

## Sunday School Lesson for January 18, 2026

### Matthew 2

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallahassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this third Sunday of January, we're starting a ten-year plan for Bible study entitled, "Vines by the Book." It's a chapter-by-chapter study of the entire Bible developed from the preaching of Jerry Vines, pastor emeritus of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. The first book in our study is the Gospel according to Matthew that we introduced last week. This Sunday morning, Pastor Trey will preach from the first chapter of Matthew, and our Bible Fellowship lesson for today comes from the second chapter, and sermon and Bible study will follow that pattern for the next fourteen weeks to cover the 28 chapters of Matthew.

Matthew's story of the birth of Jesus continues in chapter two, following the record of the Lord's genealogy all the way back to Abraham and the angel's announcement to Joseph, his plan to divorce Mary, the angel's response to Joseph's concerns including the announcement that the birth of Mary's Child would fulfill scripture, and, finally, Joseph's resolve to do as the angel of the Lord had commanded him.

Chapter two opens with the visit of the wise men--a passage that we covered during our advent lesson on December 21st. That lesson is still available on the church app, and you can review it there. The only thing I'd like to add is a timeline for this chapter--at least the suggestion of a possible timeline since we don't know for sure just how everything played out.

Scholars generally agree that Jesus was born between six and four B.C. Why was He born in a year "Before Christ" you ask? The short answer is that the calendar we use today went through many revisions over the centuries. In 525 A.D., a Roman Catholic monk who was trying to set the date for the annual observance of Easter among all churches in Christendom actually

miscounted by four years the actual number of years since Jesus' birth. Those years before His birth were originally categorized as "ante Christum natum"--Latin for "before the birth of Christ"--and abbreviated aCn. This was later translated into English and shortened to "B.C.," meaning "before Christ." The years after His birth are A.D., or "anno Domini," Latin for "in the year of our Lord. Some have tried to change the B.C. to "B.C.E.," meaning "before the Common Era" and the "A.D." to "C.E." meaning "the Common Era," in order not to offend non-Christians, but the dividing point of history still remains the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Back to our approximate timeline--it's not certain or exact, but it suggests a possible arrangement of the events of the first and second chapters of Matthew. Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and Jesus was conceived in her womb in late November to early December of 6 B.C. She left Nazareth to spend about three months with her sister, Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist between February 27th and March 11th. It's then that Joseph discovers his fiancé is pregnant and decides to divorce her quietly; but an angel intervenes and lets him in on the plan.

Somewhere between August 27th and September ninth of 5 B.C., Mary gave birth to Jesus. One scholar suggests a date of September the second as the exact date, the first day of Hebrew civil year 3757 and the Jewish holy day known as "Rosh Hashanah" or the Feast of Trumpets. Eight days later, Jesus was circumcised in accordance with Leviticus, chapter twelve, verse three. Mary was required to wait another 33 days for her ritual cleansing according to Leviticus, chapter twelve, verse four.

Around the middle of October and after Mary's purification, the family traveled to Jerusalem so that Jesus can be presented to God in the temple as we read in Luke, chapter two, verses 22 through 24. While at the temple, Simeon blesses the family and prophesies about Jesus. A widowed prophetess named Anna recognizes the Savior and tells "all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" about Him.

After their interactions at the temple the family heads back to Bethlehem, and the magi arrived, presenting their gifts to Jesus who was, by then, in a house--according to Matthew, chapter two, verse eleven--still in Bethlehem--the house probably owned by Mary or Joseph's relatives. Joseph is most likely working at this time as well. The magi are warned in a dream not to report back to Herod as he had instructed them; instead, they returned home without going back through Jerusalem. Joseph also receives a warning in a dream. In his dream, the angel of the Lord told him to go to Egypt because Herod was about to look for Jesus to kill Him.

Now, at the end of October, 5 B.C., when the magi haven't returned to tell Herod where the Child was, the king ordered the execution of all male children two years of age and younger. The two years was--as we read in Matthew, chapter two, verse sixteen--, "according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men." Whether that means it took two years for the magi to get to Jerusalem or if it took them less than two years--perhaps as little as six months--Herod was just being cautious.

We next skip ahead to the spring of four B.C. The first century historian, Josephus, writes that there was an eclipse of the moon just before Herod died, and that he died just before Passover that took place on April 11th. From other information provided by Josephus, we can pinpoint Herod's death as occurring between March 29th and April 4th in four B.C.

At this point, Joseph is once again visited by the angel of the Lord in a dream and told he can return. On the way back to Bethlehem, however, Joseph learns that "Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, [and] he was afraid to go there, and, being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee"--Matthew, chapter two, verse 22. **As you can see on this map**, Judea included the town of Bethlehem, and Galilee was far to the north and included the city of Nazareth, the place where they had departed from to participate in the census.

Again, this is just a possible approximation of the timeline, pulling all the information from Matthew and Luke together to give you an idea of how the events of Matthew, chapter two, might have taken place. Of what I've just shared, the only date on record is that of Herod's death, and even that's an approximation.

So, after the visit of the wise men that was the focus of our study last month, they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. It's quite possible that they told Joseph of their dream as a warning to him of the danger posed by King Herod. Joseph also received a warning in a dream, perhaps very soon after the wise men left--verse thirteen: "Now 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.' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and 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.'"

Notice that the angel doesn't tell Joseph, "Take your wife and son," but "Take the child and his mother," because Jesus was not his son. The angel mentions "the child" first, not only because He was God in the flesh, but also because the preservation of the Child was the greatest concern. The angel makes that clear when he says, "Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." After all, this child was "the King of the Jews" Whom the wise men were seeking when they first came to Herod.

So, Joseph didn't hesitate-- verse fourteen: "And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod." The angel said, "Rise," and Joseph "rose." The very night that the angel spoke to him, he gathered up his family and left Bethlehem behind.

Egypt, a province of the Roman Empire, was about sixty miles from Bethlehem. Herod's rule only extended to the River Sihon. Many Jews who had fled from the wars with the Syrians to the north were living in Egypt. In Alexandria, the Jews made up a fifth of the population, and there were several synagogues there. One tradition says that they went to a place north of what is now Cairo, but, wherever Mary and Joseph ended up in Egypt, it's reasonable to assume that they received a friendly welcome as well as a safe place to escape from the wrath of Herod.

What did they live on while they were in Egypt? There are a couple of possibilities. First, the gifts the wise men brought could have provided enough funds for even an extended stay, and, second, Joseph's skills as a carpenter were portable enough that he could have easily gotten a job most anywhere. Either way, God provided everything they needed--of this we can be sure.

Soon after they left Bethlehem, Herod realized that the wise men hadn't come back to tell him where the King of Jews was, and he wasn't happy. Matthew tells it like this in verse sixteen: "Then 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."

The word translated "tricked" in most modern translations doesn't carry the full weight of how Herod felt about the wise men not returning to him as he had told them. It's translated "mocked" in the King James Version, and Herod took the "trick" that the wise men played on him very personally as if they had ridiculed him by disregarding or intentionally disobeying his command and treating him with flagrant disrespect.

One commentator writes, "It was more than deception; they had trifled with him." In his extreme anger and fearful of the possibility that this Child Who was the King of the Jews might possibly interfere with his own rule in Judea, Herod ordered that all male children "in Bethlehem and in all that

region,” two years of age and younger, were to be killed immediately. How large the region around Bethlehem was and how far Herod’s order extended, we really don’t know.

Herod’s criterion for the children to be killed was two years and younger, established “according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.” Back in verse seven, we learned what Herod had learned from the wise men when they first saw the star. Adding the time it took for them to prepare for their journey, the travel time, and the time that had passed since they had left Herod’s palace--plus a little extra time just in case he missed something--Herod sent his soldiers to kill all newborn boys who would have been born during that time.

This is now the third time that Matthew pauses to tell his readers, “Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet.” In this case, it was the prophet Jeremiah who wrote in chapter 31, verse fifteen, “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.’”

As Jeremiah announces the Lord’s judgment to come upon the people of the ten northern tribes as they’re carried off into exile, he writes that Rachel is weeping. Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and the favorite wife of Jacob. When Jacob passed on the family blessing to his grandsons, Joseph’s share of the blessing went to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The clan or tribe of Ephraim became the most powerful of the ten northern tribes and therefore came to represent all of the ten tribes, and the people of Ephraim lived just north of Jerusalem. Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, and she was buried near Bethlehem, some six miles south of Jerusalem.

Ramah, however, was about five miles north of Jerusalem, and it was at Ramah that the fate of Jeremiah and those who had escaped the destruction of the city would be decided by Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Assyrian guard,

as we read in the first verse of Jeremiah, chapter forty. The nobility of the northern kingdom of Israel had been assassinated. The king's sons were executed in his presence, then his eyes put out so that the last thing he would remember seeing was the death of his children. The people were placed in chains and gathered in Ramah as they began their journey eastward into an exile from which they would never return. No wonder Rachel wept; but she would weep again.

So, here in Matthew, chapter two, Rachel weeps because her children are not merely led into exile, they're destroyed--even by one who called himself the king of Israel.

Matthew sees Rachel representing the mothers of Bethlehem mourning their children. He points to Jeremiah's image and applies it to the results of Herod's wrath--not as a direct correlation but to show a causal connection. The destruction of the people of Israel by the Assyrians and Chaldeans is what's called a "type"--a picture, if you will--of the massacre of the infants at Bethlehem, in so far as the sin that caused the children of Israel to be destroyed through their exile from their homeland foreshadowed Herod's order to kill all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger because of his obsession to destroy the true King and Savior of Israel.

Meanwhile--back to verse fifteen--, Joseph has safely sheltered Jesus in Egypt where he stays until he hears that Herod has died. Here Matthew inserts the second of his prophetic fulfillments when he tells us that "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" It was the prophet, Hosea, who recorded this word from the Lord in the first verse of chapter eleven of the book that bears his name.

As the Lord spoke through Hosea, He reiterated over and over again His unfailing love for the people of Israel, but they continued to reject His love. Chapter eleven opens with another refrain as the Lord says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This was, of course,

referring to the Exodus when, in Israel's greatest moment of experiencing the sovereign power of God on their behalf, God delivered his chosen people from four hundred years of bondage to the most powerful nation on earth. We find the particular passage where Moses delivered the Word of the Lord to Pharaoh in Exodus, chapter four, verse 22: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me.''" So, just as it had happened with the nation, so did it happen with the nation's Representative and King. The children of Israel and Jesus were born in their own land and had to flee into Egypt where they remained until God brought each of them out, and set them in their homeland once again.

Matthew sees in Jesus' return from Egypt a second fulfillment of the Lord's words through Hosea as the same love shown by God to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt now delivers His own Son from that same place. The history of Israel is regarded as typical of the Messiah's life. He alone gives significance to that history. Matthew reminds his readers several times in his gospel that Jesus is the true Child of Abraham. In Him, the blessing God promised to Abraham finds its highest fulfilment, and we'll see how Matthew points to particular incidents in the life of Jesus that have their counterpart in the Old Testament. It's for this reason that Matthew sees, in this event, an analogy to the call of Israel out of Egypt.

There's also the possibility that this verse in Hosea had become a kind of proverb among the Israelites, referring to any great deliverance from danger. As with the prophecy of Jeremiah, chapter 31, verse fifteen, this is not a Messianic prophecy per se, but it was used by Matthew to show how God's hand was at work in preparing the children of Israel for the arrival of the Messiah in a way that mirrored God's previous work among His chosen people.

Herod died in the 37th year of his reign around the date suggested by the Jewish historian, Josephus, as we mentioned earlier--between March 29th and

April 4th in four B.C. Josephus describes Herod's horrible afflictions just prior to his death in rather explicit language: "the distemper seized upon his whole body, and greatly disordered all its parts with various symptoms." I'll spare you the graphic details. He added, "Besides which he had a difficulty of breathing upon him, and could not breathe but when he sat upright, and had a convulsion of all his members, insomuch that the diviners said those diseases were a punishment upon him for what he had done to the [Jewish leaders]."

Herod's cruelty was universally known. He accused two sons of his favorite wife with plotting against him and had them--and his wife--executed. Five days before his death, He had his firstborn son--the heir-apparent to the throne--killed for the same reason. In light of his actions, Emperor Augustus is reported to have said, "It is better to be Herod's pig than [his] son"--meaning that, since Herod was a Jew, he didn't eat pork and his pig would be safe, but not his own children.

With Herod dead, it was now safe for the family to return home--verse nineteen: "But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.'" We don't know how long they had stayed in Egypt. Using the timeline I've suggested, they would have been there only about five months before Herod died.

At his death, Herod's' kingdom was divided between his three, remaining sons: Judea, Idumea, and Samaria were given to Archelaus; Philip received Batanea and Trachonitis; and Galilee and Perea went to Antipas. We'll hear more about Archelaus and Herod Antipas later in Matthew's gospel. In fact--verse 22: "But when [Jospeh] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee."

Archelaus wasn't much different from his father. At one of the Passovers, he had three thousand people put to death in the city of Jerusalem. His crimes

were so severe that he was banished to Gaul by Emperor Augustus after reigning only nine years. When Joseph heard that Archelaus was the tetrarch of Judea, he was warned in a dream not to return to Bethlehem. Instead, he took his family to the district of Galilee and the town of Nazareth in lower Galilee in the land of the tribe of Zebulon--the same city from which Mary and Joseph had traveled to go to Bethlehem, as Luke tells us.

Being from Nazareth, however, was not a badge of honor in Jewish society of that day. You may remember that, when Philip told Nathanael that they had “found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” and identified Him as “Jesus of Nazareth,” Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” In John, chapter seven, verse 52, the officers who had been sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus came back empty-handed. When they asked the officers why they hadn’t arrested Him, they said, “No one ever spoke like this man!” to which they replied, “Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” When Nicodemus interrupted them to ask, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” they replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” The character of the people of Nazareth was such that they were universally despised and condemned, yet this was the very place where God would have His Son grow up and live for some thirty years.

For the fourth time now, Matthew notes that Jesus’ residence in Nazareth with the result that He would be called a Nazarene fulfilled scripture, but, instead of saying, “by the prophet,” as if to ascribe the fulfillment to one particular prophet, he says, “by the prophets”--plural.

The best explanation for this is that Matthew is playing on two Hebrew words that are translated “branch” as in the Messianic prophecy found, for example, in the first verse of Isaiah, chapter eleven, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit,”

and the prophecy of Zechariah, chapter three, verse eight, “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.” The Hebrew word for “branch” and a form of the name of the city, “Nazareth,” are close enough that Matthew saw in them a connection between Jesus being a Nazarene as well as the One who was “a branch from the root of Jesse,” thereby fulfilling prophecy.

On the other hand, some of the prophets speak of how the Messiah would be despised and rejected when He came, just as the people of Nazareth were despised and rejected, and this, some scholars believe, is how “what was spoken by the prophets” was fulfilled.

As chapter two comes to a close, so also does Matthew’s account of the birth of the Lord Jesus and the events surrounding it--many of which fulfilled scripture, validating Matthew’s purpose in writing: to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.

Sadly, the three events of the second half of this chapter foreshadow what lay ahead for the Lord Jesus as well as the future of Christianity--rejected by the Jews, yet embraced by the Gentiles, just as John wrote in the opening chapter of his gospel, verse eleven: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Thank you for being a part of our study of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus seen through Matthew’s eyes as he leads us to understand Who Jesus is through His works and His words so that we might be the people of God He’s calling us to be for such a time as this. Next week, following Pastor Trey’s message from chapter three of Matthew’s gospel where we’ll learn of the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism, we’ll turn to chapter four where we’ll discover how Jesus responded to Satan’s temptations, the Lord’s

calling of His first disciples, and the early success of His teaching, preaching, and healing ministry.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!