

The Land and Governors during the Life of Yeshua



During the life of Yeshua, the Jesus of history, the homeland of the Jewish people was part of the **Roman Empire**. Rome controlled its various territories in two ways.

- By **kings** who were “friends and allies” of Rome; often called “client” kings or, more disparagingly, “puppet” kings.
- By **governors** supported by a Roman army.

When Yeshua was born, all of the Jewish homelands, as well as some of the neighboring Gentile areas, were ruled by Rome’s able “friend and ally” **Herod the Great**. For Rome, the Jewish homeland was not important in itself, but because it lay between **Syria** and **Egypt**, two of Rome’s most valuable possessions. Rome had **legions** in Syria and Egypt, but not in **Judea** and **Galilee**.

Roman imperial policy required that its territories *be loyal and peaceful*, so that they did not undermine Rome’s larger interests. This end was achieved for a long time by permitting **Herod** to remain king of Judaea (**37 – 4 BCE**). Herod was allowed to have a free hand in governing his kingdom, as long as the requirements of *stability and loyalty* were met. When Herod died shortly after Yeshua’s birth, his kingdom was divided into five parts:

- **Herod Archelaus** received **Judea** and **Idumaea** (as well as **Samaria**, which was non-Jewish).

- **Herod Antipas** received **Galilee** and **Peraea**.
- **Non-Jewish areas** (except Samaria) were assigned to a third son, **Philip**, Herod's sister **Salome**, or to the **province of Syria**.

Roman Emperor Augustus deposed the unsatisfactory **Archelaus** in 6 CE and transformed **Judea**, **Idumaea**, and **Samaria** from a *client kingdom* into an "**imperial province**." He then sent a **prefect** to govern this province. This minor Roman aristocrat (later called a *procurator*) was supported by *a small Roman army of approximately 3,000 men*. *The soldiers came from nearby Gentile cities, especially Caesarea and Sebaste, but the officers came from Italy*. During Yeshua's public career, the Roman prefect was **Pontius Pilate (26 – 36 CE)**.

Although nominally in charge of **Judaea**, **Samaria**, and **Idumaea**, *the prefect did not govern his area directly; instead, he relied on local leaders*. The prefect and his small army lived in the predominantly Gentile city **Caesarea**, on the Mediterranean coast, about two days' march from Jerusalem. They came to Jerusalem only to ensure peace during the pilgrimage festivals — **Pesach** (Passover), **Shavuot** (Weeks/Pentecost), and **Sukkot** (Booths) — *when large crowds and patriotic themes sometimes combined to spark unrest or uprisings*.

On a day-to-day basis Jerusalem was governed by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin (a council). The High Priest had the difficult task of mediating between the remote Roman prefect and the general population, many of which were hostile toward pagans and wanted to be free of foreign domination. His primary political responsibilities were:

- *maintain order*
- *see that tribute was paid*

Caiaphas was the High Priest during Yeshua's adulthood and he held the office from about 18 to 36 CE, longer than anyone else during the Roman period. This is a clear indication that he was a successful and reliable diplomat. Since he and Pilate were in power together for 10 years, they must have collaborated successfully.

At the time of Yeshua's public career, Galilee was governed by the tetrarch Antipas, who was sovereign within his own domain, provided that he remained loyal to Rome and maintained peace and stability within his borders. Judea (including Jerusalem) was nominally governed by Pilate, but the actual daily rule of Jerusalem was in the hands of Caiaphas and his council.

Key point to remember from this lesson is that during Yeshua's adulthood he lived in a **Roman imperial province**.

Primary Source:

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesus-Christ>