



# 9

## Seeking the King

### Key Theme

- God is faithful to His promises.

### Key Passages

- Mathew 2:1–18; Micah 5:2; Jeremiah 31:15

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how the wise men reacted to Jesus.
- Describe how King Herod reacted to Jesus.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

Write on the board, “What are the two basic responses to Jesus?”

Students will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Crossword and reciting the verse to a friend or to the class.

- Memory Verse Crossword for each student from the Resource DVD-ROM



### Studying God's Word

Wise men from the East rejoiced when they learned that the King of the Jews had been born. They brought gifts and worshipped Him. The king of Judea, King Herod, reacted far differently. He became jealous, angry, and attempted to destroy Jesus!

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



### Activity: Two Responses

Students will compare the responses of the wise men and King Herod using a two-column format to formulate their ideas.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this background.

We learned last week that Jesus came as a humble servant (Philippians 2:8). He came to earth in a very simple way. He was born to a young Jewish woman and laid in a manger (Luke 2:7). God did not send His angels to announce the birth to kings, rulers, or religious leaders. God sent His angels to announce the arrival of the Savior of the world to simple shepherds in the field who were watching over their sheep in the countryside (Luke 2:8–14).

This child laid in a manger was the one promised to be heir to the throne of David, whose kingdom would not end (2 Samuel 7:16). Isaiah prophesied of a King who would bear the government upon His shoulder. He would be the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would have a Son through the Holy Spirit and that her Son would be great. He would sit on the throne of David, and His kingdom would not end (Luke 1:32–33). This baby Jesus would fulfill many prophecies. And He would one day be a mighty, everlasting King.

How would this King be received? Matthew tells us of two very different reactions. First, we hear of magi (“wise men”) from the East who came to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1). These wise men were probably from Babylon and ancient Persia. Hundreds of years earlier, magi in this area may have had opportunities to learn of the Jewish Scriptures and the promised Messiah—the King of the Jews—from the prophet Daniel who had been taken as a captive from Judah to Babylon and served in high positions there for many years (Daniel 1:19–20, 6:3).

These great wise men from Babylon came to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). When King Herod heard about these magi, he met with them to learn of their journey and destination. At the advice of his counselors, King Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find the child. When the wise men saw Mary His mother, they fell down and worshipped Him. They then presented Him with treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:9–11).

The wise men from Babylon, Gentiles from a dis-

tant land, came with expensive gifts and humbly fell before the child in praise and worship.

But what of King Herod—the ruler who was ruling over Judea? What was he thinking about this King who had attracted such attention from men of pagan nations? King Herod was troubled at the news of the one called King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2–3). He sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find the child and instructed them to come back to him and tell him where the child was so that he could worship Him (Matthew 2:8). King Herod’s motives were deceitful, but the almighty sovereign God was watching over the Christ child and His family. Soon after the wise men left for home, Joseph was warned in a dream to take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt because they were in danger. King Herod intended to destroy the child (Matthew 2:13).

Jesus escaped King Herod’s jealous wrath. But many other children were killed as Herod sent forth an order to put to death all the male children two years old and under who were born in Bethlehem and in all its districts (Matthew 2:16).

What a contrast we see between the Gentile wise men and the king of Judea (Herod) regarding the birth of Jesus Christ. The wise men travelled a great distance to worship the King. They humbly bowed before Him and presented valuable gifts. King Herod, on the other hand, was threatened by this one who was destined to be King. His extreme response of murder was one of hatred and fear of losing his throne.

The truth of the matter is, there are only two reactions to Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly states that the one who is not with Christ is against Him (Luke 11:23). There is no middle ground. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Those who repent, trust, and receive Him will freely and willingly bow to Him in praise and worship. They will have eternal life. And those who don’t believe in Him, but are threatened by Him because they don’t want another King in their life, will be condemned because they will not believe in God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Jesus is King! Many people throughout history have rejected His lordship and demanded that they are the kings of their own lives. Like King Herod, they conspire to deny Jesus His rightful place on the throne.

Every person throughout all of history has been born a rebel against King Jesus. In Colossians 1:13, Paul makes it clear that no one is born into Christ's kingdom—all are born under the power of darkness. It is only by acknowledging, through repentance and faith, that Jesus is Lord that anyone can be brought into the kingdom of Jesus.

Herod was so intent on remaining the king of Judea, and the king of his own life, that he was willing to murder many young children and infants. This heinous act was committed in fulfillment of a prophecy given through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:17–18). This murderous legacy continued through Herod's line. His son, Herod Antipas, was the ruler who beheaded John the Baptist and tried Christ before His death. Later, Herod Agrippa I was persecuting the fledgling church in Acts 12. And Paul appeared before his son, Herod Agrippa II, to defend himself in Acts 26.

Herod the Great could not deny Jesus the throne God had prepared for Him. In the same way, any effort of people to deny the lordship of Jesus will also fail. One day, every knee will bow before King Jesus—some exalting Him as the merciful Savior, others as the just Judge who will cast them into eternal punishment (Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 20:11–15). As ambassadors of King Jesus, we have the joyful duty of serving Him and calling people to bow their hearts to Him before it is too late.

As people celebrate the birth of Christ, there are many traditions they participate in. You might choose to have a nativity scene in your home during the Christmas season. What pieces does it include? Mary? Check. Joseph? Check. Jesus in the manger, a few animals (hopefully no pigs), maybe a stable backdrop . . . and three wise men? Check. But do all of those pieces belong in this scene together?

The birth of our King didn't necessarily happen in a stable behind a hotel, but could have been in the lower room of a house where animals were often kept. Based on our text today, we see another discrepancy between Scripture and the typical nativity scene. If you read the account of the birth in Matthew 2, you will find no mention of how many wise men travelled to Jerusalem seeking the King of the Jews. Some have assumed that there were three since there were three gifts. Others have even suggested the names of these men, but the Bible does not confirm these ideas. They are extrabiblical traditions.

Also, the text seems very clear that the wise men were not present at the birth. They did go to Bethlehem

and offer gifts and worship to the child. The Greek word used in Matthew 2:11 is *paidion*, the word commonly used of a child, not an infant. Additionally, Herod had determined the time of the star's appearing from the wise men and ordered his soldiers to kill every child up to age two (Matthew 2:7, 2:16). This indicates that it was as many as two years later that the wise men found the Christ and offered their worship and gifts to Him. If you would like to spark some conversation, place the wise men across the room (to the east) and when people ask why, open up the Scriptures with them and share the true account of their visit to worship the young King.

Another common question relates to the sign the wise men saw. What was the star? Many have tried to explain it as a convergence of different stars or planets at a specific time, but these explanations fall short of the biblical descriptions. The alignment of planets in the constellations could never point the wise men to a particular city, let alone a particular house. According to the biblical account, the star was a supernatural object that led the wise men to Jerusalem, disappeared, and then reappeared to lead the wise men to the very house where Jesus was living (Matthew 2:9–10).

At Christmas and throughout the year, we need to be diligent to ensure that the cultural traditions and the media do not corrupt the truth of God's Word. We must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ—our King. As we do so, we can help those who are His subjects to understand more about their King and share those truths with those who are not yet part of His kingdom.



## BEFORE THE THRONE

King of kings, I worship you. Once again, I am brought to my knees as I consider your glory. You alone are worthy of the kind of royal worship that the wise men offered you. I have no gold, frankincense, or myrrh, but my life is yours. My desire is to surrender my life completely to your lordship. As I teach this lesson and discuss the response of men to King Jesus, please bring understanding to the minds of my students. Move in their hearts to hear the truth and to one day submit to the authority of Scripture and to Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

## Review

Our last lesson gave us a look at the birth of Jesus. While it is a familiar subject, I bet there were areas that had you thinking this past week. That might especially have been the case if you discovered that you had some misunderstandings of what the Bible says took place at the birth of Jesus.

? Would anyone care to share something that they realized they had a false idea of concerning Christ's birth and how your thinking has changed? *Discuss various answers including the timing of the arrival in Bethlehem, the inn, the innkeeper, singing angels, the arrival of the wise men, etc.*

In all of the events of the birth of Christ, there was one point that rose above everything else—the humility of Christ.

? What do we mean when we talk about the humility of Christ in His birth? *Jesus, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, humbled Himself to come to the earth and take on flesh, setting aside the privileges and glories of heaven. He came to a world that was broken by sin and entered into the world He had originally created as perfect.*

? What very important point did we make about the nature of Jesus as both God and man? *We talked about the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Hypostatic Union of Jesus. He was 100% God and 100% man with no mixing or diluting the natures. He was not a demigod. There have been many heretical views that describe His two natures as mixed or blended in various ways. We need to be careful to avoid those errors, looking to Scripture as the authority.*

? Another important distinction we made was that the Creator stepped into His creation. Why is this an important distinction to make, especially when talking with Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses? *Both of these religions teach that Jesus was/is a created being, not part of the eternal Trinity. John 1 and other passages make it clear that Jesus is eternal and that He was involved in the creation of all things.*

Today we are going to continue looking at the early life of Jesus. At some point after His birth, He was treated quite differently by two different dignitaries. Let's take a look at what happened.



➤ Write on the board, "What are the two basic responses to Jesus?"



## Studying God's Word

### READ THE WORD

Let's read Matthew 2:1–12 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

? What two clues about the timing of the arrival of the wise men are given to us in this passage? *The wise men came after the birth of Jesus and during the reign of Herod the Great.*

? Where had the wise men come from? *They came from the East.*

➤ The wise men are often referred to as magi, from the Greek *magoi*.

- ? **What were the wise men looking for?** *They were looking for the one who had been born King of the Jews.*
- ? **How did they know the King had been born?** *They had seen His star from their home country.*
- ? **Why had they come seeking the King?** *They wished to worship the King.*
- ? **How did Herod respond?** *He was troubled by the news.*
- ? **Was Herod the only one who knew of the mission of the wise men?** *No. The text says that all of Jerusalem was troubled along with Herod. It is likely that their arrival had attracted much attention, and they had announced their intentions to others besides Herod.*
- ? **How did Herod determine where the new King had been born?** *He called all of the chief priests and scribes of the Jews to get the answer.*
- ? **What other identity does the King of the Jews have according to verse 4?** *He is also the Christ (Messiah).*
- ? **How did the priests and scribes determine the answer for Herod?** *They looked to the prophecy of Micah 5:2 to identify the location of the birthplace of the Christ.*
- ? **How certain was their response?** *It seems from the text that theirs was a very clear and definite response, so all of these men must have believed the prophecy and thought it to be trustworthy; Bethlehem was the birthplace of the King.*
- ? **Under what circumstances did the events of verse 7 take place?** *Herod called the wise men to himself in secret.*
- ? **What did Herod want to know from the wise men?** *He wanted to know when the star had appeared.*
- ? **What instructions did Herod give the wise men?** *He sent them to Bethlehem and asked them to report back to him with the location.*
- ? **Why did Herod want to know where the King was?** *He said he wanted to go and worship Him as well.*
- ? **What appeared as the wise men left Herod?** *The star they had been following appeared.*
- ? **What did the star do?** *It moved ahead of them until it came to the house where Jesus was. This would have led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, a journey of about 5 miles.*
- ? **How did the wise men respond to seeing the star appear?** *They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. Note the repetition for emphasis.*
- ? **What did they find inside the house?** *They found the Child and Mary.*
- ? **How did they respond to the Child?** *They fell down and worshipped Him.*
- ? **What did they offer Him?** *They gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*
- ? **How many wise men were there?** *The text does not say. Some suppose there were three since there were three gifts, but this is not a solid conclusion from the text. Further, some even give them names, but these are all examples of eisegesis—adding ideas from outside of the text.*

Micah 5:2

- ? **Why did the wise men not return to Herod?** *They were warned in a dream. The text does not say, but it is likely that an angel was the messenger.*
- ? **How did they return home?** *They went a different way, meaning that they did not return through Jerusalem and to Herod as he had requested.*

## Discover the Truth

Before we get into the main point of the lesson, let's stop and clear up a common misconception about the star the wise men followed.

- ? **What have you heard about the nature of the star the wise men followed?**  
*Some may have heard that it was an aligning of certain planets and stars or that it was a comet. While there are certain attempts to explain a natural occurrence, these fall short of meeting the description of the star in the Bible.*

The word used in the text is *aster*, the normal word for star in Greek. But does this description in the text really match a star in the heavens?

- ? **What does the text say about the star that makes it clear this was a supernatural object and not simply a star up in the sky?** *The star moved before them as they went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and pointed to a specific house. A star in the sky could never identify a single house in a small town. This must have been a supernatural object that guided them to the correct house.*

As we read this text, we are going to draw out the two different responses to the birth of Jesus. We have just gone through the response of the wise men, so we are going to record how they responded in just a minute.

The star alerted the magi to the birth of Christ, prompting them to make the long trek to Jerusalem. These magi were "from the East" according to verse 1; they are generally thought to be from Persia, which is east of Jerusalem. If so, they may have had some knowledge of the Scriptures since the prophet Daniel had also lived in that region centuries earlier. Perhaps the magi were expecting a new star to announce the birth of Christ from reading Numbers 24:17, which describes a star coming from Jacob and a King ("scepter") from Israel. They knew this was the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews, so they went to Jerusalem to find Him, bearing gifts worthy for a King, and to offer Him the worship that was due Him.





# Two Responses

## MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

## INSTRUCTIONS

We have just worked through the response of the wise men to the birth of Jesus. In your Student Guide you will find an activity titled Two Responses. Our goal is to compare the response of the wise men with the response of King Herod. In the left column, write down the various aspects of how the wise men responded to the birth of Jesus. Start with their recognition of the star and work to their departure. Look back through the text to find the details and try to come up with six or seven points. After we finish reading

the rest of the passage we will go back and fill in the points for King Herod, so you might want to leave a little space between each point in case you recognize some **more contrasts later**. *Have the students work in small groups to complete the left column.*

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's have a couple of you share the responses of the wise men. *Have several people share and use the list below as a guide.*

*Responses of the wise men: they were looking for the coming of the King; they were willing to travel a great distance to find the King; they sought the new King diligently; they desired to worship the new King; they rejoiced when they were guided to the new King; they went to Bethlehem immediately; they worshipped the young King; they presented valuable gifts to the King; they obeyed God immediately when warned not to return to Herod.*



## READ THE WORD

Now that we have looked at the response of the wise men, let's finish reading the passage and focus on Herod's response to the new King of the Jews. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Matthew 2:13-18

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? **What did Joseph experience soon after the wise men departed?** *He received a dream, and an angel warned him to flee to Egypt for safety.*
- ? **What was the danger?** *Herod intended to kill the child.*
- ? **How would Joseph know when it was safe to return?** *He would receive word from the angel when it was safe. This was fulfilled approximately two years later after the death of Herod the Great as described in Matthew 2:19-23, fulfilling another prophecy of the Messiah. You can point out these dates on the New Testament History Poster.*
- ? **How quickly did Joseph carry out the orders of the angel?** *He left immediately, in the middle of the night.*

## Jeremiah 31:15

- ? **How did Herod respond upon hearing that the wise men had not returned?** *He was exceedingly angry.*
- ? **How did Herod find out about the wise men avoiding him as they left?** *The text does not say, but it is likely that they were seen leaving Bethlehem, and it was reported to Herod even though he had talked to them in secret asking them to return to him. Just as their arrival was known by many, their departure would have been the same.*
- ? **What did Herod order after finding out the wise men deceived him?** *He ordered the soldiers to go to Bethlehem and kill all the male children under two years old.*
- ? **How did Herod determine to kill the males from two years and younger?** *He had asked the wise men when the star appeared and used that as a gauge to determine who to kill.*
- ? **What does this tell us about the timing of the arrival of the wise men in Jerusalem?** *It tells us that they did not arrive on the night of the birth, but up to two years later.*
- ? **What was Herod's goal in ordering the killing of these children?** *He wanted to eliminate the new king since Herod was the current king over the Jews. While his exact motive is not stated, it is likely jealousy that drove him to murder so many children to cling to power.*
- ? **Did the murder of these children surprise God?** *Definitely not. The warning given to the wise men and Joseph and the prophecy in verse 18 make this clear.*
- ? **Where does the prophecy in verse 18 come from?** *It is a quote from Jeremiah 31:15.*
- ? **What is the immediate context of Jeremiah 31:15?** *Jeremiah was proclaiming this at the time of the Babylonian exile, so the women of Israel lamenting the destruction and its impacts on their children, including their deaths, was the immediate context. This shows the near and future context of many of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Matthew connected the grief over the death of children at the exile to the death experienced in Bethlehem on that cruel night.*

### Discover the Truth

Let's stop and think about King Herod for a minute. There are many different Herods mentioned in the New Testament. This is Herod the Great, also Herod Agrippa I, the first in the line, who reigned from 37–4 BC along with his brothers and father, Antipater. He was installed as the king of Judea by the Roman government in 40 BC and was an illegitimate king of the Jews, being from nearby Idumea (Edom) to the south. Herod was a murderous and extravagant man who had at least ten different wives. While he did many renovations and building projects in the region, including rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, he was a cruel man. That cruelty and his desire to cling to power and pass it on to his sons led him to attempt to murder the Messiah! In his desire for power, he was willing to kill any male child that might possibly be the one who had come to sit on the throne of David—the throne upon which Jesus rightly belonged. This was a wicked man who would even seek to kill God's Anointed to keep his power over this earthly kingdom.

- ? **What attributes of God are displayed in the warning to Joseph to flee to Egypt and the wise men being directed to avoid Herod on their return trip?** *Omniscient because He knew what would happen in the future; sovereign to direct both*

OMNISCIENT

SOVEREIGN

WISE

FAITHFUL

to safety and fulfill the “out of Egypt” prophecy; wise in directing the events to their intended end; faithful in preserving the life of the Messiah to fulfill the plan of redemption.

While Herod desired to take the throne away from Jesus, that was not possible. The throne of David was promised to Jesus by the Father, and no man could thwart the plan God had put in place. Herod’s response stands in direct contrast to the response of the wise men who submitted to King Jesus.

Turn back to the Two Responses activity in your Student Guides, and take a few minutes to fill in the Herod column. Try to contrast the points with the ideas in the Wise Men column, but make sure you don’t stretch the text too far.

➤ Refer back to the Two Responses activity.

*Responses of Herod: was not looking for the coming of the King (seemed to be unaware of the star and its meaning); he would not even go to Bethlehem to see the King; he said he wanted to worship the King, but really didn’t; he desired to kill the new King; he worked against God to kill the Christ; he got angry when his plans changed.*

After discussing the two responses, have the students answer the question at the bottom of the activity page: Write a short summary that describes each of the responses to Jesus as King.



## Applying God’s Word

### WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we think about the two responses we see in our text today, they are actually the only two reactions that people have when confronted with the truth that Jesus is King. You are either for Christ or you are against Him (Luke 11:23). There is no middle ground!

Throughout Scripture, Jesus is described as Lord—the master and king over all things. Each person is called to answer the question of who will be king over their lives. The wise men answered one way, and Herod answered the other.

- ? **How did you summarize the response of the wise men?** *The wise men acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the King of the Jews, offered Him gifts, and worshipped in submission to Him as King.*
- ? **How did you summarize the response of Herod?** *Herod denied Jesus the position of King and sought to deny Him His rightful place on the throne, even willing to kill Jesus rather than submit to Him as King and give up his own power.*

These are the two basic responses of all men who hear of Jesus as King.

So what about you? Have you submitted to Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords? Have you bowed your knee in worship and submission and offered your gifts to King Jesus? That was the response of the wise

men and all those who find salvation in Christ. Are you submitted to Christ as King?

Or, are you like Herod? You may be sitting here today in this classroom, and you have convinced others around you that you are following Jesus (as Herod told the wise men he intended to worship Jesus, but with false pretenses), when, in fact, you are offering Him vain worship, and you really have no intention of submitting to Him as King over your life. You don't really believe He is the Christ. You are the king, and you will not have this Jesus take your place on the throne. In fact, if you got the chance you would stage a rebellion and overthrow His kingdom and maybe even seek to kill Him. I know that may sound harsh, but it is a question you sincerely need to ask yourself.

Just as King Herod could not keep Jesus from taking His rightful place on the throne of David, no man can prevent Jesus from exercising His lordship. As we read in Philippians 2, every knee will bow to King Jesus—either here and now or at the final judgment.

## **GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD**

- ? What was one interesting nugget from the text today that you would like to share with another believer, and what would you hope to teach them or encourage them in? *Discuss various answers, reminding the students that as we learn, we can pass that knowledge on to others as we disciple them or encourage them with truth.*
- ? If you have a nativity set that you use at Christmas, what adjustments might you need to make as you set it up in the future? *Many nativity sets include three wise men and a few camels. To be accurate, you might want to place the wise men and their camels to the east of the nativity scene. This might actually lead people to ask why the magi are on the other side of the room, and then you can share that they surely came long after the night of the birth, opening the Bible to show them the truth.*

? As you think about your friends and family, can you identify those who you believe are truly submitting to Jesus as King and those who are holding on to the throne for themselves? What evidences do you see for your conclusion? *We are told that we can recognize those who are true believers in Christ (good trees) by their fruits (Matthew 7:15–19). Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit should be evident in the lives of Christians and not the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:16–26).*

? How could you use this passage to help someone who you do not believe is truly in Christ? *You could sit down with someone who may not be submitted to Christ as King and read this account to help them see the contrast in the two responses. Then ask them which one they identify with. Are they submitted to Christ as King or clinging to power over their own life?*

? How could you use this passage to show someone else the faithfulness of God? *God had promised to send the Messiah to redeem mankind from sin. The messages delivered to Joseph and the wise men show that God was directing all of these events to His intended purpose. His faithfulness is present in the fulfilled prophecies and in ensuring that the young Jesus would survive the murderous intents of Herod. All of this reminds us of the absolute trust we can place in our faithful God.*



### MEMORY VERSE

**Philippians 2:8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for the Scriptures to guide us in truth.
- Praise God for His faithfulness to send the Redeemer.
- Ask God for a passion to serve Him as King of kings.

