

He did WHAT???

God's Word:

Matthew 2:1-10, 16-23

Key Verse:

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

--Matthew 2:2



Breaking It Down:

Let me tell you something about Herod. This is a short story to help you understand the environment into which Jesus was born. Herod – or Herod The Great, as he's known historically – came to rule Israel in a time of great treachery in the Roman world. The historian Josephus wrote¹ that not too long after Cassius and Brutus murdered Caesar in Rome (hopefully some of you have heard this story) a bad dude named Malichus wanted Herod's dad Antipater out of the way. So Malichus bribed his friend's butler to poison Herod's dad while they were all at a feast. When Herod found out about this, he befriended Cassius, and through some trickery and politics, he eventually was able to avenge his father's death. After Malichus was murdered, Herod continued to gain power through war and betrayal until he began to suspect that even his close friends and family were against him. He killed them too, out of fear that they would take over his kingdom.



Herod was a messed up, jealous, and ruthless king. He was in power when the Magi in today's verses arrive on the scene and tell him they've come to worship the King of the Jews – and it wasn't Herod. When we say, "Magi," we're not talking about three

¹ Jewish Antiquities, Book 14, Chapter 11 through Book 15, Chapter 7

kings. They were wise men, and they probably came with a whole boatload of people. The reason Christmas stories describe them as three kings is because of their three gifts – gold, incense, and myrrh. The Bible rightly says in verse 3 of today’s passage that Herod was disturbed and all of Jerusalem with him by this news of Jesus’ birth.

However, evil men do not stop God’s purposes. God even used Herod to direct the Magi to Jesus, Joseph and Mary to present gifts to Jesus. Their coming confirmed to Jesus’ parents what the angels had told them just a few months earlier and what the shepherds had told them about Jesus: He was the Christ, the Savior, “Immanuel” -- God with us -- and the One who would save His people from their sins. The gifts also provided resources so that Joseph’s family could flee to Egypt to protect baby Jesus from Herod’s orders to kill all the male babies around Bethlehem (see verse 16) until it was time for them to come home.



Living It

Do you sometimes feel that all the wrong people are in control? Maybe you have a teacher you don’t like, a boss who could learn people skills from a porcupine, or you think that Congress is full of corrupt leaders. This week’s lesson teaches us that though it is right to recognize the evil things that people do, it’s even more important to recognize that God is working out His purpose for our lives in spite of the evil things ungodly people and leaders do.

In fact, all of the events in this chapter were prophesized in the Old Testament. Micah 5:2 said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Hosea 11:1 said that God would call His Son out of Egypt. Jeremiah 31:15 said that the Israelites would mourn their children, and this was caused by Herod’s edict. Finally, Psalm 22:6 and Isaiah 53:3 said that the Messiah would be despised, which is another word for “Nazarene.” While it seemed to everyone, including Herod, that Herod was in control, God was really in control.



What did the Magi do to keep from assisting Herod in his evil quest to rid Israel of the Messiah? First, they listened to God. God made Herod’s plans plain to them in a dream. Sometimes, we aren’t listening when God speaks to us. Do you have a relationship with Jesus that is close enough to hear Him and listen to Him when He speaks to you? Without this relationship, you are susceptible to becoming entrapped by the devil’s snares and his henchmen. With our relationship to God through Jesus, God

offers to lead us out of temptation and gives us a way to stand firm when the devil plots against us.

However, the Magi didn't just listen to God, they obeyed God. They took another route home when they learned that Herod was going to try to kill Jesus. Are you a hearer of the Word, but not a doer? It's not enough to go to church every Sabbath, listen to your Sabbath School teacher teach and your pastor preach without putting into practice what you learn. Listening to God without obeying Him results in the same evil effect. Those who are part of the family of God listen to God and then do what God tells them to do. (Luke 8:21) Finally, it is those who believe God and do what He says who will overcome the world. (1 John 5:2-5)



Questions:

1. How did God warn the Magi and Joseph of Herod's plans?
2. Who told the Magi where Jesus could be found?
3. What are some other examples (either in the Bible or from events in your life or in the news) of how God made good happen despite someone evil being in charge and doing or intending harm?
4. How can you praise God in the midst of bad things happening around you?



Do It!

Think of a leader you don't like or someone you didn't like in the past. Think really hard about something that he or she did or does right. Read Romans, chapter 13, and then pray for that person. Ask God to bless the person and bless people through the person, for God calls us to love even our enemies. Expect God to do something really amazing.

