

The Book of Matthew

Portraying Jesus Christ our King

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Before We Begin....

1) The Book of Matthew is one of four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry on Earth. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John make up the four books of the Bible we call the Gospels. The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' Thus, in these four accounts of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, we have the good news of salvation come to man.

2) Each of the gospels emphasizes Jesus' ministry and characteristics to the reader in a slightly different way. Matthew, writing to his fellow Jews, wanted to show how Jesus fulfilled the role of the Messiah as promised by the prophets. Mark, writing to the Romans, focuses more on Jesus' actions than his words and presents him as a suffering servant who died that others might live. Luke, emphasizing Jesus' humanity, tells his story to the Greeks in a more poetic fashion, focusing on Jesus' ministry and the historical surroundings. Finally, John wrote his gospel to a world in need of a savior, that the reader might believe and be delivered from darkness. John emphasizes Jesus as 'Son of God,' Savior, and the Light of the world.

All of these characteristics are true of Jesus. In combining the four accounts we get a very clear picture of just who Jesus is.

3) Matthew is the first gospel in the New Testament. This is not because Matthew was written first (there is much debate on which gospel was written first), but because Matthew spends so much time showing how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. To make his point, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament more than any other gospel. For this reason, Matthew serves as a natural bridge between the Old and New Testaments, and thus it is the first gospel presented.

4) Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who worked for the Roman government. He was not well liked by his fellow Jews, but as a tax collector he would be well-educated and well-versed in record keeping. He was also very well acquainted with Jewish history and customs. We see his call to follow Jesus in Matthew, chapter 9.

Now, on to Matthew, chapter 1....

MATTHEW 1:1-17

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Study Notes & Comments...

Before starting a commentary on Matthew, let's set the stage:

When Jesus entered the historical scene, the land of Israel (called Palestine by the Romans) had been under the control of the Roman Empire for over 70 years. Prior to that time, the land had been under the control of Syria, Greece and before that, Babylon. The people of Israel hadn't experienced any kind of real freedom for hundreds of years. It was a land of downtrodden people, an insignificant little outpost near the southeastern edge of the Roman empire. The Jews lived and breathed under the shadow of a huge empire, trying to retain their Jewish culture and heritage while under Roman occupation.

It had been over 400 years since God had sent a prophet to Israel (Malachi was the last). The people were exceedingly anxious, praying for the coming of the foretold Messiah, looking for him to usurp the rule of the Romans and reestablish Israel as a great and glorious nation. The time was ripe for the Messiah's coming, and those who understood the prophecies of Daniel knew the Messiah would be arriving on the scene very soon (see commentary on chapter 2).

Matthew, in his gospel, tells the story of how Jesus, the foretold Messiah, entered this Jewish world. Matthew begins his gospel by presenting us with the genealogy of Jesus, demonstrating both his royal lineage and his link with Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race.

Mathew Chapter 1:

- 1) 1:1: There are three things Matthew emphasizes in this verse. First, that Jesus is indeed the Christ (Messiah). Second, that Jesus is a legal heir to King David, meaning he had a rightful claim to the throne as a descendant of the royal family (fulfilling **2 Samuel 7:12-13**). Third, that Jesus is a son of Abraham, father of the Hebrews and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 22:17**.

There is something else interesting here as well. Note the phrase "**The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.**" There is only one other time this phrase is used in the Bible - in Genesis 5:1. It says, "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam." Thus what we have within the Bible are two genealogical books - two families. In the Old Testament, we read about those who are born into the family of Adam, whose destiny is death. That includes *everyone*, as we are all descendants of Adam. In the New Testament, however, we see the beginning of a new book, a new genealogy containing the names of all those who will be born into Jesus' family - whose names are written in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5, 20:12-15).

Two families, two eternal destinations. A very interesting allusion from Matthew as he starts his gospel.

- 2) 1:2: Jesus, as we see, is descended from the Patriarchs. Not only Abraham, but Isaac (the child of the promise) and Jacob. Jacob's sons made up the 12 tribes of Israel, and it is noted here that Jesus is descended from Judah. On his deathbed, **Jacob blessed Judah** by telling him "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes." (**Gen. 49:10**). In other words, Jacob foretells that the royal line of Kings will come through Judah's sons (as they did) and continue that way until 'Shiloh' comes. **Who is Shiloh?** It is a Messianic title which means 'The Peaceful One' or "to whom dominion belongs." Jesus is the fulfillment of both titles.

- 3) 1:3: Here we see Jesus' ancestral line continue through Perez, via Tamar and Judah. The story of Judah and Tamar can be found in Gen 38. It is a wicked story of incest, whereby Tamar, deprived of a son and heir, dresses herself up as a prostitute and sleeps with Judah, her father-in-law. Tamar bears him twins, Perez and Zerah. Jesus is descended from Perez. Not much is known about Hezron or Ram.
- 4) 1:4: Amminadab's daughter (Nahshon's sister) was wife to Aaron, the high priest (Ex 6:23). Nahshon became the leader of the tribe of Judah. (Numbers 2:3). Nothing is known of Salmon outside of his place in Jesus' genealogy.
- 5) 1:5: Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who put her faith in the God of Israel and protected Israel's spies during the campaign against Jericho. (Joshua 2). Her faith in the God of Israel literally saved her and her family when the walls of Jericho came down. Obed was the grandfather of David, who would be Israel's greatest king.
- 6) 1:6: David was the father of Solomon through Bathsheba. Another lurid tale, David, the King of Israel, lusted after the wife of Uriah, sent for her, and she became pregnant with his child (2 Samuel 11). David then sent Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, into the front lines of battle to ensure he would be killed. Then David took Bathsheba as his wife. God was very displeased with David for this action, and as a result, David's first son by Bathsheba died at childbirth. Their second son was Solomon, who became king after David and built the temple in Jerusalem. Solomon also wrote the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.
- 7) 1:7: **Now we get into the royal line of Kings.** Rehobaom's evil, sadistic ways resulted in the dividing of Israel into two kingdoms (1 Kings 12:1-24), Israel to the north and Judah (which included Jerusalem) to the south. Rehobaom was the king of Judah. Rehobaom's son Abijah was also a wicked king, but his son Asa was a king who feared God (1 Kings 15:9-14) and destroyed the idols to other gods his fathers had made. The Bible tells us that "Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord all his days."
- 8) 1:8: Jehoshaphat, son of Asa was another good king, but his son Joram was wicked. Joram's descendant, Uzziah, was a good king who feared the Lord, but became full of pride and entered the temple to burn incense to the Lord, bypassing the priests. (only priests were allowed in the temple sanctuary). When the priests asked him to leave the sanctuary, King Uzziah became furious, and as he prepared to burn the incense, God struck him with leprosy on his forehead. (2 Chr 26:16-21). Once struck with leprosy, Uzziah was isolated and cut off from the people, and his son Jotham took charge of the palace and governed Israel in his place.
- 9) 1:9: Jotham was a good King, but his son Ahaz, was very wicked and took part in pagan occult rituals to other gods. After seeing a pagan altar he liked, he had a duplicate made and remodeled part of the temple in Jerusalem to accommodate it! (2 Kings 16). Hezekiah his son, however, was a very good king who loved the Lord. 2 Kings 18:5 states that "There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him."
- 10) 1:10: Manasseh was the most evil king to rule over the kingdom of Judah. So evil in fact, that according to 2 Chr. 33:9 he did more evil before God than any of the nations Israel had destroyed previously. However, Manasseh repented of his sins at the end of his life (2 Chr. 33:13). Amon, his son, was another wicked king, but Josiah, Amon's son, was a good king who turned to the Lord and tried with all his heart, soul, and strength to undo all the evil work of his father. (2 Kings 23:19-25).
- 11) 1:11: **Babylon came to power at this time.** Jeconiah reigned in Jerusalem only three months before Babylon laid siege to it. Jeconiah was removed from power and one of his brothers (Zedekiah), a

puppet ruler for Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar, was installed on the throne in his place. Eventually Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem completely, destroying it and the temple. The entire nation was taken into exile to Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24:16-25:21). **This exile marked the end of Israel's kings.**

There is a very interesting prophecy about Jeconiah in **Jer. 22:24-30**. The Lord put a blood-curse on his family, stating that not only would he and his family be taken away into exile, to a "land which they do not know," but that none of his descendants would "sit on the throne of David" anymore. In other words, **no descendant of Jeconiah will ever be king or sit on David's throne!**

How can this be? Doesn't this exclude Jesus' from ruling from David's throne as prophesied in scripture? No, it doesn't! Why? Because, as we shall see, Jesus is *not* of this blood-line. This line is Jesus' *legal* genealogy through his father Joseph (see comments on 1:16), but Jesus' was not Joseph's physical son. **Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit**, not by Joseph! Jesus physical genealogy, through his mother Mary, is found in Luke 3. That genealogy is also of the royal line, but through King David's son Nathan rather than Solomon. So the curse put on Jeconiah does not extend to Jesus.

Also, note that in Jer. 22:24, Jeconiah is referred to as Coniah. Why? Because 'Je' is the name of the Lord. God has removed his name from Jeconiah!

Next, note what the prophet Jeremiah says about **the future of the kingship**. Read **Jer. 23:1-6**. Also, see **Isaiah 11:1-5**, prophesying the same event. Out of the shattered 'stump' of Jesse's line shall come a righteous branch who will rule forever. In other words, **the next king to come is the Messiah!** Jesus is that king!

- 12) 1:12: Jeconiah's grandson Zerubbabel was important because he was governor (not king) of Israel *after* the Babylonian exile (Hag. 1:1). When the people were allowed to return to their homeland, Zerubbabel was a key figure in rebuilding the temple. (Ezra 5:2). The book of Haggai speaks much of Zerubbabel and how God used him to begin the work of rebuilding the temple.
- 13) 1:13-15: Nothing is known of these men. They lived in the 400 year period between the Old and New Testaments.
- 14) 1:16: **Now we come to Joseph**, Jesus' legal father and guardian. Note what Matthew writes about him. "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." You don't see any mention that "Joseph begat Jesus" as you do with the other descendants. This point Matthew is making is that Joseph was *not* Jesus father, as Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, as pointed out in verse 18.

Even though Joseph was not Jesus physical father, from the standpoint of Jewish law, he *was* Jesus' legal father. **Jesus, as the adopted son of Joseph, had all the rights of the firstborn.** He also had all the rights due to him as a son in the royal line. Thus, Jesus was a **legal heir** to the throne.

In a like manner, you and I, though not *born* into God's family, are adopted sons and daughters. Once we put our faith in Jesus Christ and are reconciled to our Father in heaven, we are adopted as His children, and become **co-heirs in his kingdom with Jesus.** (Rom. 8:16-17, Eph. 3:6)

- 15) 1:17: **Matthew sums up the family tree** here, dividing the royal line into three distinct periods. The period from Abraham to David, from David to captivity in Babylon, and from Babylon to the Messiah.

It should be stated that Matthew does leave out some names of this genealogy. In other words, not

every father-son relationship is mentioned down through the course of history. There are times, such as in verse 11 when we see “Joshiah begot Jeconiah” where a generation is skipped. Joshiah is actually Jeconiah’s grandfather. However, to state that “Joshiah begot Jeconiah” is still correct. The wording does not mean Joshiah is Jeconiah’s immediate father, but that he is descended from him.

Why does Matthew do this? Some scholars believe Matthew mentions particular individuals and leaves out others for very specific historical or spiritual reasons, and this may be true. However, Matthew’s path of thinking seems to be to emphasize periods of 14 generations each. Matthew is focusing on specific periods of time, as well as important individuals. Both are in play.

In this study we have taken a look at a number of individuals and their place in the genealogy of Jesus. What is notable is that Jesus’ ancestors included not only kings, but shepherds and prostitutes, rich and poor, Hebrew and gentile (none of the women mentioned in the genealogy are Hebrew!), men and women, slaves and free men. **Every person, from every walk of life, whether they feared God or not, were involved at some level in the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation.**

That fact really speaks to **God’s sovereignty**, for you see, every person alive today, whether they know it or not, is in some way linked into what God is doing. Even those who reject God will find their work, though evil, will have had the net effect of bringing about God’s plan in the end. **We can be disobedient and rebellious toward God, but we cannot thwart his plan.** By the way, that goes for Satan, too! How much better for those who put their faith in the Lord so that at the end we can look back with joy and see how the Lord has used us for His kingdom even without our knowing!

Finally, in reading through the genealogy of Jesus, we see that **Jesus was a real person in real history.** The time is fixed, the place is fixed, the reality of Jesus has substance. Jesus was not a person of myth. He was a person of flesh and blood just as you and I are, who lived, breathed, ate and slept just as we do. He was someone you could talk to, someone you could walk with, someone whose hand you could hold. He was a brother, a son, a teacher, a neighbor, and a very ordinary looking man. He was a man who loved others with a love we cannot begin to understand. And Jesus, this man who was God made flesh to show us the way of salvation, laid his life down so that we might live.

What a wonderful God we serve, who loved us so much that he came so that we might know him *personally*.

MATTHEW 1:18-25

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Study Notes & Comments...

In the first 17 verses of Matthew, the writer establishes Jesus as legal heir to the throne of Israel through the line of King David. Jesus was in the royal family, both as 'adopted' son (through Joseph), and as a physical descendant (through Mary). Having established that, Matthew now relates the story of Jesus' birth.

- 1) 1:18: Mary was *betrothed* to Joseph. Betrothal is somewhat like what we call an engagement today, but it's *much* more binding. **Once Mary and Joseph were betrothed, they were committed to each other for life.** There was no backing out - the marriage was set. The only way to end a betrothal was through divorce or death. During the betrothal period, which typically lasted a year, Mary and Joseph did not live together, nor did they have marital relations. This period was considered to be a time to test the purity of the woman in the relationship. If she were to become pregnant during the betrothal, the husband would know that she had been unfaithful.

...and that's the very position Mary was found in. Note that Matthew states in verse 18 that Mary was "*found to be with child.*" We are given the impression that Joseph discovered this fact as she began to show. Mary apparently didn't volunteer the information.

Matthew's gospel account does not concern us with the details of how Mary reacted to all of this. **Matthew gives us the perspective of Joseph.** Remember, Matthew is writing his gospel to the Jews, so what Matthew is doing in his account is emphasizing that Joseph is *not* the father, and that Jesus was instead conceived by the Holy Spirit.

While Matthew gives us Joseph's perspective, Luke, in his gospel account, tells us Mary's side of the story. **Read Luke 1:26-56.** Luke 1:56 concludes with Mary going back home to Nazareth, having stayed with her relative Elizabeth for three months. It is after this time, that Mary is likely 'found' to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

- 2) 1:19: Joseph was a righteous man who loved Mary, but she had become pregnant and Joseph knew that this was not his child. He was in a bind. If he went ahead and married her, it would appear as if he was the father and had had relations with Mary before the marriage - that would reflect very poorly on his family and reputation. There was also the issue of who the father was. From Joseph's human perspective, Mary had been unfaithful to their betrothal.

According to the law, since Mary had committed adultery (as he would have naturally assumed), **Joseph could have had her put to death by stoning.** Alternatively, Joseph could declare a very public divorce, humiliating Mary and her family, and in doing so save his own reputation. But this was not the kind of man Joseph was. Even though he surely felt betrayed by Mary, being a righteous man and **having the heart of God, he showed her mercy.** Rather than disgrace her publicly, he chose to divorce her quietly and send her away secretly.

It does not seem likely that Mary told Joseph about the circumstances of the conception even at this point. **We have no record of Mary trying to explain herself to Joseph.** More than likely, Mary and Joseph's marriage had been pre-arranged by their families. That being the case, it's entirely possible that Mary had never spoken intimately to Joseph about *anything* to this point. It's no wonder the two of them had not discussed this.

Try to imagine Mary's plight. Who would believe her? She would be seen as an adulterer, and people would gossip. Imagine Mary trying to explain to her father that her baby had no father. You can imagine the family turmoil over these events. And yet, look at her attitude about the situation in Luke 1:38. She says, **"May it be done to me according to your word."** Mary had an amazing amount of faith, trusting that God would work out the details.

- 3) 1:20-21: And that's exactly what God did, sending an angel to Joseph in a dream to tell him about the baby Mary is carrying. Note the angel calls him "Joseph, son of David," a reference to his royal family and inheritance. The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid, but to take Mary as his wife, as her son is conceived not of a man, but by the Holy Spirit.

"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins."

The name Jesus is actually the Greek form of his Hebrew name, Yashuah (Joshua), which means **"God is Salvation."** God's salvation has come to man, through this child, who will save his people from their sins. Who are 'His people'? They are those who believe (John 10:27-29).

This is an important point, as the Jewish people are expecting their Messiah to come and save them from the tyranny of the Roman empire. That is not his mission – Jesus' mission is much greater – to save His people from their sins.

- 4) 1:22-23: This all took place to fulfill the words of prophecy, which are the promises of God. Matthew here quotes from Isaiah 7:14, which reads:

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel."

Matthew applies this prophetically to Jesus. The fact that a "virgin" would bear a son would be considered a sign indeed, for **only God can bring fruit where there is no seed.** There are liberal scholars who argue that the word virgin here can simply mean 'young woman.' There are two big problems with that position, however. First, the Hebrew word used for virgin here (*almah*) refers to an actual virgin in *every other instance* the Bible where it is used, and second, for a young woman to give birth to a child is no sign at all. Young women give birth to children every day! However, virgins do not, and *that* is the sign. **Mary was a virgin and remained so until after Jesus was born.**

Finally, the prophecy states "they shall call his name *Immanuel*" which, as Matthew explains, means 'God with Us.' Now, you may ask the question (I know I have) – "If Jesus' name was Jesus, then his name wasn't Immanuel, was it?" Actually, yes, it was. You see, **Immanuel is a title, much like Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah and King.** Take a look at **Isaiah 9:6-7.** This passage contains other titles for this promised child who is to come. **Immanuel isn't just a name, it's a stated purpose, a title, a characterization of who the baby Jesus is.**

Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with Us. He is God in the flesh, come to teach us, to love us, to show us the way of righteousness and to save us from our sins. So Immanuel is who Jesus is. Immanuel, "God with Us" is what we call him.

- 5) 1:24-25: Joseph, being a righteous man, did exactly as the Lord commanded. He took Mary to be his wife, and did not sleep with her until Jesus was born. For Joseph to obey the Lord meant that he would spend the rest of his days living with a social stigma. People would talk, either supposing that Joseph got Mary pregnant, or that he didn't and someone else did. But Joseph accepted that, because it meant obedience to the Lord.

If we are obedient to the Lord, it just doesn't matter what people say about us. The only words that matter to me are "Well done, good and faithful servant." I want to hear those words from Jesus, and if that means I take a little heat down here on earth, so be it. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and in trusting the Lord. Don't worry about what the world thinks. Just stay true to God's Word.

In Matthew's account, we are shown what it means to really be a Godly man. We don't talk about Joseph much, as Mary gets much of the focus in the story of the birth of Jesus, but Joseph was there and he was obedient to the Lord. He showed grace, love and mercy toward Mary. He heeded the words of God. He showed great faithfulness in following through, and he showed respect and restraint in not having relations with Mary until after Jesus' birth. **All in all, what we see in Joseph is a man who was not ruled by his fleshly desires, nor his ego, but a man who first and foremost sought after the wisdom and counsel of God.** What a great example Joseph is for us!

Matthew does not give us details about the events surrounding Jesus' birth in the manger at Bethlehem. However, Luke does, in his gospel account in chapter 2.

In our next study, we will take a look at the events surrounding the coming of the 'wise men,' and the star that led them to Jesus.

MATTHEW 2

Wise Men Seek Jesus

Study Notes & Comments...

In our last study, we covered the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. As we move into chapter 2, some time has passed – anywhere from probably 6 to 18 months. ‘Herod the Great’ was king over Israel. Herod, however, wasn’t *truly* Israel’s king. He was put into power by the Roman empire (he was a friend of Caesar), who gave him the title. In fact, Herod the Great was an Edomite, meaning he was descended from Esau (as in Jacob and Esau – Gen 25:19-34 & 27). He was *not* in the royal family, which came down through Jacob. Herod had absolutely no right to the throne.

In addition to being ‘ruler’ over the people, Herod was a very paranoid man. He ordered the death of *anyone* who might present a challenge to his rule. This included members of his own family, even three of his own sons and one of his wives whom he executed.

In spite of this, Herod the Great was a popular king with *some* of the Jews because he was a builder – he made the city of Jerusalem look good. He built new walls around the city, built a new amphitheater, a new market, a beautiful harbor and he ordered the reconstruction of temple.

Herod the Great had many sons, some of which he named, curiously enough, Herod. Thus, there are other “Herod’s” mentioned in the New Testament, such as his son Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist. Don’t get them confused.

1) 2:1-3: **Who are these wise men?** We don’t know for sure. The Greek word for ‘wise men’ used here is ‘magos,’ which is the name the Babylonians gave to teachers, priests, dream interpreters, and astrologers. There is some speculation that these wise men came from a priestly organization of astrologers in Persia (Babylon), and some believe they may be descended from a group founded by Daniel the prophet while he was in Babylon (Dan. 6:3,26,28). In the end, who exactly these wise men were is speculation. The Bible says they came ‘from the east.’ If they were from Persia, as most scholars believe, they had traveled for thousands of miles.

These wise men seemed to be familiar with the prophecies from the Old Testament, which lends credence to the *possibility* that they were descended from Hebrews who were taken in captivity to Babylon (which included Daniel). Their mention of ‘His star’ and seeking the king *might* be in reference to a prophecy given by the prophet Balaam in Numbers 24:17. Also, why would these “wise men from the east” care about the birth of the King of the Jews? If they were of Hebrew decent, and understood the Hebrew prophets, then it makes sense that the birth of the Messiah would be especially important to them.

The Bible doesn’t indicate anywhere that these men were ‘kings’ as is assumed in the Christmas song ‘We Three Kings of Orient Are...’ We are simply told they were ‘wise men.’ Also, we don’t know how many wise men there were. Tradition says three, but the Bible does not state that at all. The idea that there were three wise men most likely comes from the three gifts presented to Jesus. I would suggest that in reality the ‘wise men’ consisted of a very large group of people. That’s part of the reason why all Jerusalem was troubled by the event (v.3). It wouldn’t seem likely that “all Jerusalem” would take much notice of three people coming into town, but a large company of men from the east, asking for the location of the “King of the Jews” would certainly cause a ruckus.

Herod would be especially troubled by this event. First, he was not the legal heir to the throne.

Secondly, the people were expecting their Messiah to come soon and overthrow the Romans who put him into power. If there was a legitimate king out there, Herod would want him disposed of immediately. The people, knowing Herod's paranoia, would also know that such event could cause great turbulence in Israel.

- 2) 2:4-6: Hearing of all this, Herod called the scribes (typically Pharisees) and chief priests (usually Sadducees) together to inquire where the *Messiah* would be born. **Notice that Herod inquires about the Messiah, not just a king.** He knows, as do the scribes and chief priests, that according to the prophets the Messiah is due to appear on the scene within his generation. In response to his question, "Where the Christ is to be born?", the scribes quote from Micah 5:2, which indicates quite specifically that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (about 5 miles south of Jerusalem).

What this all clarifies *beyond any shadow of doubt* is **that the people of Israel, particular those in religious circles, knew the Messiah was coming.** And yet, when Jesus appeared on the scene fulfilling all the prophecies, they rejected him. Why? He was not the Messiah they wanted! For the Pharisees and Sadducees, they were quite content in their positions of power. For the general populace, they had a different Messiah - a Messiah of war to throw out the Romans - in mind. They were seeking the kingdom *they* wanted, not the kingdom God was building.

- 3) 2:7-8: Herod called a secret meeting with the wise men to determine when exactly the star appeared. (He will use this in his calculations in v. 16). Remember, the wise men had traveled a very great distance to come and worship the king – a journey that probably took them over a year! **How important this event must have been to them!** How many things would you give up two years (at least) of your life for?

Herod, after receiving their answer (we aren't told here what that was, specifically) feigns interest in worshipping the new born Messiah also. Of course, his real intent is simply to discover his location so that he may have him killed (see verse 16).

- 4) 2:9-10: Notice that **the wise men went alone.** Neither the scribes, nor the chief priests, even though they *knew* this newborn king might be their Messiah, went to see him! Here are people who *profess* to be religious, and who *claim* to worship God, but really have not interest at all in Jesus! **Religion doesn't mean a thing, if it does not lead you to a place of worship before Jesus!**

So, what about the star? What was it? There's a lot of speculation, of course, but the fact is, a) the star moved, b) it moved slowly, c) it came to rest. Whatever it was, it was not a 'star' as we think of it. I don't believe it was a conjunction of planets, a falling star, or even a comet. It was a supernatural occurrence, the light of God leading them.

Remember how God used a pillar of fire to lead his people through the wilderness in the book of Exodus? I would suggest the same type of event is in play here. The Lord is simply guiding those who want to worship Jesus to the house of the Lord!

The NRSV states for v.10 "when they saw the star had stopped, they rejoiced." Their rejoicing would make sense as their journey had *finally* come to an end after traveling such a long distance. They had found the promised Messiah!

- 5) 2:11-12: **Notice the wise men found the 'young child' at a house.** This is not the *baby* Jesus, he is now a young child. Nor is Jesus in the manger, he is at his house. The typical nativity scene with the three wise men in the picture is not accurate. As stated before, the wise men appeared a considerable while after Jesus was born. Jesus was probably between one and two years old.

The wise men fell down and worshipped Jesus, knowing he was the foretold Messiah. How did they know? They understood the promises of God! The time was right (this generation), the place was right (Bethlehem), and the light of God led them. These men placed their faith in the word of God to lead them to their Savior. Wise men indeed!

They presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Again, we don't know how many men there were. Perhaps several hundred had gathered around the house. That would be rather a noticeable thing in such a small town!

As to the gifts, many see these as being symbolic of Jesus **birth as a king** (gold), the beautiful **fragrance of his life** (Frankincense), and **his death on the cross** (Myrrh). Others interpret the gifts slightly differently. I am content simply to say that these are gifts worthy of a king. They were treasures of great value, brought thousands of miles across the desert so that they may be presented before the Messiah. (for those interested, read Isaiah 60 which is prophetic of the second coming of the Lord. Notice that gold and incense, but not myrrh is mentioned as gifts from Gentiles – death has no hold on the Messiah at that point.)

Being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the wise men traveled back to their own country.

- 6) 2:13-15: The Lord once again speaks to Joseph in a dream, warning him that Herod intends to seek after and kill Jesus. **Immediately, Joseph obeys** (Joseph is always quick to obey the Lord!), taking his wife Mary and Jesus and fleeing to Egypt, where they stay until Herod the Great dies.

The quotation in v.15 is from Hosea 11:1, and is referring, in that instance, to the people of Israel, having been called out of Egypt (in Exodus). Here, Matthew takes this event and applies it prophetically to Jesus, making Jesus his 'son' in the New Testament as Israel was his 'son' in the Old Testament. It gives us an example how historical events can sometimes be prophetic of yet future events. In v. 19-20, Jesus will be 'called' back out of Egypt to return to his home in Israel.

- 7) 2:16-18: Bethlehem was only 5 miles from Jerusalem, so very likely within a day or two Herod realized the wise men were not coming back. Using the dates the wise men gave him as a measure for estimating the age of the Messiah at that time, (v.7) he ordered the death of all male children in Bethlehem under the age of two. It's relatively safe to assume that Herod *rounded up* to age two to ensure that he didn't 'miss'. In other words, the timing might have been one year, but Herod went up by a year to be sure. That would certainly be within his character.

The scripture quoted here is from Jer. 31:15. Rachel was the wife of Jacob, and is considered to be the mother of the twelve tribes of Israel. Ramah was a place of deportation, from which captives were sent into to Babylon in the 6th century B.C. Here, Matthew compares the pain and grief of the mothers at the time of the captivity to the pain experienced by the mothers in Bethlehem.

- 8) 2:19-23: As the prophecy states in v. 15, after Herod's death, the Lord calls his son out of Egypt, and Joseph is instructed to head back to Israel. Rome divided up Herod's kingdom between his three sons, two of which were named Herod (Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip II). His other son was Archelaus, who began his reign over Judea by ordering the execution of 3000 people of influence in the kingdom. He was a wicked man, much like his father.

Joseph was warned to avoid Judea, so he headed north to Nazareth. The Hebrew word for Nazareth is Netzer, which means *root* or *branch*. In calling Jesus the 'Nazarene' we are calling him the root, or branch, which by the way fulfills prophecy. See Isaiah 11:1-5, 53, Jer 23:5-6, 33:14-16, Zech 3:8.

The main point I would like to draw your attention to in this chapter is the reaction that the 'wise men'

had to the coming of the Messiah. **The ‘Good News’ of Jesus literally changed their lives.** Their daily routine changed, and immediately, upon seeing the ‘light’, their life took a new direction, one of seeking out and worshipping the Lord. This presents a wonderful picture of how a person’s life should change when they give their life to the Lord! Once you’ve found salvation, it should send your life in a new direction, one led by the Holy Spirit and the light of God’s Word. The wise men gave up everything to seek out Jesus. You too, should be willing to drop whatever you are doing if it is not of the Lord.

There are two kinds of religious people in this story. There are those ‘wise men,’ whose lives changed forever, and there are those ‘chief priest’ who are religious but their religion has no meaning. I think it’s fascinating that the scribes and chief priests, who profess to be God’s people, were only 5 miles away from the Lord but could not be bothered to seek out Jesus, while these wise men were willing to travel thousands of miles to worship him.

Which are you? Are you just religious in name? Or has Jesus really changed your life? Who, or what are *you* seeking after?