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## LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE)

### MATTHEW — THE KING ARRIVES

Lord's Day, December 20, 2015

Teaching and Study Preparation



### OVERVIEW

Preparation for Session "3" Matthew 2

Even with Charlie Brown, it's not easy to remember the birth of Jesus, accurately that is. Like a nutritious stew, celebrating Christ coming to earth as Jesus is all the rage. People, however, continue to add ingredients to the narrative stew—some cute, some pernicious, but all false. The stew has become over-seasoned. With all due respect to Frosty, Santa Claus, and Rudolph, may Scripture guide our recipe for celebrating the incarnation of Christ and this over-seasoned season we call Christmas.



Why the concern? Well, Cecil DeMille once produced and directed a film entitled "The Ten Commandments." In the screenplay of his second attempt in 1956 we learn Moses arose to be a great leader, a son of Pharaoh as it were. There's one great scene where Charlton Heston, sans beard and robe, is overseeing the construction of a great temple. But, consider Exodus 2:5-11, especially the verses between 10 and 11, which explain

the great life Moses had in the house of Pharaoh. I call this the "Cecil DeMille Effect;" i.e., we use our culture, its movies, its philosophy, its art, etc. to adjust/improve/season the Scriptural record. I am sure Holy Spirit is not pleased by how we "expand" His record of the Truth.

This week the "Cecil DeMille Effect" seasons the celebration season. For example, there were not three kings—Scripture mentions neither "three" nor "kings." Contrary to tradition, Scripture makes it clear the Magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth as did the

shepherds. They came some months later and visited him as a “child” in his “house.” Be wary of the Cecil DeMille effect.<sup>1</sup>

Does it matter? What do you think, James (speaking to Pastor Joe)? How do you feel Sam (speaking to Pastor Bill)? What’s your reaction, Jill (speaking to Tricia Brannon)? What do you think, Jesus Christ (speaking to Jesus the Christ)? How do you think Holy Spirit feels when referred to as “it?” Does it matter that gentiles, pagan gentiles, came to worship the Christ, even as a child? Yes. It matters. Truth matters.

## CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT (MATTHEW & THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL ERA)

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In the days of Matthew the Roman equivalent of the IRS was ominous. Tax collection was done by agents, almost always indigenous individuals; i.e., people who knew where the money was. Rather than pay these collectors a “salary,” they were paid by a commission of sorts where they could charge whatever the market bore. When this system was implemented among the Maccabee-impassioned citizens of Judah, all hell broke loose. It was neither politically correct to be a tax collector nor a Jew. To be both? Well, that was Matthew, the human author of our studies in Scripture for the next three months.

When Matthew was given the opportunity to serve the Lord God Jehovah, he became the worst disciple—no teacher or prophet of any standing would permit a *tax collector, a whore of Rome* to be a student. Yet, Jesus the Christ showed that anyone could be a follower, if he follows the One. And so we have this rather poignant description, by none other than Matthew himself...

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [He is quoting Hosea 6:6] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." –Matthew 9:9-13

Note the irony—Jesus’ reputation was on the line. Jesus was consorting with a whore of Rome. Matthew’s reputation was on the line as well. Matthew was consorting with a revolutionary, a man who would soon prove Himself to be Deity, Rome’s most serious adversary, ever. How do we know they were “consorting?” Nothing sealed the bargain of friendship more publicly than eating dinner together, not at the local Village Inn, but in one’s home. Jesus was indeed consorting with sinners.



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<sup>1</sup>Consider also the “angel of death” legend. During the last plague, all the firstborn were killed, humans and animals alike who were not protected by the blood of a lamb on the door lintels. Cecil DeMille portrayed the “angel of death” as the one who delivered God’s judgment. Not accurate, but very useful. Scripture says it was the Lord God Himself (Exodus 11:4, 12:12, 12:29). So, be wary of the Cecil DeMille Effect.

Matthew was not written in a vacuum. Lots of pressures, cultural anomalies and Holy Spirit Himself are reflected in his record of the Christ. For Matthew, Jesus the Christ was indeed Jesus Christ Superstar.

When you study Matthew, you are studying the history of people's first personal, face-to-face, kinetic encounter with the Lord God Almighty. As the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth brought a new covenant, a new understanding of who Yahweh is and how to understand Yahweh as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Jesus of Nazareth we see the magnificence of obedience to purpose, the profound passion of Deity devoted to His creation, and the perfect resolution of justice and mercy. His earthly name was Jesus. Matthew was His tax collector.

## KEY TEXT ISSUES (MATTHEW 2)

Matthew 2:1-8. *Persian seekers endanger the King.* Later after Yeshua had been born in Bethlehem, some Persian astrologers came to Jerusalem. They asked around, "Where is this 'king of the Jews?' We saw His star when it arose. We have come to pay Him homage, to worship Him."

When the rather insecure King Herod heard about this, he freaked. He was the "king of the Jews," or at least that's what his press secretary was spinning. So, he brought together his entire cabinet, including the big wheels of the temple and all the professors of the Law...

Just where is the Messiah to be born?

In Judea's Bethlehem; this is precisely what Micah said 700 years ago:

"From Bethlehem will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel."

The freak level doubled. So King Herod called the Persians secretly (encrypted cell-phone?) and found out the précised time the

star had appeared. He then dispatched them to Bethlehem, saying, "Make a careful search for the child when you get there. When you find him, report to me. I may want to go and worship him also."

- Q Why was Jesus of Nazareth not born in Nazareth, but in Bethlehem of Judea? Were there no qualified obstetrical clinics in Nazareth?
- Q To whom did the Persians address their inquiries? Where? Why there?
- Q Why would some pagan gentiles from Persia want/need to seek out a "king of the Jews?"
- Q Why was Herod freaked? Why didn't he see the great opportunity to become known in history as the Messiah admirer, instead of the Messiah killer?

### MATTHEW 2:1-8

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 [or *star when it rose*] and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>"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." [Micah 5:2]

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them 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."

- Q Why did Herod bring in the chief priest and Biblical experts? What was his response to their declaration that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea? Why secretly?
- Q Do you suppose he was seriously planning to make a trip to Bethlehem? It was, after all, only 5 miles from Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:9-15. *Smart Persians; protective Father*. The Persians listened to the king and went on their way. Now this star which had rose, went ahead of them until it stopped over the house where the child was. They saw the star and overjoyed, they came into the house in Nazareth (see Luke 2:39) and saw the child



with Marias. They bowed, and worshiped Him. From the treasures they brought with them, they presented Him gifts of incense, gold, and fitting for a king, myrrh.

But, being warned in a dream to avoid Herod, they returned home via state & county roads instead of the interstate where Herod had lots of highway patrol officers watching.

### MATTHEW 2:9-15

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east [or *seen when it rose*] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>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. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

<sup>13</sup>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."

<sup>14</sup>So he got up, took the child and his mother 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." [Hosea 11:1]

Afterward, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to take the child and His mother to Egypt, out of the reach of Herod; they stayed there until Herod died. Just like Hosea said about the Israelites, "Out of Egypt I have called My Son."

- Q Why did they continue to follow the star which rose? Where did it stop? Why were they "overjoyed?"
- Q Why did Herod need/want to kill this child?
- Q If Joseph had not been a good stepfather, would Jesus have survived the menace of Herod? When did he leave for Egypt?
- Q How were the poor [see Luke 2:24] Joseph and Mary able to afford a trip to Egypt? Remember Porter's First Law of Theology.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup><http://thescoop.dthomasporter.com/porters-laws/porters-laws.html>

Matthew 2:16-23. *Herod is furious, Rachel weeps, and the Child returns.* None of Herod's officers on the interstate found the Persians, either at the house of the child nor on their way home. He was incensed (the Persians did not share theirs with him).

So? He ordered all the boys 2 years and younger in Bethlehem to be killed; this was in accordance with what he had learned from the Persians.

As the parents learned of Herod's cleansing, there was great mourning and weeping, reminding us of the time Rachel wept for her children and refusing to be comforted. They were no more.

Well, Herod died never knowing the one who he tried to kill came to save him. It was then that an angel of God appeared again in a dream to Joseph—

“Get up, again! Take the child and His mother back home to Israel. Those who were trying to kill Him are dead.”

Joseph got up and did indeed bring the child and His mother home in Israel. But, Archelaus, a grandson of Herod,<sup>3</sup> was reigning in Judah, so Joseph went back to Nazareth, in the district of Galilee where Antipas ruled, also a grandson of Herod. The town—Nazareth, a real backwater. From this town, the child grew up with a “Nazarene” label—the despised (Isaiah 53:1-3)<sup>4</sup> branch (Isaiah 11:1). It was a tough beginning... But not the end.

Q Why was Herod so furious? Did the Persians do the lawful thing?

Q What happened to the parents of the boys in Bethlehem? Why did the Lord God permit this evil to happen?

Q Who told Joseph to return to Israel? Why didn't he do that?

Q Who was called a “Nazarene?” So what? Was Jesus called despised or a branch by Matthew? [Hint: See Mark 14:67, 16:6; and Acts 24:5 See page 8 for more elaboration on the issue.]

## MATTHEW 2:16-23

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. <sup>17</sup>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.” [Jeremiah 31:15]

<sup>19</sup>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.”

<sup>21</sup>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.”

<sup>3</sup>Herod the Great decreed all his sons be killed at his death. The Greek for “pig” is υς ; υιος for “son.” Thus, a humorously skeptical saying of the time was, “Better to be Herod's pig than his son.”

<sup>4</sup>Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

**2:1** *Bethlehem in Judea.* A village about five miles *south* of Jerusalem. Matthew says nothing of the events in Nazareth (cf., Luke 1:26-56). Possibly wanting to emphasize Jesus' Davidic background, he begins with the events that happened in David's city. Matthew calls the town "Bethlehem in Judea," not to distinguish it from the town of the same name about seven miles *northwest* of Nazareth, but to emphasize that Jesus came from the tribe and territory that produced the line of Davidic kings. Believers expected Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and to be from David's family. See John 7:41-44 which says...

Others said, "He is the Christ."

Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?"<sup>42</sup> Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"

<sup>43</sup> Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Some wanted to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him.

*King Herod.* Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.), to be distinguished from the other Herods in the Bible. Herod was a non-Jew, an Idumean, who was appointed "king" of Judea (actually "governor" would be a more accurate title) by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and gained control in 37. Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless, murdering his wife, his three sons, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle and many others—to say nothing of babies in Bethlehem (verse 16).

His reign was also noted for splendor, as seen in the many theaters, amphitheaters, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other buildings he erected or refurbished—including the greatest work of all, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, begun in 20 B.C. and finished 68 years after his death.

*Magi.* Probably astrologers, perhaps from Persia or southern Arabia, both of which are east of Palestine.

*Jerusalem.* Since they were looking for the "king of the Jews" (v. 2), they naturally came to believers' capital city, Jerusalem.

**2:2** *king of the Jews.* Indicates the Magi were Gentiles. Matthew shows that people of all nations acknowledged Jesus as "king of the Jews" and came to worship him as Lord. *star.* Probably not an ordinary star, planet or comet, though some scholars have identified it with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn.

**2:4** *chief priests.* Sadducees who were in charge of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. *teachers of the law.* The Jewish scholars of the day, professionally trained in the development, teaching and application of Scriptural law. Their authority was very human and steeped in tradition, some useful, some ungodly.

**2:11** *house.* Contrary to tradition, Scripture makes it clear the Magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth as did the shepherds. They came some months later and visited him as a "child" in his "house." Be wary of the Cecil DeMille effect.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Adapted, corrected and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

<sup>6</sup>Most people believe Moses became a great leader in Egypt; after all, his name was Egyptian (although his name in Hebrew sounds like "drawn from water") and he grew up on the royal household. He built pyramids, and was a pharaoh favorite. Balderdash, if you use Scripture as your guide to what happened. Aesthetically pleasing poppycock if you use the "Ten Commandments" movie as your guide (Cecil DeMille was the producer/director). Believers need to wary of the actual source of their knowledge about the Lord God—from Holy Spirit, or His Scriptures are the true guide to the One who is indeed the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

*the child with his mother Mary.* Every time the child Jesus and his mother are mentioned together, he is mentioned first (vv. 11,13-14,20-21). Normally, a child would never be mentioned before his/her parent or forbearer. Matthew is providing a significant statement about the status of “the child.”

*gold . . . incense . . . myrrh.* The three gifts perhaps gave rise to the legend that there were three "wise men." Scripture does not indicate the number of the Magi, and they were almost certainly not kings.

*myrrh.* Probably to be identified with labdanum, an aromatic gum (see Psalm 45:8; Pr 7:17; Song of Solomon 3:6; 5:13) exuded from the leaves of the cistus rose. Its oil was used in beauty treatments (see Esther 2:12), and it was sometimes mixed with wine and drunk to relieve pain (see Mark 15:23). As a gift fit for a king, myrrh was brought to Jesus after his birth and applied to his body after his death (John 19:39-40).



**2:15** *Out of Egypt I called my son.* This quotation from Hosea 11:1 originally referred to God's calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt in the time of Moses. Matthew, by the direction of Holy Spirit, applies it also to Jesus. He sees the history of Israel (God's children) recapitulated in the life of Jesus (God's unique Son). Just as Israel as an infant nation went down into Egypt, so the child Jesus went there. And as Israel was led by God out of Egypt, so also was Jesus. How long Jesus and his parents were in Egypt is not known.

**2:16** *kill all the boys . . . two years old and under.* The number killed has often been exaggerated as being in the thousands. In so small a village as Bethlehem, however (even with the surrounding area included), the number was probably not large—though the act, of course, was no less brutal.



*A mother learning of  
Newton killing...*

**2:18** Listen to the words of Jeremiah (31:15)...

This is what the LORD says:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
mourning and great weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because her children are no more.”

**2:22** *Archelaus.* This son of Herod the Great ruled over Judea and Samaria for only ten years (4 B.C. - A.D. 6). He was unusually cruel and tyrannical and so was deposed. Judea then became a Roman province, administered by prefects appointed by the emperor.

*Galilee.* The northern part of Palestine in Jesus' day.

**2:23** *Nazareth*. A rather obscure town, nowhere mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. The area, however, was prophesied to be special. See Isaiah 9:1 which says,

“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—”

It was Jesus' hometown (13:54-57; see Luke 2:39; 4:16-24; John 1:45-46).

*He will be called a Nazarene*. These exact words are not found in Scripture and probably refer to several Hebrew Scripture prefigurations and/or predictions (note the plural, "prophets") that the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Ps 22:6; Isa 53:3). In Jesus' day “Nazarene” was virtually a synonym for “despised” (see John 1:45-46). On the other hand, some contend that in speaking of Jesus as a “Nazarene,” Matthew is referring primarily to the word “Branch” (Hebrew *neser*) as in Isaiah 11:1.