#### Herod

*When Herod found out that the wise men from the east had tricked him, he was very angry. He gave orders for his men to kill all the boys who lived in or near Bethlehem and were two years old and younger. This was based on what he had learned from the wise men.*

*So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet Jeremiah had said, "In Ramah a voice was heard crying and weeping loudly. Rachel was mourning for her children, and she refused to be comforted, because they were dead."*

*After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph while he was still in Egypt. The angel said, "Get up and take the child and his mother back to Israel. The people who wanted to kill him are now dead."*

*Joseph got up and left with them for Israel. But when he heard that Herod's son Archelaus was now ruler of Judea, he was afraid to go there. Then in a dream he was told to go to Galilee, and they went to live there in the town of Nazareth. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "He will be called a Nazarene."*

Matthew 2: 16-23

**Background**

King Herod the Great came from a long line of Mideast royalty. He grew up in Rome knowing Julius Caesar, Cassius, Brutus, and Mark Anthony. Cleopatra even helped him gain his throne. As a young man he formed a political alliance with Octavian (also known as Caesar Augustus) and was rewarded with great powers throughout Israel and surrounding lands. Herod’s kingdom equaled King David’s in size. He consolidated his power by killing all the Jewish royal religious leaders (Hasmoneans) who’d brought freedom to Israel during the Maccabean revolt.

Herod’s father was forced to convert to Judaism and his mother was an Arab princess. Herod had a great admiration of western literature and culture. He was very ambitious. He became a builder king and oversaw the construction of immense palace-fortresses in Samaria, Jericho, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Masada (most are modern day tourist stops).

Herod also built a new temple in Jerusalem. This was one of the largest worship centers of ancient times. The foundations took up a full thirty-five acres. The craftsmen used the finest marble and gold. Stones were taken from a nearby quarry called Golgotha. The people were quite pleased. Some said it was so beautiful it made up for all the innocent people that Herod had killed! Herod had built a new sanctuary but left no room in his heart for God to dwell.

Herod was also a clever politician who would do absolutely anything to preserve his power. He was merciless when his own safety or position was threatened. He was described as an unhappy man conflicted with two souls. Herod was a modern man embracing ideals of the Greco-Roman culture (like Caesar), but he also considered himself a messianic ruler (like King David).

When Herod was informed by the Wise Men that the “King of the Jews” was born he became very jealous. This was a biblical name Herod sometimes claimed for himself. Rather than considering the possibility that Jesus was God’s own son, Herod viciously responded with the slaughter of the young innocent male children of Bethlehem (similar to Pharaoh’s monstrous massacre of children in Moses’ time).

Herod and Jesus are a study of contrasts:

* Herod was the royal king of the land; Jesus was poor and born in a manger.
* Herod had all earthly power and might; Jesus was a helpless baby.
* Herod used his position in greedy and cruel ways; Jesus empowered others with love.
* Herod was crafty and sly; Jesus was trustworthy.
* Herod wanted to be an all powerful leader; Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of all Creation.

Herod executed three of his sons and his favorite (Jewish) wife during fits of paranoiac rage. Caesar Augustus remarked that it was safer to be a pig in Israel than one of Herod’s sons. Ultimately disease destroyed his body just as greed and power lust had destroyed his soul. Herod executed thousands of people during the last few years of his life. He never found the love, security, and meaning in life he was seeking. This builder king ultimately lacked a spiritual foundation.

## Reflections

King Herod the Great is a somber example of someone without purpose in his life. In some ways he had it all; in other ways he had nothing. Everyone’s life is driven by something. Herod was driven by fear, greed, and a corrupt soul. He had everything by worldly standards and yet he never found true happiness.

Historians indicate that Herod was no worse than many of the other famous leaders of his time. One wonders why people call Alexander or Herod “Great” when they spent their lives conquering and oppressing other people. They may have been powerful in the eyes of the world, but they led unfulfilled lives in the sight of God.

Lord Acton, a history professor at Cambridge, wrote that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Herod placed his ultimate faith in power. His purpose in life was to build himself up by tyrannizing others. He was a slave to his own desires and ambition.

Herod sought security in possessions. He had everything by the world’s standards and yet had nothing by God’s criteria. He ended up insecure and filled with fear. His life had no meaning because he ignored God’s purposes.

None of our accomplishments ever earn us salvation or a special place in God’s kingdom. Our acts of loving-kindness should be expressions of appreciation for the love that God shares with us. We don’t seek to rule other. We seek to be part of the kingdom that lasts forever. Earthly domains come and go, but God’s kingdom lasts forever.

The great irony of Herod’s life is that his name means “child of a hero.” A hero is someone who has great courage, has strength of character, or is someone admired for outstanding work. Herod was none of these. His great buildings were soon destroyed. History remembers him as a self-centered villain. Herod never realized that it’s never about us. The only things that really matter in life are all about God.

**Enneagram connections: Six**

Herod is sad example of someone who had great power and possessions and yet was consumed by fear. We all have our fears, but Herod allowed these fears to influence everything about him. He built biff fortresses to defend himself. He murdered wife and children who he saw as a threat. He murdered thousands of infant boys in order to destroy the one who helps us fight our fears.

The birth of Jesus is marked by angelic voices telling the shepherds not to fear. On Easter Sunday, the resurrected savior, told his disciples to have no fear. God’s acts of loving kindness help us all to find peace.

Herod was not a man of faith. He believed only in himself. He cared only for himself. It is simply impossible to be an effective leader without a meaningful faith center.

Jesus taught us to be humble servant leaders. Every child of God is special. Herod joins a long list of world leaders whose kingdoms are marked by pain and destruction (Alexander, Herod, Hitler, Putin).

A wise church leader\* proposed that there is no hell (devil, flames, torture). He reflected that the worse punishment in existence is not to spend time now and in the future with God and God’s people. All humanity is called to be the whole people of God. Effective leaders protect all of us, not just themselves. It’s not always about me. It needs also to be about we.

A health leader protects us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who watches out for us. A good shepherd caries a staff (*thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*) for two reasons. First it can be used to defend the sheep and protect them from predators. Secondly, the shepherd holds the staff high in the air for all to see and follow.

Jesus the shepherd lifted-up a piece of wood on a hillside for all to see. Jesus lifted a piece of wood on a hill side to protect us. Jesus lifted a piece of wood on a hillside called calvary to show us the way, sacrificial love.

**<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-six>**

### **Questions**

1. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-413 AD) was also a Roman nobleman. He was a Christian poet who wrote “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.” He wrote about Herod. What use was Herod’s violence?

All hail, ye little martyr flowers, Sweet rosebuds cut in dawning hours!

When Herod sought the Christ to find ye fell as bloom before the wind.

First victims of the martyr bands, with crowns and palms in tender hands,

Around the very altar, gay, and innocent, ye seem to play.

What profited this great offense? What use was Herod’s violence?

A Babe survives that dreadful day, And Christ is safely borne away.

# 2. People who don’t know their purposes try to do too much on their own. They are driven by their own desires. This causes stress, disease, and conflict. Why is it so difficult to admit our limitations and trust more in God? How could Herod have found true comfort in his life?

# 3. The temple built by Herod was completely destroyed shortly after completion. What things in our lives are only temporary? Which things will last forever?

***Herod’s Suspicions***

*Why art thou troubled, Herod? What vain fear*

*Thy blood-revolving breast to rage doth move?*

*Heaven’s King, who doffs Himself weak flesh to wear,*

*Comes not to rule in wrath, but serve in love:*

*Nor would He this thy fear’d crown from thee tear,*

*But give Thee a better with Himself above.*

 *Poor jealousy! Why should He wish to prey*

 *Upon thy crown, who gives His own away?*

*Make to thy reason, man, and mock thy doubts;*

*Look how below thy fears their causes are.*

*Thou art a soldier, Herod! Send thy scouts,*

*See how He's furnish'd for so fear'd a war.*

*What armor does He wear? A few thin clouts\*.*

*His trumpets? Tender cries.*

*His men to dare. So much? Rude shepherds.*

*What his steeds? Alas, poor beasts! A slow ox, and a simple ass.*

Richard Crashaw, 1646

*\* Archbishop of Canterbury, 1967*

# \* clout: a patch of cloth.