

Caesar Augustus

Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC and the ensuing struggle between Octavian and Anthony left Octavian master of the ever-expanding Roman empire

Four years after he came to power after the sea battle of Actium in September 31 BC, the Senate conferred on Octavian the titles *Augustus* and *Princeps*. The first reflected his religious role as ‘the illustrious one’ and the second his political role as the ‘first citizen of Rome’. Although only a great-nephew on his mother’s side to Julius Caesar, Augustus adopted the title ‘Caesar’ to commence his own family name. Thus he became Caesar Augustus.

Augustus was generally a wise and gifted ruler, and during his time Rome enjoyed relative peace. He developed a network of good roads with a fast courier service – from Rome to Alexandria in Egypt took just three days. Augustus also reformed taxation, created police and fire services and established a standing army. He was known for his many building projects, and on his deathbed in AD 14 Augustus claimed: ‘I found Rome of clay and leave her to you of marble.’

Caesar Augustus was the Emperor at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:1), and undoubtedly his forty-five year rule was a significant preparation for the entrance of the Christian faith and its expansion across the known world.



Left

Augustus statue

Below

Augustus was probably the first to appreciate the propaganda value of coinage and he had his image stamped on many coins of his reign



116
.....



Name: Statue of Augustus with laurel crown
Size: Height 215 cm
Present location: Naples National Archaeological museum



Name: Coin Aureus of Augustus
Present location: Cabinet des medailles, Paris

'A census of the entire Roman world'

This was the first census while Quirinius was governor of Syria...everyone went to his own town to register' (Luke 2:2). It has long been established that there were regular censuses in the time of Augustus and that everyone was required to return to their 'home' for this purpose (BRD p 255-274). A papyrus document reveals that, for the purpose of a census, in AD 104, the Roman Prefect of Egypt, Gaius Vibius Maximus ordered all those in his area who were away from 'home', *nomes* – the word refers to an administrative district, to return to their 'hearth', *ephestia* – meaning a place of origin.

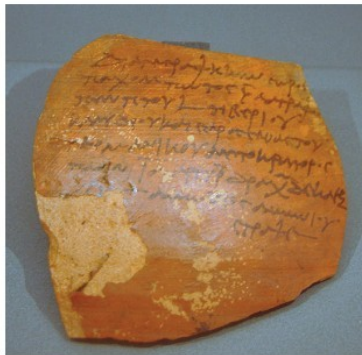
Jesus was born before the death of Herod in 4 BC. But was Quirinius governing Syria around 6–12 BC? Both Josephus and Luke refer to the fact that he was Governor of Syria and Judea in AD 6 (WJ *Antiquities* 18.1 and *Wars* 8.1 and Acts 5:37). William Ramsay demonstrated that whilst Sentius Saturninus was governor of Syria at the time of the census in 4 BC, Quirinius controlled the armies and directed the foreign policy of Syria – a not uncommon arrangement in the empire (BRD pp 238-295).

For a more detailed discussion of Quirinius and the census see page 203.



Above

Reflecting the order recorded in Luke 2:3, this papyrus comes from Egypt in AD 104 and in part reads '...it is essential that all those who are away from their homes be summoned to return to their own hearths...'



Left

This ostracon was found in Elephantine in southern Egypt, and was written by someone who was obviously accustomed to writing many texts. A man named Amonios son of Amonios, tax gatherer, declares that a man named Soros, son of Pachompos, had paid the head tax in the fifth regnal year of the emperor Claudius (i.e., 45 CE). The man had paid sixteen drachmas, for himself and seven relatives



Name: Papyrus census order from Egypt
Origin and date: Egypt, AD 104
Discovered: 1905
Size: Height 21.3cm Width 15.2cm
Present location: The British Museum Papyrus 904

Herod the feared and hated ruler

Herod the Great, hated and feared by almost all who knew him, is introduced to us in the Bible through the story of the visit of the magi and its aftermath

Main image

Herod's impressive aqueduct at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast

120

Augustus once commented that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son. A bitter reflection on the fact that Herod ordered the murder of his second wife, her two sons, his mother-in-law and, just prior to his death, Antipater his loyal firstborn – but as a Jew he would not eat a pig! Josephus calls him 'a man of great barbarity towards all men equally and slave to his passion' (WJ Antiquities 17.8.1).

The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem would hardly demand recognition outside the Bible (Matthew 2:1-18).

In 30 BC when he saw Octavian would win, Herod switched sides, grovelled to Octavian and was confirmed by the Senate in Rome as king of Judah. His rule was directly under the Senate and he was not answerable to the Roman governor of Judea. Herod increased the

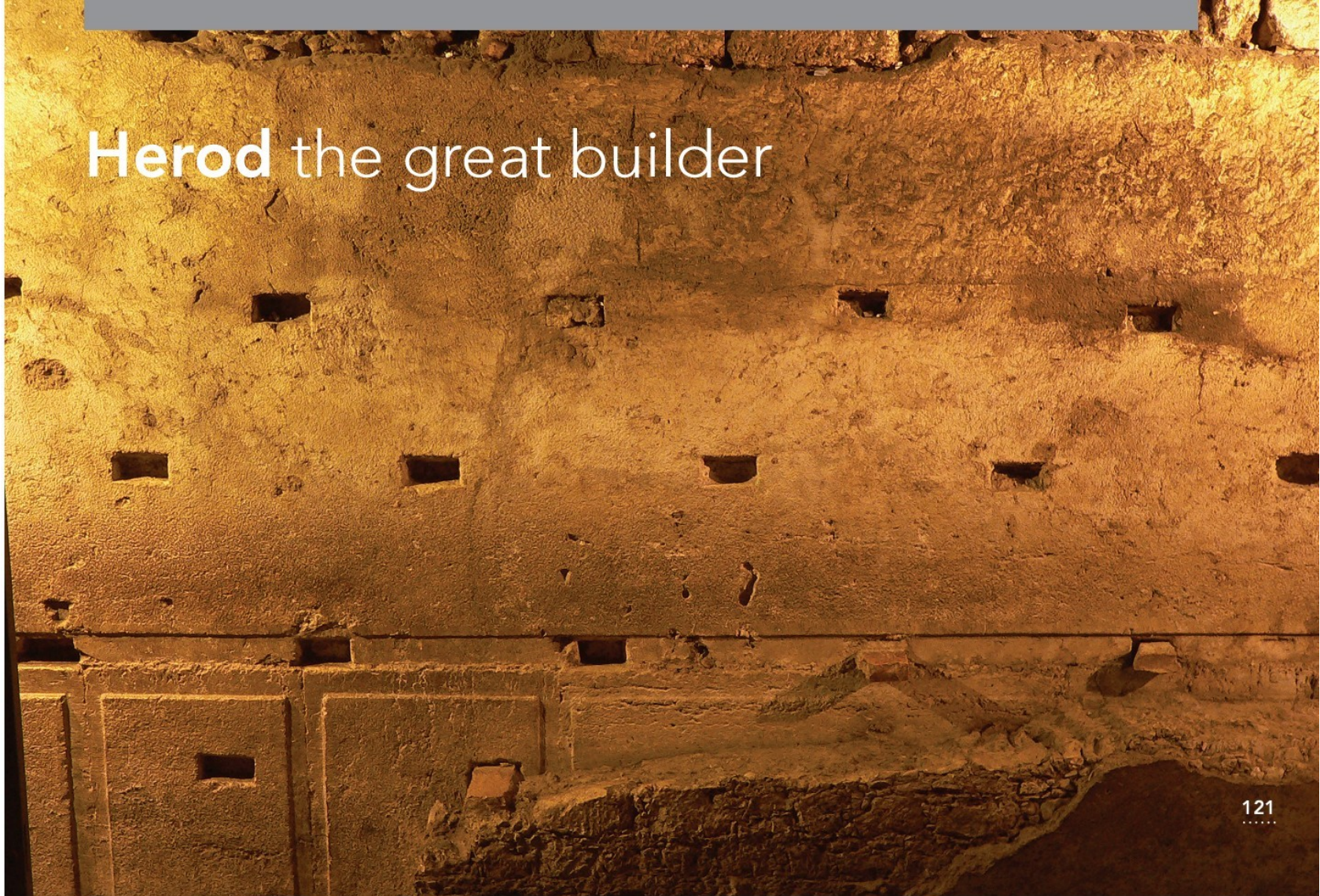
prosperity and outward peace of Jerusalem and ruthlessly restored law and order, but his rule was built on corruption, cruelty and fear, and his support of Rome and love of all things Greek meant that he was hated by the Jews.

Inset

Herod the Great could only mint bronze coins as he was a client king and silver was reserved for Rome. This one portrays a soldier's helmet because to depict a person or animal would have violated Jewish sensitivities over the second Commandment. (British Museum CM 1908 1-10 263)



Herod the great builder



121

Herod's gift to Jerusalem was a temple that would equal that of Solomon. He extensively remodelled the one built at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 3:12-13), and created a massive new temple of white stone. Modelled on Solomon's temple, the courtyard, colonnades and cloisters were unfinished when Jesus began his ministry; building would continue until AD 64.

When Jesus spoke of his own bodily resurrection, the Pharisees thought he was talking of the temple and exclaimed, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple' (John 2:20). They were right; Herod completed the inner sanctuary around 16 BC and then commenced the rest of the building; it was now AD 30 at the start of Jesus' ministry.

Herod's extensive building programme also included a royal fort and towers, the enclosure of the tombs of the patriarchs with huge walls, and the construction of Masada as a fortified mountain refuge for the royal family. He also spent twelve years building a fabulous seaport a short distance from Carmel, with all the trappings of Greek culture, including a hippodrome for chariot racing, a shrine for the pagan god Pan and a splendid temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus; he named the city 'Caesarea' in honour of the emperor. Herod died at Jericho in 4 BC after a long and painful illness. *

*(Jesus was born between 6 and 4 BC because of an error in calculating the date made in the 6th century AD)

Above

Part of the foundation of Herod's temple destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. The huge limestone block measures 13.5m in length, 4.5m high, 3.5 m depth and weighs around 600 tons

Herod's successors

When Herod died, the emperor Augustus confirmed Herod's will, and the kingdom was divided between his three sons: Archelaus, Antipas and Philip



Above
Coin of Archelaus

Herod Archelaus was appointed ethnarch (a political leader over a distinct ethnic group) of Judea, Samaria and Idumea. He was detested by the Jews because he had divorced his wife to marry a foreigner and had suppressed a revolt by massacring almost 3,000 Jews. Finally the people petitioned Augustus and he was sent into exile. His reputation led the family of Jesus to hesitate before returning to Judea and they went to Galilee instead (Matthew 2:22).

They were little safer there since Galilee and Perea had been given to Herod Antipas and he was known for his cunning and spite; Jesus referred to him as 'that fox' (Luke 13:32). He built the city of Tiberius by Galilee and lived as a strict Jew. He was responsible for the execution of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:1-12). In AD 37 he was accused of treachery to the emperor Caligula and was exiled.

Herod Philip was assigned the area across Galilee. He established Caesarea Philippi, named after himself and the emperor. Philip was a fair-minded ruler of a people who were mostly Syrian and Greek. He married the infamous Salome, the daughter of Herodias. Philip is referred to only once in the New Testament (Luke 3:1). He died in AD 31 and six years later his nephew Herod Agrippa received his territory.

'Lysanius, tetrarch of Abilene' (Luke 3:1), is otherwise unknown for certain. Abilene was in the far north, part of Syria today.

Herod Agrippa

In his frenzy of fear and suspicion, in 7 BC Herod the Great ordered Agrippa's father Aristobulus and his brother Alexandros to be strangled. Agrippa was hustled off to Rome for his education and safety.

Agrippa is the last of the five Herods referred to in the New Testament. A clever diplomat, he made himself a friend of Tiberius and his successor Caligula. He was popular with the Jews because he dissuaded Caligula from establishing emperor worship in Jerusalem and vigorously opposed Christianity. Agrippa arrested and executed James the brother of John and then ordered the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-19).

When Caligula was assassinated in AD 41, Agrippa backed the most likely successor and, with his brother Herod of Chalcis, hurried off to the coronation of Claudius. In the same year, Claudius made Herod king of Judea and Samaria.

To maintain his relationship with the emperor, Herod hosted extravagant games at Caesarea in honour of Claudius. The description of his death in AD 44 (Acts 12:21-23) perfectly accords with the account given by the Jewish historian Josephus who described Agrippa's garment 'made wholly of silver' that shone so brilliantly the people cried out, 'We have hitherto revered thee only as a man. Yet shall we henceforth own thee

as superior to human nature'. Agrippa did not correct this and immediately 'a severe pain arose in his belly'. Within five days he was dead (WJ. Antiquities 19.8.2).

Below

It was here in the theatre at Caesarea that Herod Agrippa was hailed as a god and died horribly a few days later

Inset

A coin depicting Herod Agrippa and his brother Herod of Chalcis at the coronation of the emperor Claudius in AD 41



Name: Coin of Herod, king of Chalcis
Origin and date: c AD 41-48
Present location: The British Museum CM1985.10-2.1

Emperor Tiberius

When Caesar Augustus died in AD 14, his stepson Tiberius, at the age of fifty-six, took the throne



Although he is mentioned only once in the New Testament (Luke 3:1), he was the Roman emperor throughout the adult life of Jesus Christ. After a meteoritic rise to political power and a brilliant military career, Tiberius had been forced by Augustus to divorce the wife he loved and marry the emperor's daughter Julia. The divorce and Julia's openly immoral life soured Tiberius and he was never a popular emperor, becoming ever more cruel. Tiberius was incapable of working harmoniously with the Senate. By AD 27 he retired to the island of Capri and never returned to Rome, exercising little influence over events in the capital. He left the government to Sejanus who schemed only for power.

In AD 31, when Tiberius learned his true intentions, Sejanus was executed and there followed bloodletting and turmoil in Rome. In Judea and Galilee Jesus of Nazareth was preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, but the events that would change the world would have held little interest for Tiberius even if he heard of them.

When Tiberius died in AD 37 at the age of 78 years, the Senate accorded Tiberius no divine honours and the populace chanted 'To the Tiber with Tiberius' – in which the bodies of criminals were disposed.

Left

A statue of the emperor Tiberius in the Vatican Museum in Rome. Discovered at Priverno, Italy by Robert Fagan it is dated AD 37

Right

The portrait, carved on carnelian set in gold, bears a close resemblance to that on coins of the emperor Tiberius minted during his reign



'Whose image is this?'

In the early years of his reign, Tiberius did much good work in reforming the civil service and improving the finances of Rome. Since Augustus was deified at his death, Tiberius was designated *divi filius* 'a son of god'. That title was therefore familiar in the first century and the claim of Jesus was not lost on the Jews (Luke 1:35; 22:70-71). Tiberius also had his own image stamped on coins.

When Jesus was asked whether or not it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, he called for a small silver *denarius*, the daily wage of a labourer or legionary (Matthew 20:2; 22:19). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the merchant paid the landlord 'two denarii' (Luke 10:45), which presumably covered board and lodging until his return two or three days later. It was known as the 'tribute penny' and was an offence to the Jews because it contained an image of the emperor (Tiberius), which broke the second Commandment, and also because the inscription read *Divus Augustus* – the divine Augustus.

The smallest coin in the Roman empire was a *quadran*; however, in Jerusalem the *lepton* – a word meaning 'small' or 'thin' – was half this value. Mark explains for his non-Jewish readers that the two *lepta* that the widow gave to the Temple were equal to one *quadran* (Mark 12:42).

A table of the coins referred to in the New Testament and their value in relation to the denarius which, as a labourer's daily pay, was the standard unit.

talent	6,000	Matthew 18:24; 25:14-30
mina	100	Luke 19:13
stater	4	Matthew 17:27
didrachmon	2	Matthew 17:24
drachma	Greek daily pay	Luke 15:8
denarius	Roman daily pay	Matthew 18:28; 20:1; 22:19 etc
assarion	one tenth	Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6
quadran	one fortieth	Matthew 5:26; Mark 12:42
lepton	one eightieth	Mark 12:42; Luke 12:59; 21:2

The thirty 'silver coins' of Matthew 26:15 is thought to refer to the shekel, each worth 4 denarii. Jesus was sold for four months pay.



Actual size
15mm

Above

A silver *denarius* from the time of Jesus. It was a coin like this that Jesus held up in answer to the question posed in Matthew 22:17



Above

A *lepton* was the coin of least value in Jerusalem (Mark 12:42)