

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expositional Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

5- The Ministry of the Magi; the Slaughter of the Innocents; and the Flight into Egypt

Church March 20, 2022

Matthew 2:7-23

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

8 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."

9 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.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

11 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.

12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

13 Now when they had gone, 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 I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

16 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.

17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

18 "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."

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

20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."

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

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

23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

You could travel a long way and wait a long time before you find a Story that seemingly is so well-known; and yet is so obscured by both ancient Tradition and religious Myth as that of the “**Magi**”, or what many call, the “*Wise Men*”, mentioned by the Apostle Matthew.

During the Middle Ages, several different Legends developed that these men were actually kings- and that they were three in number. They even invented their names: *Casper*, *Balthazar*, and *Melchior*. And because many people *assumed* they represented the three sons of Noah, one of them is often pictured as an Ethiopian. A twelfth-century Bishop of Cologne even claimed to have found their skulls.

But the only legitimate facts- the only inspired and inerrant facts about these particular “*Magi*” are given by Matthew in the first twelve verses of chapter 2. And with apologies to all the myths and the various Christmas carols- we have no idea how many they were; or their names; or their means of transportation; or the specific country or countries they came from. In **Matthew 2:1**, we read that they were from the “**East**”. And Levi probably was referring to the priestly-political Class of the Parthians-who lived to the east of Palestine (Israel).

Now the “*Magi*” *first* appear in History in the 7th Century B.C. as a tribe within the Median nation in eastern Mesopotamia. Many historians consider them to have been ethnic Semites, which if true, made them (along with the Jews and Arabs)-descendants of Noah’s son Shem. It may also be that, like Abraham, the “*Magi*” came from ancient Ur in Chaldea.

Now the name, “*Magi*” might *originally* have been given them by others, who were speaking negatively about them.¹ But soon, this name or title came to be associated solely with the hereditary Priesthood within that particular Median tribe. Back then- both “Astronomy” (the *study* of the stars/Science) and “Astrology” (the *worship* of the stars/Religion) were closely related. And the “Magi” became skilled in both. They even had a sacrificial System that somewhat resembled the System that God gave to Israel through Moses. We need to understand that, back then, genuine Science and Religion overlapped. And so, the “Magi” were also involved in various Occult practices- including Sorcery and were especially noted for their ability to interpret dreams. It is from their name that our English words like, “*Magic*” and “*Magician*” come.

Now a foundational tenet of the Worship of the Magi was fire, and on their *primary* Altar (supposedly in a *primary* Temple) a flame, that supposedly came from Heaven- burned continually.

However, the “*Magi*” were dedicated “*Monotheists*”- that is, they believed in and worshipped only one “god”- as opposed to the many ancient religions, which had many “gods” (Polytheism). And it is because of their steadfast Monotheism, that it would have been very easy for the Magi to adapt to the Teachings of the 6th Century B.C. Persian religious leader named, “*Zoroaster*”, who also believed in a single god, named, “*Ahura Mazda*”.

Now like many of the other Man- made religions of that day- the “Magi” believed in an ongoing cosmic battle between “Good” and “Evil”. And this continual Struggle was a primary tenet of their Beliefs and thus dominated their lives and prayers and thinking.² The Emperor, Darius the Great, established Zoroastrianism as the official religion of all of Persia.

Because of their combined knowledge of Science, Agriculture, Mathematics, History, Astrology, Astronomy, and the Occult, the religious and political Influence of the Magi continued to grow until they became the most prominent and powerful group of Advisors in the Medo-Persian and subsequently the Babylonian Empires. And so, it was not strange that these men were often referred to as “*Wise Men*.” It is very possible that “**the Law of the Medes and Persians**” recorded in **Daniel 6:8, 12, 15;** and **Esther 1:19** was founded on the Teachings of the “Magi”. Historians tell us that no Persian was ever able to rise to become a king without mastering the scientific and religious Disciplines of the “Magi” and then being

¹ Similar to the 1st Century Believers in Jesus being called, “*Christians*” first in Antioch (**The Acts 11:26**). Originally, this was a derogatory term that is translated as “*little Christs*” or “*small anointed ones*”.

² It is important to know that Christianity does NOT believe or teach that there is an ongoing Battle between Good and Evil. We teach and believe in a Sovereign God- Who rules absolutely over all His Creation. And this one God has chosen to allow Evil to exist- to various degrees- but ONLY because by allowing Evil in some form- that helps to bring about the undefeatable Will of God.

approved and crowned by them, and that this group also largely controlled judicial Appointments as well-(**Esther 1:13**).

We do know from **Jeremiah 39:3** that Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag (Chief) of the Babylonian Magi, was with Nebuchadnezzar when he attacked and conquered Judah.

And we learn from the **Book of Daniel** that the “Magi” were among the highest-ranking Officials in the Babylonian Empire. Because the Lord gave Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream-which none of the other “*court seers*” were able to do-Daniel was appointed as “... **Ruler over the whole Province of Babylon and chief Prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.**” (**Daniel 2:48b**). Because of his great Wisdom and because he had successfully pleaded for the lives of the “Wise Men”, who had failed to interpret the king’s dream (**Daniel 2:24**), Daniel came to be highly regarded among the “Magi”. The plot against Daniel that caused him to be thrown into the lions’ den was ginned up by the jealous “Satraps”³ and the other Commissioners- but NOT the Magi- who respected him- even though he was a Jewish slave (**Daniel 6:4–9**).

Because of Daniel’s high political Position and the great Respect he had among them, it seems certain that the Magi learned much from this Prophet about the one, true, and living God- the God of Israel. It is also very certain that the Magi became students of Daniel as he taught them about God’s Will and Plans for His chosen people through the coming glorious Messiah. And because many Jews remained in Babylon after the Exile and intermarried with the people of the East, it is likely that Jewish messianic Influence remained strong in that region even until New Testament times.

During both the Greek and Roman Empires the Magi’s Influence continued in the eastern Provinces of their Empires, particularly in Parthia. And it was the Parthians that Herod, on behalf of Rome, drove out of Palestine between 39B.C. and 37 B.C., when his kingship of Judea began. Some Magi-many of them probably outcasts or false practitioners-lived in various parts of the Roman Empire, including Palestine. Among them was Simon of Samaria (**The Acts 8:9**), whom tradition and history have come to refer to as “*Simon Magus*” because of his “practicing magic” (Greek, *mageuo*, derived from the Babylonian *magus*, singular of *magi*). The Jewish false prophet Bar-Jesus was also a sorcerer, or “magician” (Greek, *magos*). These magicians were despised by both the Romans and the Jews. Philo, a 1st Century B.C. Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, called the Magi, “*vipers and scorpions.*”

Interestingly, in the original Hebrew, the English phrase of **Matthew 2:1**: “*Magi from the East*” literally means: “*from the rising of the sun*”, and actually refers to the Orient- NOT Persia. So, these men, who came to worship Jesus were

³ A Satrap was a provincial Governor in the Persian Empire

truly different than anything Herod had seen before. Not only were they true Magi, but they surely had been strongly influenced by Judaism, quite possibly even by some of the biblical prophetic Writings- *especially* that of Daniel. They appear to be among the many “**God-fearing Gentiles**”⁴ who lived at the time of Christ, a number of whom- such as Cornelius and Lydia (**The Acts 10:1–2; 16:14**)- are mentioned in the New Testament.

So, these Magi went to Jerusalem. Why Jerusalem? Probably because they knew that this was the capital of Palestine (as 1st Century Israel was called). But it was also the capital of Judaism as practiced in the 1st Century. I mean the Temple was there. The Sanhedrin Court met there. And the Pharisees- the single most fastidious Jews were there. And surely, with an Event as important as the one they knew about (the Birth of the King of the Jews)- the guy in charge in the capital city would know about it.

Now as I said earlier, we don’t really know how many people were in this group of the Magi. But however many actual Magi there was- what we *do* know is that this group was not alone. They carried priceless Gifts to give to the King of the Jews- gold, frankincense, and myrrh- so there is no doubt that they had a regular caravan of many people- including body-guards; cooks; and slaves- who tended to the luggage and tents, etc.

So, here is this large caravan coming into the city. And Matthew is quick to tell us in verse 3:

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

But *why* were they troubled? Now I could understand if Herod and the city had been excited or energized or amazed or even frightened. But Matthew says they were “troubled”. Now the word that was translated here as “**troubled**” comes from a Greek word (*tarassoo*; Strong’s #5015) that means: *to render anxious or distressed*. So, why does this large caravan of magicians entering the city from the East render Herod and all Jerusalem anxious or distressed? Look what they told Herod in verse 2. There, the Apostle says they asked Herod:

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

⁴ During the times of the Bible, there were different Gentile (non-Jewish) groups representing the level to which God had dealt with them. Among them are “God-fearers” or “those who fear God”. These are unsaved Gentiles, who greatly respect the God of the Jews- as they understand Him- even to the point of rejecting their Polytheism (multiple gods).

Now the Magi had no idea that King Herod had recently given himself the title of, the “*King of the Jews*”. And King Herod had no idea how these men had followed a star all the way to his office. But what troubled Herod; what caused him the most anxiety and what made him terribly distressed was that these men were NOT sight-seers. They weren’t just visiting. They didn’t come all that way because of some intellectual curiosity. These men followed a star and they came with a large caravan and priceless Gifts- so they could worship Jesus!

And so, the sight of men, who had traveled a great distance- following a star, who brought priceless Gifts and said they wanted to worship the King of the Jews- intimidated Herod and many of the laid back, nonchalant Jews- who wouldn’t walk around the block to worship God. So, in actuality the dedication and earnestness that was obvious in these men about Worship brought great Conviction and Guilt in the mind of Herod and the others.

This phenomenon is similar with many of us today. Most people in the modern church, who say they are saved, get convicted and feel guilty; and may even get angry when they are around genuine believers, whose worship of God is pure and fervent. Sincere Worship has *always* intimidated the Lukewarm; the backslid; the Unsaved; and the “casual worshiper” - and it always will.

So, here these men were- standing there with Herod and at least four things began to eat at Herod’s mind and heart:

1. Why didn’t he know about this before now?
2. Who is this “King” that his birth causes Gentiles to follow a star and bring valuable Gifts?
3. He was supposedly the King of the Jews and yet- these men had NOT come to see him.
4. The very concept of Worship itself

Obviously, these men weren’t crazy- because they had all the trappings of wealth and education and religious fervor. And they had NOT come all that way to simply give this King valuable gifts. That was not uncommon back then. Almost *every* King received Gifts from other peoples and from other nations all the time. The difference was the Gifts that *these* wizards were going to give to *this* “King” were *part* of their *worship* of Him. So, Herod knew these guys were serious.

But what is all this nonsense about following a star? What has that to do with the King of the Jews? I mean everybody today knows that many of the stars we see in the sky are actually distant galaxies that contain millions or even

billions of suns. And even grammar school children know that stars certainly don't lead people to a particular house in a particular city in a particular country.

So, by anyone's standard, the Star that led the Magi to the very house where Jesus lived with His Parents was a Miracle. And as true with all Miracles- God was doing many things at the same time with this amazing and strange Event surrounding the Magi. And among all that God was doing and is still doing today with this Event- are these three things:

1. God was judging Herod
2. God was identifying Jesus as God
3. God was drawing unsaved pagans to Jesus for Salvation

... and this was the "Ministry of the Magi."

These Gentile magic-men were used by God to actually minister to the Incarnate God. And their Ministry was so powerful and so important- that without God using these men at that time- Jesus never would have grown into the Man, who was Son of David; Son of Man; Son of Mary; and Son of God!

So, let's read verses 4-6 again:

4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

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 WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

Now even though Herod was an Idumean and not a full-blooded Jew- he knew about the Jews; and he knew that they were eagerly waiting for the Messiah. But what the average Jew thought the Messiah would be and what he would do once he got here- was grossly at odds with what the Old Testament actually taught. The Jews were looking for a Military Warrior to round up an army and vanquish the pagan Roman occupiers. They had no sense that they needed to be saved *spiritually*. All they wanted was to be "saved" or "rescued" or "delivered" from the despised Gentile Romans.

And it was this disconnect between the kind of Messiah the Jews wanted and the actual Messiah that God had promised them- that contributed to the way that Jesus was treated when He came into His Ministry. So, even though Jesus was

perfectly sinless- the Jews had no problem assigning demonic powers to Him for no other reason than He didn't fit the mold of the Myth that they were wanting for.

So, at this moment in Israel's history- the anticipation about the Messiah was white hot. Remember, that beginning about 200 years prior to the Birth of Jesus- many men began to rise up-claiming to be the Messiah. For example, in the Book of the **Acts 5**- Gamaliel recounted about two of these false Messiahs- Theudas and Judas of Galilee. And this is why in **Matthew 24:5**, Jesus promised that false Messiahs (Christs) would rise up- claiming they were the genuine item- and would deceive many. In the *Apocrypha*⁵- we have accounts of various men, who were given the nickname, "*Maccabees*", which means: "*Hammerer*". These men started a revolt about 100BC which led to the Roman Government clamping down on the Jews. And it was in this hostile and violent Age that Jesus was born and lived and died and rose again.

So, when the Magi told Herod they were looking for the "*King of the Jews*"- so they could worship Him- Herod called his own religious experts to tell him what city the real Messiah would be born. And they said, "**In Bethlehem of Judea**". And then they quoted from the Prophet Micah, who said,

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.

Now at that moment- Herod wanted to get Jesus- probably to either discredit Him or murder Him. And so, he tried to deceive the Magi as the Apostle Matthew describes in verses 7&8:

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.

8 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."

Now there is no doubt in my mind that Herod had no desire to actually worship Jesus himself. But it is possible that the Magi may have actually believed Herod at this time. And then, in verses 9-11, Matthew tells us what happened when the Magi found Jesus:

⁵ The Apocrypha is a collection of 14-17 books (with additional verses in **Esther** and **Daniel**) that several religious groups include in their Bibles. Jerome (who wrote the Latin Vulgate) and Origen denied that they were of Divine Origin

9 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.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

11 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.

Now I have gone over this in previous Sermons, but there are several things here in this inspired Narrative that we need to understand- not the least of which is that Jesus and His Parents lived in a house when the Magi worshipped Him and were no longer at the manger. This tells us that the Shepherds and the Magi did NOT come to Jesus at the same time.

Now look at how God sovereignly intervened for the Magi at this time from verse 12:

And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

... but then God came to Joseph as well in verses 13-15:

13 Now when they had gone, 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 I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

Now the Apostle Matthew tells us here at the end of verse 15 that the Prophecy of both Hosea (**Hosea 11:1**) and Moses (**Numbers 24:8**) were fulfilled by Jesus going into Egypt to wait until Herod died and then coming back to Israel from Egypt.

Now we don't know for sure how long Joseph and his family lived in Egypt. It could have been as little as a few weeks or months or as long as a few years. But we do know when King Herod died- April of 4BC. But we don't know exactly when Joseph took them to Egypt.

But once again, the Magi—those unsaved pagan Gentile magicians were used by God to minister to Jesus and His family- to help them survive during their time in Egypt. The Bible tells us that, as part of their Worship of Jesus- these men gave Joseph and Mary gold, frankincense and myrrh. Now we all know that gold is valuable- but frankincense and myrrh were very valuable too.

So, even though we don't know how much of these valuable commodities the Magi gave them- it could be that Joseph was able to sell these commodities and live off the proceeds while he was in Egypt. So, once again, the God used the Magi to minister to Jesus and His family. And that tells us that there are times that it is God's Will to use lost sinners to bless His people.

Now it could have been that the Magi meant to deceive Herod- but the Bible doesn't tell us that. But it does say that Herod absolutely though they had tricked him. Verse 16a says,

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged ...

So, even though Herod had been a phony from the start- he honestly thought that the Magi owed it to him to willingly lead him to where Jesus was. So, when Herod discovered that the Magi were long gone- without informing him of where Jesus was- he did one of the most horrific Acts in History- an Event called, the "*Slaughter of the Innocents*".

Please look what Matthew said at the end of verse 16:

... and [Herod] 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.

... and then look at what Matthew wrote next:

**17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:
18 "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."**

Now we need to remember that Herod was an Idumean- which means he was ½ Jewish. And we learned from our time in **Haggai** that the 2nd Temple in Jerusalem- which initially was called, "*Zerubbabel's Temple*"- had gotten into disrepair. So, Herod spent a lot of money to refurbish that Temple. And after that- it became known as "*Herod's Temple*".

Now Herod didn't put money and effort into the Jewish Temple because he wanted the Jews to be able to worship God properly. This was all about public relations with him. And to a degree, it worked. The Jews thought highly of Herod- even though he was a brutal murderer- because he had given them a nice Temple.

And it is *that* Temple that Jesus promised would be destroyed so thoroughly that "**not one stone would be left upon another**" (**Matthew 24:2**) And that Prophecy was fulfilled in 70AD.

But unlike any other time in Jewish History- when God brought correction and chastisement to His people- God did NOT allow the Jews to rebuild this Temple. This destruction was total. And with the destruction of the Temple- came also the destruction of the Jew's entire way of life. So, for over 2,000 years now- there has been no Levitical Priesthood; no Sanhedrin Court; no Pharisees; and no animal sacrifices. And all of that is true- because there is no Temple. Even the genealogical Records of the Jews were all destroyed- so that no Jew today can go further back from 70AD to prove what Tribe they are from.

This was God's Way of demonstrating to the entire world that the Old Covenant had been forever abolished; and He has brought in the infinitely superior New Covenant!

And this Event here in **Matthew 2** tells us about the beginnings of this amazing transformation from the Old to the New Covenant with the Birth of Jesus. Now Luke's Gospel Record goes even further back- to the Account of John the Baptist's Parents. But the New Testament writers- who were all Jews- understood perfectly what God was doing- even though the overwhelming majority of Jews then as well as now- do not.

But what is the End of this amazing and earthshaking Transformation? One of the best accounts is found in **The Revelation 5:1-4**- where the Apostle John was moved by God the Holy Spirit to write:

1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.

4 Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

So, John saw no one- no human and no angel that was found Worthy to open the Book that had been sealed. Now keep in mind that John is NOT saying that no

one had the Ability or the Power or even the Inclination to break the seals and open the Book. The missing ingredient here was NOT Ability or Power or even Desire- it was Worthiness! No one was WORTHY to break the seals and open the Book. And the fact that not one single person in Heaven or earth was found worthy brought great sadness to John and he wept- and he wept- GREATLY!

But now look what the Apostle John wrote next:

5 and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

So, Jesus alone was worthy to break the seals and open the Book. In other words, what God Almighty had sovereignly started- which was the Old Covenant- could NOT be altered by any man. No human or angel was qualified or worthy to bring an end to the Old Covenant and usher in the New- except Jesus, Who is God Almighty in human flesh. And with each seal being systematically opened in the **Book of the Revelation-** and God pours out His Fury on a sinful world- we see more and more how Jesus is truly the End of all things; and how, at the End of Time- Jesus will truly be Lord of all! But I want you to look as to the Reason *why* Jesus broke the seals and opened the Book:

The Revelation 5:9&10

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

So, we see that only Jesus has the Worthiness to take what God began and complete it. Only Jesus is qualified to fulfill what God promised. And only Jesus is worthy to take what God has sealed up and break the seals and open the Book.

And now- because Jesus has broken the seals and opened the Book- a new and infinitely *better* Covenant is in force- where the redeemed will NOT be counted from the 12 Tribes of Israel alone- but will be:

... from every tribe and tongue and people and nation

Now we don't usually think too much of this today in the 21st Century- because this is all we have ever known. Every year that we have been saved- the Church of Jesus has sent out Missionaries to the four corners of the earth to preach the Gospel to every creature and to see ALL of God's elect- from every nation under Heaven- saved. Why? Because we know that the *best* and *greatest* demonstration of the Glory of God- is seen and realized- NOT in God creating black holes and supernovas or even by raising up and casting down nations. No, the best and greatest demonstration of the Glory of God is seen when God's Grace is displayed in the saving of wicked rebels- by what He alone does for them. That glorifies God greater and better than ANYTHING else!

But at the time this was written the notion that God was going to save barbarian Gentiles, who knew nothing of the Old Covenant- was radical theology to the Jews. And that is why resistance against the New Covenant has lasted to this day. But because Jesus has now broken the seals- there will NEVER be a hierarchical Priesthood- like the Levitical Priesthood that existed under the Old Covenant- but John wrote,

... You have made them [the people out from every tribe and tongue and people and nation] to be a kingdom and priests to our God...

... so, now EVERY believer is a Priest unto God!

Now this is the great Doctrine of the "*Priesthood of ALL Believers*" that was one of the main distinctions that separated Protestants from those deceived by Rome in the 16th Century. And it is what helps to keep us separated today.

The system that Rome employs concerning their Priests is based on the Old Covenant. And that would be bad enough. But by basing your Priesthood on the Old Covenant rather than the New- you are actually fighting *against* the New. And you are testifying loudly and proudly that what people had under the inferior Old Covenant was *better* than what we have under the New. And that is celestial High Treason.

Also notice that the 24 heavenly Elders called this Priesthood- a "Kingdom". And that tells us that the Promises in the Bible about the "Promised Land"- the Kingdom of the Jews- is NOT fulfilled within the geographical boundaries of the nation of Israel. But God has promised an even *better* Kingdom

under the New Covenant. Because this Kingdom of Priests, who come from all over the world- will, one day...

... reign upon the earth

... which should be understood to say- the WHOLE earth!

So, all of that; all of the Old Testament Prophecies; all of the Signs; Symbols; and Types that we read in the Old Testament; all of the Promises that God made in the Old Testament; are now beginning to come to pass. They are now going to be fulfilled- because the one, single Person, Who is Worthy; the one- Who has all Authority in both Heaven and on Earth; the one Person; Who pleases God- perfectly; the only One, Who is fully God and fully Man; the one Man- Who is God Almighty in human flesh- has now been born of a virgin in the City of David. And God has raised up Gentile magicians to follow a star so they can minister to Him and His family- so they can be preserved until the wicked King is dead.

And now this amazing Drama also contains the very *first* shedding of blood: the Slaughter of every male child in Bethlehem and probably the surrounding area as well- who is two years old or younger. And these infants are *systematically* rounded up- and they are murdered!

But please understand- that this Slaughter; this brutal and evil massacre; this horrendous and intentional murder of living human beings- was ordained by God! It was spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah- hundreds of years before Herod was ever born!

So, what should we make of this? Is God then in favor of slaughtering babies? Does God enjoy this? What do we do with the spiritual Principle that God ONLY does what He wants? That God's Sovereignty means that He always gets what He wants! How do we reconcile that with the spilled blood of these infants?

Things like this should make us tremble before God. Now we know, instinctively, that God is Good; and He is pure Love. And that is correct. But we also know that God created Hell for the devil and His angels. And every single human that refuses to believe will be cast into Hell and will be tormented forever! And that includes our family members.

Brothers and sisters, what we should NOT do with this Slaughter- is to retreat from saying that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time. What we should NOT do- is to say that this was of the devil and God was either too weak; or too busy; or He was asleep; or on vacation; or otherwise engaged- or else He *would* have stopped it. The Bible doesn't teach that.

No, this was the Will of God.! "No, no, Brother Blair- God would never do something like this! God was merely telling us how evil Herod was- but our lovely

Savior would NEVER be a part to this!" Okay, if that is true- then why didn't God stop it? If all this is- is Herod operating completely separately from God's Will (which is impossible for anyone to do)- why didn't God intervene and stop it? Unless it was what He wanted.

Look, as hard as it is for us to fathom this- and I am struggling with this too- God *proved* this was His Will by having Jeremiah predict it hundreds of years earlier.

So, one thing that we MUST get from this- is that the surface and silly and fragile Man-made Doctrines about God that we have been taught our entire life do not provide sufficient Answers when we are confronted with a Slaughter like this. So, what do we do?

Well, we MUST NOT condemn God. God loves people MORE than we do. And we MUST NOT rail out against God- because that is a fool's errand. But we should fall before this God; and confess that we deserve to be slaughtered like this. That our Sins have qualified us for NO Mercy; and NO Grace; and NO Forgiveness! We don't deserve an easy life here on earth. We don't deserve ANYTHING but Damnation. And the fact that we are saved and not in Hell at this very moment- tells us that God IS *better* than Good; and God is *better* than pure Love. And so, even though we may not fully grasp this- what we SHOULD do- is to worship God and say, "*My God does ALL things well!*"

So, the *first* Casualty; the *first* blood that was spilled onto the ground as the Old Covenant is now coming to an end and the New Covenant is in its ascendancy- is the blood of babies and infants! And this was illustrated by the Apostle John in **The Revelation 12:4&5**- where John wrote:

4 ...And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

So, just as Jesus was being born- satan was trying to have Him murdered. And then, in **The Revelation 12:17**- John said that satan not only fought Jesus the entire time He was on the earth but he also will...

... make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

... which is the Church.

So, this is satan's very *first* attack against the Christ- the anointed One and the Jewish Messiah- as He has now, for the first time, *inserted* Himself into the

Creation and has become a part of it. And from this moment until Jesus physically rises into the air at His Ascension- satan will be doing all he can to thwart the Will of God concerning Jesus and the magnification of the Glory of God's Grace in saving all of His elect. But the Good News is that he *will not* win because he *cannot* win!

Now over the years, I have wondered why there is no extra-biblical account of this Slaughter. This wholesale murder had to be horrific. And it had to be the topic of conversation by many people for many years. And yet, to my knowledge, there is not one ancient historian that even mentions it. No record of it- anywhere. How could

that be? And the absence of any extra-biblical record of this Slaughter is what has allowed many skeptics to doubt the inerrancy of the Bible.

Now the fact that this Issue was not recorded by any of the ancient Historians of that time- troubled me for many years. I certainly believed the Biblical Record and I don't need anyone to verify biblical facts in order for me to believe them. But a Slaughter like this SHOULD have been mentioned- but it wasn't.

But then as I continued to pray and study God's Word- I realized something that might help with the Answer. Herod did NOT order the murder of ALL the children of Israel. He only ordered the murder of the children in the city of Bethlehem and probably the surrounding areas. And this Slaughter was also limited to ONLY the Male babies and infants. And then it was further limited to ONLY the Male infants and babies who were two- years older and less.

Now back then- Bethlehem was a very small city. Nazareth was larger and Jerusalem was much larger. So, it may well be that the population of Bethlehem was around 15,000 - 25,000 back in the 1st Century.

Secondly, in a city, whose population is between 15,000 - 25,000- people, how many women were pregnant during a two- year time frame? I'm not sure- but it wasn't a lot- a few hundred at best. But then of all those women, who gave birth just two years prior to this Event- how many had Male babies? So, we have maybe 100 or maybe even half that. And then finally consider that infant mortality back in the 1st Century was probably as high as 40-50%- and it wasn't really newsworthy that babies and infants died- because they died all the time.

The point I am making is that even though the Slaughter of the Innocents was terrible and evil; and even though it was so important that God caused the Prophet Jeremiah to foretell it- it wasn't a lot of babies and infants- as far as numbers go- which is what would have attracted a Historian to write about it. The number of two- year- old or less male babies could have been as high as a few hundred or as low as 20-30. And that would explain why such a wicked Event never made it in the pages of History.

But this also tells us the degree to which God keeps His Word. It is understandable that this would be in the Bible if 10,000 or 100,000 babies were murdered. But God had Jeremiah utter a Prophecy and then God moved Heaven and earth to assure that this Prophecy was fulfilled- even though it pertained to a small number of babies! And that is truly remarkable! Now please read verses 19&20:

**19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said,
20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."**

Now even though Matthew just told us that it was Herod, who ordered the Slaughter of the Innocents- Matthew now tells us that “**those**” who sought to murder all of the children two years old and less in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas- are dead. But who are the “**those**”? Because by using this plural word- God the Holy Spirit is telling us through Matthew that it was MORE than just Herod.

Now this is not an Error but probably has to do with the hierarchy of the Military. So, Herod gave the Order. And then that Order to slaughter babies and infants was then distributed down the line to the Commanders and then to those over the individual sections of the Military- all the way down to the men, who actually killed the babies.

So, the angel told Joseph he could go home. Okay, but precisely where in all of Israel should he go? And that was the next struggle Joseph had in verse 22 and the first part of verse 23:

**22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee,
23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth...**

Now the choice that Joseph made here is really amazing. The angel at first told him to simply go back to Israel. But when Joseph heard that a man, who was just as barbaric and just as evil as Herod was ruling over Judea- Joseph was scared to go back to Bethlehem. And at some point- as Joseph was trying to figure out what to do- God warned Joseph in a dream. So, he decided to go north- into the “regions of Galilee”. And when he got into that area- he made the conscious Decision to make his home in Nazareth.

Now this is a perfect example of the Will of Man running

alongside the Sovereignty of God- without conflict. As you understand the Bible better, you begin to realize that the biggest obstacle for people to overcome when they hear us speak of the absolute Sovereignty of God- is what they *think* they understand about the Will of Man.

Now most people will say that human Will is “Free”. But the concept of our Will being “free” has to do with “Autonomy”. And that would mean that nothing informs or motivates our Choices. And that simply isn’t true. We choose what we *want*; what we *love*; and what we *desire*. But *why* do we want what we want? Lost people want whatever promotes Sin and Self. But why is that? Because the Nature of lost people is “fallen”.

So, the problem with lost people is NOT their Choices nor is it their Loves. The real problem is their Natures. But human beings can’t change their own Natures. But that is what happens in the Miracle of the New Birth. God sovereignly transforms our Nature. And with that change of Nature comes a change in what we love. And because our loves have changed- so do our Choices.

But because most simply don’t understand this- they will say things like, “*God can’t be Sovereign or else we are nothing but robots and have no will of our own.*” But here is an example of Joseph making his own Choice- yet that Choice was already pre-determined by God- many centuries before. Joseph consciously and (as far as he was concerned) independently chose to dwell in Nazareth. Yet it had been prophesied early that the Messiah,

... shall be called a Nazarene.

Now the Bible doesn’t tell us HOW God’s Sovereignty and Human Responsibility work side-by-side without being in Conflict. It only tells us that it does. So, we simply believe it and praise God for it. That even though I make Choices all day long- None of my Choices will thwart the Will of God from coming to pass!

Now we must keep in mind that calling someone a “Nazarene” back in the 1st Century had more to do with giving them an Insult than it did with simply talking about the city they were from. Nazareth had a horrible reputation as a wild city- filled with Sin and violence- *especially* sexual Sin. Also, Nazareth was where the Roman garrison for the northern areas of Galilee was located. Therefore, the Jews would have little to do with this place and they largely despised it.

But we have run into a Problem because there isn’t any Old Testament Book in the Canon that contains a Prophecy like is written at the end of verse 23. And there isn’t a Prophecy like this in the Apocrypha either. And so, we have three choices here- since there are no Errors in the Bible.

1. Matthew does not say ‘prophet,’ singular- but ‘prophets,’ plural. So, it *could* be that Matthew was referring to several Old Testament References to the Character of Jesus that was despised by many of the Jews. (i.e., **Psalm 22:6, 13; 69:10; Isaiah 49:7; 53:3; Micah 5:1**). Perhaps this is why it says in **John 1:46**, “**And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’**” So, this statement here in **Matthew 2:23** *could* simply be a Reference- NOT to a geographical location- but to the Character of the Messiah- that was constantly being maligned- even as Nazareth was maligned for housing the Roman garrison and allowing Sin to flourish. So, Matthew *might* have put this phrase here- in reference to the Hatred that people had of Jesus.

2. This might simply be a play on words. In **Isaiah 11:1**- the Prophet said, “**Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.**” Now back in the 1st Century- the Old Testament that most Jews used- was a Greek translation, called the “*Septuagint*”. But there is reason for us to think that Matthew wrote his Gospel record *first*- and that he wrote it in Hebrew and NOT Greek. And in Hebrew, the word for “**branch**” is *netzer*- which was almost always abbreviated with the initials, “NZR” which happens to be the letters included in NaZaReth. So, it *could* have been that Matthew was actually referring to the Prophecy of Isaiah here and saying that Jesus was the “**branch**” which, in turn, is a Reference to God’s raising up of the Messiah. Now it is clear that Matthew was not exegeting the Book of **Isaiah**, but it *could* have been that he was referring to Jesus being the Branch here.

But however it was- we know that Matthew has given us an amazing Narrative that is fully inspired- about the beginning of Jesus’ Life here on the earth. And as we get into Jesus’ Ministry and the Miracles He performed and all of the other Issues of Jesus’ Life- in the future- we must never forget about the Ministry of the Magi; the Slaughter of the Innocents; and the Flight into Egypt!

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.