

**Herod and the Magi**  
**Our Coming Savior--part 5**  
**Dec. 27, 2015**

**DAY 1: Can Evil Stop God's Plan?**

1. Dr. Seuss' Christmas classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, is the story of how a mean old Grinch devised a failed plan to try to halt the most wonderful time of the year: Christmas. Just at the Grinch "could not stop Christmas from coming," neither could King Herod the Great thwart the Christ child from being born as the new King of the Jews in the little town of Bethlehem. While the Grinch's heart grew "three sizes that day," Herod the Great remained hardhearted, and he did his best to stamp out any potential threat to his throne. Ultimately, that ended in defeat. While the Grinch is a fictitious character, Herod was a historical person who played a significant adversarial role in the Christmas story.

2. Herod was born in 73 BC. His father and grandfather—both named Antipater—had served as military commanders in their homeland of Idumea. In 37 BC that Herod officially began his rule as king of the Jews. Herod was brutal and shed much blood to secure his throne from any who might appear as a threat. He killed his favorite wife, his own sons, and others in order to keep a firm grip on his kingdom.

*Matthew 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem*

<sup>2</sup> *and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*

<sup>3</sup> *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*

<sup>4</sup> *When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.*

<sup>5</sup> *"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:*

<sup>6</sup> *"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."*

3. Magi (a combination of educated about culture, science and religion, as well as being wise) came to Jerusalem. For what reasons did they come?

4. Why do you think King Herod was disturbed at the hearing of one "born king of the Jews?"

5. Why do you think Herod gathered "all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law (5 books of Moses)?"

6. If you had been King Herod what do you think would have been your response?

## DAY 2: Bethlehem: arrival and prophecy

1. The long-awaited prophecy of a Messiah born in Bethlehem had finally come true. The one born king of the Jews was living right under Herod's nose—and he didn't even know it. When Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes together to help him understand what the prophecies said about the birth of the coming Christ, the members of the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees who were under Herod's thumb told him of the prophecy from Micah 5:2:

*Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

2. How does the prophet Micah describe the town of Bethlehem?

3. What do we learn about the one to come out of Bethlehem? (look for three things)

4. Herod's response to the news of the birth of the king of the Jews had been "*troubled*." The chief priests of the Jewish law met the same news with *indifference*. The Magi's response was to go and *worship*.

*Matthew 2:7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.*

<sup>8</sup> *He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."*

5. What do you think was Herod's motivation?

*Matthew 2:9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.<sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*

6. We don't know the time of the Magi's arrival, but it was far enough after Jesus' birth that Joseph and Mary had living in a house in Bethlehem.

*Matt. 2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

7. We have seen how God used visions and dreams to divinely communicate at key points in history, including Joseph. The Magi are "warned in a dream" not to return to Herod. What strikes you about God's sovereign direction, and His ability to override even powerful men like Herod?

### DAY 3: Flight to Egypt

1. The sovereign God prepared the next steps of the journey for the magi, and then for Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

2. All while King Herod was getting antsy at the delay from these wise men who were supposed to return with good news of Jesus' whereabouts. When it became clear that Herod would not have an RSVP from the wise men, he became irate. However, this didn't happen until after the sovereign preparation and provision by God to protect his only begotten Son:

*Matthew 2:13 When the magi had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.*

*"Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."*

<sup>14</sup> *So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,*

<sup>15</sup> *where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

3. Not only had God supernaturally provided and prepared a place of protection for Jesus, but he also was fulfilling the promise of prophecy spoken of seven hundred years before through his prophet Hosea!

*Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."*

4. This prophecy was one that tied back to God's faithfulness to his people from the Exodus in Egypt. Matthew helps his readers to see the faithfulness of God by providing another fulfilled prophecy of the Messiah who would one day lead all people out of a slavery to sin.

5. Bethlehem was seventy-five miles to the border of Egypt and another hundred miles once inside the border to a place of safety. There were upward of one million Jewish people who lived in Egypt at this time. Joseph, Mary and Jesus would be able to find refuge there while Herod rampaged, trying to kill baby Jesus.

6. The gifts from the wise men would have been used to finance the trip as Mary and Joseph were just a poor couple. But now they had gifts from the magi that included gold. God had provided this young family with enough to get them into Egypt and live there until further notice.

7. All along the way, God is moving the story of redemption along, in spite of powerful officials moving with evil intent. What strikes you about God's ability to keep the story moving forward?

#### **DAY 4: Ramah--slaughter and hope**

*Matthew 2:16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.*

1. Herod went ballistic when he learned of the wise men's failure to report. His orders are to kill all the male children two years old and under in Bethlehem! Much blood was shed, and many tears were cried at this atrocity.

2. Herod's order to murder Hebrew baby boys in Bethlehem reminds Matthew of Pharaoh's orders to murder Hebrew male babies in Egypt (Exodus 1-2). But just as God provided and prepared a way for Moses to escape a death sentence by Pharaoh, so did God provide and prepare a way for Jesus to escape Herod's wrath.

3. Here's the important prophetic connection between the two events.

*Matthew 2:17 Then what was said through the prophet **Jeremiah** was fulfilled:*

*<sup>18</sup> "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."*

4. The fulfillment of prophecy is tied back to Jeremiah 31:15. However, the two verses that follow in verses 16 and 17 show that hope is on the horizon of tomorrow for those who weep today:

*Jeremiah 31:16 This is what the LORD says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the LORD. "They will return from the land of the enemy. <sup>17</sup> So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD. "Your children will return to their own land."*

5. This prophecy refers to the all the Jewish mothers who wept tears of sadness at the loss of their children, specifically during the days of exile. It also can be applied to those grieving mothers in Bethlehem who were weeping over their dead babies Herod slaughtered on that brutal day. But the Messiah was not one of them.

6. And while that day was one of sadness, there was hope in the Messiah who had escaped during the night before so that he could die for the rescue of all people on another appointed day three decades in the future. On that day, Jesus, once again, would be called "The King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37). On that future day, Jesus' mother, Mary, would have her turn to mourn as had the weeping mothers in Bethlehem.

## **DAY 5: Herod dies; the Story continues**

*Matt. 2:19-23 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.*

1. Herod's days were numbered. All tyrants have a reign that comes to an end. Herod soon died after Jesus was safe in Egypt.

2. No matter how hard Herod tried, he could not manipulate the timing of his own death beyond his appointed hour. In his classic account of history called Antiquities, the historian Josephus writes of how Herod died. He said, "Herod died of this, ulcerated entrails, putrefied and maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions, foul breath, and neither physicians nor warm baths led to recovery."

3. Herod, the appointed king of the Jews, was dead and left a horrible heritage. Jesus, the one born King of the Jews, would have a very different legacy. Biblical scholar William Hendriksen compares the two kings:

King Herod was selfish and self-indulgent. King Jesus was self-denying and self-sacrificing.

King Herod was yielding to Satan. King Jesus was about vanquishing Satan.

King Herod was a destroyer of people. King Jesus was the Savior of people.

King Herod was cruel, even to little ones. King Jesus was kind, especially to little ones.

Jesus and his family returned to Israel.

4. There is another prophetic word and fulfillment, illustrating once again the sovereignty of God to move in the affairs of history.

*Matt. 2:22-23 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*

5. Jesus is born at a town that is not his hometown, Bethlehem. He is moved to pagan Egypt as a small child, and moves back to Nazareth, not his hometown due to Archelaus, all in fulfillment of prophecy written centuries before.

6. This week we've seen multiple prophecies fulfilled, God deliver the Messiah out of mortal danger, and God sovereignly move the story of redemption forward even through the worst of men and atrocities.