

CHRISTMAS

AT GRACE DEVOTIONAL

THE HEROD IN ME: WHEN I NEED TO BE IN CONTROL // DECEMBER 13, 2020

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Discussion Starter: Everyone struggles to one degree or another with a desire to be in control of their lives. How can this desire for control hinder one's walk with God?

Key Passage: *"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. ¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.'" (Matthew 2:1-18)*

Herod is the family name of a ruling dynasty in Palestine. There are four different Herods mentioned from Matthew 2 to Acts 26. Herod the Great founded the Herod dynasty, and is the only Herod mentioned in the context of Jesus' birth. Herod the Great appears in Matthew 2:19 and Luke 1:5. Herod began his career in the military but manipulated his way to the top in politics. He governed Galilee, added Syria, and finally was crowned King of Judea by Roman Emperor Augustus in 37 BC. He was an Edomite, not a Jew. His ruthless leadership style caused constant conflict between himself, Augustus, and Jewish leaders.

Discuss: Do you think power and authority tends to corrupt a person or reveal corruption that is already within a person, or both? Explain your answer.

Herod's subjects disliked and feared him, and Herod did not trust his friends or his own family. He oversaw the executions of three of his own sons, his wife, his mother-in-law, two brothers-in-law, and forty-six members of the Sanhedrin. Herod never allowed the Jewish religion to influence him. He took away the civil power of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of justice and supreme council of ancient Jerusalem, and reduced them to a religious role. Herod rebuilt the Jewish temple in Jerusalem but, to spite the Jews, Herod erected a golden eagle at the temple's gate—an action that the Jews saw as insulting and blasphemous. Josephus, the historian, described Herod as a man “of great barbarity toward all men equally” and “a slave to his passions.”

Discuss: How should Christians respond if living in a place ruled by violent, ruthless leaders?

When the Magi arrived and asked, “*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*” (v.2), Herod immediately felt threatened. Herod considered himself to be the King of the Jews, and he refused to tolerate any competition, even if the competition was from a child! Herod learned from Jewish priests and scribes that Bethlehem was the birthplace of baby Jesus, so he sent away the Magi with orders to return to Jerusalem and give him the exact location of Jesus. The Magi left but did not follow Herod's orders. Herod estimated that Jesus' age was two years old based upon the fact that the wise men said they first saw the star less than two years before their visit to Herod. Driven by his rage and paranoia, Herod attempted to kill Jesus by ordering the slaughter of all male children age two and younger (this now known as the “Massacre of the Innocents”).

Discuss: In what ways do nonbelievers who are antagonistic against the gospel try to diminish or even destroy Christ's influence in our culture today?

After the Magi saw Jesus, they returned to their homeland. Joseph, Mary's husband, had a dream in which an angel warned him of the impending danger in Bethlehem, so Joseph took Mary and baby Jesus and fled to safety in Egypt where they stayed until an angel informed Joseph of Herod's death (Matthew 2:13-15). Herod the Great died in BC 4 after a long and excruciating illness.

Discuss: What do we learn about God's sovereignty from the story of Herod's attempt to kill the Christ child?

Discuss: How would you counsel a new Christian to yield control of his/her life over to God on a daily basis?

Resources

The Many Faces of Herod the Great by Adam Marshak

The Case for Christmas by Lee Strobel

“What Was the Star of Bethlehem?” article at www.gotquestions.org