HEROD

Jericho's Master Builder

by Conn Davis

THE ANCIENT CITY OF JERICHO has several unique features. Archaeologists recognize it as the oldest excavated city in the world—dating back to 9000 B.C. Jericho is also the lowest city on earth, 800 feet below sea level. This city was the point of entry for Joshua and Israel when they invaded Canaan. Herod the Great, king of Judea from 37-4 B.C., died there.

Jericho's proximity to Jerusalem (16 miles), mild winter climate, and abundance of fresh water springs led to its development as a resort area by wealthy Jews in the first century B.C. Luke's description of an encounter between Jesus and the rich tax collector, Zacchaeus, confirms this reality (Luke 19:1-8). The presence of the blind beggar in Jericho may point to the existence of wealthy Jews with generous hearts (18:35-43).

The ancient (Old Testament) city of Jericho is identified with an excavated mound, Tell es-Sultan.[1] Herod built three winter palaces one to two miles south of the ancient city. These palaces were located around the Wadi Qelt, a natural streambed from the nearby hills.

Herod's first palace, built early in his reign in 35 B.C., existed as a rectangular building about 280 feet x 150 feet. The palace had a central court, a triclinium or dining area, and a bathhouse of six rooms. An earthquake destroyed this palace in 31 B.C.

Herod constructed the second palace over the ruins of the first in 25 B.C. Excavators discovered a large swimming pool with a garden area as the lower part of a two-story palace. The upper level had a large garden/court area (92 ft. x 112 ft.) including an unusual irrigation system of two clay pipes for siphoning water.[2]

Herod built his crown jewel palace (his third) in 15 B.C. This luxurious palace and complex, which was constructed on both sides of the Wadi Qelt, covered seven acres. It became Herod's greatest construction achievement because of size, Roman workmanship, and location.

The Israeli archaeologist Ehud Netzer analyzed the third palace as having two basic construction styles. These methods included the Jewish way of building by placing sun-dried bricks on rubble and the Roman masonry manner of pouring concrete into small square stones.[3]

On the south side of the wadi, Herod made a sunken garden, a large pool for swimming and recreation, and a reception hall. He built the palace on the north side of the stream with a large reception hall (100 ft. x 60 ft.), two courtyards, and a Roman bathhouse. The reception hall was paved with colored stones and marble.

The magnificence and grand design of this palace revealed Herod at his zenith in prosperity and building skill. Quality architecture and extensive decorations were evident. The establishment of this palace occurred at the same time that Herod was building the temple in Jerusalem where Jesus taught and worshiped. Thus, the Jericho to Jerusalem road existed as a busy highway for wealthy Jews, tourists, and those engaged in Herod the Great's massive construction projects. B

1. Ehud Netzer, "Jericho" in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 674.
2. Ibid, 687.
3. Ehud Netzer, "Jericho" in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah, vol. 2 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), 568-569.

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LESSON REFERENCE

ETBS: Luke 18:35–19:10

Right: A pot and hoard of silver coins dating from the 1st century A.D. These coins were found in the Jericho area.

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Right: Ruins of Herod's palace complex at New Testament Jericho.

Left: Inverted Corinthian column capital found at New Testament Jericho.

Below: New Testament Jericho looking across the Wadi Qelt.

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LEGEND

Below is a reconstruction of Herod the Great's Winter Palace at Jericho. Situated at the mouth of the Wadi Qelt along the lower slope of the western ridge of the Jordan Valley, the palace had a commanding view of New Testament Jericho and the arid yet fertile Jordan River Valley.

1 . . . . . Reception Hall
2 & 3. . . . . Colonnaded Courts
4 . . . . . Frigidarium (Cold Bath Room)
5 . . . . . Bath Complex
6 . . . . . Wadi Qelt
7 . . . . . Sunken Garden

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Above: Excavations of the city mound of New Testament Jericho.

Right: Traveler along the Jericho road to Jerusalem with two donkeys, a scene that has not changed for thousands of years. The man rides one donkey while the loaded beast with sacks neatly stowed on his back leads the way home. The outskirts of Jerusalem are in the background.

Right: Part of the bathouse in the north wing of Herod's third palace at New Testament Jericho. This round room (26 ft. in diameter) probably initially had a domed roof (area 4, above) and served as a frigidarium (cold room). The center likely housed a large basin.

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