

A Tale of Two Kings: Herod & Jesus

Matthew 2:1-23

Charles Dickens begins his famous story, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with these words:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.”¹

Matthew records the real life events of Herod and Jesus in Matthew 2:1-23. At its heart, this is a tale of two kings:

KING	HEROD	JESUS
LOCATION		
LIVING CONDITIONS		
STATUS		
SPIRITUAL CONDITION		

¹ Dickens, Charles, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Penguin Putnam, Inc., New York, 1859.

Herod the Great was wealthy, politically gifted, an excellent administrator, an Edomite (not Jewish), and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman Emperors. His famine relief was superb, and his building projects – including the temple – were admired even by his foes. But he had a temper and a violent penchant for power. Therefore, he governed by fear, deceit, and violence. He inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a tyrant.

How is this the same as those in power today? How is this different?

By contrast, Jesus is unknown, weak, and in need of protection even though His coming was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Where was the King of all creation born? Why was this considered odd?

How did Herod find out about the birth of Jesus? How does Herod take the news of a newborn king? How does Jerusalem take the news of a newborn king?

It appears King Herod is in charge as he plots his moves to stay in power, sending the Magi to find Jesus and report back to him.

Who is really in power? How do you know?

What does Herod do in response to the Magi never returning?

It's uncomfortable to read Matthew 2:16-18. It's not very Christmas-y. Although Herod fails in his effort to kill the Child-King Jesus, he succeeds in murdering perhaps as many as 20 male children 2-years old and younger in and around the village of Bethlehem. The babes of Bethlehem are often called the first martyrs of Christianity.

How does reading this make you feel?

Why does God allow such an evil act to take place?

So, we've established that King Herod is paranoid, power-hungry, cruel, and wicked. And that King Jesus is lowly, meek, mild, and holy.

Who do you have more in common with, Herod or Jesus?

When is Jesus crowned as "King of the Jews"? What is He crowned with?

As different as Herod and Jesus are, they have one significant thing in common: They both believe that there's nothing that bloodshed can't cure. Herod thinks the blood of the children in Bethlehem will save his kingdom. Jesus knows His own blood shed on the cross will save the world.

What is the sign, or proof, that Jesus' blood saved the world?

How are we to treat our earthly "kings" today?

Regardless of what befalls us in this life, whether it's the best of times or the worst, we have expectant hope in the life to come. For ultimately, "the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15b ESV).

In light of this future reality, how can we live in loving service to King Jesus today?

How does this worldview, that Jesus is King of all creation, impact all we think, say, and do?