

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

God's Stability In An Unsettled World At Christmas

Part III: God's Stability Amid Dangerous Government Intrigue At Christmas

(Matthew 2:1-15)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

In recent years, various Church members have expressed concern about what they believe is dangerous government intrigue in the nation and world, and we can document facts that cause such concern (as follows):

(1) Ryan Struyk of ABC News ("What you need to know about the 'deep state,'" April 29, 2017; abcnews.go.com) claimed that "nearly half of Americans believe there is a 'deep state' operating within the federal government," a group of "officials who try to secretly [sic] manipulate government policy."

(2) Politically conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh is one such American: he recently said that the real purpose of the Mueller investigation that was launched to find complicity between Russia and President Trump in the presidential election "has been to just [sic] rein Trump in and stop him . . . It has basically been a deep state plot . . . (T)hey started all this [investigating] knowing full well there wasn't any crime here . . ." (Rush Limbaugh, "The Deep State's Original Purpose Was To Rein In Trump," December 7, 2018; rushlimbaugh.com; brackets ours)

(3) Even politically liberal entities have hinted of government intrigue: huffingtonpost.com posted Dierdre Imus' piece, "FDA: Another Government Regulatory Disaster - II of III," May 25, 2011, that told of a January 2, 1970 San Francisco Chronicle story and claimed, "Following three frustrating years as FDA Commissioner, Dr. Herbert Lay resigned and told the San Francisco Chronicle, 'The thing that bugs me is that people think the FDA is protecting them. It isn't. What the FDA is doing and what the public thinks it's doing are as different as night and day.'"

Need: *So, we ask, "If we possibly face dangerous government intrigue this Christmas, how are we to respond?!"*

- I. Matthew 2:1-3 reveals that the arrival of the magi to Jerusalem with their request for the location of the newborn King of the Jews that they might pay him homage troubled King Herod and all Jerusalem.**
- II. Scripture does NOT explain WHY these parties were troubled, but secular history reveals that this Matthew 2:1-3 event would have left Joseph, Mary and Jesus facing dangerous government intrigue:**
- A. The Magi were Parthians, and Rome and the Parthians had fought over the control of Israel, and even Herod had to defeat Parthians to gain access to his throne in Jerusalem, Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, v. Four, p. 32-34.
 - B. The Magi were also powerful kingmakers who were disposed to favoring Jewish over Roman rule, so their arrival in Roman territory was obviously threatening to Herod who ruled by Roman power. (Ibid., p. 33-34)
 - C. For the Magi to ask for the newborn king of the Jews that they might pay him homage threatened Herod even more: he was an Edomite, so the birth of a Jewish king meant Herod's reign was at risk, Ibid., v. Three, p. 126.
 - D. However, Herod was greatly inhibited from taking any military action against the Magi party:
 - 1. For Parthian Magi to infiltrate Israel, potentially hostile Roman territory, they would have come under a large cavalry escort (Ibid., v. Four, p. 34). Herod could not attack such a large Parthian cavalry without using equally great force, and that risked escalating tensions with Parthia and getting Caesar's attention.
 - 2. However, Herod had been demoted from being Caesar's "friend" to being his "subject" for invading Arabia to quell foes there (Wm. Whiston, Josephus, 1974; citing Josephus, Antiquities, xvi. 9. 3, p. 350), so Herod was under pressure to avoid inciting war with nations like Parthia lest Caesar remove him from power!
 - E. Accordingly, Herod planned to utilize the Magi as his unsuspecting informants to learn of the Infant Messiah's location so that after the Magi had left Israel, he could quickly find and quietly kill the Infant, Matthew 2:4-8:
 - 1. Herod summoned all of the chief priests and scribes together and asked them where the long-expected Jewish Messiah was to be born, and they answered that it was in Bethlehem of Judah, Matthew 2:4-6.
 - 2. King Herod then secretly summoned the Magi to ask them when the star they had seen that indicated the Hebrew king had been born had actually appeared, Matthew 2:7.
 - 3. Thus, aware of the town where the Infant abode and the time of his birth so that Herod would know what age of child to kill and where, Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem to search for the Infant and then bring him word of His location that Herod, in his lying words, might also come and pay Him homage, Matt. 2:8.
 - F. The magi then traveled south Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and the star they had seen that signaled the birth of the Hebrew king miraculously moving south to lead them to the house where the Infant dwelt, Matt. 2:9. This event fulfilled an ancient belief and expectancy of such stellar guidance (A. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 2004, p. 144, fn. 22), so seeing this star's movement caused the Magi great joy, Matt. 2:10.

G. The arrival of the Magi under large Parthian cavalry escort in little Bethlehem to visit Jesus would have made Him and the belief that He was the expected Messiah common knowledge in the town. Also, the shepherds on His birth night had already proclaimed abroad the words of the angels about Jesus so that the countryside and town of Bethlehem already knew Him to be the alleged Messiah, Luke 2:8-18. Thus, were the humanly unsuspecting Joseph, Mary and Jesus to stay in Bethlehem, Herod would *easily* have found and slain Jesus!

III. However, with Joseph, Mary and Jesus being humanly ignorant of and vulnerable to the dangerous government intrigue they faced, God sent them a warning to move them out of danger, Matt. 2:12-15:

- A. The Parthian cavalry's presence in the area kept Herod from pursuing the Infant Jesus in Bethlehem: the Magi sought to honor the Infant where Herod sought to kill Him, and Herod would not risk conflict with Parthians over an Infant since doing so might incite war with Parthia that would anger Caesar and cost Herod his throne!
- B. Thus, God got the Magi out of the area while Herod thought they were still there, delaying Herod's pursuit of the Infant Messiah and giving time for Joseph, Mary and Jesus to escape: the Lord did so by warning the Magi in a dream not to return to Herod, so they departed for their country without returning to Herod, Matt. 2:12.
- C. Once they left the area, God's angel quickly told Joseph in a dream to take Mary and Jesus and flee into Egypt and to stay there until further notice, for Herod would seek Jesus to kill Him, Matt. 2:13. This dream to a man who we learned in our last message viewed dreams as God's sign highly motivated Joseph to take Mary and Jesus that same night and begin a rapid flight from Bethlehem into Egypt, Matthew 2:14.
- D. Their relocation fit God's plan to have His Son identified with Egypt in fulfillment of Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15.
- E. By the time Herod learned that the Magi had left Israel for their own country, Joseph, Mary and Jesus were outside the area that Herod believed the Infant Messiah would be located, and they were headed into Egypt, another foreign country that Herod could not attack without likely losing his throne for angering Caesar!

Lesson: *When Joseph, Mary and Jesus were humanly unaware of the dangerous government intrigue they faced, God sovereignly used the Magi and Rome's Emperor Caesar Augustus to inhibit Herod from pursuing them and provided credible guidance that they needed to escape harm and fulfill His assignments for their lives.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. (2) As Revelation 17-18 reveals that a secret, evil religious, economic and governmental entity powered by Satan known as Babylon the Great is now forming and foments dangerous intrigue, (3) may we trust God to check the activities of this entity as He did king Herod so we can function in His will and (4) supply us (a) the Scripture and (b) circumstantial signals we need to do His will.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply this lesson to the issues mentioned in our sermon introduction (as follows):

(1) Regarding the Food and Drug Administration, Proverbs 20:12 ESV claims, "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord had made them both," so God wants us to use our eyes and ears coupled with our brains for insight!

In doing this, (a) we recall from our introduction that even according to politically liberal sources, Dr. Herbert Lay resigned as Commissioner of the FDA after three frustrating years, telling the San Francisco Chronicle the FDA was not protecting us! (b) Also, medical people tell us to heed how our bodies react to what we feed them and how we treat them. (c) We also note that when we tell our doctor we are not taking any prescription drugs, the doctor usually responds by saying, "Good!" Thus, even doctors often imply it is good not to need to take prescription drugs!

So, applying Proverbs 20:12 ESV, we should practice **preventative** medicine to minimize our exposure to the FDA in the event that it is involved in dangerous government intrigue. We thus must rely on the Holy Spirit for the self control (Gal. 5:16-23) to get the sleep, exercise and food we need to live as free of prescription drugs as we can!

(2) On the "deep state" issue, (a) Scripture reveals we face a oppressive opposition: (i) Revelation 17-18 claims there has **long** been a growing, evil "deep state" of Babylon the Great in religious, economic and government realms that is under Satan's influence. (ii) Daniel 2:43 predicted that the late stage of the Roman Empire, including Europe and the U. S., would be partly strong and partly weak, with its races of men not mixing. (iii) Revelation 3:21 in its context predicted a mini-Great Tribulation of intrigue by despotic leaders for our era. (iv) Thus, we **must** fellowship in Biblical churches for God's instruction and spiritual balm. (b) To function in today's secular world, we must heed 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (i) to live as **independent** of government agencies as is possible, minimizing our exposure to dangerous government intrigue, (ii) to live **quiet** lives that minimize attracting negative government attention and (iii) become as **financially independent** as we can for a good testimony and to avoid material need.

May we trust in Christ for salvation. May we heed Scripture and God's circumstantial signals to deal with dangerous government intrigue as God leads that we might align with His will and enjoy His blessing!