

Herod the Great: A Biblical and Historical Profile

Use with the full teaching and a Bible. Read or watch first, complete the questions, then discuss and apply. For family study, an adult can select suitable portions and accept spoken answers.

Test the teaching's explanations against the cited passages. Keep the answer key and facilitator notes separate when distributing learner pages.

This teaching discusses murder, persecution, and the killing of children. A parent or facilitator should preview the full teaching and choose suitable portions for younger learners.

[Open the full teaching](#)

Teaching summary

Herod the Great ruled Judea with Roman backing. This teaching uses historical accounts, especially Josephus, to explain the ruler who threatened Yeshua's life in Matthew 2. He must be distinguished from Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I, and Agrippa II.

The historical background begins with the Hasmonean rulers and the expansion of Roman influence. Herod's father, Antipater, gained authority through Roman alliances. Herod later secured the Roman Senate's support for his kingship and took control of Judea after armed conflict.

Herod undertook major construction projects, including Caesarea and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple complex. The teaching explains how these projects enhanced his reputation and Roman ties while imposing costs on the people. Public achievements did not undo the violence and intimidation of his rule.

The teaching describes Herod's suspicion of rivals, including members of his own family. Josephus provides much of this background. These accounts help explain why news of a newborn king of the Jews could seem threatening to him, but they should be distinguished from Matthew's own account.

In Matthew 2, Herod asks the wise men to report the child's location while claiming he wants to worship him. God warns them not to return to Herod and directs Joseph to take Yeshua and his mother to Egypt. Herod then orders the killing of young boys in Bethlehem and its region.

After Herod dies, Joseph is afraid to return to Judea because Archelaus rules there. Warned in a dream, he settles in Nazareth in Galilee. The profile invites us to consider the danger of protecting power through fear and violence, and to follow God faithfully when powerful people resist his purposes.

Summary points

- Herod the Great is the ruler in Matthew 2.
- Herod Antipas, involved in John the Baptist's death, is a different ruler.
- The Hasmonean and Roman background helps explain Herod's rise.
- Antipater was Herod the Great's father.
- The Roman Senate supported Herod's claim to kingship.
- Herod's building projects served political and personal goals.

- Josephus supplies much of the teaching's historical background.
- Matthew records Herod's hostility toward the newborn king of the Jews.
- Joseph obeyed the warning to flee to Egypt.
- Archelaus's rule and a further warning preceded the family's settlement in Nazareth.

Fill in the blank

Use the teaching and the cited Bible passages. Equivalent wording is welcome when it expresses the same meaning.

Basic

1. The Herod in Matthew 2 is known as Herod the _____.
2. The wise men asked about the one born king of the _____.
3. Herod's major Jerusalem building project was the _____ complex.
4. Herod's kingship depended on backing from _____.
5. Joseph took the child and his mother to _____.
6. The son ruling Judea after Herod's death was _____.

Challenging

1. The Herod involved in John the Baptist's death was Herod _____.
2. The Jewish ruling dynasty before Herod was called the _____ dynasty.
3. Herod's father was named _____.
4. Herod's allies persuaded the Roman _____ to declare him king.
5. The ancient historian quoted extensively in this teaching is _____.
6. After returning from Egypt, the family settled in _____.

Group discussion

Discuss respectfully and support answers from the passages. Use these lines for brief notes or a notebook for longer responses.

1. Why should we distinguish Herod the Great from the other rulers named Herod?

2. How do Herod's Roman alliances help explain his insecurity about a new king of the Jews?

3. What can we learn from the contrast between Herod's building projects and his treatment of people?

4. What comes directly from Matthew 2, and what comes from Josephus or later historical study?

5. How do the warnings and Joseph's responses shape the account?

6. Where might the desire to protect status tempt us to disregard truth or harm others?

Answer key

For the leader or parent. Answers follow the teaching and the passages. Accept equivalent wording that expresses the same meaning.

Basic

1. Great

Teaching introduction; Matthew 2

2. Jews

Matthew 2:1-2

3. temple

Teaching section Herod's Reign

4. Rome

Teaching section Herod's Rise to Power

5. Egypt

Matthew 2:13-15

6. Archelaus

Matthew 2:22

Challenging

1. Antipas

Teaching introduction; Mark 6:17-29

2. Hasmonean

Teaching section The Hasmonean Dynasty

3. Antipater

Teaching section Herod's Family

4. Senate

Teaching section Herod's Rise to Power; Josephus, Antiquities 14.14.4

5. Josephus

Teaching historical sections

6. Nazareth

Matthew 2:22-23

Facilitator notes

These responses give direction for discussion. They are not a test of identical wording. Invite participants to explain the passages and consider a faithful practical response.

1. The name belongs to several different people. The Great threatens the child in Matthew 2; Antipas is involved in John's death; Agrippa I appears in Acts 12, and Agrippa II in Acts 25-26. Identifying the ruler keeps events and motives in their proper settings.

Matthew 2; Mark 6:17-29; Acts 12; Acts 25-26

2. The teaching portrays a ruler whose position depended on foreign support and force. A legitimate rival could threaten that position. This historical background helps us understand Matthew's account without replacing what Matthew actually says.

Matthew 2:1-8; teaching sections Herod's Family and Herod's Rise to Power

3. Impressive buildings and public generosity are not sufficient measures of a ruler's character. The teaching describes intimidation, oppressive taxation, and violence alongside construction. We should examine how power is used and how people are treated.

Teaching section Herod's Reign

4. Matthew records the wise men, Herod's response, the warnings, the flight, the killings, and the return. Josephus and later studies supply wider political and biographical context. Keep those sources identified and do not imply that every detail appears in Scripture.

Matthew 2; teaching historical sections

5. Joseph takes action to protect the child when warned and returns only after further direction. The story shows concrete obedience under danger. It does not promise that faithfulness prevents all suffering, as the grief in Bethlehem also makes clear.

Matthew 2:13-23

6. Discuss a situation we can examine honestly without accusing an absent person. Herod's example warns against treating people as threats to our importance. We can consider an action that places faithfulness and the welfare of others ahead of reputation or control.

Matthew 2:3-8, 16-18; teaching conclusion

Put it into practice

Choose one response to the passages. What will we do, and when will we revisit it? Share only what you are comfortable sharing.