

HEROD THE MAD MAN!

Herod was a “mad” man, and when he was mad, he was really MAD – killer Mad! Josephus called him “*a man of great barbarity towards all men.*”

Matthew 2:16 (NKJV)

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

Historians tell about an old man who was a veteran of Herod’s many wars who once dared to tell him, “The army hates your cruelty. Have a care my lord. ...many of the officers openly curse you.”

“Enraged Herod had the old soldier stretched on the rack and tortured until he sobbed out meaningless confessions and accusations of treason. Herod urged the torturers on. The wretched man accused more and more officers by name as he was twisted and torn until his joints came apart and his bones cracked. Herod summoned the accused officers and turned a mob loose on them. Livid with rage, he jumped up and down as he screamed for the death of the suspected traitors.” – **John Phillips**

Such was the temperament of the so-called “**Herod the Great**”. He was a vicious, paranoid man consumed with power.

In exceeding rage, Herod sent his thugs to kill all the Jewish male children two years old and under in Bethlehem and all the surrounding area.

The age of the children to be killed was determined by the timeline the wise men had told him. They had evidently told him that they had seen the special star in the East indicating the birth of the King of the Jews about 2 years earlier – or maybe Herod rounded it up to 2 years just to make sure this young “King of the Jews” was killed.

Scholars believe that Bethlehem was a very small village at this time, with perhaps about 300 people. And therefore, they estimate that, counting the surrounding districts, there may have been somewhere between 6 and 30 children under the age of 2 who would have been killed. According to the killer standards of Herod, it was a rather small operation and therefore historians such as Josephus did not even mention it. But for the small village of Bethlehem, it was horrific beyond description.

This is certainly an example of God permitting something to go on that is a total offense to Him, and yet He remains sovereign over all that happens.

This is a good truth to keep in mind as we see political leaders in our day do things that are very wrong. They are allowed to do these things, but God is BIGGER. He is still sovereign, and through it all, He is still accomplishing His purposes. We must always cling to the truth of God's sovereignty even in the face of horrific circumstances – even when we have no clue as to WHY this is allowed to happen. Still, God remains sovereign!

Matthew 2:17–18 (NKJV)

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”

This is a quote from Jer. 31:15.

Jeremiah 31:15 (NKJV)

15 Thus says the Lord: “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.”

What we have here is another example of the typological fulfillment of prophecy. The context of Jeremiah 31:15 is the Babylonian Exile.

Rachel is pictured as a mother figure in Israel who is poetically depicted as weeping over the children of Israel being taken away, although at this point, she had been dead for 13 centuries. Rachel was buried near Ramah, which is about 8 miles north of Jerusalem. She was buried there as they were on the way to Bethlehem (cf. Gen. 35:19).

Ramah was a staging area where the Jewish captives were gathered before being led off into captivity to Babylon (cf. Jer. 40:1-2). Therefore, Rachel being buried in this vicinity was symbolically pictured as weeping over the children of Israel being taken from the land (cf. 1 Sam. 10:2).

This exile to Babylon, removing the Children of Israel from the land, happened in 586 BC, which marks the beginning of the “times of the Gentiles” in which the Jews would be trodden down by the Gentiles because of their sinful unfaithfulness to God (cf. Lk. 21:24).

Now here they were centuries later, still under the heel of the Gentiles (in this case, King Herod), and Rachel is still pictured as weeping over the loss of her children. Note in context, the Messiah had just been born, and Israel was apathetic, resulting in continuing mournful consequences.

Just as the mothers in Israel wept over the removal of their sons in the Babylonian Exile (personified as Rachel weeping), so now there was a prophetic fulfillment of this typology in the weeping over the murder of these Children in Bethlehem and the surrounding area.

In a sense, this is all part of ONE BIG prophetic story. Israel's story and the Messiah's story go together. Both these calamities are part of the same larger story of Israel's sin climaxing in the rejection of her Messiah. The Jews, in rejection of God, suffered the mournful consequences of the Babylonian Exile. This became a prophetic type of their mournful experience in their apathetic rejection of the Messiah at His birth. In both cases, the results were "lamentation, weeping, and great mourning."

Ironically, and really prophetically, the wailing at the time of the Babylonian Exile, which ushered in the "times of the Gentiles," eventually brought about the rule of King Herod, and this atrocity, which the Jewish mothers in Bethlehem were now experiencing.