



## **Chapter 2**

# ***The Birth of Jesus & Flight into Egypt***

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## **Background:**

### **The Magi of Medo-Persia**

“Magi” is the Latinized form of *Magoi*, ancient Greek transliteration of the Persian original [Herodotus, 1:101].

*Rab-Mag*, Chief of the Magi in Nebuchadnezzar’s Court (Jer 39:3,13) and Daniel’s Title (Dan 4:9; 5:11). [This *Jewish* appointment may have had repercussions among the *hereditary* Median priesthood, leading to the plot of Daniel 6, which involved the ordeal of the lion’s den.]

Singular *magus*... “magic.” “Magicians” (a profession, rather than citizenship or cultural link), presented in the book of Acts as vile men without standing or morals: Simon Magus in Samaria (Acts 8:9-24); Elymas Magus at Paphos on the Island of Cyprus associated with Sergius Paulus the proconsul [*International Dictionary* 3:222].

Persian magi were credited with profound and extraordinary religious knowledge. (*Babylonian magi often considered mere imposters.*)

Oneiromancy, not astrology, was their key skill [*Herodotus* I.107, 120; VII.19]. Established as the state religion of Persia by Darius the Great, after some Magi who were considered to be expert in the interpretation of dreams had been attached to the Median court.

They were *not* originally followers of Zoroaster [*Encyclopedia Britannica* 7:691]. Later: Philo of Alexandria, Cicero, and Philo, and others, record that the Magi were attached to senior Roman courts with acknowledged gifts and standing.

### **Magian Religion vs. Judaism**

The subsequent syncretistic Magian religion of Archaemenid days had much in common with the religion of the Jews: Cf. The Urim and Thummim of the Levites, and the Barsoms, small bundles of divining rods of the Magian priest. Each had its monotheistic concept of one beneficent creator, author of all good, who in turn was opposed by a malevolent evil spirit; each had its hereditary priesthood which became the essential mediator between God and man by virtue of a blood sacrifice; each depended upon the wisdom of the priesthood in divination; each held concepts of clean and unclean forms of life; and, each involved a *hereditary* priesthood. The Magi were the priestly caste during Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian periods.

### **Political Background**

Since the days of Daniel, the fortunes of both the Persian and the Jewish nation had been closely intertwined.

Both nations had fallen under Seleucid domination in the wake of Alexander’s conquests. Subsequently both had regained their independence: the Jews under Maccabean leadership, and the Persians as the dominating ruling group within the Parthian empire. It was at this time that the Magi, in their dual priestly and governmental office, composed the upper house of the council of the Magistanes (“magistrates”) whose duties included the absolute choice and election of the king of the realm.

It was therefore a group of Persian-Parthian “king makers” who entered Jerusalem in the latter days of the reign of Herod. Herod’s reaction was understandably one of fear when

one considers the background of Roman-Parthian rivalry that prevailed during his lifetime.

### **The Inscription of Bisitun**

- Darius I (The Great) (522-486 B.C.)
- Three languages: Elamite, Akkadian/Babylonian, and Old Persian/Aramaic.
- Speaks of his speedy and final triumph over a revolt of Magi in 522 B.C.

Alexander then conquers the Persians and makes Babylon his capital (not “destroyed” as many books suggest). Greek, the most precise of languages is promoted as an international standard throughout the region. (Thus, LXX + NT ministry...) After Alexander’s death, Israel endures being a buffer zone between the struggles between the two dynasties of Ptolemy and Seleucus. These “400 silent years” between the OT and NT are detailed in advance with such accuracy that skeptics have attempted to “late date” Daniel...

## **The Roman Empire 68 BC – 476 AD**



### **The Parthian Empire**

Parthia, the ancient empire of Asia, was located in what is now Iran and Afghanistan. The Parthians were of Scythian descent, and adopted Median dress and Aryan speech. Parthia was subject successively to the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and Macedonians under Alexander the Great, and then the Seleucids. In 250 B.C., the Parthians succeeded in founding an independent kingdom. During the 1st century B.C., it grew into an empire extending from the Euphrates River to the Indus River and from the Oxus (now Amu Darya) River to the Indian Ocean.

### **Judea: A Buffer Zone**

After the middle of the 1st century B.C. Parthia was, thus, a rival of Rome, and several wars occurred between the two powers.

Pompey, the first Roman conqueror of Jerusalem, in 63 B.C. had attacked the Armenian outpost of Parthia. In 55 B.C. Crassus led Roman legions in sacking Jerusalem and in a subsequent attack on Parthia proper. The Romans were decisively defeated at the battle of Carrhae with the loss of 30,000 troops, including their commander. The Parthians counterattacked with a token invasion of Armenia, Syria, and Palestine.

Nominal Roman rule was reestablished under Antipater, the father of Herod, who retreated before another Parthian invasion in 40 B.C. Mark Antony reestablished Roman sovereignty in 37 B.C. and, like Crassus before him, also embarked on a similarly ill-fated Parthian expedition. His disastrous retreat was followed by another wave of invading Parthians, which swept all Roman opposition completely out of Palestine (including Herod himself who fled to Alexandria and then to Rome).

With Parthian collaboration, Jewish sovereignty was restored and Jerusalem was fortified with a Jewish garrison.

### **King Herod and the Magi**

Herod, by this time, secured from Augustus Caesar the title of “King of the Jews.” However, it was not for three years (including a five-months siege by Roman troops) that the king was able to occupy his own capital city. Herod had thus gained the throne of a rebellious buffer state that was situated between two mighty contending empires. At any time, his own subjects might conspire in bringing the Parthians to their aid.

At the time of Christ’s birth, Herod may have been close to his final illness. Augustus was also aged; and Rome, since the retirement of Tiberius, was without any experienced military commander. Pro-Parthian Armenia was fomenting revolt against Rome (which was successfully accomplished within two years). The time was ripe for another Parthian invasion of the buffer provinces, except for the fact that Parthia itself was racked by internal dissension.

Phraates IV, the unpopular and aging king, had once been deposed and it was not improbable that the Persian Magi were already involved in the political maneuvering requisite to choosing his successor. It was conceivable that the Magi might have taken advantage of the king’s lack of popularity to further their own interests with the establishment of a new dynasty, which could have been implemented if a sufficiently strong contender could be found.

During this time it was entirely likely that the Messianic prophecies of the OT, culminating in the writings of Daniel, one of their own Magians, was of profound motivating significance. The promise of divinely imposed world dominion at the hands of a Jewish monarch was more than acceptable to them. (Their own Persian and Medo-Persian history was studded with Jewish nobles, ministers, and counselors; and in the great Archaemenid days, some of the kings themselves were apparently of Jewish blood.)

### **A Precarious Visit?**

It was a group of Persian-Parthian king makers who entered Jerusalem in the latter days of the reign of Herod. It was conceivable that the Magi could have taken advantage of the king's lack of popularity to further their own interests with the establishment of a new dynasty, if a sufficiently strong contender could be found...

In Jerusalem the sudden appearance of the Magi, probably traveling in force with imaginable oriental pomp and accompanied by adequate Calvary escort to insure their safe penetration of Roman territory, certainly alarmed Herod and the populace of Jerusalem. Herod's reaction was understandably one of fear when one considers the background of Roman-Parthian rivalry that prevailed during his lifetime.

It would seem as if these Magi were attempting to perpetrate a border incident which could bring swift reprisal from Parthian armies. Their request of Herod, regarding the one "who has been *born* king of the Jews, " was a calculated insult to him who had contrived and bribed his way into that office.

In the providence of God, the Messianic prophecy of the kingdom having been then fulfilled; the Magi, "being warned in a dream" (a form of communication most acceptable to them), departed to their own country with empty hands.

Within two years, Phraatacs, the parricide son of Phraates IV, was duly installed by the Magi as the new ruler of Parthia. Later, Philo of Alexandria, Cicero, and others record that Magi were attached to senior Roman courts with acknowledged gifts and standing.<sup>1</sup>

### **McGee Introduction: THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY**

All of this is an historical record of what took place, but back of it there is a tremendous truth being presented, and we don't want to miss that. We have said before that each gospel was directed to meet the needs of a particular group of people and that Matthew was written to the nation of Israel. It is for religious people. Recorded here is the fulfillment of four prophecies. To show how these Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled at the birth of Jesus is the purpose, I believe, of this chapter. I am sure there were many sincere students of the Scriptures living in Christ's day who wondered how all of these prophecies could be fulfilled. It seemed difficult, if not impossible. Let me list several here, then we will see how they were fulfilled at the time of Christ's birth: (1) He was to be born in Bethlehem (see Mic. 5:2); (2) He was to be called out of Egypt (see Hos. 11:1); (3) There was to be weeping in Ramah (see Jer. 31:15); and (4) He was a root from the stem of Jesse and therefore to be called a Nazarene (see Isa. 11:1).

Since Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, why should there be weeping in Ramah, which is about as far north of Jerusalem as Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem? And He was to be called a Nazarene although He would be born in Bethlehem and called out of Egypt. The question is: How could all of these prophecies be fulfilled in a little baby? Well, Matthew shows how literally, accurately, and easily all were fulfilled without any strain on prophecy or on history. It just came about as God said it would come about.

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<sup>1</sup> Chuck Missler, The Christmas Story briefing package, khouse.org

In our day when there are certain prophecies that relate to the second coming of Christ, we may find it difficult to correlate them and to see the way in which they can all be fulfilled. I'm of the opinion we are coming to the time of their fulfillment, and we are going to find out that it all will take place in a normal, natural way. It looks like a jigsaw puzzle to us down here, but, when we get into His presence and it is all fulfilled, it will have been just as natural as the prophecies about His first coming. Every little piece in the jigsaw puzzle will fit into place, and we're going to wonder why in the world we didn't see it at the time.<sup>2</sup>

**Hegg Introduction:** Chapter one has focused on the identity of the Child ("who He is"), showing His connection to the royal line of David, and describing Him as the One promised by the prophets to bring salvation to His people. Chapter two, however, takes an interesting turn, for it describes the manner in which the King, Yeshua, would be received ("what He is"). Foreigners (the magi) come to give Him honor (vv. 1–12), while Herod seeks to take His life (vv. 13–23). From the very beginning of Matthew's story, we are confronted with the fulcrum of God's love—the person of Yeshua. Those who reject Him are left to their own demise, but those who receive Him as King, are granted entrance into His kingdom. Moreover, we are introduced to an undercurrent of Matthew's story—the ingathering of the Gentiles. Here, the first to honor Yeshua are foreigners, and at the end of Matthew's Gospel, the injunction to make disciples of the nations forms the final commission of the Master. While the primary focus of Yeshua's ministry will be "to the lost sheep of Israel" (10:6; 15:24), the fuller picture of the ingathering of the nations is consistently heard as a counter melody to the main theme.<sup>3</sup>

## **Matthew 2:1**

**Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,**

**[in Bethlehem of Judaea]** Fulfilling Micah 5:2. Bethlehem is a small town five miles south of Jerusalem. It sits on a high ridge over 2,000 feet above sea level. It is mentioned in more detail in the Gospel of Luke. Luke also explains why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, rather than in Nazareth, their hometown.

**[In Bethlehem of Judaea]** Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, was a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. The word *Bethlehem* denotes "house of bread"--perhaps given to the place on account of its great fertility. It was also called *Ephratah*, a word supposed likewise to signify fertility, Genesis 35:19, Ruth 4:11, Psalms 132:6. It was called the city of David, (Luke 2:4) because it was the city of his nativity, 1 Samuel 16:1,18. It was called *Bethlehem of Judea*, to distinguish it from a town of the same name in Galilee, Joshua 19:15. The soil of Bethlehem was noted for its fertility. Ancient

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<sup>2</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, [toraresource.com](http://toraresource.com)

travellers frequently spoke of its productions. The town is situated on an eminence, in the midst of hills and vales. At present it contains about 200 houses, inhabited chiefly by Christians and Mohammedans, who live together in peace. About 200 paces east of Bethlehem, the place is still shown where our Saviour is supposed to have been born. There is a church and a convent there; and beneath the church a subterranean chapel, which is lighted by thirty-two lamps, which is said to be the place where was the stable in which Jesus was born. No reliance is, however, to be placed on this tradition.<sup>4</sup>

**[wise men]** Greek: *magoi* (GSN-3097), wise men. Their number, nationality, and country are unknown. They were a priestly hereditary caste that uttered prophecies, explained omens, interpreted dreams, and practiced divination (Daniel 2:2,48; Daniel 4:9). The original word here is *magoi* from which comes our word *magician*, now used in a bad sense, but not so in the original. The persons here denoted were philosophers, priests, or astronomers. They dwelt chiefly in Persia and Arabia. They were the learned men of the eastern nations, devoted to astronomy, to religion, and to medicine. They were held in high esteem by the Persian court, were admitted as counsellors, and followed the camps in war, to give advice.

**[Herod the king]** Judea, where our Saviour was born, was a province of the Roman empire. It was taken about sixty-three years before, by Pompey, and placed under tribute. Herod received his appointment from the Romans, and had reigned, at the time, of the birth of Jesus thirty-four years. Though he was permitted to be called *king*, yet he was in all respects dependent on the Roman emperor. He was commonly called Herod the Great, because he had distinguished himself in the wars with Antigonus, and his other enemies, and because he had evinced great talents, as well as great cruelties and crimes, in governing and defending his country; in repairing the temple; and in building and ornamenting the cities of his kingdom. At this time Augustus was emperor of Rome. The world was at peace. All the known nations of the earth were united under the Roman emperor. Intercourse between different nations was easy and safe. Similar laws prevailed. The use of the Greek language was general throughout the world. All these circumstances combined to render this a favourable time to introduce the gospel, and to spread it through the earth; and the Providence of God was remarkable in fitting the nations in this manner for the easy and rapid spread of the Christian religion among all nations.<sup>5</sup>

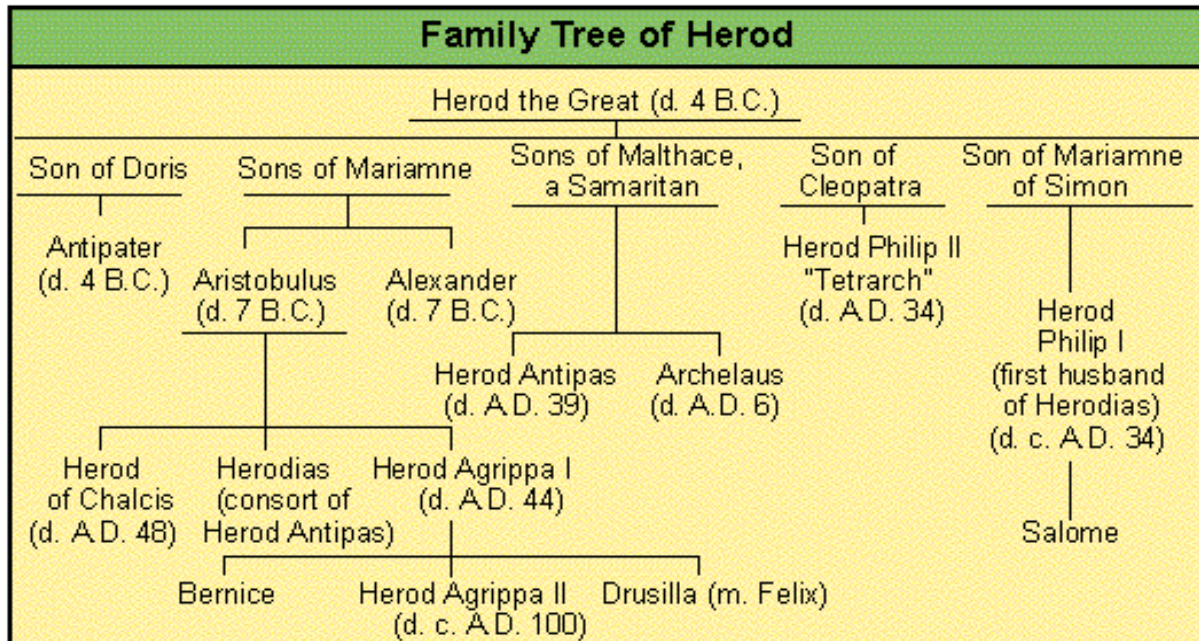
The land of Israel was divided into four political districts and several lesser territories. Judea was to the south, Samaria in the middle, Galilee to the north, and Idumea to the southeast. Bethlehem of Judea (also called Judah, Matthew 2:6) had been prophesied as the Messiah's birthplace (Micah 5:2). Jerusalem was also in Judea and was the seat of government for Herod the Great, king over all four political districts. After Herod's death, the districts were divided among three separate rulers (see the note on •Matthew 2:19-22). Although he was a ruthless, evil man who murdered many in his own family, Herod the Great supervised the renovation of the temple, making it much larger and more

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<sup>4</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

<sup>5</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

beautiful. This made him popular with many Jews. Jesus would visit Jerusalem many times because the great Jewish festivals were held there.<sup>6</sup>



**Believers Study Bible:** “Herod the king” is Herod the Great, who was born in 74 B.C. and died between March 29 and April 11, 4 B.C., shortly after the birth of Jesus. His father Antipater was a Jew of Idumean (Edomite) descent, who was appointed procurator of Judea in 47 B.C. by Julius Caesar. The Herodian dynasty, which began with Antipater, was extended through his son Herod, whose military and political career Antipater launched by appointing him governor of Galilee when Herod was only 22. Because of his Idumean descent, Herod, though a Jew by religion, could never become high priest. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 B.C.), Herod befriended Mark Antony, who with Octavius had defeated Brutus and Cassius at Philippi (42 B.C.). Both Antony and Octavius advised the Roman Senate to give him the title “King of the Jews.” After three years of fighting (40-37 B.C.) against the Parthians, who had invaded Syria and Palestine, Herod ascended the throne and ruled astutely and cleverly until his death. That he was able to convince Octavius (Caesar Augustus, 27 B.C.-A.D. 14) of his loyalty to him, after having switched allegiance from Antony and Cleopatra following their defeat at Actium (31 B.C.), attests to his genius as a politician. As an astute ruler he (1) pacified the territories on his northeastern frontier, (2) undertook elaborate building projects at home and in foreign cities, (3) rebuilt Samaria and called it Sebaste, (4) rebuilt Strato’s tower and called it Caesarea after the emperor, (5) reconstructed the Jerusalem temple (begun 19 B.C. and completed A.D. 65) in an attempt to pacify the Jews, and (6) built military installations which freed Palestine from foreign invasion and guaranteed peace, which in turn brought prosperity. Because of his many atrocities (v. 16), his favor with Rome, his Idumean ancestry, and especially his elimination of the Hasmonean family, Herod never achieved favor with the Jewish people. Ultimately, he had 10 wives, and

<sup>6</sup> Life Application Notes



many of his descendants appear in the N.T. Of special significance are those related through four of his wives: (1) Mariamne, a Hasmonean and granddaughter of the former high priest, John Hyrcanus II (63-40 B.C.). She gave birth to two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. Aristobulus was the father of Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37-44; cf. Acts 12:1), the last of the Hasmoneans to rule over a kingdom approximately the extent of that of his grandfather, Herod the Great (14:3). This Herod Agrippa I was the father of the King Agrippa II who appears with his two sisters, Drusilla and Bernice, in Acts 24-26. (2) Cleopatra of Jerusalem, mother of Philip the tetrarch (Luke 3:1). (3) Mariamne, the mother of Herod Philip (14:3; Mark 6:17). (4) Malthace, a Samaritan, mother of Archelaus (v. 22) and Herod Antipas (14:3; Luke 3:19). In his will, which he changed many times, Herod the Great divided his kingdom among three of his sons: (1) Archelaus (v. 22) received Judea, ruling as ethnarch, with the promise of the title of king (4 B.C.-A.D. 6). (2) Herod Antipas (4 B.C.-A.D. 39) reigned as tetrarch over Galilee and Perea (Luke 3:1). (3) Philip the tetrarch (4 B.C.-A.D. 34) received Iturea and Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Auranitis, and Batanea. This Philip is not to be confused with Herod Philip Boethus, who married Herodias (14:3).

One system of accounting for time in the Greco-Roman world reckoned the years from the establishment of the city of Rome (753 B.C.). Years were designated a.u.c. (*ab urbe condita*, Lat.), “from the foundation of the city.” In A.D. 525, in Rome, a Scythian monk named Dionysius Exiguus began development of an alternate method at the request of Bishop John I. Assuming the birth of Christ was December 25, 753 a.u.c., Dionysius started his calendar with January 1, 754 a.u.c., and reckoned years *anno Domini* (Lat.), “in the year of the Lord” (A.D.). Thus, 754 a.u.c. became A.D. 1 of the Christian era. His calculation is probably about four years off, since subsequent research has determined 750 a.u.c. to be the year of Herod’s death (on or before the Passover in 4 B.C.). The Jewish historian Josephus says it was on April 11 of that year. Matthew (2:19) places Christ’s birth prior to Herod’s death. According to Luke 2:1-5, He was born about the time of a census ordered sometime between 6 and 4 B.C. (preferably the latter part of that period) by Quirinius, who was twice governor of Syria. Thus, Christ’s birth may have occurred in the summer or early fall of 4 B.C. Shepherds would not normally have been tending their fields in December, due to the cold of winter. However, if the shepherds mentioned in Luke 2:8-20 are temple shepherds responsible for providing sheep for sacrifice, the birth of Christ could have been in the winter.<sup>7</sup>

**Nelson:** The events of ch. 2 probably took place some months after Jesus’ birth. Several reasons may be offered to support this conclusion: (1) Joseph and Mary were living in a house (v. 11); (2) Jesus is referred to as a child, not an infant (v. 11); (3) Herod murdered all the male children *two years old and under* (v. 16); and (4) it would have been strange for Joseph and Mary to offer the sacrifice of the poor, a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (see Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24), if the wise men had just given them gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Thus the wise men must have arrived after the ritual sacrifice described in Luke 2:22-24, 39. **Herod the king** is Herod the Great, who reigned over Palestine from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. A crafty ruler and lavish builder, Herod had a reign marked by

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<sup>7</sup> Believers Study Bible

cruelty and bloodshed. The word translated **wise men** can refer either to fraudulent sorcerers (see Acts 8:9, 11; 13:6, 8) or, as here, to a more honorable class of astrologers.<sup>8</sup>

**McGee:** This is the historical record of the coming of the wise men. Notice that they came in the days of Herod the king. One thing that Herod did not want was competition. In fact, the one thing that Herod would not *tolerate* was competition. So the wise men coming to Jerusalem really alerted him.

“Behold, there came three wise men from the east to Jerusalem.” Is that what your Bible says? You say, “No, you’ve inserted the number three.” Well, isn’t that what you’ve been taught by your Christmas cards? I think a great many people know more about the Christmas story from Christmas cards than from the Bible, and therefore they have many inaccurate impressions. I’ll attempt to correct several of them in this chapter.

First, you will notice that the record doesn’t tell us there were three wise men. I don’t know how many there were, but I doubt whether three wise men would have disturbed Herod or have excited Jerusalem. I do believe that three hundred men would have done so. These wise men who came from the East evidently came from different areas. They had been studying the stars, and when this new star appeared, they joined forces and came to Jerusalem. I don’t know how many there were, but I’m almost sure it wasn’t three, and I believe three hundred would be more nearly true. But, please, don’t say that I said there were three hundred!<sup>9</sup>

#### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

**Yeshua was born** between 8 and 4 B.C.E. The reason he was born “B.C.” (“Before Christ”) is that Dionysius Exiguus, the sixth-century monk who set up the modern calendar, made a mistake in determining the date which was not corrected till later. Instead of the terms “A.D.” (“*Anno Domini*,” “in the year of [the] Lord” Yeshua) and “B.C.” the Jewish community customarily denotes these periods by “C.E.” (“Common Era”) and “B.C.E.” (“Before the Common Era”), to avoid relating dates explicitly to the Messiah.

**In Beit-Lechem.** See v. 6&N.

**Herod** the Great (c. 73–4 B.C.E.) founded the Herodian dynasty (see Lk 3:1N), which ruled the Land of Israel and its surroundings from 37 B.C.E. until the war with Rome in 66–70 C.E. Herod himself was a man of great physical energy and ambition. His career comes to the notice of historians in 47 B.C.E. in Syria and the Galil; a combination of military successes, political machinations and bribery of Roman superiors enabled him to replace the last of the Hasmonean rulers, Antigonus, when the latter died in 37 B.C.E. (possibly in consequence of one of Herod’s bribes).

Though technically Jewish by birth, since his family was from the Idumeans (Edomites), who had been forcibly converted to Judaism under the Hasmonean Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. (see 23:15N), neither his religious behavior nor his ethics reflected anything of Judaism. He did, however, reconstruct and enlarge the Second Temple, which had been built under Z’rubavel (see the book of Haggai) in 520–516 B.C.E. The Talmudic rabbis said, “One who has not seen Herod’s temple has never

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<sup>8</sup> The Neslson Study Bible

<sup>9</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

seen a beautiful building” (Bava Batra 4a), but also, “It was built by a sinful king, and the building was intended by him as an atonement for having slain Israel’s sages” (Numbers Rabbah 4:14).

Herod was consistently paranoid about his power. He had all his rivals exterminated, including those of his wife’s family (he had married Mariamne, a Hasmonean, and feared the restoration of the Hasmonean dynasty) and even some of his own children (he had fifteen). He built remote fortresses, Herodion and Matzada, as refuges should he be deposed. The events described in 2:1–17 are entirely in keeping with the man’s independently attested character.

**Magi** were not merely sorcerers or magicians, although the term “magician” comes from this word; nor were they simply astrologers, although they did observe the stars. They were sages, wise men, often in positions of responsibility but sometimes commanding respect because of their wisdom even when not holding office. These Magi came from the Medo-Persian Empire or Babylon.<sup>10</sup>

### **Hegg:**

**[Now after Yeshua was born]** The paragraph in the Greek begins with a genitive absolute<sup>11</sup> in the form of an aorist participle. This gives the reader notice that the events about to be described took place subsequent to the birth, with the context specifying the time-frame more precisely. That the magi enter the house (oijkiva, *oikia*) of Mary and Joseph (v. 11), makes it clear that they had taken up residence in Bethlehem, casting the narrative in a time well after the birth of Yeshua. That the magi visited the stable where Yeshua was born is the mistaken notion of later Christian tradition surrounding the celebration of Christmas.<sup>12</sup>

**[in Bethlehem of Judea]** Bethlehem (בֵּית-לֶחֶם), located about five or six miles south-southeast of Jerusalem, continues to link Yeshua with the lineage of David (cf. Lk 2:4; Jn 7:42), for it was David’s home town and where he was anointed king of Israel (1Sam 16:1-13, cf. 17:12, 15, 58; 20:6, 28). Bethlehem was the place of Rachel’s burial (Gen 35:19) as well as the city in which the story of Ruth is set (Ruth 1:19). Perhaps Matthew adds “of Judea” to distinguish the southern Bethlehem from its northern counterpart in the region of Zebulun, located seven miles northwest of Nazareth (cf. Josh 19:15). An Arab village at this location retained the name *Beit-lachm*. Rabbinic sources contain some indication that Bethlehem was known as the place of the Messiah’s appearance, though in this regard such few references may indicate a later desire to distance the tradition from the Christian use. In Mid. Rab. *Lam* 1.51 we read about the “shoot” of Zech 6:12, understood as a messianic symbol by the Sages.

R. Judan said in the name of R. Aibu: His name is ‘Comforter’; as it is said, THE COMFORTER IS FAR FROM ME. R. Hanina said: They do not really differ, because

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<sup>10</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>11</sup> On the syntax of the genitive absolute, see Blass-Debrunner, *Greek Grammar*, §423 (p. 218).

<sup>12</sup> Christian tradition gave names to each of the magi, which they numbered as three (see Bruce Metzger, “Names for the Nameless,” *NTS*, NTTS 10 (1980), pp. 23–43). The supposed relics of the magi are housed in the Cologne Cathedral (cf. Allison-Davies, p. 231, n. 17).

the numerical value of the names is the same, so that ' Comforter ' is identical with ' Shoot '.

The following story supports what R. Judan said in the name of R. Aibu:

*It happened that a man was ploughing, when one of his oxen lowed. An Arab passed by and asked, 'What are you?' He answered, 'I am a Jew.' He said to him, 'Unharness your ox and untie your plough' [as a mark of mourning]. 'Why?' he asked. 'Because the Temple of the Jews is destroyed.' He inquired, 'From where do you know this?' He answered, 'I know it from the lowing of your ox.' While he was conversing with him, the ox lowed again. The Arab said to him, 'Harness your ox and tie up your plough, because the deliverer of the Jews is born.' 'What is his name?' he asked; and he answered, 'His name is "Comforter".' 'What is his father's name?' He answered, 'Hezekiah.' 'Where do they live?' He answered, 'In Birath 'Arba, 1 in Bethlehem of Judah.'*

Likewise, the Targum to Mic 5:2[1] reads:

*And you, O Bethlehem Ephrata, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah, from you shall come forth before Me the Messiah, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned from before, from the days of eternity.*

On the basis of Jn 7:27, "“However, we know where this man (Yeshua) is from; but whenever the Messiah may come, no one knows where He is from,” some modern scholars have suggested that a tradition that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem was a later Christian addition. But the words of Yeshua’s detractors in this text most likely reflect the idea that the Messiah was from eternity. That Yeshua, a “local fellow,” would claim to be the Messiah seemed out of sync with their idea of the eternal status of the promised redeemer.<sup>13</sup>

## **Matthew 2:2**

**Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.**

**[Where is he that is born King of the Jews?]** This is question number 1 in the Book of Matthew. The next question will be in Matthew 3:7.

There was, at this time, a prevalent expectation that some remarkable personage was about to appear in Judea. The Jews were anxiously looking for the coming of the Messiah. By computing the time mentioned by Daniel, (Daniel 9:25-27,) they knew that the period was approaching when the Messiah should appear. This personage, *they* supposed, would be a temporal prince, and they were expecting that he would deliver them from Roman bondage. It was natural that this expectation should spread into other countries. Many Jews, at that time, dwelt in Egypt, in Rome, and in Greece; many, also, had gone to eastern countries, and in every place they carried their Scriptures, and diffused the expectation that some remarkable person was about to appear. Suetonius, a Roman historian, speaking of this rumour, says :-"An ancient and settled persuasion

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

prevailed throughout the East, that the Fates had decreed some one to proceed from Judea, who should attain universal empire." Tacitus, another Roman historian, says:--

*"Many were persuaded that it was contained in the ancient books of their priests, that at that very time the East should prevail, and that some one should proceed from Judea and possess the dominion."*

Josephus also, and Philo, two Jewish historians, make mention of the same expectation. The *fact* that such a person was expected is clearly attested. Under this expectation these wise men came to do him homage, and inquired anxiously *where he was born?*

**Hegg:** These are the only words the magi speak. Their opening query regarding "where" the Promised One was, is taken up by Matthew in this chapter. To the question "where was He born," Matthew appeals to Micah 5.2—"in Bethlehem." As to where He went after His birth, Matthew quotes Hosea 11.1, "out of Egypt I have called My son." And regarding where He lives, Matthew responds with "Nazareth," and "He shall be called a Nazarene."

The grammar of the opening phrase makes it clear that the meaning is not, "Where is He who had been born, King of the Jews?" but that this One is the new-born King. He has come for the purpose of reigning as King. The title "King of the Jews," found often in the Gospels (Matt 2:2; 27:11, 29, 37; Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26; Luke 23:3, 37-38; John 18:33, 39; 19:3, 19, 21), is only uttered by Gentiles. Jews use the phrase "King of Israel" (Matt 27:42; Mark 15:32; John 1:49; 12:13).

How was it that the magi referred to Yeshua by this title? Apart from the possibility (if they were from Babylon) that a tradition based upon Daniel's prophecy was known to them, it may have been that the astrological phenomenon they had observed was of such a magnitude as to be applicable only to the appearance of royalty. This was not uncommon in the ancient world.<sup>1</sup> For example, Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.22) remarks that "the general belief is that a comet means a change of emperor," so much so that "when a brilliant comet now appeared...people speculated on Nero's successor as though Nero were already dethroned." Even the Sages remark that "every righteous man has his star and it shines according to the brightness of his deeds" (*Mid. Ps.* on 148:3).

There is little doubt that the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:17) informed the Jewish perspective that a star would accompany the appearance of Messiah: "A star will come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel." Both Onkelos and Ps. Jonathan understand this text as referring to Messiah, as do the midrashim (*Mid. Rab. Ex* 30.24; *Mid. Rab. Lam* 2.4). Likewise, the Qumran society interpreted Num 24:17 as a prophecy of the levitical Messiah (CD 7.18-26, cf. 4QTestimonia; 1QM 11.6). Finally, the fact that Akiva attributed this prophecy to Bar Kosiva, changing his name to Bar Kokhba ("son of the star") in order to proclaim him "messiah," witnesses to its early and strong messianic interpretation.

This being the case, one might wonder why Matthew did not incorporate it into his story, especially since he alone of the Gospel writers gives us the notice of the magi and the star they had seen. The answer must be that at this point in Matthew's narrative, he is focusing on geographical information (each of the quotes from the Tanach include a place name), something Num 24:17 does not have. He will spend the remainder of his efforts in the Gospel account to show that Yeshua fulfills the "star/scepter" prophecy.

Various suggestions have been given as to what star the magi may have seen. Jupiter (the “star of kingship”) and Saturn (the “star of the Jews, Tacitus, *Hist* 5.4) were in conjunction three times in 7 BCE. A comet appeared in 5 BCE.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the magi refer to the star as being “in the east” may also be understood to mean “rising.” The Greek word *ajnatolhv* (*anatole*) has a technical use in astronomy, meaning “at its rising. This is confirmed by the fact that points of the compass in Greek never take the article, which is found here. We can only speculate the possibility that Matthew has the rising star of Num 24 in mind by using this language. According to Matthew’s further account, the star “went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was” (v. 9). Whatever the star was, then, it was the result of a divinely appointed sign, marking the appearance of the Promised One.<sup>14</sup>

**[King of the Jews]** Tacitus and Suetonius testify that in the East at this time there was a general expectation of a king to be born in Judea who was to rule the whole world. Daniel predicted His coming and being “cut off” to be 483 years after the post-Babylonian captivity commandment to restore Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24-26). Jesus was born to rule and will do so forever after His second coming (Luke 1:32-33; John 18:37; Isaiah 9:6-7; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 22:1-5).

**[His star]** Among the ancients, the appearance of a star or comet was regarded as an omen of some remarkable event. Many such appearances are recorded by the Roman historians at the birth or death of distinguished men. Thus, they say, that at the death of Julius Caesar a comet appeared in the heavens, and shone seven days. These wise men also considered this as an evidence that the long-expected Prince was born. It is possible that they had been led to this belief by the prophecy of Balaam, Numbers 24:17, “There shall come a *star* out of Jacob,” etc. What this star was, is not known. There have been many conjectures respecting it, but nothing is revealed concerning it. We are not to suppose that it was what we commonly mean by a *star*. The stars are vast bodies fixed in the heavens, and it is absurd to suppose that one of them was sent to guide the wise men. It is most probable that it was a luminous appearance, or meteor, such as we now see sometimes shoot from the sky, or such as appear stationary, which the wise men saw, and which directed them to Jerusalem. It is possible that the same thing is meant which is mentioned by Luke 2:9-“*The glory of the Lord shone round about them,*” i.e., (Luke 2:9 on this place) a great light appeared shining around them. That *light* might have been visible from afar, and have been seen by the wise men in the East.<sup>15</sup>

**McGee:** They were looking for a king, and that was the thing which disturbed Herod, the king.

“We have seen his star in the east.” In poetry that is called the eastern star, and, actually, there is an organization by that name. The worthy matron of that group was a member of my church in Nashville, and she was greatly upset when she heard me say that it was not an eastern star. If they had seen His star in the east and it had been an eastern star, the wise men would have ended up in India or China. The star was in the west! The wise men were in the east. The star was in the west, and they followed it. They came

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

<sup>15</sup> Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament

west, not east. My question is this: How in the world did they associate a star with a king, and how did they identify it with Israel? All I know is that in that section of the East, the people had a prophecy given by Balaam, which is recorded in Numbers 24:17. (Remember that old Balaam gave this prophecy concerning the nation Israel.) “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.”

Notice that the prophecy says a Star shall come out of Jacob—that is, the nation Israel. And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. The star and the sceptre go together. That is the only place I know where they are put together in prophecy in the Old Testament. The wise men in the East had that prophecy, and so they came out of the mysterious East seeking a king.

This did disturb the city of Jerusalem and old king Herod.<sup>16</sup>

### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

**King of the Jews.** At Yn 1:19N I argue that the Greek word *Ioudaioi* should usually be translated “Judeans” and not “Jews” when the context is the Land of Israel. But the set phrase, “king of the *Ioudaioi*” is used in the New Testament only by non-Jews—here by the Magi, and later by Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers (27:37; Mk 15:26; Lk 23:3, 38; Yn 19:19). This argues for making an exception: all of these people were interested not in distinguishing Judeans from Galileans but Jews from Gentiles.

However, one can make a strong case for rendering *Ioudaioi* “Judeans” even here. Not only is the context the Land of Israel, but three times in vv. 1–6 we read of Beit-Lechem in Y’hudah (Judea). The Jewish scholar Solomon Zeitlin so understands the phrase:

“The gospels according to both Matthew [1:1–16] and Luke [3:24–31] trace the genealogy of Jesus to David, while Mark, who does not give the genealogy, states that Jesus is the son of David [12:35]. John, who stresses the view that Jesus was the son of God, nevertheless wrote, ‘But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, that Christ cometh out of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was?’ [7:41–42]. According to the gospels Jesus was greeted with the words, ‘Blessed be the kingdom of our father David’ [Mark 11:10], ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’ [Matthew 21:9]. On the cross on which Jesus was crucified the words ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Judaeans’ were inscribed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin [*Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*]. *Mashiah*, messiah, Christ were synonymous in their minds with ‘son of David’ and ‘king of the Judaeans.’ ” (“The Origin of the Idea of the Messiah,” in Daniel Jeremy Silver, ed., *In the Time of Harvest*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963, p. 458)

**His star.** This seems to allude to Numbers 24:17, where Balaam prophesies, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob.” Judaism understands this “star” to be the Messiah. See 2 Ke 1:19N on “the Morning Star.”<sup>17</sup>

**Hegg: [and have come to worship Him]** Here Matthew has the pagan magicians giving honor in worship to Yeshua. The language parallels the common Hebrew הָרַחֵם יְהוָה, “to

<sup>16</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>17</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

prostrate oneself” (e.g., Gen 18:2; 19:1). Matthew has no problem, from the very beginning of his Gospel, describing the manner in which people worship Yeshua. In fact, Matthew will use the same word 12 more times, and always in connection with proper worship, and especially the worship of the Messiah (2:8,11; 4:9-10; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; 28:9, 17). Thus, for Matthew, worshipping Immanuel is the proper response of those who meet Him.

Prostrating oneself before a king or dignitary was common practice in the ancient Near East, and thus one could understand this phrase as “and they paid homage to Him.” Yet, as noted above, Matthew regularly uses the Greek verb *proskuneo* (*proskuneo*) of worship, and it seems fitting to give the word this same sense here. As such, the magi portray in a figurative sense the manner in which the nations, eventually, will all bow to worship the Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

*(Phil 2:10–11) so that at the name of Yeshua every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

### **Matthew 2:3**

**When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him**

Their information makes Herod nervous as he was not King of the Jews, he was appointed by Rome, and he was also Idumaeen. Their request of Herod, regarding the one “who has been born king of the Jews,” was a calculated insult to him who had contrived and bribed his way into that office. Herod was paranoid that is why he built fortresses like Masada, (12 in all).

**[Herod the king]** Herod the Great, son of Antipater (an Idumean) and Cypros (an Arabian woman). Antipater was made Procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar in 47 B.C. Herod was made governor of Galilee when he was 25 years old and was made king of Judea in 37 B.C. He rebuilt the Jewish temple (John 2:20). At his death in 4 B.C. his kingdom was divided. His son Herod Antipas reigned over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 (Luke 3:1-2). He killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1). Another son, Archelias, was made ruler of Judea and Samaria (Matthew 2:22). He is called "Philip" in Matthew 14:3. Philip was succeeded by Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 37. In A.D. 40 he took over all the original territory of Herod the Great. He is mentioned in Acts 12. He was succeeded by Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13; Acts 26:32).<sup>19</sup>

**[He was troubled]** Herod had obtained the kingdom by great crimes, and by shedding much blood. He was, therefore, easily alarmed by any remarkable appearances; and the fact that this star appeared, and that it was regarded as proof that the King of the Jews was born, alarmed him. Besides, it was a common expectation that the Messiah was

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, toraresource.com

<sup>19</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible



about to appear, and he feared that his reign was about to come to an end. He, therefore, began to inquire in what way he might secure his own safety, and the permanency of his government.

Herod the Great was quite disturbed when the Magi asked about a newborn king of the Jews because: (1) Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne of David; therefore many Jews hated him as a usurper. If Jesus really was an heir, trouble would arise. (2) Herod was ruthless and, because of his many enemies, he was suspicious that someone would try to overthrow him. (3) Herod didn't want the Jews, a religious people, to unite around a religious figure. (4) If these Magi were of Jewish descent and from Parthia (the most powerful region next to Rome), they would have welcomed a Jewish king who could swing the balance of power away from Rome. The land of Israel, far from Rome, would have been easy prey for a nation trying to gain more control.<sup>20</sup>

**[All Jerusalem]** The people of Jerusalem, and particularly the friends of Herod. There were many waiting for the consolation of Israel, to whom the coming of the Messiah would be a matter of joy; but all of Herod's friends would doubtless be alarmed at his coming.

**McGee:** When there converged on the city of Jerusalem a very impressive delegation of wise men, asking a question like this, the whole city was disturbed.

Herod wanted to know about this. This man was Herod the Great, a very superstitious man. I hope that you have a good Bible dictionary and that you will take time to read about the Herod family. They were a bunch of rascals, much like the house of de' Medici. This family was a real first century Mafia. Herod the Great was the biggest rascal of them all. He was an Idumean who had bought his position from the Roman government; he was not of Israel at all. And he was really anxious to locate this One who appeared to be a rival for his throne.<sup>21</sup>

**Hegg:** We may note similar language in 2 Sam 4:1,

*Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed.*

Herod's reign was tenuous from the beginning. His political office was constantly being challenged. It was primarily his strong loyalties to Rome, and his own cunning, that allowed him to remain in power as long as he did. Granted, he was known for his wide and grandiose building projects, chief among which was the expansion of the Jerusalem Temple, and this gave him favor with the people. Yet his unstable character (especially toward the end of his reign) left him vulnerable to his enemies, both external and particularly internal. The fact that "all Jerusalem" was also troubled reflects the historical fact that the Jewish leaders did all in their power to prevent uprisings of the people, since history had proven that acts of insurrection were almost always met with sudden and wide disaster. The notion that one had arisen who would declare Himself "King of the

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<sup>20</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>21</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jews” suggested the undercurrent of revolt, and the Jewish leaders would have taken such a notice very seriously.

Moreover, the fact that foreigners were coming with such knowledge would have been unnerving. We should understand “Jerusalem” in this context to stand for the leaders of the Jewish community (and perhaps the Sadducean priesthood) and not as a metonymy for the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>22</sup>

### **Matthew 2:4**

**And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.**

**[chief priests]** Heads of the 24 courses (1 Chron. 24) and of the council (Greek: Sanhedrin, Acts 5:21).

**[scribes]** Referred to 120 times in the Bible. Formerly secretaries to kings (2 Samuel 8:17; 2 Samuel 20:25; 2 Kings 12:10; 2 Kings 22:3-12). Later, they were copyists and interpreters of the Scriptures and laws of Israel, keepers of all records, and were the lawyers and schoolmasters in Israel (Ezra 7:6-21; Neh. 8:1-13; Matthew 23:2-34; Mark 9:11; Mark 14:43; Mark 15:1; Luke 5:17; Luke 22:66; Luke 23:10; Acts 4:5; Acts 5:34; 1 Tim. 1:7). By the *scribes*, in the New Testament, are meant learned men, men skilled in the law, and members of the great council. They were probably the learned men, or the lawyers of the nation. They kept the records of the court of justice, the registers of the synagogues, wrote their articles of contract and sale, their bills of divorce, *lawyers*, Matthew 22:35, and doctors of the law, Luke 5:17. They were called *scribes* from the fact of their writing the public records. They were not, however, a *religious* sect, but might be either Pharisees or Sadducees. By the chief priests and scribes here mentioned, is denoted the *sanhedrim*, or great council of the nation. This was composed of seventy-two men, who had the charge of the civil and religious affairs of the Jews. On this occasion, Herod, in alarm, called them together, professedly to make inquiry respecting the birth of the Messiah.

**[Demanded of them]** Inquired, or asked of them. As they were the learned men of the nation, and as it was their business to study and explain the Old Testament, they were presumed to know what the prophecies had declared on that point. His object was to ascertain from prophecy *where* he was born, that he might strike an effectual blow. He seems not to have had any doubt about the *time when* he should be born. He was satisfied that the time had come.

**[chief priests]** The chief priests and teachers of the law were aware of Micah 5:2 and other prophecies about the Messiah. The Magi’s news troubled Herod because he knew that the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come soon (Luke 3:15). Most Jews expected the Messiah to be a great military and political deliverer, like Alexander the Great. Herod’s counselors would have told Herod this. No wonder this ruthless man took

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<sup>22</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, toraresource.com

no chances and ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem killed (Matthew 2:16)! This first mention of the Jewish council— “all the chief priests and scribes of the people”—reveals that the Jewish leaders were alerted early to the coming of the Messiah. Their quick recital of Mic. 5:2 showed their prophetic astuteness concerning the messianic prophecies (v. 6).

He didn't ask; he *demand*ed. He said, “I know that you have the Scriptures and in them you have a record of a Messiah that is coming. I want to know where He is to be born.” One of the amazing things is that they were able to tell him.

### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

*Cohanim* (plural; singular *cohen*), “priests,” a word which today evokes the image of clerics in formal Christian denominations or functionaries in eastern or primitive religions. This is because the Jewish priesthood has been dormant since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. But in Yeshua's day, when the Temple still stood, Judaism without a priesthood was unimaginable.

The task of a priest, like that of a prophet, is to serve as spokesman and mediator between God and man. The prophet speaks to man on behalf of God, the priest to God on behalf of man. The *cohanim* serving in the Temple were descendents of Moshe's brother Aharon, great-grandson of L'vi, Ya'akov's third son. In terms of practical job-description their primary duty was to offer sacrificial animals on the altar. The ever-bloody altar in the Temple of God was a continual witness to Israel that God's penalty for sin is death (see MJ 10:3). The concepts of priesthood and sacrifice are minimized in today's non-Messianic Judaism (see MJ 9:22N), but the Judaism of the Bible is inoperative without them. Messianic Judaism holds that Yeshua the Messiah is our everlasting *cohen* (MJ 7:23–25) and our everlasting sacrifice (MJ 7:27, Yn 1:29).

**Torah-teachers.** The Greek word “*grammateus*” translates literally Hebrew *sofer*, which has the literal meaning “scribe” and is usually so rendered in English. But the function of the *sofrim* in Yeshua's day went well beyond copying scrolls or performing secretarial duties; they were the primary students and teachers of the content of Judaism, that is, of *Torah*.

**The leading *cohanim***, who were mostly Sadducees, **and *Torah-teachers***, who were allied with the Pharisees (but see next paragraph), represented the two main concentrations of power within the Jewish religious establishment (see 3:7N). The opinions of the two groups frequently differed, but Herod's question received a single response; from this we learn that all Israel agreed that the Messiah would be born in Beit-Lechem (see v. 6N).

Joseph Shulam, a Messianic Jewish leader in Jerusalem, points out that modern scholars believe the scribes were neither rabbis nor Pharisees but “sages of the *am-ha-aretz*” (see Yn 7:49N, Ac 4:13N), *Torah-teachers* without *s.mikhah* (ordination; see 21:23N)—but see Mk 2:16&N. For this reason they could not bring *chiddushim* (introduce new interpretations) or *posek halakhah* (make legal judgments). According to

Shulam, this is why the people were in shock that Yeshua taught like a rabbi and not like a scribe (7:28–29, Mk 1:22&N).<sup>23</sup>

**Hegg:** The “chief priests and scribes” were two separate classes of leaders, though Matthew and Luke have them together in several places (Matt 16:21; 20:18; Luke 9:22; 22:66). More often, Matthew combines the scribes with the Pharisees (5:20; 12:38; 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29). The chief priests (ajrciereuv~, *arxiereus*) comprised more than merely the high priests, present and past. They comprised an established college which included the current high priest and his predecessors, the captain of the temple, the heads of the weekly courses, the directors of the daily courses, the temple overseers, and the temple treasurers. Scribes, on the other hand, were the teachers of the Torah (later referred to as “sages,” מִיִּמְחָכ ), the lawyers who interpreted the legal aspects of the Torah, and administered justice (all functions that at one period in Israel’s history belonged to the priesthood). The Scribes functioned as an independent body of leaders, but always in connection with either the Sadducees or Pharisees.

That Herod would have had ready access to the “chief priests and scribes” is obvious, since history records that he had taken it upon himself to appoint several of the high priests (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.22–41, 319–22). Thus, Herod held plenty of political clout in connection with the temple leadership, and it was only natural that he would seek information from them. Some have suggested that Herod gathered the Sanhedrin, but this is unlikely, since his relationship with the Sanhedrin was tenuous. When Herod came to power, one of his first actions was to execute the standing Sanhedrin (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.175, cf. *b.BavaBatra* 3b).

Herod’s question was quite simple. He wanted to know, according to Jewish tradition, where the Messiah (crstov~, *xristos*) would be born. But as one would expect, his motives for gaining the information were nefarious.<sup>24</sup>

## **Matthew 2:5**

**And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,**

Matthew often quoted Old Testament prophets. This prophecy, paraphrasing Micah 5:2, had been delivered seven centuries earlier.

Matthew clearly records how the Jewish religious authorities, who became Christ’s enemies later, unintentionally affirmed that Jesus had fulfilled a messianic prophecy in His birth. God sometimes uses the words of His opponents to speak the truth (see John 11:49–52).

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<sup>23</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, [toraresource.com](http://toraresource.com)

## **Matthew 2:6**

**And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.**

Two kinds of people found here in Chapter 2, those with hatred or those paying homage! The entire world falls into one of these two categories.

Note that the Magi were Gentiles!

*(Micah 5:2) But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

“...from everlasting”: One born in Bethlehem is going to be preexistent!

**[And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel]** The 2nd Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 2:6; Micah 5:2). Next, Matthew 2:15.

**[rule my people Israel]** Christ will rule Israel and all other nations from His second coming into eternity (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44-45; Daniel 7:13-14,27; Zech. 14; Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 20:1-15; Rev. 22:4-5).

**[Israel]** Israel is made up of thirteen tribes, not only the ten so-called lost tribes. The terms "Jews" and "Israel" are used interchangeably

Most religious leaders believed in a literal fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy; therefore, they believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Ironically, when Jesus was born, these same religious leaders became his greatest enemies. When the Messiah for whom they had been waiting finally came, they didn't recognize him.

This prophecy, which combines Mic 5:2 and 2 Sam 5:2, emphasizes Matthew's conviction that the King who brings the kingdom is a Shepherd-King.

**McGee:** When Herod asked the scribes this question, they didn't have to search the Scriptures for it; they knew where it was—Micah 5:2. As a matter of fact, they didn't need even to turn to it, because they had it in their minds. They could quote it. They knew all about the coming of the Messiah. The problem was that their knowledge was academic rather than vital. It was not personally meaningful to them. They are examples of folk who know the history contained in the Bible and they know certain factual truths, but these things carry no personal meaning for them. Since the scribes knew the Old Testament Scriptures so well, you would have thought that they would have gone to the wise men and said, “How about letting us ride down with you? We are looking for the Messiah, too!”

I wonder today how many people are really looking for the coming of the Lord. We talk about it, and we study a great deal about prophecy. Would you really like to see Him right now? Suppose He broke in right today where you are and into what you are doing.

Would He interrupt anything? Would you like to say to Him, “I wish that You would postpone your visit to some other time”?

Herod got his information from the scribes—<sup>25</sup>

### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

In Judaism the citation of a Scripture text implies the whole context, not merely the quoted words. Thus Micah 5:1(2) reads, in full, from the Hebrew:

“But you, Beit-Lechem Efratah, though small among the thousands of Y’hudah, nevertheless out of you shall one come forth to me who will be ruler in Israel; and his goings-forth are from of old, from ancient days.”

Some have taken this verse to mean only that the Messiah is to be descended from King David, who came out of Beit-Lechem (1 Samuel 17:12), also called Efratah (Genesis 48:7). But it is bad exegesis to give this very clear prediction of the geographic origin of the Messiah such a figurative meaning. Instead it is an effort to fudge the obvious reference to Yeshua, the eternal Son of God “whose goings-forth are of old, from ancient days,” as noted in Yochanan 1:1–2&N, 14; 8:56–58&N.

It is amazing that in many periods of history significant numbers of Jewish people have fallen for the claims of Messianic pretenders (see 1:22N), not one of whom fulfilled this prophecy by being born in Bethlehem.

There are even rabbinic sources which directly identify Beit-Lechem as the birthplace of the Messiah, for example, the Midrash Rabbah to Lamentations, Section 51 (on Lamentations 1:16):

“A man was plowing when one of his oxen lowed. An Arab passed by and asked, ‘What are you?’ He replied, ‘I am a Jew.’ The Arab said to him, ‘Unharness your ox and untie your plow [as a sign of mourning].’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because the Temple of the Jews is destroyed.’ The Jew asked, ‘How do you know this?’ ‘From the lowing of your ox.’ While they were talking the ox lowed again. The Arab said, ‘Harness your ox and tie up your plow, because the deliverer of the Jews is born.’ ‘What is his name?’ ‘His name is Menachem [Comforter].’ ‘What is his father’s name?’ ‘Chizkiyahu [King Hezekiah is identified in Jewish literature with the Messiah].’ ‘Where do they live?’ He answered, ‘In Birat-’Arba, in Beit-Lechem of Judea.’ ”

The same *aggadah* (story) appears in the Jerusalem Talmud at B’rakhot 5a; there the last line is, “In the royal capital of Beit-Lechem.” Moreover, although it does not identify the Messiah as Yeshua, it implies that the Messiah has come already, around the time of the Temple’s destruction.<sup>26</sup>

**Hegg:** The question of Herod is answered by the group rather than by a designated spokesman, indicating that they had formulated their answer after discussing it together. No doubt they wanted to be careful in how they answered since political intrigue was the warp and woof of Herod’s reign.

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<sup>25</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>26</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:6). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

They base their answer upon the words of Micah 5:2, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, the tribal allotment of Judah. The older notion that the Sadducees relied entirely upon the five books of Moses (the Torah) and gave no credence to the Prophets, has been shown to be in error. Here, both the chief priests and the scribes base their answer to Herod upon Micah, and show that they considered the Prophets to be included in the canon of their authoritative scriptures.

The quote is from Micah 5:2[1]:

MT	Lxx	Matthew
<p>וְאַתָּה בֵּית־לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צְעִיר  לְהִיּוֹת בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמֶּךָ לִי יֵצֵא  לְהִיּוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמוֹצֵאֲתוֹ  מִקִּדְמוֹת מִיְמֵי עוֹלָם</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>καὶ σὺ Βηθλεεμ οἶκος τοῦ Εφραθα ὀλιγοστός εἰ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰουδα ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος</p> <p>And you, Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, are few in number to be reckoned among the thousands of Judah; yet out of you shall one come forth to me, to be a ruler of Israel; and his goings forth were from the beginning, even from eternity.</p>	<p>καὶ σὺ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἰ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ.</p> <p>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.</p>

It can be readily seen that Matthew's quote is neither directly from the MT nor from Lxx, which is, by-and-large, an accurate translation of the Hebrew. Some have suggested that Matthew, rather than quoting Mic 5:2, gives a rather free, interpretative midrash. Instead of "Ephrathah," which would have had little connection to Matthew's readers, he substitutes "land of Judah," which would have had direct bearing upon them, and further connects the Messiah to the tribe of Judah. Moreover, where the MT and Lxx emphasize Bethlehem's insignificance, Matthew says the opposite: "by no means least among the leaders of Judah." Most obvious is Matthew's complete reinterpretation of the final clause, which attributes to the Ruler a shepherding role over the people of Israel, while both the MT and Lxx emphasize the eternal (and thus authoritative and even divine) rule or reign of the prophesied One.

It is possible that Matthew has combined a phrase from 2Sam 5:2 (=1Chron 11:2), where God addresses Saul through the prophet Samuel: "You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel," or else he has paraphrased the Lxx of Mic 5:4, "And the Lord shall stand, and see, and feed his flock with power...."

But one wonders if this should be construed as Matthew's interpretive quotation (as most commentators take it), or whether the quote as he gives it reflects the manner in which the chief priests and scribes presented it to Herod. If it is their paraphrase, one could see a desire to soften the idea of "ruling" to leading like a shepherd, though admittedly, the role of a king in the ancient Near East was often compared to that of a shepherd. Moreover, if the chief priests and scribes were concerned that Herod be pleased

and not distracted with their answer, they may have desired to cast Judah, the domain of his political power, as great rather than least among the clans of Israel. Regardless, the use of the quote in reference to the birth of the Messiah reflects the wider tradition among the Judaisms of the 1st Century, that connected the prophecy of Mic 5 to the coming Messiah (see above).<sup>27</sup>

### **Matthew 2:7**

**Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.**

**2:7-9** Herod's inquiry concerning the time of the appearance of the star indicates that the Magi had not seen the star from the time they left their homes in the East. The question also belies Herod's scheme to locate and execute the infant claimant to the throne. Verses 9, 10 suggest that the Magi saw the star again only upon their departure from Jerusalem. It led them unfailingly to Bethlehem. The account would seem to indicate that the star was a supernatural and not a natural phenomenon (cf. Num 24:17).<sup>28</sup>

**McGee:** I am going to make a statement now and will try to prove it later: The star had appeared in the night sky sometime before the wise men appeared in Jerusalem. Remember that they made the trip by camel—not by jet plane. It is a long, hard trip by camel! I am of the opinion that they didn't arrive in Jerusalem until at least a year after the appearance of the star. This wasn't just a little Christmas celebration for them. As they traveled the long, weary miles, they had been hanging on to the hope of seeing Him and presenting their gifts to Him. Notice that Herod "inquired diligently" the *time* of the star's appearance in the sky. Keep that in mind. It will be an important fact later in the story.<sup>29</sup>

**Hegg:** Herod has put together two pieces of information, one from the magi, that a star appeared as a portend of a change in rulership, and one from the chief priests and scribes, that the prophets had predicted a ruler for Israel who would be born in Bethlehem. But he wants to know the timing of the event, so he inquires of the magi "the exact time" the star appeared (began to shine.). There is no indication that the Jewish leaders are aware of the presence of the magi, nor that the magi know of Herod's inquiry of the chief priests and scribes. This all adds to the clandestine plot ("Herod secretly called the magi") being formulated against the Child. Moreover, the "exact time" of the star's appearance is necessary because Herod has already determine to affect a mass slaughter of Jewish boys.

He needs to know how wide to make his massacre (cf. 2:16). The fact that he eventually determines all males two years old and younger were to be destroyed would indicate that the initial appearance of the star had occurred some time earlier, but we cannot say that it was necessarily two years earlier. One would expect a mad-man like

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<sup>27</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, toraresource.com

<sup>28</sup> Believers Study Bible

<sup>29</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



Herod to have cruelly chosen an excessively wide margin of time to assure that the Child was no longer a threat.<sup>30</sup>

### **Matthew 2:8**

**And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.**

He thought he was sending them, but they did not go there at all. They followed the star, not prophecy, to where He was born. The star led them to Nazareth

**[Go, and search diligently]** Herod took all possible means to obtain accurate information respecting the child, that he might be sure of destroying him. He not only ascertained the probable time of his birth, and the *place* where he would be born, but he sent the wise men that they might actually see him, and bring him word. All this might have looked suspicious if he had not clothed it with the appearance of religion. He said to them, therefore, that he did it that he might go and worship him also. From this we may learn,

(1.) that wicked men often cloak their evil designs under the appearance of religion. They attempt to deceive those who are really good, and to make them suppose that they have the same design. But God cannot be deceived, and he will bring them to punishment.

(2.) Wicked men often make use of the pious to advance their evil purposes. Men like Herod will stop at nothing if they can carry their ends. They endeavour to deceive the simple, allure the unsuspecting, and to beguile the weak, to answer their purposes of wickedness.

(3.) The plans of wicked men are often well laid. They occupy a long time; they make diligent inquiry; and all of it has the appearance of religion. But God sees the design; and though men are deceived, yet God cannot be, Proverbs 15:3.<sup>31</sup>

**McGee:** He's being as subtle as an old serpent, and that's exactly what Herod was. Suppose he had said, "If there's a king born around here, I'm going to get rid of him," and then had sent soldiers down to Bethlehem. I can assure you that he would never have found the Child because He would have been hidden. He knew that the clever way and the best way was to let the wise men go down and find the child and then come back and tell him. He said he wanted to go down and worship Him, but of course what he really wanted to do was to kill Him.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, toraresource.com

<sup>31</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

<sup>32</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Hegg:** A number of questions arise from this verse. First, is it possible that the magi were unaware of Herod's sinister reputation? Perhaps so, but it brings into question their ability to know secrets (the very occupation in which they were engaged). Secondly, why would Herod rely upon foreigners when he had a whole police force at his disposal? Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the fact that toward the end of Herod's reign, he was able to trust no one in his court. Had it become known that Herod was "running scared," it would have offered an opportune time for his enemies to seize the throne.

He tells the magi to "search carefully for the Child" (*paidiovn, paidion*, a diminutive form of *paiv~, pais*, and thus "young child") emphasizing the exigency of the matter, just as he had inquired about the "exact" time the star appeared. He further explains that when they have found the Child, they should inform him so that he too could "come and worship Him." This lets the reader know beyond doubt that the magi are not complicitous in the plot, but must be "tricked" in order to do Herod's bidding. Again, it seems strange that Herod would trust their ability to discern hidden things on the one hand, while thinking that they were unable to see through his scheme on the other. But the same power that corrupts also makes fools.<sup>33</sup>

### **Matthew 2:9**

**When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.**

**[The star-went before them]** From this it appears that the *star* was a luminous meteor, perhaps at no great distance from the ground. It is not unlikely that they lost sight of the star after they had commenced their journey from the East. It is probable that it appeared to them first in the direction of Jerusalem. They concluded that the expected King had been born, and immediately commenced their journey to Jerusalem. When they arrived there, it was important that they should be directed to the very place where he was, and the star again appeared. It was for this reason that they rejoiced, They felt assured that they were under a heavenly guidance, and would be conducted to the new-born King of the Jews. And this shows,

(1.) that the birth of Jesus was an event of great moment, worthy of the Divine direction of these men to find the place of his nativity.

(2.) God will guide those who are disposed to find the Saviour. Even if for a time the light should be withdrawn, yet it will again appear, and direct us in the way to the Redeemer.

(3.) Direction to Christ should fill us with joy. He is the way, the truth, and the life; the Saviour, the Friend, the all in all; there is no other way of life, and there is no peace to the soul till he is found. When we are guided to him, therefore, our hearts should overflow with joy and praise; and we should humbly and thankfully follow every direction that leads to the Son of God, John 12:35,36.

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<sup>33</sup> Tim Hegg; Commentary on Matthew, toraresource.com

**Hegg:** “Hearing” may have its Semitic sense of “obey,” so that they went on their way in obedience to Herod’s instructions (though see Allison-Davies, p. 246).

The star seems to appear, disappear, and reappear. Apparently it appeared to magi while they were still “in the east,” and now it reappears in order to guide them to the location of the Child. This is indicated by the use of “behold” (*ijdouv, idou*), which once again the NASB, NIV, and NRSV omit. The Greek does not require an interpretation such that the star hovered precisely over the house where Mary and Joseph lived. Rather, the star reappeared and directed the magi to Bethlehem (they were probably travelling at night, contrary to early Christian tradition), where they doubtlessly made discreet inquiry about the birth date of a boy that coincided with the original appearance of the star. Moreover, since according to Luke’s account, the shepherds did not keep silent about the event they had witnessed (cf. Lk 2:18), it is reasonable to presume that the town as a whole was aware of the birth.<sup>34</sup>

### **Matthew 2:10**

**When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.**

The Magi knew about conjunctions, they were looking for something unique, something special, something prophesied (probably by Daniel). They also knew that He was King of the Jews! In the East, not necessarily in Bethlehem! Probably a year or so later, no longer in stable, v. 11 notes in a house.

**McGee:** Now the star appears again. I think they must have traveled a long time without seeing the star. That ought to answer the nonsense one hears today about there being a confluence of certain stars that happened at one particular time. Matthew makes it clear that this star was a very unusual star; in fact, it was a supernatural star. It was miraculous, and we needn’t try to find an explanation for it. Now, it may be, as many astronomers think, that there was quite a movement in the heavens at that time. When He came, heaven and earth both responded to His coming into this world. I think such things did take place, but the wise men saw a supernatural star.<sup>35</sup>

**Hegg:** The star, which the magi had seen while still in their country, reappeared while they were in Jerusalem. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the star had originally led them to Jerusalem, so we should presume that they came to the capital city because they had interpreted the star as indicating the birth of a king. When they saw the star once again, they took it as a confirming sign of their original interpretation, and thus they rejoiced exceedingly (literally, “*they rejoiced with great joy exceedingly*”). Apparently

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<sup>34</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

<sup>35</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

the star was in the direction of Bethlehem, offering them further direction as to where they might find this newly born king.<sup>36</sup>

Why does Matthew include this notice? We wonder why the magi would have had such joy at knowing that a king had been born in Israel, especially when we have just read that all of Jerusalem was troubled over the matter (v. 3). Whatever the case, we may once again note the sub-theme of Matthew in regard to the ingathering of the Gentiles to the worship of Israel's God. Here, Gentiles have come from a foreign nation, and express joy at the birth of the Messiah. Whatever the cause of rejoicing may have been for the magi themselves, in Matthew's retelling of the story, this highlights the fact that the birth of the Messiah signaled the time foretold by the prophets, when the nations would come to Israel's light, and offer worship to her God.<sup>37</sup>

### **Matthew 2:11**

**And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**

**[the house, they saw the young child]** Not in the stable at Bethlehem where He was born, but in "the house" at Nazareth where He had lived since being presented to the Lord 41 days after His birth (Luke 2:7,21-39). He was about 2 years old by now.

**[worshipped him]** Since only God is to be worshiped, the deity of Christ is emphasized here (Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9; Luke 2:13).

The Magi gave these expensive gifts because they were worthy presents for a future king. Bible students have seen in the gifts symbols of Christ's identity and what he would accomplish. Gold was a gift for a king; incense, a gift for deity; myrrh, a spice for a person who was going to die. These gifts may have provided the financial resources for the trip to Egypt and back.

#### **Gifts**

- Not necessarily all mentioned. These mentioned because they are prophetic:
  - Gold** = deity;
  - Frankincense** = priesthood (mixed into the shewbread by the priests);
  - Myrrh** = when crushed, an ointment for burial.
- Prophet; Priest; and King. In the millennium, we find in Isaiah that he is given gifts: gold and frankincense (but no myrrh because His death is behind Him).

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<sup>36</sup> Josephus notes that a star appeared over Jerusalem, interpreted as a portend of the city's destruction: "Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year." (War 6.5.3)

<sup>37</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

“The young Child” *paidion*, ( Gk.), and not “the Babe” *brephos*, (Gk.) as in Luke 2:16, has been moved from the manger, indicating that several months, or possibly more than a year, had passed before the Magi’s visit (cf. vv. 7, 16).

**McGee:** When they arrived, Jesus was not in the stable behind an inn. The great movement of people in the city of Bethlehem had now all ceased. They had gone back to their homes because the enrollment was over. But this little Baby was newly born, and they couldn’t move Him for a while. Probably such a trip for the Little One would have jeopardized His life. So they had stayed in Bethlehem and had moved into a house. The wise men found them in a *house*. Again, the Christmas cards show the wise men coming into the stable. Well, unless Joseph pointed out that stable to them, they never even knew where it was. They came to the *house*.

Please note that when they saw the young child with Mary His mother, they fell down and worshiped *Him*. If ever there was a time when Mary should have been worshiped, this was it. But they didn’t worship her—they were *wise* men! They worshiped Him and presented to Him their treasures: gold and frank-incense and myrrh.

It is very interesting to study the facts concerning His second coming as they are related to us in Isaiah 60:6: “The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.” What gift is left out at His second coming? Myrrh! They do not bring myrrh because that speaks of His death. When He comes the second time, nothing will speak of His death. Gold speaks of His birth. He is born a King. Frankincense speaks of the fragrance of His life. Myrrh speaks of His death. All of this is indicated in the gifts that were brought to Him at His first coming. But at His next coming, myrrh will not be brought to Him. The next time He comes, He won’t come to die upon a cross for the sins of the world. He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>38</sup>

**Hegg:** The notice that they entered a house alerts us to the fact that Mary and Joseph had taken up residence in Bethlehem, something that would have been reasonable given the fact that infant mortality was high in the ancient world, and traveling long distances with a newborn would have been avoided if possible. It would also seem likely that Joseph had relatives living in Bethlehem, so remaining there would not have been difficult. There is no discrepancy with Luke’s account (*contra* Allison-Davies, 1.248), in which he describes a stable as a temporary dwelling where Mary gave birth to Yeshua. Matthew fills out the picture by alerting us to the fact that after the birth, Joseph found more permanent housing in Bethlehem.

Having previously seen only the star, the magi now come to gaze upon the King they were seeking. The “Child” is listed before Mary, since He is the center of attention. Indeed, Mary is known primarily as His mother, and when the magi offer their worship and gifts, they do so only to Yeshua, not to Mary. Moreover, Joseph is not even mentioned, stressing the fact that Yeshua had no earthly father. We may also note the repeated use of the phrase “the child and *Mary* His mother” (with slight modifications) in

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<sup>38</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

2:13, 14, 20, 21, where Joseph is not listed. In each case, “the Child” is listed first because this is Matthew’s focus.<sup>39</sup>

### **Matthew 2:12**

**And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.**

**[dream that they should not return to Herod]** Second of six dreams in the New Testament (Matthew 1:20).

### **Magi Traditions**

- Eastern tradition: 12 days: Christmas; Jan 6.
- 3rd century: “Kings” bearing gifts (Ps 72:10, 68:29)
- Western tradition: 3 (due to the three gifts), Epiphany: Jan 6.

Sixth-century chronicle, *Exerpia Latina Garbari*, gives the names of the Magi:

Bithisarea Balthasar  
Melichior Melchior  
Gathaspa Gasper

Bede (673-735): Magi were representatives of the three sons of Noah and their progeny from Asia, Africa and Europe: Shem, Ham and Japeth.

14th-century Armenian tradition:

Balthasar King of Arabia  
Melchior King of Persia  
Gasper King of India

Relics attributed to them were discovered in the fourth century; transferred from Constantinople to Milan, fifth century; to Cologne by Frederick Barbarossa in 1162 where they remain enshrined.

### **“Star” of Bethlehem?**

- Balaam’s prophecy?
  - *not* quoted by Matthew: Num 24:17. Conjunctions? Isa 60:3.
  - Kepler suggested the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7 B.C. from an erroneous inference from *Josephus*. Note: Simon *Bar Kochba*, 135 AD, “Son of the Star.”
- Not a “natural” phenomenon: it settled over a specific location... *Shekhinah?*
  - The Creation Gen 1
  - The Abrahamic Covenant Gen 15
  - Burning Bush Ex 3
  - Pillar of fire by night Ex 13
  - Flames at Pentecost Acts 2
  - *Why not here?*

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<sup>39</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

After finding Jesus and worshipping him, the Magi were warned by God not to return through Jerusalem as they had intended. Finding Jesus may mean that your life must take a different direction, one that is responsive and obedient to God’s Word. Are you willing to be led a different way?<sup>40</sup>

**Hegg: *The Flight to Egypt***

The second section of Chapter Two deals with the flight to Egypt by Joseph, Mary, and Yeshua, in order to escape the persecution perpetrated by Herod. It divides neatly into three sections, each ending with a quote or allusion to a Tanach reference: 1) vv. 13–15, the warning in the dream and the flight to Egypt, Hos 11:1, 2) vv. 16–18, the slaughter of the innocent ones, Jer 31:15, and 3) vv. 19–23, the return to Israel and settling in Nazareth, with an allusion (perhaps) to Is 11:1.

The parallels of this section of Matthew to the story of the exodus seem apparent, and have been noted by commentators throughout the centuries.

Exodus Story	Matthew
The slaughter of male children	The slaughter of male children
Flight of Moses out of Egypt	Flight of Joseph, Mary, Yeshua out of the Land
Israel is delivered at night (Ex 12:29)	Joseph, Mary, and Yeshua flee to Egypt at night (Matt 2:14)
Moses returns after the death of Pharaoh	Jacob, Mary, & Yeshua return after the death of Herod
“for all those who have sought your life have died” (Ex 4:19)	“for those who sought the Child’s life are dead” (Matt 2:20)

As the paradigm for redemption, the exodus is here brought forward by way of type and anti-type. The anti-type of Pharaoh is Herod, while Moses stands as a type of Messiah. Even as Moses mediated the covenant for Israel, and led her out of her bondage, so Yeshua would be the mediator for His people, and redeem them from the slavery of sin.

But it is not as though Matthew has contrived his story in order to conform it to the pattern of the exodus. The sources upon which he drew related the history of Yeshua’s birth and early years, including the events that parallel the exodus. Matthew is simply telling his story in such a way as to highlight these parallels.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>41</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

### **Matthew 2:13**

**And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.**

**[for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him]** The 2nd New Testament prophecy in Matthew (Matthew 2:13, fulfilled). Next, Matthew 3:10.

**[destroy him]** Satan knew that this "seed of the woman" was to crush his head and restore man's dominion (Genesis 3:15; 1 John 3:8), so he tried many times to kill Him before He could get to the cross to defeat him (Matthew 26:3, refs.; Col. 2:14-17; 1 Peter 2:24).

**[Flee into Egypt]** Egypt is situated to the south-west of Judea, and is distant from Bethlehem perhaps about sixty miles. It was at this time a Roman province. The Greek language was spoken there. There were many Jews there, who had a temple and synagogues; and Joseph, therefore, would be among his own countrymen, and yet beyond the reach of Herod. The jurisdiction of Herod extended only to the river Sihon or river of Egypt, and of course, beyond that, Joseph was safe from his designs. For a description of Egypt, Isaiah 19:1. It is remarkable that this is the only time in which our Saviour was out of Palestine, and that this was in the land where the children of Israel had suffered so much and so long under the oppression of the Egyptian kings. The very land which was the land of bondage and groaning for the Jews, became now the land of refuge and safety for the new-born King of Judea. God can overturn nations and kingdoms, so that those whom he loves shall be safe anywhere.

This was the second dream or vision that Joseph received from God. Joseph's first dream revealed that Mary's child would be the Messiah (Matthew 1:20-21). His second dream told him how to protect the child's life. Although Joseph was not Jesus' natural father, he was Jesus' legal father and was responsible for his safety and well-being. Divine guidance comes only to prepared hearts. Joseph remained receptive to God's guidance.

**Hegg:** In the Torah, descent to Egypt or connection to Egypt spells trouble. Abraham descends to Egypt because of famine, and puts Sarah in jeopardy (Gen 12); Hagar is an Egyptian; Isaac is commanded not to descend to Egypt (Gen 26:2); the Midianite traders to whom Joseph was sold were on their way to Egypt (Gen 37:25, 28); Joseph is enslaved in Egypt prior to his rise to power; ultimately, the nation of Israel is enslaved in Egypt as well. Thus, Egypt became a symbol of trouble and slavery.

In Matthew's story, however, Egypt is a place of protection away from the murderous decree of Herod. This may parallel the life of David in which he too retreated to the land of Israel's enemies to escape those seeking his life. In 1Sam 21:10f, David flees from Saul to the land of Achish, king of Gath, and feigning insanity, takes refuge there. In a similar fashion, the Son of David is taken to a foreign land in order to escape His enemies.



The rabbinic sources are aware of the “flight to Egypt,” but most likely they have taken this from the Gospel sources. We therefore gain little historical value in their mention of this event. The purpose for including Yeshua’s flight to Egypt, however, seems clear: wanting to portray Him as a magician whose powers were not from God and who led Israel astray, some notices in the rabbinic literature describe Yeshua’s magical arts as having been learned in Egypt. For instance, in b.*Sanhedrin* 107b, the accusation against Yeshua is linked to the fact that His father, called Joshua ben Parahyah, had taken Him to Egypt. But Joshua ben Parahyah lived nearly two generations before the time of Yeshua, showing that this notice, like the others, were put forward as a polemic against Yeshua and His followers.

But Matthew is clear in relating the facts of his sources: Joseph took Mary and Yeshua to Egypt on the basis of divine instructions, and remained there until God instructed him to return to the Land. The “flight to Egypt” is entirely the plan of God.<sup>42</sup>

### **Matthew 2:14**

**When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:**

Notice Joseph’s instant obedience.

**[by night]** Indicating haste, proving the visit of the magi was at Nazareth. If they had been at Bethlehem the family would not have gone to Nazareth to live before going into Egypt, as in Luke 2:39. In no place is it stated that the magi went to Bethlehem, that they obeyed Herod, that the visit was immediately after His birth, or that the star led them to a manger. All these are traditions passed on to us.<sup>43</sup>

**Hegg:** Joseph’s obedience is precise and immediate. He does not wait, but believing the revelation he has received, and knowing that Herod is intent on harming Yeshua, he leaves at night. Like the Israelites of old who left Egypt at night (Ex 12:29), so Jacob and his family flee from Herod at night. But even more important is the notice, once again, that Joseph was entirely obedient to the divine word he had received. The earlier notice that Joseph was a righteous man (1:19) is confirmed in the story time and again.

Egypt fit the circumstances well. It was close, and a well established Roman province outside of Herod’s jurisdiction. Moreover, it had a large Jewish population. According to Philo (*Flaccus* 43), a million Jews lived in Egypt.

### **Matthew 2:15**

**And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.**

Matthew is implying that there is a symbolic validity to the history of Christ in terms of the history of Israel. As Israel was driven into Egypt and then called out, and that concept

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<sup>42</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

<sup>43</sup> Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

is tied up with the Passover Lamb, likewise, Jesus Christ, as a babe, was sent to Egypt for a while is called out and then goes into the wilderness (like Israel). Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness; Israel was in the wilderness 40 years.

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

Hosea 11:1 was written 700 years before!

### **Pattern Is Prophecy**

Matthew here points out that some of these passages that discuss the nation Israel also have a valid Messianic interpretation.

- Exodus 4:22: Israel nationally spoken of as God's son (Jer 31:9; Rom 9:4-5).
- *All through Isaiah, the thought shifts between the nation and the Messiah:* Isaiah 41:8: Abraham as the friend of God, and Israel spoken of as if the nation was an individual, here Israel my servant; Isaiah 42:1-4 "spirit upon him," subject changed, no longer referring to nation, but now the Messiah; and Isaiah 52:13 - 53. The Jews interpret this chapter nationally, not individually.

**[Out of Egypt have I called my son]** The 3rd Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1). Next, Matthew 2:18.

**[That it might be fulfilled]** This language is recorded in Hosea 11:1. It there evidently speaks of God's calling his people out of Egypt under Moses. See Exodus 4:22,23. It might be said to be fulfilled in his calling Jesus from Egypt, because the words in Hosea aptly expressed this also. The same love which led him to deliver his people Israel from the land of Egypt, now led him also to deliver his Son from that place. The words used by Hosea would express both events Matthew 1:22. Perhaps, also, the place in Hosea became a proverb, to express any great deliverance from danger; and thus it could be said to be fulfilled in Christ, as other proverbs are in cases to which they are applicable. It cannot be supposed that the passage in Hosea was a prophecy of the Messiah, but was only used by Matthew appropriately to express the event.<sup>44</sup>

Going to Egypt was not unusual because there were colonies of Jews in several major Egyptian cities. These colonies had developed during the time of the great captivity (see Jeremiah 43-44). There is an interesting parallel between this flight to Egypt and Israel's history. As an infant nation, Israel went to Egypt, just as Jesus did as a child. God led Israel out (Hosea 11:1); God brought Jesus back. Both events show God working to save his people.

**Believers Study Bible:** Some suggest that, by employing Hos 11:1 in this verse and Jer 31:15 in Matt 15:17, 18, Matthew implies that Jesus recapitulates the history of Israel. The passage from Hosea, which follows the flight into Egypt, recalls the Exodus. Under this view, Matthew sees in the personal experiences of Jesus a summary of the experience of His people. He is afflicted with their affliction (Isa 63:9) and repeats their religious experience of the Exodus from Egypt. As Egypt had been a refuge for God's people (Gen 12:10; 46:3, 4; 1 Kin 11:40), so now it offers asylum for the Lord's Anointed. Hosea saw

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<sup>44</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

in the Exodus both the liberation and election of the chosen people (cf. Ex 4:22). Matthew uses Hosea to stress that Jesus is the liberating Messiah and Son of God, whose birth and infancy are guided by God's providence as was Israel's history.

**Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

**Out of Egypt I called my son.** Hosea 11:1 clearly refers not to the Messiah but to the people of Israel, who were called God's son even before leaving Egypt (Exodus 4:22). The previous two *Tanakh* quotations (1:23, 2:6) involved literal fulfillment, but this does not. In what sense, then, does Yeshua's flight to Egypt **fulfill what Adonai had said through the prophet?**

To answer, we must understand the four basic modes of Scripture interpretation used by the rabbis. These are:

- (1) *Pshat* ("simple")—the plain, literal sense of the text, more or less what modern scholars mean by "grammatical-historical exegesis," which looks to the grammar of the language and the historical setting as background for deciding what a passage means. Modern scholars often consider grammatical-historical exegesis the only valid way to deal with a text; pastors who use other approaches in their sermons usually feel defensive about it before academics. But the rabbis had three other modes of interpreting Scripture, and their validity should not be excluded in advance but related to the validity of their implied presuppositions.
- (2) *Remez* ("hint")—wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text hints at a truth not conveyed by the *p.shat*. The implied presupposition is that God can hint at things of which the Bible writers themselves were unaware.
- (3) *Drash* or *midrash* ("search")—an allegorical or homiletical application of a text. This is a species of eisegesis—reading one's own thoughts into the text—as opposed to exegesis, which is extracting from the text what it actually says. The implied presupposition is that the words of Scripture can legitimately become grist for the mill of human intellect, which God can guide to truths not directly related to the text at all.
- (4) *Sod* ("secret")—a mystical or hidden meaning arrived at by operating on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, transposing letters, and the like. For example, two words, the numerical equivalents of whose letters add up to the same amount, are good candidates for revealing a secret through what Arthur Koestler in his book on the inventive mind called "bisociation of ideas." The implied presupposition is that God invests meaning in the minutest details of Scripture, even the individual letters.

The presuppositions underlying *remez*, *drash* and *sod* obviously express God's omnipotence, but they also express his love for humanity, in the sense that he chooses out of love to use extraordinary means for reaching people's hearts and minds. At the same time, it is easy to see how *remez*, *drash* and *sod* can be abused, since they all allow, indeed require, subjective interpretation; and this explains why scholars, who deal with the objective world, hesitate to use them.

These four methods of working a text are remembered by the Hebrew word "*PaRDeS*," an acronym formed from the initials; it means "orchard" or "garden."

What, then, is Mattityahu doing here? Some allege he is misusing Scripture, twisting the meaning of what Hosea wrote from its context in order to apply it to Yeshua. Such an

accusation stands only if Mattityahu is dealing with the *p.shat*. For there is no question that the *p.shat* of Hosea 11:1 applies to the nation of Israel and not to Yeshua.

Some think Mattityahu is using the *drash* approach, making a *midrash* in which he reads the Messiah into a verse dealing with Israel. Many rabbis used the same procedure; Mattityahu's readers would not have found it objectionable.

Nevertheless, I believe Mattityahu is not doing eisegesis but giving us a *remez*, a hint of a very deep truth. Israel is called God's son as far back as Exodus 4:22. The Messiah is presented as God's son a few verses earlier in Mattityahu (1:18–25), reflecting *Tanakh* passages such as Isaiah 9:5–6(6–7), Psalm 2:7 and Proverbs 30:4. Thus the Son equals the son: the Messiah is equated with, is one with, the nation of Israel. This is the deep truth Mattityahu is hinting at by calling Yeshua's flight to Egypt a "fulfillment" of Hosea 11:1.

This fact, that the Messiah Yeshua stands for and is intimately identified with his people Israel, is an extremely important corporate aspect of the Gospel generally neglected in the individualistically oriented Western world. The individual who trusts Yeshua becomes united with him and is "immersed" (baptized; see 3:1&N) into all that Yeshua is (see Ac 2:38&N), including his death and resurrection—so that his sinful propensities are regarded as dead, and his new nature, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is regarded as alive (Ro 6:3–6&N). Likewise, just as this intimate identification with the Messiah holds for the individual, so the Messiah similarly identifies with and embodies national, corporate Israel. Indeed it is only because Yeshua identifies himself with the Jewish people, national Israel, the "olive tree" into which Gentile Christians have been "grafted" (Ro 11:17–24), that he can plausibly identify with the Messianic Community, the Church, as "head of the Body" (1C 11:3; Ep 1:10, 22; 4:15, 5:23; Co 1:18, 2:19) and "cornerstone" of the building (below at 21:42, Mk 12:10, Ac 4:11, Ep 2:20, 1 Ke 2:6–7).

Modern readers of the Bible, by using "grammatical-historical exegesis," ignore all modes of interpretation except the *p.shat*, discounting them as eisegesis. This is in reaction to the tendency of the Church Fathers in the second through eighth centuries to over-allegorize, an error which probably resulted from their misunderstanding the limitations of, and therefore misusing, the other three rabbinic approaches to texts. But the New Testament is a Jewish book, written by Jews in a Jewish context; and the first-century Jewish context included all four ways of handling texts. Mattityahu knew perfectly well that Hosea was not referring to Yeshua, to a Messiah, or even to any individual. Yet he also sensed that because Yeshua in a profound yet recondite way embodies Israel, his coming from Egypt re-enacted in a spiritually significant way the Exodus of the Jewish people. Since *remez* and *p.shat* have different presuppositions one should expect fulfillment of a prophecy by *remez* to be different from literal fulfillment. At 1:23 and 2:6 the plain, literal sense of the text, the *p.shat*, suffices to show how the prophecies are fulfilled, but here it does not.

The phrase, "**what Adonai had said through the prophet,**" takes our attention off the prophet himself and puts it on God who spoke through him. It lets the reader understand that *Adonai* might have been saying more than what the prophet himself understood when he wrote. It prepares him for the possibility that behind Hosea's *p.shat* was God's *remez* to be revealed in its time and lends credibility to the "*PaRDeS*" mode of interpretation.

Recognition that there are four modes of Jewish exegesis also resolves much of the controversy concerning how certain passages in the *Tanakh* ought to be interpreted. For example, most Christians say that Isaiah 53 refers to the Messiah, and some (though not all) traditional Jews say it refers to Israel. But if there is a mystical identification between the Messiah and the people whose king he is (an idea expounded at length by the best-known Christian theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth, in his *Church Dogmatics*), then the interpretational conflict vanishes; both claimants hold part of the total truth.

Moreover, the idea that the Messiah personifies or is identified intimately with Israel is a Jewish one. First of all, we see it in the *Tanakh* itself. Compare Isaiah 49:3 (“You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”) with Isaiah 49:6 (“Is it too slight a thing that you should be my servant . . . to restore the preserved of Israel?”). The servant is at once Israel and he who restores Israel, that is, the Messiah. In chapter 12 of Raphael Patai’s *The Messiah Texts* he quotes Pesikta Rabbati 161–162, where the Messiah is called Efrayim (a name symbolizing Israel) and is at the same time presented as bearing Israel’s sufferings. Likewise the thirteenth-century work which is at the core of the Jewish mystical approach called *kabbalah*, the *Zohar* (2:212a), links the Messiah’s suffering with that of Israel. Patai also retells the eighteenth-century Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav’s story of the viceroy and the king’s daughter, adding that most interpreters understand the viceroy to represent both Israel and the suffering Messiah.<sup>45</sup>

**Hegg:** The death of Herod brought relief to many. Carson notes that following the death of Herod, the Qumran covenanters returned to rebuild their center which had been destroyed in 31 BCE. The death of Herod also made it possible for Joseph and his family to return safely to the Land. The return to the Land is said by Matthew to fulfill a prophecy of the Tanach, introduced by the common formula. The quote is from Hosea 11:1, but the manner in which Yeshua’s return to the Land was its fulfillment requires further discussion.

MT	Lxx	Matthew
<p>כִּי נַעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶהְבֵּהוּ וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבְנִי:</p> <p>When Israel was a youth, I loved him; and from Egypt I called My son.</p>	<p>διότι νήπιος Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐγὼ ἠγάπησα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ</p> <p>for Israel is a child, and I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called his children.</p>	<p>ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου.</p> <p>out of Egypt I have called my son.</p>

Matthew quotes from the Hebrew rather than the Lxx, for he follows the reading נַבְּל , “my son” rather than the Lxx τα; “his children.”

The phrase in the context of Hosea 11 is clearly a reference to the exodus. As

<sup>45</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:15). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

the prophet bemoans the waywardness of Israel in regard to her marriage covenant with God which she has despised, he reminds her that God had loved her and had proven His love through redeeming her from the slavery of Egypt. Her exodus was not the result of her own strength, but was entirely the work of the Almighty Who stretched forth His hand to redeemer (Ex 6:6, cp. Deut 4:34; 5:15; Ps 136:12; Jer 32:21). It is this demonstration of His redeeming love that is the point of the prophet in his bringing the judgment against Israel for her faithlessness.

Thus, the quote in Matthew's story is given to parallel the exodus event as the demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness to Israel which resulted in her redemption, with the coming of Yeshua as His Messiah Who would effect eternal redemption. In that Yeshua represents Israel, He does so as her Redeemer, as the One through Whom she receives her promised reward.

Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 gathers together the strands of messianic expectation with the redemption of Israel. He applies the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, "out of Egypt I have called My son" to Yeshua, because, like the exodus from Egypt which formed the paradigm for redemption itself, it is in Yeshua that Israel's ultimate and final redemption would be realized. Even as Yeshua would be taken to Egypt by Joseph and Mary, and would return to the Land at the appointed time, so Israel as a nation, God's firstborn son, would find her redemption from slavery in the person and work of God's Son, the Davidic King Messiah. Far from wresting Hosea's prophecy from its context, or misusing it for his own theological purposes, Matthew has brought it forward within the overall messianic promise of the Tanach, appropriately applying it to Yeshua.<sup>46</sup>



Fulfillment of prophecy was involved both when Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), obeying the imperial decree (Luke 2:1-5), and when they went to Egypt (Hos 11:1), following the angel's command (Matt 2:13).

<sup>46</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

## **Matthew 2:16**

**Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.**

[**mocked**] Greek: *empaizo* (GSN-1702), jeer, deride. This is further proof that they did not obey Herod's orders to go to Bethlehem. They scorned him, no doubt detecting his purpose in wanting to find the child. The same word is used in Matthew 27:29-31; Luke 18:32. When he saw that he had been deceived by them; that is, that they did not return as he had expected. It does not mean that they did it *for the purpose* of mocking or deriding him; but that he was *disappointed* in their not returning.

[**Slew all the children**] That is, all the male children. This is implied in the original. The design of Herod was to cut off him that had been born *King* of the Jews. His purpose, therefore, did not require that he should slay all the female children; and though he was cruel, yet we have no right to think that he attempted here anything except what he thought to be for his own safety, and to secure himself from a rival.

[**two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men**] The magi found a "young child" (Greek: *paidion* (GSN-3813), Matthew 2:9), a child older than the newborn "babe" (Greek: *brephos* (GSN-1025)) which the shepherds found over a year before at His birth (Luke 2:16).

Herod was afraid that this newborn king would one day take his throne. He completely misunderstood the reason for Christ's coming. Jesus didn't want Herod's throne; he wanted to be king of Herod's life. Jesus wanted to give Herod eternal life, not take away his present life. Today people are often afraid that Christ wants to take things away when, in reality, he wants to give them real freedom, peace, and joy. Don't fear Christ—give him the throne of your life.

The historian Josephus does not mention this massacre; and since Matthew is our only source for it, some have erroneously thought it legendary. However, Bethlehem, located a few miles south of Jerusalem, was not a large town, and the number of victims may not have been many. Since Herod's reign was bloodstained, the murder of these children (50 or fewer) may not have attracted much attention outside the immediate vicinity. Such an atrocity was not uncommon for Herod, of whom Augustus Caesar said, with a play on words, it was better to be Herod's "sow" (*hus*, Gk.), than his "son" *huios* (Gk.). Based upon the calculations of the Magi, Herod arbitrarily included all "male children" under two years of age in order to make sure that the one "born King of the Jews" (v. 2) would be included. As by the sword he had removed all former threats to his reign, so he now tries to do with the Christ.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Believers Study Bible

**McGee:** Part of what I'm going to say now is supposition, and part is based on solid fact. As I mentioned before, the wise men did not arrive at the time the shepherds arrived at the stable. The wise men came later, and, according to verse 11, the family had moved into a house by then. When Herod had had his private session with the wise men, he "inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared." I suppose that the wise men said, "Well, it was about a year ago." If we are accurate in thinking that these wise men came from all quarters of the East and had met in a certain place from which they began their trek to Jerusalem, that would consume a great deal of time in a day when travel was by camel instead of by jet. It may have been a year, it may have been longer, but Herod was so infuriated that the wise men did not come back and report concerning the Child, that he probably said, "Well, if they said it was a year ago when they saw the star, I'll just double it and make it two years and kill all the children two years old and younger!" Herod was actually a madman.<sup>48</sup>

**Hegg:** The word of the angel given to Joseph has come true (v. 13). Herod, realizing that the magi had failed to cooperate with his plan ("to mock, dupe, deceive"), became enraged (like Pharaoh in the exodus story, and exactly the opposite of the joy expressed by the magi), and initiates his plan to massacre all male children in the environs of Bethlehem in hopes of destroying Israel's infant king. The exact time frame is not given, but we should reason that sufficient time had elapsed for Herod to realize the magi had refused to further his murderous plot.

Herod's later years were marked by massacres of innocent people. Not only is he remembered for murdering his own wife, but he also slew his two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus (6 or 7 CE), and thereafter his son Antipater. He further ordered that upon his death, a member of every prominent Jewish family under his rule should be executed, in order that there would be sufficient mourning for his passing.

The author of the *Testament of Moses* likewise "prophesies" of "powerful kings" who would arise over Israel, usurping the office of High Priest, and who would "exterminate them in secret places so that no one will know where their bodies are. He will kill both old and young, showing mercy to none... He will impose judgments upon them as did the Egyptians, and he will punish them." So the connection of Herod's reign with the oppression of the Pharaoh of the exodus is something already in place by Matthew's time. For Herod (like Pharaoh), only the male children are murdered: Matthew gives no room for a female king.

How many male children were massacred is not known, but given the fact that the population of Bethlehem and its environs was most likely around 1,000, and given the birth and mortality rates of the time, it is likely that the number would be in the neighborhood of 20. The tradition in the Christian church exaggerated the number to 14,000 or even 64,000. As note above, Herod expanded his execution order both geographically and chronologically: "in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and younger." Given the age of the victims, it is reasonable to presume that the birth of Yeshua (calculated by the original time the star appeared to the magi) had most likely occurred at least a year and a half earlier.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, [torahresource.com](http://torahresource.com)



## **Matthew 2:17**

**Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,**

[Jeremy] Jeremiah. This quotation is taken from Jeremiah 31:15. The word "fulfilled," here, is taken evidently in the sense that the words in Jeremiah *aptly express* the event which Matthew was recording. The original design of this prophecy was to describe the sorrowful departure of the people into captivity, after the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan. The captives were assembled at Rama, Jeremiah himself being in chains, and there the fate of those who had escaped in the destruction of the city was decided at the will of the conqueror, Jeremiah 40:1. The nobles had been slain, and the eyes of their king put out after the murder of his sons before his sight, and the people were then gathered at Rama in chains, whence they were to start on their mournful journey, slaves to a cruel monarch, leaving behind them all that was dear in life. The sadness of such a scene is well expressed in the language of the prophet, and no less beautifully and fitly applies to the melancholy event which the evangelist records; and there could be no impropriety in his using it as a quotation.

## **Matthew 2:18**

**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.**

Rachel is being used by Jeremiah, idiomatically, as mother Israel. But Rachel is specifically linked to Bethlehem.

*(Jeremiah 31:15) Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*

Gen 35:18: Death of Rachel. As she died in labor, she called his name Benoni; son of my sorrow, or travail. Jacob renamed to Benjamin, Son of my right hand. Isa 53 notes "a man of sorrow." Ps 2, the Son of my right hand.

**[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]**

The 4th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 2:18; Jeremiah 31:15). Next, Matthew 2:23. Ramah was 5 miles north of Jerusalem, indicating that Herod's slaughter of the children extended at least 10 miles around Bethlehem, including Jerusalem. Rama was a small town in the tribe of Benjamin, not far from Bethlehem. Rachel was the mother of Benjamin, and was buried near to Bethlehem, Genesis 35:16-19. Rama was about six miles north-west of Jerusalem, near Bethel. The name *Rama* signifies an eminence, and was given to the town because it was situated on a hill. Rama is commonly supposed to be the same as the Arimathea of the New Testament-the place where Joseph lived who begged the body of Jesus. See Matthew 27:57. This is also the same place in which Samuel was born, where he resided, died, and was buried, and where he anointed Saul as king, 1 Samuel 1:1,19, 2:11, 8:4, 19:18 1 Samuel 25:1.

Rachel was the wife of Jacob, one of the great men of God in the Old Testament. From Jacob's 12 sons had come the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19).

The massacre of the innocents recalls Jeremiah's prophecy lamenting the captivity of Rachel's descendants (Jer 31:15). Ramah is located eight miles north of Jerusalem and was the scene of the gathering of the exiles. As they pass Ramah, Jeremiah pictures Rachel's weeping from her tomb over the fate of the fallen Ephraimites. Jeremiah uses this tragic event to introduce his description of the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31-34). Although the parallelism of sentiment between the Exile and Herod's atrocity is evident, Matthew employs the event to introduce the new covenant which Jesus has come to inaugurate in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

**McGee:** This is an unusual prophecy, also. Jeremiah didn't say that the weeping would be heard in Bethlehem. I'm sure there was great mourning in Bethlehem, too. But Jeremiah mentions Rama (spelled Ramah in the Old Testament), and Rama was about as far north of Jerusalem as Bethlehem was south of Jerusalem. And Rama was Jeremiah's country, by the way. I imagine that when the soldiers had been given their orders to slay the children, the captain said to Herod, "Where do you want me to begin?" And I think that old Herod said, "Well, just draw a circle around Jerusalem with the radius as far south as Bethlehem and as far north as Rama"—yet Rama was not in any way involved in it. So, you see, Herod slew a great many children. You can imagine the weeping all the way from Bethlehem to Rama, a radius of about ten to twelve miles, or twenty to twenty-five miles across the area. It must have been a heartbreaking time in the lives of these people when they lost their little ones. The prophecy given through Jeremiah was literally fulfilled.<sup>50</sup>

**Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

The *p.shat* of this verse from Jeremiah does not refer to the Messiah but to the slaughter of the northern tribes of Israel by the Assyrians. But there is a *remez* here of which Mattityahu makes use: the traditional burial-place of Ya'akov's wife Rachel is in Ramah, just outside Beit-Lechem—one can visit what is called "Rachel's Tomb" there today. Just as Rachel in her grave mourns for her posterity descended from her son Yosef, so the many women of nearby Beit-Lechem mourn for their slain infants.<sup>51</sup>

**Hegg:** The appeal to Jeremiah 31:15 once again requires explanation for Matthew's use of the Tanach in his narrative. Clearly, Matthew has made a connection between the death of children spoken of by Jeremiah, and the situation in Bethlehem at the time of Yeshua's infancy. If we look more closely at Jer 31, we will see some remarkable parallels to Matthew's story. Moreover, it is clear that Jer 31 was understood eschatologically as speaking of the time of Yeshua, for the New Covenant passage (vv.

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<sup>50</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>51</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:18). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

31–34) was regularly interpreted as being accomplished by the salvific work of Yeshua (cf. Heb 8:8, 10:16; cp. Luke 22:20; 1Cor 11:25; 2Cor. 3:6).

Jeremiah 31	Matthew
vv. 4, 21 - O virgin of Israel	1:23 - the virgin shall be with child
v. 9 - I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son	11:25 - You...have revealed them to infants
v. 8 - See, I will bring them...among them will be ... expectant mothers	1:18 - she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit
v. 7 - O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel	1:21 - He will save His people from their sins.
v. 17 - Your children will return to their own land	2:20–21 - go into the land of Israel; Joseph got up, took the child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.
v. 35 - He appoints ... the stars to shine by night	2:2 - For we saw His star in the east
v. 25 - those who hunger and thirst will be filled	5:6 - blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied
vv. 31–34 - a New Covenant to be established with Israel	26:28 - for this is My blood of the covenant

As Allison and Davies point out (1.267), knowing the story of Yeshua's birth and infancy, and then re-reading Jeremiah 31, Matthew would have seen these verbal parallels as significant, and would have naturally concluded that the prophet's promise of a coming New Covenant with Israel must have come to fulfillment in the appearance of Yeshua. The fact that Jeremiah 31 also includes a notice of weeping over the loss of children therefore fits the scenario perfectly. Even if the completion of Jeremiah's prophecy remained for the yet eschatological future, in Matthew's mind, the appearance of the Messiah sealed the prophecy as inevitably fulfilled by Him. Furthermore, since some of what Jeremiah foresaw had already taken place in a representative way in Yeshua (as noted above in the discussion of Hosea 11:1), then Matthew could reason that the rest of Jeremiah's prophetic message would also be accomplished by Him.

Matthew’s quote from Jeremiah 31:15 aligns with the Hebrew text, and is not a direct quote for the Lxx as we have it, though the Lxx does generally capture the sense of the MT:

MT	Lxx	Matthew
<p>קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְכִי תְמָרוֹרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מֵאַנָּה לְהַנְחִים עַל-בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ:</p> <p>A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.</p>	<p>φωνὴ ἐν Ραμα ἠκούσθη θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ όδυρμοῦ Ραχηλ ἀποκλαιομ- ένη οὐκ ἤθελεν παύσασθαι ἐπὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτῆς ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν</p> <p>A voice was heard in Rama, of lamentation, and of weeping, and wailing; Rachel would not cease weeping for her children, because they are not.</p>	<p>φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμὰ ἠκούσθη, κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμὸς πολύς· Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν.<sup>1</sup></p> <p>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.</p>

The historical background of Jer 31:15 is that of the deportation of Israelites to Babylon (most like of the deportation of Judah and Benjamin) under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, by the hand of the commander of his imperial guard, Nebuzaradan. He gathered the captives at Ramah before taking them to Babylon (Jer 40:1–2). Rachel’s tomb lay north of Jerusalem at Zelzah in the same vicinity (1Sam 10:2), for Jacob buried her “on the way to Ephrath” (Gen 35:19). Jeremiah’s prophecy thus envisions the captives of Judah going past Rachel’s tomb, and her crying out from her tomb as her “children” are taken away. (Rachel was idealized as the mother of Israel, even though more of Jacob’s sons were born by Leah.)

But how does this fit Matthew’s story? The weeping in Bethlehem is not for the One who is being exiled to Egypt, but to those who remained and were slaughtered. The answer may be found in the context of the Jeremiah quote. Jer 31 is a chapter of hope, for even though there are tears in connection with the exile, there is hope because the Almighty intends to reverse the exile and regather His people, renewing them in their obedience to Him, forgiving and wiping away their transgressions, and establishing them forever as His people in the Land. In the same way, the anguish at the needless slaughter of children will give way to hope for the coming redemption, for the Redeemer has come. Furthermore, Matthew has already noted that the exile has ended (1:11–12), and that the Davidic King has arrived. The One who would establish the New Covenant has come, and the tears will be wiped away. Gathering the hopeful tone of Jeremiah, writing in the face of the exile, Matthew brings this hope to rest squarely upon Yeshua, Immanuel. As Carson concludes:

*The tears of the Exile are now being “fulfilled”—i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah’s day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir of David’s throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (26:28) promised by Jeremiah*

## **Matthew 2:19**

**But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,**

**[angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt]** Third of four angelic dreams of Joseph (Matthew 1:20; Matthew 2:13,19).

Herod left three sons, and the kingdom was at his death divided between them. To Archelaus was given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria; to Philip, Batanea, Trachonitis, etc.; to Antipas, Galilee and Perea. Each of these was also called Herod, and these are the individuals who are so frequently referred to in the New Testament during the ministry of the Saviour and the labours of the apostles.

## **Matthew 2:20**

**Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.**

**[land of Israel]** Used twice (Matthew 2:20-21). Called "land of the Jews" (Acts 10:39), thus proving that Jews and Israel were one people. All the tribes were still known (Matthew 19:28; Acts 26:7; James 1:1).

It's essential to get Jesus out of the land of Egypt and back up into Israel. The most important reason is that He has been born under the Law, and He is to live under the Mosaic Law. He is the only One who really ever kept it. He must get out from under the influence of Egypt. He is not to be raised down there as Moses had been and as the children of Israel had been when they were becoming a nation down in Egypt.

**Hegg:** Herod's death is recounted in Josephus (*Ant.* 17.168–69), and apparently he died of some disease that ate away at his vital organs. Though given every manner of cure from physicians, he died of his sickness, only after he had given the order to have his son Antipater executed and given an ignoble burial at Hyrcania. It was Herod's death that signalled the time for Joseph's return. Even though the news of Herod's death would have been immediately broadcast in the local region, it would have taken some time to reach Egypt. Accordingly, the angel of the Lord (this is the third mention in Matthew) gives yet another dream to Joseph, assuring him that it is safe to return to the Land.

How long were Joseph, Mary, and Yeshua in Egypt? The biblical text gives us no answer. The apocryphal gospels supply various reckonings: 3Infancy 1:3 and Latin Gospel of Thomas (1–3) have one year, while the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy (25–6) has three years. But these are all speculation. The message of the angel notes a plural: "*those* who sought the Child's life are dead." Were there more than Herod in on the plot to destroy the infant Yeshua? While it is possible that Herod's father, Antipater, may have been involved in the decree to slaughter the Hebrew boys, it is more probable that Matthew's plural is a generalizing or categorical stylization. Besides, Herod had enlisted his troops to carry out the decree, and so the plural is understandable. Some have

suggested that Matthew employs the plural in order to strengthen the parallel to Ex 4:19, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Matthew 2:21**

**And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.**

**[And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel]** His obedience to all God's commands proves that he was a man of good character and consecration to God.

#### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

What does the New Testament call the Holy Land? Not Palestine but *Eretz-Israel*, “the Land of Israel.” Similarly, the regions north and south of Jerusalem are called not the West Bank but “Y’udah” and “Shomron” (Judea and Samaria; see Ac 1:8). The New Testament, like the Israelis of today, uses the names the Hebrew Bible uses, not those employed by the Romans or other conquerors. See 5:5&N.<sup>53</sup>

### **Matthew 2:22**

**But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:**

**[Galilee]** The region north of Samaria. At this time the land of Palestine was divided into three parts: GALILEE, on the north; SAMARIA, in the middle; and Judea, on the south. Galilee was under the government of Herod Antipas, who was comparatively a mild prince; and in his dominions Joseph might find safety.

**[He heard that Archelaus did reign]** Archelaus possessed a cruel and tyrannical disposition similar to his father. At one of the passovers he caused three thousand of the people to be put to death in the temple and city. For his crimes, after he had reigned nine years, he was banished by Augustus, the Roman emperor, to Gaul, where he died. Knowing his character, and fearing that he would not be safe there, Joseph hesitated about going there, and was directed by God to go to Galilee, a place of safety.

Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. of an incurable disease. Rome trusted him but didn't trust his sons. Herod knew that Rome wouldn't give his successor as much power, so he divided his kingdom into three parts, one for each son. Archelaus received Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea; Herod Philip II received Traconitis. Archelaus, a violent man, began his reign by slaughtering 3,000

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<sup>52</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

<sup>53</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:20). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

influential people. Nine years later, he was banished. God didn't want Joseph's family to go into the region of this evil ruler.<sup>54</sup>

**[Archelaus]** (4 B.C.-A.D. 6) inherited Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. Augustus made him ethnarch, a title with less prestige than that of "king." He pursued the building of public works but was a repressive ruler. Early in his reign a riot broke out in Jerusalem during Passover. Three thousand people were killed by his soldiers, a fact which evidently contributed to Joseph's migration to Galilee. After a deputation of the aristocracy from Judea and Samaria visited Rome to protest his rule, he was deposed and banished.

Archelaus was another Herod and very brutal.

**Hegg:** Once again, Joseph is fully obedient to the word of God given by the angel in a dream. He and his family return to the Land as God has instructed. But on arriving, he receives the information that Herod's successor was Archelaus. Previously, Herod had decreed that Antipas (referred to simply as Herod the tetrarch in Matt 14) should be his successor over Judea, but at the time of Herod's death, he changed his mind, assigning Antipas to be tetrarch of Galilee and Berea, and named Archelaus as successor to his throne (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.188). He named his son Philip became tetrarch over Iturea, Trachonitis, and some other territories (in the north, Transjordan region).

Of the three, Philip was the best, and Yeshua frequented the region under his control (Matt 14:13; 15:29; 16:13). Both Archelaus and Antipas, however, were ruthless, and Archelaus was the worst of the pair. "His short reign was marked by scandal, by brutality, and by tyranny." So foul was his reign that complaints lodged by a Jewish and Samaritan envoy to Rome succeeded in having him deposed and exiled to Gaul in 6 CE.

Though it appears as though Joseph would have chosen to settle in Judea, had the conditions been favorable, having been warned by God (once again, in a dream), he travelled to the north and settled his family in Galilee.<sup>55</sup>

### **Matthew 2:23**

**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.**

This passage does imply that they turned to Nazareth after Egypt (and therefore not before, so it was not the place where the wise men came to worship the child.)

**[fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene]** The 5th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Matthew (Matthew 2:23). Next, Matthew 3:3. "Spoken," not written by the prophets, for no prophet recorded this as here stated.

**[Nazareth]** This was a small town, situated in Galilee, west of Capernaum, and not far from Cana. It was built partly in a valley, and partly on the declivity of a hill, Luke 4:29. A hill is yet pointed out, to the south of Nazareth, as the one from which the people of the

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<sup>54</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>55</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

place attempted to precipitate the Saviour. It was a place, at that time, proverbial for wickedness, John 1:46. It is now a large village, with a convent and two churches. One of the churches, called *the church of the Annunciation*, is the finest in the Holy Land, except that of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

**[That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets]** The words here are not found in any of the books of the Old Testament; and there has been much difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of this passage. Some have supposed that Matthew meant to refer to Judges 13:5, to Samson as a type of Christ; others that he refers to Isaiah 11:1, where the descendant of Jesse is called "a Branch;" in the Hebrew *Netzer*. Some have supposed that Matthew refers to some prophecy which was not recorded, but handed down by tradition. But these suppositions are not satisfactory. It is a great deal more probable that Matthew refers not to any particular place, but to the *leading characteristics* of the prophecies respecting him. The following remarks may make this clear:

1st. He does not say, "*by the prophet*," as in Matthew 1:22, 2:5,15; but "*by the prophets*," meaning no one particularly, but the general character of the prophecies.

2nd. The leading and most prominent prophecies respecting him were, that he was to be of humble life, to be despised, and rejected. See Isaiah 53:2,3,7-9,12, Psalms 22:1.

3rd. The phrase "he shall be called," means the same as *he shall be*.

4th. The character of the people of Nazareth was such that they were proverbially despised and contemned, John 1:46, 7:52. To come from Nazareth, therefore, or *to be a Nazarene*, was the same as to be despised, and esteemed of low birth; *to be a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness*. And this was the same as had been predicted by the prophets. When Matthew says, therefore, that the prophecies were fulfilled, it means, *that the predictions of the prophets that he should be of humble life, and rejected, were fully accomplished in his being an inhabitant of Nazareth, and despised as such*.

Nazareth sat in the hilly area of southern Galilee near the crossroads of great caravan trade routes. The town itself was rather small. The Roman garrison in charge of Galilee was housed there. The people of Nazareth had constant contact with people from all over the world, so world news reached them quickly. The people of Nazareth had an attitude of independence that many of the Jews despised. This may have been why Nathanael commented, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (see John 1:46).

The Old Testament does not record this specific statement, "He will be called a Nazarene." Many scholars believe, however, that Matthew is referring to Isaiah 11:1 where the Hebrew word for "branch" is similar to the word for Nazarene. Or he may be referring to a prophecy unrecorded in the Bible. In any case, Matthew paints the picture of Jesus as the true Messiah announced by God through the prophets; and he makes the point that Jesus, the Messiah, had unexpectedly humble beginnings, just as the Old Testament had predicted (see Micah 5:2).

**Believers Study Bible:** "Called a Nazarene" introduces a third O.T. quotation (cf. vv. 15, 17, 18) which does not exist in this precise form in any part of the O.T. That Matthew here uses the plural "prophets," and not the singular prophet, may alert us to the possibility that he does not have a single O.T. text in mind. Different explanations of the



citation are given: (1) The reference is to Num. 6, implying that Jesus took a Nazirite vow and encouraged or else required the same of His followers. But Nazarene has nothing to do with Nazirite; in fact, Jesus was not a Nazirite. (2) “Nazarene” is a scribal gloss. (3) “Nazarene,” as used by the scribes and religious leaders of the first century, is a word of contempt (John 1:46), and Jesus fulfilled the O.T. prophecies that the Messiah would be scorned. (4) Verse 23 alludes to Isa 11:1, which states that a “branch” (*netser*, Heb.) will grow out of the roots of Jesse (cf. Jer 23:5). Under this view, “branch” and “Nazarene” share the same root (*nzr*, Heb.), and “branch” refers to the coming ruler of Davidic descent. Although they used a different word, other prophets also spoke of the Messiah in terms of the “branch” (Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12), and Matthew could legitimately say that this prediction was “spoken by the prophets” (vv. 6, 15). Hence, the residence in Nazareth was in fulfillment of a general position held by the prophets as a body. To the author, every stage of the life and work of Jesus, including the residence in Nazareth, is directed by God and fulfills His purpose and promise.

**McGee:** “He shall be called a Nazarene.” The Hebrew word for Nazareth was *Netzer*, meaning a branch or shoot. The city of Nazareth was so called because of its insignificance. The prophecies of Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2–3; and Psalm 22:6 are involved in the term *Nazarene*. But the Lord Jesus was given that term not only because He was a root out of the stem of Jesse, but because He grew up in the city of Nazareth, and He was called a Nazarene, which fulfilled the prophecies.

Now we have seen all four of the prophecies dealing with locations in the birth of Christ: born in Bethlehem, called out of Egypt, weeping in Rama, and called a Nazarene were fulfilled in a very normal way. He touched base in all of these places, and what seemed rather strange prophecies became very sane realities.<sup>56</sup>

### **Jewish New Testament Commentary:**

This is a problematical verse. In every instance where Mattityahu is showing the fulfillment of a Scriptural prophecy (see list in 1:23N), a specific writer—Isaiah, Jeremiah, David—is named, or “the prophet,” or “the *Tanakh*,” followed by a verse or passage. Here **the prophets** (uniquely plural) are mentioned, and no text is quoted. This is clear from the fact that Mattityahu leaves out “*legontos*” (“saying”), the Greek keyword he uses to cite Scripture. Rather, he seems to be alluding to a general concept found in several prophets, capable of being fulfilled by the Messiah’s being what the Greek text here calls a *Nazôraios*? (in some other places the word is “*Nazarênos*”). The questions: Which prophets? What did they actually say? And what is a *Nazôraios/Nazarênos*?

Some have suggested that the verse has to do with Yeshua’s taking the vows of a Nazirite (Numbers 6:1–23). But this is improbable, since there is no record that Yeshua, who was not an ascetic (11:16–19), ever did such a thing.

A second possibility is that since **Natzeret** (Nazareth, see Lk 1:26N) was a place people made fun of—as in Natan’el’s remark, “Natzeret? Can anything good come from there?” (Yn 1:46)—Mattityahu is referring to the many *Tanakh* prophecies that say the

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<sup>56</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Messiah would be despised (e.g., Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13–53:12) and is informing us that these prophecies would be fulfilled, in part, by his having the onus of being a *Natzrati*, a resident of Natzeret.

The third possibility is that Mattityahu is speaking of the prediction that the Messiah will be a *netzer* (“branch”) from the stock of Yishai, King David’s father (Isaiah 11:1); but compare Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15; Zechariah 3:8, 6:12, where the word is “*tzemach*,” (“sprout”). Thus several **prophets** use the idea, though not the word “*netzer*.” (For more on “the prophets” see 5:17N.)

What I consider most probable is that Mattityahu is combining the second and third alternatives by means of wordplay, a technique very common in Jewish writing, including the Bible. Yeshua is both *netzer* and *Natzrati*.

Finally, although one of the earliest names for the Jewish believers was “*Notzrim*” (“Nazareth-ites,” that is, “followers of the man from Nazareth,” Acts 24:5&N), it would be odd for Mattityahu to use the same term for the one they followed. The Talmud refers to him as *Yeshu HaNotzri* (B’rakhot 17b, Sotah 47a). In modern Hebrew “*Notzri*” remains the everyday word for “Christian”; but it is wrong and confusing to speak of “Yeshua the Christian,” i.e., the follower of Christ—he could not follow himself! The Talmud’s expression should be understood as meaning “Yeshua the *Natzrati*, Yeshua from Natzeret.” I use the term “*Natzrati*” instead of “*Notzri*” (both are acceptable modern Hebrew) in order to get away from the modern connotations of “*Notzri*” in Hebrew.<sup>57</sup>

**Hegg:** Joseph takes up residence in the city called Nazareth. Nazareth is situated in the Lower Galilee, just north of the Valley of Jezreel, approximately 64 miles north of Jerusalem, and 20 miles southwest of Capernaum. The population of Nazareth in the early 1st Century is estimated at approximately 480 people, calculated on a 60 acre land area. The village was apparently founded in the 3rd Century BCE, though it was not until the late Hellenistic period that it grew to the size of a small city. Its economy in the 1st Century was entirely based on the surrounding agriculture.

It was well known that Yeshua came from Nazareth, a city of low esteem to some (Matt 21:11; 26:71; Mk 1:24; Lk 18:37; Jn 1:45-46). Nathanael is credited with the statement, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46).

Once again, Matthew wants his readers to know that each part of Yeshua’s life is in direct fulfillment of the prophetic message regarding the Messiah. Thus, His living in Nazareth becomes the fulfillment of the prophets: “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Yet, as we quickly discover, no prophet of the Tanach makes such a statement, and we are left wondering exactly what text Matthew appears to be quoting. However, we should note that, unlike Matthew’s other quotes, here he attributes the saying, not to a particular prophet, but to “the prophets” (plural). This is important, because it alerts us to the fact that Matthew is not giving us a verbatim quotation of one particular Scripture from the Tanach, but he is rather appealing or alluding to a general perspective gleaned from the wider voice of the prophets. Similar to this, in 26:54, Yeshua appeals to the “Scriptures” (plural) which must be fulfilled, rather than to a single text. Here, again, the fulfillment of the Scriptures is seen in that the events taking place agree with the overall message of the Tanach.

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<sup>57</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Mt 2:23-3:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Secondly, it seems likely that our text has to do with a word-play on two words that have similar sound, namely, the word נָזִיר, *nazir*, “a nazirite” and the word Nazarene (someone from the city of Nazareth). A nazirite was a person who dedicated himself or herself to the service of God by taking a special vow which required abstinence from anything related to the vine, and letting one’s hair grow uncut. The first step in this subtle word play is to understand that a “nazirite” was considered “holy” (separated) unto God. In fact, in Judg 13:7, where Samson’s mother relates the words of the “man” who visited her and gave her notice of the coming child, we read:

*“But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God (nazirai`on qeou`) from the womb to the day of his death.’”*

However, in the other Lxx version of this text (the B text), (*naziraion theou*, “Nazirite of God”) is changed to a{ (*hagion theou*, “holy one of God”). We discover the same phenomenon in Judg 16:17. Nowhere in the B text of the Lxx is Samson referred to as a “Nazirite,” but only as one separated (“holy”) to God. This tells us that from a very early period, well before the 1st Century, the idea of “holy one of God” and “Nazirite of God” were linked through the concurrent translations of Judges into Greek. To this we may add Mk 1:24. In Mark’s story, Yeshua has entered the synagogue on Shabbat, and while He was teaching, a man with demon spoke out and said:

*“What business do we have with each other, Yeshua of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”*

Here, “Yeshua of Nazareth” is paralleled by “Holy One of God,” utilizing the same Greek words found in the B text of Lxx which substituted for “Nazirite.” This helps us tie the two similar sounding words together ( נָזִיר [natzri, Nazarene] and נָזִיר [nazir, Nazirite]) with the very meaning of Nazirite, i.e., “holy one of God.”

Moreover, in Luke’s account, he alludes to Scripture relating to Samuel (who was a Nazirite), applying them to Yeshua. The Magnificat of Mary is modelled after the prayer of Hannah (1Sam 2:1–10; Lk 1:46–55). Also note this parallel:

*1Sam 2:26* Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men.

*Luke 2:52* And Yeshua kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Further, Yeshua’s words at the last Pesach, that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He came into His kingdom, are reminiscent of the Nazirite prohibition regarding eating or drinking anything from the vine. The same may be said of Yeshua’s refusal to accept the wine while on the cross.

Finally, with these data in mind, we may note Is 4:2–3, where the prophecy of the “Branch of the Lord” is given, understood as pertaining to the Messiah by the Targum. In v. 3, the text reads: “...he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem *will be called holy....*” Once again, in the Jewish tradition of the 1st Century, there is evidence that the Messiah would be called “holy” was well in place, as was the idea that a Nazirite was “a holy one of God.”

It seems, then, that Matthew has given us a subtle play on words, linking *natzri*, *nazir*, with “the Holy One of God.” And since the Lxx had made a clear connection between a

*nazir* and “the Holy One of God,” then it was easy to apply the equation to Yeshua, especially if at the last Pesach, His words were interpreted along the lines of a Nazirite vow.

A second suggestion given by many is that Matthew is alluding to Is 11:1, and the prophecy of the “Branch” (נֹצֵר, *netzer*): “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.” In this case, the sound-alike words would be *natzri* (Nazarene) and *netzer* (Branch). This suggestion also has merit, for: 1) Is 11:1 was interpreted messianically by the Jewish Sages (Targum, Mid. Rab. *Gen* 2.4.; 97; 98.9; Mid. Rab. *Num* 13.11; Mid. Rab. *Ruth* 5.6; b.*Sanhedrin* 93b; Rashi on Is 11:1–2), so an allusion to the “branch” in the sound of *natzri* is possible; 2) Is 11 is very Davidic, and this fits with the opening genealogy of Matthew; 3) Other Apostolic writers appeal to Is 11 (Rom 15:12; 1Pet 4:14; Rev 5:5); 4) since נֹצֵר “shoot” is also used in Is 11, as well as other prophets in a messianic way (cf. Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12), this could help explain Matthew’s use of “prophets” (plural); and 5) it is possible that נֹצֵר may have been pronounced as *navzar* (*nazar*) in 1st Century Hebrew, which is strikingly close to the form of Nazareth (*nazarav*) as found in Matt 4:13 and Lk 4:16.

Yet the connection with *nazir*, “Nazirite,” and the substitution of “holy one of God” in the Samson narrative of the Lxx, seems particularly compelling. Of course, it is always possible that Matthew found more than one key word or text for his Nazarene midrash.

To summarize then: Matthew finds a general message in the prophets regarding the Messiah, a message that is connected with the word “Nazarene” (*natzri*). By a play on the word, Matthew connects to “Nazirite” (*nazir*) by way of assonance (similar sound). The primary characteristic of a Nazirite is that he or she was separated to God by way of a specific oath. This overarching idea of the Nazirite separated (“made holy”) unto God was strong enough that in the two versions of the Lxx, in the story of Samson, “Nazirite” is replaced by “holy one of God.” That strong connection between “Nazirite” and “holy one of God” is the point Matthew is making. In the same way that a Nazirite is separated unto God (holy), so Yeshua, in all of His life lived out the quintessential meaning of a Nazirite vow, for He was the Holy One of God in every way. Thus, that by God’s providence, Joseph would settle in Nazareth, and Yeshua would be known as *Yeshua haNatzri* was sufficiently close for Matthew’s midrash. He is *Yeshua haNatzri*, *Yeshua haNazir*, and *Yeshua, haKodesh Adonai*.<sup>58</sup>

## **Jesus: The Nazarene – The Nelson Study Bible**

The politics of Jesus’ day forced Joseph to move his family around. From Bethlehem they fled to Egypt. Their return to Israel found them skirting Judea and finally resettling in the relatively peaceful region of Galilee, in the town of Nazareth. Matthew sees God’s providence in these moves. Micah 5:2 had predicted that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem (2:6); and Matthew cites another prophecy, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene,’ as being fulfilled when Joseph moved to Nazareth (2:23). An exhaustive search of Scripture reveals that the specific words of this prophecy are not found in any Old Testament prophet.

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<sup>58</sup> Tim Hegg, Commentary on Matthew, torahresource.com

There have been two major explanations of this biblical mystery. Some have traced the origin of the word Nazarene to the Hebrew word for *branch* or *shoot*. The word Branch is used by the prophets to speak of the coming Messiah. For example, Isa. 11:1 states that the Messiah would come out of Jesse's "roots," as a "Branch" (see Isa. 53:2). Like a tree that had been cut down, the royal line of David had almost been destroyed in the Babylonian captivity; yet a twig would grow out of the stump. This is Jesus, a descendant of David and the King of kings.

Others have pointed to Matthew's use of the plural "prophets" in Mt. 2:23 as an indication that Matthew was not referring to a specific prophecy, but to a concept that appears in a number of prophecies concerning the Messiah. The town of Nazareth housed the Roman garrison in northern Galilee. Jewish hatred of the Romans was so extreme that most Jews avoided any association with Nazareth. In fact, Jewish people who lived in Nazareth were thought of as "consorting with the enemy." At that time, calling someone a "Nazarene" indicated utter contempt for that person. Having come from Nazareth, Jesus was despised in the eyes of many Jews. Even Jesus' disciples initially harbored such feelings about a person from Nazareth. When Nathanael heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he scoffed, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The fact that Jesus was despised because of His Nazarene background aptly fits several Old Testament prophecies that speak of the humble character of the Messiah (see Ps. 22:6-8; Isa. 42:1-4; Mic. 5:2).

Whether the word Nazarene is associated with the prophecies of the Messiah as the Branch or the general prophecies of the Messiah's humble character, apparently Matthew's largely Jewish audience would have seen the association clearly. Otherwise Matthew would have provided further explanation.

### **Missler:**

**(Isaiah 9:6-7)** *<sup>6</sup>For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

Child born, Son given = not synonymous!

**(Luke 1:31-33)** *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Did Jesus ever actually sit on David's Throne? He couldn't have. It didn't exist at that time. Jeconiah, was the last of David's line to sit on the Throne. Remember the blood curse on his line.

## Nazarene

- Nazarene: implies an ignorant man. Partly due to being a Gentile area, a figure of speech which implied contempt.
- *netzer* branch, sprout, shoot; a sprout that grows out from a stump (Isa 11:2).
- Intended puns: Jer 33:15; Zech 6:12.

## The Branch *tsemach*

- “The Branch of the Lord” Isa 4:2
- Royal King from line of David Jer 23:5
- (Repeat of above) Jer 33:15
- Servant of Jehovah Zech 3:8
- Will build the Temple Zech 6:12
- Of 20 Hebrew words translated “branch,” only one of them—

*Tsemach*—is used exclusively of the Messiah

**(Jeremiah 33:15)** *In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.*

**(Zechariah 6:12,13)** *And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is **The BRANCH**; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*

## Signs in the Heavens: The Mazzeroth

- All the stars have a name (Ps 147:4; Isa 40:26; Ps 19:1-6: heavens declare the glory of God).
- Zodiac: from *Sodi*, “the Way.”
- The Temple of Denderah, 2000 B.C.

The field of astronomy attempts to identify stars and celestial objects, and it uses a system that astrologers also deal with. The sun has an apparent path through the sky (called an ecliptic), 12 degrees on either side of the ecliptic, creating a band. You can divide this band into 12 parts, which can be used to map the stars. These 12 zones around the band are called “signs.”

We know these signs by their secular pagan names. These signs go way back, even before the tower of Babel. All systems of communication were corrupted at Babel and, therefore, we do have a hard time finding out what they originally meant. Twelve signs of the sun and also 28 mansions of the moon. Don’t confuse a sign with a constellation. A sign is an area that has a name and ideas around it; within that sign there is typically three decans, or constellations (the word “decan” means deck or division or piece). Sailors and nomadic tribes study the stars for navigational purposes.

Star maps have pictures with diagrams trying to outline the stars that form each picture. There is no relationship between the pictures that label the sections of the sky and the

arrangement of the stars. What has been forgotten over the thousands of years was that the labels were to remind you of the pictures; the stars were named to remind one of a concept (the concept is not depicted in the stars). The stars are a mnemonic (which is a mechanism to remember a story) and if you can remember the names of the stars, you can remember the story. The story is not depicted by the stars, but rather the star names depict the story. The signs of the zodiac are the same in all languages! The 12 signs of the Mazzeroth deal with the 12 tribes. Every detail of the gospels is spelled out in the sky by the Hebrew names of the stars!

### **An Example: Virgo**

*Bethulah*: Hebrew name for virgo, which can mean “virgin.”

*Parthenos* is the Greek name for virgo (the same word which the Septuagint uses for “almah” in Isa 7:14). Isa 7:14: “The Lord Himself” - God will give the sign. “You” is plural to the whole House of Israel

“Daughter of Zion” is an idiom for Israel, so there is a national fulfillment of Isa 7:14 as the House of Israel does bring forth the Messiah.

The stars are ranked according to brightness:

1st star: *Zerah* = the seed. Brightest star in this sign. Gen 3:15: seed of the woman. See also Gen 15:5 and Gal 3:16 (seed is singular not plural). The generations were taught the gospel, and the way they remembered it was thought the names of the stars.

2nd star: *Tsemech* = The Branch. There are 20 different Hebrew words for branch, only one of them —*tsemech*—is used exclusively of the Messiah (5x).

Dual nature: God yet despised. Insight of the double nature is hinted at in the mythology surrounding the constellation. The double nature is imbedded in the idea of the sin offering of the despised one at the same time being a ruling King. 1893 we found that the star in *tsemech* is a double star.

“Netzer” and “Nazarene” are puns. *Netzer* is another word for branch or “shoot from a stump.” (Cf. Zech 6:12; Isa 4:2; 11:1.) Nazarite = separated One (Num 6:2).

### **The Scepter of Judah**

In Genesis 49, Jacob prophesizes over each of the twelve tribes. Among these seemingly cryptic riddles, the best-known one concerns the royal tribe of Judah:

**(Genesis 49:10)** *The Scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

The term “scepter” refers to their tribal identity and the right to apply and enforce Mosaic Laws and adjudicate capital offenses: *jus gladii*. The term “Shiloh” was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> It is significant that even in their 70-year Babylonian captivity (606 - 537 B.C.) the tribes retained their tribal identity.<sup>2</sup> They retained their own logistics, judges, etc.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Scepter Departs**

In 6-7 A.D., King Herod’s son and successor, Herod Archelaus was dethroned and banished to Vienna, a city in Gaul. Archelaus was the second son of Herod the Great.<sup>4</sup> The older son, Herod Antipater, was murdered by Herod the Great, along with other family members. (It was quipped at the time that it was safer to be a dog in that household than a member of the family!) Archelaus’ mother was a Samaritan (1/4

or less of Jewish blood) and was never accepted. After the death of Herod (4 B.C.?), Archelaus was placed over Judea as “Entharch” by Caesar Augustus. Broadly rejected, he was removed in 6-7 A.D. He was replaced by a *Roman* Procurator named Caponius. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and adjudication of capital cases was lost. This was normal Roman policy. 5 This transfer of power is mentioned in the Talmud 6 and by Josephus:

*After the death of the procurator Festus, when Albinus was about to succeed him, the high priest Ananius considered it a favorable opportunity to assember the Sanhedrin. He therefore caused James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, and several others, to appear before this hastily assembled council, and pronounced upon them the sentence of death by stoning. All the wise men and strict observers of the law who were at Jerusalem expressed their disapprobation of this act...Some even went to Albinus himself, who had departed to Alexandria, to bring this breach of the law under his observation, and to inform him that Aranius had acted illegally in assembling the Sanhedrin without the Roman authority.7*

This remarkable passage not only mentions Jesus and His brother James as historical figures, it also underscores that the authority of the Sanhedrin had passed to the Romans.

### **Reaction**

When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, they covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, and bemoaned, “Woe unto us for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come!”8 They actually thought that the Torah, the Word of God, had failed! They should have known better.

The scepter had, indeed, been removed from Judah, but Shiloh *had* come. While the Jews wept in the streets of Jerusalem, a young son of a carpenter was growing up in Nazareth. He would present Himself as the Messiah the King on the very day that had been predicted by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel five centuries earlier.9

Every detail of His life was foretold centuries earlier. And much of what He is about to do is also predicted with the same accuracy. A World Leader will shortly come and try to change our focus off that one singular, incomparable life.10 The world will soon be in for a series of surprises!

\* \* \*

### **Notes:**

1. Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Yerusahmi, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretations; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, Samson H. Levy, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1974.
2. Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 108-168.
3. Ezekiel 1:5,8.
4. Josephus, *Antiq.* 17:13.
5. This transfer of power was recorded by Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Bk 2 Ch. 8., Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin, folio 24.
6. *Jerusalem Talmud*, Sanhedrin, folio 24.
7. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:9.
8. *Babylonian Talmud*, Chapter 4, folio 37; also, Augustin Lemann, *Jesus before*



*the Sanhedrin*, 1886, translated by Julius Magath, NL#0239683, Lib of Congress #15-24973.

9. Daniel 9:24-27. See also *Daniel's Seventy Weeks*, Koinonia House.

10. Daniel 7:25.