

The Battle of Carrhae: History Channel Video: “Crassus: Rich Man, Poor Man”; Political Background of Palestine: the Treaty between Rome & Parthia in 20 B.C.

IX. Battle of Carrhae: DVD¹

Introduction: “Crassus: Rich Man, Poor Man”

Marcus Licinius Crassus, surnamed Divez \dī-vēs\, i.e. the Rich.

In 60 B.C. Crassus joined with Pompey and Julius Caesar in organizing the First Triumvirate of the Roman Empire as its financial backer. Triumvirate was a title granted for five years giving three men absolute authority, dictatorial in scope. The First Triumvirate was not formally created but an informal understanding among these three political leaders.

Among the three, Crassus was the money man but at the same time a criminal and a gangster. At the time, he was fifty-five years old and rich as, well, as—Crassus. He was the Fire Chief of Rome and made most of his fortune by controlling all the fire departments. He would not let the fire department come to a fire until the owner paid at least half of all that he owned in slaves and money.

Pompey was one of the greatest military tacticians of his day and Julius Caesar was the genius among the three. Both had been successful in accomplishing battlefield victories. Crassus had more money but he did not have the glory of a battlefield victory. Unfortunately for him, he chose to fix this deficiency against the Parthians. It was a bad idea and what we are about to see is his defeat at the hands of Surenas and the Parthian cavalry at the Battle of Carrhae.

Here now is the History Channel’s digital presentation of the battle from its series *Decisive Battles of the Ancient World*, “Crassus: Rich Man, Poor Man,” and we might add, “Dead Man.”

NOTE: If you would like to stream this video click on the three links below to access its presentation from three seven-minute segments on YouTube.com:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b61XHRfFQmk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKQ2Abc55j8&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69_Rc_EYlQA&feature=related

X. Political Background of Palestine

For three years, 40–37 B.C., Palestine was within the Parthian Empire and was ruled by a Jewish vassal king of the Parthians named Antigonus. At that time King Herod, the Roman king of Judea, fled from the Parthians in fear of his life. While the Parthian-sponsored rule of Antigonus was brief, it was apparently popular with the Jews. When the Parthians withdrew across the Euphrates, Antigonus, with Jewish support, attempted to maintain himself as king of the Jews, but was defeated by Herod. Mark Antony, the Roman leader famous for his dalliance with Cleopatra, ordered Antigonus beheaded, and Josephus records that this was done to compel the Jews to accept the hated Herod as their king. Mark Antony afterward led a massive invasion of Parthia in 37–36 B.C., but his army was utterly defeated by the Parthians. Parthian rule over Palestine was, therefore, vividly remembered by many in Jewish society as being preferable to Roman rule. (pp. 126–27)

¹ *Decisive Battles*: “Crassus: Rich Man, Poor Man,” DVD (2006; New York: A&E Television Networks, 2008).

Parthia's victory over Mark Antony led to a long period of peace between Rome and Parthia, with the Euphrates River serving as the border between their two vast empires. This prolonged period of peaceful relations lasted from 36 B.C. until 58 A.D., including not only all of Jesus Christ's life, but also the early period of the Apostolic Church as well. It was an established Roman policy not to provoke a Parthian war during that period of time so long as both empires agreed to coexist on separate banks of the Euphrates River.

As long as the Caesars wanted peace with Parthia, Roman officials along Parthia's border, such as King Herod and Pontius Pilate, knew they risked their positions and lives if they entangled Rome in an unwanted war with Parthia. (p. 127)

Without this period of Parthian-Roman detente, it would have been impossible for some of the events of Jesus Christ's life to have occurred. The first such event was the coming of the Magi, or "Wise Men" to pay homage to Jesus. We read of this event in Matthew 2:1–12, which becomes more important when considered in the overall context of Roman-Parthian relations.² (pp. 127–28)

It was within this political circumstance that the Magi set out for Palestine. But who these men were and how they came to have such an interest in the birth of a Jewish child is a mystery that can be solved only by researching the history of the Magi and how the influence the seven-century influx of Jewish deportees impacted Parthian culture.

² Steven M. Collins, *Parthia: The Forgotten Ancient "Superpower" and Its Role in Biblical History* (Royal Oak, MI: Bible Blessings, 2003), 126–28.