

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

RLJ-1778

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PART 2: HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD OF THE APOSTLES

I am giving you the background of Judea and the violent history of the Jewish people to show the world of the parents of the men who would become apostles. They instilled in their children the struggles of the Jews and the hope of a future Messiah that would someday drive out the Romans and re-establish the kingdom of Israel.

This is why the apostles asked Jesus when He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. The Jewish people were defeated. Tens of thousands had died violently in the 200 years prior to the coming of Jesus. The political system was corrupt. A descendant of Esau was their king. It seemed there was no hope until Jesus finally arrived.

Acts 1:4-8

JUDAH ARISTOBULUS

John Hyrcanus died in 104 B.C. and his son Judah Aristobulus became the next king. Hyrcanus had named his wife as the next political ruler with Aristobulus as the high priest. The problem was that Judah put his mother in prison and starved her to death. He imprisoned three brothers and a few months later ordered the murder of another brother after which he declared himself King of Judea.

Aristobulus led an army against the Ituraeans, an Arab tribe who had settled in an area north of Galilee. They were conquered and told to convert to Judaism, or be driven out from their land. The men were ordered to be circumcised. With no place to go, they complied with the decree and became Jews.

Aristobulus' health began to deteriorate and he was forced to return to the palace in Jerusalem. His wife, Salome Alexandra, stated that that his brother, Antigonus, was plotting against him and she asked Aristobulus to bring Antigonus to the palace and have him killed. The two brothers were close friends, but Aristobulus believed his wife and had his brother murdered. He died of an unknown disease in 103 B.C. and his short reign came to an end.

ALEXANDER JANNAEUS

Once Aristobulus was dead, Queen Salome Alexandra ordered the three imprisoned brothers to be released and appointed Alexander Jannaeus to be the next high priest and king of Judea. He took Salome as his wife and reigned until 76 B.C. They had two sons, Hyrcanus II, who became high priest in 62 B.C., and Aristobulus II, who was a high priest from 66-62 B.C.

Jannaeus went to war shortly after becoming king and attacked the large port city of Ptolemais (modern day Acre). Armed forces from the city of Dora came to the aid of Ptolemais but they were defeated.



Ptolemy IX was the son of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III of Egypt. He fled Egypt when his mother forced him to give up being a co-regent with her. He settled on the island of Cypress and built up a large army and navy. The leaders of Ptolemais requested aid from him and he landed forces in Judea and began to fight the Judean army.

The Judean army was defeated by Ptolemy's generals in a battle at Asophon near the Jordan River. It is estimated that 30,000-40,000 Jewish soldiers were killed. Most of northern Judea was lost and Ptolemy ordered his soldiers to kill women and children and eat them in order to terrorize the survivors.

Queen Cleopatra III decided to intervene on behalf of the Jews and ordered her army north into the land of Judah. She appointed two Jewish generals, Ananias and Chelkias, to command the Egyptian army. Ptolemy realized that it was not possible to fight a second enemy and returned to Cypress.

Jannaeus begged Cleopatra III and she allowed him to be the vassal king and continue to serve as the high priest of Judea. He continued to fight a number of wars until 89 B.C. when he was fighting against Arabs in southern Judea. He was ambushed and most of the army was killed or captured.

The Pharisee party had been waiting for an opportunity to oust Jannaeus. When he appeared at the Feast of the Tabernacles, they surrounded him on the temple ground and pelted him with lemons. Jannaeus became enraged and ordered his soldiers to charge the crowd and six thousand people were slaughtered.

This incident led to a general uprising and the leaders of the Pharisees sent a request to the Seleucid king of Syria to intervene. Demetrius III Eucærus arrived with a large army and Jannaeus was forced to flee to the mountains with the remnant.

When the Pharisees realized that Demetrius intended to take control of Judea and Jerusalem, they deserted the Syrian army and joined Jannaeus and his forces.

Demetrius withdrew and Jannaeus returned to power. He ordered his secret police to hunt down the rebels who had conspired against him. He was able to arrest a large number of Pharisees and ordered a great banquet at the palace to be set up. He invited the Sadducees, who incidentally hated the Pharisees, to come and celebrate his victory over the insurgents.

The 800 rebel prisoners watched in agony as their wives and children were executed. Then all these men were crucified while the Sadducees and Jannaeus had a feast, surrounded by 800 men slowly dying on crosses.

Alexander Jannaeus was a very cruel man. He died in 76 B.C. at the age of 49.

SALOME ALEXANDRA

While Jannaeus lay on his death bed, there was a battle raging over the fortress Ragaba. Skilled in politics, Salome did not announce the death of her husband until the Judean forces captured the fortress. Before Jannaeus died, he told his wife that their sons were not strong enough to become kings and appointed Salome as his successor.

Her political handlers contacted the Pharisees and told them that she did not intend to continue the same policies. She appointed Hyrcanus II as the high priest, who had publicly expressed his favor for the Pharisees.

The Sanhedrin once again became the highest court in Judea and most of the men serving on the Sanhedrin were Pharisees. The queen ordered all Sadducees banished from Jerusalem and sent to certain Jewish cities. She also realized that she needed a strong military and increased the army and upgraded the fortified cities to discourage hostile nations. There were no wars during her nine-year reign.

INFIGHTING

When Queen Salome died in 67 B.C., Hyrcanus II as the oldest son assumed the throne. Trouble arose when Aristobulus II started an uprising against his brother. Hyrcanus was not skilled in warfare having only served as the high priest.

Backed by the Sadducees, Aristobulus was able to form an army and lead them to Jerusalem. Hyrcanus was not able to rally the Pharisees and had no choice but to surrender the throne to his brother.

An agreement was made between the brothers where they vowed eternal peace and friendship. To seal the deal, Aristobulus' son, Alexander, married Hyrcanus' only daughter, Alexandra.

THE ROMAN ERA

Antipater the Idumaeen was a high ranking official in the government of Hyrcanus II who plotted to get rid of him and his brother Aristobulus. Antipater was born to Edomite parents who had been forced to convert to Judaism. He convinced Hyrcanus II that his brother had usurped the throne. Antipater said he had connections with the Nabataea Arabs, a nation that lived in modern day Saudi Arabia, and King Aretas III was ready to send an army to Jerusalem to depose Aristobulus. Hyrcanus promised Aretas that if he restored him to the throne, he could secure necessary money from the state treasury.

Hyrcanus forgot about the eternal friendship pledged to his brother and Antipater sent a messenger to the Nabataeans. They arrived to Jerusalem a short time later and laid siege to the city. Aristobulus did not expect betrayal from his brother, and since he did not have the forces to fight the Nabataeans, he withdrew while his soldiers stood guard on the walls of Jerusalem. Both sides expected a drawn out siege.

GNAEUS POMPEIUS MAGNUS

General Pompey had conquered Syria and was considering the next territory he wanted to add to the Roman Empire. He had a spy network that informed him about two quarreling brothers in Jerusalem. He decided this was a golden opportunity to add the Judean kingdom to Rome's growing list of territories and sent a lieutenant named Marcus Aemilius Scaurus with a detachment of Roman soldiers to Jerusalem. Scaurus told Aretas to end the siege at Jerusalem or face war with Rome. The Nabataeans did not want a conflict with a powerful enemy and returned to Saudi Arabia.

Around 63 B.C. Pompey arrived in Judea and took control of the countryside. Hyrcanus and Aristobulus asked him to mediate a solution in their conflict. Since Aristobulus

controlled the temple, he ordered a vine of pure gold from the temple treasures sent to the Roman general, who in turn sent it to Rome and it ended up at the temple of Jupiter.

Antipater, as a skilled political operator, sent word to Pompey that siding with Hyrcanus would make it easier for Rome to control Jerusalem and add it to their expanding empire.

While Pompey was contemplating the matter, a third delegation consisting of Pharisees from the Sanhedrin showed up. They accused the brothers of acting like Judea was their private property and asked Pompey to remove Hyrcanus and Aristobulus from power so that Judea could return to its' ancient way of rule through the office of the high priest.

Pompey had no interest in taking sides in the fight between Jewish factions and ordered his soldiers to storm Jerusalem. Aristobulus surrendered to the Romans, but the Sadducees refused to open the gates. Hyrcanus had some supporters in Jerusalem and these two factions fought each other. The gates to the city were opened and the Sadducees retreated to the temple and barricaded behind its wall.

When the Romans stormed the temple, they did not make any difference between the Sadducee soldiers and the priests. Pompey had given orders to his soldiers to clean out the temple and kill everyone. According to Jewish historical records some 12,000 Jews were killed.

Once the city was secured, Pompey and his officers entered the temple to see the inside for themselves. According to the Jews, their very presence desecrated the holy of holies despite the fact that all they did was look around. The next day Pompey restored Hyrcanus to the office of high priest and ordered the men in charge of the temple to purify it and to bring offerings to God.

THE RISE OF THE ANTIPATER DYNASTY

Pompey decreed that Judea was to be incorporated as a province of Syria, which was already a Roman possession. Aristobulus II and his two sons were taken to Rome and marched in a victory parade for General Pompey. Hyrcanus II was allowed to stay as the high priest while Antipater became the vassal ruler over Jerusalem and Judea. Antipater had two sons Phasaël and Herod. Phasaël was to be a governor under Antipater and Herod was to be the governor of Galilee.

TROUBLE IN ROME

Gaius Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompey became involved in a power struggle that resulted in a civil war encompassing a large portion of the Roman Empire. It was a bloody conflict with Roman legions fighting one another.

Caesar wanted to create trouble for Pompey, who controlled the eastern part of the Roman Empire. He freed Aristobulus II and supplied him with money to raise an army in Judea and attack Pompey's positions. Antipater discovered the plan and sent his men to poison Aristobulus as he traveled through Greece and also ordered the murder of Aristobulus' son, Alexander.

The Roman civil war ended in 48 B.C. Antipater had backed Pompey, but as a slick political operator, he quickly switched sides and pledged support to Caesar who confirmed that Antipater could keep his position and Hyrcanus II remain the high priest.

SECOND ROMAN CIVIL WAR

Gaius Cassius Longinus was a Roman senator and general, and with Senator Marcus Junius Brutus, they plotted the murder of Julius Caesar. The Ides of March in the Roman calendar corresponds to March 15th and was notable as a deadline for settling debts. This took place in 44 B.C. and led to a second civil war.

Roman legions fought each other as Cassius and Brutus controlled the eastern part of the empire. Cassius needed large amounts of money to pay his soldiers and imposed a heavy tax upon Judea. Antipater and his sons didn't know it but they were lined up with the losing side again as their soldiers ruthlessly plundered the people of Judea to provide Cassius with the funds he needed. This financial rape created hate for Antipater and his family.

Two Roman generals, Gaius Octavius (also known as Gaius Julius Caesar, Octavian, and Caesar Augustus) and Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) rallied their forces and pursued Cassius and Brutus.

The two sides lined up at Philippi. Antony's soldiers fought against the forces of Cassius and defeated them. Cassius committed suicide after falsely hearing that Brutus had also been defeated. Octavius' legions were pushed back by the soldiers of Brutus, but it went badly during the second battle a couple of weeks later and Brutus committed suicide.

Antipater the Idumean was assassinated in 43 B.C. by the Nabatean king, Malichus I, who bribed one of Hyrcanus' cup-bearers to poison Antipater.

The Parthians that invaded Syria in 40 B.C. wanted a vassal ruler on the throne of Judaea that was hostile to the Romans. Antigonus II Mattathias, son of Aristobulus II, was that man. He promised them a large amount of gold and five hundred female slaves and was given five hundred mercenaries in return. Antigonus became popular with the aristocratic class in Jerusalem and also gained the support of the Pharisees.

With the help of the Parthians, Hyrcanus II the high priest and Phasael the governor of Jerusalem were captured under the pretext of peace talks. Antigonus had his uncle's ears cut off so he could no longer be a high priest and exiled him to Babylon. Phasael committed suicide while imprisoned and Herod the Great fled to the Roman forces which were coming to retake Jerusalem.

Mark Antony commissioned Gaius Sosius, the governor of Syria and Cilicia, to march on Jerusalem and take it. Antigonus was captured in 37 B.C. and executed by the Romans at Herod's behest because of his Hasmonean lineage. Herod became the vassal king of Jerusalem and went on to rebuild the temple.

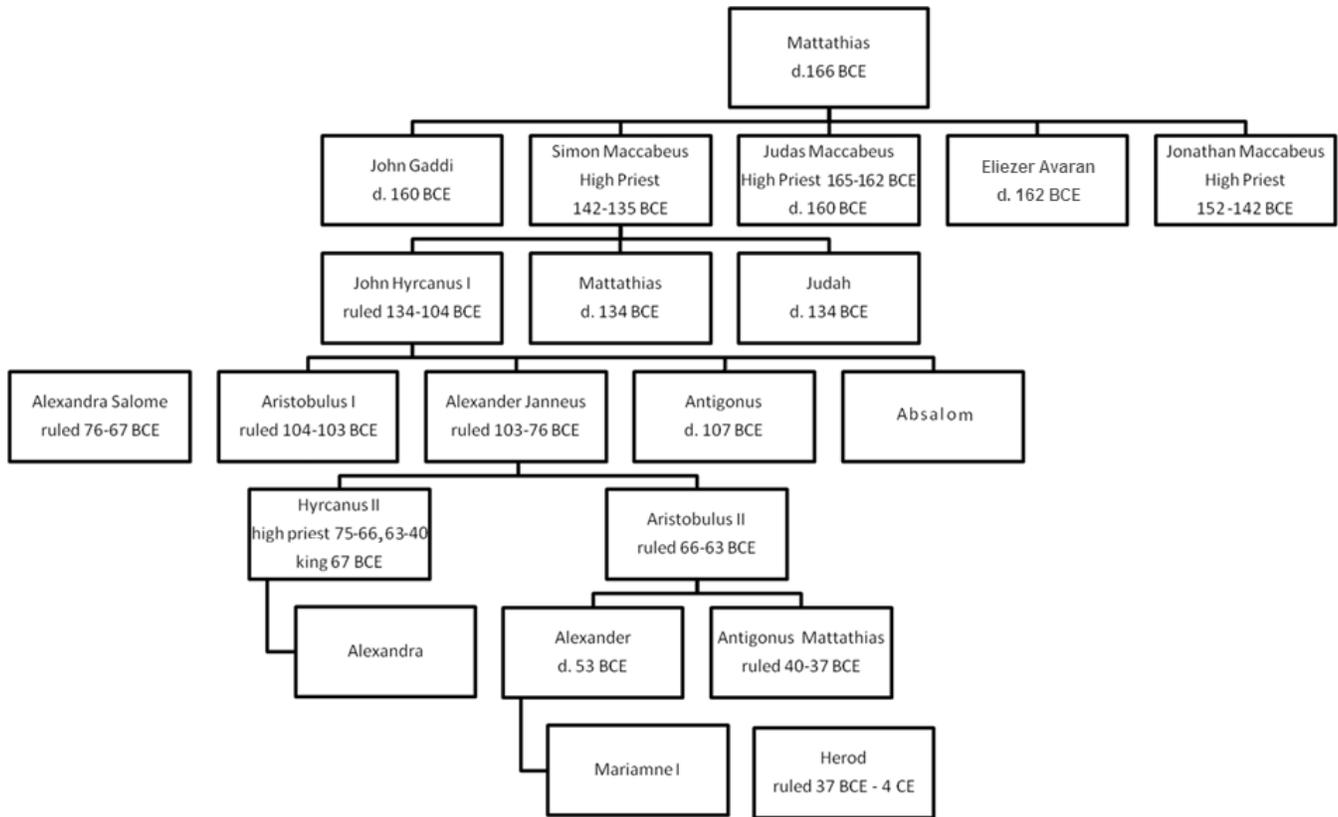
Gaius Octavius (also known as Gaius Julius Caesar, Octavian) would go on to become the Roman Emperor in 27 B.C. This great-nephew to Julius Caesar took the name of Caesar Augustus and reigned until his death in 14 A.D. This is the man that was

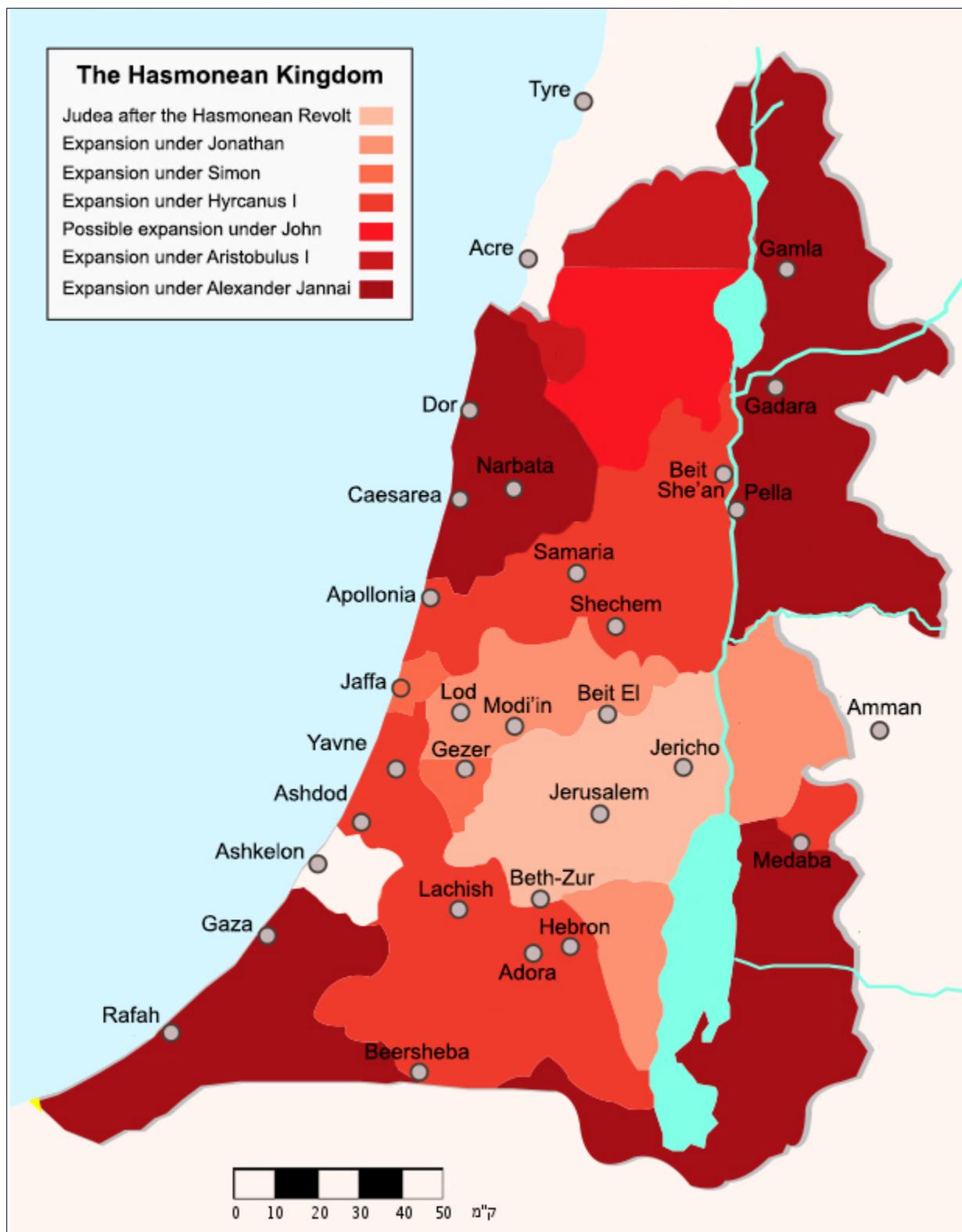
responsible for the taxation decree that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where the Son of God was born into the world and introduced to humanity. **Luke 2:1-7**

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?

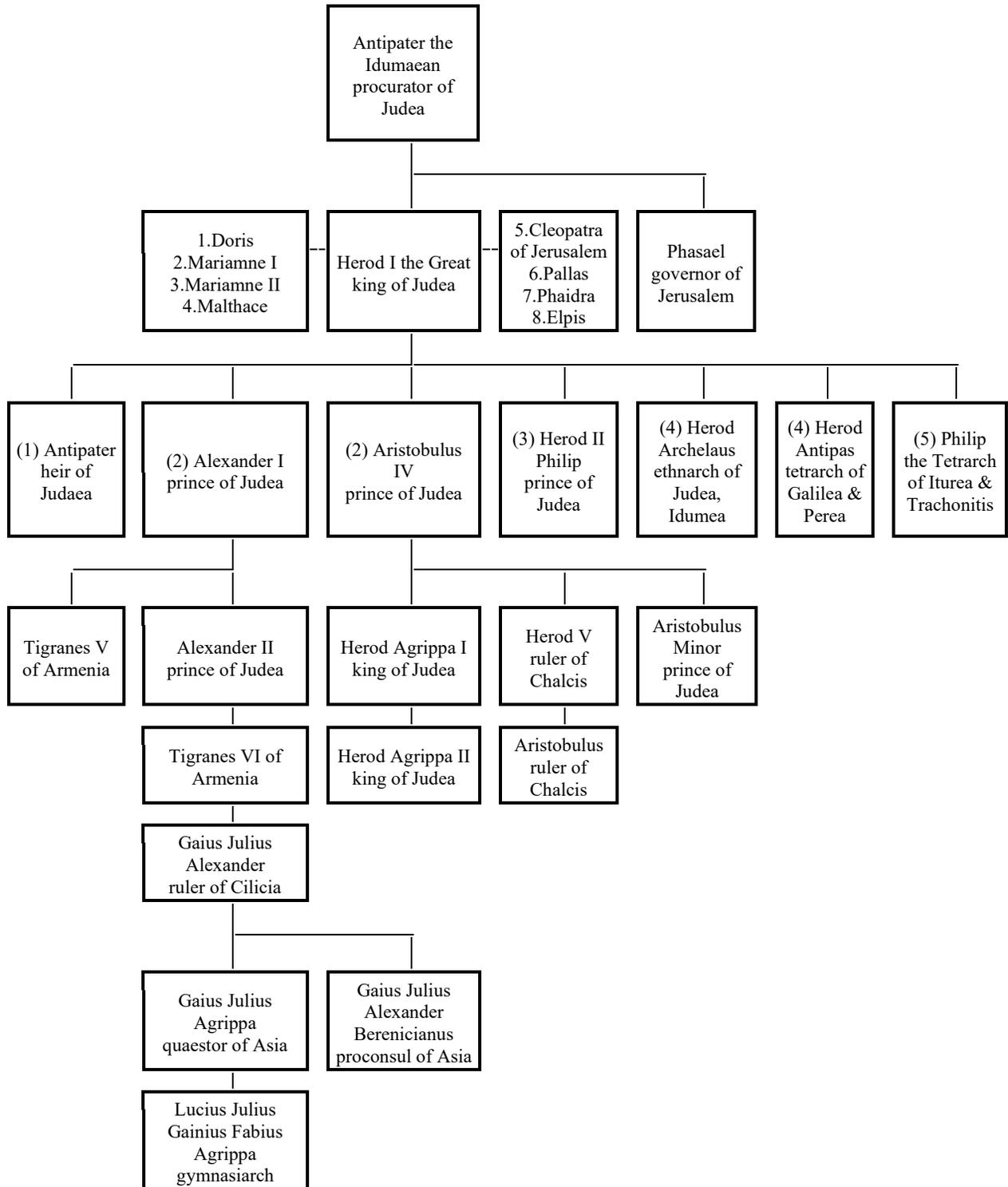
The Hasmonean Dynasty

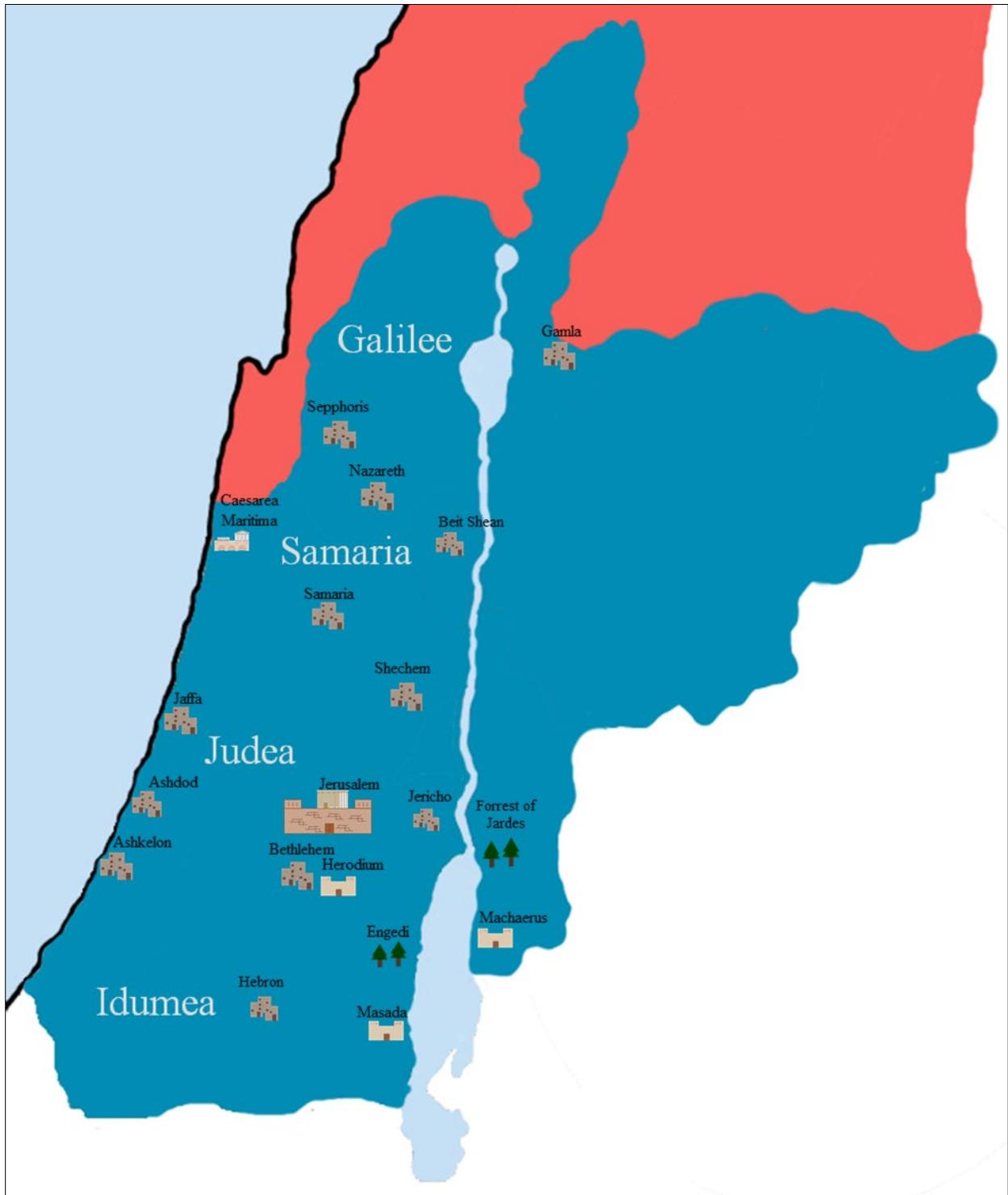




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The Herodian Dynasty





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