LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE MESSIAH

Learning the Faith of Jesus
IN THE SHADOW OF HEROD

Herod the Great was king of Israel when Jesus was born. A ruthless and powerful king, he ruled from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC and controlled more territory than almost any previous king of the Jews. Herod is especially remembered for his magnificent building programs and his relentless suppression of all resistance — real or imagined. No matter how many potential enemies he crushed, he never felt secure in his realm and especially feared Cleopatra of Egypt. So he built a series of fortress-palaces to provide an escape route between his palace in Jerusalem and his ancestral homeland of Edom, which at that time was called Idumaea. From Jerusalem he could travel fewer than ten miles south to the safety of the Herodion, then about thirty miles to the cliff fortress of Masada, and finally the fifty miles to the safety of Idumaea.

The Herodion was a spectacular complex that symbolized Herod’s visionary genius, power, and splendor. Built on a high hill, the Herodion was the third largest palace in the ancient world. Its buildings covered about forty-five acres surrounded by another two hundred acres of palace grounds. The walls of the upper palace stood about ninety feet tall with about half of that height covered by a steep rampart. One of the four massive defensive towers of the fortress extended high above these walls. The expansive lower palace at the base of the cone-shaped hill included elaborate halls and guest rooms, a terrace more than one thousand feet long, and a swimming pool (140 by 200 feet) surrounded by colonnades and a beautiful garden.

Many significant biblical sites are near the Herodion. A few miles to the north and west lies Bethlehem, and just beyond are the Judea
Mountains. Nearby are the hills where Jacob buried Rachel, the route Naomi and Ruth traveled from Moab, the fields owned by Boaz in which Ruth gleaned, the valley where Goliath died, and the place where Samuel anointed David as king of Israel. To the east is the Judea Wilderness, where shepherds grazed their flocks on the green pastures David described. In the distance, one can even see the Dead Sea and mountains of Moab.

Herod clearly intended his magnificent building projects to demonstrate his power and establish a lasting reputation for himself. The Herodion dominated the landscape and could be seen from Jerusalem — nearly ten miles north. As the sun rose and set, the Herodion literally cast its shadow across the surrounding towns. In a similar way, the personality and power of Herod cast a shadow across the landscape of Israel’s history and people.

King Herod seemed to possess all power, magnificence, and glory. But during his reign, God brought together two vastly different kings — Jesus and Herod — to fulfill his purposes. Generations earlier Rebekah, the wife of Abraham’s son, Isaac, conceived twins. “Two nations are in your womb,” the Lord had told her, “and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). Esau, the older son, founded Edom; Herod was one of his descendants. Jacob, the younger son, founded Israel; Jesus was one of his descendants.

Conflict between the descendants of Esau and Jacob had been predicted by Balaam: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. . . . Edom will be conquered; . . . but Israel will grow strong” (Numbers 24:17 – 18). Later Malachi prophesied, “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals” (Malachi 1:2 – 3). So the Jews knew that even though Herod was their king, someday the line of Jacob would overpower the line of Esau.

No matter how strong and glorious Herod appeared to be, the baby in Bethlehem’s manger represented true power. Today, Herod’s buildings lie in ruins, and most people remember him only as the king who killed innocent babies while trying to kill the infant Jesus.
Whereas Herod made his mark on the world and then was gone, Jesus didn’t leave a single building as a legacy. No one is exactly sure where he was born or died. Yet his passing changed the world forever. Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth, triumphed over all evil — even death! Today he lives! His kingdom has no end, and he will return to conquer all earthly powers.

Opening Thoughts (4 minutes)

The Very Words of God

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew 2:1–3

Think About It

One of the dramas we see played out every day in the world around us is our human striving to be “first,” to be the most powerful, to be recognized as the best, to be the strongest, to be the richest. It was no different during the days of Jesus. But there is a greater power at work than the power we see exerted in this world.

Which situations in the Bible can you recall in which what appeared to be weak and powerless defeated that which appeared to be stronger and more powerful? What thoughts and feelings do these situations bring to mind as you consider the forces of evil at work in our world today? How can we know who wields the real power?
DVD Teaching Notes (18 minutes)

  The Herodion in its setting

Israel and Edom: a history of conflict

Herod the Edomite versus Jesus the King of kings

DVD Discussion (7 minutes)

  1. Which details about the Herodion impressed you the most?
Given the Herodion’s size, purpose, and proximity to Bethlehem, what insight do you gain into why Joseph left in the middle of the night when he took Mary and Jesus to Egypt?

2. What are some of the contrasts between King Herod and Jesus the Messiah that stand out to you?

As you consider the contrasts in power between Herod and Jesus, what insights do you gain into God’s perspective on power and his faithfulness in fulfilling his promises?

3. In what ways has this video changed your view of the faith that was required for Jews in Jesus’ day, who lived under the harsh rule of Herod (and later his successors), to believe that Jesus truly was the Messiah?
PROFILE OF A FORTRESS
The Awesome Herodion

• Was located on a hilltop at the edge of the Judea Wilderness to provide a safe haven for Herod in the event he needed to flee Jerusalem.

• Had walls rising more than forty-five feet above the hilltop, with one watchtower rising an additional sixty feet or more, and could be seen from Jerusalem about ten miles away.

• Was built about thirty years before Jesus’ birth near the site of Herod’s battlefield victory over the Hasmonaeans, which earned him the Roman nomination to be the earthly king of the Jews.

• Overshadowed Bethlehem, about three miles away, where Jesus, the almighty King, was born.

• Was often passed by shepherds (such as those who came to see the baby Jesus) and farmers who lived in Bethlehem—a small town of at most several hundred people. Bethlehem had fertile farmland and was close to the wilderness where shepherds kept their flocks.
**The Upper Palace**

- Had double cylindrical walls about fifteen feet apart with an outside diameter of nearly 220 feet. Between the walls were seven stories of apartments, chambers, and storage rooms. Herod covered the lower four stories with steep walls of packed dirt, creating the unique, volcanic-cone shape.
- Was protected by smaller defensive towers on the south, north, and west that extended outside the cylindrical structure. The enormous eastern tower was fifty-five feet in diameter, more than 120 feet tall, and provided royal apartments for King Herod and his family.
- Included a glorious bath complex that featured a vaulted caldarium (hot bath), tepidarium (warm bath), and frigidarium (cold bath)—each of which had floors decorated with mosaics. Herod brought water from more than three miles away through aqueducts and stored it in cisterns at the base of the fortress-palace.
- Could accommodate many guests in its large, roofed reception hall that had colored plaster walls. During the Jewish revolts long after Herod’s death, the Zealots made the reception hall into a synagogue.
- Had an open-air garden with columns on three sides and a niche at each end for statues.
- Was entered by a 300-step stairway on the outside of the mountain followed by a 200-foot-long tunnel that led into the fortress.

**The Lower Palace**

- Consisted of a complex of buildings and a pool at the foot of the mountain. The pool—one of the largest in the ancient world—was ten feet...
deep, 140 feet long, 200 feet wide, and was surrounded by colonnaded gardens—quite a sight given that the water came via aqueduct. On an island more than forty feet in diameter in the middle of the pool stood a colonnaded circular building in which Herod and guests could relax in complete privacy.

- Contained a huge building complex between the pool and the upper fortress, with more than 400 feet of elaborate halls and guest rooms. In front was a terrace more than 1,000 feet long.
- Presumably holds the tomb of Herod. Though this largest of the fortress structures has not yet been completely excavated, renowned Herod scholar Ehud Netzer appears to have unearthed the remains of Herod’s tomb—the grave, sarcophagus, and mausoleum—on the east slope of the Herodion. Netzer began excavating at the Herodion in 1972 and made this discovery as excavations began on the palace slope in 2006. The tomb was hidden because the site’s mausoleum was mostly demolished in ancient times. Only a large platform of white dressed stone remained buried in the soil on the side of the hill. Although hundreds of fragments of red-colored limestone believed to be from Herod’s highly ornamented eight-foot sarcophagus have been found around the site, no inscriptions
Session One: In the Shadow of Herod

have been discovered so far. Netzer believes the Zealots broke into the tomb during one of the Jewish revolts and demolished the tomb and the sarcophagus. They may have even scattered the remains of the king in defiance of his pagan ways. This appears to confirm a significant irony. Herod, the Edomite, the descendant of Esau, one of the most powerful kings of Israel’s history, was buried in the immediate vicinity of Bethlehem where Jesus, descendant of Jacob, helpless infant in a manger, was born king of the Jews … and the entire universe (Matthew 2:1). Once again the human trappings of power mislead us, for it is “‘not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

Small Group Bible Discovery and Discussion (19 minutes)

A Contrast Between Two Kings

It’s amazing to realize that Jesus, the self-sacrificing King of the universe, was born in the shadow of the palace-fortress of Herod the Great, the renowned, self-glorifying king who killed anyone he thought might stand in his way — including members of his family, close advisors, and the innocent babies of Bethlehem. Jesus and
Herod, who for a short time lived just a few miles apart, had conflicting worldviews and held vastly different types of power. Herod had all the power, wealth, and glory that the world could offer. Jesus had nothing of worldly value, but he had the power to overcome every evil (including that of Herod).

1. Read Matthew 2:1 – 18, which portrays some of the intrigue and conflict that took place when Jesus was born as king of the Jews during the reign of King Herod, who was Rome’s choice as ruler of the Jews.

   a. What do you learn about King Herod’s power, what he feared, and how far he would go to eliminate potential rivals, specifically Jesus?

   b. How would you describe the contrasts between Jesus’ and Herod’s position, destiny, and impact on other people that lie “beneath the surface” in Matthew’s account?

   c. The wise men of the east met with Herod face-to-face and personally witnessed the material evidence of his greatness, yet they continued on to Bethlehem (with the great Herodion clearly in view) to worship the infant king, Jesus. What do you think about the faith that inspired their journey, prompted them to bring gifts for
him, and led them to refuse to reveal the location of the child to Herod?

2. Given the nature of Herod’s rule, why was the shepherds’ visit to Bethlehem to see Jesus such an act of faith? (See Luke 2:8 – 18.)

3. What do you think motivated Herod the Great, and in contrast, what motivated Jesus — the Messiah, the King of the universe — to do what he did on earth? (See John 4:34; 5:30; 10:10 – 11, 14.)

4. By bringing Jesus and King Herod — two kings who couldn’t have been more different morally, spiritually, materially — together at the same time in history, what do you think God was revealing about how he works? About his kingdom?
**Profiles in Contrast**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>Herod the Great</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placed in a manger</td>
<td>Lived in magnificent palaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeared as a weak and powerless baby</td>
<td>Appeared to have great strength and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had no earthly status but really had it all—eternal power, glory, authority, etc.</td>
<td>Had great earthly status, but lacked eternal status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived to honor his Father and fulfill God’s purposes</td>
<td>Lived to glorify himself and fulfill his own purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built a kingdom of people for the glory of God so that others would know Yahweh is truly God</td>
<td>Built a kingdom of glorious buildings in order to honor himself and maintain good relations with Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated to serving others</td>
<td>Self-serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had ultimate authority and still does (Ephesians 1:18–22)</td>
<td>Had only limited earthly authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died in agony on the cross to remove the sins of humankind</td>
<td>Died in agony, hated by his family, after ordering one of his sons to be executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Messiah from Jacob’s lineage who overcame all evil but was never accepted as King of the Jews</td>
<td>The Edomite whose reign violated God’s rules (Deuteronomy 17:15) and was never accepted by the Jews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faith Lesson (6 minutes)**

Herod had all the power, wealth, strength, and glory that his worldly position could offer. Jesus, the King of the universe, had nothing of that sort to demonstrate his position. Read Luke 2:8–20, which sheds light on the great step of faith that was required for the Jews of Jesus’ day — including the shepherds mentioned in this passage — to believe that the baby Jesus in the manger was the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth.

1. What earthly king would send such an important and glorious announcement of his coming to mere shepherds?
If you had been a resident of Bethlehem when Jesus was born, what might you have thought if the shepherds had told you about the divine announcement of the Savior’s coming?

Why would it have been frightening for the events of Jesus’ birth to occur, as they did, in plain view of the Herodion, which was such a powerful symbol of Herod’s might and glory?

If you had lived in Bethlehem, who would you have believed was more powerful and worthy of your honor and allegiance — Jesus or King Herod? Why?

What kind of faith did it take for the shepherds to respond as they did to the news of the Messiah’s birth?

Why was it risky for them to tell other people that a new king, the King of heaven and earth, had been born?
What would Herod likely have done to the shepherds if he had discovered they actually visited and worshiped another king?

In what ways are the risks you face in worshiping Jesus and telling others about him similar to or different from the ones that people during his lifetime on earth were asked to take?

Closing (1 minute)

Read Luke 2:15 - 18 aloud: “When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

Spend time in prayer, asking God to help you remember that no matter how pervasive and powerful evil appears to be, God’s power is even greater. Thank him for the work he is still accomplishing in the world and ask him to help you walk in faith and obey him in all things.

Memorize

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Luke 2:15 – 18
Understanding the World in Which Jesus Lived

In-Depth Personal Study Sessions

Day One | Israel and Edom: Nations in Conflict

The Very Words of God

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: ... “Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king’s highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.”

But Edom answered: “You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword.”

Numbers 20:14 – 18

Bible Discovery

A Tale of Two Brothers

The conflict between Jacob and Esau, twingrandsons of Abraham, began before they were born and led to long-term tension between the powerful nations they founded. At times, these nations tolerated each other; more often they fought each other. History reveals that Herod the Great, the king who tried to kill Jesus the Messiah (a descendant of Jacob), came from the nation Esau founded.

1. Genesis tells the story of Jacob and Esau, the grandsons of Abraham. What do you learn about the nature of their relationship from each of the following passages?

   Genesis 25:21 – 26
Genesis 25:27 - 34

Genesis 27:1 - 10, 22 - 35

2. Where did the descendants of Jacob and Esau settle? Locate these areas on the map on page 28. (See Genesis 35:1, 6 – 7, 9 – 13; 36:1 – 9.)

3. When Esau begged for a blessing from his father, how did Isaac answer him? (See Genesis 27:34 – 40.)

   How was Isaac’s answer reflected in the prophecy of Balaam regarding Jacob’s people — the Israelites — and Esau’s people — the Edomites? (See Numbers 24:15 – 19.)

   In what ways has Isaac’s answer been reflected in the history of relationships between Israel and Edom? (See Numbers 20:14 – 21; 1 Kings 11:14 – 25; 2 Kings 8:20 – 22.)

   What did God, through his prophets, say the descendants of Jacob and Esau would experience because of Edom’s
long-standing bitterness against Israel? (See Ezekiel 35:1 - 15; Amos 1:11 - 12; 9:11 - 12; Obadiah 8 - 18.)

4. History reveals that Herod the Great came from Idumaea (what Edom was called at the time of Jesus). How does what Jesus accomplished on earth during Herod’s reign fit with the blessings given to Jacob and Esau and the prophecies about Israel and Edom?

DATA FILE

The Edom Connection

Esau’s descendants settled in the mountainous country of Edom that lay to the east and south of the Dead Sea. They were to have a kindred relationship with Israel through Esau, and the third generation of Edomites could, in fact, be received into Israel (Deuteronomy 23:7 – 8). Yet the history of Jacob and Esau and their descendants is a history of deception and conflict.

• When the Israelites wanted to pass through the land of Edom on their way to the Promised Land, the king of Edom refused their request and threatened to attack them if they tried (Numbers 20:14 – 18).
• During the reign of the kings of Israel, conflict between Israel and Edom continued. The Edomites at times were Israel’s allies and at other times allied themselves with Israel’s enemies (1 Kings 11:14 – 17; 2 Kings 3:4 – 9; 8:20 – 22; 2 Chronicles 20:1 – 12, 22 – 24).
• The bitter conflict between these nations continued to escalate. When Israel was finally destroyed and carried off to Babylon, Edom not only did nothing to relieve their suffering but added to it. God promised the destruction of Edom because of their hostility toward their brothers (Ezekiel 35:1 – 15; Obadiah 8 – 18).

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By the time Jesus was born, the area or province of Edom was known by its Greek name, Idumea, and had been greatly extended toward the north and west. This was due to the influence of Herod’s father, Antipater, and the Roman decision of the provincial boundaries. As Herod’s father was ruler of Idumaeia, and his mother was a Nabatean from Petra, the capital city of Edom, Herod clearly would have been recognized as a descendant of Esau. Jesus, on the other hand, was a descendant of Jacob, and people knew that when the Messiah came, the line of Jacob would conquer the line of Esau.
Reflection

The deceit between Jacob and Esau grew into a bitter, complicated struggle between the nations of Edom and Israel. No wonder God abhors the sin of deceit. While it’s easy for us to point fingers at Rebekah and her son, Jacob, for deceiving Isaac and Esau, we must remember that we are not immune from the temptation and consequences of deceit.

What are some of the ways — even “small” ways — in which we practice deceit?

In what ways is deceit dangerous to us? To others?

Ephesians 4:31 reminds us of what bitterness, such as that which grew from the deceit between Jacob and Esau, does when it is not dealt with properly through confession and forgiveness.

In what way(s) has deceit hurt you or someone close to you?

Who do you need to forgive so that bitterness will not cause you to stumble?

Memorize

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

*Ephesians 4:31 – 32*
Day Two | Bethlehem — Small but Significant

The Very Words of God

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathab, though you are small among the clans of Judah, 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_

Bible Discovery

_God Chose Bethlehem to Fulfill His Purposes_

Despite Bethlehem’s small size, some of the events that took place there thousands of years ago still impact the world today. Bethlehem’s role in history provides hints that for a long time God had been accomplishing his work in this unassuming town which, when Jesus was born, was overshadowed by the great Herodion.

1. Look at the map of Israel on page 28. Note Bethlehem’s location in relationship to Jerusalem, the Herodion, the Judea Mountains, the Judea Wilderness, Moab, and Edom (Idumaea). Which occupations did Bethlehem’s unique location at the border between the mountains and the wilderness enable its people to have?

2. For which events that caused great grief is Bethlehem known, and what gift from Bethlehem would remove all tears? (See Genesis 35:14 - 19; Jeremiah 31:15 - 17; Matthew 2:16 - 18.)
3. What place do King David and Ruth, the Moabitess, have in common, and for what common purpose did God include them in his plan? (See Ruth 1:1 – 6, 22; 1 Samuel 16:1 – 3, 12 – 13; Matthew 1:1, 5 – 6, 17.)

4. About seven hundred years before Jesus was born, what did the prophet Micah say would happen in Bethlehem? (See Micah 5:2.)

Why, then, was it important for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem? (See Luke 1:30 – 33; 2:1 – 7.)

Reflection

When Jesus was born, the contrasts between Bethlehem and the Herodion could not have been greater. One seemed insignificant — a small town located between the terraced farmland of the Judea Mountains and the rugged wilderness where shepherds found pasture for their flocks. The other was a massive monument to Herod’s power — a magnificent structure that literally towered over the countryside, casting its shadow over the landscape. Yet God used Bethlehem to accomplish his eternal purposes.

As you think about how God specifically chose Bethlehem to be Jesus’ birthplace, what can you — if you are an obedient follower of Jesus — believe about his plans for you?
What comparisons might you draw between what eventually happened to the Herodion and what will happen to people today who trust in their own power, resources, and glory to create “monuments” to themselves?

What does the fact that Jesus was born in a small town populated mainly by shepherds and farmers reveal about God’s willingness to use seemingly insignificant locations and ordinary people to change the world?

Just as God, long ago, set in motion a plan for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem in the lineage of David, God is still at work in our world today — in small communities as well as large cities. How can you discover what God is doing in your culture and community — and participate with him in doing it?

DATA FILE
The Works of a Master Builder
Herod the Great’s visionary building programs, ingenious development of trade with other countries, and advancement of his nation’s interests are remarkable. His magnificent building projects helped to strengthen his relationship with Rome and fulfill his desire to be recognized as the greatest builder and king the Jews ever had.
Jerusalem
Herod rebuilt the temple out of marble and gold. The building was taller than a fifteen-story building, and its foundation included limestone blocks weighing more than 500 tons. On the western hill of the city, he built a spectacular palace complex that included reception halls, apartments, fountains, gardens, baths, and a fortress for his personal guards. He also built a Greek theater and hippodrome, paved the streets, and installed sewers.

Masada
Perched atop a plateau in the Judea Wilderness, this fortress was one of the wonders of the ancient world. A spectacular palace suspended from one end of the plateau, luxurious hot and cold baths, mosaic floors, swimming pools, huge storehouses, barracks for soldiers, and cisterns holding millions of gallons of water helped to make this hot, dry wilderness outpost bearable for its occupants.

continued on next page...
This palace was built on both sides of a wadi (a dry, deep riverbed), and a bridge spanned the riverbed. One wing contained a huge, marble-floored hall where Herod received guests. Next to it were peristyle gardens, dining halls, and a complete Roman bath. Across the wadi, another large building housed baths, a swimming pool, and gardens.

**Caesarea**

Needing contact with the Roman world for its military support and trade opportunities, Herod built Caesarea into one of the most amazing seaports of the ancient world. Founded in 22 BC, the city housed a large theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, a massive temple to Augustus, and—of course—an elaborate seaside palace. Much of the city was built with imported marble, and the city had an elaborate sewer system that was cleansed by the sea.

The city’s real glory, however, lay in its forty-acre, man-made harbor. A lighthouse guided ships that brought Roman legions, marble, granite, and the Hellenistic culture into the region. From the harbor, ships also carried spices,
olive oil, grain, and—most important—the gospel to the far reaches of the world.

Day Three | God’s Plan for the Birth of the Savior Unfolds

The Very Words of God

The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Psalm 33:11

Bible Discovery

God Used All Kinds of People to Help Accomplish Jesus’ Birth

Just as Bethlehem was a small, seemingly unlikely place for God to choose as the birthplace of the Messiah, God also used seemingly
unlikely, imperfect people to accomplish his plan of redemption. Some of them had suffered life-changing loss and sorrow; others had grown up in idol-worshiping cultures; yet another had been a prostitute. Despite their shortcomings, God was at work—in each of their lives as well as in his plans for the birth of the Savior.

1. Read the following portions of Scripture and note the flaws and strengths of the people involved.

   Tamar: Genesis 38:6 – 19, 24 – 26

   Rahab: Joshua 2:1 – 14, 6:22 – 25


   David: 1 Samuel 16:1 – 13


2. What do each of these people have in common? (See Matthew 1:1 – 6, 17.)
3. Of all the people God could have chosen, why do you think he selected these particular people to have a role in bringing about the birth of the Messiah?

4. We often have strong expectations of the kinds of people God can and cannot use to accomplish his work. For example, Ruth, Naomi’s daughter-in-law, was reared in Moab, a pagan country near Israel.

a. What do the following verses reveal about Ruth’s cultural background that might cause concern about her usefulness in participating in God’s plan? (See Genesis 19:30 – 38; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 3:26 – 27.)

b. Why did Ruth return to Bethlehem with Naomi, and what does this reveal about her faith? (See Ruth 1:15 – 18.)

c. After recognizing Ruth’s faithful commitment to him, what did God work out for her, and what were the consequences? (See Ruth 4:9 – 16; Matthew 1:6 – 17.)
**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Worlds Apart, But Still within View**

The Dead Sea, which is barely ten miles east of Bethlehem, lies at the bottom of the Great Rift Valley. The mountains of Moab, the homeland of Ruth, rise above the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. Naomi fled to Moab with her husband and sons to escape a famine in Israel. So when Ruth went with Naomi to Bethlehem, she probably moved fewer than twenty miles. On a clear day, Ruth could even have seen the mountains of her homeland. What a significant, although not extensive, trip that turned out to be!

![Image of the wilderness east of Bethlehem](image-url)

**Reflection**

It's easy for us to judge people according to where they live, how they relate to other people, whether or not they have committed certain sins, or how “successful” they are according to our earthly standards. It's also easy for us to discount the extent to which God can use people who “don't seem to measure up” to accomplish his will. So from a human standpoint, it's amazing that God placed some of the people he has in the lineage of Jesus. What this reveals about God and his work in our lives is important for us to think about.

How does the fact that God used Ruth, who grew up in Moab — a nation that began in incest, worshiped false gods, and participated in child sacrifice — relate to the times when we feel...
we have sinned too greatly or too often to be of any service to God?

Do you sometimes feel as if the failures in your past will keep God from using you in a significant way? How might the stories of people God has chosen to use in the past help you better understand his redemptive work in your life?

Why do you think God often uses “undeserving people” by the world’s standards to accomplish great things for his kingdom?

How can you know for sure that God loves you and will fulfill his purpose through you?

Memorize

*It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

*Philippians 2:13*

**Day Four** Jesus Christ Is King

**The Very Words of God**

*Therefore God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*Philippians 2:9–11*
Bible Discovery

God Sends a King of His Choosing

King Herod ruled with unmatched power and authority. He lived in amazing splendor and luxury, enjoying the best life had to offer. Everything he did was intended to glorify himself and magnify his own power. In contrast, Jesus came to earth with none of the usual trappings of greatness. He was born to unknown parents in a small town that was literally overshadowed by the Herodion, and he lived what seemed to be an ordinary life on earth. But make no mistake about the fact that Jesus is king. He is simply king of a different kind of kingdom — an eternal kingdom where his power is unlimited and where true greatness bears little resemblance to earthly ideas of greatness.

1. What did the prophets say about the kind of king God would send to his people?

   Isaiah 9:2 – 7

   Isaiah 11:1 – 5

   Micah 5:2 – 5

2. King Herod was intensely motivated to bring honor and glory to himself. In contrast, what motivated Jesus to do what he did while he was here on earth? (See John 13:3 – 5, 12 – 17; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:6 – 8.)
3. The power King Herod wielded was highly visible. He had incredible political power that was backed by Rome. He commissioned massive construction projects. He simply said the words, and his enemies were executed. In contrast, what kind of power did Jesus demonstrate?

Matthew 8:23 – 27

Matthew 10:1

Luke 5:17 – 26

John 10:25 – 28

4. King Herod left behind a record of brutal enforcement of his power and a legacy of monumental building projects that today lie in ruins. In contrast, what did Jesus accomplish during his days on earth? What is the legacy of the King of kings? (See Matthew 20:25 – 28; Hebrews 2:9, 14 – 15; 1 John 2:2.)

5. Whereas King Herod sought the exultation of men and women during his life on earth, Jesus sought to fulfill his Father’s will. Afterward, what kind of exultation did Jesus receive? (See Mark 16:19; Philippians 2:8 – 11.)
KEY DATES FOR ISRAEL’S HISTORY OF RULERS

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<th>Event</th>
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<td>586 BC</td>
<td>Babylonian captivity of Judah</td>
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<tr>
<td>538 BC</td>
<td>Return to Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>332 BC</td>
<td>Alexander the Great conquers Israel</td>
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<td>330–198 BC</td>
<td>Rule of Hellenistic Ptolemies over the Jews</td>
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<td>198–167 BC</td>
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<td>37 BC</td>
<td>Herod the Great begins his reign</td>
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<td>c. 6 BC</td>
<td>Jesus’ birth</td>
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<td>4 BC</td>
<td>Herod the Great dies</td>
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<td>c. AD 30</td>
<td>Jesus is crucified</td>
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<td>AD 66–73</td>
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<td>AD 73</td>
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<td>AD 131–135</td>
<td>Bar Kochba revolt (second Jewish revolt)</td>
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Reflection

So great are the contrasts between what we tend to honor in kings and leaders and what God values that we should give careful thought as to what these differences might mean in how we live and seek to serve God every day.

Describe in your own words the character, strength, and power that God honors in a king.
As you consider the kind of King God chose for his people, what are the implications for your life as you consider what Jesus has done, and is willing to do, for you?

To what extent do you trust in your own power, wisdom, and accomplishments as opposed to trusting in God’s power, wisdom, and guidance?

How thankful are you for the King whom God has sent to be Lord of your life?

How deeply do you praise him?

What do you do to bring honor to Jesus’ name so that other people will know who he is?

Memorize

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

Revelation 5:13
Day Five | Living by the Power of the King

The Very Words of God

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever.

Psalm 138:8

Bible Discovery

God Is Pleased to Accomplish His Work through Us

God calls everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus to desire to obey and accomplish his will. He is willing and able to use each of us, no matter how flawed, weak, or insignificant we may be in the eyes of the world. All God needs in order to use us in significant ways is our willing heart.

1. What difference does our earthly appearance or status make in our ability to fulfill God’s purposes well? (See 1 Samuel 16:1, 6 – 7.)

2. Even when circumstances threaten to prevent God’s plan from happening, who is still in control? (See Genesis 45:4 – 8.)

3. When God calls us to accomplish his work, the task is often greater than we can imagine doing. What is the source of our ability to fulfill what God sets before us, and how do we become equipped to accomplish it? (See 2 Samuel...
Reflection

Today, we are asked to believe that Jesus is King, no matter how overwhelming Wall Street’s power, the government’s control, Hollywood’s morals, and the evils of pornography, hunger, AIDS, and racism appear to be.

To what extent do you dare to live as if God is greater than any evil you face in life and culture?

How confident are you that God can use you in significant ways, just as he has used many other people to bring about his purposes on earth?

In what way(s) are you paying more attention to outward appearances rather than demonstrating faith in God?

Which of your beliefs concerning God and yourself may not line up with who he really is, how he works, and his plan for you?
What or who are the “Herods” of your life — the powers of evil that seem so strong and glorious or that seem more attractive and important than following Jesus?

Which specific actions will you dare to take because you trust that the power of Jesus the Messiah within you is greater than any evil you will face, and that God is in control even when it appears otherwise?