

## Rachel's Tears Matthew 2:16-18

Though we have no extra-biblical corroboration of this traumatic event recorded by Matthew it accords perfectly with what we know of Herod. The later years of his administration was consumed by his obsessive efforts to defend his throne.

- His most immediate threat was the royal family of the Hasmoneans. Earlier in his reign he eliminated his predecessors Antigonus and Hyrcanus, together with a large number of their supporters. He eventually got to the entire remaining members of the Hasmonean clan and exterminated them one by one. This included those directly related to him by marriage: His brother-in-law, mother-in-law, and even his favorite wife Mariamme.
- In his last years he had his three eldest sons were killed on suspicion of plotting to seize their father's throne they too were Hasmoneans.
- Outside of his campaign against the Hasmoneans ruthless suppression through espionage was a common occurrence. On one occasion he faced an assassination attempt, the ten conspirators were executed, along with their entire families.
- He was alleged to have planned the massacre of the entire Jewish nobility to coincide with his death in order to ensure real mourning took place.

The reaction of Herod, as recorded by Matthew comes as a surprise to no one. This was just one more of a slew of

egregious events perpetrated during the last stages of his administration. We have three things: **(1)** What it symbolized. **(2)** What it signified. **(3)** What it teaches.

1. **What it signified.** **V. 16.** He would've expected the Magi to return within a day or two. He was now about 70. The child wasn't likely to ever cause him any disturbance.

***“When he saw that he had been tricked [lit. mocked]...”*** When He realized they deceived him he became furious. His reaction is swift, brutal and comprehensive. **What stands out obviously is:**

- a. **It signifies the clash of two kingdoms.** This is the age old conflict reaching a climax. It may involve the actions of men but there are powers and principalities operating in and inciting them. **Cf. Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:1-6.**
  - b. **The OT parallel.** It's hard to evade the thought that Matthew eagerly includes this event partly for its similarity to the infancy of Moses. As Moses was born deliverer and survived an attempted genocide so does Jesus the new Moses.
2. **What it symbolized.** **Vv. 17-18.** Matthew sees this as fulfillment of OT prophecy. **Two things are noteworthy.** **(1)** The passive language. **(2)** The complexity of his actual thought.
    - a. **The passive language.** An event so egregious Matthew wants to emphasize secondary causality. God runs the world in such a way that he knows and is behind all

things but not in the same way. **Cf. Gen. 50:20; Isa. 10:6-7; Acts 2:23.** They do wickedly and God does good in the same act!

b. **The complexity of the fulfillment.** It is not at all easy to see the connection here. **We have to answer two things:**

i. **What was the original meaning?** Two OT stories lay behind the prophecy:

1. **Gen. 35:16-21.** Rachel was barren. God gave her two sons. She died giving birth to the second son just outside of Ephrath. She called his name Ben-oni but Jacob called him Benjamin. That was a portent for a future anguish for the nation. Under Joshua, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramah were among those allocated to the tribe Benjamin.

2. **Jer. 31:15-17.** Contains a prophecy of the impending Babylonian captivity. It makes poetic usage of Rachel's tomb.

ii. **Why does see its' fulfilling?** **For three reasons.**

1. **Jer. 31** is a chapter of hope and restoration; the grief of **v. 15** sounds the only discordant note.

2. **"Ramah"** was significant. It was the place where the exiles were gathered for the long march to Babylon in **586 B.C.** **cf. Jer. 40:1.** This would trigger thoughts of exile, return, hope beyond disaster.

3. Jeremiah himself, was released there. He didn't go with the captives but returned to unsuccessfully plead with the leaders and was ultimately taken into Egypt.

3. **What it teaches.** There are three great principles that must not be missed:

a. **We are involved in a great spiritual conflict.** **Cf. Eph. 6:10ff; Rev. 12:1-6.**

b. **God's ways involve unexpected and sometimes inexplicable trials.** He ordains things that are painful but use it for good.

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go, The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; For I will be near thee, thy troubles to bless, And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

c. **Christ is the only one who can help us.** He is our redemption. He is given us by God and the victory is in Him. In Him every trial is sanctified. In Him weeping endures for the night but joy comes in the morning.

*Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD."*