

Review: *Herod's Lost Tomb*, National Geographic, 2008

Runtime (min): 100 (inc. bonus feature)

Herod's Great Works and Jerusalem's Religious Sites

A well produced secular documentary on a selection of Herod's architectural wonders: Herodium, Masada, Caesarea Maritima and the Temple expansion. Investigation of Herod's tomb is secondary to his own history and works (which is to the production's advantage).

The viewer should keep in mind Herod was a murderous beast – killing his own wife and sons, also ordering the infanticide of Bethlehem to eliminate the child Jesus. This slaughter fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah 31.15 made over 600 years earlier.

It includes an equally good [50 min] bonus feature of Jerusalem's three main religious sites: Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Wailing Wall. The producers have tried hard to equalise what are three entirely different faiths. For a Bible-believer false premises are evident:

*The purported rock of Mt. Moriah under the Dome is not a 'gateway' to God (Christ is the only doorway).

*The Qur'an contains fatal contradictions and absurdities: Abraham took Ishmael for sacrifice rather than Isaac. Son of the Egyptian bondswoman Hagar, Ishmael had already been cast out; Muhammed (on a small winged creature) made an overnight return trip to Jerusalem from Mecca (1,200km away). He then ascended to heaven from the site of Herod's Temple (it had been demolished for 550 years).

*Christianity is conflated with Catholicism and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is referred to as the holiest shrine in Christendom (replete with a holy rock for people to touch). Christians do not believe in shrines, or that any piece of land is intrinsically 'holier' or closer to God than any other on the earth's surface.

A documentary of Herod's great building achievement by which his epithet was earned. These are Caesarea Maratima, Masada, Herodium, and the Second Temple. Explorations come within the context of finding his lost tomb.

The acropolis of Herodium is a 20 Ha self-memorial 13km south of Jerusalem. It constitutes a fortress called Herodian built on a mountain crater, and a Winter Palace complex in the valley below. According to Flavius Josephus Herod's tomb is to be found in this valley.



Stone was taken from an adjoining hill, lifting the construction site 100m above sea level.

A 'half-Jew', he was an Arab by extraction and made king by co-regents of Rome Marc Antony and Caesar Augustus. He was not of the royal Hasmonean line so married a princess (Mariamne I) of them in order to gain legitimacy.

A murderous beast, Herod killed his wife and two sons, apart from the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem (cf. Mt. 2.16-18, Jr. 31.15)¹.

Herod's family suffered at the Masada site when they were besieged by the Parthians and were nearly forced to surrender due to lack of water. As a result he decided to construct Masada, site of the famous 73-4AD siege by the Romans.

The name is from the Hebrew for 'fortress'. It was designed to garrison 10,000 soldiers for several years. Aqueduct and cistern system could store 40M L of desert rain water. Two rock walls were built as insurance against

an internal Jewish revolt.

At the Battle of [Gulf of] Actium, 31BC, Octavian [Caesar Augustus] eliminated rival Marc Antony of Ptolemaic Egypt. Herod was allied with Marc Antony so to show loyalty to his new master he built the port Caesarea Maritima². This pagan city further alienated his Jewish subjects.



Caesarea's amenities include a hippodrome, Roman theatre and pagan temple. Herod's artificial 16 Ha deep-water harbour was made from breakwaters 450m off-shore. It was constructed with hydraulic cement made from volcanic ash, poured into wooden frameworks which were then sunk when in appropriate position.

Sea floor core-drilling was used to understand what happened to the port. Layers of shell and city debris were found in the core cross-section suggesting tsunami damage. The breakwater barrier foundations were likely eroded by underwater tectonic movement, tilting them against the sea. Receding waters then overturned them.

Herod's grand expansion of Solomon's Temple was done to both win over hearts of the Jewish people and for his own religious beliefs. It was 140k m² and made of block limestone from a couple of miles in the vicinity. Rock was hammered, chiselled and wedged by hand, then with Roman crane and roller technology transported to site. Herod died before its

completion.

His tomb was found 2007 by Professor Ehud Netzer after 35 year's work. Red and whit sarcophagi-red one was smashed (postulated by Jewish rebels against Rome).

Herod died aged 67 (c4 BC) despised and insane. According to the Jews, he: “stole the crown like a fox, ruled like a tiger, but died like a dog.”

Inside Jerusalem's Holiest Places (bonus feature)

The narrator's premise is this city is sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all three are linked to Abraham and all essentially worship the same God. By Christianity it is plain they mean Catholicism. Islam's linkage back to Abraham is carefully made due to the obvious fatal contradiction in the Qur'an which has Ishmael the sacrificial victim rather than Isaac.

The city itself has no inherent geographical, commercial or military significance which is astounding to those unaware of Biblical prophecy (cf. Zc 12.3).

Three religious structures are investigated:

(i) Dome of the Rock⁴ on Haram al-Sharif (the 'Noble Sanctuary')/Al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount where Muhammad supposedly travelled overnight from Mecca to visit heaven⁵. It was built c700AD at the early military expansion stage of Islam.

A natural cave known as the 'Well of Souls' lies beneath the site. In Islamic theology this is the place where souls of the faithful will gather on the day of resurrection. It is rumoured to house the Ark of the Covenant, buried by priests before the Babylonian destruction. Herod built a vast network of underground arches (to support the weight of his temple) which may have housed it.

The roof is gold-gilded as a gift from a Jordanian King. The dome shape is meant to mimic (and exceed) that of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It is positioned against the Church's entry so it can be seen coming out. It was in possession of the Templars for 88 years until 1187 when Saldin

retook it.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was commissioned by Constantine the Great after his conversion, c335AD. It symbolises the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

It is a few street blocks from the Dome, and at the end of the via dolorosa ('way of sorrows') or Christ's pathway to the cross and is believed (by Rome) to be situated on Golgotha and to house Jesus' tomb.

The Western [wailing] Wall is a retaining wall said to be part of Herod's Temple and is the SW perimeter of Haram al-Sharif.

The site is a kind of 'open air synagogue' where men group on the left and women on the right. The wall's foundation extend up to 1,200 feet underground. The largest stone is an incredible 600T (14*11*42 [D*H*W]ft). In comparison, the largest pyramid stone is only ~80T.

One of four gates underground is the closest exterior location to the Holy of Holies (100m away).

¹The narrator notes almost no 'scholar' believes this event actually happened.

²Not to be confused with Caesarea Philipi in Matthew 16.13.

³Made from volcanic ash that hardens under water.

⁴Named so because it is built over a large rock, supposedly Mt. Moriah upon which Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac.

⁵The al-Isra wal-Miraj.