

“Those Politicians”

Politicians! Oh, the horror of it all. Those called to be servants of the people end up consumed with self-service. Hard to tell the truth from the lies. You have to be suspect with former enemies suddenly having alliances, hoping into bed with one another, so to speak. Meanwhile the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. And it seems like the whole country, perhaps the whole world is going to go down the tube. No wonder there are terrorists hiding out in mountain caves. Politicians—the horror of it all.

And so the people came out to hear John the Baptist in the wilderness because they had lost hope in the political leadership. King Herod, the King of the Jews, was an able politician. He rebuilt the Jewish Temple, the water supplies, and the Palace in Jerusalem, refurbished the boundary fortresses such as Masada, and created new cities such as Caesarea, Maritima and Herodion. From the extraction of asphalt from the Dead Sea, he shared with Cleopatra the monopoly on its important use in shipbuilding. He leased copper mines on Cyprus from the Roman emperor. He had a dominant position in the production of bronze, using British tin. He supported the financially strapped Olympic games and ensured their future. Globalization—he had it in hand.

But there was a dark side. Two popular teachers from the monastery at Qumran, Judas and Matthias, encouraged their pupils to remove the Roman golden eagle from the entrance of the Temple. This was not simply a sign of Roman domination; it was considered an affront to God and the prohibition against idols. The teachers and the pupils were burned alive.

There were high taxes, not only for the building programs but also the employment of mercenaries and a secret police to enforce order. He had to have these to support his reign of terror even in his own family.

A nephew tried to take the throne from him but Herod defeated him and then married his teenage

niece, which helped to secure him a claim to the throne. However, Herod already had a wife, Doris, and a three-year-old son. So he banished Doris and her child. Killed on his orders were his brother-in-law and high priest, Aristobulus, his wife, his mother-in-law, and a number of his sons. In signing the death warrant for one of his sons, Augustus Caesar remarked that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son!

Just before his death, Herod, realising that when he died there would be no great mourning, sent letters to the principle heads of every family in Judaism demanding their presence on pain of death. Having got them to Jerusalem, Herod ordered them to be locked up in the horseracing ground. He then gave the orders to his sister that upon his death they were all to be executed—thus making sure that the whole nation would mourn when he died, albeit not for him. Fortunately, when Herod died, his sister released the imprisoned Jews and allowed them to return home.

Then the country was split in two and one of his sons, Herod Antipas was appointed as the ruler of Galilee and it seemed it was going to be the same old story again all over again. And “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness...and people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him”

They went because there was no help from the top down. If there was going to be any help for the country and the people, it had to start from the bottom up. The idea of reforming the system was hopeless; it was as if they had to start again from scratch.

So the people went out to the Jordan River, the very place where they first came into the land, well over a thousand years before. They were baptized—washed by John. They dedicated themselves to the old ways, the

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