

## Gospel of Matthew Chapter 2 -- John Karmelich

1. One of the great questions people struggle with is, "Why does God allow so much evil to exist?"
  - a) History records one of the most evil people ever to exist in this chapter.
  - b) This chapter takes place during the one to two years of Jesus' life.
  - c) We read of King Herod killing every baby and child under the age of two in one specific town (Bethlehem) in order to kill the baby Jesus.
    - i) A question to ponder is, "Why would God allow this to happen?"
    - ii) Or even the question, "Why would the Roman soldiers obey such an order?"
    - iii) For those of us who know this story, I want you to think about the story from the standpoint of good and evil, and why God allows evil to exist.
      - a) That may be well and good for you and me, but what about from the parents of those who had their babies killed?
      - b) How could God allow something like that?
        - (1) In this chapter, God told Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt to avoid this persecution. Why didn't he tell all the parents to flee? Doesn't God love everybody? Why would he be so cruel?
  - d) Well I just dug myself into a deep theological hole, and now I have to climb out! ☺
    - i) For starters, one has to have the eternal perspective.
    - ii) I am positive, those children are in heaven. The bible teaches that all children who die innocently because of someone else's sin get to go to heaven. The example is a son of David. A son of his died as punishment for his affair with Bathsheba. Yet David declared that he would see his son again in heaven. (Ref: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sam. 12:23)
    - iii) God wants everyone to come to Jesus.
      - a) That means making the evidence as strong as humanly possible that Jesus is the coming messiah.
      - b) There is an Old Testament prediction that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. We'll talk more about this later.
      - c) Despite the horror of the event, it gives further support for Jesus being the coming Messiah. We'll talk more about this later in the chapter.
  - e) My whole purpose of this introduction is for us to think about how this event applies to our lives.
    - i) Horrible things happen to people. Many, if not most of which, I cannot explain.
    - ii) Sometimes it can be attributed to pure evil. Satan's plan can be summarized as opposing God's redemptive plan. First he tried killing Jesus before he born. Today Satan works on trying to stop the spread of Christianity. Murder and horror are among the things God allows him to do to accomplish his plan.
      - a) Our offensive weapon against Satan is prayer. (Ephesians 6:17)
    - iii) What we have to remember when horrible events occur is that:
      - a) 1) God is on the throne.
      - b) 2) He allows horrible things to happen ultimately for his glory.
      - c) Sometimes those events occur to us so we can comfort others with the same affliction. Other times it is to teach us to trust God more during the pain. I don't have all the answers. What I do know is that God is constantly working in my life and yours to get us to trust him more. Often, that comes though allowing tragedy to occur.

2. With that, let's go to Verse 1. I have a lot to say today. ☺ Verse 1: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."
- a) Part of my job today is to ruin your image of traditional Christmas greeting cards. ☺
    - i) Some of the images we have about the "wise men" visiting Jesus don't compare with the historical facts.
    - ii) If you would rather visualize three guys on camels with presents coming to the manger, you better skip this section. ☺
  - b) Just who the "Magi" are, is a bit of a mystery. The commentaries are full of speculation.
    - i) The word "Magi" is a transliteration of the original word.
      - a) It is the same root word where we get the English word "magic".
      - b) Many English translations use the word "wise men", and that is where we get the image of the "three wise men" in Christmas pageants.
    - ii) The consensus opinion is that they are Persian religious leaders.
      - a) They may have been from the same tribe, or representatives of different tribes. There is even some Jewish tradition that Daniel founded the "order of the Magi" when the Israelites were in captivity in Persia (i.e., the "Medo-Persian Empire) centuries earlier. There is no proof of this theory.
      - b) Just east of the Israel territory of that day was the land of "Parthenia". The Magi were the spiritual leaders of the Parthenians. (Parthenians are part of the greater Persian tribes). They were respected by the people and often had a lot to say over who would be the next government leader.
      - c) Remember that King Herod was not Roman nor a Jew. He was appointed the governor of this Jewish territory mostly out of gratitude because his father helped Rome conquer this area. In the early days of King Herod's rise, he worked with the Romans to fight off the Parthenians.
        - (1) Now here comes a bunch of religious Magi to King Herod and asked, "where is the baby king of Israel?" You can just imagine how stressful that scene was given this background!
    - iii) The second thing is that we have no proof it was just three guys.
      - a) That tradition started because the Magi brought three gifts to the baby Jesus. We will discuss this more in a few verses.
      - b) The scripture does not imply anywhere it was just three guys.
      - c) If you were traveling around in the desert with expensive gifts, you would probably have a large armed caravan for protection.
  - c) The next mystery is the "star" itself. Just how does one follow a star anyway?
    - i) There is a lot of speculation behind this miracle. Since we don't know the answers, we simply accept it on faith.
    - ii) There are those who theorize that this "star" was two planets lined up close together. I personally don't buy that theory as such a star makes you look upward. It doesn't lead you to Jerusalem.
    - iii) It goes back to the classic argument of "If you believe God created the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1), you can handle the rest of the bible". If you believe God can do anything, then he can create a star that can lead people around.
      - a) Some commentators point out there was an Old Testament prediction about a star coming out of Jacob (an idiom for Israel) being a prediction for Jesus. It is from Numbers 24:17. I personally don't agree that the Numbers 24:17 verse connects with this star because it says this "star" will "shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.", which is not the role of Jesus' first coming.

- iv) I was thinking about the fact that these Magi sought Jesus by following some sort of miraculous star. The longer I live as a Christian, the more amazed I become by the different variety of ways people have become Christians. I have heard stories of those who have seen Jesus in dreams. There are those who make life long commitments at evangelistic crusades. There are many people with no significant religious backgrounds who are called by God to serve him and go from “no religious interest” to zealous Christians in a short time span.
  - a) Here we have people “looking for the King of Israel” based on following a star! That is amazing to think about!
    - (1) How did they know he was “born to be King of the Jews”?
      - (a) There is speculation that when the Israelites were in captivity, they left some Old Testament scrolls and maybe these guys did some prophecy studies. ☺ We don’t know.
      - (b) There are a bunch of references in the book of Daniel to a group of “wise men” who were influential to the Babylonian Empire. This is probably the same Magi. Daniel could have been an influence to their bible knowledge.
    - (2) As you can tell by now, Chapter 2 is full of “little historical mysteries” that are difficult, if not impossible to solve.
    - (3) The important thing for us is not to explain all the historical mysteries, but to see the big-picture of how all of this evidence points to the birth of Christ. That is Matthew’s purpose.
    - (4) Here are these royal dignitaries from the “East” coming to King Herod’s territory.
      - (a) They then insult the king by saying “We are here to worship the future king of Israel.”
      - (b) The “star” is simply another miraculous sign used to draw some people to Jesus.
- v) I was contemplating, “So what is the purpose of the Magi anyway?”
  - a) Why did Matthew include this story and how is it relevant to us, other than three background characters to set up on our nativity sets? ☺
    - (1) One possibility that popped in my head is that these were the first “Gentiles” drawn to Jesus. They were divinely guided to find the future savior, just as we are “divinely guided” (pre-destined) to find Jesus and worship Him.
    - (2) One of the promises of the Messiah is that he would not only be a ruler over Israel, but he would be a “light to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 49:6, et.al.) Here is the first example of such.
  - b) In the historical perspective, remember that Matthew wrote this Gospel to show the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. In that time and world, the Magi were known as the spiritual leaders and “king-makers” of the eastern world. Jews in that area were well aware of the Magi, their history and how the Jews intermingled with them during the time of the Babylonian Captivity. Therefore, the Magi coming to worship Jesus was another sign of the birth of the Messiah.
    - (1) The application to you and I is we never know how or who will be drawn to Jesus. Remember that Paul said “God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1st Timothy 2:3-4, NIV).
    - (2) We pray for all to be saved. God gets involved in the process through all sorts of methods to lead people to Christ.

- vi) We will come back to these guys in a few verses. Next, move on to Verse 3.
- 3. Verse 3: When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
  - a) Let's talk a little more about King Herod.
    - i) There are a number of Herod's mentioned in the New Testament. It is confusing as this Herod was appointed the governor of the Israel region by the Romans. He was neither a Jew nor a Roman, but an Edomite. The Edomites were the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau.
    - ii) He was the first of a dynasty of kings named Herod. The last of the Herod's is mentioned near the end of the Book of Acts, which is about 60-70 years later.
    - iii) This Herod, who killed the babies in Bethlehem, is the first, and arguably the most evil of all the Herod's.
    - iv) On the "plus" side, he did all sorts of great building projects in order to win over the Jews. Among them was the building and restoration of the Jewish temple.
    - v) He was extremely paranoid. He had members of his own family killed. He feared anyone who was a possible successor. His wife, his mother in law and three of his sons were killed out of fear that they would overthrow him. Right before his death, he ordered that some of the leaders of Jerusalem be killed at the same time so that people would be in mourning at the time of Herod's death.
    - vi) He was a terror to the local people. There is the strong possibility that the reason the Jews were "disturbed" at the Magi is that they knew of Herod's paranoia and they feared a lot of blood would be shed just because the Magi are here.
    - vii) I've already explained why Herod would be "disturbed" by the presence of the Magi. They are responsible for anointing kings and leaders. Plus, the neighboring territory of Parthenia, which fights against the Romans is heavily influenced by the Magi.
- 4. Verse 4: When he (Herod) had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.
  - a) Remember Herod was not a Jew, he was appointed by the Romans to be governor.
  - b) He knew enough about Judaism to know they believed a Messiah would come one day and rule from Israel.
  - c) What Herod did not know, was where the Messiah was predicted to be born.
  - d) Therefore, he asked the religious leaders this question.
- 5. Their response is Verse 5-6: "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "
  - a) I've always been amazed by the response of the religious leaders.
  - b) They obviously feared Herod, but I'm sure they wanted a Messiah to come as well.
  - c) Why would they give Herod the correct answer?
    - i) They must have suspected Herod would have tried to kill any competition.
    - ii) Maybe they thought, "The Messiah will come no matter how hard Herod tries, so we might as well tell him where the baby will be born."
    - iii) Maybe it was a matter of ego. They wanted to show off their ability to quote the bible and give Herod the correct answer.
    - iv) If they were so sure the baby is born of Bethlehem, why weren't they more closely watching the births of that town and protecting those children?
    - v) This verse is simply one of many examples in the New Testament of people who can quote the bible backwards and forwards, but they still "miss it" when it comes to searching for the Messiah and looking for the coming of the Promised One!
    - vi) The key to being a Christian is not to know the Bible, but to apply it to our lives.

- d) The religious leaders were correct. They were quoting Micah 5:2, which does predict that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
  - i) Bethlehem today, as it probably was back then, is just a small little town.
  - ii) King David, among others was born there. Micah made this prediction centuries after David lived and died, so it was not a prediction about David himself.
  - iii) Let me also remind you that in 70AD, when the Temple was destroyed, so were the genealogical records of anyone who was a direct descendant of David. No one born in Bethlehem after 70 AD can claim to be the Messiah because they cannot prove they were a direct descendant of David.
  - iv) Matthew's main point of writing this (again to the Jews) is to show another proof of how Jesus fulfills the predictions about the Messiah. He uses the religious leaders as the authorities that the Messiah is born in Bethlehem.
- 6. Verse 7: Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.
  - a) Let's get back to the Magi.
    - i) They have traveled from a long distance, for a long time, searching for the promised King of Israel, in order to worship him.
    - ii) The "star" lead them to the territory around Jerusalem. It did not specifically lead them to Bethlehem. Therefore, they searched around to try to find this child.
    - iii) They probably made a diligent search and figured... "OK, no luck so far, you would figure the locals would know. Let's go ask the king if he knows anything".
    - iv) Now the Magi were going from place to place, trying to look for that star again, or wonder if anyone knew where the king-baby is.
    - v) Herod sent messengers to the Magi and asked about the time frame of the star.
  - b) It's time to destroy another Christmas story myth. ☺
    - i) The Magi (i.e., the "wise men") did not come to the manger.
    - ii) Jesus was probably a young baby, I suspect at the age of 2-3 months when the Magi appeared. By comparing Matthew and Luke's Gospel, we can get a fairly good idea when the Magi came to Jesus:
    - iii) Let's read from Luke what Joseph and Mary did after Jesus was born:
      - a) "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him (Jesus) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord; <sup>24</sup>and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." (Luke 2:22, 24)
      - (1) A Jewish law is that when a baby is born, you are to present an offering to God on behalf of that baby. The woman was to wait a specific time period (33 days) to "purify herself" prior to making this offering. (See Leviticus 12:15 for more details).
      - (2) The book of Leviticus further states that if a family could not afford a lamb, they were to offer doves or pigeons.
      - (3) I believe that Mary's offering had to have come before Jesus received the gift of the "gold, incense and myrrh". Jewish law states that the baby offering must be a lamb. If the family can't afford a lamb, then they offer either two doves or pigeons. Since Mary and Joseph only offered birds, they didn't have the gold yet.
      - (4) That is one argument why the Magi probably didn't come until a good time after the birth of Jesus. More proof is coming. ☺

7. Verse 8: He (Herod) sent them (Magi) to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."
  - a) I suspect Herod's reputation was known to the Magi. When Herod said "so that I too may go and worship him", you could almost hear the Magi saying "yeah right."
  - b) The point is that God can, and does use a nonbeliever, and even evil people for his glory.
  - c) God can use people like Herod to lead others to Christ!
8. Verse 9: After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.
  - a) Verse 9 implies that this mysterious "star" which lead them towards Jerusalem had disappeared for awhile and now had reappeared and was pointing the way to Bethlehem.
    - i) Bethlehem is a "suburb" of Jerusalem. It is also known as the city of David's birth.
    - ii) God put that "star" on pause so the Magi could have an encounter with Herod!
    - iii) It is simply another example of how God was working in the background to lay all of this out for us to learn.
9. Verse 10: When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.
  - a) The Greek word for "overjoyed" implies excitement and happiness put together.
    - i) These guys spent a long time (some say about a year) traveling to find the baby King of Jews. They risked their lives going into "enemy territory", let alone fear of thieves carrying the expensive gifts.
    - ii) Yet nothing was going to stop them from finding Jesus.
    - iii) I find God works that way in our lives as well. Those who diligently seek Jesus will be guided to him. That is a promise in the bible:
      - a) "I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me." (Proverbs 8:17, NKJV)
    - iv) Just because God temporary "turns off" your star doesn't mean it is off permanently. Sometimes God stops us along our journey for some other purpose.
  - b) OK, back to the destruction of the Christmas myth. ☺
    - i) Notice it says the Magi came to the house where Jesus was born.
      - a) That is different from the manger in the barn.
      - b) Whenever the Magi came, Jesus was staying in a house somewhere.
        - (1) We don't have the details. We know Joseph was a carpenter, so maybe he built something. ☺
  - c) There are some other interesting details that affects our religious beliefs:
    - i) Notice Matthew was careful to call Jesus "born of Mary", with no mention of Joseph as the natural father.
    - ii) Notice the Magi gave gifts to Jesus and not Mary. It is one of many arguments we are going to find in the gospels that argues against worshipping Mary in any form.
10. Verse 11, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sentence: Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.
  - a) You have to wonder, what does a several month old baby do with "gold, incense and myrrh" anyway? ☺
  - b) Let's talk about the practical aspect first, and then I'll talk about the symbolic aspect.
  - c) On a practical aspect, a baby doesn't have much use for these things.
    - i) To a parent, all three represent valuable commodities that can be sold for cash.
    - ii) Remember there were no "banks" in those days. Valuable things that were easy to store and hide were important to keep for trading purposes.
    - iii) In the next few verses, we will read of Joseph and Mary fleeing for their lives to Egypt. I suspect they used these gifts to finance the journey and their livelihood.

- iv) A classical Christian expression is “Where God leads, God provides”.
    - a) If God provides you with some great gift, he may have some practical purpose for you to use that gift.
    - b) God wanted Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt and here, God was providing the way to make it financially possible.
    - c) God provides us with financial and other special gifts. Usually, God has “something in mind” for us to use those gifts.
  - d) Now let’s move on to the “spiritual” application of those gifts.
    - i) Gold in the bible is associated with deity. One thinks of a “golden crown” belonging to king.
    - ii) Incense, (often translated “frankincense”) is a valuable balm. In the Old Testament, it is associated with the priest offering incense in the temple.
      - a) In the Old Testament Tabernacle and the Temple, there was an altar of incense. It is also word-picture for prayer. Just as one can visualize the sweet smelling smoke rising from the altar, so is our prayers as a “sweet smelling aroma” to God.
    - iii) Myrrh is another incense, but not as valuable as frankincense.
      - a) It was mostly known as an embalming substance.
      - b) (“Gee, guys, thanks for the embalming fluid.” ☺)
    - iv) Symbolically, one can see the three gifts as representing Jesus in his different aspects. The gold represents his deity as king, the incense represents his role as our high priest (Hebrews 6:20) interceding on our behalf to God the Father) and finally, the myrrh representing his role as the living sacrifice for our sins.
11. Meanwhile, back to the Magi, Verse 12: And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
- a) Don’t take this lightly. It is not just like one guy sneaking out of town at night.
  - b) These guys were known by Herod to be in town, and specifically where they were.
    - i) There was also the Roman army and checkpoints.
  - c) Earlier I mentioned, “Where God leads, God provides”.
    - i) Here is another example. I believed the Magi were saved because they believed in the future king of Israel. They may not have understood all the implications of what Jesus was going to accomplish, but God judges us fairly based on what we do know about Jesus.
    - ii) God rewarded the Magi’s faithfulness by providing an escape route.
      - a) If God is capable of preserving the Magi from Herod and the Roman army, he is just as capable of preserving you through whatever dangers or troubles we encounter in following Jesus.
12. Verse 13: When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."
- a) Don’t you wonder what Joseph and Mary must have been thinking about this visit?
    - i) Here were these leaders of a foreign land, coming to them to tell them their child is going to be King of Israel, the promised Messiah and here are these expensive gifts for the baby?
    - ii) Well, God didn’t give Joseph and Mary much time to digest all of this. ☺

- iii) I suspect the same night, or very soon thereafter, Joseph got another dream in which God told him, "Get going to Egypt".
  - a) I find that sometimes God does his best talking to us when we are either asleep or quiet, as during the day we are too busy thinking or talking to be in communication with God. Don't get me wrong. God can talk to us anyway and at anytime. When I hear testimonies of people getting orders from God, I usually find it comes during quiet times without distractions.
- b) Let's give Joseph credit again for recognizing the voice of God and obeying.
  - i) Joseph understood this was a message from God and he choose to obey.
- c) At this time in history, there were many Jewish colonies living in Egypt. Those colonies date back to the times of the Babylonians and Persians, and these spots in Egypt's were safe havens from the war torn territory of Israel.
- d) It is amazing to think how God the Father was working to protect baby Jesus.
  - i) Let's face it, God could have wiped out Herod.
  - ii) God could have warned all the parents to flee to Egypt.
  - iii) But God, in his sovergn will, choose to save only Jesus, Joseph and Mary from the wrath of Herod.
    - a) The best explanation I can give is God's purpose, then, as it is now, is to leave as much evidence as possible to lead people to Jesus.
    - b) I am sure the news of a horrible event like this spread far and wide.
    - c) Among the parents who lived in Bethlehem, a small town, must have eventually noticed that the baby born to Joseph and Mary did not suffer the same fate as their babies. They also knew that the Messiah must also come from Bethlehem.
    - d) As a religious Jew, the survival of baby Moses must have popped in their heads. More than a thousand years earlier, Pharaoh of Egypt had all the young males killed. Only Moses survived and went on to be their leader.
      - (1) Bible predictions in the Old Testament is not just direct commentary on the future, but patterns to be studied.
      - (2) The pattern of baby Moses surviving a horrible massacre was a model of how the Messiah would survive a similar massacre.
      - (3) God allowed a horrible tragedy to occur to point people to Jesus.
      - (4) While it may not provide comfort to the parents who lost their children, it does provide more evidence to you and I that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It is just another reminder of that God allows horrible things to occur ultimately for his glory.

13. Verse 14: So he (Joseph) got up, took the child (Jesus) and his mother (Mary) during the night and left for Egypt,<sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."
- a) Matthew describes the fact that Jesus went to Egypt soon after his birth, and stayed in Egypt until after the death of King Herod.
  - b) Matthew then describes how this was a fulfillment of bible prophecy.
    - i) It is a quote of Hosea 11:1
  - c) The interesting thing is that if you read Hosea, you would have a tough time seeing that verse as a direct prophecy of Jesus.
    - i) In Hosea, it is talking specifically about how God has called the Nation of Israel out of Egypt when Moses led the people through the Red Sea.
    - ii) Just like the comparison of the survival of baby Moses to baby Jesus, one has to read the Old Testament as patterns to be studied. Those patterns of the Old Testament are principals taught in the New Testament.



14. Verse 16: When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.
- a) Notice Herod gave the order to kill all babies “two and under”. This is another small bit of evidence that the wise men did not come to the manager, but some time soon after.
  - b) I want to talk a little about “Satanic attacks”.
    - i) I am convinced that Satan was specifically behind this attack.
    - ii) Satan’s plan was to stop God’s redemptive plan. If he could successfully kill the Messiah before He went to the cross, Satan “wins”.
    - iii) Therefore, one can read the whole Old Testament from the standpoint of Satan trying to block the promised Messiah from coming. One can read of all the efforts to wipe out the line of the Messiah, or kill the entire Jewish nation, all for the fulfillment of Satan’s purposes.
    - iv) Today, in the “post-cross era”, Satan is doing all he can to slow down the growth of Christianity. Any attack he can do to you is strictly for the purpose of making you away from God, and realize there are spiritual forces behind those attacks.
    - v) I am also convinced that not every negative thing that happens to us is a demonic attack, but I am also convinced that we would be shocked to find out the evil that exists all around us. Part of our faults comes from our own sinful nature, but part comes from spiritual attacks.
      - a) The two mistakes to make about Satan is 1) he is everywhere and/or 2) he doesn’t exist. During the 1,000 year millennium (Revelation 20) Satan is bound up for this time period. A purpose for this 1,000 year time era is to show how bad man can be even without Satan’s influence.
    - vi) Satan knew the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. He just didn’t know when.
      - a) Therefore, he “used” King Herod to do his dirty work.
  - c) The Greek word for “furious” implies that King Herod “lost it”. He lost all sense of ration and was now acting out of pure emotion. It is as if he was throwing a temper tantrum.
    - i) I found Satan uses us best in those types of situations!
    - ii) There is the possibility that Herod thought “The Magi must have warned Jesus’ parents to flee”. The killing of the babies was simply Herod acting out his anger.
    - iii) More likely he was trying to kill a baby who he saw as a threat to his throne.
      - a) Throughout history, you can read of leaders trying to eradicate any Christian influence because it is a threat to their leadership. To summarize a lot of history, these people are dead and forgotten and Christ lives on.
15. Verse 17: Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup> "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."
- a) If you can’t tell by now, Matthew spends a lot of time quoting the Old Testament, showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah.
  - b) I couldn’t help but notice the pattern of “saved first, study later”. Let me explain.
    - i) Most Christians I know do not “study the bible first, then come to the logical conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah”. The ones I know have come to Jesus by hearing the gospel message, having people pray for them, and then they commit their lives. After that fact, they start to study their bible diligently to learn how to be a better Christian. That is what I meant by “saved first, study later”.
      - a) I doubt that Matthew, prior to meeting Jesus was a bible scholar. ☺
      - b) Let’s face it, he was a tax-collecting, pro-Roman, Jewish-traitor.
      - c) Guys like that don’t go to Hebrew seminary! ☺

- d) Yet, he knew obscure passages of the Old Testament and how they apply to Jesus.
- e) I am convinced that Matthew didn't study the Old Testament, from a "Christian perspective" until years after his time with Jesus.
- f) That same pattern works in our lives. We encounter the living Christ, and through his Word, spend the rest of our days learning more about Him.
- g) Grant it, many people grow up in a Christian home and learn their bible. In those cases, I see those blessed people as being saved at an early age and then desiring to grow in their love and knowledge of Jesus.
- c) With that said, let's get back to this particular prophecy about "Rachel' weeping".
  - i) In the historical context of this verse, Jeremiah wrote it about the captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians. Remember that centuries earlier, when the Jews were conquered, they were deported to the Babylonian Empire, hundreds of miles away. The prophecy mentions "Ramah". This was a place where the Jews were gathered as a "deporting station" before being lead away.
    - a) "Rachel" was one of two wives of Jacob and the mother of two of the 12 tribes of Israel (Judah and Benjamin).
    - b) Here were the babies of the town of Bethlehem, part of the tribe of Judah being slaughtered.
    - c) Again we see Matthew using bible prophecy as patterns. The pattern of the people of Judah morning was also a pattern of a prophecy of Jesus.
    - d) Remember what Jesus said about the Old Testament:
      - (1) Jesus said, "You (Pharisee's) search the Scriptures (Old Testament), for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they (again, the Old Testament) which testify of Me." (John 5:39, NKJV)
      - (2) We see Jesus validating that the Old Testament speaks of him. Matthew validates that the patterns of the stories also are prophetic of Jesus' life and purpose.

16. Verse 19: After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt <sup>20</sup> and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."
- a) Notice God does not tell Joseph to "take your son", but specifically says, "take the child and his mother".
  - b) We have no historical record of Jesus' life during his time in Egypt.
  - c) History records that Herod died right around the time of Jesus' birth. (Some historians place the death of Herod in 4BC, which means the time of Jesus birth is "off-the calendar" by a few years. Personally, I'm always a little hesitant to strongly agree with a particular date of Jesus' birth. I do believe the historians were off by a little bit (as opposed to being born in the year "0"), but I'm not 100% convinced it was the year 4 BC.
  - d) The point is that Jesus was not a teenager when he went back to Israel. The time period between the time Herod killed the babies and Jesus returned from Egypt to Israel was probably a very short time span.
  - e) History also records that Herod died a painful death from disease. If you are angry at him for what he did, remember he is now spending eternity in hell for his punishment.
  - f) Again, let's give Joseph some credit.
    - i) Let's face it, God could have magically transported Jesus, Mary & Joseph back to Israel. God could have parted the Red Sea again.
    - ii) Instead, God just told Joseph in a dream in effect, "pack up your things, Herod is dead, and Jesus has a purpose to fulfill back in Israel".
    - iii) There is a wonderful pattern of obedience by Joseph that is a wonderful model for us to follow.

17. Verse 21: So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, <sup>23</sup> and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."
- a) Herod had three living sons who each got a part of his territory. One of them Archelaus, was the worst of the three and was just as evil as his father.
  - b) The most interesting thing to see about this section is how God works.
    - i) God could have told Joseph to go directly to Nazareth and avoid Bethlehem.
    - ii) God simply worked with one bit of information at a time.
    - iii) First he told Joseph to get going back to Israel.
    - iv) When Joseph obeyed that order, he then was afraid of Archelaus.
      - a) Then God told Joseph in another dream to go settle in Nazareth.
    - v) The pattern for us to follow is that God often works in our lives in steps.
      - a) He gives us something to do, and after that, it is time for the next move.
      - b) We often wonder "what does God want us to do next?" when we should be worrying about "what has God asked me to do in the past" and have I obeyed that order?
  - c) From Joseph's standpoint, you had to wonder about this:
    - i) Gee, if my "son" is the Messiah, shouldn't I be living in Jerusalem?
      - a) "After all, if this is the chosen Messiah, God is going to protect him, why should I worry about this Archelaus guy anyway?"
      - b) The point is Joseph, like us should never assume how God is going to work in our lives. Our job is to obey orders and move on!
    - ii) OK you say, I've never received any dreams from God. What does God command me to do? That is what daily bible reading is all about!
      - a) Remember Jesus quote on our lives:
      - b) "Then they said to Him (Jesus), "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:28-29, NKJV)
        - (1) Doing "God's will" begins by believing in Jesus. From there, simply seek God in prayer and studying of his Word. That is your 100% "marching orders" as a believer.
        - (2) I've heard the Christian life summarized as "Love God with all of your might and do whatever you want". Because if you love God that way, you want to live in obedience to Him.
  - d) Let's finish the text: Jesus then grew up in Nazareth, and was called a "Nazarene".
    - i) Matthew calls this a fulfillment of Scripture.
    - ii) Just what scripture Matthew was referring to is a classical debate.
      - a) Most likely it was a number of Scriptures that describe the Messiah as a "nesser" or a "branch". Specifically, this is a small branch growing out of an almost dead tree, imply a new life springing from the old.
      - b) Others compare this to a type of Jewish "vow" called a "Nazirite Vow" in Numbers Chapter 6. It is a vow of separation to be used by God.
      - c) There are other arguments one can make as to what Matthew may have been referring to, but Matthew stated his purpose of this book to show Jesus as the promised Messiah. Therefore, I believe the scriptures that tie being "separated" to be called by God into a new life all give clues as to aspects of the Messiah's role and purpose.

18. Well, I've covered over 12 pages, and it is time to wrap it up.
- a) We read of miraculous preservation of Jesus and horrible crimes committed by man.
  - b) We read of spiritual attacks designed to prevent Jesus from completing his ministry.
  - c) We read of Joseph's obedience to what God called him to do.
  - d) I opened this study with the question of, "why does God allow such horror to exist"?
    - i) The answer has to do is he allows it, ultimately for God's glory. It is hard for us to see the purpose of all suffering. Part of it has to do with the sinful nature corrupting this world, part of it has to do with God allowing free-will and part of it has to do with God's ultimate purpose being accomplished through man.
    - ii) God gets us involved in his redemptive plan. He allows evil forces to oppose our serving him, partially to keep us close to God (through prayer) and partially to show the world how God always, ultimately triumphs.
  - e) The birth of Jesus is a miraculous story of preservation and fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy. It shows how Old Testament story patterns tie to the early aspects of Jesus life as a young child.
  - f) The application for us, is to live in obedience to God. To be an effective witness means we will have spiritual opposition. Don't worry, those who are with you are far more powerful than those against you. The ultimate victory has already been decided.
19. With that, let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, help us to live our lives for your ultimate purposes and not to glorify ourselves. We look at our circumstances and our problems and we fail to trust you to solve these issues and bring us comfort. We ask your protection and your blessing as we live for your ultimate glory for those, and those people who are on our hearts. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.