

# **Bible Study June 25, 2025**

## **MATTHEW 2 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)**

### **The Magi Visit the Messiah**

***<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem***

Bethlehem is a small town five miles south of Jerusalem. It sits on a high ridge over 2,000 feet above sea level, where it can be seen easily. Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David. 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.

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 southwest. Bethlehem of Judea (also called Judah; 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, even in his own family, Herod the Great supervised the renovation of the Temple, making it much larger and more beautiful. This made him popular with many Jews. Jesus would visit Jerusalem many times because the great Jewish festivals were held there.

***<sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."***

Not much is known about these wise men. We don't know where they came from or how many were in the group. Because of the three different gifts they gave to Jesus, tradition has assumed that there were just three men on this journey. Tradition also says that these were men of high position from Parthia, near the site of ancient Babylon. How did they know that the star represented the Messiah? (1) They could have been Jews who had remained in Babylon after the Exile and knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's coming. (2) They may have been eastern astrologers who studied ancient manuscripts from around the world. Because of the Jewish exile centuries earlier, they would have had copies of the Old Testament in their land. (3) They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah. Some interpreters say these wise men were each from a different land, representing the entire world bowing before Jesus and fulfilling the prophecy that all the nations would come to him (Isaiah 11:10; 52:10). These men from faraway lands recognized Jesus as the Messiah while most of God's chosen people in Israel did not. Matthew pictures Jesus as king over the whole world, not just Judea.

The wise men traveled many hundreds of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship, and gifts. This is so different from the approach people often take today. We expect God to come looking for us, explain himself, prove who he is, and give us gifts. But those who are wise still seek and worship Jesus today not for what they can get from him but for who he is. God reveals himself to those who seek him and rewards them with faith (Hebrews 11:6).

The wise men said they saw Jesus' star. Centuries earlier, Balaam had referred to a coming "star . . . from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). Some say this star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars around the same time. A variety of other explanations have been offered. But couldn't God, who created the heavens, have created a special star to signal the arrival of his Son? Whatever the nature of the star, these wise men traveled many miles searching for a king, and they found him.

***<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.***

Herod the Great was quite disturbed when the wise men 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 a ruthless villain, 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 wise men 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 an eastern nation trying to gain more control as Assyria and Babylon had done centuries earlier.

Matthew reveals that both Herod and the people of Jerusalem were disturbed. When Jesus was born into the world, people immediately began to react. His presence did not soothe and comfort most people; instead, it startled and disturbed them. In some, like the wise men, he awakened spiritual longings; in others, fear and insecurity. Things have not changed that much. Jesus still upends, stretches, and disrupts us. Because God entered our world in person when Jesus was born, we dare not sit idly by, ignoring and rationalizing our inaction. We must acknowledge Jesus as the rightful king of our lives and join with him to build his eternal and just Kingdom.

***<sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:***

***<sup>6</sup> "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel."***

The leading priests and teachers of religious law were aware of Micah 5:2 and other prophecies about the Messiah. Matthew repeatedly highlighted both their knowledge and their unbelief. The wise men'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. They took their cues from Scriptures like Psalm 2 and 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Herod's counselors would have told Herod this. No wonder this ruthless man took no chances and ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem killed (Matthew 2:16).

Most religious leaders believed in a literal fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy; therefore, they believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as foreseen by the prophet Micah seven centuries earlier (Micah 5:2). 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.

***<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”***

Herod did not want to worship Jesus—he was lying. This was a trick to get the wise men to return to him and reveal the whereabouts of the newborn king. Herod’s plan was to kill Jesus.

***<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.***

Jesus was probably one or two years old when the wise men found him. By this time, Mary and Joseph were living in a house and intending to stay in Bethlehem for a while. (For more on Joseph and Mary’s stay there, see the note on Luke 2:39.)

The wise men gave these expensive gifts as worthy acknowledgment for a future king. Bible students have seen in the gifts symbols of Jesus’ identity and what he would accomplish. Gold was a gift for royalty; frankincense was a gift for deity; and myrrh was a spice used to anoint a body for burial. These gifts may have provided the financial resources for the trip to Egypt and back.

The wise men brought gifts and worshiped Jesus for who he was. This is the essence of true worship—honoring God for who he is and being willing to give him what is valuable to you. Worship God because he is the perfect, just, and almighty creator of the universe, worthy of the best you have to give.

***<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.***

After finding Jesus and worshiping him, the wise men 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 open to his Word and responsive to his leadership. In what ways has Jesus affected the direction of your life? If you haven’t found Jesus but you’d like to, what direction does your life need to take?

## **The Escape to Egypt**

***<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”***

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 (1:20-21). His second dream told him how to protect the child’s life. Although Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father, he was Jesus’ adoptive father and was responsible for his safety and well-being. Divine guidance comes to hearts prepared to receive it. Joseph remained at full attention to receive God’s guidance.

***<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”***

Going to Egypt was not unusual because several major Egyptian cities had established colonies of Jews. These colonies had developed during the time of the great Captivity (see Jeremiah 43–44). Matthew portrays Jesus as the true Israelite—his earthly life mirrored major movements in Israel’s history, and he kept the laws of Moses perfectly. The parallels between Jesus and Israel’s history are many: (1) Joseph took his family to Egypt for refuge (Matthew 2:14-15); the Hebrews went to Egypt to escape famine (Genesis 46:1-7). (2) Herod killed the babies of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18); Pharaoh killed the Hebrew boys (Exodus 1:15-22). (3) Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17); the Hebrews were saved from the Egyptians through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15-31). (4) Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11); the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:26-35). All of these events show God working to save his people.

***<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.***

Herod, the king of the Jews, killed all the boys under two years of age in an obsessive attempt to kill Jesus, the newborn king. He stained his hands with blood, but he did not harm Jesus. He thought the wise men had outwitted him, but it was God who had done so. Herod was king by human appointment; he desired to destroy life for his own personal benefit. Jesus was King by divine appointment; he came to bring life and show us how to serve others. Which way is better? No one can thwart God’s plans!

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 Jesus wants to take things away when, in reality, he wants to give them real freedom, peace, and joy. Don’t be afraid of what you might lose; instead, give Jesus the throne of your life, and then you will gain everything of real value.

***<sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:***

***<sup>18</sup> “A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”***

Rachel had been the favored wife of Jacob, one of the great men of God in the Old Testament. As such, she was considered the mother of a nation. From Jacob’s 12 sons had come the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19).

## **The Return to Nazareth**

***<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup> and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”***

***<sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,***

Herod the Great died in 4 BC of an incurable disease. Rome had trusted him to keep the peace throughout the region, but Rome didn’t trust his sons. Herod knew that Rome wouldn’t give his successor as much power as he’d had, so he divided his kingdom into three parts, one for each of three of his sons. 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 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>23</sup> and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.***

Nazareth sat in the hilly area of southern Galilee near the crossroads of great caravan trade routes. The town itself was rather small and insignificant. 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 Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

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