

# The Wise Men From the East (Part 2)

## Matthew 2:3-12

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**Matthew 2:3-12 (NASB95)**

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# Hebrews

## The Wise Men From the East (Part 2)

### Matthew 2:3-12

#### INTRODUCTION:

This morning we will continue with the story of the wise men from the East. We left off last week with the wise men, who had been led by a star, arriving in Jerusalem. We also looked at many Old Testament scriptures that foretold of this event and how the wise men would have known to look for the star.

Using the same approach as the author employs in Hebrews, we will continue to use prophecies from the Old Testament concerning the birth of Christ and how the Wise Men would know when Jesus would arrive and how they could find Him.

It is clear enough to see that the story traces the quest of these Magi to find the one who was born king of the Jews. The star prompted the magi to travel to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. This would be the logical place to start looking for the birth of the King of the Jews for someone who may not have known about Micah's prophecy about Bethlehem.

#### All Stand and Read Scripture

##### **Matthew 2:3-12 (NASB95)**

<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." <sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

#### Prayer

In Jerusalem, the magi visited King Herod and were told that the new king they were looking for would be born in Bethlehem, not in Jerusalem.

## **BODY:**

### **I. Micah's Prophecy.**

#### **Matthew 2:3-6 (NASB95)**

<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

The arrival of a new king was very disturbing to Herod and all Jerusalem with him. Herod asked the priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born, they told him it was in Bethlehem because of the prophesy of Micah. You can stay in Matthew and follow along with the quotation from Micah.

#### **Micah 5:2 (NASB95)**

<sup>2</sup> “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

Here the quotation from Scripture is the basis for their answer to the king, as well as Matthew’s confirmation in this section that Jesus was indeed this promised ruler of Israel.

The scribes and teachers of the law knew exactly **where** Messiah was to be born, for they knew the Scripture very well. The scribes probably had most if not all of it memorized. The prophet Micah foretold that from the little town of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, there would come the ruler who would be the Shepherd of Israel.

The Bible prophesied that Messiah would come and be a great leader who would deliver the people from oppression and bringing in an age of peace. I suspect that Herod soon realized that the setting in his day was right for the prophecy to be fulfilled.

If you read closely in Micah 5:2 the prophecy also tells us something else about this ruler: “His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.” It reveals that Messiah was pre-existent, that He had an ancient history of activities before He would be born in Bethlehem. Later, Daniel would see this “Son of Man” in heaven receiving kingship from the Ancient of Days, clearly revealing that the Messiah was sent into the world.

#### **Daniel 7:13-14 (NASB95)**

<sup>13</sup> “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. <sup>14</sup> “And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

Here we learn something about the way the New Testament draws on the Old Testament. These folks knew their Bible, especially the parts that told of the coming of Messiah. By recording the answer of the scribes to Herod, Matthew has reminded his readers that

Jesus is this promised Messiah who was to be born in Bethlehem, and that His goings were from everlasting. This is why in Matthew's view it was fitting for the wise men to worship Him.

## II. Herod's Request.

### Matthew 2:7-8 (NASB95)

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

King Herod discovered from the magi the "exact time" the star of Bethlehem had first appeared to them. Herod obviously thought the star of Bethlehem had first appeared when Christ was born; if he was right, then Jesus could have been up to two years old when the star of Bethlehem later guided the magi through the streets of Bethlehem.

Now then, what about **Herod**? This is Herod the Great, who ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. Now if we had calculated B.C. and A.D. correctly, we would have had Herod dying somewhere around 1 - 3 A.D. As you know Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. So it was not possible for Herod to have died in 4 B.C. B.C. means **before** Christ and A.D. is Latin which means "**God with us**". Any study of Herod will immediately show that the man was a ruthless and paranoid tyrant. He would easily kill his own sons, or one of his wives, or the high priest, if he thought any of these were in any way conspiring against him. And so the thought of a king being born was an immediate threat. Especially if it was the promised Messiah, the king of the Jews. Herod, you see, was not Jewish. He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau and not Jacob. He had tried to ingratiate himself to the Jews by marrying into the Hasmonean family (the line of Jewish kings, the Maccabeans, that had reigned for a hundred years), and by building the temple in Jerusalem. But he could not be trusted; and he himself trusted no one. So if you learn a little more about this character you will appreciate more why he and his court were thrown into a panic. There could also be a little history behind the disturbance as well, for the wise men may have come from a land that was antagonistic to Rome, and so their visit raised a lot of questions.

Due to Herod's insecurity, he asked the Magi to report their findings to him. However the Magi are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod and so Satan, using Herod, is unable to kill Jesus directly.

## III. Arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem.

### Matthew 2:9-12

<sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> After coming into the **house** (not manger) they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

The wise men left Herod's palace, and the star of Bethlehem appeared to them once again. In fact, the star "went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy". The star of

Bethlehem, apparently mobile, led the magi to the precise place where they could find Jesus. Was the star an natural event or a miracle? Scripture does not tell us. I am of the opinion it was a miracle. This would lend to the wise men understanding more fully that it was of God.

So, the magi may have first observed the star of Bethlehem the night of Jesus' birth, or they may have first seen it up to two years beforehand. Either way, they found Jesus still in Bethlehem when they arrived. Joseph and Mary almost surely stayed in Bethlehem until Mary could travel again. In fact, they probably stayed there for the 40 days necessary to complete Mary's purification. From Bethlehem, they could easily make the five-mile trip to Jerusalem for the sacrifice for Mary's purification and then flee to Egypt. The fact that the magi came to a "house" rather than the stable makes sense because Joseph naturally would have moved his family to a more protected place as soon as possible—the morning after Jesus was born, in all probability. I am sure that the visit from the shepherds did not go unnoticed.

A short word about the **house** may also be helpful, primarily because of traditional pictures and scenes of the wise men, the shepherds, and the animals are all gathered around the manger. Most people **realize** that such a grouping just puts all these **elements** of Christmas **together** thus creating the confusion among many people. The Bible traditionally used the English word "inn" for the birth narrative--there was no room in the "inn," so they had to go to the stable area. Bethlehem was a very small community; it would not likely have had an "inn," at least not in any sense that we today have. It seems that there is a good bit of evidence to suggest the word refers to a "cave-home" type of dwelling. People often lived in caves, and expanded their building out in front of the cave. Inside the cave-home the few animals they possessed would be kept way in the back in the cave, or down in a lower level of the cave, to keep them from wandering off; and the people would live and sleep in the room or rooms at the front. When Joseph and Mary came to the town it was all very crowded because all the people who were there to be taxed. And when they came to the lodging, perhaps the home of a close relative, the sleeping places for guests as well as family were all taken. There was no room--except in the back where the animals were. While this seems to us a shame, in some ways it would have been better for Mary--it was at least private and warm. After Jesus was born, there was probably more room in the house proper since the people who came to be taxed would have left. So the Magi could come to the house and find Mary and the child in the living quarters.

But the critical word to define in this story is the word **worship**. They came to worship Jesus. And after they received confirmation from the Bible and from the Star, they knew this was of God, and so they came and worshiped him. The word for worship in the text does not help us much in knowing what they thought, what they said, or what they did. But a general study of acts of worship would lead us to conclude that they bowed down and worshiped him because they believed he was divinely sent or even divine. Perhaps they considered him another divine monarch. We do not know. But the passage emphasizes that they received the sign from heaven, heard the word from Scripture, were led to the exact place by the star, and naturally bowed and worshiped him. Worship includes submission, adoration, and homage. The evidence of their worship came in the gifts they gave, gifts fit for a divine king.

You might also want to consider why **gold**, and **incense**, and **myrrh** were brought to Jesus by the Magi. Biblical commentaries often see symbolic meanings in the specific gifts; they say that gold was a gift for a king (but in the Old Testament gold was also the proper

setting for the sanctuary where God dwelt among His people), the incense was for deity (as the sacrifices in the Old Testament were sprinkled with it), and the myrrh was a preparation for His suffering. Matthew makes no such points out of the gifts, and so we should be cautious about reading something into the text that has little support elsewhere in the Bible. It is easy to get carried away with symbolic interpretations--but you must learn not to do this unless there is some pretty good support for it. There is a lot of symbolism in the Bible, and so if the items were well known symbols (like oil, or the dove) you can do something with it; or, if the text itself makes something of it, that too is the basis for doing it. But there is little that is convincing for the symbolic interpretation of these elements--they are used in too many ways in the Bible. So we probably should simply say that these were costly gifts, and so they were certainly appropriate for a king. They speak of the homage of the Magi. And, they would have been welcomed by Joseph and Mary who were very poor.

#### **IV. Herod's Anger.**

##### **Matthew 2:16-18 (NASB95)**

<sup>16</sup> Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> "A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, Because they were no more."

Remember when Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection?

##### **Luke 24:27, 32-35 (NASB95)**

<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

...<sup>32</sup> They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup> And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, <sup>34</sup> saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup> They *began* to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

I suspect that most of the New Testament references to Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ most likely were inspired by the passages that Jesus told the disciples on the road to Emmaus. That is because many of the prophecies are obscure and hard to understand. The two disciples relayed to the disciples what they had heard from Jesus. Although we are not told this in the scriptures, I am sure that Jesus spent time with the other disciples also explaining the Old Testament prophecies He had fulfilled as well.

This is the passage of scripture that Matthew quoted from Jeremiah.

##### **Jeremiah 31:15 (NASB95)**

<sup>15</sup> 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."

But why would Herod wish to commit such an atrocity? Herod was afraid of losing his throne to Jesus! This violent act toward the residents of Bethlehem was merely one in a long series of attempts to protect his throne. Out of fear, Herod killed most of his family including his favorite wife, brother-in-law, mother-in-law and three sons, along with other Jewish nobility and their families. Thus it was totally reasonable to Herod to execute a number of young boys in an effort to reduce the odds of a Messianic King growing up and taking his throne. This was, no doubt, through Satan who repeatedly tried to eliminate the Messiah.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Now we may be appalled at Herod's actions. But we are more like Herod than we may think. Jesus did come into this world to be king. And the sinful human heart hates the thought of having someone to answer to. If we are honest, we prefer to be rulers of our own lives and follow our own laws. We don't want someone else to take us off our throne.

But that is precisely what Jesus has come to do. And so we often behave like Herod. We try to remove Jesus from our lives. Some may attack Jesus viciously, denying his existence altogether. Not content with that, they seek to remove Jesus from the lives of others (just as Herod did) by removing all mention of him from history – a recent example is even rewriting the calendar to remove the initials A.D. and B.C which refer to Christ to B.C.E. and C.E. which means "before common era" and "common era". Meanwhile, some people are more subtle in their murder of Christ, they simply forget about him altogether. They go from one day to the next never thinking about their Creator and rightful ruler.

But the Lord will not be mocked. One day Christ's throne will be evident to all. Jesus will return and take his people to live forever with him. Meanwhile, those who have sought to rule their own lives will be punished forever. Jesus says:

### **Matthew 13:41-43 (NASB95)**

<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, <sup>42</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

So this New Year, ask yourself are you like Herod? Are you trying to remove Christ from your life? Will you even go to desperate lengths to do so? Don't do it. Repent of trying to rule your own life. Trust in Christ as your savior and accept him as your loving ruler.

Be like the wise men. They were men who 1) devotedly read and believed God's Word, 2) sought Jesus, 3) recognized the worth of Christ, 4) humbled themselves to worship Jesus, and 5) obeyed God rather than man. They were truly wise men!

On this New Years day I pray that you will be like those wise men—seeking Jesus with your whole heart, and then by faith committing your life to Him. He is the greatest gift you will ever receive because it is eternal.

**Go Tell it on the Mountain**