

## THE HOLY INNOCENTS THAT NEVER WERE

The Gospel of Matthew is the only record in the world that says that King Herod had the male babies of Bethlehem butchered while the holy family, the baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, were on the way to hide in Egypt. No other source says that Herod was a mass-child killer. Matthew claims his plan was to kill the baby Jesus his political rival and since he didn't know which baby was which he had them all slain.

Christians don't worry about that and say that only a few babies would have been killed for Bethlehem was a hamlet, that everybody was used to Herod doing things like that and that nobody really cared in those barbaric times especially about what happened in remote villages (The Case for Christ, page 139-140).

When the prophecy from Malachi that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem not necessarily that he would be born there, the Jews would have been scared of some other village being attacked by Herod next. Herod might have wanted to attack roundabout villages in case the Messiah child was there visiting. There was also the danger that the Messiah child had escaped to another village and that fanatics would start a rumour that he was in their village. Herod knew that the baby could be born in Bethlehem and not necessarily be kept in the village. So his massacre had to engulf the whole locality around Bethlehem and not just the village. There had to have been loads of deaths.

Bethlehem was only about five miles from Jerusalem the capital so it was anything but a remote village that people had no interest in. The world had to take notice.

The whole of Judaism had to take notice for most of them wanted the Messiah to come fast.

The uproar would have been furious and tremendous.

According to Matthew, the magi informed King Herod that the newborn Messiah was born in Bethlehem and that they were going to pay him homage. In fact, the magi would not have told a monster like Herod that he had a rival. It was not wise to do that with any king never mind a notoriously ruthless one.

There are lies in Matthew like all Jerusalem being disturbed and annoyed at the news that the Messiah who was to rescue Israel had been born (Matthew 2). That news was exactly what the people wanted to hear for they believed that the Messiah would be a political saviour from Rome and inaugurate a wonderful reign over the holy land that is if Matthew is right that they took the magi seriously. Herod would not have been happy but the people would have been delighted to see an end to him and the Roman occupation. Matthew could not be trusted in unimportant details never mind big ones.

The magi promised Herod that if they found the child they would go back to tell him where he was so that he could go and worship him. But after they had found the child and bestowed gifts upon him they broke their word because a dream warned them that Herod was up to no good. This promise is more ridiculous than them telling Herod in the first place. Only fools go and tell tyrants that a rival has been born.

Matthew claims that Herod was furious when the magi didn't come back. This anger was never felt for Herod could not have really expected them to return when they had every chance of finding out that he was a man without mercy. (And Matthew expects us to swallow the absurdity that they had to learn what Herod's true colours were in a vision!) The detail that Herod depended on them coming back is a lie for somebody as shrewd and cynical as Herod would have arranged for them to be observed by his spies. If Herod knew about Jesus he would have known where he was and Jesus would have been hastily dealt with and so there would have been no massacre. It had to be quick in case the parents would panic and the child taken to safety.

Herod would have sent guards with them, just to spy, on the pretext that the magi were bearing expensive goods. He did not do this for the child would have been slain on their arrival if he had unless the truth was that Herod just laughed at their claim that the Messiah had been born (which contradicts Matthew and means that the Massacre never happened). Or Mary and Joseph would have made a run for it to Egypt with the child before they got to the house.

If Herod waited for the magi there would have been no massacre for Herod would have known that the baby would be hidden once the parents learned that Herod knew. He knew the baby had to have been gone when the Magi would not come back to tell him where he was which indicated that they knew what a monster he was. There was no massacre.

And would Herod and the city of Jerusalem who did not accept astrology have worried about the magi's claims and would Herod have used their astrology to work out to kill only male children of two and under and by going by the date the star

allegedly appeared to the magi? Why couldn't the Jews see if the star was there? Matthew lied about Jerusalem taking the news of the birth badly for they would have scoffed at it considering who the news came from.

If Herod did not believe the magi then the massacre would not have happened. The star would not have led the magi to his palace. As king, Herod must have listened to plenty of similar cranks so it would be wonder if he let them have an audience with him at all. And the Jews hated astrology so they would have believed that if the stars said Christ was born then he was not the real Christ but a satanic fraud who would come to no good. However, Matthew says they consulted their scholars to see where Christ would be born which was in Bethlehem according to the prophets which shows that Matthew claimed that they expected the true Messiah. It is absurd too that Herod and his men would have needed to consult them for that information for the Messiah was so important in Judaism that everybody was sure they knew where he would have to be born in Bethlehem.

If Herod believed that the child was the Christ he knew that God could warn the parents of his hatred towards it so he would have went with the magi. Herod would have been prepared for the family making a run for some place of refuge. There would have been no escape had he gone and no chance of a massacre.

When Herod searched for the child it is extraordinary that he didn't find him for the child was still in Bethlehem after the magi left (2:13,14). Neighbours could and would have directed his band of killers to where they saw the caravan go when the holy family were on the run to Egypt so there would have been no massacre if as Luke says that Mary and Joseph made no attempt to hide who their child was.

Mary and Joseph allegedly fled to Egypt with the child when Herod started his search and then all boys two and under two were slaughtered by Herod's command. If they had left it that late the neighbours might have told Herod's men that a couple who had been visited by the magi had disappeared suddenly with their baby and averted the slaughter. The Bible tells us that the soldiers knew that they had not killed the right child implying they did tell when it was too late (Matthew 2:20,22) so somebody knew something about the child being taken away. Joseph was aware that they knew for he chose to stay in Egypt until Herod went to his reward in Hell. There was no need for a massacre and the telling would have been done before it happened. The story is wholly incoherent.

If the flight into Egypt happened it happened as soon as Mary and Joseph heard from the magi that Herod knew about the baby. But Matthew denies this saying that Joseph had to be warned in a dream after the departure of the magi. This is another absurdity.

The story of the massacre is riddled with inconsistencies and improbabilities. Matthew seems to have made it up over not reading the prophecy he said forecasted in its context.

He said that the massacre fulfilled Jeremiah 31:15 which has nothing to do with it at all. In the prophecy Rachel weeps for her exiled children not dead ones. Also, would Herod kill the baby boys and spare the fathers for the Messiah's father or foster-father would have to be the true king of Israel for the baby to be the Messiah? The story of Herod's demented determination to kill the child is contradicted by Luke who says that the shepherds at Bethlehem told about the birth without restraint and Anna and Simeon created a fuss in the Temple about the son of God who had been brought there forty days after he had been born. Luke relates that she told everybody though Herod's palace was just round the corner (2:38). This visit to the Temple was for Mary's purification because it was thought that having a baby was unclean. All this on Herod's doorstep. They were not scared of him at all. Luke must have thought that Herod was dead or harmless – contradicting Matthew. When the reason Matthew told the story was to fulfil the prophecy and the prophecy does not support the story it is evident that because of the misinterpreted prophecy it was assumed that something like that happened even though there was no evidence for it. That happened a lot in the construction of the gospels.

If Herod had been interested in doing to baby Jesus what Matthew says he would have went after baby John the Baptist too. Luke reported that it was common knowledge in Judea that the baby John was to be the one to pave the way for the Messiah if he was not the Messiah himself. The story says how happy they were to hear about John's birth which indicates strongly that it was believed the child would be the Messiah. Herod would have believed that if he could not stop the coming of the Messiah he could have stalled him by getting rid of the precursor. There was also the possibility that John was more than just a forerunner and could actually be the Christ himself. So when Herod did not go after John and no secret was made about who John was supposed to be the Massacre could not have happened.

The Assumption of Moses said that Herod kills princes by the sword and kills them in secret and hides the bodies and has no mercy for young or old. This does not corroborate the massacre because the babies were not princes and could not have been killed in secret. The book was written just about the time of the birth of Jesus in Matthew. A sewage pit for an ancient villa in Ashkelon not far from Bethlehem was found to be full of babies who were at two days old and a little bit older. Two thirds were boys. There were a hundred corpses in the pit and they were there since the reign of Herod. But Matthew says that the babies were as old as two and all boys. And why would Herod hide what he did for he couldn't? Luke has the baby

Jesus paraded openly among the people in Jerusalem contradicting Matthew about the alleged danger Jesus was in.

Josephus loved to chronicle the life and crimes of Herod and never mentioned the alleged massacre of the babies. One reason the massacre would have got attention is that it was about Herod trying to avoid tolerating a messianic contender. The small or large number of babies dead is not what would get attention so much as the purpose.

Christians don't argue, "Josephus hated Messianism so he would not have mentioned this for it would have implied that Jesus who was born in Bethlehem must have had a special right to be declared Messiah." To argue that way would be to cast doubt on their beloved text in Josephus that affirms Jesus as Messiah and back from the dead and admit what everybody knows: its forged.

Silence then in this case amounts to denial.

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