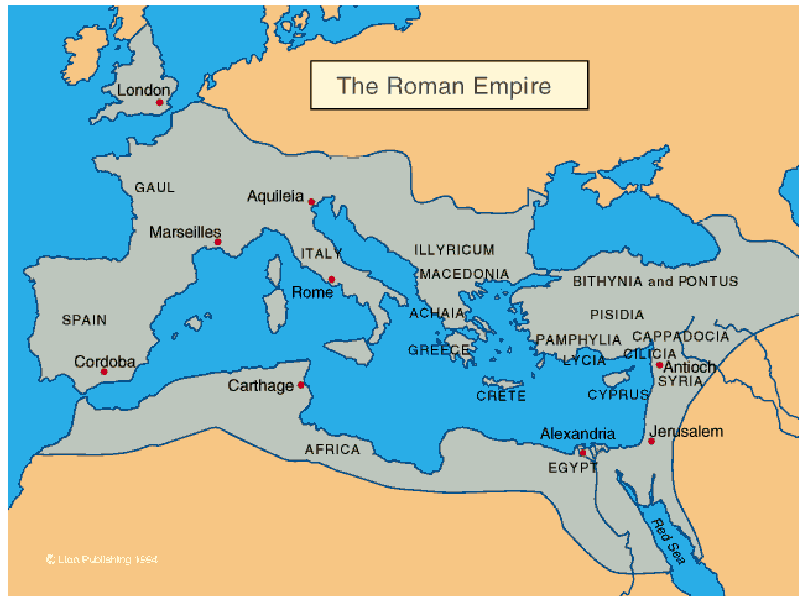


The Political Situation

Who was in charge?

The simple answer is 'the Roman Emperor'. The Roman Emperor was the real power behind every local power. Local rulers only ruled with his permission. At the birth of Christ, the Emperor was Caesar Augustus. Tiberius ruled during Jesus' public life, death and resurrection. Even though Rome allowed the Jews considerable freedom in practising their religion, many Jews longed for the day when a Messiah would come to deliver them.



How big was the Roman Empire?

When Jesus was born, Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, which extended from Great Britain in northern Europe to Egypt in the southeastern part of the Mediterranean basin. The so-called *Pax Romana* — the Peace of Rome — meant that the entire region was united under a single rule and no wars were taking place anywhere in the Empire. This brought several benefits: a common language, an intricate system of roads, a good system of justice, and a strong military force.

Who were the local rulers in Palestine?

Herod the Great (37 – 4 BC)

Herod the Great was a wily and ruthless man from Idumea, south of Judea. He schemed his way to being the 'King of the Jews', though he wasn't a Jew at all. He kept them sweet by revamping the Second Temple into a more magnificent edifice. He also had to keep on good terms with his Roman overlords. He developed towns like Caesarea in honour of the emperor. Not forgetting number one, he built a string of forts to secure his own power.

In many ways Herod's track record reads like that of psychopath. His power-paranoia led him to massacre the innocents (Mt 2:16-18) and to slaughter several of his sons, a wife and other relatives. In 4 BC, as he lay dying, he ordered leading Jews across the land to be imprisoned and killed when he himself died. The idea was that people may not be crying for him when he died – but at least they'd be crying.

When he died his kingdom was split between three of his sons: Herod Archelaus, Philip and Herod Antipas.

Did you know ...?

A fifth century monk, Denis the Small, developed the BC/AD dating system. He was out by about five to six years. We know this because Herod the Great died in 4 BC. Jesus had already been born by that time. Guesses place Jesus' birth at about 5 BC.

- Judea and Samaria went to Herod Archelaus** - as ruthless as his father but without his skill at ruling. After constant complaints, the Romans dismissed him in 6 AD and put an official called a Procurator in his patch. Pontius Pilate was the Procurator at the time of Jesus' public life.
- Lands north east of Galilee went to Philip** – a little-known figure who inherited his father's city-building hobby (Caesarea Philippi, for example) and his competence as a ruler.
- Galilee and other land went to Herod Antipas** - who inherited his father's cunning (Jesus called him a fox) and some of his competence. He was the Herod whom John the Baptist condemned for improper marriage (Herod had him beheaded). He also asked for a 'miracle show' from Jesus during his trials; Jesus wouldn't entertain him. The Romans eventually banished him to Gaul in 39 AD.



Pontius Pilate

Core Reinforcement

- Study the graphic opposite which represents the political situation in Palestine of Jesus' time.

There are three types of line in the graphic:

string lines,
arrow lines,
cross line.

Explain what **each** type of line means.

- Explain which Herod is meant in
 - Matthew 2:1?
 - Mark 6:17?

