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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Matthew 2.

(2013)

The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises

But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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Matthew 2.

Topics.

- The King of the Jews is born.
- Herod kills two-year-old children.
- Rachel is heard weeping for her children.

The Previous Chapter: in the previous chapter Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus the angel Gabriel coming to Mary and of the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary and Joseph's emotions, feelings, doubts, and insecurities and fears and how he responds to Mary and the Angel of the LORD. The chapter ended with Joseph taking Mary to be his wife.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

Wise Men see the Star of Christ.

Matthew 2:1-2 ----- ¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Bethlehem: (called Ephratah) means, a house of dust. It was the city of Joseph and the birthplace of Jesus. The town was in Palestine about 5 miles from Jerusalem and 6 miles from Nazareth.

Herod: (Herodes) means, hero it is a compound of the word heroes (a hero) and Greek (eidos) heroic.

Herod the Great (King of the Jews): -

- Was a Jewish Roman client king of Israel.
- Had ten wives and fourteen known children.
- Enjoyed the backing of Rome, but his excessive brutality was condemned by the Sanhedrin.
- Named tetrarch Galilee by the Romans.
- Was described as a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis.
- Had his wife Doris and her 3 year old child banished so he could marry Mariamne (known as Mariamne I).
- Took the role as sole ruler of Israel and the title of king for himself, ushering in the Herodian Dynasty.
- Took Jerusalem in (36 BCE).
- Ruled for 37 years, 34 years of them after capturing Jerusalem.
- Proceeded against the Pharisees in 6BCE.
- Executed several members of his own family, including his wife Mariamne.
- Most likely suffered throughout his lifetime from depression and paranoia.

Herod's temple: Herod's most famous project was the expansion of the second temple in Jerusalem, in the eighteenth year of his reign he built the temple on a more magnificent scale. The new temple was finished in a year and a half, although work on out-buildings and courts continued another eighty years. To comply with religious law, Herod employed one-thousand priests as masons and carpenters in the rebuilding. The finished temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Today, only the four retaining walls remain standing, including the Wailing Wall or western wall. These walls created a flat platform (the temple Mount) upon which the temple was then constructed.

These wise men obviously understood enough prophetic Scripture to know a king was going to be born who would become the king of the Jews. Through some amazing phenomenon in the heavens the wise men knew he had been born, but it seems they may have thought the birth had taken place somewhere in the city of Jerusalem because they went there not only to inquire where he was, but to worship him.

Wise Men and Magos.

The term wise men from Strong's Concordance comes from the Greek word magos and the Hebrew word Rab-Mag, which means a magian (i.e. an oriental scientist) and by implication a chief magician or sorcerer. Many believe the wise men were not Jewish, nevertheless whoever they were they had a better heart attitude toward God and prophetic Scripture than did the LORD'S own people. These wise men rejoiced at the birth of the promised King so they were not anti the LORD even though they may not have been Jewish, whereas the chief priests and scribes were troubled (v3).

It is not uncommon for God to use pagan people to achieve His plans and purposes. God used Cyrus the King of Persia to deliver His people from their seventy years captivity in Babylon. The LORD even calls Cyrus, His shepherd (Isaiah 44:28) and He called Babylon His great army. Tragically if the LORD had used the chief priests and scribes to find the new born King it is most likely they would have handed him over to Herod (which they eventually did). In this instance the wise men whoever they were had a better heart than the LORD'S very own priests and religious leaders.

A Biblical Principal: many stories describing the ways of the LORD often only give enough detail to see clearly the main message, the detail is left to speculation but the main message is clear. The main message in this story is that the Christ child is born, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The exact detail of how a thing came about or who the people maybe (i.e. the wise men being Jewish or not), may vary to some degree with various believers, but that difference in the detail should not become a dogmatic point so that it separates fellowship with others that believe and embrace the main message of the story.

Herod hears of the Birth of the King.

Matthew 2:3-6 ----- ³When Herod the king heard this he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They (the chief priests) told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Troubled: (tarasso) from Strong's Concordance means to stir or agitate, (i.e., to make one nervous or arouse public interest). In this context it carries the idea of attempting to stir up public support that will cause others to move vigorously or violently against something.

The chief priests and scribes knew Christ would be born in Bethlehem because Micah in the Old Testament had prophesied it.

- You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days (Micah 5:2).

There are many other Scriptures throughout the Bible that speak of Christ ruling not only as King over Israel, but over the entire world when he returns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Herod and the religious leaders: the amazing thing in all this is that the chief priests and scribes knew the Scriptures and that a King was prophesied to come, yet they were as troubled as Herod was when they heard that he had been born, but they should have been enormously excited and rejoicing at such great news. Sadly this attitude of jealousy continues with the chief priests and scribes and ultimately leads to them having him killed. The wise men (whoever they may have been) had a better heart attitude than the LORD'S own priests and scribes, this would be one of the primary reasons the LORD used the wise men to proclaim the birth of this King rather than His own priests and religious leaders.

Herod asks the Wise Men when they saw the Star.

Matthew 2:7-12 ----- ⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Gold: is a very precious metal that symbolises pureness and royalty.

Frankincense: was a chief spice used in perfumes and as incense, especially in religious ceremonies, its clear yellow aromatic gum or resin exudes from incisions made in the bark and hardens into small yellow tears.

Myrrh: (a bitter plant) was a chief spice its aromatic resinous gum is used in perfumes, incense and medicinal preparations.

The star rose and came to rest where the child was: some find it difficult to believe that a star actually moved out of its natural orbit to travel across the heavens and arrive at a predetermined point, but ponder for a moment this one event is about to fulfil much of Old Testament prophecy and change history as it was at that time.

This is the climax of the promised King arriving into the world who will ultimately bring and eternal Kingdom of peace to our suffering planet, so it is not surprising God used a star to dramatically and wonderfully announce the birth of this King. Added to this splendour is the fact that it is a very easy thing for God to do since He created not only the multitude of stars in the heavens but also the laws that govern them. It is true we are bound to the laws of the universe, but is also equally true that God is not.

The Faith of the Wise Men.

The faith of these wise men whoever they were was so strong that they already had valuable gifts for this new born child. When they saw the child they fell and worshipped, they obviously knew and believed the prophecies written in the Old Testament scrolls predicting a coming King.

How tragic is this the Scripture says, the wise men rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and worshipped the Christ child, but the LORD'S chief priests and scribes were troubled, they should have been there with the wise men rejoicing and worshipping God, how sad God could not trust His own people to find the Christ. God knew Herod and even His own religious leaders would have Mary's child, the Messiah and Saviour killed, so the LORD protects His Son by warning the wise men in a dream.

An Angel tells Joseph to depart to Egypt.

Matthew 2:13-15 ----- ¹³Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

The words, "Out of Egypt I called my Son" are cited from the following verse of Hosea: -

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

This literally applies to the nation of Israel, but prophetically transcends time and history to arrive at Joseph, Mary and their child Jesus leaving Egypt.

Herod Kills Two-Year-Old Male Children.

Matthew 2:16 ----- ¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

No-doubt when the wise men had gone to find the child, Herod being king of the Jews would have gathered the religious leaders chief priest's and scribes to learn more about this new born King, but when Herod learned this newborn king was the one prophesied to be born king of the Jews he feared him usurping his rule and probably his ongoing dynasty through his own sons.

These verses show the madness of Herod (revealing his cruel murderous heart and lack of compassion for anyone except himself) and the goodness toward the LORD in the heart of the wise men who could have gone back to Herod and no doubt received a handsome reward for telling him where the child was, but they chose to obey the LORD and protect the new born King. Thus when Herod realized he had been outwitted by the wise men he gave orders to kill all boys of the age of two and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity.

This horrific event is recorded in history as the: Massacre of the Innocents.

Although Herod was certainly guilty of many brutal acts, including the killing of his wife and two of his sons, no other known source from this period makes any reference to such a massacre. Since Bethlehem was a small village, the number of male children under the age of two, would probably not exceed twenty. This may be the reason for the lack of other sources for this history. Nevertheless the Scripture does say, "And all that region surrounding Bethlehem" so there may have been a number of other children murdered.

Rachael Weeping.

Matthew 2:17-18 ----- ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Rachel is weeping for her children is cited from Jeremiah: -

- Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more" (Jer. 31:15).

Jacob was struck by Rachel's beauty and immediately fell in love with her and she became his wife, she gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin, but sadly died when giving birth to Benjamin. Even though it was Leah and her maid Zilpah and Rachel and her maid Bilhah who gave birth to the twelve sons of Jacob and who became the twelve tribes of Israel Rachel was the woman Jacob loved, and thus she is called the mother of Israel.

Sins of Israel: at the time of Jeremiah the land of Israel was full of idolatry, astrology, occultism, they had altars for worshiping the host of heaven (the sun, moon, stars and planets) in the court of God's temple and not only worshipped at the altars of Baal, but were even sacrificing their sons on the altar of Molech in the Hinnom valley. Added to these abominations they were killing those that were innocent, cheating the helpless out of justice, not helping the less fortunate and oppressing the poverty-stricken for their own gain

The LORD sent prophet after prophet to call Israel to repentance and warn them of impending doom, but the rich continued to cheat the innocent out of justice, and show no sense of responsibility towards the poor, and instead of relieving the economic distress of the under-privileged seemed bent upon devising new means of depriving them of their property.

This gross idol worship and indiscriminate, indulgent and excessive luxurious living resulted in the LORD having to use the armies of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to punish and Judge Israel. Nebuchadnezzar (a secular king) under the hand of God and acting as the LORDS army burned their houses, brought the city of Jerusalem to ruin, defiled the temple and not only took the treasures and sacred vessels of the temple back to Babylon, but also took all the inhabitants of Jerusalem into Babylonian captivity for seventy-years.

Jeremiah fully aware of all of Israel's abominations before the LORD pictures Rachel (the mother of Israel) rising from her grave, to weep over her children who have been stripped from their land and Matthew uses this enormous grief expressed through Rachel for her children to depict the horror and sorrow all the mothers of Israel are feeling over the death of their children who have been murdered by Herod's soldiers (Jer. 31:15). (Matt. 2:17-18).

An Angel tells Joseph to go to the Land of Israel.

Matthew 2:19-23 ----- ¹⁹But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." ²¹And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he (Joseph) was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Galilee: (the heathen circle) is a region in northern Israel on the west side of the lake or Sea of Galilee in the northern district of Palestine.

Nazareth: was a small insignificant town in Palestine in lower Galilee where Joseph and Mary lived, today it is a large Arab city. Joseph and his family stayed in Egypt until Herod's death then moved to Nazareth in Galilee in order to avoid living under Herod's son Archelaus.

The words: -

- That what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Are not found in any of the books of the Old Testament, because of this there has been much difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of this passage. Some have supposed that Matthew had in mind the following verse in Judges: -

- Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:5).

In that Samson is seen as a type of Christ since he was called to save Israel and died for them doing it.

Others suppose that Matthew was referring to the following verse of Isaiah: -

- There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1).

Because here the descendant of Jesse is called a "Branch" and in the Hebrew branch is נצר Nêtzar.

Some have supposed that he refers to some prophecy which was not recorded, but handed down by tradition. But these suppositions are not very satisfactory. It is much more likely that Matthew is not referring to any particular place, but to the leading characteristics of the prophecies concerning the Lord.

Consider the following: -

Matthew does not say "by the prophet," as in the following two verses: -

- All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet (Matt. 1:22).
- They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet (Matt. 2:5).

Unlike these verse Matthew says, "By the prophets," meaning no one particularly, but the general character of the prophecies. The following prophetic Scriptures show that the leading and most prominent prophecies respecting the Lord were that he was to be of humble life; to be despised and rejected.

- For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isaiah 53:2-3).
- He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:7-9).
- Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12).
- See also Psalm twenty-two.

These verses shine a brilliant spotlight on the truth the Messiah the Christ would not only have no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him or esteem him, but would also be despised and rejected.

Likewise the character of the people of Nazareth was such that they were proverbially despised and thought lowly of. When Philip said to Nathanael, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph come and see," Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45-46).

To come from Nazareth, or to be a Nazarene, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth; to be a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness. This was what had been predicted of Christ by all the prophets.

With this in mind and the fact that the phrase "He shall be called" means the same as "He shall be" it is most likely when Matthew said that the prophecies were "fulfilled," his meaning was that the predictions of all the prophets that the Messiah the Christ would be of a low and despised condition, and would be rejected, were fully accomplished in his being an inhabitant of Nazareth, and despised as such.

An overview of the history of Jesus birth: Caesar Augustus declared that everyone should be registered in their own town so Joseph and Mary (while pregnant) left Nazareth in Galilee to go to Bethlehem in Judea which is called the city of David (Joseph was of the lineage of David) where Jesus was born. For fear of Herod Joseph and Mary then took Jesus to Egypt, where they stayed until Herod's death then returned to their hometown Nazareth in Galilee in the land of Israel.

End