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The Two Kings: Herod and Jesus



Part 8 (021215AM)

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Christ's birth[1] was the day in history when the two most absolutely opposite kings confronted one another for the first time. One was the ultimate earthly king. He sat that day at the pinnacle of power. His name was Herod the Great, descendent of Esau or (as the New Testament had it) an Idumean. Herod lived for Herod. He would soon slaughter the babies of Bethlehem in his desire to exterminate Christ. The theme of his life was: "What will it profit me?"

The other king was baby Jesus. He was the King of Kings, Creator of the Universe. He was the natural heir to David's throne. He was the supreme King over all the kings of this earth. But He did not look like a king, wrapped in humble clothing. He would live to be rejected.

At the height of His ministry He would die a criminal's death. Had he wanted to, Jesus could have called forth legions of angels who would have vindicated His cause instantly and have swept the usurper Herod from the throne. But Jesus did not want the throne in that way. He did not want the throne until you and I could share it with Him. To make that possible He died.

That dramatic moment in history is found in Matthew 2. Of all those chapters in God's Word there are four that detail the Birth of Jesus. They are Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2. From these chapters comes an intriguing and very powerful cast of characters.

We have already met two of the cast members: Joseph and the Magi.

Joseph: Faithful and Following ([Matthew 1: 18-25](#); 2: 13,19), he was willing to be obedient and obscure! Joseph was a model of God's servants who obey even if you don't understand what God is doing.

- Joseph sought the Lord with his problems (1.18-20a)
- Joseph listened to the Lord for His guidance (1.20b-23)
- Joseph obeyed the Lord by his actions (1.24-25a)
- Joseph honored the Lord through his obedience (1.25b)

The INSISTENT Magi: God can use the rich and powerful ([Mt. 2: 1,7,16](#))

- Come to Him (they didn't send their gifts, they came. God wants you, in person, to come to Him).
- Sacrifice your time, freedom, and comfort for Him (they traveled 1100 to 1200 miles across deserts and mountains from the regions of Babylon or Persia or Media)
- Present what you have to Him (a little boy's lunch; an upper room; an unbroken colt; an unrequested flask of perfume ...)
- Personally Worship Him (they came, bowed and worshiped Him).

After following His star for such a long distances, they must have been amazed to find a mere babe in a manger, especially after having been in King Herod's presence and witnessing the material evidence of his greatness. In some ways it is amazing that they worshiped Jesus as they did. Their refusal to do Herod's bidding and reveal the location of Jesus is an indication of their faith, for their action could easily have brought harm to them.

Let pause and read the story again Matthew 2.1-5, 16 and meet our third character of Christmas.

Insecure Herod, the earthly minded, WANTED TO BE THE ONLY KING. HE DID NOT WANT jesus. [Matthew 2:1](#) *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem (NIV)*

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By bringing Jesus[2] and King Herod together at the same time in history, God reveals that He uses what seems to be weak to accomplish His purposes. He uses people who appear to be weak to triumph over those who appear to be strong. Although Herod's power seemed overwhelming and undefeatable, God's power was stronger still. What is done for God and His kingdom has lasting value, as opposed to what we do to obtain honor for ourselves. We create a lasting legacy through self-sacrifice and servanthood, not through self-glorification.

1 Corinthians 1:26-30 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

PROFILES[3] IN CONTRAST:

Jesus (4BC - 28 AD)	Herod the Great (73BC – 4 BC)
Placed in a manger, appearing weak and powerless as a baby with no earthly status but really had it all eternal power, glory, authority, etc.	Lived in magnificent palaces, appeared to have great strength, power, and great earthly status, but lacked eternal status
Lived to honor His Father and to fulfill the purposes of God	Lived to glorify himself and to fulfill his own purposes
Built a kingdom of people (Mt. 16:18; 1 Pet 2:4-8) for the glory of God so others would know Lord.	Built glorious buildings of marble and other stones to honor himself and maintain good relations with Rome
Died in agony on the cross to remove the sins of mankind	Died in agony, hated by his family, after ordering one of his sons to be executed
Jesus was born in Bethlehem as the Messiah from Jacob's lineage who was never accepted as King of the Jews	Herod was born in Edom as an Edomite whose reign violated God's rules (Deuteronomy 17:15) and yet was accepted by the Jews
Jesus the Messiah was sinless.	Herod, the king of the Jews, was a wicked and cruel tyrant.
Jesus had none of the power that the world could give, but His power in heaven is beyond comprehension.	Herod's earthly power was awesome, but he had nothing in the kingdom of heaven;
Jesus gave His life and ministry as a sacrifice on behalf of other people;	Herod's life revolved around sacrificing others in order to bring glory and honor to himself.

Jesus and Herod were opposites morally, culturally, spiritually, and certainly in terms of their worldly status.

King Herod[4] the Great ruled Israel from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. He was king at the time Jesus was born. Here were his temporary and earthly possessions.

- HEROD WAS INSECURE. Though Herod controlled more territory than almost any king of the Jews who had ruled before him, yet he saw threats in every corner and cruelly suppressed all resistance real or imagined.
 - He especially feared Cleopatra of Egypt, so he built a series of fortress-palaces along an escape route between his palace in Jerusalem and his home country of Edom. From Jerusalem he could travel fewer than ten miles south to the safety of the Herodion, then about thirty miles to the cliff fortress of Masada, and finally the fifty miles to Edom.
- HEROD WAS ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST BUILDERS. Though in ruins, his buildings are still among the greatest.
 - The Herodion, the first fortress-palace along Herod's escape route was built 30 years before Christ's birth. This spectacular complex, built just over three miles southeast of Bethlehem, is typical of the great building projects for which Herod is known. Built upon a high hill, the walls of the upper palace stood about ninety feet tall, and steep earthen ramparts built against the lower half of the structure gave it the shape of a volcanic cone.
 - The upper palace dominated the landscape for miles around and even could be seen from Jerusalem nearly ten miles to the north. As the sun rose and set, the Herodion literally cast its shadow across the surrounding towns. The Herodion clearly symbolized Herod's visionary genius, power, and splendor. The third largest palace in the ancient world, its buildings covered about forty-five acres surrounded by about two hundred acres of palace grounds. It included elaborate halls and guest rooms, a terrace more than one thousand feet long, and a huge swimming pool (140 by 200 feet) surrounded by colonnades and a beautiful garden full of exotic plants.
- HEROD CAST HIS SHADOW ON BIBLICAL EVENTS. Though he intended to rival Biblical history he did become one of the greatest failures.
 - As with Herod's many other magnificent building projects, his efforts were clearly intended to demonstrate his power and make a lasting reputation for himself. Many significant biblical sites are located close to the Herodion:
 - The hills near Bethlehem where Jacob buried his beloved Rachel,
 - The route Naomi and Ruth traveled when returning from Moab,
 - The fields owned by Boaz in which Ruth gleaned,
 - The valley where Goliath fell dead, and

o The place where Samuel anointed young David as king of Israel.

- In fact, the Herodion literally overshadowed the greatest historical event of all time the humble birth of Jesus the Messiah in the small town of Bethlehem only several miles away.
4. HEROD WAS OVERSHADOWED BY GOD’S WORD. Just as the Herodion cast its shadow across the landscape of biblical history, Herod cast his shadow across the history and people of Israel.
 - Although Jesus and Herod were vastly different, God clearly engineered history to bring them together in fulfillment of His purposes. Generations earlier, Isaac, Abraham’s son, had prayed on behalf of his barren wife, Rebecca. The Lord answered his prayer, and she conceived twins. “Two nations are in your womb,” the Lord said to her, “and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). Esau, the older son, founded the nation of Edom. Jacob, the younger son, founded the nation of Israel.
 - King Herod (who was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau) seemed to possess all the power, magnificence, and glory. He certainly appeared to rule over a newborn baby in Bethlehem names Jesus. But years earlier, Balaam had prophesied, “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel... Edom will be conquered; ... but Israel will grow strong” (Numbers 24: 17-18). And the prophet Malachi spoke the word of the Lord: “...I have loved Jacob ...but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals...” (Malachi 1:2-3). So, the Jews knew that someday the line of Jacob would assume power. These prophecies have certainly come true.
 5. HEROD’S LIFE IS NOW OVERSHADOWED BY TIME. Today, the awesome projects that King Herod built lie in ruins, and most people remember him only as the king who had innocent babies killed in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus, the promised Messiah. Herod made his mark in the world and then was gone. In contrast, Jesus didn’t leave a single building as a legacy. No one is exactly sure of the locations where He was born or died. Yet His passing changed the world forever. And today He lives! His kingdom has no end, we Christians are His temples, and the eternal truths He revealed remain true today. No matter how strong and glorious Herod appeared to be, the baby in Bethlehem’s manger was stronger. Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth, triumphed over all evil even death! He will return to conquer all earthly powers.

Lessons from the Tragic Life of Herod show that Herod gained the whole world but lost his own soul. [Matthew 16:26](#) For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

1. HEROD HAD IT ALL IN THIS LIFE. **You can have it all in this life and fail in the next.** As a General he was nearly undefeated. As a Diplomat he was unstoppable. As a Builder he was unparalleled. As a Businessman he was unimaginably wealthy. It took great faith for the Jewish people to believe that Jesus, who began His life on earth as a baby in Bethlehem, was truly the Lord of heaven and earth. The contrasts between Jesus and Herod could not have been greater. Herod had all the power, wealth, strength, and glory that his position in the world could offer; yet Jesus, the King of the universe, had nothing of that sort to demonstrate His position. So to believe in Jesus as the Messiah was to believe that regardless of outward appearances, Jesus, the baby in the manger, was indeed Lord of heaven and earth.
2. HEROD LIVED FOR THE EARTH, NOT HEAVEN. **If you live for the earth and not heaven you will lose everything.** Herod was too earthly minded to notice the significance of this event. [John 3: 19-21](#) This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (NIV). King Herod, who personified evil, no doubt seemed to have all the power and control. He ruled with an iron hand, seeking out and destroying every possible enemy even killing innocent babies. Yet Jesus, the humble King of all creation, was truly in control. He had the power to overcome every evil including that of Herod. Today, Christians are asked to believe that no matter how powerful Wall Street appears to be, no matter how controlling a government seems, no matter how influential the morals of Hollywood appear to be, no matter how evil pornography seems, no matter how overwhelming hunger, racism, or AIDS appear to be -- Jesus Christ is King. Because His power, which has conquered all evil, resides within us, we do not need to fear the evil we face. Although it is easier and safer to avoid evil than to confront it, the crucial question that all Christians must answer for themselves is: “Will I dare to live as if God is greater than any evil I face in my life and my culture, as if the power within me is greater than every power of evil that I will encounter?”
3. HEROD HAD DEMON FAITH. **You can tremble before God and still be damned.** Demon faith means God scares you but you never change. King Herod believed the Scriptures! Herod believed God’s Word enough in that crowded court to dispatch a corps of butchers to Bethlehem to slaughter innocent children, in hopes of destroying this rival to his throne. But he was too late. The magi had come and gone and Jesus was by now safe in Egypt. All Herod’s exposed to God’s Word many trembled none changed! [James 2: 19](#) You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!
4. HEROD PUT HIS FAITH IN HIMSELF, HIS POWER, HIS RICHES, HIS WEALTH, AND HIS PLEASURE. **You can gain the whole world and lose your own soul.** King Herod - more concerned about his crown than his soul. [Matthew 16:26](#) For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [John 3: 19](#) And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. [John 3: 36](#) He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”
5. HEROD MISSED HIS CHANCE. **You can get as close as Herod and still miss heaven.**

Few people were as close to salvation as the Herod family was. Few had so many opportunities to meet the Messiah and to hear His teaching. Look up the following verses, and notice the encounters the Herod family had with Jesus and His message. The Legacy of Herod the Great is that few families in history have come as close to Jesus’ message as the Herod’s. Many members of this ruling family knew of Jesus and His followers. Yet, one after the other, they killed or tried to kill anyone connected to Him.

1.	Herod the Great	Matthew 2: 1-8, 13-18
2.	Antipas (son of Herod the Great)	Mark 6: 14-29 Luke 23: 8-12
3.	Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great)	Acts 12: 1-5, 18-24

4.	Drusilla (wife of the governor Felix and daughter of Agrippa I)	Acts 24: 24-26
5.	Agrippa II (great-grandson of Herod the Great)	Acts 25: 13,23,26:1-29
6.	Bernice (great-granddaughter of Herod the Great)	Acts 25: 13,23,26:1-29

A TALE OF TWO KINGS. So, Christ's birth[5] was the day in history when the two most absolutely opposite kings confronted one another for the first time. One was the ultimate earthly king. He sat that day at the pinnacle of power. His name was Herod the Great, descendent of Esau or (as the New Testament had it) an Idumean. Herod lived for Herod. He would soon slaughter the babies of Bethlehem in his desire to exterminate Christ. The theme of his life was: "What will it profit me?"

The other king was baby Jesus. He was the King of Kings, Creator of the Universe. He was the natural heir to David's throne. He was the supreme King over all the kings of this earth. But He did not look like a king, wrapped in humble clothing. He would live to be rejected.

At the height of His ministry He would die a criminal's death. Had he wanted to, Jesus could have called forth legions of angels who would have vindicated His cause instantly and have swept the usurper Herod from the throne. But Jesus did not want the throne in that way. He did not want the throne until you and I could share it with Him. To make that possible He died.

Herod said, "What is in it for me?" Jesus said, "I come to give my life a ransom for many." But Jesus triumphed over Herod! Jesus grew up, went to the cross, and He died. But His death was followed by a resurrection, and today He lives to enable those who believe on Him to behave as He did and bring a true, supernatural brotherhood to this world. For his part, Herod went on with his revelry but soon he died in misery. Herod's dreams came be found in the millions of smashed fragments of marble from his great palaces. This is the choice before you: to go Herod's way or Jesus' way. You cannot do both!

[Matthew 7: 13-14](#) "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

APPENDIX

The Legacy of Herod the Great - Few families in history have come as close to Jesus' message as the Herods. Many members of this ruling family knew of Jesus and His followers. Yet, one after the other, they killed or tried to kill anyone connected to Him. Maybe the Herod family, descended from Esau and Edom, simply fulfilled the prophecies ([Genesis 25:23](#); [Numbers 24:17](#); [Obadiah 8-21](#)).

Ruler	Notable Deeds	Last Days
Antipas: ruled Galilee and Perea 40+ years	Brought peace and prosperity: sensitive to Jewish religion yet married brother Philip's wife. Built Sepphoris and Tiberias. Had John the Baptist beheaded, met Jesus and plotted His death (Jesus opposed him) Agrippa accused him of a plot	New emperor exiled him and claimed his property
Archelaus: ruled Judea, Samaria, Idumaea 10 years	Killed families of Jewish delegations who had gone to Rome to accuse him, known for his bloodthirstiness and evil qualities	Exiled to Gaul, then disappeared from history
Philip: ruled area north and east of the Sea of Galilee 37 years	A just ruler who mainly governed Gentiles, peace-loving	Died of natural causes at end of his reign
Agrippa I: ruled area north and east of Sea of Galilee, Judea 8 years	Ruled a large area, sought to stop Jesus' followers, killed James and imprisoned Peter and other disciples	An angel of God stuck him down, eaten up by worms and died
Agrippa II: ruled small portion of his father's region, had limited rule in Jerusalem	Advanced Hellenistic culture, wounded during Jewish Revolt supporting Rome, heard Paul's stirring presentation of the gospel in Caesarea, but was not persuaded	Was wounded fighting for Rome against the Zealots at Gamla, but the specifics of his death are not known

[1] I am indebted for this comparison to a small tract written years ago by Joseph Hoffnman Cohn for the American Board of Missions to the Jews, entitled "The Man from Petra," No. 65 in the series "What Every Christian Should Know About the Jews" (revised 1961, no original date of publication).

[2] The details on Herod are quoted and paraphrased from Ray Vander Laan, *Faith Lessons On The Life & Ministry Of The Messiah. Leader's Guide*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, p. 22ff.

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