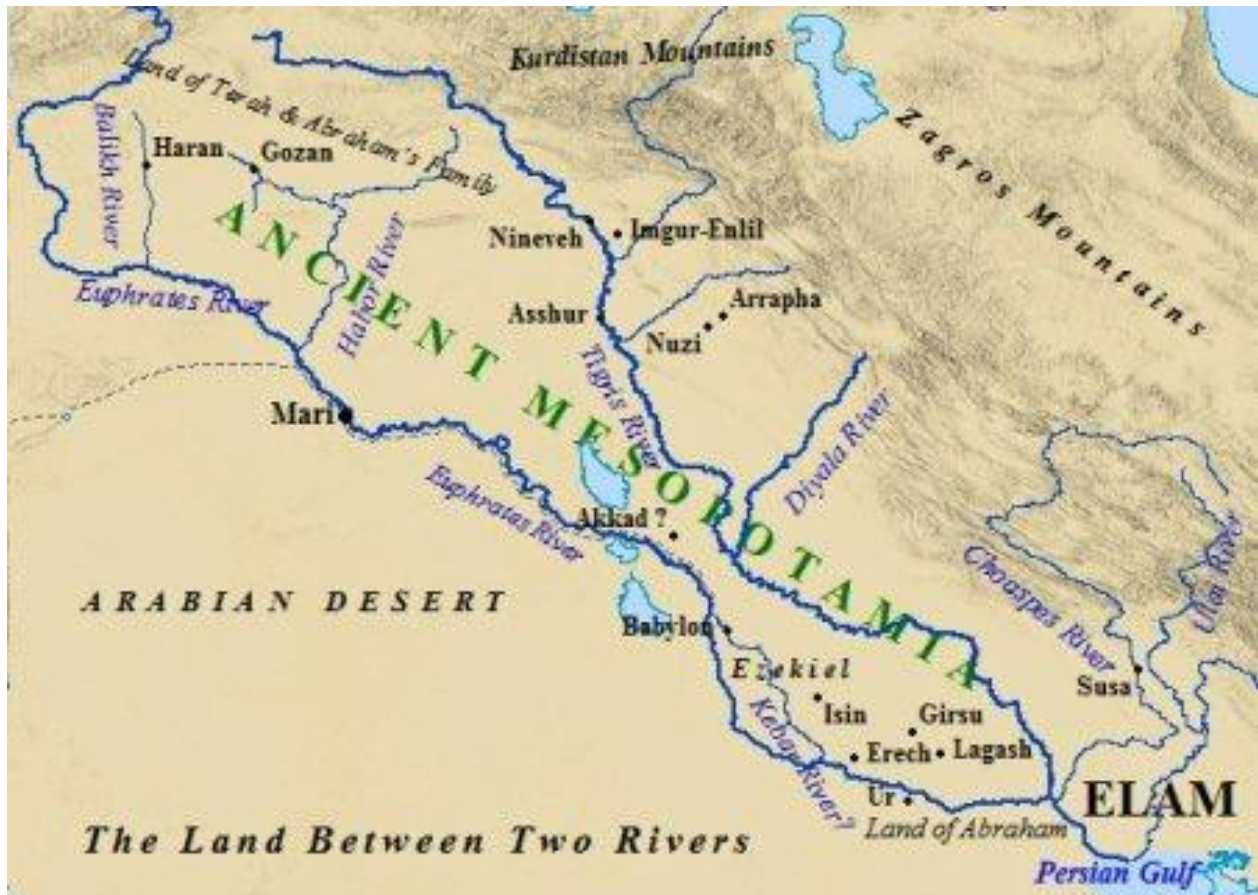


Matthew 2:1-23: The Visit of the Magi:

2:1: Now, after Jesus was born [circa 4 B. C.] in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying,

Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως, ἰδοὺ μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν παρεγένοντο εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα λέγοντες,





While the Bible does not reveal the date of Jesus' birth, it is probable that God ordained the 25th of December as this coincides with the Feast of Lights, also called the Feast of Dedication. This was a Jewish military holiday commemorating the conclusion of the Maccabean Wars and the rededication of the temple after victory against the Greek invaders in 164 B. C. After cleansing the temple on that day, the Jews worshipped and celebrated until January 1st. Sometime after the birth of Jesus (from six months to a year later) a fraternity of scholars from the ancient land of the Medes, possibly with a hundred or so people in the entourage, came to Jerusalem to worship the one born the king of the Jews. Being a very old and famous fraternity which had existed continuously throughout the times of the Medes, Persians, Chaldeans, and at that time the Parthians, they were given an audience with King Herod. To Herod's shock and consternation, they announced that the rightful heir to the throne of David had been born (Matthew 2:2). Herod, by contrast, was not born into his royalty, but with his father had attained royalty through hard fought military and diplomatic means. Now, he was coming to the end of his life and was willing to do anything, even murder innocent young children, to establish a lasting dynasty in his name. So, after careful and separate interrogation of both the Magi and Jewish theologians in Jerusalem, Herod ascertained the age and location of the one born, 'King of the Jews' in order that he might remove this threat to his dynasty.

The Magi were astronomers, astrologers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists, and explored all areas of medicine. In other words, they were 'wise men'. During the time of the Babylonian captivity, Daniel had been made a member of the Magi and had been elevated to become their president (Daniel 2:48). This was considered highly unusual for a Jew, for the Magi were strictly a gentile fraternity, though his acceptance and ascension through their ranks would have been facilitated by Daniel being given a Gentile name and educated under the Chaldean system. We must assume that at some stage in their history they had been told

(presumably by Daniel, having been given a prophecy regarding this matter) of a particular star that would appear at the time of the birth of the Messiah. When their astronomers informed them of this sign that the king had been born, they set out for Jerusalem. It is possible that the entire fraternity came along.

2:2. “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw [calculated that this was] His star in the east [in the land of the ancient Medes] and have come to worship Him.”

Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἦλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ.

The Magi came over a thousand miles to worship the King of the Jews, yet the Jewish religious leaders, now having been made aware of His birth, did not even bother to travel five miles to investigate the matter. As for Herod, he had worked very hard to acquire this kingdom and to win over the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. So, even though most still despised him and though no gentile fraternity had come to worship him, nor had any star declared his kingdom, he was not about to hand it over to someone born king of the Jews.

2:3. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled [under a lot of pressure and stress], and all Jerusalem with him.

ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης ἐταράχθη καὶ πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα μετ’ αὐτοῦ,

You should recall that at this time, Herod was suffering from both physical and mental illness and so was not a happy man. Consequently, this news only put greater pressure on him. With the dramatic entry of the

Magi into the city the word would have spread to ‘all Jerusalem’ very quickly. Upon hearing this news, the religious leadership of Jerusalem was stressed-out since they were very corrupt and involved in a lot of evil activity which they did not want stopped. The Jewish masses were enslaved in their souls to this religious system, and as such were devoid of truth and ignorant of God’s plan. Without truth they would not be able to evaluate correctly the report of the Magi; furthermore, ignorance fears what it cannot understand. So, quite naturally, they would be upset as well.

2:4. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he kept on inquiring of them [the progressive imperfect vividly draws a picture] where the Christ [Messiah] was born.

καὶ συναγαγὼν πάντας τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς τοῦ λαοῦ ἐπυνθάνετο παρ’ αὐτῶν ποῦ ὁ Χριστὸς γεννᾶται.

The Chief priests and scribes were the religious leaders, and so knew all the verses containing information regarding the Messiah, yet none of them went to Bethlehem to investigate; they had no interest in truth. Religious people are never interested in learning about God and His truth since they adhere to a religious system of trying to gain the approbation of God through works. In their self-righteous arrogance they placed themselves in total opposition to God’s grace plan.

2:5. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for in this way, it has been written by the prophet:

οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, Ἐν Βηθλὲμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας· οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται διὰ τοῦ προφήτου·

2:6. “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 [the Messiah] who will shepherd my people Israel.” [Micah 5:2]

Καὶ σύ, Βηθλέεμ γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ.

The good shepherd must be willing to die for his sheep. During the first advent, Jesus suffered substitutionary spiritual death (while being separated from fellowship with the Father, he was punished for the sins of mankind) in order that He might gather His sheep and rule over them at His second advent, the Millennial reign of Christ.

2:7. Then, Herod secretly having called the Magi [after he had inquired of the Jewish leadership about the place of birth] **he ascertained from them the [exact] time of the appearing star** [from this information, Herod was able to determine the age of Christ].

Τότε Ἡρώδης λάθρα καλέσας τοὺς μάγους ἠκρίβωσεν παρ’ αὐτῶν τὸν χρόνον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέρος,

Herod is now putting two and two together. Upon hearing from the Magi of the birth of the Christ, he had them wait separately while he garnered as much information as he could from the Jewish high priests and theologians. They probably gave him an extensive development of the story, but only a part is recorded for us, that which is quoted from Micah 5:2. Herod cleverly keeps the two groups separated so that neither group would come to know his plan to murder the new born child. Now that he has the information obtained from the high priests and scribes, he calls the Magi back. So, he relayed the information about the Messiah’s location to the Magi and sent them on their way.

2:8. And having sent them to Bethlehem, he said, “Go and search

carefully for the child, and when you have found him, report to me in order that I too may come and worship him.”

καὶ πέμψας αὐτοὺς εἰς Βηθλέεμ εἶπεν, Πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε ἀκριβῶς περὶ τοῦ παιδίου· ἐπὰν δὲ εὔρητε ἀπαγγείλατέ μοι, ὅπως κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ.

Herod playing the cunning fox decided not to go himself, but to commission these magi to locate the Messiah for him. He felt that through the use of his cavalry patrols and his forts for signaling, he would not lose sight of these Magi even if they should try to betray him. (Of the eleven forts which Herod had built, four of them were around Jerusalem and one of them, Fort Herodian was just four miles southeast of Bethlehem.)

2:9. After hearing the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star which they had seen in the east [This enabled them to plot the direction] went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπορεύθησαν, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὁ ἀστὴρ ὃν εἶδον ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ προῆγεν αὐτοὺς ἕως ἐλθὼν ἐστάθη ἐπάνω οὗ ᾧ τὸ παιδίον.

This is the first time they have seen the star since they had seen it in the East. After seeing it in the East, knowing its course, they were able to plot the direction to Jerusalem which confirmed to them that the King of the Jews had been born. Once in Jerusalem, they still required more details in order to locate the child. Micah 5:2 provided the details they needed in order to continue their quest for the King of the Jews. At some point as they approached Bethlehem, they located the star again which they then followed to the exact location of the house that Joseph and Mary was now staying in.

2:10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great happiness.

ιδόντες δὲ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα.

This does not mean that they were all believers for when they had first arrived in Jerusalem, they announced they had come to worship ‘the King of the Jews’ – there was no mention of worshiping the one who would save them from their sins. Undoubtedly, some were believers and some were not, though they all recognized that a great future king had been born.

2:11. After coming into the house [not a manger], they saw the young child [not a baby] with Mary, his mother, and they fell to the ground and worshiped him. [Both unbelievers and believers can worship a king.] Then opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense [incense used by the nobility] and myrrh [a very expensive perfume used by the wealthy and by kings].

καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἶδον τὸ παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν.

When the shepherds came, they came to a manger. When the Magi came, they came to a house. The shepherds were the only ones who had been directly invited by God (via the angel Gabriel) to celebrate the birth of Christ. On the other hand, the Magi arrived of their own accord, possibly a year to a year and a half later. When the Magi first saw the star in the east, the shepherds were worshipping the new born Christ in the manger.

The Magi have come from a place where some of the greatest treasures of

the ancient world had been located. When Nineveh (the ancient capital of Assyria) fell in 612 BC most of their treasures were taken by the Medes. There were three great nations that destroyed the Assyrians: the Medes, Scythians, and the Chaldeans. The Scythians were predominantly interested in strong men for slaves, beautiful women for wives and good horses and animals. The Chaldeans took the least amount of booty for they were mostly interested in land; the Medes took most of the art treasures made of both gold and silver and the exquisite jewelry back with them into the high plateau country of their homeland in the Zagros Mountains. The Magi having originated from among the Medes acquired many of these treasures. It was from these artifacts that they selected the ‘gifts of gold’ to be presented to Jesus Christ. They also brought two very valuable perfumes: frankincense and myrrh. Frankincense is a gum which was commonly used as incense by people of nobility and speaks of the unique person of Jesus Christ. Myrrh is a gum which was used for the burial of kings, and so foreshadowed Christ’s death on the Cross.

These gifts not only showed the reverence of the Magi toward the newborn King of the Jews, but also served a practical purpose of sustenance for that very night Joseph would have to flee with his family into Egypt where he would remain for a few years.

2:12. And having been warned [by God] in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi returned to their own country by another way.

καὶ χρηματισθέντες κατ’ ὄναρ μὴ ἀνακάμψαι πρὸς Ἡρώδην, δι’ ἄλλης ὁδοῦ ἀνεχώρησαν εἰς τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν.

How they got out of this trap is not revealed in scripture. Possibly, they crossed the Jordan and traveled north on the King’s highway and then east across northern Mesopotamia back to their country; or, they might have gone down to Petra and then followed a caravan route through the Arabian Desert back to their own country.

2:13. Now when they had gone [when the Magi had departed for their country], **behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until which time** [indefinite period] **I tell you, for Herod intends to search for the Child in order to kill him.”**

Ἀναχωρησάντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων, Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ φεῦγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον, καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἂν εἴπω σοι· μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό.

The angel commanded Joseph to get up in the middle of the night and to move out before Herod could seal off all the roads around Bethlehem. Joseph did as he was commanded without hesitation.

2:14. So, Joseph got up and took the Child and his mother while it was still night and departed for Egypt.

ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς καὶ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον,

Joseph being a humble believer obeys these commands in detail. He leaves immediately as the angel had instructed.

2:15. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Hosea] “Out of Egypt I called My Son” [in Hosea 11:1, it refers historically to the Jewish people departing Egypt; the Holy Spirit directed Matthew to apply it prophetically to the humanity of Christ].

καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς τελευτῆς Ἡρώδου· ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος, Ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου.

2:16. Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the Magi, he became very angry [enraged; a manifestation of his mental illness] and sent forth [his military] 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.

Τότε Ἡρώδης ἰδὼν ὅτι ἐνεπαίχθη ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων ἐθυμώθη λίαν, καὶ ἀποστείλας ἀνεῖλεν πάντας τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐν Βηθλέεμ καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ὁρίοις αὐτῆς ἀπὸ διετοῦς καὶ κατωτέρω, κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ὃν ἠκρίβωσεν παρὰ τῶν μάγων.

Herod was very thorough in this military operation to kill the young boy. Though Herod was able to ascertain the age of the humanity of Jesus Christ from the accounts of the Magi (v.7), he added some extra time to ensure he would get him, and though he was told that Christ was born in Bethlehem, he also included the vicinity around Bethlehem to make sure that the young child would not escape. He probably had his military close down all the escape routes and then did a house-by-house search and kill.

Disaster is turned into blessing by the grace of God. Not having reached God-consciousness, these Jewish children were all taken to heaven. If they had grown up in the homes of their religious Jewish parents who for the most part were extremely negative to the Gospel, they may not have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:17. Then, what had been spoken through Jeremiah [31:15] the prophet was fulfilled:

τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος,

2:18. “A voice was heard in Ramah [as what happened in Ramah, happened in and around Bethlehem], weeping and great mourning, Rachel [idiom for Jewish mothers] weeping for her children. And she refused to be comforted because they were no more [her children no longer existed].”

Φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμὰ ἠκούσθη, κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὀδυρμὸς πολὺς· Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν.

This was a prophecy given by Jeremiah over 500 years earlier about events that occurred in Ramah, a town about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. In 586 BC this was the location where King Nebuchadnezzar had gathered all the captives for deportation to Babylon. All those not fit for the trip, for example those who were too old, too young including babies or infirm, were killed. Perhaps thousands were killed.

2:19. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων,

2:20. “Get up, take the Child and his mother and go into the land of Israel for those [four men] seeking the Child’s life are dead.”

Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ, τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου.

Herod the Great, Alexander, Aristobulus and Antipater had to die before it would be safe for Joseph to return back to the Land. Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of Mariamne, the original heirs had already been executed by Herod on what appeared to be trumped up charges of

conspiracy, and Antipater, the eldest son of Herod was in prison awaiting the same fate as his half-brothers. Then, just four days before Herod's death, he (Herod) attempted suicide: he was suffering so much pain that he asked his cousin to bring him a knife and an apple. After his cousin had left the room, he began to stab himself, but hearing the cries of pain his cousin ran back in and took the knife from him. Herod was not yet dead, but the word soon got out that he was. Antipater, hearing the false rumor that Herod had successfully committed suicide, commanded his jailor to release him from his cell as he was now the king. Fearing for his life the jailor did as Antipater had commanded him. Then, Antipater immediately went to Herod's summer palace in Jericho, and as soon as he entered proclaimed himself king. Upon hearing Antipater's proclamation, Herod, still alive, commanded his guards to kill him. Herod lived another 4 more days, during which time he dictated a new will in which he made Archelaus his heir.

2:21. So, Joseph got up, took the Child and his mother and came into the land of Israel.

ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς γῆν Ἰσραήλ.

2:22. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid [concerned about the safety of his son] to go there. Then after being warned [by God] in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee,

ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἀντὶ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρώδου ἐφοβήθη ἐκεῖ ἀπελθεῖν· χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ ανεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας,

Joseph, knowing that Archelaus was very cruel, he decided to live in

Nazareth of Galilee. Nazareth was located in the tetrarch ruled by Herod Antipas, a wily but benevolent ruler who would carry on the building projects started by his father. This would provide better opportunities for Joseph in his work as a building contractor.

2:23. and came and lived in a city called Nazareth in order that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled namely that He shall be called a Nazarene.

καὶ ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ, ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται

Prophecy by paronomasia: the word Nazarene is derived from *Natser* which means a branch or root. Isaiah 11.1, “Then a root-shoot will spring up [1st Advent] from the stump of Jesse [the dynasty of David defunct because of the 5th Cycle of Discipline.]; and a Branch [*Natser*] from his roots [at the 2nd Advent the root-shoot becomes a branch, a great tree] will bear fruit [His rule in the Millennium].”