

## Notes for Matthew –Chapter 2 (Page 1 of 6)

### Introduction – Why does God allow so much evil to exist?

1. This chapter has the story of Herod killing every baby and child under two years in Bethlehem.
  - a. A question to ponder is, “Why would God allow this to happen?”
  - b. Or even the question, “Why would the Roman soldiers obey such an order?”
  - c. 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 God be so cruel?
  - d. I am positive those children that Herod killed are in heaven. The bible teaches that all children who die innocently get to go to heaven. The biblical example is a son of David. That son died as punishment for his affair with Bathsheba. David declared after he died that he would see his son again in heaven. (Reference: 2nd Sam. 12:23)
2. God allows freewill.
  - a. Imagine if every time a murder or theft was about to happen, an angel intervenes and stops the crime. While that helps society, people would not come to God out of freewill. God never makes the evidence of his existence over-obvious.
  - b. He gives us free will, even at the expense of allowing pain and suffering.
3. God wants everyone to come to Jesus.
  - a. That means making the evidence as strong as possible that Jesus is the coming messiah.
  - b. Bethlehem is a town in Israel where the Messiah was predicted to be born.
  - c. God allowed the other Bethlehem babies to be killed to point the way to Jesus.
4. Horrible things happen to people. Many, if not most of which, I cannot explain.
  - a. 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 through Herod.
  - b. One way Satan works today to stop the spread of Christianity through persecution.
  - c. Our offensive weapon against Satan is prayer. (Ephesians 6:17)
  - d. What we have to remember when horrible events occur is that:
    - i. God is on the throne. And he allows horrible things ultimately for his glory.
    - ii. Sometimes those events occur 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. 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.

Chapter 2 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."

1. Who the “Magi”? (Clue: They were not 3 guys on camels coming to the manger!)
  - a. The word “Magi” is a transliteration of the original word. Some bibles say “wise men”.
  - b. It is the same root word where we get the English word “magic”.
  - c. The consensus opinion is that they are Persian religious leaders.
  - d. There is a 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.
  - e. The Persian territory bordered the Roman Territory. It is not part of the Roman Empire.
  - f. 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!
2. The second thing is that we have no proof it was just three guys.
  - a. That tradition started because the Magi brought three gifts.

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### Chapter 2 Verse 1: (cont.)

3. The next mystery is the “star” itself that the Magi followed. How does one follow a star anyway?
  - a. 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.
4. How did the Magi know Jesus 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.
5. 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.
  - a. Here are these royal dignitaries from the “East” coming to King Herod’s territory.
  - b. They then insult the king by saying, “We are here to worship the future king of Israel.”
  - c. The “star” is simply another miraculous sign used to draw some people to Jesus.
6. I was contemplating, “So what is the purpose of the Magi anyway?”
  - a. One possibility is that these were the first “Gentiles” drawn to Jesus.
  - b. 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.
  - c. Matthew wrote this Gospel to show the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. In that time frame, 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.

### Verse 3: When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

1. This is the first of many King Herod’s in the bible. This one killed the babies in Bethlehem.
  - a. His son had John the Baptist beheaded. (Matthew 14:10, et.al.)
  - b. His grandson Herod Agrippa had a confrontation with Paul (Acts 26)
2. This Herod was extremely paranoid.
  - a. 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.
  - b. 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.

### Verse 4: When he (King 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.

1. Remember Herod was not a Jew, he was appointed by the Romans to be governor.
2. Herod knew enough about Judaism to know they believed a Messiah would one day rule from Israel.
3. What Herod did not know, was where the Messiah was predicted to be born.
4. Therefore, he asked the religious leaders this question.

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Verses 5-6: "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6" `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.'" (Verse 6 is a quote of Micah 5:2)

1. This was the Jewish religious leaders response to the direct question asked by Herod.
2. Why would these religious leaders give Herod the correct answer?
  - a. They must have suspected Herod would have tried to kill any competition.
  - b. 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."
  - c. Maybe it was a matter of ego. They wanted to show off their ability to quote the bible.
  - d. 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?
  - e. This verse is simply one of many examples of people who can quote the bible backwards and forwards, but they still "miss it" when it comes to looking for the Messiah!
3. These leaders were quoting Micah 5:2, which predicts the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
  - a. 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.
  - b. 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.

Verse 7: Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

1. The Magi traveled a long distance searching for the promised King of Israel, to worship him.
2. The star leads them to the territory around Jerusalem. It did not specifically lead them to Bethlehem. Therefore, they searched around to try to find this child.
3. 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".
4. The Magi (i.e., the "wise men") did not come to the manger.
  - a) 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:
    1. "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; 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)
    2. A Jewish law is when a baby is born, you are to present an offering to God on behalf of the baby. The woman was to wait a specific time period (33 days) to "purify herself" prior to this offering. (See Leviticus 12:15 for more details).
  - b) Leviticus states that if a family could not afford a lamb, they were to offer doves or pigeons. I believe that Joseph & 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.

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."

1. 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." ☺

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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.

1. Verse 9 implies that this mysterious “star” which lead them towards Jerusalem had disappeared for a while and now had reappeared and was pointing the way to Bethlehem.
2. Bethlehem is a “suburb” of Jerusalem. It is also known as the city of David’s birth.
3. God put that “star” on pause so the Magi could have an encounter with Herod!

Verse 10-11a: 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.

1. The Greek word for “overjoyed” implies excitement and happiness put together.
2. The Magi spent a long time (some say a year) traveling to find the baby King of Jews. They risked their lives going into enemy territory, let alone fear of thieves stealing the expensive gifts.
3. God works that way in our lives too. Those who diligently seek Jesus will be guided to him.
  - a. “I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me.” (Proverbs 8:17, NKJV)
4. 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.
5. Notice it says the Magi came to the house where Jesus was born.
  - a. That is different from the manger in the barn.
  - b. We don’t have the details. Joseph was a carpenter, so maybe he built something. ☺

Verse 11b: Then they (The Magi) opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

1. What does a several month old baby do with “gold, incense and myrrh” anyway? ☺
2. To a parent, all three represent valuable commodities that can be sold for cash.
  - a. Remember there were no banks. Valuable things that were easy to store and hide were important to keep for trading purposes.
3. A classical Christian expression is “Where God leads, God provides”.
  - a. In a few verses, we’ll read that God wanted Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt and here, God was providing the way to make it financially possible.
4. Now let’s move on to a spiritual application of those gifts.
  - a. Gold in the bible is associated with deity. A “golden crown” belongs to king.
  - b. Incense, (often translated “frankincense”) is a valuable balm. In the Old Testament, it is associated with the priest offering incense in the temple.
    1. 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 are prayers as a “sweet smelling aroma” to God.
  - c. Myrrh is another incense. It was mostly known as an embalming substance.
  - d. Let’s put them together. Each is a word-picture of Jesus in a different aspect.
    1. The gold represents Jesus as the King. The word Messiah means king.
    2. The incense represents Jesus as our high priest (Hebrews 6:20) interceding for us.
    3. The myrrh representing Jesus role as the living sacrifice for our sins.

Verse 12: And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they (Magi) returned to their country by another route.

1. Earlier I mentioned, “Where God leads, God provides”.
  - a. God rewarded the Magi’s faithfulness by providing an escape route from Herod.
  - b. 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.

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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."

1. I suspect the same night, or very soon thereafter, Joseph got another dream in which God told him, "Get going to Egypt".
2. Let's give Joseph credit again for recognizing the voice of God and obeying.
3. It is amazing to think how God the Father was working to protect baby Jesus.
  - a. God could have killed Herod. God could have warned all the parents to flee to Egypt.
  - b. 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.
  - 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.
    1. As religious Jews, the story of 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. (Ref.: Exodus Chapter 2)
    2. The pattern of baby Moses surviving a horrible massacre was a model of how the Messiah would survive a similar massacre
    3. 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.

Verses 14-15: 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."

1. Matthew describes Jesus went to Egypt soon after his birth, and stayed until the death of Herod.
2. Matthew then describes how this was a fulfillment of bible prophecy. (He quotes Hosea 11:1)
3. If you read Hosea, you would have a tough time seeing that verse as a direct prophecy of Jesus.
4. 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.
5. 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.

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.

1. 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.
2. I am convinced Satan himself was behind this attack. Satan's primary mission is to stop, slow down and prevent God's redemptive plan from happening. On a "logical" basis, he didn't want the people looking for a promised king who could revolt against him.

Verses 17-18: 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."

1. 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.

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### Verses 17-18: (cont.)

2. I doubt that Matthew, prior to meeting Jesus was a bible scholar.
  - a. Let's face it, Matthew used to be a tax-collecting, pro-Roman, Jewish-traitor.
  - b. Guys like that don't go to Hebrew seminary! ☺
  - c. Yet, he Matthew is quoting obscure Old Testament passages and how they apply to Jesus.
  - d. Matthew didn't study the Bible from a "Christian perspective" until years after Jesus.
  - e. 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.
3. Let's get back to this particular prophecy about "Rachel' weeping". It is a quote of Jeremiah 31:15
  - a. In the historical context Jeremiah wrote about the Jewish captivity 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.
  - b. Rachel was one of Jacob's 2 wives and the mother of two of the 12 tribes of Israel (Judah and Benjamin).
  - c. Here were the babies of Bethlehem, part of the tribe of Judah being slaughtered.
  - d. 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.
  - e. Remember what Jesus said about the Old Testament:
    - i. 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)
  - f. Matthew validates that the Old Testament patterns are prophetic of Jesus' life & purpose.

Verses 19-20: 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."

1. We have no historical record of Jesus' life during his time in Egypt.
2. History records that Herod died right around the time of Jesus' birth.
3. 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".

Verses 21-23: 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."

1. God could have told Joseph to go directly to Nazareth and avoid Bethlehem.
2. God simply worked with one bit of information at a time.
3. First he told Joseph to get going back to Israel. When Joseph obeyed, he then was afraid of Herod's son Archelaus. Then God told Joseph in another dream to go settle in Nazareth.
4. Like Joseph, we should never assume how God is going to work in our lives. Our job is to obey orders and move on!
5. Let's finish the text: Jesus then grew up in Nazareth, and was called a "Nazarene".
  - a. Just what scripture Matthew was referring to is a classical debate.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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.