

Herod's Explosive Anger & the Release of His Assassins; *Apostello*: Those Who Give Orders & Those that Carry Them Out are Equally Guilty; the "Slaughter of the Innocents," Herod's Grotesque Death-Shadowed Valley, Matt 2:16; Fulfillment of Jeremiah's Prophecy: Rachel Weeps for the Slaughter of Innocents by Nebuchadnezzar, Jer 31:15, & by Herod, Matt 2:17-18

The failure of the Magi to report to him the location of the Messiah was the spark that ignited the explosion recorded in Matthew 2:16 described there by the verb *thumoō*:

- aorist:
Ingressive: stresses the beginning of an action or the entrance into a state or condition. Being outwitted by the Magi converted bitterness into overt anger.
- passive:
Herod received the action of this conversion with news of the Magi's deception.
- indicative:
This is a statement of fact. Operational anger was the motivation for Herod's order for the holocaust of all children aged 2 or under in Bethlehem.

This trifecta of motivational anger plus chronic bitterness plus operational anger had become facilitated wheel-tracks that became manifest whenever his throne was threatened whether real or imagined.

This outburst of anger resulted in his assassins being "sent": the aorist active participle of the verb **ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*)**. This word indicates that even though Herod issued the order and others carried it out, the onus is on Herod. This excerpt indicates why:

ἀποστέλλω in Secular Greek. ἀποστέλλειν expresses the fact that the sending takes place from a specific and unique standpoint which does not merely link the sender and recipient but also, in virtue of the situation, unites with the sender either the person or the object sent. To this extent it is only logical that ἀποστέλλειν should also carry with it the significance that the sending implies a commission bound up with the person of the one sent. This emerges more clearly in Hellenistic Greek. The expression: οἱ ἀπεσταλμένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως [*hoi apestalmenoi hupo tou basileōs*: "sent from the king"] ... links, with the thought of sending, the further thought of the associated authorization of the one sent.

The men thus described are representatives of their monarch and his authority. (pp. 398—99)

ἀποστέλλειν in the New Testament. We can say in general that when ἀποστέλλειν is used it rests on the commission linked with it, no matter whether the one who sends or the one who is sent claims prior interest.¹ (p. 404)

Just as John related in Revelation 12:4, Herod is an emissary of Satan whose mission is to execute the Messiah. *Apostellō* indicates that Herod commissioned his assassins to execute the children. The ones who did the deed had authorization to do so under the authority of their king.

There is no question that they were Herod's "triggermen" and are thus guilty of infanticide. True they had a choice to refuse the assignment but, knowing Herod, such a decision would have been tantamount to suicide. Rather than buck Herod they followed orders and "slew all the male children."

¹ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "ἀποστέλλω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 1:398—99; 404.

The word *slew* is the aorist active indicative of the verb ἀναίρειν (*anaireō*). This word has various meanings. Its basic concept is “to take away.” With regard to persons it refers to killing with violence, e.g., by execution, murder, or assassination.² This is how the word is used in our context regarding the infanticide of the innocents of Babylon and its environs.

aorist:	Constativ: contemplates the action in its entirety without regard to its extent of duration by gathering it into a single whole. The best word is “executed.”
active:	The executioners produce the action of the verb but Herod, the authority that ordered them into action, is the catalyst for the action.
indicative:	This is a statement of historical fact.

The passage goes on to identify the victims as “all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under.” Why this age range is chosen by Herod is explained in this excerpt:

When Herod met with the Magi to learn how long ago they had sighted the “star” he came away believing that no more than two years had passed. His rationale apparently considered the possibility that the original sighting of the star in September of 3 B.C. could have been the moment of the virgin birth.

To be absolutely certain that the Child is eliminated, Herod’s order in Matthew 2:16 stipulated that all of Bethlehem’s children aged two or younger were to be murdered.³

This is known as the Slaughter of the Innocents. I can only imagine the discipline that came to the executioners but we have an historical record of the grotesque end this vicious act earned Herod:

Herod’s distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God’s judgment upon him for his sins; for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly, as it augmented his pains inwardly; for it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one food or other. His entrails were also exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also had settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, further, his privy-member was putrified, and produced worms; and when he sat upright, he had difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree. It was said by those who pretended to divine, and who were endued with wisdom to foretell such things, that God inflicted this punishment on the king on account of his great impiety.⁴

² Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 54–55.

³ Joe Griffin, “Review: Matthew 2:1–12,” *The Concept of Freedom by the Founding Fathers* (St. Charles: Joe Griffin Media Ministries, 2010), MP3: TG09-65. Also available online at <http://www.joegriffin.org/MediaMins/classinfo.asp?nm=TG09%2D65>.

⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, nd), 512–13 (bk. XVII, chap. VI, par.5).

Matthew 2:16 - When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, his chronic bitterness flared into operational anger, and he ordered his hit men to slaughter all the male children who were in Bethlehem and its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the Magi. (CTL)

v. 17 - Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

v. 18 - "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." (NASB)

The passage quoted by Matthew is from Jeremiah 31:15:

Jeremiah 31:15 - Thus says the Lord, "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (NASB)

The question is, "Why did Matthew choose this passage to amplify the Slaughter of the Innocents?"

Both verses amplify Rachel weeping for her children. Rachel is Jacob's, or Israel's, right woman. Although her children, Joseph and Benjamin were the last to be born of the twelve children, she is considered to be the legitimate wife of Jacob, therefore Joseph is considered the first born.

Joseph and Asenath \as'-e-nath\, the daughter of Potipherah \po-tif'-er-ah\, an Egyptian priest, had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Their allotments of land were found in the north of Israel during the United Kingdom but they made up most of the Northern Kingdom once it became divided. The Northern Kingdom suffered the fifth cycle in 721 B.C. when conquered by the Assyrians.

Rachel's tears in the Jeremiah passage are for her progeny through Judah and Benjamin as they are taken hostage following the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar on July 18, 586 B.C.

The city of Ramah (**Heb: רַמָּת**, **Gk: Ῥαμᾶ**) is one of two traditional burial sites of Rachel and is located about six miles north of Jerusalem. It was here that the Chaldeans assembled the captives of Jerusalem. Many who were thought not worth transporting to Babylon due to age, weakness, or poverty, were slaughtered. It was also the policy of the armies of the ancient world that any baby who had to be carried was killed before a march started. The common practice was slitting the throat.

The second site for Rachel's tomb is described as follows:

The oldest tradition points to a place one mile north of Bethlehem and four miles from Jerusalem. Matthew 2:18 speaks of this place, since the evangelist, reporting the slaughter of the innocents of Bethlehem, represents Rachel as weeping for her children from her neighboring grave.⁵

Regardless of the location of Rachel's tomb, it is the background of Jeremiah 31:15 but it is recalled to the mind of Matthew by the Holy Spirit to describe the Slaughter of the Innocents at Bethlehem by Herod the Great.

⁵ S. D. Press, "Rachel's Tomb," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2524.

Matthew 2:17 - Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

v. 18 - "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud wailing, Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were gone." (NET)