

Matthew Chapter 2 – Jesus’ Early Life

Review

Matthew Chapter 1 begins with the genealogy and the birth of Jesus the Messiah, focusing on the line of Joseph and how Jesus’ birth was foretold in Scripture.

In the last lesson, we discussed how fulfilled prophecy works in the New Testament. The events surrounding the time of Messiah are looked at with the backdrop of the Messianic nature of Hebrew Scriptures.

Some things in the Hebrew Scriptures are a direct fulfilled prophecy: He would be born of a virgin, He would be born in Bethlehem, He would be of the line of David. These are examples of direct fulfillment.

Other items see an event that happens in the life of Jesus or surrounding His life that lines up with an event or statement made in the Hebrew Scriptures: Jesus came out of Egypt just like Israel did. The distress of the families during the time of Herod was just like the time of the exile. This is known as foreshadowing.

It is our responsibility to review what is called fulfilling what is spoken by the prophets and understand it as either direct fulfillment or a reference to foreshadowing. We also must remember that the authors of the New Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and we get to see God’s insights into the foreshadowing of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Consequently, we must be careful not to take on the same responsibility as the New Testament writers and look for foreshadowing and types.

Matthew 2:1-23 – Jesus’s Early Life

Matthew 2 is about the early life of Jesus Christ. 2:1 does not give us a time frame; it simply says, “after Jesus was born in Bethlehem...” How much time has passed since His birth? The texts of both Matthew and Luke give us an idea of how much time has passed.

Matthew 2 uses the term “παῖδιον *padion*,” which means child as opposed to “βρέφος *brephos*” which means infant or baby. “brephos” is used in Luke 2 in reference to Jesus in the manger, and in Acts 7:19, it references the decree of Pharaoh to kill newborn babies. It would be unlikely that Matthew would use the term for a child when referring to a newborn.

In Matthew 2, the magi and Herod have a conversation about when they saw the star. Then after Herod realized that the magi would not return, he slaughtered all male babies 2 years old and under. This indicates that the star would have appeared up to 3 years before the decree of Herod.

In Luke 2, Jesus was presented in the temple eight days after His birth (Luke 2:21-24). Jesus’ parent offered up two small inexpensive birds. In Leviticus 12:1-6, we have the law of consecrating a first-born male. According to Leviticus 5:7, 11, if they did not have the means to afford a lamb, then it would default to the turtle doves or pigeons. If they had been given the gifts from the magi, they would have had enough wealth to afford a one-year-old lamb.

The implication of Luke 2 is that when they were done with the requirement of the Law and returned to Nazareth.

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Is it possible that Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem at the time of the visit of the magi and Luke 2:39-40 refers to an event well after everything that happens in Matthew 2:1-22? Perhaps, I will not rule it out. But based on the timing of the star, the magi would have visited at least 1 year after the events of the birth of Jesus.

I do think it is more probable that the magi were led to Bethlehem by the scribes, but the star would have led them to Nazareth. God tells Joseph to go to Egypt knowing that Herod would pursue the Child everywhere in Israel including Galilee. When they come back, they return to Nazareth rather than resettling in Judea.

Who are the magi? Many people speculate on their identity, but the only thing we know is that they are from the east, most likely Babylon.

The word *magi* is “μάγος magos” and is used here, in Acts 13:6-8, and in the Septuagint in Daniel 2:1-10 twice. In all other uses outside of Matthew 2, it is translated *magician*, although this is probably not an accurate translation.

The magi are not three men but probably a large cohort. These men gave three gifts, but the text does not say there were three men. The magi would have been wealthy advisors to kings or astrological fortune tellers.

Having this same word appear in Daniel, who was in the east, and then the “μάγος magos” coming from the east is too coincidental not to have some roots in Daniel. It is commonly held that Daniel’s legacy is concluded with these magi.

It would have been common for “μάγος magos” to be pagan, but these “μάγος magos” adhered to the word of the Lord and worshipped Jesus as would have been proper for a believer in YHWH.

I believe that these are Gentile believers, and they came as a result of Daniel’s teaching and prophecy. These Gentiles were both looking for and responsive to the birth of the Messiah while all of Israel were not. This is the point of the testimony of the magi.

Herod is a well-known character in history. Herod is not his name but a title. This particular Herod is called the Great, an obviously self-given name for all Jews hated him. He was not a Jew; his father was Antipater an Edomite and his mother an Arabian. The right to rule was stripped from Israel and given to a Gentile; this is in keeping with the prophecy in Jeremiah and Daniel that Gentiles would rule over Israel until the Messiah would come into His kingdom.

The historical nature of this section is clear to the original audience. Everyone would have known the history of Herod; they would have heard about the magi; they would have heard about the rumor of the King of Israel being born 40-50 years ago. They would have known about the cruelty, unreasonableness, murderous act of killing babies, and the evil of Herod. Now they the readers would have the context for what they already knew.

The star of the King of Israel is completely unknown to us. We do not know what this was. Some believe it is a convergence of some celestial stars; some say a comet (very unlikely), some say it is

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from a study of constellations. We do know that it appeared and alerted the magi to the event. Then the same “star” reappeared and led them to the exact location. This is obviously a supernatural event, and we simply do not know what that was.

When the question of this One that is born King of the Jews comes up, the priests and scribes knew where the King was to be born. Although they knew the prophecies, there was no interest in these events. Rather it troubled all of Jerusalem.

Troubled is “*ταράσσω tarassō*” and means to be perplexed, agitated, anxious. Why? Obviously, we know why Herod would be troubled (he even killed some of his sons for fear of them usurping him), but why was all of Jerusalem troubled? Having submitted to the godless, a godly happening is not reassuring but terrifying.

One can see how the plot thickens when Herod tries to use the magi to determine the identity of the Child so that he could destroy the threat to his power. The magi, led by the star and not by directions, saw Jesus, worshipped (literally bowed down), gave the gifts, and went back to the East after being warned not to return to Herod.

When Herod tries to kill the One who was born King of the Jews, Joseph is warned and told to flee to Egypt and stay there until it was safe. As stated in the last lesson, what is written in verses 15 and 17-18 is a fulfillment of foreshadowing. The references in Hosea and Jeremiah have no direct Messianic message, but the nature of the circumstances of Herod and the flight to Egypt is understood as having been foreshadowed in the history of Israel. When they return from Egypt, they resettled in Nazareth of Galilee, explaining why Jesus was known as being from Nazareth, although he was born in Bethlehem.

Conclusion

The text is historical with commentary from Matthew, clearly drawing out how Jesus fits the Messianic promise.

What is also clear is the contrast between Joseph and Herod and between the magi and the residents of Jerusalem. Those who should have seen it did not; those who should be faithful were not. Those who were not thought of did see it, those who were forgotten were faithful.

The lesson of those involved in the life of Jesus was that of simply being faithful to the truth and instruction of the Lord. They were instrumental in protecting the Child, and later, those unlikely disciples become the most instrumental people in spreading the news about the Messiah.

As with the genealogy and birth of Jesus, the early life of Jesus provides additional evidence that Jesus is the promised One of God, the Messiah. As we progress into chapters 3-4, we will see how four distinct events in His adult life also demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah.