

GROWTH + GROUPS

NAVIGATE LIFE TOGETHER

Maranatha Chapel Sermon Based Study Guide
SB 12.17.2023

A TALE OF TWO KINGS– MATTHEW 2:1-11

Receiving the Message and Relating to the Study

What insights, principles or observations stood out to you from this week’s message? Discuss with your group.

Pastor Daniel tells us, “In today’s story, Matthew presents Jesus as Israel’s true king. At the same time, he introduces another king to the story named Herod. A greater contrast could not exist. Herod was the ultimate earthly king. He sat in opulence, possessed great wealth, and exerted his will over his subjects with an iron fist. The other king was baby Jesus. He held no scepter in his hands and had no servants to attend to him. When He was born, rather than being placed in a gilded crib, he was laid in a manger. His parents were the furthest thing from royalty. His dad worked a blue-collar job as a carpenter, and his mother was a lowly peasant. Together they lived in a fly-over town. There was nothing outwardly that would suggest this baby was anything other than ordinary. Yet that child went on to change the world and inaugurate a kingdom that is still expanding to this day. At Jesus’ birth, the worlds of these two opposite kings collided in a most interesting way.” Let’s get into our lesson...

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What struck you most from the Pastor Daniel’s sermon?
2. How is your level of excitement over a gift proportionate to the value of (or the sentiment behind) the gift itself?

Digging Deeper in God’s Word: Life Lessons

READ MATTHEW 2:1-6

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, it caused quite a stir. Do you remember the scene in the movie Aladdin when prince Ali of Ababawa makes his grand entrance into the city of Agrabah? That’s what I picture their arrival in Jerusalem like. Before long, they found themselves standing before King Herod. When he inquired about the purpose of their visit, they explained that they had followed a star and come in search of the king of the Jews in order that they might worship Him.

1. Share something you learned about the Wise Men (Magi) that you learned from Pastor Daniel’s sermon?
2. Since the wise men were pagan astrologers, why would they leave everything in order to follow the star?

If we consider the Prophet Daniel who had lived some 600 years before the time of Christ. Daniel lived through two different empires, the Babylonian under Nebuchadnezzar, and the Medo-Persian Empire under Darius the Mede. One of the titles given to Daniel was “Rab- Mag” or Chief of the Magi. The Magi became the supreme priestly cast of the Persian Empire. They were known to be highly educated in Astronomy and religious authority. It is believed that Daniel, since he was the Chief of the Magi communicated to the Magi the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, the King of the Jews.

3. Share something you learned about King Herod?
4. How would you contrast King Herod with King Jesus?

“PROMISES” in 2023

5. Why do you think Herod was so paranoid when he heard about the birth of a king from the Magi?

Herod the Great was a half-Jew, half-Idumean who, through accommodation to the Romans, ascended to power as client-ruler of Israel in 37 B.C. Although he was known as a great builder of public works and a shrewd diplomat in his dealings with both Romans and Jews, he laid oppressive taxes on and conscripted labor from the Israelites. As King Herod grew older, he became increasingly paranoid about threats against his person and throne. He had numerous people put to death because he feared plots to overthrow him. After frequent disputes with Caesar Augustus, the emperor uttered his famous pun that he would rather be Herod's pig than his son. King Herod's paranoia provides proper context to his reaction to the wise men's pursuit of the King of the Jews: "When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him" (v. 3). Herod's paranoia and unpredictable behavior led to the worry of his people.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:7-11

Having been given the location of the birthplace of the King of the Jews, the wise men continued their journey. What the magi recognized as divine guidance filled them with joy (v. 10). Upon seeing Jesus, they did what they set out to do—they prostrated themselves before Him and “worshiped Him” (v. 2, 11). The wise men were in awe of Jesus.

1. Note the responses of the wise men upon seeing Jesus. How was their reaction to Jesus both similar and different to the response Christians make to Christ?
2. How is it that both Herod and the Magi could get the same revelation, but one sought to kill Christ while the other worshiped Him?
3. In drawing the wise men to Christ, what did God reveal about His plan for the Gentiles (non-Jews)?

God often chooses to reveal Himself to pagans, at times even in the midst of their religious practices, to lead them on to the full truth found only in Christ. The wise men were the first Gentiles to worship Jesus. They believed He was the Messiah, something many Jews, God's chosen people, failed to realize. From Jesus' infancy, God made it evident that His Son came to save the world, not just the Jews.

1. What does it tell you about the nature of God and His gospel that pagans were invited to worship His Son?
2. Look at verse 11. What three gifts do the wise men give Jesus? What is the significance of these gifts?

The gifts used to honor Jesus were associated with royalty. Because Matthew has not yet introduced the theme of Jesus' death, it is not likely that he is implying it here, even though myrrh was a spice often used in embalming. (Additionally, unbeknownst to her, Mary used myrrh to anoint Jesus for His burial in Matthew 26:7.) Gold, then and now, was a precious metal prized for its beauty and value, an appropriate regal gift. Frankincense and myrrh were fragrant spices and perfumes equally appropriate for such adoration and worship. Similar visits of magi to royalty are described in other Greco-Roman literature of the time, but more significant here is the Jewish background.

3. In your journey toward Jesus, how are you like the wise men? How are you unlike them?

How we respond to the information we have about Jesus determines what impact our relationship with Him will have on our lives. Just like Herod and the wise men, we're presented with information about the Messiah. How we respond determines how our relationship with Christ will impact our lives. We can pursue an intellectual faith only, one that consists of studying facts about Christ but never letting that knowledge change us. We can let that knowledge make us insecure and cause us to wonder what we'll have to give up to follow Christ. Or, like the wise men, we can risk everything for Christ and choose to worship Him—and do so with overflowing joy.

“PROMISES” in 2023

Applying God’s Word

What did you learn from this study and how does this personally speak to you? Discuss with your group.

Without even knowing it, the Magi were preaching the gospel with their gifts. The gospel is the story of how God himself, stepped aside from His throne as the King of heaven to come down to earth to fulfill His priestly duties (frankincense) and eventually die for our sins (myrrh). As we close, I want you to think about the three responses we see to Jesus in in this story and consider which one best describes your reaction to Jesus. You can either reject Jesus and be hostile towards Him like Herod or be indifferent towards Him as the religious leaders were, or worship Him, as the wise men did.

1. For the wise men, God used a star to point them to the Messiah. What kinds of events does God use to point others to His Son today?
2. How do the wise men’s actions model both humility and awe in worship for us?
3. Jesus’ birth shattered religious and cultural barriers. How does He still do this today?

PRAYER: Ask God to make it normative for you to seek after Jesus with your whole heart. Ask God, like He did with the wise men, to help you leave everything behind in your pursuit of Him and His glory. Thank God for the opportunity to worship Him freely because of what Jesus did on your behalf.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Juda, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” {Micah 5:2}