

“Ugly Sin, Beautiful Savior” (Matthew 2:16-18)

1. The Wickedness of Herod

- Herod was king of Judea from 37 B.C.- 4 A.D. He was the most brutal and vile governor (king) of Judea:
 - He killed three hundred court officers for no legitimate reason.
 - He slaughtered the last remnants of the Hasmonean dynasty.
 - He executed more than half of the Sanhedrin.
 - He put to death Hyrcanus (grandfather-in-law) at the age of 80.
 - He put to death Alexandra (mother-in-law).
 - He had his own wife, Mariamne executed.
 - He had his brother-in-law drowned in the Jordan River.
 - He murdered three of his sons (Antipater, Aristobulus and Alexander).
 - He ordered the massacring of all male infants under the age of 2 in Bethlehem and the surrounding regions.

King Herod murdered anyone who he perceived as a threat to his throne. He made no distinction between familial ties and the common man. He murdered those from a day old...to 80 years old. Age played no factor.

2. The Weeping of Rachel

Rachel was one of the wives of Jacob. Jacob had two sons with Rachel; Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel died after she gave birth to Benjamin and was buried on the way to Ephrath (Genesis 35:16-19).

Jeremiah was the first to prophecy about Rachel weeping (Jeremiah 31:15). Jeremiah was written during the Babylonian captivity when the southern Kingdom of Judah was carried away in captivity. Many in Judah were killed by the Babylonians, and Jeremiah saw the captives carried away in chains.

Jeremiah and the captives are gathered at Ramah before they are taken into Babylon as slaves (Jeremiah 40:1).

Why is Rachel weeping?

- Even though Joseph never had a tribe, Manasseh and Ephraim would inherit the land in his place. During the Babylonian captivity, the tribe of Benjamin and part of the tribe of Manasseh were taken into exile.
- They are gathered at Ramah. Ramah was very close to where Rachel was buried (half mile).
- It is as though Rachel “rises” from the grave when she sees the slaughtering, the starvation and the loss of her “children” who are gathered at Ramah.

Even though Rachel has been dead for 1200 years, the event at Ramah is so horrific, that it is as though Rachel is weeping from the grave.

- Matthew takes this historical event at Ramah, and says it is “fulfilled” at Bethlehem.
- Herod’s brutal slaughtering of the male children was the fulfillment of what happened at Ramah.
- Just as Rachel would have wept at Ramah, Rachel, or “the Rachels” of Bethlehem who have likewise witnessed their children slaughtered would be weeping as well. Ramah is close to Bethlehem (10 miles).

3. The Fulfillment of Prophecies (v.6, 15, 18, 23)

- The chief priests and scribes told Herod about the ruler born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- Joseph, Mary, and the child departed from Bethlehem to Egypt (Hosea 11:1)
- The massacre of male infants in Ramah (Jeremiah 31:15)
- Jesus’ humble upbringing in Nazareth (Isaiah 11:1, 53:2-3; Zechariah 11:4-14; Psalm 22)

We learn that even the most horrific intentions and actions of man cannot thwart the plans of God. While Herod’s wickedness and actions prompted the plight to Egypt (fulfillment of prophecy), God still holds Herod morally accountable.

4. The Promise of Salvation and Redemption

- Herod’s actions are proof that mankind needs a Savior. God sends a Savior and people want to kill him. Many would rather kill the Savior than be saved by Him. Light came into the world and men hated the light (John 3:19-20).
- One of the major themes in Jeremiah is that there would be a future restoration (that the exiles would return to the land). There will be a future deliverance.
- In the future, 30 years after this event, this child will grow to manhood and redeem mankind.
- Unlike wicked Herod who killed and took the lives of others who were innocent, the true King, Jesus Christ, would give his own life as a ransom.
- This child, when he grows up, will be slaughtered by a wicked governor and fickle Jewish crowd. He will hang on the cross, not as a criminal, but as a Savior.
- Matthew includes this account because we share many similarities with Herod. We need a Savior and God has provided one.
- It is not Herod’s wickedness that needs to be atoned for; it is our sin as well. God has provided salvation for anyone who calls on the name of LORD to be forgiven.