

The Eighth Day of Christmas: Pharaoh and the Magicians

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. For the eighth day of Christmas, I'm going to be continuing to look at echoes and symmetries within the nativity and infancy stories of Christ. As we look in the Gospels, we see a number of ways in which they connect with later stories and also with earlier stories from the Old Testament.

Here I'm going to be returning to chapter 2 of Matthew and to consider the character of Herod and the surrounding cast of characters and to think more about what they might signify.

Some of the connections that exist between Herod and other characters, such as Hadad and Pharaoh, I've already mentioned. I've talked about the way in which he's significant as an Edomite king, the way that he's connected with the Canaanites, he's connected with Pharaoh.

And then Christ, by contrast, is connected with Moses, with Israel and being brought out of the land, these sorts of things, out of the land of Egypt. There are other characters within the picture, though, and it's interesting to think about the way that the Gospel writer is using these to draw attention, to fill out the picture, to show us more about what Herod is, the significance of what is happening.

One of the ways we can see Herod being subverted is even within the quotes themselves. So, for instance, the statement that's made in verse 6, where the Old Testament is cited, Micah 5, verse 2, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the city's rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

[1 : 29] Now, if you read that text, you will be, if you don't know your Old Testament very well, you may not notice anything. But if you do know your Old Testament well, you'll notice that the quote has been changed.

There's been an extra bit on the end, spliced on, which comes from the story of 1 Samuel, or 2 Samuel. And it relates to David being set up as king instead of Saul, and that God had said to David, It will be you who will shepherd my people Israel.

And that is significant. It helps us to see that even within the quotation from the scribes, that there is, and the chief priests, there is a subversion of Herod's rule. That the true king, the one who will take the place of Saul, who himself is compared to Pharaoh and Canaanite kings, that he's replaced by David, and Herod, another Saul-like figure, who seeks the life of this David, is going to be replaced.

And so, we see a filling out of the picture even further. There's this broadening cast of characters, and there's also this deepening of the typological movements that are taking place. As we look at this sort of detail, we can see that there's a lot more going on in this text than we might first think. What else is going on? Well, we've looked at Herod as Pharaoh. What does this mean for the chief priests and the scribes of his court?

[2 : 58] Well, they play a role similar to the magicians of Pharaoh's court. They are the supporting cast, the people who surround Herod and support him and act on his behalf, and act in contrast to the people who have come to truly worship this king of the Jews.

And who are they? They're the Magi. And the Magi are associated with magic and other arts and things like that, which we might naturally associate with the magicians of Pharaoh's court.

But here there's a reversal. Here it is those who we expect to be the foreign magicians who come to worship the newborn king. And it's the chief priests and the scribes of the court that are seeking to destroy and subvert in the name of Herod, who's the Pharaoh figure in this picture.

And this helps us to see again that this picture is a fuller one than we might first think. The Pharaoh figure, the Pharaoh connection is familiar to people, but there is more that can be teased out from

that.

And the significance of the Magi coming fits in with some broader themes within Matthew. At the beginning of his gospel, he's already emphasised characters such as characters who represent outliers, who are Gentiles or people who are otherwise seen as potentially disreputable, who have been part of Christ's family tree.

[4 : 32] And here we see something similar, that there are Gentiles who come to worship this newborn king. Just as we see Gentiles coming at key moments in Israel's history to support them in whether that's Jethro supporting Moses, whether it's someone like Melchizedek bringing out bread and wine after the victory of the kings in chapter 14 of Genesis, whether it's Hiram supporting David in the collecting material for the temple and Solomon, or whether it's these figures such as Cyrus with his decree.

In many of these cases, we see Gentiles assisting the people of God, providing material and support. And once again, we have Magi, we have foreigners, we have Gentiles coming to provide material, giving their material to help this new temple building project, as it were.

They are the ones who are going to assist and to support the Messiah as he establishes his kingdom and as he builds his temple.

And their gifts, I think, are associated with that. I could get into those perhaps in a later video. I won't discuss them here. Taking all these things together, we see a fuller picture of the pharaoh antagonist as Herod.

And we also see this filling out of the picture to see the larger establishment of Jerusalem. The chief priests and the scribes and how they are all part of this house of bondage, of Pharaoh, this new pharaoh's court.

[6 : 05] And they're all implicated in various ways. They are the magicians that serve with Pharaoh. And they must be overcome. And this new king, in an ironic statement, is declared to be the one who will subvert the Saul figure.

The Edomite king is going to be removed. And this new king is going to take his place. And even within the text itself, we see Christ returning to the land after the death of this pharaoh figure. Later on, we see a similar thing in the story of Acts 12. As God raises up his servant Peter, he strikes down the character of Herod. Putting all these things together, then, we have a fuller picture, a richer understanding of these themes that are to play.

And we will be able to understand how this sets a foundation for the deeper conflicts that animate this book and the Gospels as a whole. Thank you very much for listening.

Lord willing, you found this helpful. And I hope that you have a great day. I'll be back again tomorrow with further reflection. And if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to leave them in my Curious Cat account.

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