

# Some Wise Men, King Herod, Cain, Some Disturbing News & Some Really Good News

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One of the most fascinating parts of the Christmas Story involves the Magi from the east, or as we often refer to them: **The Wise Men**. But, there is one person in this part of the story that we tend to rush past. Now, this person is certainly a villainous character, so I can see why people don't linger in considering him. You can pick him out immediately in Matthew's Gospel once those Wise Men reach the palace there in Jerusalem when Matthew gives the following account: <sup>1</sup> Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>2</sup> "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> King Herod was **deeply disturbed** when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. Matthew 2:1-3 (NLT2)

Now, if you read on it tells us that King Herod directed the Wise Men to go on their way and find this "**newborn king**" so that he could supposedly come to worship Him. Of course, Herod was lying—what he really wanted to do was extremely evil. But, God warned the Wise Men in a dream and let them know that Herod wanted to gain from them the exact location of the Baby Jesus solely for the purpose of sending his soldiers there to kill Him. That makes King Herod one of the most wicked human beings who ever lived. But, despite Herod's despicable character, let's focus on him to see what we can learn from his part in the Nativity Story.

First of all, notice that the text tells us that "**King Herod was deeply disturbed**" when he heard that these Wise Men were looking for a King. Why was he so **deeply disturbed**? Well, think about. It would have been like some campaign guys showing up at The White House and telling Mr. Trump that they were working on the Mike Pence 2020 presidential campaign and they'd like to see the Vice President. I am fairly sure that President Trump would not take too well to such news and it would really get his Twitter to tweeting! Now, I try not to get too political in my sermons, but even President Trump's supporters would readily admit that he may sometimes have an anger management problem. But, I'm telling you—King Herod would make President Trump look like a choir boy. To see this better, let me provide you with a little bit of Herod's biographical information.

Although Herod was the King in Israel, he was only partly Jewish. In fact, Herod's family were mostly descended from Edomites. In other words, their patriarch was Jacob's brother, Esau, whose people were usually hostile to Israel throughout most of their history. And Herod was an extremely evil man, and a bit paranoid, because he was always convinced that someone was trying to steal his throne.

And if he ever got the notion that anyone was disloyal to him, Herod would promptly have them murdered or executed on some trumped up charge. Among the list of those whose deaths could be traced back to Herod were one of his wives, his mother-in-law, a brother-in-law,<sup>1</sup> and a few of his own sons—the last of which was killed not too long after these Wise Men had appeared and only five days before Herod’s own death.<sup>2</sup>

So, when these Wise Men came asking about a ***new “king of the Jews”*** that was all it took to spark Herod’s murderous heart into seeking yet another victim—albeit one that was only an innocent little baby. And, it is certainly understandable that ***“all of Jerusalem”*** was concerned about this because once Herod clicked into ***“murder mode”*** no one was safe—anyone could be killed, either directly by Herod’s actions or simply as collateral damage. Herod was one of those people whose hate, anger and jealousy made him a perfect pawn to be used in Satan’s game. And Satan’s game is a truly evil one for he wishes to foil God’s plan to redeem humanity through His Son, Jesus Christ—and in so doing, to consume as many pawns along the way as he can. By so willingly adopting such wicked character traits, Herod made himself available for Satan’s services. And there is a priceless lesson here that we can learn from observing King Herod. And, the lesson is this: Murderous hearts are always the easiest for Satan to manipulate. Now, why is that?—Well because a murderous heart is so akin to Satan. And we certainly know about Satan’s murderous heart because it was Jesus who clearly identified him as a murderer from the very beginning of Creation. In fact, if that baby in the manger down in Bethlehem had been able to look Herod right in the face when the Wise Men showed up at the palace, He would have told him the same thing that He would tell some of the Jewish leaders who sought to murder Him on a Cross so many years later—He would have told King Herod: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44 (NIV)

Now that statement by Jesus is quite interesting because it gives us an important clue as to why so many people either deliberately or unwittingly follow that murderous, lying Satan. And the biggest clue is that this has been the case from the very ***“beginning.”*** So what is it that we see from the ***very beginning***—at least, from the very beginning of humanity? Well, if we go to the beginning, in the Book of Genesis, God’s Word warns us about ***murderous hearts***—just as He warned the world’s first murderer, Cain, who murdered his own brother, Abel. Not long before his ultimate act of rage, Cain became angry at God for calling him out for his unworthy worship practices. Instead of worshipping God as he should have, Cain offered some cheap, bloodless sacrifice, while his brother, Abel, sacrificed an

innocent lamb—for which God praised Abel. God made the following point to Cain: “Is it not true that if you do what is right, you will be fine? But if you do not do what is right, **sin is crouching at the door**. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it.” Genesis 4:7 (NET1) But, like King Herod, Cain didn’t want to subdue sin, and it apparently ended up consuming him with woeful eternal consequences. And that verbal imagery of sin—like some wild animal waiting to pounce upon us when our backs are turned is so spot-on.

Last Sunday, a father and his 7-year-old son were visiting a zoo in Dublin, Ireland. The little boy was posing for a picture with his back to a thick glass-plated wall. And on the other side of that glass wall was a huge Siberian tiger. Siberian tigers are noted as being the largest cats in the world and can weigh up to 700 pounds, and this one was about 30 feet behind the boy. And as the father was videoing his son, you could see this tiger beginning to take a bead on the child. All of a sudden the tiger crouched and sprang forward with both claws and teeth showing in the hopes of tearing the boy to pieces. The father got it all on video and then claimed that the only thing that saved his son was the thick glass wall that separated him from the tiger. But he was only partially correct. I don’t have any doubt but that the hand of God may have been holding that glass in place considering the weight of that huge tiger and the force with which he hit the glass.<sup>3</sup>

But, that incident at the zoo is instructive because that’s the way sin is. If you let sin hang around in your life long enough and just turn your back to it as if it’s just part of the scenery—one day it’s going to devour you. Your sin will spring upon you when you least expect it and tear you apart. And for those who wait too long, it may end up being too late because it becomes harder and harder to see and hear the Truth, and only the Truth can set you free from the slavery of sin. What Truth? The question isn’t really *“what Truth,”* but rather, *“Who is the Truth”*—because the Truth is a person. It is the person of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter uses imagery similar to that tiger in the Dublin zoo to describe what Satan does with those who allow themselves to become slaves to sin when he says: “Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart.” 1 Peter 5:8 (TLB) There is no defense against that evil roaring lion who seeks to destroy you except the Truth of Jesus. And yet the world seems so confused as to where to look for the *Truth*.

I know I have said this before, but it bears repeating: I cringe whenever I see those bumper stickers that spell the word, *“COEXIST”*. The designer of the sticker, Piotr Mlodozieniec, took the symbols of the world’s three major religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and mixed in some secular gobbledy-gook for good measure, to spell the word *“COEXIST”*. The letter “C” is shown as a

crescent moon representing Islam. The letter "O" is presented by the peace symbol. The letter "E" is twisted into the symbol for a male or a female (which is interesting considering that the latest trend seems to be to deny sexual identity)—also, the letter "E" on the bumper sticker is occasionally shown as symbol for a scientific equation. The letter "X" is reconfigured to show the Star of David representing Judaism. The letter "I" is a bow to the so-called pagan Wiccan religion associated with witchcraft. The letter "S" is balanced in such a way to pay tribute to the Chinese symbols for the yin and yang. And finally, Christianity is accorded last place with the "T" showing the sign of the Cross.<sup>4</sup> Now, I know that some people who display this bumper sticker do so with good intentions. They are advocating against wars and violence that have dotted world history in the form of one religious group fighting against or persecuting the members of another faith. And to that extent, I suppose that their hearts are in the right place.

I am certainly in favor of freedom of religion. But, there is also an implicit message that screams out from this bumper sticker that, as a Christian, I cannot accept. It is the message of Satan—that father of lies—that all of these religions are *co-equals as statements of the truth*. But, Jesus emphatically denied that when He declared that there is only *One Truth*. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." John 14:6 (NIV) And for those who are frantically looking for answers in life, for those who are lost and confused, for those who are terrified by the sin crouching at their door and want to be free of their sin, there is only one solution: *Jesus Christ!* Now that is a hard thing for so many people living in today's modern world to accept. The social and educational trend for many decades now has been to accept the false notion that there is no absolute truth. Satan, being both the liar that he is, and being the Prince of this World,<sup>5</sup> loves to steer us away from the Truth by pushing us away from Christ.

And that's why Satan was so intent on influencing King Herod upon the arrival of the Wise Men. The Truth was lying in that Bethlehem manger and Satan was a thousand times more afraid of that one little baby than those shepherds were when the angel first appeared to them in the fields outside of Bethlehem. The angel gave the shepherds "*GOOD NEWS* that [would] bring great joy to all people."<sup>6</sup> But from Satan's perspective this was the *most disturbing news ever*. Satan knew something that the chief priests and scribes surrounding Herod were ignorant of. Satan knew that a world exposed to the Truth of Jesus Christ would be a world freed from spiritual ignorance, superstition and sin. And a world freed from the bondage of sin would no longer tolerate Satan crouching at its door.

And you have to wonder—why were King Herod and all the chief priests and Jewish religious leaders blind to the Truth that the Messiah had come? Why didn't they embrace the Wise Men and thank them for pointing out the fact that God had finally sent their Savior, and go rushing with them

down to Bethlehem to bear gifts and offer worship to the true New Born King? What was it that they thought they could rely upon for their salvation, if not the Son of God? The answer is a sad one, because it is an answer that points to a false belief held by even some Christians. You see, Herod was a lot like Cain. Both of them thought that they could be made right with God if they just did something for Him—even if what they did was **offered solely upon their own terms**. King Herod likely thought that his great construction project of rebuilding the Temple<sup>7</sup> would be an act sufficient to gain him a spot in Heaven. Surely, he must have reasoned, this would offset all those murders he'd orchestrated to preserve in own throne. Cain was really no different—he deliberately gave an unacceptable sacrifice to God as well—with a **“take it or leave it, God”** kind of attitude. There as so many Christians today who are not much different from Cain and Herod in that respect.

And yet, a lot of people object to God's treatment of Cain. **“Cain did the best he could and he should be given credit for that,”** they argue. Do you know why Cain's offering to God was deemed inferior to that of Abel's? Remember now: Cain gave a crop offering, but Abel's offering was a first born lamb of his flock.<sup>8</sup> So what is the difference between these two offerings? The most obvious difference is that Abel's offering involved the sacrifice of an innocent lamb and the **spilling of its blood**. So what!—someone might say. There is a big difference in a sacrifice involving blood because the shedding of blood reflected the death of an innocent substitute. Often in reading the story of Adam and Eve, and continuing on with Cain and Abel, we miss something that's extremely important. We miss how God had demonstrated that the forgiveness of sin can only be purchased—**not by our own works**—but only by a **substitutionary sacrifice of innocent blood**. And God first made this known to humanity when He killed animals in the Garden of Eden and then used their skins to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. James Montgomery Boice explains this so well when he noted: **“God was showing that, because sin means death, innocent victims must die in order that sinners might be pardoned. The sacrifices pointed forward to Christ. When Abel came with the offering of blood, he was believing God and was looking forward to the provision of the deliverer. [But,] when Cain brought his [crop offering] he was rejecting that provision.”** And that was the problem with Cain. As wholesome and as beautiful as that crop offering may have been, Cain deliberately omitted the blood.

Boice continues by further explaining: **“The offering of Cain represents all the beautiful things of this world that God has given to us and which you and I would like to offer back to Him. It is possible for us to offer these to God, but only if we have first come to Him on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ.”**<sup>9</sup>

That was the sin of Cain. And Herod was no different. Herod could have built a thousand temples, all grander than the one Solomon built, and it wouldn't have done any good either. The **Truth**—the **Truth represented by God's Word**—is that where there is **no blood, no Christ, no acceptance of Him as the sole Truth and Way and Life**—**THERE IS NO SALVATION**. And that lion or tiger couching at the door—well, his mouth is just salivating all the more—waiting to devour his next Cain, or Herod or whoever seeks salvation apart from the **Blood of Jesus Christ**. The problem is that so many tend to think like Cain and King Herod. They believe that all they have to do is acknowledge God's existence and just do something that they deem "**good**" enough in order to gain His acceptance. Like Cain, they give **their** desired sacrifices without really understanding that God really desires one thing. God reveals what that one thing is when he says: "I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have My people know Me than burn offerings to Me." Hosea 6:6 (TEV) And you can't really love or know God if you are unwilling to repent and accept the cleansing blood of Christ in atonement of your sins. That was the really **disturbing news** that came to Cain and King Herod. Both were disturbed by this news because it really meant that they needed to love God by submitting to Him as King and by committing to His ways, and not their own ways.

Those who truly love and know God do this. Those who don't follow in the footprints of Herod and Cain—whose father was that murder, Satan. And what a terrible position to be in—because it's a position whereby sin remains crouching at your door. And sooner or later, it will pounce upon you like a wild beast. Those who are in Christ have the advantage of something infinitely more powerful than that glassed-plated barrier that supposedly saved the little boy at the zoo. But, those who follow the footprints of Herod and Cain in the path of Satan will receive some more disturbing news—much more disturbing than the news Herod heard from the Wise Men. It is the disturbing news that the rejection of Jesus Christ and His mercy and grace leaves them with no hope. And those who choose this path end up in a place called Hell where no hope will be found for all eternity. But thankfully, due to God's mercy and love, we are given different news.

It is the **Good News** that the angel first gave to the shepherds—it is the same **Wonderful News** indicated by the innocent blood that was sacrificed again and again: When Adam and Eve were evicted from the Garden of Eden and God killed those innocent animals to cloth their nakedness, or when Abel offered his best lamb as a sacrifice to God, or when the knife-filled hand of Abraham was stilled and a lamb was substituted to take the place of Isaac, or when sacrificial lambs were offered by the priests over the centuries as an atonement of the peoples' sins. And yet, this ocean of spilled innocent blood all pointed to the spilling of the most precious blood of all, of the most innocent lamb of all, when Jesus

Christ bled and died on the Cross for a world of ***former Cain's and Herod's***—those relatively few who are willing to repent of their sins and give their lives to Jesus Christ.

Those who choose the path of Christ and are willing to bear their crosses and follow Him—They have found the ***Way***. And it is not the ***false "multiple-road-way"*** suggested by some misguided bumper sticker. Rather, it is the ***Only Way***, guided by the ***Only Truth***, to the ***Only One*** who can give ***Eternal Life***—and that is the person of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
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<sup>1</sup> Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, "Herodian Dynasty," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Herodian Dynasty".

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Redford, comp., *New Testament Volume 1: The Life and Ministry of Jesus*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 63.

<sup>3</sup> "Caught on Camera: Tiger charges little boy visiting Dublin Zoo," ABC13 Eyewitness News, <https://abc13.com> (December 23, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.blufftonicon.com/news/2012>.

<sup>5</sup> John 14:30 (NIV) [Jesus said:] "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world [Satan] is coming. He has no hold on Me." (The *prince of this world* is a reference to Satan. See: *NET Bible*, First ed. Richardson, Texas: Biblical Studies Press, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 14".)

<sup>6</sup> Luke 2:10-11 (NLT2) <sup>10</sup> The angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup> The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!

<sup>7</sup> James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Chicago: Howard-Severance Co., 1915), s.v. "," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 4:3-5 (NLT2) <sup>3</sup> When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift,

<sup>5</sup> but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

<sup>9</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis, Volume 1: Creation and Fall (Genesis 1-11)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 251-252.