

Wise Men Special 25-12-24a

Greetings, it is Wednesday night here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. It is the 24th of December, 2025. We are going to have a single session Christmas special tonight so that we can get back to our festivities of the season with our families and other hangers-on and seekers of snacks.

But we're going to do a study that I seriously doubt is being investigated anywhere in the world on this date, although maybe it should be, and one that we have certainly never done before, but I find it a fascinating subject. I think it will be helpful and meaningful, and I hope you will find it as challenging and as fruitful for reflection and meditation as I have. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we will begin our time of fellowship in Matthew chapter two, shall we pray? Father, it is such a privilege to be called by your name, to have access to you directly, to represent ourselves as priests under the lordship and priesthood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We thank you for him. We thank you for the occasion that we celebrate at this time of the year, his coming to earth to partake of our human flesh, to be one of us so that he can serve as our faithful high priest and the exceptional privilege we have of, in this age, being added to his body and being a unique and special gift to him from you. We thank you for the many provisions that we have, not the least of which is the presence and power of your spirit to lead us and guide us in the investigation of your word.

We pray that as we look at this portion of scripture together this evening, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts in such a way that it will be helpful to us now and in the days ahead and enable us to live our lives in a way that reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name, amen. As I said, we are going to be in Matthew chapter two.

This is the story of the wise men, very familiar. I might begin with a pop quiz. How many wise men does scripture say there were? And if you say three, you've been listening to too much Christmas music.

That is an inference based on the gifts that they bring. Doesn't say there were three, doesn't give their names with Malkior and all the rest of that. Let's read the passage as is our custom to make sure we are on solid ground as we begin.

Matthew chapter two. Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, look, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, 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. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they, the chief priests and scribes said to him in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Take note, shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search carefully for the

young child. And when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also.

When they heard the king, they departed. And look, behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Now, verse 13, when they had departed, look, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, arise, take the young child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he awoke, he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, out of Egypt, I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet saying, a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel, weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more. That of course is Jeremiah 31, 15. Now, when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

It's, you can't help but be startled when you read those words. It's appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. Dreams, Joseph, Egypt.

How severely does that resonate with our understanding of the latter chapters of Genesis? An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, arise, take the young child and his mother, go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead. Then he arose, took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judah instead of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene. Now, I find this shocking in a way.

The actions of God here are very inscrutable. Can you think why? Let me go back and review. The wise men come from the East, they come to Jerusalem, because that is as far as they know to come.

It does not say that they followed the star from the East to Jerusalem. The star appeared in the East, they packed up and came to Jerusalem, Jerusalem being the capital and the residence of the purported King of Israel. But it doesn't say the star led them there.

Where is he? We have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him. The songs say there are three wise men and they followed the star from the East, but that's not what scripture says. The star appeared, it communicated to them that there was a newborn King of Israel.

And from that celestial appearance, they determined to go and worship him. And so they go to Jerusalem. Now, interview with Herod, scribes say, go to Bethlehem.

The star then appears in verse nine. When they heard the King, they departed and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. And it doesn't say that it took them long to get them to Bethlehem.

We don't know where it took them. They set out for Bethlehem, but the star appeared and guided them to where the child, parentheses, actually was. And he is now in a house, not in a stable or an inn or a cave or a barn for sheep, he's in a house.

And we know from the time that was determined in verse 16 by the appearance of the star, when they saw in the East an appearance of the star, the wise men, it takes time to assemble a caravan, to travel, to arrive. And evidently this was something measured in months, not days. You are well aware that the shepherds and the wise men didn't come to the stable on the same night.

This is well after the birth. The Lord Jesus is now a young child living in a house somewhere in Judea, whereabouts specifically unknown. Could be in Bethlehem, could be near Bethlehem, could be almost anywhere.

Here's my question. When they find the child and worship him and present the gifts, look at verse 12. Verse 12 is the sticking point.

Matthew chapter two, verse 12. This is the subject of our study, the central tenet of what we wanna look at tonight. Being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

God has been actively guiding the wise men. He ensures that the star appears and guides them to the location where the Lord Jesus and his family are, right? They are able to worship him. And then the star is guiding them.

Now they are warned in a dream, don't go back to Herod. Now that you know where the child actually is, don't return. Here's my question.

Why didn't God warn them in a dream as they were leaving the East and heading for Jerusalem, don't go there and don't talk to Herod? Because that's going to endanger the life of the child. See, the star is moving over your head. Just follow the star directly to where the child is, bypass Jerusalem and don't talk to Herod.

Hypothetically speaking, what would be the result of that? Take a look at verse 16 again. When Herod saw he was deceived by the wise men and was angry, he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its districts from two years old and under. This is perhaps hundreds of two years old male children and under.

This could easily have been avoided if Herod had not been alerted to the birth of a child that the wise men think is the king of Israel. God does not divert the wise men until after they have come to see the child. As a result, in accordance with the way God has and has not provided guidance, hundreds and hundreds of male babies, not just in Bethlehem, but in all of its surrounding districts are slaughtered.

This has been historically referred to as the slaughter of the innocents. They are babies. They have done nothing.

Their families have done nothing. It is an accident of time and place, so to speak, from a human point of view, in terms of their birth. So here's my question.

God obviously knew that Herod would react when the wise men did not return after a period of days. God knew that he would send forth and slaughter these infants, and God did not stop it. God did not prevent the wise men from alerting Herod to the birth, nor did God warn the soldiers who went forth in a dream or divert them or stop them in any way.

What are we to think about this? It's a Christmas tragedy. And as I said, people love to dwell on the wise men kneeling and presenting their boxes of gifts. Not so much attention paid to this infanticide that is a direct result of their visit.

Direct result and easily preventable. God is appearing in guiding stars and in dreams to the wise men. He is warning Joseph in dreams what to do and what not to do, tells him explicitly where to go, how long to stay, when to return.

But why does he allow this tragedy to unfold? The more you think about this, the more puzzling it can seem. This is in circa 4 BC. This is shortly before Herod the Great's death that this situation occurs.

He is called Herod I or Herod the Great. He was born about 72 BC. So he is in his late 60s at this time.

He refurbished the second temple in Jerusalem. He is the one that spent the money to expand it, including the Western Wall, what's called the Wailing Wall today. That was built by Herod the Great.

Josephus has recorded many of the details of his life, but he is most famous for this massacre at which we are looking. And when you go to the Bible, most of the references to Herod in the gospels are to his son Antipas, execution of John the Baptist, being troubled over the Lord Jesus. Is he, John come back to life and so on.

Matthew chapter 14 details this, but that is the son of this Herod. Herod the Great is from Edomia, which is an area south of Judea. And he is not Jewish.

Herod's father was an Edomite. The Edomians, Edom is Edom. So when you see Edomian, just think Edomite.

So the Edomians in days past had been forcibly converted to Judaism, kind of against their will. And so Herod was raised as a Jew. Strabo, the historian who is a contemporary of

Herod, said that the Edomians constituted the majority of the population of Western Judea, where they commingled with Judeans and adopted their customs.

But Herod rose to power through his father's good relations with Julius Caesar, who at the time was a Roman general and became dictator. And Herod was appointed the provincial governor of Galilee around 47 BC. He was 25 or 28 years old, depending on who you read.

He ridded the region of bandits and collected a lot of taxes and got himself in good graces with the Roman government as a result. And so he was backed by Rome, but was condemned by the Sanhedrin for his brutality. He achieved his objectives through quite a lot of violence toward the population.

So to cut a long story short, his religious commitment was only political. And we've seen politicians do this, claim Christianity or mention the Bible or whatever, because it's politically advantageous. Refurbishing the temple was to curry favor, especially with the aristocracy.

And Herod sort of created an aristocracy within the region of Jerusalem and Judea. And these are the Herodians. And you can see where their loyalties would at best be divided because they enjoyed status and wealth as a result of this action on Herod's part.

But Herod was eventually granted the title King of Judea by the Roman Senate. So he's a vassal of the Roman Empire and he's expected to support the Romans. And around the time that Cleopatra married Antony, he got tangled up in that and he had to pick a side and so he chose Antony.

And when Antony gets defeated by Octavian, this is another threat to Herod's wellbeing and it starts to make him paranoid that he's gonna be unseated and lose his long standing throne. This is around 31 BC. And so his support from Rome enabled him to continue to maintain his rule as a despot.

But he gets more and more paranoid. He has three sons and he eventually murders them all because he's afraid they're going to kill him first and take his throne. So he's paranoid.

And when the wise men show up and say, here's a young child that's been born King of the Jews, he is taking no chances and violence is a common recourse for him. He's used to it. This is how he has ruled for decades.

So people sometimes say, well, how come there isn't any record of this terrible tragedy? It was a commonplace that he would commit murders and purges, it didn't even raise eyebrows, especially not in a relatively small rural district, somewhere in the Roman Empire. Oh, there's that Herod killing people again. So that's a little bit about him.

But the question is he's killed three of his sons, Alexander, Aristobulus and Antipater. He executed his wife, Mariamne, who was a Hasmonean princess, one of the ways that he had some legitimacy to be King of the Jews. The Hasmoneans did have some Jewish roots, but he was preemptive.

He would eliminate people proactively. And that's why Augustus would later say, it is better to be Herod's pig than his son, which is a pun in Greek because huos is pig and huos is son. Better to be his huos than his huos.

And so you can understand the psychology of his purge of anybody. Since he can't find the individual child, he'll just wipe them all out. So he is going to soon die from a prolonged and painful illness.

Josephus gives gory details of the ugly way in which he died. And his kingdom will be divided among his remaining unexecuted sons. Archelaus is gonna get Judea and Samaria, but about 10 years after Herod's death, he's gonna be deposed.

And Antipas, who initially gets Galilee and Perea, is going to inherit from his brother the Judea and Samaria area. So he'll have Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and Perea. And the brother, Philip, will have the northeastern territories that aren't pertinent for our purposes.

So this is the Herod that God allows the magi, the wise men from the east to visit. Why? Let me, first of all, set a stage for this. All of us can look at circumstances in our own lives and in the lives of others that are similar.

There's a church bus full of teenagers coming back from a camp. There's a tragic accident. It goes over a cliff and they all die.

Young people, seemingly with a lightning strike, are taken from their families, are struck with disease or calamity. Young couples, all sorts of vagaries strike even believers, and it has overthrown the faith of many, who say, what's the point of being a Christian if God's not gonna look out for me and smooth my path and prevent egregious tragedies? You could look at this situation in Bethlehem of Judea and its surrounding districts as an example. Why did God let this happen? These children have done nothing.

Their families have done nothing. They are Bethlehemites. They are Judeans.

They are the very people of David, people of God who have done no wrong. And this is indiscriminate. It doesn't say the rebellious, the faithless, the ones toying with idolatry.

They're just not guilty of anything, and this enormous tragedy strikes. Losing a child, it's hard to think of anything worse. There are things that match it in all of our experience.

And where is God? And God manifestly, the more you read this chapter, God allowed this. God could have stopped it and didn't. He ensures that the Lord Jesus is not caught up in this purge by sending Joseph and Mary with him to Egypt and having him remain there.

Why didn't he lead an exodus in reverse of all of the families that had young children? Lead them all down to Egypt. We could be reading that story, but we don't. So here is the question that I think we can answer by looking at this story.

When unaccountable, unforeseen, and seemingly undeserved and even unjustified suffering enters our lives, what are we to think about our heavenly father and his lack of intervention on our behalf? This, I think, will serve as a classic example to help us understand what God is up to. So this is my suggestion for our Christmas study. Let's look at the slaughter that is in

one perspective, and you will find atheists and reconstruct, deconstruct people who throw rocks at God and saying, if this is the God that we worship and serve, why on earth would he allow these innocent babies to be slaughtered when he could have easily warned off the wise men? Why? Ask yourself that question.

Can you immediately think of a solution? Well, God's ways are higher than our ways. He must be up to something. True, but I think we can be more specific from scripture.

Number one, who is aware of the birth of the Lord Jesus as a result of the wise men's visit in Jerusalem? Read the story again. It's so easy to overlook. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came.

Where is he who was born King of the Jews? Saw his star. Look at verse three. When Herod the King heard, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

This wasn't a private conversation in an inner chamber with the King. All Jerusalem hears the testimony of the wise men. Think about that.

All Jerusalem is troubled by this testimony. It is being talked about in the marketplaces from house to house, in the streets, caravans coming and going. Look at this large delegation of sophisticated academic wise men who have come all of this distance because they have seen a sign that there is a King born to Israel.

What are we to make of this? It is the talk of the town. All Jerusalem hears it and is troubled. Who else knows? Herod gathers all the chief priests and scribes of the people together and inquires of them where the Christ is to be born.

How many of the chief priests? How many of the scribes? How many of the scholars who are responsible for understanding scripture? All of them. Who in Jerusalem is aware that there is a sign in the heavens of the birth of the Messiah? Everyone. Everyone.

How many of them follow the wise men as they leave Jerusalem initially headed for Bethlehem? How many of the scribes put down their pens and their parchments? How many of the chief priests leave their duties to an assistant or a subordinate and say, I'm gonna turn aside and see this great sight like Moses did at the burning bush? Nobody. Nobody in Jerusalem follows the wise men. Certainly not that we know of.

They're not mentioned in scripture. What does this do? What does the delivery of this message to Herod, to the chief priests, to the scribes, and to all the people of Jerusalem do? What does it do? It creates responsibility. This is an opportunity to respond to the prophetic scriptures.

This is an opportunity to seek out the ongoing actions of God on behalf of His people, Israel, and nobody does it. I say, this is a thing to be avoided. This is something we should take to heart and prevent in ourselves.

If God is revealing His work and His word and His will to us, we don't want to be apathetic and indifferent. It reminds you of what happens in the parable, Jesus will tell 30 years hence, when He says, the king was giving a great wedding feast and he sent out invitations and people said, I'm too busy. I've got property to visit.

I've got something I need to buy. I've got distractions. I'm caught up.

I can't leave aside my normal life to investigate this important happening or to attend it or to celebrate. Nobody leaves. So the scribes have quoted Micah 5, verse two, you Bethlehem, right? Not the least among the rulers of Judah, out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel.

The shepherd is born. Nobody goes to see him. Only these wise men that have already traversed such a great distance because they believe.

And when they find him, they will fall down and worship. But it's, it's gosh. It's not classy.

It's, it's not seemly to believe that something like this could happen. All things go on as they have for decades and centuries. This can't be it.

I don't wanna be ill thought of by my neighbors or my coworkers or my fellow aristocrats. So no, no, no, I'm not gonna go. By the way, think about your Christmas story knowledge has there been a previous testimony to the birth of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem? Remember Simeon and Anna and the visit on the eighth day for the baby Jesus to be circumcised.

And Anna goes and tells all those who were looking for the hope of Israel, that she has seen the Christ child. Simeon says, now I can go in peace. I have seen the Lord's salvation.

That was months earlier. This is a second testimony in Jerusalem to the birth of the child. Not only that, but on the night of the birth, a week before Simeon and Anna, who saw and celebrated and told everyone they knew, the shepherds.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. There is the testimony of the shepherds. There's the testimony of Simeon and Anna.

Now there is the testimony of the wise men. And nobody leaves. Nobody goes.

Nobody believes enough to set aside. And what is the message for us? There is a consequence. And Herod, the chief priests, the scribes, and the people of Jerusalem are culpable.

They are accountable for what they do with the testimony. As are we, right? We are accountable for what we hear and what we learn, and it ought to make a difference. How high does it rise in our priorities to remember who we are and why we're here and what the Lord Jesus has done for us and the privileges He has conferred on us, the promises that He has made to us if we persevere, if we trust in the face of what seems unaccountable.

So Jerusalem, as well as Herod and the leadership are put on notice. The scribes identify Bethlehem, but they don't go. They do not seek to worship.

These guys from the East fall down and worship. Those who are in charge of worship for the nation of Israel can't be bothered even to check. Much less to worship themselves.

Gentile seekers, we imagine these guys are Gentiles. They traveled hundreds of miles to bring gifts and to worship. The covenant people of God can't travel a few miles to even check and see if it's so.

So you can put with this Matthew chapter 11, verses 20 through 24. Matthew 11, 20 through 24, Jesus began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done because they did not repent. Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you. How important is it for us to not be distracted, to not be swept along by popular opinion, popular concept, popular attitudes, popular behaviors, instead of what is responsible and accountable as the people of God? How important is it for us not just to hear the word of God? Everybody heard Micah 5.2 quoted. How many people responded and did something about it? Matthew is going to explicitly connect this to Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 15.

Turn back with me or listen to me read Jeremiah 31. 31, the context of this. In Jeremiah chapter 31, the specific passage is verse 15.

This is a promise that there is a remnant in Israel that will be saved. At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel. They shall be my people.

Thus says the Lord, the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness. Israel, when I went to give him rest, the Lord has appeared of old to me saying, yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving kindness, I have drawn you.

Again, I will build you and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel. You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, go forth in dances of those who rejoice. You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria.

The planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food. For there shall be a day when the watchman will cry on Mount Ephraim, arise and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord, our God. For thus says the Lord, sing with gladness for Jacob, shout among the chief of the nations, proclaim, give praise and say, O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.

Behold, I will bring them from the north country, gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them, the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child together, a great throng shall return there. They shall come with weeping and with supplications, I will lead them.

I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way in which they shall not stumble. For I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord,

O nations, declare it in the isles afar off and say, he who scattered Israel would gather him and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.

Keep him as a shepherd does his flock. For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the Lord for wheat and new wine and oil.

For the young of the flock and the herd, their souls shall be like a well-watered garden and they shall sorrow no more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, the young men and the old together. I will turn their mourning to joy.

I will comfort them. I will make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priest with abundance and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord.

What a promise of blessing. What an opportunity. Thus says the Lord, verse 15, a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children because they are no more.

This is quoted in our context. It is tragic and seemingly undeserved, unaccountable, unjust, unfair. What's the purpose? How does this do any good? Keep reading.

Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. What does the New Testament say the last enemy to be destroyed is? The last enemy to be destroyed is death, according to the Apostle Paul. They shall be restored.

They shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border. Rachel weeping and cannot be comforted.

God says, be patient. Trust me. They will come back from the land of the enemy.

They will be restored and they will come back to their own border. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself. If you chastise me and I was chastised like an untrained bull, restore me and I will return for you are the Lord my God.

Surely after my turning, I repented. And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh. I was ashamed, humiliated.

I bore the reproach of my youth and so on. God has a purpose and many times we can't see it. And this is what faith is all about.

Can you put yourself in the position of these families whose children were slaughtered? Unaccountably. If they would go to the scriptures and trust that God knows what he is doing. How many scriptures tell us about God's mercy and grace? I can only give you a sample.

You think about Job, though he slay me yet will I trust him? Job 13, 15. Faith trusts in God's character when you can't figure out the circumstance. And that is the test of faith.

Can we trust in who God is when we don't understand what he is doing? Lamentations chapter three, verses 22 through 33. This is Jeremiah once again, the weeping prophet. But what does he say? God's mercies are endless.

Great is your faithfulness. You could go to the Psalms. Let me just suggest these.

We do not have time to read them. Psalm 13, Psalm 22, the 42nd and 43rd Psalms, Psalm 73, Psalm 22 we often revisit around resurrection Sunday. Habakkuk chapter one, verses two through four.

Though the fig tree should not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Whether or not blessings are fulsome and experienced, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will trust in the Lord.

Isaiah chapter 40, verses 27 through 31. Israel is convinced that God has forgotten them. God says not so.

That's Isaiah 40, 27 through 31. Isaiah 49, 14 through 16. Isaiah 57, 15.

I normally don't just give you references, but I'm running myself out of time here on my single session special. But this is the point. We don't have to understand what God is doing in every case.

Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't. But we always understand who He is. His love and His mercy and His grace are unfailing.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning. And if we think we see evidence to the contrary in circumstances, wait on the Lord.

Be of good cheer. He will strengthen our hearts. We can't understand why He does everything, but we can understand the ultimate purpose is our good and His glory.

Paul says in Romans chapter five, one through five, Romans chapter eight, verses 18 through 39, nothing can separate us from the love of God. And he goes on to list all of these calamities. They cannot separate us from God's love.

God knows better than we do. We do things on behalf of our children that they don't understand when they're small. We do things for our pets that they don't understand, but we know that it is best for them.

We have nothing but their good at heart. They just don't have the capacity. Even if we tried to explain it, they're just not capable.

And we have that relationship with God. But isn't it wonderful when children trust their parents? I don't know what you're doing or why you're doing it, but if you tell me it's gonna be okay, I believe you. There is peace, there is comfort, there is security in absolute trust in the love that fathers and mothers have for their children.

It's a wonderful thing when your pet will obey when they don't understand why you've given them a command, why you are incarcerating them, why you are putting them on a leash, why you are leaving them behind. They can't understand our priorities, our

responsibilities. We just hope they trust us and they will wait patiently until we can once again bless them.

Second Corinthians one, three through 10. Second Corinthians four, seven through 18. Second Corinthians 12, seven through 10.

I'm giving you these passages. When we find ourselves challenged, look these passages up. The key here is my grace is sufficient for you.

Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh? It's in second Corinthians one, three through 10, four, seven through 18, 12, seven through 10. God doesn't remove hardship in all cases, but he gives us grace. He knows it is needful for us.

First Peter one, three through nine. First Peter four, 12 through 19. We should not be surprised at the hardship that befalls us, but there is grace to meet it.

And it refines us, it purifies us. God has a purpose in it and we've got to trust him for that. The Lord Jesus himself exemplified this.

On the cross. Hebrews chapter 11 and Hebrews chapter 12, verses three through 11. Consider him who endured so that you may not grow weary.

Look at the example of the Lord Jesus. We have hope in the midst of tragedy. We're gonna see this extensively in our revelation study.

So what is the final summary here? As you look at this tragic massacre, so easily preventable by a simple word from the Lord, God's character is unchanging. His purpose is redemption. He will vindicate his righteousness and his justice.

His grace and his mercy are something we can trust in absolutely in all circumstances, regardless of how harsh, regardless of how the world might look at it and say, curse God and die. Job says, I'm never gonna stop trusting him. He can kill me.

I will never stop trusting. And look at the vindication in the story of Job. All you have to do is look at the first couple of chapters and the last couple of chapters, and there's wonderful meat in between, but the signal message of Job is you can spend a lot of time trying to discuss it and figure it out, even with your friends who are godly men, but ultimately you don't have to know why God is doing what he's doing.

He's got heavenly purposes. We will grasp it better in the future. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

Though he slay the children in Bethlehem, allow them to be slain. There is a purpose in it. This is an indictment of Jerusalem, and it is the beginning of the witness against them that is gonna culminate in the destruction in 70 AD.

Both at his birth and at his death, there is a witness that is rejected by the leadership in Israel and by the masses of people in Jerusalem and the entire region, and having been given opportunity after opportunity, witness after witness, they do not turn. They do not

repent. We'll see this pattern repeated when the seals, trumpets, and bowls unfold in Revelation, and there is grace available, but it has to be accepted.

It has to be chosen. It has to be embraced or dire consequences follow. Well, Merry Christmas.

I hope this study is helpful, not just in a season of celebration, but in those seasons of hardship and trial and difficulty, inexplicable suffering. I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that future day, of redemption, of gathering, of glory, of promotion, of opportunity. We don't have to understand what is happening.

We just have to know who's in charge. There's a great gospel song that says, "'I don't know what the future holds, "'but I know who holds the future.'" Even if it's a secret known only to him, I will understand what I need to understand, and it's my opportunity to aim my faith at those promises and principles and doctrines. Well, something to think about over the holiday season, and we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for these examples. Even those that seem harsh and negative, we know that all infants are in your care. Their appearance, their fate, their lives, their deaths, however short, however long, are in your provenient, providential plan.

And whatever entails, we know that you are gracious, you are fair, you are righteous, and they are held securely in your hands. We don't have to understand what happens to children who die early. We don't have to understand why tragedies occur.

It is enough to trust in your grace, your faithfulness, and your promises toward us. We pray that as we traverse the celebratory season that the Holy Spirit will help us to remember who we are and why we're here, that the light will shine from our lives as a beacon to others who would love to leave the darkness and enter into the light of fellowship and relationship with you. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.