

## A VOLCANO IN THE DESERT (The Tale of Two Kings)

Imagine yourself finally getting that Hawaiian vacation you always dreamed about and now the time has arrived. You've decided to stay on the "Big Island" of Kilauea, and you have reservations at the beautiful Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel. Your mind goes wild when you think of all the beautiful sights you are about to see. So, you cram in as much activity as your body allows on the first day, go to bed a little early, and eventually fall asleep exhausted.



Figure 1 - Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, Kamuela, Hawaii - [www.trivago.com](http://www.trivago.com)



Figure 2 - Kamuela Volcano eruption

However, you are awakened first by a loud rumble, and then the sounds of explosions send panic through your body. As you look out your window, your eyes zero in on the bright fiery sight before you. At first, you count yourself lucky to have seen a volcanic explosion, but soon realize that this volcano has no intention of stopping. And soon you know that this well-planned vacation is going to change drastically within the next few hours.

What has happened on that beautiful "Big Island" will be etched into the memory of all the Islanders and visitors during May in 2018.

But let's change the scenery from the lush green vegetation of Hawaii to a brown desert. There are no flowers or beautiful scenery for a photographer's delight. Nothing around you other than sand and rocks. As you gaze across the desert, your eyes capture the sight of what looks like a volcano, and you think your eyes are playing tricks on you. You ask yourself, "What is a volcano doing in the middle of a desert?". However, on closer investigation, you discover that what you at first thought was a volcano is a man-made structure. And you find that it was a significant building project by one of the most paranoid Kings during Biblical days. His name was Herod. They called him Herod the Great.

Herod was a master-builder. One of his major building projects was this palace, known as the Herodium (Herodian). It is a fantastic cone-structure, built on the highest peak in the Judean Desert, at an elevation of 2,460 feet above sea level. This "volcanic-looking structure" also served as Herod's fortress and tomb. Herod built this 2,000-year-old fortress in commemoration of his defeat over the Hasmonean King Antigonus in 40 B.C.



Figure 3 - The Herodium

I had the opportunity to visit the Herodium in 2008. As I was walking through the structure, I noticed a ladder jutting out of the floor. When I asked our guide about the purpose of the ladder, he replied that it was jutting from the area where recently they found

the sarcophagus of King Herod. As we continued our tour, we walked through various tunnels until we came out near the bottom of the Herodium. However, as impressive as the history and glory of this palace had been at one time there is a story behind this story. I'm talking about a tale of two Kings.

On one of my trips to Israel, Bethlehem was closed to us, so we stood on a hill overlooking the city. But what startled me was the sight of this volcanic structure directly across from Bethlehem. And though the two locations were a little over three miles apart, I was able to stand at a position where I could capture both places through my camera lens. After I had snapped the shot, my mind raced back to the reality of what I was observing. From my position, I not only saw two geographical locations but also two completely different stories about two men who claimed to be "The King of The Jews."



Figure 5 - Top of the Herodium - Photo by Rick Yohn



Figure 4 - Overlooking the Herodium & Bethlehem - Photo by Rick Yohn

a structure known as the Church of The Nativity that commemorated the birth of Jesus Christ. And these two Kings came from two brothers hundreds of years previously. So, let's investigate these facts by making a journey back to a young couple with the names of Isaac and Rebekah. Since Rebekah was barren, Isaac pleaded with the Lord to allow her to have a child. The Lord responded with this surprised announcement: *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* (Genesis 25:23)

First, these two brothers would become two different nations. And secondly, the older of the two would serve the younger, which was anti-cultural. The older son always had a double portion of the father's blessing, and all the following sons would be subservient to him. But God doesn't always follow man's cultural ways. Recall that Ishmael was thirteen years older than Isaac, and yet God's hand of blessing and promise were on Isaac and not Ishmael. Likewise, the blessing of the Covenant that God made with Abraham was going to pass through the younger son Jacob rather than the older son Esau. If we had to choose between the two boys, we probably would have selected Esau over Jacob. Esau was a man's man who loved hunting and was the apple of his father's eye. On the other hand, Jacob was a Mama's boy and learned the art of manipulation, stealing both the birthright and his father's blessing from Esau.

As the years passed, the Edomites, also known as the Idumeans, emerged from the lineage of Esau, while the Jews trace their lineage back to Jacob and his twelve sons. Why is it important to trace this lineage? The reason why this is important is that Herod's family traces back to Esau, while Jesus Christ came from the line of David. And when you follow the character and accomplishments of the two men, you see nothing but contrasts. Let's begin with King Herod the Great.

**KING HEROD THE GREAT** - Herod was a ruthless, paranoid tyrant. He killed members of his own family and would go into a tirade at the drop of a hat. As I mentioned earlier, at the same time, God had equipped him with a unique passion and ability to build fortresses, monuments, cities, and various other structures. He created a winter palace in Jericho, a fortress by the Dead Sea known as Masada, and extended the Temple Mount to twice its size. Another great project was a harbor and an entire city.

Israel had only one natural harbor at the time located at Haifa in northern Israel. So, Herod decided to build a harbor along the central coast of Israel, as well as a large city, constructed of white marble. The results were a wonder to behold as ships sailed into port and gazed upon the sun shining on the white-marbled city. Caesarea had a 4,000-seat theater, a hippodrome for chariot races, and an aqueduct that carried water from 13 miles away, and rises to an elevation of about 20 feet. The harbor was the first artificial harbor in the world, and though it was destroyed by an earthquake, you can still see the outline of the harbor from the air.



Figure 6 - Aerial View of Caesarea Maritima

However, today you can visit Israel and observe all of the building projects of King Herod, but what you witness is the ruins of what was once great accomplishments created by a gifted, but evil King. All that he accomplished in his lifetime lay in ruins, and his character as a ruthless King is the legacy he leaves behind.

**KING JESUS** - Now let's consider the second King of the Jews who was born three miles away from the Herodium. He was one of many infants in danger of King Herod's edict to murder all male children two years and younger. This edit resulted from the Magi's search for the "King of the Jews" who had just been born in Bethlehem, located about five miles from King Herod's palace in Jerusalem. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph to take his new-born and flee to Egypt, for the protection of the child, as well as to fulfill the prophecy of Hosea, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15).

As Jesus grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52), people began to take notice of this young man. At the age of twelve, Jesus confounded the teachers of the Law in the temple who were amazed at his wisdom, understanding, and answers to questions as He interacted with these learned men. And at the age of thirty, Jesus began His public ministry, once again capturing people's attention with His teaching, His kindness and love for people. He walked among them, interacted with them, and performed miracles in their sight.

Jesus was also a builder. However, His focus was not on buildings, palaces, harbors, or cities. The Lord invested His time building into the lives of people. He began with twelve men. And after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the twelve multiplied to 3,000 and then to 5,000 and from there to millions across the world. People living in spiritual darkness were now walking in the light of God's truth. Those who were slaves to sin now enjoyed God's forgiveness and freedom. Those who lost hope now experienced purpose in life.

This King of the Jews now has a following of around 2.8 billion people. His influence is universal and continues to impact lives for good. And men, down through the centuries, have admired His character and accomplishments. It was **St. Augustine** who said, *"Thou has made us for thyself, O God; and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."* And **Pascal**, the great French physicist stated, *"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."* Even **Napoleon** stated, *"I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him."* And consider a well-known historian who admits he is not a believer, and yet stated, *"I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably **the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.**" (H.G. Wells)*

As we consider the words of the angel, who told Jacob and Rebekah, *"The older (**Esau**) will serve the younger (**Jacob**) (Genesis 25:23; Romans 9:12)*, we realize that King Herod was a descendant of **Esau** and Jesus, a descendent of **Jacob**. One day, King Herod will bow at the feet of King Jesus and acknowledge Him not only as the King of the Jews but also the Lord of all things - *"...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*. Of course, for King Herod, it will be too late to change his destiny.

If you ever get the opportunity to visit Israel, ask your tour guide for a tour of the Herodium. As you walk up the ramp and later through the tunnels, recall that you are an eyewitness to what remains of King Herod's accomplishments. However, **you** also are the result of what King Jesus has done for you and in you. That **"volcano in the desert"** is the legacy of a gifted tyrant, but **you are the legacy of The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.**