But, for engaging in palace intrigues, they were executed by their father (strangled) on charges of high treason in 7 BC, in Samaria.

- Herod Philip I (or Herod II, 27 BC – 34 AD; son of Herod and Mariamne II, his third wife, whom he divorced to marry Malthace. Mariamne II was of the Hasmonean family, daughter of the high priest Simon – Simon ben Boethus). Herod Philip died in 33 or 34 AD in Rome. Salome III was the daughter of Herod Philip and Herodias, who returned from Rome, abandoning her husband to marry her brother-in-law, Herod Antipas. Salome III danced for Herod Antipas and asked for the head of John the Baptist as a gift (Matt. 14: 3-11; Mk. 6: 21-28).

- Herod Antipas, Herod Archelaus and Olympias (daughter) = children of Herod the Great, and Malthace, a Samaritan who married the king in 23 BC (she died in 4 BC in Rome).

- Philip the Tetrarch (son of Herod and Cleopatra, born in Jerusalem, Herod's 4<sup>th</sup> wife). It is not confirmed that Philip, the tetrarch, married Salome III, the daughter of Herodias and Herod Philip I. Philip, the tetrarch, is called by some historians, Herod Philip II.

Herod the Great had five more wives after Cleopatra of Jerusalem, according to historians, and more sons and daughters.

After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons, by the emperor Caesar Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus – he reigned between 29 BC and 14 AD). Augustus named Herod Archelaus (4 BC-6 AD), Herod's least esteemed son and youngest (Matt. 2: 2. He was despotic and cruel and died in exile in Vienna, Gaul, in 18 AD), not to be the king of the whole country but to rule over half of what was subject to Herod. The other half, he divided into two parts, and gave them to the other two sons of Herod: Philip and Herod Antipas, who disputed with Archelaus, his brother, the whole kingdom, but failed.

Thus, the legacy was divided between the three living sons of Herod (The other living son, Herod Philip, lived in Rome and was ignored in the partition):

- Judea and Samaria with Archelaus; later it became Roman domain under Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD).

- Galilee and Perea with Herod Antipas (reigned from 4 BC to 39 AD).

- Territories of the Northeast – the tetrarchy of Ituraea and Trachonitis with Philip (Matt. 16: 13; Lk. 3: 1).

Trachonitis was the region located to the south of Damascus, between the mountains of the Anti-Lebanon and the Batanea. Trachonitis means “rocky region”, “rocky place.”

Ituraea is the Greek name of a mountainous territory in the Transjordan region during the Hasmonean and Herodian and Roman period, occupied by an Arabic-speaking Aramaic tribe. It was practically inseparable from Trachonitis.

The other regions were in the Northeast of the Sea of Galilee, and were:

- a) Auranitis: name from an ancient Assyrian province called Auran; Auranitis is a volcanic plateau located in southwestern Syria, extending towards the northeast of the Jordan River.

- b) Batanea: region that occupied part of the old Bashan.

- c) Gaulonitis: Transjordan region, so named because of the city of Golan.





Palestine Jesus' time

## TETRARCHY

Tetrarchy is the fourth part of a region, province or government into which some states were divided, or the government of four kings or rulers. The Romans applied it to any ruler from any part of an eastern Roman province.

Philip built his capital on the village of Bethsaida, baptizing it with the name of Julius, in honor of the daughter of Emperor Caesar Augustus, and rebuilt the city of Paneas, which came to be called Caesarea (or Caesarea Philippi) in honor of Augustus.

Herod Antipas (Lk. 3: 1; Lk. 23: 6-12) was also educated in Rome. Antipas married Herodias, wife of Herod Philip (who in some passages of the bible is only called Philip – Matt. 14: 3-4; Mk. 6: 17-19; Lk. 3: 19), perhaps not to expose him, because his mother Mariamne II was a priest's daughter; but for this Antipas repudiated his wife, Phasaelis, daughter of King Nabataean, Aretas IV, who feeling offended, invaded Galilee in 36 AD, defeating the tetrarch's army, and only retreated due to Roman intervention.

By the Sea of Galilee, Antipas built the capital of his tetrarchy in the year 20 AD, giving it the name Tiberias in honor of the Roman emperor Tiberius. The city was built

on the ruins of a small village called Rakkath or Rakkat (Josh. 19: 35). Antipas, even though making concessions to the Gentile culture of the Romans, still cultivated the Jewish tradition, going annually to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. That is why the bible reports that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, before having him crucified.

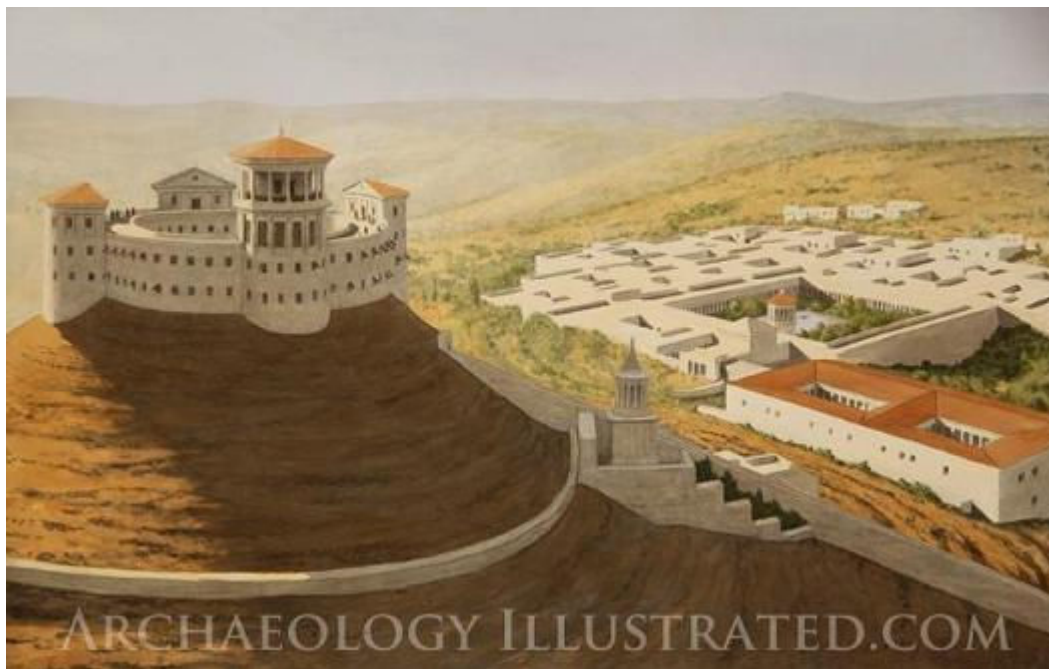
Herod Antipas was exiled in 39 AD to Lion, Gaul, accused of conspiracy with the Parthians (enemies of Rome), by his nephew Herod Agrippa I, and died that same year. According to historical sources, Antipas had no children.

Herod Archelaus, as mentioned above, received from Caesar Augustus half of what was subject to Herod the Great (Judea and Samaria). But then it became Roman domain under Pontius Pilate (26-36 AD).

Herod Agrippa I was the son of Bernice I and Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great. Aristobulus was executed by his father in 7 BC. Herod Agrippa I had inherited Philip's tetrarchy, and was recognized as king by Emperor Caligula. This one also gave him the tetrarchy of Antipas. Herod Agrippa I reigned over all Palestine and ordered James, brother of the apostle John, to be beheaded. He died in Caesarea in 44 AD (Acts 12: 1-23), at the age of 54.

As previously written, the human being remains the same throughout the ages. The lack of fear of the Lord led kings and mighty men to violent death, troubled children or with diseases; marital separations, lack of success in their professional and governmental careers, loss of leadership skills, affective disappointments and betrayals and many other evils as a divine judgment against the cruelty they practiced in life against their fellow men. Only in the Lord there is justice and deliverance.

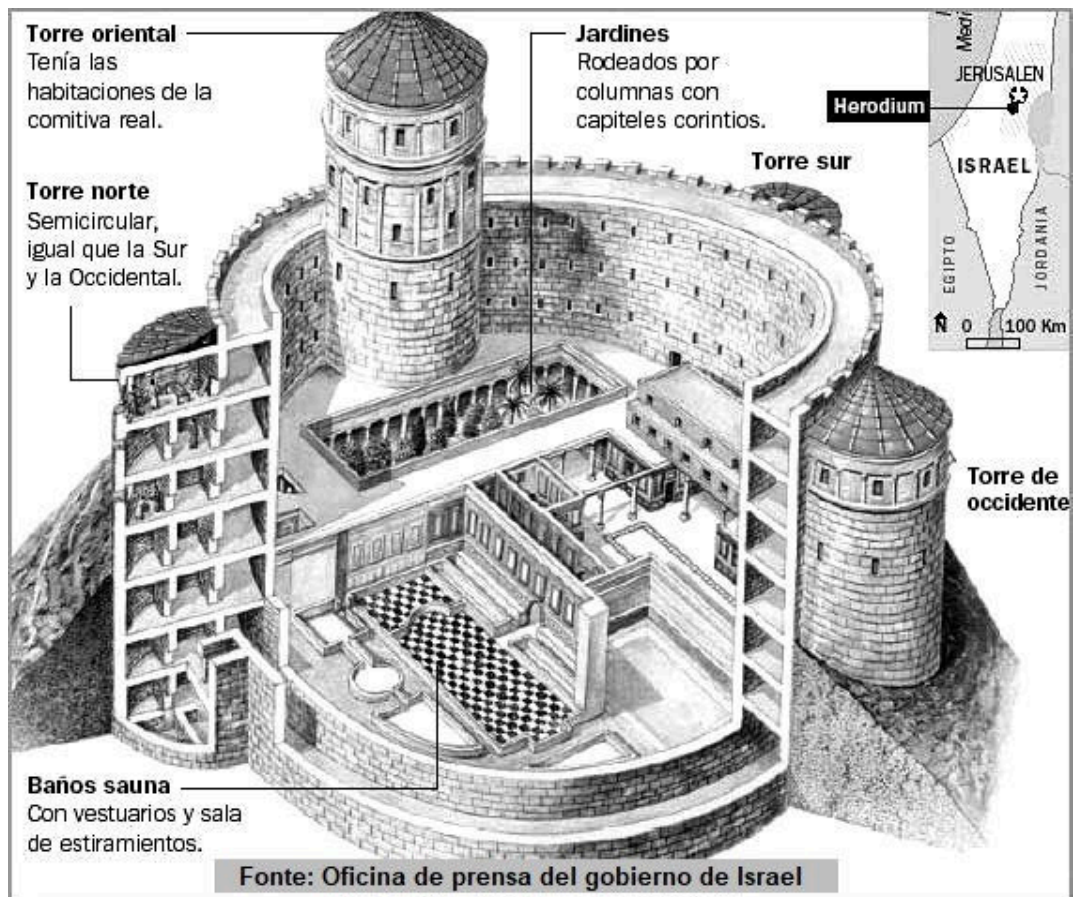
Below, the Herodium, where were Herod's fortress and tomb













Remains of the eastern round tower

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