

Bethlehem: The Two Kings

SLIDE # 1: TITLE

Jesus¹ was born in Bethlehem, while Herod was born in Edom. Jesus the Messiah was sinless; Herod, the king of the Jews, was a cruel tyrant. Herod's earthly power was awesome, but stored no treasures in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had none of the power the world could give, but his power in heaven was beyond comprehension.

Jesus gave his life and ministry as a sacrifice so that the world would know God, but Herod's life revolved around sacrificing others in order to bring glory and honor to himself. Jesus and Herod were opposites in every way—morally, culturally, spiritually, and especially in terms of their worldly status.

Ultimately, Herod's glory and strength were forgotten. Few people remember the accomplishments of this proud king. Rather, he is remembered as a paranoid tyrant—the man who killed children in Bethlehem as an effort to save his power.

Jesus' legacy continues to impact millions of people throughout the world. Even non-Christians have heard about his life and death. Today, his followers still study his words and seek to follow the humble example of his life.

¹ Quoted from Ray VanderLaan's website at: <http://community.gospelcom.net/Brix?pageID=1793>

Christ's birth² 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.

Let pause and read the story again Matthew 2.1-5, 16 and meet our next 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)*

By bringing Jesus³ 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 an

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³ 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.

eternal reward 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.

SLIDE # 2: SUN OVER CITY

PROFILES⁴ 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	Herod was born in Edom as an

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the Messiah from Jacob's lineage who was never accepted as King of the Jews	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.

SLIDE # 3: MAP

King Herod⁵ 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.

1. 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.

SLIDE # 4: HERODION

2. 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

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ramparts built against the lower half of the structure gave it the shape of a volcanic cone.

- The Herodion, third largest palace of its day, was built in the wilderness near Bethlehem. The huge structure was a monument to Herod's wealth and engineering skill. Its buildings covered forty-five acres of land and were surrounded by nearly two hundred acres of palace grounds. Herod, who was paranoid about threats to his power, feared that Cleopatra of Egypt would invade his land. He built the Herodion as one of several fortress-palaces lining the escape route to Moab, Herod's home country. In case of attack, he could flee Jerusalem and head to one of his fortress retreats. The Herodion's circular upper palace could be seen for miles and literally overshadowed surrounding villages. Built on a high hill, the palace stood about ninety feet tall, with steep earthen ramparts built around it. Four huge towers extended above the fortress' double walls. The upper rooms of these towers caught the cool Mediterranean breezes and served as homes for the royal family and other government powers. The inner circle of the palace was open to the sky and featured a garden, reception hall, and various baths. Herod also built a lower palace, a huge swimming pool, and exotic gardens at the base of the Herodion. Like his other building projects, the Herodion convincingly demonstrated his tremendous power.
- Try to picture a hill near Bethlehem that Herod decides to double in size one basketful of dirt at a time. On this hill he creates one of the most lavish palaces of his time, filled with every luxury Herod desired. Within three miles of this palace is a dark and smelly cave. This is the cave that Jesus was born in. God took a lowly infant child and turned his ministry into the greatest history-changing event ever, and gave us the choice of salvation through it. All of our lives have a Herod part to them. Part of our life is dedicated to material things, and this part of our life holds many of us captive. In direct opposition to the materialism exemplified by Herod is the servanthood exemplified by Jesus. We need to dedicate our lives to serving Jesus and not the material possessions that Herod thought were so important. In the Christmas season, we need to remember the servanthood of Jesus, even though we are surrounded by the blinking lights of our materialistic culture. We need the spiritual guts to proclaim from the mountaintop that the world of Herod's materialism is full of dead promises, and that the world of Jesus Christ's

servanthood is alive. Bless God for sending his son to show us the way to eternal life.

SLIDE # 5: HERODION and MANGER

3. 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
 - 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.

SLIDE # 7: HERODION TODAY

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?

SLIDE # 6: HERODION RUINS

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

SLIDE # 7: TITLE SLIDE

A TALE OF TWO KINGS. So, Christ's birth⁶ 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?"

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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.

Herod lay dying in his opulent palace in Jericho. He had been seriously ill for a long time. From the description in Josephus' writings, Herod had gangrene, severe itching, convulsions, and ulcers. His feet were covered with tumors, and he had constant fevers. The stadium of Jericho was filled with loved and important people from around his land who were to be killed at the moment of his death, lest no one mourn when he died. It didn't seem to matter that they would not be mourning for him.

As he lay on his deathbed, Herod's thoughts may have turned to the rabbis and their students whom he recently had executed for tearing down the Roman eagle from the Temple gate because it violated God's law against images. Perhaps he reflected on his beloved wife Miriamne's two sons whom he had drowned in the palace swimming pool next door. He could have remembered the execution of his favorite son, Antipater, only days ago for plotting against him—Antipater, the one who was to take his father's place. Or maybe he thought about the 45 members of

the Sanhedrin whom he had murdered, the hundreds of family and staff whom he had suspected of plotting against him, or the thousands of subjects who died in his brutal campaign to claim a country they believed he had no right to rule. It is possible Herod also recalled—though only briefly—the massacre of a few boy babies in a town near his massive fortress Herodion, soon to be his tomb.

SO CLOSE

There have been few families in history who came so close to the greatest message the world has ever heard. One after another, the Herods met or knew of Jesus and his followers. One after another, they killed or tried to kill anyone connected to him. How anyone could be so close and yet so far is hard to understand. Maybe the Herod family, who were descended from Esau and Edom, simply fulfilled the prophecies (**Gen. 25:23**; **Num. 24:17**; **Obad. 8–21**).

The most powerful family of kings Israel had known for many years had the opportunity to meet and serve the King of the universe. Instead, they exemplify the ultimate fate of those who do not recognize the Messiah. They lived only for themselves and not so that the world may know that there is a God in Israel (**1 Sam. 17:46**).