

HEROD

10-episode drama, 50-minute episodes

The show "Herod" will encompass a time period of 20 years, beginning in the year 47 BC, as young Herod is appointed governor of the Galilee, then following his dizzying ascent to the throne and the first ten years of his bloody regime, and finally ending with the execution of his wife, Mariamne the Hasmonean.

HEROD THE MAN

When young Herod is appointed governor of the Galilee in Judea, no one predicts a bright future for him. The year is 47 BC, Judea is a protectorate of the Roman Empire and is led by the High Priest, John Hyrcanus of the Hasmonean dynasty. Herod is appointed because his father, Antipater, holds much power in the Judean government. Herod's first mission in the Galilee - taking out a gang of Jewish rebels - quickly ends in triumph. He surprises them in their caves and captures their leaders. But rather than bring them to trial in Jerusalem, Herod decides to crucify the rebel leaders before their family's eyes. The slain rebels' mothers head for the temple in Jerusalem, crying out for vengeance. The people of Judea are enraged, and Herod is forced to stand trial in the Jewish Sanhedrin, with a death sentence awaiting him at the end of it.

And so, with a swift blow of his sword, Herod steps onto the stage of history and begins a fantastic, 45-year-long career, over the course of which he will become the ruler of the kingdom of Judea and one of the biggest heroes of the ancient world's historical drama. He is a tragic hero, whose amazing accomplishments as king, along with his miserable personal life, create a fascinating tragedy about the man who had it all. All but love.

The story of Herod's life is so unbelievable, his adventures, achievements and life's work could fill the biographies of ten rulers, and they would still each be considered great and prolific kings.

He is considered one of the greatest villains in human history - the man who ordered the Massacre of the Innocent babies in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus's birth, all because he heard a prophecy that in Bethlehem the "next King of the Jews" would be born. And though this story's historical accuracy is questionable, it grew from the fertile soil of Herod's real-life exploits. For this man, who ruled Judea for 35 years and was close friends with Roman rulers, executed his beautiful wife Mariamne the Hasmonean, drowned her 17-year-old brother, hanged her mother Alexandra, and killed her elderly grandfather, the former ruler, John Hyrcanus. He sentenced to death and executed his two sons from Mariamne, Alexandros and Aristobulus, because they were handsomer and taller and would tease him about being a commoner. Then, five days before his death, he killed his eldest son Antipater, suspecting that he had tried to poison him and take his place on the throne.

A man of riddles and contradictions, Herod soared to heights of fame and then plummeted to hit rock bottom. He was a merciful man who fed his people during a drought, while leading a bloody regime, with a secret police and torture chambers.

He suspected his friends and his family, and imprisoned, murdered and tortured many of them - all while building the most beautiful temple in the world for God in Jerusalem, building fortresses and palaces in the desert, funding Olympic games in Greece, building cities all over the Roman Empire, and establishing the biggest and most advanced port in the ancient world in Caesarea.

"His land is much smaller than his talent," said Herod's good friend Augustus, ruler of the Roman Empire, and nonetheless gave Herod more and more land and people to govern over.

"It is better to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons," said the same Augustus, since as a Jew, Herod would not eat pork, but he did kill his sons off one after the other.

Anyone watching his grand funeral procession from afar would have seen his golden casket surrounded by his wives, dozens of children and grandchildren, thousands of soldiers, slaves, courtiers in their finest armor and garbs, and might have mistakenly believed he was a beloved, admired king. But anyone taking a closer look would have noticed that not a single tear was shed, not a single lament was spoken, not a single person was crying.

If Herod's life had been made into a movie, we would probably have said it was crammed with too much violence and blood, too much passion, too much cruelty and madness, and far too much plot. There would be too many names of historical celebrities, world conquerors who were also the greatest of lovers, an endless parade of namedropping meant to impress us. If Herod's life had been made into a movie, we would have said it was over-the-top, pretentious and unconvincing.

Luckily for us, to fit Herod's life, we have the format of the television series.

Half Jew, Half Edomite, Half Arab

Herod, king of the Jews, was not of Jewish origin - on his father's side he was an Edomite and part of a well-respected Edomite family that converted to Judaism. His father, Antipater, was the advisor to the Hasmonean king John Hyrcanus, and the most powerful man in the kingdom. Herod's mother, Cypros, was a Nabataean noblewoman from Petra - the city carved into the rock. The Nabataeans were Arabic tribes who moved north from the Arabian Peninsula, and ruled the world's perfume trade.

Herod, the greatest Jewish King, was in fact an Arab.

The man who rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and ruled over the Jews for 35 years was of Arab descent, educated the Hellenistic way, a Jew by way of religion, and a Roman citizen. Nothing good could come of this.

A JEWISH KING OR KING OF THE JEWS?

"One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother."

This biblical verse settled like a dark cloud over Herod throughout his reign as king.

"One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you."

And not a single Jew in all of the Judean Kingdom felt that Herod was his brethren.

Herod was not chosen as king by his subjects, nor by clerics, nor by being heir to a dynasty, nor by God - the Romans appointed him king in the Roman senate, and sent him to conquer Jerusalem and depose the Hasmonean king who sat on the throne at the time.

12 thousand Jews were killed by this action.

In spite of all that Herod did for the kingdom, for the Jews in Judea and in the diaspora, and though he built the Temple and strictly adhered to the Torah's commandments, the Jews never recognized him as a fellow Jew or as worthy of the crown.

Naturally, the rest of the world saw him as a Jew.

HOUSE OF HEROD VS. HOUSE OF HASMONEANS - TWO DYNASTIES IN A BATTLE TO THE DEATH.

Herod takes the throne after a hundred years of Hasmonean rule. His grandfather and father were advisors to Hasmonean kings. He grew up in a house employed by the Hasmoneans, where he developed the inferiority complex he suffers from when dealing with Hasmonean princes, as well as his jealousy.

The Hasmonean dynasty was grand - it had brave, successful kings who earned Judea's fine regional standing and were beloved by their people. When Herod takes the throne, he feels he must be better than them, more successful than them, more beloved. He's worried that the people will rebel and bring the Hasmoneans back to rule over them, and he understands that he must kill every last Hasmonean. He is not exceptional in this sense - King David, for instance, erased any trace of Saul's royal court. As did King Solomon after him. All new kings hate the fact that the people miss the previous royal dynasty. To stamp out all hope of the former dynasty's return, they must be eradicated.

HEROD MAKES A TRAGIC MISTAKE

In a surprisingly illogical move, Herod gets engaged to the beautiful Mariamne, the Hasmonean princess and granddaughter of the former king, thereby throwing his life into endless chaos.

When he is forced to leave the country during the Parthian invasion, he sends his Nabataean mother Cypros and his sister Salome up to Masada, along with his fiancé Mariamne and her mother Alexandra. This is a terrible mistake. The two years these four women spend besieged on a desert mountaintop will ruin Herod's life over the next forty years.

The arrogant Jewish princesses of the Hasmonean dynasty look down on the Nabataean's origins. Their venomous attitude, their contempt for the Nabataean's ignorance and bad manners, leave the souls of Cypros and Salome wounded beyond repair.

From that point on, Cypros and Salome will wage an endless war against Mariamne and Alexandra.

They will cause Herod, who is madly in love with his wife Mariamne, to kill her out of jealousy, believing she has been unfaithful. They will frame Mariamne's sons and bring about their deaths at Herod's hands. They will whisper in his ears and rob him of all rest until they have destroyed four generations of the Hasmonean dynasty.

WHEN IS ALL THIS HAPPENING?

It is the 1st century BC, one of the most fascinating periods in human history - at the beginning of the century, Julius Caesar is born, and at the end of the century, Jesus Christ is born, and over the course of the century, the Hellenistic world collapses while the Roman Republic turns into an Empire and conquers most of the world. A new religion is on the horizon - Christianity. The plot of Herod's life crosses ways with the century's most exciting figures - Julius Caesar, Marc Antony, Cleopatra, and first and foremost, his good friend Augustus Caesar, ruler of the world.

WHERE IS ALL THIS HAPPENING?

The plot is mostly set in the kingdom of Judea - in the temple and the royal court in Jerusalem, in the rebel's caves in the snowy Galilee, the winter castle in Jericho, the wondrous port city of Caesarea, the Jordan valley, the Dead Sea and the powerful desert fortresses - Masada, Herodium, Hyrcania and Alexandrion. But it also ventures to the legendary city of Petra, capital of the Nabataean kingdom, Damascus in Syria where the Roman governor is stationed, Beirut in Lebanon, Cleopatra's Alexandria, Rhodes, the copper mines of Cyprus, and the Roman Forum, senate, Jupiter Temple, Augustus Caesar's palace and his wife Livia's kitchen.

HEROD'S ROYAL COURT

Three enormous towers defend Herod's royal court, all turned inward, toward the city, protecting the king from his own subjects. Here, in Herod's beautiful royal court in Jerusalem, is the government's central nervous system, and this is where the majority of the plot unfolds.

The court is a social network built of many layers and people. It is an incredibly dangerous place. A man's career does not end by being fired or deposed but rather by sudden death. And "heads will roll" is meant quite literally.

The people of the court are Jews, Edomites, Romans, Greeks and Nabataeans - a dense web of conflicting interests. Each person has their own religion, culture, loyalties and commitments. There are money men and temple priests, Germanic bodyguards, zealous rabbis, beautiful eunuchs from Syria, the king's wives and daughters, mistresses, cooks, food tasters, the king's personal tailors and doctors, and philosophers to educate the royal children. There are artists, actors and musicians from all over the world, hangmen and torture experts. And all of them plot with everybody. All of them betray everybody. In the extensive library, a famous historian, Nicolaus of Damascus, writes the world's history, revolving around king Herod, who funds its writing. This is where ambassadors, secret police officers and military commanders come to. This is where the orgies, banquets and staff meetings take place. This is where decisions are made and orders are issued. This is where severed heads are brought for display.

THE STYLE OF "HEROD" - WHAT KIND OF A SHOW IS THIS?

"Herod" is an intense drama like "Homeland", as poisonous and political as "House of Cards", and as thrilling, cruel and multi-charactered as "Game of Thrones".

This is not a historical period piece where people speak slowly or artificially and rarely smile.

There is no "narrator" - no elderly king relaying his memories on his deathbed, no voiceover narrator reading off the pages of a dusty old book.

"Herod" is a realistic, political, vibrant and dynamic show taking place in the here and now of Judea in the 1st Century BC, an international city, dazzling in its beauty and unparalleled in its dangers.

The plot focuses on Herod's tragic, fascinating personality; the enormous gap between his greatness and his misery; his relationships; the passionate power plays between the royal houses; the political moves; the family intrigue; the scheming surrounding him; the plotting, betrayal and assassination attempts.

The Path to Herod

In the year 586 BC, after nearly 600 years of King David's dynasty ruling the hilly kingdom surrounding Jerusalem, Judea rebels against the Babylonian Empire.

The Babylonians conquer Judea, destroy the holy temple and exile the Jews to Babylon. Not all of them - only the elites.

70 years go by, and Babylon is conquered by Persia. Cyrus, king of Persia, allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. Some return, but not all. They find that most of their land has been repopulated by others - Samaritans in the center, Edomites in the south, Phoenicians and Greeks along the shoreline. The Jews have no king - their leader is their High Priest.

Two hundred years of Persian occupation go by. In the year 333 BC, Alexander the Great rampages through the Middle East, brings Persia to its knees and instates Greek culture - Hellenism - over most of the world. And then he dies at a young age.

His vast empire is split among three heirs. Judea falls to the Seleucid Empire. The Jews do not care who rules over them, as long as they are permitted to observe their religion and laws. But in the middle of the 2nd century BC, Antiochus the fourth of the Seleucid Empire decides that Judaism must end. He forbids circumcisions and other religious rites, desecrates the temple and forces the Jews into idolatry.

The rebellion begins almost at once. One family from Modi'in, the Hasmoneans, leads the successful rebellion. They banish the Seleucid Empire and establish an independent state. They attack the Hellenistic cities along the shoreline, strike at the Samaritans, and forcefully convert the Edomites to Judaism. Their kingdom expands, especially under the rule of Alexander Jannaeus and his wife, Salome Alexandra.

For a short period of time, Judea knows happy days. The religious leadership is in the hands of the Pharisees - a reform religious cult, and the country's military and diplomatic successes turn Judea into a thriving kingdom.

Then, Salome Alexandra dies, and her two sons, John Hyrcanus and his younger brother Aristobulus, fight over the inheritance.

Pompey the Great, the victorious Roman military leader, returns from the east with his legions.

The rival Hasmonean siblings stand before him in Damascus and ask for Rome's support. Pompey promises an answer in the spring, when he comes down to Judea on his way to fight the Nabataeans. But Aristobulus gets ahead of himself - he and his men entrench themselves in the city of Jerusalem. Pompey has no choice - he conquers Jerusalem, appoints Hyrcanus as the high priest and leader, while putting the real power in the hands of Hyrcanus's advisor, Antipater, the Edomite convert and Herod's father.

EPISODES 1-2 - OUTLINE

A full moon hangs in the sky. A convoy of Nabataean camels, loaded with perfumes and spices, is ambushed while making its way north on the King's Road to Syria. The attackers are followers of Hezekiah the Galilean, the leader of the lawless Jewish rebels up north. They gain control of the convoy, kill the guards, leave the merchants bound on the side of the road, and head off to Gadar, the next stop on the convoy's route. Here, disguised as Nabataean merchants, they infiltrate the Roman military camp, loot the armory and strike at the soldiers of the stronghold. The city is up in flames as they retreat with their spoils, galloping west toward the Sea of Galilee. By the Jordan River Estuary they come across a small royal convoy heading north, led by the High Priest from Jerusalem, John Hyrcanus. Hezekiah the Galilean decides not to attack the convoy, and allows it to ride on.

A CRUCIAL MEETING WITH JULIUS CAESAR

47 BC

After Julius Caesar is victorious in Egypt, he returns to Rome. On his way, he stops in Syria to set a new world order in the region. One after another, delegations of local leaders come to see him. Representatives from Judea stand before Caesar - John Hyrcanus the High Priest, Antipater the Edomite (Hyrcanus's right hand man and the most powerful man in the kingdom), and Antipater's two sons - Phasael and Herod. Slaves carry in chests full of gold coins, a gift for the emperor.

Caesar likes these men. He thanks John Hyrcanus and Antipater for their bravery and their critical aid during his battle in Egypt, when he was in great distress. He dictates his decision - he appoints John to be High Priest and leader of the Jewish people forever and decrees that the position will stay within the Hyrcanus dynasty forever. He provides Antipater and his sons with Roman citizenship, and appoints Antipater governor of Judea. John has been given an honorable representative position. Antipater will be the de-facto ruler. Caesar returns to Judea districts that were torn from the kingdom, and lessens its tax burden. The Hyrcanus camp is overjoyed.

Enter Antigonus, son of Aristobulus, the previous Hasmonean king, poisoned in Rome two years ago. He has brought chests of gold and jewelry as well - a gift for Caesar. He wishes to appeal the decision, and demands the crown for himself. His claim to the crown is quite convincing, but it does not sway Julius, who decides in favor of Hyrcanus, mostly on account of Antipater. Julius Caesar trusts Antipater's loyalty and organizational skills; he knows Antipater will ensure timely taxations, law and order, and the end of the rebel gangs in the Galilee.

Antigonus realizes that Rome will do him no favors. The chests of gold he brought with him are gone, taken by Julius Caesar's men. Before leaving, he promises his uncle Hyrcanus he will return and avenge this injustice. (And he will, in fact, return in 7 years, accompanied by the army of Parthians, conquer the land and rule over Judea for 3 years).

HEROD GETS MARRIED

It's springtime in Jerusalem, and Herod's wedding day in the Edomite quarter of Jerusalem. Herod, 25 years old, marries Doris, a 15-year-old girl from a Jerusalem Edomite family. The ceremony is delayed; they're waiting for the arrival of John Hyrcanus, the high priest and leader of the Jewish people, who is coming to bless the marriage. Hyrcanus has been heavily criticized over the past few months for his inaction. Jewish leaders claim that he has ceded rule of the land over to Antipater of Idumea.

Herod, the groom, is a third generation Edomite whose family converted to Judaism. The ceremony is meant to be Jewish. But in a hidden courtyard, the women of the family secretly hold a ceremony to the Edomite god Qos. They smear oil on the body of the teenaged bride and prepare her for her wedding night. A Jewish slave who watches this ceremony is horrified.

Meanwhile, an urgent council gathers in Antipater's offices. Messengers coming from the north report that gangs of rebel Jews led by Hezekiah the Galilean have attacked Nabataean merchant caravans and Syrian settlements in the Golan heights, slaughtering, robbing and pillaging. The Roman governor in Syria is threatening to invade the Galilee and instill order. Judea's autonomy is at risk. Antipater, the governor of Judea, divides rule of the country up between his sons, his eldest Phasaël and Herod. Herod wants to head up to the Galilee, but Antipater is concerned about Herod's unpredictable temper, and prefers that he stay in Jerusalem under his supervision, and that Phasaël his brother go up north. Herod's bride will need him by her side as well. Herod refuses. Jerusalem needs a politician, while the Galilee needs a warrior. He wants to fight. Antipater has no choice. Herod is appointed governor of the Galilee. Phasaël will remain in Jerusalem.

Herod gets to work even as his wedding is underway. The song and dance and drinks are of no interest to him. He sends a carrier pigeon to his military commander up north and announces he will arrive in a month, after the celebration days are behind him and he has recruited and trained soldiers. His mother Cypros interrupts his plans and takes him to fulfill his wedding night obligations. He enters a room where his young bride Doris awaits him, along with the family's women. Without any further ado, he fucks her and walks out, leaving her bleeding, hurting and crying. Herod does not show up for the feast held in the main courtyard. Where has he gone?

HEROD GETS IN TROUBLE UP NORTH

Herod, leading a division of warriors, rides north along the Jordan River for a night and a day, and camps secretly by the Sea of Galilee. **As he expected, the message he sent about his arrival in a month has leaked to the rebels, causing them to be complacent in the meanwhile.** When night falls, he rides up to the mountains, surprises them in their caves, traps the rebel leaders and brings them back to his camp.

The next morning, the convoy of captives prepares to leave for Jerusalem. The captive's families press against the fence, cursing Herod and his soldiers. Herod gives his soldiers their orders and turns to the captives. Hezekiah the Galilean, the leader of the rebel gangs, insults Herod and calls him an Edomite dog, a slave to the Hasmoneans. He undermines Herod's authority and challenges him to a fight, man to man. The Jewish captives raise their voices, and Herod has no choice but to accept the challenge.

He orders his men to untie Hezekiah and provide him with a sword and a shield. Herod's men try to prevent him from fighting. Herod is a short man, and Hezekiah is large. The fight sways to either man's advantage, but finally, Herod is able to thrust his sword into Hezekiah, who falls to the ground. The families' cursing and screaming spurs him on, and Herod decapitates Hezekiah, then turns to the other bound captives and orders his men to crucify them. The entire Galilee is horrified. Sextus Caesar, the Roman governor in nearby Syria, thanks Herod and takes him under his wing.

HEROD STANDS TRIAL

The mothers of the dead captives head to Jerusalem and demand revenge. They stand their ground for days and nights at the entrance to the temple, their cries for justice piercing the skies. The Judean people are furious. Those close to John Hyrcanus tell him he has become a puppet in the hands of Antipater and his sons. Rebellion is in the air. John Hyrcanus, the weak-willed leader, has no choice - he convenes the Sanhedrin and summons Herod to stand trial.

Herod thinks very little of this. He feels protected by the Roman governor. But Herod's father, Antipater, governor of Judea and the most powerful man in the kingdom, advises to Herod that he should come to the trial with a bodyguard and his head held high, and he promises that his name will be cleared. The Roman governor in Syria sends a messenger to threaten Hyrcanus. He reminds him that Herod is now a citizen of Rome, and cannot be tried against his will. It is clear to all that this is a nothing but a trial for show that will end with Herod's exoneration. Herod arrives in Jerusalem with an armed battalion, and enters the Sanhedrin in the temple. He is dressed elegantly in a crimson Roman cape, his sword at his hips and his hair all made up. The frightened members of the Sanhedrin are about to exonerate him and set him free when one of them, Shammai, gets up and gives a brave speech that turns everything upside down in an instant. Despite his armed guards and outright defiance, it seems that Herod is about to be found guilty and face imprisonment and execution.

The high priest John Hyrcanus cuts the deliberations short and postpones the verdict to the next morning. During the night, he frees Herod from custody.

A MEETING AT THE DEAD SEA

Scorned and humiliated, Herod flees from Jerusalem on horseback in the dead of night, along with six riders. They head east, and at dawn they reach Qumran, along the northern shore of the Dead Sea. Under the first rays of light, they spot hundreds of people dressed in white and wearing sandals, standing at the water and facing east. One of them, the cantor, blesses the rising sun with verses from the book of Psalms, and the others respond in song. It's a hypnotizing sight.

When they're finished, they turn west toward the mountains and pass by the horsemen without a sound. The cantor stops next to Herod, who

has climbed down off his horse. This is MENAHEM, the leader of the Essenes cult. He asks Herod what he wants.
I'm hungry, Herod says. I want to eat with you.
You cannot. You are not one of us, Menahem replies. Why have you come?
To tell you that the prophecy you gave me was never as false as it is tonight. I escaped moments before being sentenced to death.
Menahem smiles. What did I tell you back then, when you were a child? What is the sign that my prophecy will come true?
You hit me on my left leg and told me to remember the pain. That it would be the sign.
And has the pain disappeared?
Long ago.
Well here's a new one.
Menahem raises his cane and strikes Herod hard on his left thigh. The horsemen tense up and reach for their swords. Herod calms them down, while groaning in pain. A young man in sandals walks over from the buildings at the foot of the mountains. He's carrying a wicker basket with several loaves of bread and dried dates.
Where should I run to? East, to the Nabataeans, to my grandfather? South to Edom, to my father's family? North to Syria, to the governor?
It does not matter where you run. What needs to happen, what has already been determined - will happen. Unfortunately.
Menahem turns to leave. Herod makes his decision - north.
They gallop to the north.

A ROLLERCOASTER - SEVERAL MONTHS IN THE LIFE OF YOUNG HEROD (40 BC)

It is the summer of 40 BC. The rulers of Rome are busy with inner-fighting, and they pull their forces back from the area. A new player comes in from the east - the Parthians, an enormous empire equal in its power to the Roman Empire.
The Parthian armies push the Romans out of the area. They overwhelm the Middle East and invade Judea from the north. The Jewish people support the Parthians due to their hatred of the Edomite brothers - Herod and Phasaël - the two most powerful men in Judea. Herod and Phasaël realize they may have made a fatal mistake, putting all of their eggs in the Roman basket.
The Parthians wish to replace the puppet-leader John Hyrcanus with his nephew, Antigonus the Hasmonean. Antigonus promised the Parthians all the treasures of the kingdom and the 500 women of the royal court of Jerusalem. His advanced guard is already laying siege to the city. It is the holiday of Shavuot, and Jerusalem is packed with pilgrims bringing their first fruits to the holy temple.
While Phasaël and John Hyrcanus head out to negotiate with the Parthian military leaders up north, Herod is under siege with his soldiers and family in the fortress by the Temple Mount, waiting for news from his brother.
A messenger brings a letter from Phasaël. The Parthians tricked them - he and Hyrcanus have been taken prisoners in Acres, and their condition is worsening. In the dead of night, Herod sneaks out through the castle's tunnels along with his soldiers, his men, and four women - his mother Cypros, his sister Salome, his fiancé, 13-year-old Mariamne, and her mother Alexandra.
They climb aboard their chariots, but the convoy is delayed, because Alexandra is unwilling to ride in the same chariot as Cypros, Herod's Arab mother. Herod has no choice. He separates the two women, which forces him to abandon some of his treasure in Jerusalem.
They ride south to Masada, with Jewish warriors in swift pursuit.

Twelve kilometers south of Jerusalem, Cypros's carriage is overturned, and she is knocked unconscious.

The pursuing forces close in on them. Herod is desperate. He is sure his mother is dead, and he blames himself for failing and letting her down. In an act of madness, he tries to fall on his sword and take his own life, but his soldiers stop him. They accuse him of being a coward and a traitor who is trying to escape and leave them behind in a dangerous situation.

Herod snaps out of it. He fights back and is able to save himself and his party. He houses his family in Masada, the protected fortress, appoints his uncle Joseph - who is also his sister Salome's husband - to be commander of the fortress, and immediately leaves for Petra to collect on a debt of money from the Nabataeans in order to pay the ransom for freeing his brother from the Parthians. The Nabataeans turn their backs on him and banish him from their kingdom's borders. The Parthians' messengers reached them before he could and warned them not to help him. Herod has hit rock bottom. He is lonely, hunted and betrayed. He turns west toward Egypt on his way to ask for help from Rome.

Meanwhile, in the north, the Parthians hand Herod's brother Phasael and the high priest John Hyrcanus over to Antigonus, the challenger to the throne. Antigonus bites off both of Hyrcanus's ears, and in doing so disqualifies him forever from being high priest due to his deformity. Hyrcanus is Antigonus's uncle, but this does nothing to help his ears. Phasael understands that his end is near, and he bashes his head into a rock, to death. The bad news catches up to Herod in Egypt.

He is stuck in Alexandria. It is wintertime, the sea is stormy, and ships will not sail during this season. Cleopatra, queen of Egypt and Marc Antony's lover, tries to lure Herod into staying and serving as her minister of war. Something about this man has caught her eye, and Antony is in Rome, having just recently betrayed her and married another woman.

Herod is not tempted away. He loads a ship up with goods and presents - a bribe for when the time comes - and sets sail.

The sea is stormy, and the ship nearly drowns. He throws overboard all he took on in Egypt, and is able to make it to Rhodes.

The situation in the fortress is dire. In addition to Antigonus's men, who have laid siege to the mountain, the quickly disappearing rations of food and water, and the fact that there is no help in sight, the two houses - the Edomites and the Hasmoneans - are in constant war. Alexandra, the arrogant Hasmonean princess, and her two handsome children - Mariamne, Herod's fiancé, and young Aristobulus - despise their in-laws, Herod's Nabataean mother and his sister. They are not willing to eat or drink alongside them, and treat them like servants. Masada is a den of snakes. Cypros and Salome vow to poison the two Jewish women, kill them with magic or arrange for a fatal accident.

Herod arrives in Rome. He is 32 years old, and has no one left in the world. He has come to ask for the support of Marc Antony and Octavian for the deposed ruler of Judea, John Hyrcanus, and if not him (as his ears are now deformed) then his fiancé's brother, 12-year-old Aristobulus.

But the Roman rulers have a surprise in store for him - the Roman Senate has decided that he, Herod, the Edomite convert, will serve as king of Judea from now on. A glorious procession heads out to the Forum on its way to the Jupiter temple, led by of Marc Antony, Octavian and the astonished Herod. They offer up sacrifices and send him back to Judea to conquer the throne for himself. He is 32 years

old now. He must be a hopeless optimist to believe he will be successful.

FINAL EPISODE OUTLINE

THE KING IS AT DEATH'S DOOR

In the king's palace in Jericho, Herod is in a terrible state. He has infections all over his body, both inside and out - his kidneys, his intestines, his skin. His lungs collapse, and he can barely breathe. His groin is crawling with worms, and he gorges himself on food. The slaves, doctors and advisors close to the king understand that the end is near. Everything is about to change. His sister Salome is preparing for the day after his death. She does her best to keep the rumors from reaching Jerusalem and stirring unrest.

In his prison cell in the palace basement, Antipater, Herod's eldest son, awaits an answer. Messengers are coming from Rome any day now with word from Augustus Caesar - will he allow Antipater's father to execute him? Antipater prays for death to reach Herod before the messengers.

Rumors of the king's illness reach Jerusalem and stir up excitement. Young zealots smash the golden eagle set above one of the temple gates - a symbol of the Roman rule.

Herod is furious and outraged - his good relationship with Rome is Judea's defensive shield. The provocations in the empire will be met with harsh reactions.

Herod sends the secret police after the zealots, and dozens of suspects are dragged into the torture chambers in the Jerusalem palace for interrogation.

On his last legs, Herod is led to bathe in the healing springs east of the Dead Sea. The bathhouse workers cannot stand the sight of his naked body. They run outside and vomit. While soaking in a bath of hot oil, he loses consciousness and everybody is sure he is dead - but then he wakes up.

His situation shows no signs of improvement. The prayers and ceremonies held in his honor in all languages and to all gods only annoy him. He summons his 19-year-old son, Archelaus, and dictates his funeral arrangements. He wants a funeral like that of Alexander the Great, and he wants to enjoy this funeral. He has it all planned in advance - what he will be wearing, what coffin he will lie in, what he will hold in his hand. He gives Archelaus the route from Jericho to Jerusalem and from there to the Herodium, thirty seven kilometers in all. He details what he would like them to eat in the feast following the funeral. Archelaus writes it all down.

A messenger arrives from Rome with a letter from Augustus Caesar. The ruler of the empire has approved the death sentence given to Antipater, Herod's eldest son. Augustus allows Herod to do with his son as he wishes. Herod is pleased.

He commands that all the leaders and the elite of the Jewish settlements in the kingdom be called to Jericho, where he sits them in the hippodrome, his grand horseracing track.

While everybody seated there enjoys the royal treatment, with food and drink, the zealots are dragged in bleeding from the torture chambers and forced to read aloud the confession beaten out of them. Their leaders, the wise men Judas son of Saphoris and Mattathias son of Margelot, are burned at the stake before the guests' very eyes,

and the rest of the accused are crucified. The Jewish elite remain imprisoned in the hippodrome.

That evening, Herod changes his will for the sixth time. When he's done, he asks for an apple and a knife to peel it with, the way he likes it. He grabs the knife in his deformed fingers and suddenly tries to stab himself. A great cry rings through the palace, and people scurry in fright. They grab his hand and pull the knife out of it.

In his prison in the palace basement, Antipater hears the cries and is convinced his father is dead. He offers the guard a fortune if he releases him. He hopes that if he's fast enough, he can grab the throne before his brother Archelaus does.

The guard hurries over to Herod and tells him of Antipater's offer. Herod commands that Antipater be killed immediately. At 42-years-old, Antipater, Herod's eldest son, is dragged out to the palace courtyard and his throat is slit. All the king's men watch the sight in silence.

Salome is called to the king's bed. He's hardly recognizable by this point, as he suffers from seizures every few moments, but he is in fine spirits. He dictates his final will and leaves great sums of money to Caesar Augustus, to his wife and his family.

He has Salome swear to carry out his final wishes. After planning his own glorious funeral, determining who will take part and what each person will wear, he has come to realize that he is missing one basic element in his funeral, a crucial part of any ceremony of death - the grief. The sorrow. The tears. He imagines the funeral he has directed from beyond the grave and does not hear a single sob. He knows that as soon as he dies, joy will flood the land, and he wants to kill this joy. He wants it to be a day of terrible grief, remembered forever as a day of mourning.

He demands that Salome lead the army to the hippodrome, and there, as soon as he takes his last breath, she should give the signal and have his soldiers slaughter each and every last one of the Jewish leaders gathered there. The leaders of cities, towns and villages will all die along with him. This way, the entire land will cry out in pain, and his funeral will be complete.

Salome promises that his wishes will be carried out.

Herod dies. At once, everything turns quiet. His body straightens out and slackens. His face is at peace. The king is dead.

Appendix A - Prophecies

TWO PROPHECIES ABOUT THE KING OF THE JEWS

Two prophecies determined Herod's fate during his life and after his death. He received the first prophecy when he was a child, and the second just before his death. The first appears in the writings of the historian Josephus Flavius. The second appears in the New Testament. Both are historically questionable, but deeply significant.

The first prophecy told the child Herod about what the future held in store for him:

"Now there was one of these Essenes, whose name was Menahem, who had this testimony, that he not only conducted his life after an excellent manner, but had the foreknowledge of future events given him by God also. This man once saw Herod when he was a child, and going to school, and saluted him as king of the Jews; but he thinking that either he did not know him, or that he was in jest put him in mind that he was but a commoner; but Menahem smiled to himself and clapped him on his backside with his hand, and said, "However that be, thou wilt be king, and wilt begin thy reign happily; for God finds thee worthy of it. And do thou remember the blows that Menahem hath given thee, as being a signal of the change of thy fortune. And truly this will be the best reasoning for thee, that thou love justice [towards men,] and piety towards God, and clemency towards thy citizens; yet do I know how thy whole conduct will be, that thou wilt not be such a one; for thou wilt excel all men his happiness, and obtain an everlasting reputation, but will forget piety and righteousness; and these crimes will not be concealed from God, at the conclusion of thy life, when thou wilt find that he will be mindful of them, and punish thee for them."

The second prophecy immortalized Herod's name as the biggest villain in the New Testament:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judea: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped

him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

The baby Jesus is saved from death.

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

Appendix B - Stalin and Herod

There is much resemblance between Herod the Great and Stalin, to the point where it seems that Stalin might be a reincarnation of Herod. Stalin and Herod share a similar ethnic background - both come from an inferior, unpopular ethnic group within their homeland, a group unfit for leadership. The latter was an Edomite, the former was Georgian. Herod was not a Jew, he was not a descendent of David or a Hasmonean, and Stalin was neither a Russian nor a European, neither a native of Moscow nor a native of Saint Petersburg. Both were not seen as handsome men; they were short and unattractive. Herod was too dark-skinned, Stalin had a pockmarked face. This was true of Hitler as well, and Napoleon.

Both are fearless and violent from childhood, and began their career with an exceptional and violent act - Stalin with the robbery of the money train in Tbilisi, and Herod with the brutal execution of the rebel gang of Hezekiah the Galilean.

After that, they each follow a twisted path of alliances and betrayals, bribery and backstabbing, which brings them to the top, to the position of ruler, which they maintain for decades.

Both men instill fear in their subjects, operate an enormous secret police, employ thousands of agents and spies and wage a bitter war against enemies from within. They demand loyalty and oaths of loyalty. Stalin enforces a murderous financial regime on his people, while Herod enforces brutal taxation. Both are excellent administrators, with creative imaginations and fine organizational skills. They carry out ambitious plans, initiate large-scale constructions and incredible acts of industrialization.

But the more they succeed in their governance, in their foreign policies, their wars and their economies, the more their worldwide fame grows - the more miserable they are at home, and the more misery they cause their families. Both engaged in executions and assassination of family members. Of their wife. Of their sons. Of their in-laws and friends. Their violence was aimed inwards as well, toward those closest to them.

And both men are ruled by their paranoia. The paranoid man projects himself unto others; he assumes that the other's soul is similar to his own. He assumes that if he is capable of plotting and killing without hesitation, so is anybody else. If he is capable of undermining those closest to him, tricking them and breaking through any moral barriers, so could anybody else. "Everybody is as dangerous as I am," says the paranoid man. "Everybody is as dangerous to me as I am to them. They would have no problem killing me, just as I have no problem killing them."

Comrade Stalin would say - "If a man's eyes wander, his conscience isn't clear." Like Stalin, Herod too wanted to know what was going on in there, in the head, mind and heart. He wanted to know what others were dreaming of. He wanted to know what they dreamed of him. He wanted to know if he could freeze them, paralyze them, make them nothing but citizens, subjects. Make them obey him, carry out his orders. And make them love him.