

Intertestamental Period: Politics in Early Christianity

Introduction:

1. Towards the end of the life of Herod the Great, we now enter into the New Testament period.
2. While we have now covered the “intertestamental period,” the “second temple period” continues on. Let’s examine the political situation of Judea in the time of Christ and early Christianity.

I. Herod’s Sons

A. The Death of Herod

1. After the death of Herod the Great, his kingdom is divided among several of his surviving sons in accordance with his will.
2. Ironically, the division of the kingdom counters the original intention of Herod to make Judea a strong Mediterranean power.
3. His children would not become kings but Tetrarchs and were subject to the ruling of the Sanhedrin. Should they abdicate or lose the throne, Rome would take over.

B. Archelaus (4 BC-AD 6)

1. He ruled over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea.
2. He scandalized the Jews in several ways:
 - a) His mother was a Samaritan.
 - b) Upon taking the throne, he had 3000 protesters executed in the temple during Passover.
 - c) He changed the High Priesthood at will
 - d) He married Glaphyra, the wife of his half-brother Alexander.
3. After the Jews appealed to Rome for his removal, He was exiled to Gaul.
 - a) After the Archelaus were exiled, Rome seized control over Judea and installed their own procurators to govern the territory.

C. Philip (4 BC-AD 34)

1. He essentially ruled over Batanea. (Luke 3:1)
2. A seemingly good and fair ruler without much of the paranoia and ambition of his family.
3. He rebuilt and renamed the city of Caesarea-Philippi after himself.
4. He was on good terms with the Roman emperors and built a city named after Augustus’ daughter.

D. Antipas (4 BC-AD 39)

1. He ruled over the areas of Galilee and Perea.
2. He married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, his niece.

- a) John the Baptist spoke out against this Marriage, and resulted in his death.
 - (1) (Mark 6:17-29)
- 3. He is the Herod that had the most interactions with Jesus.
 - a) (Luke 13:31-32)
 - b) (Luke 23:6-9)

II. Judea, The Roman Province

A. Changes for Judea as a Roman Province

- 1. Taxation
 - a) Poll Tax, Land Tax, Wealth Tax, etc.
 - b) The right to mint coins is revoked
- 2. Governance
 - a) The Sanhedrin is now subordinate to the procurator. The Procurators is the final say, especially in regard to the death penalty.
- 3. Military power
 - a) Without an ethnarch, military power belongs to the Roman procurator. There is also an increased presence of Roman troops.
- 4. Religious power
 - a) The Procurator may appoint the high priests.

B. Valerius Gratis (AD 15-26)

- 1. Upon taking power, Valerius removed the High Priesthood from Annas Ben-Seth. (John 18:12-14)
- 2. Gratis notoriously appointed new High Priests yearly until he found one that he liked, Caiaphas.

C. Pilate (AD 26-36)

- 1. Major Clashes between Pilate and the People
 - a) Introduced Roman Ensigns to Jerusalem
 - b) Financed and aqueduct from the Temple treasury
 - c) Engraved pagan symbols on coins minted in Judea
 - d) Installed Shields bearing the image of the emperor in Jerusalem
 - e) Mingled the blood of the Galileans with sacrifices. (Luke 13:1)
- 2. His longevity is partly explained by:
 - a) His support from Sejanus, commander of the Praetorian guard.
 - b) The lack of a governor in Syria to oversee Judea.

III. The Last Kings and Pre-Revolt Procurators

A. Agrippa I (AD 41-44)

- 1. Agrippa I, as the child of Aristobulus IV, he was the heir to both the Hasmonean and Herodian dynasties.
- 2. Agrippa was raised in the courts of Rome as a hostage, where he became good friends with the nephew of Tiberius Caesar, Claudius.

3. When Caligula became emperor, he installed his friend Agrippa I as king of Judea.
4. For a brief period from AD 41-44, all of Palestine returned to the status of a client kingdom under Agrippa 1.
5. Agrippa I famously stood up to Caligula when he attempted to put a statue of himself in the temple of Jerusalem.
6. The Jews loved Agrippa I, and Rabbi Gamaliel embraced him as a “brother.”
7. His amicability to the Jews leads him to be hostile towards early Christians. He kills James and nearly has Peter killed. (Acts 12:1-5)
8. Eventually, certain Jews began to regard Agrippa as a God. He was struck dead for this.
 - a) (Acts 20:20-23)
 - b) (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 19.8.2)

B. Antoninus Felix (AD 52-60)

1. Felix was likely a freed slave who had worked his way up in Roman society.
2. Felix was married to Drusilla, the Daughter of Agrippa II.
3. During his rule, Jonathan, the High Priest, was assassinated by the Sicarii.
4. There were several rebellion efforts that began to grow in this time.
 - a) An “Egyptian” fathered on the Mt of olives and promised to bring down the walls of Jerusalem. Felix put down the resistance.
5. Felix imprisons Paul (Acts 24:22)

C. Porcius Festus (AD 60-62)

1. Reigned as procurator for two years.
2. A certain “prophet” claimed that whoever would follow him to the desert would be saved. Festus killed him and all his followers.
3. Dismantles the Jew’s wall obstructing the view of Agrippa II over the temple to be dismantled. After appeal to Nero, the wall is allowed to stand.
4. Hears Paul plead his case alongside of Agrippa II.

D. Agrippa II (AD 50-92)

1. Agrippa II was well-liked by both Jews and Romans.
2. He remarkably maintains his rule through the Great Jewish Revolt.
3. He had an incestuous marriage with his sister Berenice.
 - a) It was before Agrippa II and Bernice that Paul pled his case. (Acts 26:24-29)
 - (1) Agrippa’s remark is almost certainly sarcastic and dismissive.

E. Albinus and Gessius Florus (AD 62-66)

1. Albinus (AD 62-64) executed many Sicarii who had been kidnapping government officials.
2. Gessius Florus (AD 64-66) was a poor leader.
 - a) He never developed a relationship with the Jews.
 - b) He allowed the seeds of rebellion to grow and fester.

Conclusion:

1. With the growing tensions of the time, and the failure of Gessius Florus to govern effectively, the Great Jewish Rebellion would soon break out.
2. Next week we will discuss and conclude this series looking at the Great Revolt and the breaths of Jewish autonomy.