

INTRODUCTION

“What’s Most Important?”



Show Visual Aids J2-L27-S1 and S2

“What now?” asked Tim.

“What do you mean?” asked David.

“You’ve solved the mystery! What’s next?” sighed Tim.

“There was a note and a new map with the last clue! So we’ve got another mystery to solve!” exclaimed David.

“What did it say?” asked Tim.

“Here goes,” answered David. “It says, ‘Dear David, Congratulations! You figured out the mystery! What a wonderful Mystery we have in Christ! I have another mystery for you to find. The clues are hidden in a rural family place. What’s most important? Herod wasn’t all he seemed to be. His throne was most important to him. He had the chance to meet the Lord of the universe and honor the King of the Jews. But he chose something different. He had all the children (blank) because of his fear. He was afraid to lose what was most important to him. Look up where the animal feed is kept. Look for the place where the sun comes in. Herod did a horrible thing to keep what was important to him. It sounds like Herod never figured out what was important. What’s the most important to you? Love, Grandpa.’ ”

“Wonder what that means?” asked Tim. “Is there anything on the back?”

“You’re right! It’s a bunch of letters with some numbers at the bottom,” answered David.

“It’s a code!” cried Tim. “I know! The first number is the line and the other number is the letter!”

“Let’s try it!” answered David. “Let’s see—the first letter is the 21st letter on the 3rd line.”

“That’s ‘K!’” yelled Tim. “And the second one is line four: letter three!”

“That would be an ‘I!’” said David. “The next one’s on the first line: letter 28.”

“That’s ‘L!’” called Tim. “Next is line two: letter five.”

“Got it!” called David. “Another ‘L’! That spells ‘KILL’.”

“Could that be right?” asked Tim. “We better check the rest. Line five: letter five. That’s an ‘E!’”

“The last one’s line six: letter eight. That’s ‘D’, so the clue is ‘KILLED!’” said David.

“How’s that work?” asked Tim.

“Now I remember! King Herod ordered all the children in Bethlehem to be killed because he was afraid of the Lord Jesus—he was afraid for his kingdom,” explained David.

“Wow! Herod killed all those kids just to save his throne?” gasped Tim. “That’s awful! But I still don’t see where the clue is.”

“Well, the ‘rural family place’ must be Uncle Matt’s farm,” suggested David. “It’s not far from here. It says all the clues are there! Let’s go!”

Soon Tim and David arrived at Uncle Matt’s farm. “Where do you think we’ll find it?” asked Tim.

“It says to look where the feed is kept. The hay for the animals is kept in the loft in the barn!” called David. “Let’s go!”

“Next it says to look where the sun comes in. Is that the window?” asked Tim.

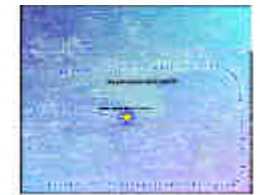
“Sounds right to me!” answered David. “Hey look—up above the window. There’s something taped to that board.”

“Got it!” exclaimed Tim. “We’re right! The clue is killed! But why does your grandfather ask about what’s important?”

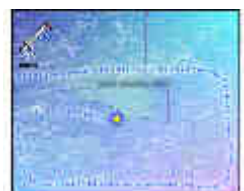
“I think Grandpa is trying to tell us that Herod tried to kill Jesus because his position was more important to him than meeting the Savior of the world!” answered David. “Jesus Christ should have been most important to him and to everyone!” said David.

“I’m going to make sure He’s most important in MY life,” said Tim quietly.

“Me too,” answered David.



Show Visual Aid J2-L27-S3



Show Visual Aid J2-L27-S4

MAIN LESSON

JUMP START QUESTIONS

1. For Whom had Israel been waiting many years?
2. How could one be considered a “true” Jew?
3. What makes a king a “true” king?
4. What was the purpose of Jesus’ first coming?

Let's ask God to help us find the answers in His Word to these important questions. (Pray)

LESSON

1) Waiting for the True King

Israel was waiting. They had been waiting for thousands of years. God had promised to send them a King. He would come from the family of Abraham and He would sit on the throne of David. His kingdom would be established in righteousness and it would never end (Isaiah 9:6-7; 2 Samuel 7:16). Exactly for Whom were they waiting? The Lord Jesus Christ!



Luke 1:32, emphasis added – “He shall be **great**, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David.”

The Bible said that He would be a great king. Even though He has not yet set up His kingdom, we know that this is true.

“Great” is a word that we use a lot today, usually when we are referring to someone very important or famous. And we often use it in a positive way such as, “That guy is a great athlete!” Today we are going to talk about a man whom historians call Herod the Great. We are going to look at his history and see what the Bible says about him. Then we will decide if he really deserved to be called “great.”

According to history books, Herod was given the title “King of the Jews” at a time when the Roman government ruled the civilized world. This was rather strange because Herod wasn't really a true king or a true Jew.

2) Not a True King

To learn something of Herod's background we have to go back many years to the time when the nation of Israel got started. God called Abraham, his son Isaac, and his son Jacob to be the fathers of the nation. And Jacob had a twin brother, Esau. Remember him? He was the hairy hunter that gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:34). Esau chose to live a life apart from the Lord in the Land of Edom (Genesis 32:3). Herod's father was a descendent of old greedy Esau and his mother was an Arabian princess. So even though Herod had come from Abraham's family, he was not considered to be a true Jew.

Herod was made the military leader of Galilee because his dad gave him the job. He quickly learned that the way to move up in the Roman government was to get along with the emperor. It worked. He soon became “king” over the land of Judea. But he didn't have absolute power like most kings. He had to do what the Roman leaders told him. One of his most important jobs was to keep the Jews in line. If the Jewish people became unhappy and troublesome, the emperor would think Herod couldn't handle them. Then the Roman army might come in and remove him from power. He had to be very careful. He was a king that was not truly a king!

During his reign he made many improvements throughout the land. He built a new market area, an amphitheater, and created a new sea port. In order to impress the Jews, he even had a new building made for the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders. And he rebuilt the Temple, their center of worship. Some say he made it even more beautiful than it was before it had been destroyed years before.




Show Visual Aid J2-L27-1



Show Visual Aid J2-L27-2

But the Jews weren't impressed. In fact, Herod seemed to be doing all kinds of things to stir them up. Who do you suppose paid for all his projects? The Jews, of course. They had to pay extremely high taxes in order for Herod to build his beautiful buildings.

Then he did something that really got them angry. He had a golden eagle set up on the gate of the Temple. This was seen as a symbol of Roman power and it was completely against the Law of Moses. The Jews were outraged! This was their holy place of worship! God's Word told them:

 **Exodus 20:4** – “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

But, Herod didn't seem to care about breaking God's Law. He was too busy being afraid that someone would come along and take away his position as king. He even hired a secret police force to spy on his people and keep him informed of anyone who might be against him. If he thought anyone was a threat to him, he had them killed.


He was not exactly a true family man, either. Over the years he had ten different wives and several children. Even they were not safe from his ambitions. Over the years, he had one of his wives, three of his sons, his mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and an uncle executed because he thought they might be a threat to him. How would you like to be a member of that family?

Do these sound like the actions of a great man?


3) The Birth of the True King

One day, Herod received some visitors with unexpected news. Wise Men or Magi from the East came to talk to him. These were very educated men who studied the stars. When they saw a bright new star in the direction of Israel, they set out to the capital city, Jerusalem. They might have been expecting the whole city to be celebrating the birth of a new king. But that is not exactly what the Wise Men found when they got there.


They went before Herod and asked:

 **Matthew 2:2b** – “Where is he that is born the King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”


Herod must have been thinking, “Wait a minute! I am the king of the Jews!”

 **Matthew 2:3** – “When Herod, the king, had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

So he gathered all the Hebrew chief priests and scribes together to see what they knew. Surely these important Jewish men would know if they were to have a new king born to them. He *demand*ed of them, “Where is the Christ to be born?” They answered him from Scripture:

 **Matthew 2:5-6** – “And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art thou not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people, Israel.”

This was not good news for Herod. So he called another meeting with the Wise Men, this time in private. If he could just find out when they first saw the star, then he might be able to tell the exact time the new king had been born. He must have been desperate to know how old this child was. He was probably wondering, “How much time do I have?”

 **Matthew 2:8** – “And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”



Show Visual Aid J2-L27-3

From what we know so far of Herod, do you think he was really interested in *worshipping* Christ? He was lying, wasn't he? The Bible has a lot to say about lying. We know that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and Satan is the father of all lies (John 8:44). So, we are just simply *not* to do it (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9).

After the Wise Men left Herod, the star appeared again. It led them to a house where they found Whom they were looking for. The young child Jesus was there with his mother, Mary. They fell down and worshipped Him and presented Him with gifts that were worthy of a king: gold, frankincense and myrrh.


They were actually in the presence of God's only begotten Son. Jesus Christ had been born on this earth to a virgin named Mary in the town of Bethlehem. Mary and her fiancé, Joseph, were to be the earthly guardians of the real "King of the Jews." And there was no doubt about it. He was a true Jew and a true King, a direct descendent of Abraham and the rightful heir to the throne of David (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). And He was the Son of God Who had come as a sacrifice for man's sin (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Object Lesson:
"Free Access"

We are so blessed to be living in this present age. We don't have to search for the Lord like Herod and we don't have to follow a star like the Wise Men. All we have to do is believe. If we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, He gives us *access* to God all of the time (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18, 3:12). Where have you put your trust? Do you have access to Him right now?

After this, the Wise Men received a message from God. They were warned in a dream. Do not return to Herod! So they immediately left for their homes being careful not to go back through Jerusalem.

At that same time, God was warning someone else of danger, too. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him:


 **Matthew 2:13b** – "... Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

That's exactly what Herod was about to do. He wanted the Lord to be destroyed!

God often used dreams to communicate with his people during that time. The Word of God had not been completely written yet, so He had to use another method. Today, we have His completed Word through which we can know exactly what He wants us to do! That's another way we have *access* to God. (There's that word again!) Isn't God wonderful to supply us with everything that we need?

When Herod found out that the wise men went home without returning to him, he was furious. He felt like they were mocking him. How dare they defy the king! And he *still* did not know where this new king was. So he came up with a cruel plan.

Definition:
Wroth – very angry

 **Matthew 2:16** – "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceedingly wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men."

Every child under two years old was to be killed. Herod figured that if he had all the little babies killed, one of them was bound to be the King of the Jews. Problem solved! He was probably feeling very satisfied with himself at that moment.

Shortly after this event, Herod became sick with a painful disease. When he realized he was dying, he came up with another cruel plan. He knew that he had made many enemies and he was afraid there would be rejoicing when the news of his death got out. So he commanded that all the important Jews from all over the nation come to him. When they arrived, he had them shut up in a large arena. He instructed his sister to have all of them executed at the very moment of his death. This way the whole nation would be in mourning when he died. But, thankfully, his sister did not obey him. As soon as Herod died, she had all of the men released.

Herod probably died without knowing that the Lord Jesus was safe in Egypt with His earthly father, Joseph, and His mother, Mary. All of his cunning plots and evil plans could not change God's will for this earth. Christ would grow up and go on to fulfill His purpose. He would offer Himself to the people of Israel as their King (Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-15). But just a few days later, they would reject Him and send Him away to be crucified (Matthew 27:22; John 19:15). He would willingly submit to a punishment He did not deserve in order to be a sacrifice for sin (Romans 5:8, 14:9; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Crossing the Finish Line

Herod wasn't really the "King of the Jews," and looking at his life, we can come to the conclusion that he wasn't very "great" either. It seems he didn't really deserve either title. He reigned over Judea for 37 years, terrorizing people with his cruelty. He tried to do everything in his power to destroy the true "King of the Jews," but he could not stop God's plans from being fulfilled. The Lord Jesus Christ came to the earth the first time in order to be a sacrifice for our sins. He is the only one Who truly deserves to be called "Great."



Psalm 145:3 – "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable."

Let's see if we can answer those Jump Start Questions now.

CLUE FOR THE WEEK & PREVIEW NEXT LESSON

Is God the most important person in your life? Tim and David learned that Herod killed people whom he thought might be more important than he was. He even tried to kill Jesus when He was a small child.

Today's clue starts a new series of 13 clues that point to a new mystery person from the Bible. Let's see, the clue "killed" could fit so many people. I wonder if it means that he killed, or was killed, or both.

Next week, we'll learn about a prophet, John the Baptist. He was the foreteller of Jesus Christ. And we'll also learn a bit more about King Herod and just how easy it was for him to have people killed.

TEACHER'S NOTE

References used in preparation of this lesson are listed below:

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www.virtuallibrary.org

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