

# The Heart of the Matter

Jesus was born while the oppressive and brutal Roman Empire and its appointed king, Herod the Great, ruled the Jewish people. Herod was a descendant of the Idumeans who had earlier been forced to convert to Judaism. Therefore, Herod was “half-Jewish” but he was also pagan and a loyal vassal to Rome. He was not just politically conflicted, however; he was a very sick and paranoid man who trusted no one and even murdered his own wife and sons as a result. He was also brilliant, extremely wealthy and one of the greatest builders of the Roman Empire. Herod put little Judea on the world map.

It was into this setting that Jesus was born and ministered. He knew how the Jewish people were longing for a savior to free them from this oppressive rule. Just the taxation alone was crippling them but the brutality and immorality surrounding them were suffocating. They prayed for the One who had been promised to their forefathers to come and establish the kingdom of God over them.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to the young virgin, Mary, and announced the birth of Jesus, he told her that this child was the one they awaited: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32–33, NIV).

Jesus’ ministry seemed to prove this. He spoke with an authority beyond any teacher and His miracles were so great they demonstrated His divinity. Surely He was the one they were looking for to free them from the brutal rule of Rome.

But Jesus’ real reason for coming was to reveal His Father’s heart of love to the people and die on behalf of their sins. His teachings pointed the people toward the heart of the matter. His actions demonstrated God’s righteousness and

mercy. It would climax with the death of Jesus on the cross to pay the price for their sins. This was how much God loved them and we, in return, should love Him with all our hearts, and then love and forgive others.

Now was not the time to confront empires or establish the throne of David over the House of Jacob, as the angel Gabriel had announced. That was for a future day.

Join me for this week's Out of Zion podcast on "The Heart of the Matter." Susan's Walk Thru the New Testament is the final quarter of her year-long Walk Thru the Bible series. Get started right away by downloading our Bible reading plan! Invite your friends and family to join us! {eoa}

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