

Series: Christ The King Is Born #1855

Title: Matthew 2.1-3

The Contrasting Kings

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Yesterday we spoke about the coordinates and today and in the days ahead we will speak about the contrasting kings, both found in our text of Matthew chapter 2, verses 1-3. Let me read this for us again. This is the second chapter of Matthew, the first three verses, **“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² ‘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.’ ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”**

These verses reveal three coordinates, like you would find on a map. Three locations. Verse 1 says, “after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.” There is location number one. And verse 1 also talks about “magi from the east.” The east. That’s location number two. Verse 2 also mentions the east as related to “His star.” And then, verses 1 and 3 speak of “Jerusalem.” That is location number three. Bethlehem of Judea, the east, and Jerusalem. We talked, briefly, about these coordinates, plotting them on a map in our minds. I know I spoke rather quickly last time, especially towards the end. But I really need to move at a swift pace so we can uncover all these verses offer us before Christmas.

These coordinates will come into play as the story develops. So I will remind you about them. And now let me introduce you to the contrasting kings. These verses speak of two kings. One is Herod, King of the Jews. The other is Jesus, King of the Jews. There is something Herod and Jesus had in common. They were both king of the Jews. But everything else is held in contrast. Herod is the human king. Jesus is the God King. This will be a good way to remember the contrast: Herod is the human king. Jesus is the God King. Logistically, my approach will be to take up Herod first, and then later, Jesus.

So, let’s dig into the history of Herod. It is valuable that we distinguish this man from three other Herods mentioned in the Gospels and Acts. There is also Herod Antipas and there is Herod Agrippa the I and Herod Agrippa the II. But the man we meet in Matthew chapter two is *Herod the Great*. He is the patriarch of this family of Herods. And then these are the others.

Herod Antipas was the tetrarch, the ruler, of Galilee and Perea, who famously imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. Herod Agrippa the I is the one who had James, the brother of John, killed and imprisoned Peter. The angel of the Lord struck him and he was eaten by worms and died. We read about him in the Book of Acts chapter 12. And Herod Agrippa the II, called Agrippa and King Agrippa, was the ruler who heard the compelling defense of the Apostle Paul that we read about in Acts chapter 26. Are these men related to each other? Yes, Herod the Great was the father of Herod Antipas. Herod the Great was grandfather of Herod Agrippa the I. And Herod the Great was the great grandfather of Herod Agrippa the II.

Herod is a significant name in the New Testament and we do well to know the distinctions between these four Herods. But do not let me distract you from the Herod of Matthew chapter 2. He is Herod the Great and he is a fascinating and influential figure in history, particularly as his life impacts Judea and the Jewish people. And Jesus. To grasp who he was we start with his father. I do this because we will see the apple does not fall far from the tree. Herod operates much like his father before him. In fact, his Dad gets him his first political appointment in the land of Israel, up in Galilee. More on that soon.

Herod the Great’s father was a man by the name of Antipater the Idumean. He was so named because he came from an area southwest of Judah named, using the Greek pronunciation, Idumea. This is the Greek form of Edom and describes the Edomites. You may remember that Isaac, the Patriarch, had two sons: Jacob and Esau? Esau’s descendants were the Edomites. Jacob’s descendants were the Israelites. (God changed Jacob’s name to Israel.)

As with the two brothers, there was enmity between the Edomites and the Israelites. Edomites had a very troubled relationship with the Israelites, which actually plays a part of this story of Herod, but I digress. The point is Antipater was an Edomite, an Idumean. Do not confuse him with Antipater, the Macedonian statesman and general from a much earlier period BC.

Antipater became a powerful player during the period of the Hasmonean kings and afterwards, he rode the politics winds of change, and served as a client of the Roman general Pompey when Pompey, from the Roman Empire, conquered Judah. Then again, when Julius Caesar defeated Pompey, in the internal feud between the Romans, Antipater successfully switched sides, aligning himself with Caesar by rescuing Caesar with men and provisions when he was caught down in Alexandria (Egypt) on campaign. Caesar defeated Pompey and Caesar rewarded Antipater by making him chief minister or procurator of, guess where, Judea the Roman name for Judah, plus Samaria, and Galilee. Let's date this appointment to 47BC.

It is around this time that Antipater appoints his son, Herod, prefect (or governor) of Galilee in Israel. Yes, the same Galilee we read about so often in the life of Christ. And, just to finish with Antipater, after the assassination of Caesar, this slick power broker, managed to move sides again to maintain his power, but eventually his life ran out and he died of poisoning. Why am I telling you all of this? It is because Antipater, this diplomat so artful at politics, paved the way for the emergence of his son Herod to greatness. Just three years after his father's death, in 40BC Herod is given the title King of the Jews by the Roman senate. And that is the title by which he is named here in Matthew chapter 2.

Sons can learn a lot from their fathers. Sometimes this is for good and sometimes this is for bad. Herod definitely took the mentorship and applied it to his own reign and rule as king of the Jews. But, let's back up slightly. When Herod was appointed prefect in Galilee he began to show his strong military muscle by quelling bands of Jews who mustered together to fight back against the foreign invaders, the Romans, as well as others. And then the Parthians invaded Palestine and Herod had to pick up and flee down to Egypt. Herod, not yet strong enough to defeat the Parthians. Eventually Herod makes his way from there to Rome, where he picks up that appointment as king of the Jews, that I just told you about.

And then with the backing of the Romans, Herod unleashes his military might and strength and makes a move on the Parthians in Palestine. There is fierce fighting for several years, but eventually Herod drives out those pesky Parthians and establishes his own rule, with the backing of Rome, over Judea. Do keep in mind the Parthians, because they are deeply connected to the magi and Herod, we are told in Matthew 2, verse 3, is "troubled" when the magi make their visit to Jerusalem. There is an historic and military reason for why King Herod is so troubled by the arrival of the magi and I will make that connection on an upcoming episode of *God Is*.

For now, capture this: Herod is a warrior. He commands men in battle and he is victorious. And, much like his father, Herod is diplomatic in how he manages relations with other people to his own advantage. For example, because he was not himself a Jew but rather an Idumean, that is an Edomite (an historic enemy to the Israelites), Herod married a Jewish woman named Mariamne. Apparently he really did love her, but this marriage lent him another advantage. It won him some favor, or at least he hoped it would win him some favor, with the Jews over whom he was now king. And I will talk about his wife Mariamne again.

Tomorrow I am going to tell you more about the history of Herod the Great. From a worldly perspective he was a great leader. And friends, I am drastically condensing my research down to fit my time. There is much that can be said about him. But to really get at that we would need time to expand our understanding of empires and geopolitical and military developments in this intriguing period in the history of Israel and what we call the Middle East. So, I will just do my utmost to highlight what I think best relates to Herod at the time of Jesus.

These verses before us speak of two kings. Herod is the human king. Jesus is the God King. I hope you learned something today and that you will join us again next time, as we prepare for Christmas. I'll have more for you on Herod the Great, well maybe the Not-So-Great. Join us tomorrow because God Is!

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