

The Church of the Servant King

Thursday Night Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Thurs_Matthew_The Wise Men & A Foolish Leader)

CHAPTER 2

While Matthew provides some degree of detail surrounding Jesus' early months and years, the focus is upon the threat that an heir of David with a legitimate, legal claim to the throne of Israel posed to the existing power structures. The rulers were hostile, the Jewish religious leaders were indifferent (and would later become hostile), but, by and large, the Gentiles welcomed and worshipped Him. These proved to be the typical responses throughout Jesus' ministry as Matthew's Gospel reveals.

In this chapter there are several references to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (vv. 5-6, 15, 17-18, 23). Since Matthew wrote this Gospel in the A.D. 50's most likely, Matthew wanted to provide proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah who fulfilled what the prophets had predicted.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI (2:1-12)

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

The Wise Men See the Star (2:1)

The magi visited Jesus a significant period of time after his birth. For instance, consider the following points that support this conclusion:

- Matthew describes Jesus as a "child" in verse 11 (Gr. *paidion*), not an infant (Gr. *brepchos*) as in Luke 2:24.

- Jesus, Mary and Joseph were still in Bethlehem, but now in a house (v. 11) – not a manger (Lu 2:1-20).
- Herod's edict to kill all children two years of age and under indicates that Jesus was within this age span.
- Joseph and Mary brought the offering of a poor person to the Temple when they dedicated Jesus about 40 days after His birth in accordance with Jewish custom (Lu 2:24); yet, after receiving the Magi's gifts, they could have brought an offering that required greater means (cf. Lev 12).

Almost every Gentile nation had wise men who studied astronomy and the religions and traditions of other nations. It is quite possible that the scrolls of Hebrew Scripture were copied and spread to Gentile nations during the Babylonian captivity by Jews who were deported. There is likely a connection between the magi's comments regarding "His star" and Balaam's prophecy concerning the star that would come out of Jacob as prophesied by Balaam in the "latter days" (Num 24:14, 17). The magi who came from the same region as Balaam had come (i.e. Mesopotamia) would have perhaps connected Balaam's prophecy to the "star" that they observed.

14 "And now, behold, I am going to my people [*probably Mesopotamia*]; come, and I will advise you what this people [*Israelites*] will do to your people [*Moabites*] in the days to come [*trans. "latter days" – NKJV*]." (Num 24:14)

17 I see him, but not now;
 I behold him, but not near;
 A star shall come forth from Jacob,
 A scepter shall rise from Israel,
 And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
 And tear down all the sons of Sheth [*better trans. "turmoil" or "uproar" – cf. Psa 2*]. (Num 24:17)

It is possible that the "star" which the Magi saw was the Shekinah glory of God. This is the same Shekinah glory that led Israel through the wilderness and that had last been seen just prior to the deportation to Babylon. Ezekiel records the progressive departing of the Shekinah glory from the temple in Ezekiel 10.

Herod the king is Herod the Great, who reigned over Palestine from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. Herod is the name of a family or a surname that belonged to all the generations of the Herodian house. All the descendants of Herod the Great down to the fourth generation, who were identified with the government of Palestine and are mentioned in the New Testament, are known in history by the surname Herod.

Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabeans),

and at least two of his sons.¹

Herod the Great was an Idumaeen (or Edomite) and as such a descendant of Esau. The Idumaeans occupied a southern district of Palestine known as the Negeb, located between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea and southward. Even though the Idumaeans had largely embraced the Jewish religion, the Jews regarded them with a great deal of suspicion and prejudice. Jews considered them half-Jews.

To conciliate the Jews who had been alienated by his cruelties, he rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. While Jewish tradition contends that the temple was built by the priests in a year and a half, the cloisters and outer enclosures were eight years in construction. Additions were continually made from year to year so that the Jews would assert to Jesus that the Temple was built in 46 years (John 2:20).

Having been exposed to the Jewish religion, Herod knew that he was not the rightful heir to the throne. He was not a king from the line of David. The Jews hated him and never truly accepted him as king.

The Ruler Consults Human "Wisdom" (2:4)

4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. (Matt 2:4)

The chief priests were mainly Sadducees at this time, and most of the scribes ("teachers of the law," NIV) were Pharisees. The chief priests included the high priest and his associates. The high priest obtained his position by appointment from Rome. The scribes were the official interpreters and communicators of the law to the people, the lawyers.

A Fulfillment Passage Relating to Jesus' Birth (2:5-6)

5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

Matthew quotes from Micah 5:2 which is a prediction of the town of Christ's birth, i.e. Bethlehem.

2"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity." (Mic 5:2)

The Jewish religious authorities who became Christ's enemies later, unintentionally affirmed that Jesus had fulfilled a messianic prophecy in His birth.

Principle: Truth can be spoken by those that the Bible would classify as enemies of truth.

¹ Carson, "Matthew," 84 cited by Thomas Constable, "Notes on Matthew" at www.soniclight.com

A Suspicious Leader Creates Suspicion (2:8-9)

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. (2:8-9)

Herod's hypocritical humility (i.e. a desire to "worship" the child) would have immediately raised the suspicion of the Magi. It is remarkable that the Jewish religious leaders made no effort to investigate this phenomenon that inspired magi to travel so far. Their apathy contrasts to Herod's fear and the magi's interest. It is also interesting to note how much the religious leaders knew, but how little it affected their actions (or lack thereof). Throughout Matthew's gospel, this theme will be increasingly developed – i.e. apathy and rejection by Jewish leadership of the rightful King and interest and belief by Gentiles.

The Gifts of the Magi (2:11)

11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (2:11)

Frankincense is a gum obtained from the resin of certain trees that was very fragrant. Myrrh was also a sap or resin-like substance that came from a tree that grew in Arabia. People used it as a spice and as a perfume often in embalming as well as in other applications.

This act by Gentile leaders also prefigures the wealth that the Old Testament prophets said the Gentiles would one day present to Israel's Messiah (Isa 60:5, 11; 61:6; 66:20; Zeph 3:10; Hag 2:7-8). This will occur in the fullest sense at the Second Coming of Christ.

5"Then you will see and be radiant,
And your heart will thrill and rejoice;
Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you,
The wealth of the nations will come to you. (Isa 60:5)

11"Your gates will be open continually;
They will not be closed day or night,
So that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations,
With their kings led in procession. (Isa 60:11)

6But you will be called the priests of the LORD;
You will be spoken of as ministers of our God
You will eat the wealth of nations,
And in their riches you will boast. (Isa 61:6)

THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT (2:13-15)

Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was

to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

Another Fulfillment Passage (2:15)

The OT passage that is quoted is Hosea 11:1.

"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hos 11:1)

The context of Hosea 11:1 is that of a prophet attempting to emphasize the ongoing love of Yahweh for His people in the midst of words of warning of impending judgment prior to the Assyrian captivity. He married a faithless harlot as an illustration of God's love for His faithless people. The original context is not a prophecy, it is an historic event.

The literal meaning in context of Hosea 11:1 is a reference to the Exodus. The words "My Son" in Hosea 11:1 refer to Israel and not a literal son as in **The** future Son of God.

Matthew uses *fulfillment* for apologetic purposes consistent with the needs of a Jewish audience. He uses *fulfillment* in the same sense in which we might use the word type or picture, yet with an emphasis upon the divinely orchestrated purpose in the events of history. Since Israel is the "son of God," the history of Israel is a typical anticipation of the life of the Messiah.

HEROD SLAUGHTERS BABIES (2:16-23)

16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Another Fulfillment Passage (2:17)

17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;

AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE." (2:17)

In Jeremiah 31:15, Jeremiah is describing a literal event that is soon to come as the Babylonian captivity begins. The young men of Judah passed by the town of Ramah as they marched toward Babylon. Not too far from Ramah is where Rachel was buried and she was the symbol of Jewish motherhood.

As the young men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they would never see again. Jeremiah uses poetic imagery to describe the entombed Rachel weeping for the Israelites who are being deported to Babylon.

Jeremiah 31:15 is not even a remote prediction of the death of babies in Bethlehem. It names the wrong city (Ramah versus Bethlehem), the wrong action (captivity versus death), and the wrong outcome (return from captivity versus no return from death).

The only point of comparison is the sadness felt in the hearts of both groups of women. This is a good example of the use of the word "fulfillment" by Matthew in a manner to highlight an *application* of the passage.

He Shall Be Called a Nazarene (2:23)

23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene." (2:23)

Matthew is not quoting an Old Testament passage, rather he is summarizing what OT prophets had said regarding the Messiah. No Old Testament prophet stated that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. Examples of these Old Testament passages that Matthew summarizes include Psalm 22:6-9 and Isaiah 53. The name Nazarene carried the idea of that which was *despicable* or *despised*.

6But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.
7All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,
8 "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."
9Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts. (Psa 22:6-9)

13Behold, My servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.
14Just as many were astonished at you, My people,
So His appearance was marred more than any man
And His form more than the sons of men. (Isa 52:13-14)

1 Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
3He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed. (Isa 53:1-5)