

11.

Young Boys Murdered at Bethlehem

With the wise men's delay, Herod the Great finally realized he had been deceived and he became very enraged. This tyrant, who was capable of killing his own sons, sent his dreaded henchmen to Bethlehem mounted on thunderous steeds. They stormed out of the northern gates and took the southern road past the moat of the Serpent's Pool. Only six miles of hillsides covered with vineyards lay ahead.

It is believed that Herod's henchmen timed their ride so that their arrival coincided with the gathering of the women accompanied by their young children in the morning marketplace within the dusty square of the village. Here they drew water from the community well and prepared for their routine chores surrounding the town's merchant shops.



Finally the riders arrived beneath the thunderous hooves of their panting mounts. Following their leader's direction, they ruthlessly slew all the male infants two years old and under, showing no remorse. No child was spared from their razor sharp swords. Sons were torn from their mothers' shielding arms in the Community Square. Homes were broken into and searched as blood flowed everywhere. Each woman who tried to run was caught and her child violently murdered. (see Matthew 2:16)

Each weeping mother quickly gathered her bludgeoned son. In bitter sorrow, they refused to be comforted by family and friends alike. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted this dreadful event by saying, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."⁵² (**Matthew 2:18**)

Finished at Bethlehem, Herod's henchmen must have learned of a young couple's escape believed within the wise men's caravan. Wasting no time, they pushed their mounts farther and stormed south to catch the wise men. Hebron would be next to feel Herod's wrath. Sixteen miles later, beneath a scorching sun with their panting horses covered in sweat, the henchmen quickly searched the city before rushing southward. Afraid to rest their mounts, some 24 miles to Beer-sheba lay ahead. By nightfall, the henchmen reached the city but learned that the wise men had traveled east up the eastern side of the Dead Sea and a couple with an infant boy continued west.

Staying only to rest, water and feed their horses, the pursuit continued. But within 15 miles, the horses had reached their limit of endurance after 60 miles. Mary now began to collapse under the task given them as man and animal toppled along the route. Forced to stop, the henchmen waited out the night. According to the gospel of Matthew, at first light the pursuit continued all the way to the Mediterranean seacoast, which was Herod the Great's most western territory. Reaching what is called today the Gaza strip area, the henchmen could go no further as their mission to overtake the couple sought by the wise men had failed!

⁵² Jeremiah 31:15.