

# Dictators

1. **Herod** was the king who ordered the slaughter of the innocents. Jesus could have perished but Mt 2:13 records what happened to change this possible outcome. Herod could not accept any rivals and was like modern dictators. King Herod tried to impress the Jews in his reconstruction of the temple, but it was obvious to everyone that he was a Roman puppet. He ruthlessly killed some of his own wives and children. Herod is thought to have died in Jericho about a year after Jesus parents hid him in Egypt.
2. **President Idi Armin** took control of Uganda. He had the former prime minister and chief justice killed along with up to 500 000 of his citizens. He martyred Archbishop Joseph Mubiru as well as many brave Christians. Armin took the properties of Indian citizens as well as pushing Europeans to leave the nation. His policies and reign of terror were disastrous for the nation and its economy.
3. **Augusto Pinochet** was president of the junta, which overthrew the elected government of Chile. He made his opponents “disappear” and imprisoned and tortured many other pro democracy Chileans. He moved into secret bank accounts vast amounts of wealth. The president kept a brutal control of the country and caused many to flee to other nations.
4. **Mao Zedong** gained control of all of China after world war two. Tens of millions of people died due to his policies. He helped modernize China but at a horrific cost in human suffering. Mao hated the Christians and persecuted the church. He created a personality cult, which meant he was all but worshipped. A book of his writings was thought of as being Bible like in its teachings and literary value.
5. **Queen Jezebel** was from Phoenicia and a devoted follower of the god Baal. She married the Jewish king and led the nation into the practice of fertility cults. Her ways of leading were ruthless and violent. Jezebel was keen to kill Elijah after he won the contest on Mt Carmel. She failed in this and was eventually thrown from a height in all her finery to have her body ravaged by dogs.

## Activities

- a) Make a list of the attributes common to despots.
- b) Look at the world news this week. Are there leaders acting in the ways of dictators through the ages? Explain your answer.
- c) What do you think changes a young man or woman from being a regular person doing relatively normal things to go through transformation becoming a brutal despot?

- d) Read the following and consider what a Christian should do if in government or in the public service advising and serving the government.

Proverbs 8:15, 16, says that governments should use wisdom to rule and to make laws that are just. Proverbs 17:7 says governments should not lie. Proverbs 20:26 says wise presidents always try to punish the wicked. Proverbs 28:2-4 and 29:4 urge government to maintain order justly, to follow God's moral code and to avoid oppressing the poor. Romans 13:3-6 and 1 Peter 2:13-15 say that government officials, are ministers and servants of God who punish and restrain criminals, and commend those who do good works according to God's moral code. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 records Moses as saying of government that the people should do the following:

"Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you."

List the attributes of a government that is following the spirit of what the Bible reveals as being good government.

- e) Paul extended his life by appealing to the Roman authorities, and the hated Roman army when the Jewish leaders were trying to have him killed. Is it legitimate then to work with despots and their police and army or should Christians oppose them in every way and have no dealings with any organisations related to the despot? Daniel and Joseph both supported, in a loyal way, tyrants. Answer in a way that explains your response.
- f) Jesus lived in a country ruled by an alien invader. He faced the corrupt religious leaders, Roman army and Herod the tyrant. How did He resist their authority and in what ways did he defer to their power?
- g) "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," wrote Lord Acton, in a letter to Bishop Creighton in 1887. Explain what Acton meant and then write a list of arguments in support of the idea. Then list arguments against it. Is political power evil in its very nature?
- h) William Wilberforce was in the UK parliament and for 20 years he waged a tireless campaign to end slavery. What characteristics are necessary for a person to use political power successfully to change a nation and eventually the world as Wilberforce did?

- i) Jesus could have come to earth as a triumphant political leader. He could have paraded into Jerusalem on a stallion with an army behind him. He could have chosen his disciples to be brilliant economists, publicity officers, lawyers, bankers, military generals, civic leaders, academics and celebrities.

How then did God set up the most significant and powerful organization in history? You may not have heard the names of all the despots listed above, but Jesus is known worldwide and despots along with legitimate government leaders often quote his words to validate their policies. Why such a short 3-year campaign in a remote part of the ancient world, not Rome in its splendor and might? How does /did God use power and influence in ways different to modern politicians?