

Advent

Weep No More

Matthew 2:16-18

There is an inescapable dark shadow accompanying the Christmas story. King Herod, a madman by any measure, ruthlessly slaughtered the infant boys in and around Bethlehem in a bid to destroy the Messiah. So paranoid and power hungry was Herod that he even had his sons and wife murdered after suspecting they were plotting to overthrow him. But God is more powerful than the wicked king. Divine sovereignty is an infinitely greater power than the might of men. The providence of God is infinitely more determinative than the plans of men.

Throughout the infancy narratives Matthew draws parallels to the birth of Moses including divine providence, murderous rulers, the slaughter of innocents, flight to Egypt and eventual return. In this sense Matthew points to Jesus as the greater Moses who will deliver his people from their greatest captivity.

God's Word is incredibly honest about human suffering and the mourning that follows. But there is a corresponding hope offered to God's people which overcomes the darkness of their falleness. The same Scriptures which acknowledge the depths of Rachel's grief also woo her to weep no more.



Main Idea: The serpent continues his quest to destroy the “seed of the woman” while God sovereignly keeps his promise to deliver his people.

Vs. 16 – Heeding the angel's warning the Magi bypassed Jerusalem on their return home. Herod, having been duped, was enraged. Unable to locate the Christ-child Herod decided to slaughter all the male children under two-years-old in the region of Bethlehem. From what we know of Herod (he had his sons and wife murdered) this action is entirely in keeping with his violent and vindictive nature.

Vs. 17 – This is the third example of fulfilled prophecy in chapter two. Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet.” Matthew appealed to him for scenes of tragedy. The wickedness of Herod's slaughter of the innocents was the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words (31:15). This speaks to the mysterious providence of God even in the actions of men.

Vs. 18 – Jeremiah was referring either (or both) to the exile of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) to Assyria in 721 BC and the exile of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to Babylon in 587 BC. Both events were utterly catastrophic. The Northern Kingdom was decimated and the Southern Kingdom even after exile would never fully recover.

The main image in the prophecy is Rachel in her grave grieving over her children carried off to captivity. Rachel, the wife of the patriarch Jacob was thought of as the mother of the people of Israel. She was buried in Ramah which was located just five miles north of Bethlehem. Ramah was located along the road that the captives would have taken as they were carted off by their pagan captors.

Jeremiah appeals to Rachel's grieving as symbolic of the mourning of all Israel as the captives were carried off to never be seen again.

Both verbs used by Jeremiah signify a deep and loud wailing of grief. However the reference to this catastrophic mourning is found within a larger section of Jeremiah which is filled with the gracious promises of God toward his people. Indeed it is this very passage (chapter 31) in Jeremiah which addresses the New Covenant which will be fulfilled in Christ Jesus (31:31-34).

1. The Malice of Herod.

Vs. 16

- After the sin in Eden God responded by graciously placing enmity between the woman and the serpent (Gen. 3:15). That enmity against satan, God promised, would extend to the “seed of the woman.” In other words, God determined to preserve a holy lineage that would never be snuffed out and would culminate in the birth of a Deliverer who, though struck, would crush the serpent. Biblical history records the titanic struggle of the serpent to wipe out that holy lineage. The malice of Herod displayed in the birth narratives of Jesus is simply an extension of the serpent’s malice.
- But there is no power that can thwart the providence of God. What God has willed, he will carry out through whatever means he chooses (Job 4:22; Isa. 14:27; Jer. 32:27). Satan’s determination to destroy the Messiah cannot succeed for God’s will cannot be overturned.
- The world is filled with evil and violence and griefs of all sorts. This side of the new creation we must never expect anything but malice from the enemy of our souls. Rather we must entrust ourselves to the Judge of all the earth who will not leave any act of evil unpunished.

2. The History of a Conflict.

Vs. 17

- The two most catastrophic experiences for the nation of Israel in their Old Testament history were their bondage in Egypt and their exile in Babylon (and Assyria). It is to the later which Jeremiah refers (31:15). Matthew employs Jeremiah’s prophesy and the images of great mourning as parallels for the mourning in Bethlehem resulting from Herod’s despicable act of cruelty.
- How are we to understand our times of loss and mourning? In those times of catastrophe has God abandoned us? The testimony of Scripture is that God will never leave nor forsake his people. In those times of grief and trials it is wise to join the Lord Jesus who prayed in his greatest trial, “Father...everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

3. The Fulfillment of a Prophecy

Vs. 18

- Evil will not triumph. All the plans of Satan will fail miserably. Indeed he has already lost the war and his fate is sealed. The Messiah has come. God became a man to save from their sins all who believe in Him. Just as God delivered his Son from the snares of Satan so too will he bring all of his people through their trials and griefs.
- Jeremiah’s reference to Rachel’s profound mourning is surrounded by reminders of God’s promises and calls to weep no more. This not because there are no griefs in this world. Indeed there are many as the Scriptures testify. But there is cause for joy and hope which surpass even the sources of our sorrow.