

OUT OF EXILE

study 2

MATTHEW 2, MICAH AND THE PROPHETS

at last!

I HATE TO SAY I TOLD YOU SO, BUT...

It's frustrating, isn't it, when you can see things so clearly in hindsight. The disastrous decisions you should have avoided... and your frustrating know-it-all friends who warned you all along. Maybe Israel felt that way about their prophets.

Take Micah, for example. As he watched Israel and Judah become more and more corrupt in the days of King Ahaz, he warned them time after time. "Nobody feels safe here anymore," says Micah. "People do whatever evil they want - just because they can. Women are driven from their 'pleasant homes' in fear. Walk past in a nice robe, you'll be robbed." But nobody listens. They prefer "popular" prophets, who'll say anything for wine and beer. "Therefore, the Lord says, 'I am planning disaster against these people'." (Micah 2:3). He'll take their land from them, (2:4) and send their children into exile. (1:16) And within a generation, it all happens. But that's not the end of the story.

Read Micah's surprising words in Micah 2:12-13.

- a) After the exile, what is God planning to do with the broken and scattered "remnant" of his people?
- b) Who will lead the "sheep"?

Read Micah 5:2-5

- c) What more do you learn about this "shepherd King" who will gather God's scattered flock?

Now (with Micah in mind) read Matthew 2:1-12.

- d) Is the birth of Jesus good news or bad news for Israel? What does it signify?
- e) What is his Herod's response in verse 8? Is he genuine?

How do the Magi respond to Jesus in verse 11?

- f) As Matthew tells the story, who do you think he intends his readers to imitate? How would we do this?

KING HEROD IN HISTORY

At the time of the birth of Jesus, King Herod ruled Israel on behalf of the Roman Empire. Herod has certainly made his mark on the history books. On the one hand he was noted for his huge building programs, including an ornate temple in Jerusalem which was designed to get the Jewish people "on side." It didn't work. In fact, Herod was feared by everyone, including his family. Rivals to his throne were put to death - including his wife Mariamne, her mother, two of her sons, and his own eldest son. The Roman Emperor Augustus was said to comment that "it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son." In fact, Herod was cruel to the very end - to make sure he went out with a bang, as he lay on his deathbed he ordered that a group of Jerusalem's leading citizens be placed under arrest. At the moment of his death they were to be executed. In this way he guaranteed there would be sorrow and tears at the time of his death!



Herod's son Philip was the first Jewish Ruler to have his image depicted on a coin.

LIKE EGYPT ALL OVER AGAIN...

You can't read Matthew's gospel without getting a strong sense of *deja vu*. Patterns keep repeating themselves in a way that brings to mind the history of Israel. Back in Genesis and Exodus, the first descendants of Abraham found themselves trapped as slaves in Egypt. God raised up Moses to lead his people to freedom in the promised land. But right from the start, there was opposition from high places!

Read Matthew 2:13-18. Warned of danger in a dream, Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt, where they remain until Herod's death. This scenario brings a number of Old Testament parallels to Matthew's mind.

g. In Mt 2:15, Matthew looks back to **Hosea 11:1**, and quotes part of the verse. Read the full verse.

What SON was Hosea originally talking about?

What was the problem with this "son"?

With Jesus, God is starting all over again! Here is the *true* Son, the *true* Israel. The trouble with Israel was their constant unfaithfulness. What will happen to the *new* Israel when he is put to the test? We'll see!

There are more Old Testament connections! **Read Exodus 1:15 - 2:4**, which describes the birth of Moses.

h. What similarities do you see between Herod and Pharaoh?

i. What similarity does this imply between Jesus and Moses?

Finally, read Jeremiah 31:15-17. In v15, Jeremiah pictures Rachel, back in Genesis, weeping for her descendants as they are carried off into exile. But in the midst of the horror of Herod's actions, what *hope* does Jeremiah hold out in the following verses (ie v16-17)?

Summing up...

Herod, like Pharaoh in the distant past, tries to cut short the life of the one who will lead God's people out of captivity. But Herod's plan is thwarted. Jesus is in Egypt, ready to follow in the footsteps of Moses as God again "calls his Son" out of captivity. Jeremiah gave hope that God's scattered people would be regathered to be the new Israel... led by Jesus, the long awaited "Christ"!

