

Herod the Great and the Birth of our Lord

Moreover, the “two years” of Matthew does not demand that Jesus be of that age. Herod’s slaughter of children up to two years of age was only to make certain that his infant rival did not escape. This is in keeping with his documented wicked and ruthless character. Herod already had 3 of his own sons murdered, 45 members of a rival faction slain, his wife’s 17-year-old brother drowned in a bath, her 80-year-old grandfather put to death, and even had her falsely accused and executed — all in order to secure the throne for himself.¹ Indeed, to gratify his lusts, he married at least 9 times.

Such a desperate a man would have taken no chances in order to maintain that security. Herod’s natural propensity for overkill, inherent in his makeup, is demonstrated in that he did not merely call for the destruction of the male children in Bethlehem. He extended the blood bath as far as Ramah, a village in the tribal allotment of Benjamin, some ten miles north of the City of David (Mat. 2:16–18).²

Finally, if Matthew is telling us of a time when Jesus is two years old and living in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; Luke 2:39), why should God instruct Joseph to flee to Egypt in order to escape Herod? The children were only being slain in the area around Bethlehem. This would hardly seem prudent as in order to reach Egypt from Nazareth they would have to pass through or in close proximity to Herod’s domain of Judea.

They would be manifestly safe where they already were, for Nazareth about 70 miles north of the slaughter. Indeed, the same reasoning applies to the fact that the Wise Men returned to their own country “another way” (Mat. 2:12).

Were they in Nazareth such action would have been unnecessary for they would have been well out of harms way by simply returning back up the “Fertile Crescent” to the “east” as King Herod was in Jerusalem (Mat. 2:3). However, such evasive steps would have been judicious had they have been south of Jerusalem in Bethlehem.

¹ Henry S. Gehman, (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, (Phil., PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 379–382 (Herod).

² Flavius Josephus, *Josephus Complete Works*, trans. by William Whiston, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), *Wars of the Jews*, I, 29, 2; *Antiquities*, XVI 11, 7; XVII 3, 2, etc.