

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

**A Layman's
Commentary on
Matthew**

T.O.D. Johnston

A Layman's Commentary on Matthew – T.O.D. Johnston - www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info

Legal Information

Copyright Information

Johnston, T.O.D.

A Layman's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

Religious Non-fiction

1st Edition 2006 – Scriptures Included

This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Contact the publisher:

Owen Johnston

E-Mail – email@biblestudylessons.pdf.info

Bible study lessons home page:

All of the author's Bible study lessons may be read and/or downloaded for free! Visit our website and click on the "Free Downloads" link.

<http://www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info>

Table of Contents

Preface	-	5
Lesson I	- Introduction, 1:1-17	6
Lesson II	- 1:18-25	11
Lesson III	- 2:4-18	15
Lesson IV	- 2:19-3:7	20
Lesson V	- 3:8-17	25
Lesson VI	- 4:1-17	29
Lesson VI	- 4:18-5:2	35
Lesson VIII	- 5:3-16	39
Lesson IX	- 5:17-37	44
Lesson X	- 5:38-6:8	49
Lesson XI	- 6:9-21	53
Lesson XII	- 6:22-7:11	57
Lesson XIII	- 7:12-29	63
Lesson XIV	- 8:1-17	68
Lesson XV	- 8:18-9:1	73
Lesson XVI	- 9:2-17	78
Lesson XVII	- 9:18-38	83
Lesson XVIII	- 10:1-42	88
Lesson XIX	- 11:1-24	100
Lesson XX	- 11:25-12:14	106
Lesson XXI	- 12:15-37	112
Lesson XXII	- 12:38-13:13	117
Lesson XXIII	- 13:14-43	124
Lesson XXIV	- 13:44-14:12	131
Lesson XXV	- 14:13-36	136
Lesson XXVI	- 15:1-20	141
Lesson XXVII	- 15:21-16:5-12	146
Lesson XXVIII	- 16:13-28	152
Lesson XXIX	- 17:1-27	158
Lesson XXX	- 18:1-20	165
Lesson XXXI	- 18:21-19:12	171
Lesson XXXII	- 19:16-20:16	177
Lesson XXXIII	- 20:17-21:11	184
Lesson XXXIV	- 21:12-46	190
Lesson XXXV	- 22:1-33	198
Lesson XXXVI	- 22:34-23:12	204
Lesson XXXVII	- 23:13-39	209
Lesson XXXVIII	- 24:1-31	214
Lesson XXXIX	- 24:32-25:30	220
Lesson XL	- 25:31-26:25	227
Lesson XLI	- 26:26-46	234
Lesson XLII	- 26:47-68	239
Lesson XLIII	- 26:69-27:26	245
Lesson XLIV	- 27:27-56	252
Lesson XLV	- 27:57-28:20	258
Bibliography	-	265

A Layman's Commentary on Matthew – T.O.D. Johnston - www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info

Layman's Commentary
On the Gospel of Matthew:
Composed In 45 Lessons

1st Edition - 2009

Written by T.O.D. Johnston
Published by Owen Johnston
www.biblestudylessons.pdf.info

Dedicated for knowledge, understanding, and inspiration as we seek to follow Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ.

Preface

After reading many scholarly commentaries on different books of Scripture, it became my mental habit to sift through the minute discussions of individual words and/or phrases, and the quoting of various scholars of the past of many differing opinions, and center on the most logical and inspirational truths that remained. Thus I relied on the studied scholarship of those who had learned the original languages and had read all the previous scholars that had written to get the best possible understanding of Scripture that I, as a non-scholar, could. It seemed that most church members would not attempt to read scholarly works - but would benefit from their knowledge if presented in a plain and straightforward manner, the truths they had perceived. The following commentary is my attempt to do this. May God bless my efforts to the extent that they increase the understanding and faith of the reader.

T.O.D. Johnston
2005

Lesson I: Introduction

All early church writers record Matthew as the author of the first Gospel that has borne his name MATTHEW. Such writers include Papias (between 125 and 140 A.D.), Irenaeus (188-198), Origen (210-250 A.D.), and Eusebius (4th century).

Eusebius makes mention of the following: "Matthew, having first preached to the Hebrews, when he was going to leave Israel, wrote in his native language the Gospel according to himself, and thus, in writing, made up for the lack of his own presence."

The evidence of history points to the date of writing as between 63-66 A.D. in Israel. This Gospel has always been the first book of the New Testament. Major parts were written in Aramaic, the common language of the Jews at that time, and the language that Jesus spoke.

At some unknown point, Matthew's Gospel was translated into Greek. This would make it available to what was then recognized as the civilized world conquered by Alexander the Great and now ruled by the Roman Empire. Alexander had forcibly spread Greek culture, which included its language, throughout his empire. Greek remained the necessary language of commerce and communication. As the Gospel spread beyond Israel, the translation into Greek was a necessity.

The Purpose: to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament promised and pointed to. This was firstly for the Jews, but also intended for the Gentiles. Matthew was a Jew writing for the Jews first - thus his Gospel is first. Matthew greatly emphasizes the work that Jesus came to earth to do - the will of the Father for man's redemption as prophesied in the Old Testament.

Chapter I: 1-17

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 ¶ Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren;

3 and Judah begat Pharez and Zerah of Tamar; and Pharez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram;

4 and Ram begat Ammin'adab; and Ammin'adab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon;

5 and Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 and Jesse begat David the king.

¶ And David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uri'ah;

7 and Solomon begat Rehobo'am; and Rehobo'am begat Abi'jah; and Abi'jah begat Asa;

8 and Asa begat Jehosh'aphat; and Jehosh'aphat begat Jeho'ram; and Jeho'ram begat Uzzi'ah;

9 and Uzzi'ah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezeki'ah;

10 and Hezeki'ah begat Manas'seh; and Manas'seh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josi'ah;

11 and Josi'ah begat Jeconiah and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

12 ¶ And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begat She-al'ti-el; and She-al'ti-el begat Zerub'babel;

13 and Zerub'babel begat Abi'ud; and Abi'ud begat Eli'akim; and Eli'akim begat Azor;

14 and Azor begat Zadok; and Zadok begat Achim; and Achim begat Eli'ud;

15 and Eli'ud begat Ele-a'zar; and Ele-a'zar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 ¶ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Matthew, mainly writing for Jewish readers, begins his Gospel with Christ's family tree, starting with Abraham. Luke begins with Adam, following the Godly line. Matthew follows descent from Abraham through Joseph (Mary's husband), the legal father, to Jesus. Luke begins with Jesus, through Mary, all the way back to Adam.

For the Jews, genealogy was consistently important. The conquest of Canaan divided up the land by family. This remained essential after the Babylonian captivity for a person's right to be a priest. A priestly descent had to be proved.

The general registration recorded by Luke (which was required by the Romans) had to be based on records of descent. Genealogical records in Scripture begin in Genesis - chapters 5, 10, 11, 22, 25, 29, 30, 35, 46. The records continue in Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Matthew later emphasizes in verses 18-25 that Joseph was not physically Jesus' father - only legally (which is pointed to in verse 16). Jesus is therefore both naturally and legally the descendant of David, having every right to call Himself the son of David, and the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham - all fulfillments of prophecies about the promised Messiah - Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God.

Verse 1.

This verse serves as a title of the list of names. This is the record of the ancestry of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.

The name Jesus. Our English form comes from Latin, which is from the Hellenized form of the late Hebrew Jeshua, which means 'he is salvation'. This is the personal name added to the official name Christ - the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah. This word includes the Anointed One (set apart, ordained, qualified by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of salvation for His people: Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Hebrew 1:9). This includes being God's True Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 55:4); our only High priest forever (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 10:12,14); and our eternal King of Kings (Psalms 2:6; Zechariah 9:9). Two names; one person.

Matthew introduces his Gospel stating clearly that Jesus Christ is what His name means - the divinely anointed Savior, the One to fulfill the promises of God in prophecy, the true heir to the throne of David, the true seed of Abraham.

The genealogy includes 3 groups of fourteen. The first shows the origin of David's line. The second shows its rise and decline. The third shows that its importance is gone, but the line still continues. In Christ, the family is restored but also becomes even greater than the royalty and power seen in David's lifetime. Jesus will surpass all earthly glory as Messiah. Matthew places Jesus as the climax of three groups of fourteen.

Symbolism of numbers in the Bible is shown in many instances. Starting with 3 - the triune God, the triune universe (space, matter, time), as well as the beginning, middle, and end. All indicate fullness. The number 4 refers to fullness - the four winds, the four elements (earth, water, air / wind, fire). These two numbers add up to 7, the number widely used to designate perfection - beginning with the creation of the 7 day week. The number 14 is twice seven, therefore a totality ordained by God. Three of 14 is 42, or six of 7, compounded completeness. Introducing the seventh seven, therefore, equals perfection.

This suggests that Matthew reveals Jesus as the One Who completes and fulfills God's plan as recorded in the Old Testament, but also begins the plan prophesied in the Old Testament that will come to be known as the New Testament (Matthew 9:16,17; 26:28,29; John 3:34; Hebrews 9:15; 10:20; Revelation 21:5).

Matthew here records the lineage that shows Jesus is the legitimate seed of David as prophecy foretold. Joseph, His legal father, was a descendant of David. Thus, Jesus had the

legal right to David's throne. From Mary, also a descendant of David, Jesus receives David's genetic flesh and blood.

They both knew that it was not the law or the flesh that gave them any right to claim any credit for Christ's coming into this world to save mankind. Joseph only adopted the boy. Mary was "the handmaid of the Lord." The Holy Spirit was the source. The glory Belongs to God alone! The very most blessed gift God ever gave to man. (Ephesians 2:8).

The Genealogy: the first fourteen.

Verse 2.

In writing primarily for Jews, it is most appropriate to begin with Abraham, the one called to be father of God's chosen people. The offspring listed were in the line to the Messiah. Matthew mentions some additional offspring (such as the brothers of Judah), but no reason is given. It is probable that the 12 brothers are included as the nation of Israel's founding tribes. Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, by Tamar (the daughter in law of Judah). Using trickery (dressing as a harlot), she conceived by him, bearing possibly twins; Perez and Zerah. Why else would Zerah be mentioned? No indication is recorded. The line continues with Hezron and Ram, of which nothing further is recorded.

Verse 4.

Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon. They lived during the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Nahshon was the leader of Judah's tribe (Numbers 2:3). In marching, his tribe took the lead. It was Nahshon's son Salmon who married Rahab, who saved the two spies in Canaan, who were sent by Joshua.

Verses 5, 6a.

The son of Salmon and Rahab was Boaz, who was in turn the father of Obed, by Ruth. An identical genealogy is found in the Ruth 4:18-22. Obed fathered Jesse, who fathered David the king.

It has been observed that the amount of time that passed related to the names mentioned, some names in the line have not been recorded - each generation has not been included. The point of the genealogy was to record the line with the most important people named. This was not uncommon with other Biblical writings (cf. Ezra 7:3 with I Chronicles 6:7-9). It was also not uncommon for Jews during Jesus' day to claim to be sons of Abraham (by the flesh) without naming every generation from his time to theirs.

Verse 6b.

David fathered Solomon by the wife of Uriah. It is unique in genealogies that these lists contain women, foreigners (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth), and evil ones (Tamar, Joran, Ahaz, Amon etc.). All this shows that fleshly descent, even from Abraham, was full of sin - there was no claim to boast of before a righteous God. No man could save himself no matter his descent, or his own works.

Even David the king had greatly sinned by taking another man's wife, and having him killed. However, he had found mercy and forgiveness from God - looking to the Promised Messiah for salvation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had their sins also recorded in Scripture - driving home their need for a Savior.

Verses 7-11.

Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jechoniah, and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

The second group of 14, beginning with Solomon. He was revered for his wisdom, as well as the wealth and extent of his kingdom. However, he was not known for his spirituality. David was the measure because he turned to the Lord with true sorrow for his sins. After Solomon's death the kingdom was divided and declined politically, materially, and spiritually.

All the other names recorded have ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah. Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah all have a fairly good record. The opposite is true of the others, though Manasseh repented before he died. With Jechoniah, the kingdom fell.

Between Joram and Uzziah, three names are left out: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. As mentioned earlier, Matthew is not concerned with a complete chronology, but listing the most important members of the male line that leads to Christ. It always points to man's need of a Savior.

God's purpose was to keep a remnant that were faithful and devoted to Him. This was accomplished through separation from the rest of the people. Solomon's reign ended up including many gods from foreign lands. This began to corrupt the whole kingdom. Thus the separation - Judah kept the Holy Temple and true worship. At a later point, the Kingdom of Judah also became corrupt. Then, the separation by the Assyrians, later the Babylonians. There the people known as Jews stood fast for their religion and were a witness to the Gentiles of the One True God.

Also, during these times, we hear the voices of the true prophets that proclaimed the people's sin and their need of the Promised Savior that God would provide. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah, pronounced many Messianic prophecies: Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; 9:1,2,6; 11:1-10; 42:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53; 61:1-3; 62:11; Jeremiah 23:5; 31:15; Hosiah 11:1; Micah 5:2.

The 70 years of Babylonian captivity began with false hope of a fast return. The Temple still stood in Jerusalem. Then in 586 B.C., Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed. Most of the people were taken away, and hope was lost. Not until near the end of the 70 years did hope return.

Verse 12.

The third list of 14 now begins. It has been noted that Jechoniah ended the list of the second 14 - as the last king of the captive kingdom of Judah. He ended up in prison, as good as dead (II Kings 24:8-12). However, later he is freed from prison and is treated kindly by the king of Babylon (II Kings 27:27-30). He had a son that continued the Messianic line - Shealtiel. His other son, Zerubbabel, was appointed governor when Cyrus (the Persian emperor) allowed a remnant of Jews to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1). Babylon had been conquered by Persia in 539 B.C.

Joshua was the head of the priesthood. For the prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah being in Bethlehem, it was necessary for the Jews to be back in their land. The Messianic line must also be there, the Temple rebuilt, that Joseph and Mary will be on that holy soil at the appointed time. We see the hand of God guiding all of these events through history that prepare for and lead up to the Incarnation of His Son, to be our Savior.

Verses 13-16a. The list continues.

Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achum, Eliud, Eleazer, Natthan, Jacob, Joseph. This covered the time of Medo-Persian rule (536-333 B.C.). Then the Greeks, a short time under the Egyptians (333-200 B.C.). A short period under Syria - then the Maccabean revolt rule (200-63 B.C.). Then, the Roman Empire took over.

Most of the names are not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, mainly because this time period was after the close of the Old Testament. Again, it appears that Matthew has abbreviated his list. For the same time period, Luke lists 23 names, whereas Matthew limits his to 14. There is ample evidence in the Old and New Testaments, as well as secular history, that accurate records were kept throughout their generations (cf. Luke 1:5; Romans 11:1; Philemon 3:5; Josephus - The Life I.6; Against Apion (???) I.30).

Verse 16b.

The husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ. Matthew makes a clear distinction about Joseph. All other names were connected by "begot". Here, the word is not used - which indicates that Joseph had no part in begetting Jesus. Mary was uniquely the mother of Jesus. Joseph was her husband, which he writes about later. Joseph became the legal father.

Verse 17.

This summarizes the ancestry of Jesus.

Next lesson - the story of the birth.

Lesson II

Matthew 1:18-25. The Savior's Birth.

18 ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.
19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.
20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins
22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,
23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Imman'u-el, which being interpreted is, God with us.
24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:
25 and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Verse 18.

The narrative is recorded from Joseph's point of view, and it begins shortly after the betrothal. This was a legal ceremony before witnesses, where bride and bridegroom pledged their troth to each other. They were considered and here called husband and wife. There was a period of time before they lived together and consummated the marriage. It was during this interval that Mary discovered she was pregnant. She knew immediately that the promise that had been delivered to her by the angel Gabriel had indeed come to pass. Though a virgin, she did conceive by the Holy Spirit, the child of promise.

Verse 19.

According to the Old Testament law, unfaithfulness by a betrothed woman was punishable by death. Joseph became aware that Mary was pregnant. He wished no harm to come to her. He planned to divorce her quietly so that she would not be publicly disgraced. Joseph had drawn the obvious conclusion that she had been unfaithful to him. He, being a righteous man, could not accept her as wife.

He had two choices. The death penalty was no longer practice. He could bring a lawsuit against her, and thus publicly disgrace her. On the other hand, he could give her a bill of divorcement - dismissing her quietly. Even though he chose the latter, it was taking him some time to think it over, before being able to follow through.

Verse 20.

It was during this time that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel calls him Joseph, son of David, thus reminding him of his heritage. He is a legal heir of David and also passes this on to Jesus as his own legal heir. This reminds us of the genealogy Matthew began his Gospel with.

The angel insists that he not hesitate to take Mary, his wife, into his home, for indeed she has not been unfaithful to him. The child she carried was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This was a unique event in human history, and could only be told by an angel of the Lord. Otherwise, Joseph would never have believed Mary saying it. We can only imagine his relief

and joy that Mary had been faithful. He could take her home as his wife, and take care of her, as well as the special child from God she carried.

Verse 21.

The angel goes on to direct Joseph to name Him Jesus, a name with a special meaning: He will save his people from their sins. Mary had also been told to name the child Jesus (Luke 1:31).

Sins include thought, word, and deed - omission and commission, all coming from our sinful nature. Only the sinless One could ever save another by His sacrifice on the cross. There are a great many Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments that emphasize salvation as a work of God alone: Genesis 49:18; II Kings 19:15-19; II Chronicles 14:11; 20:5-12; Isaiah 12:12; Jeremiah 3:23; Daniel 4:35; Micah 7:7; Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 19:28; 28:18; Luke 12:32; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8; Philemon 2:12; Revelation 1:18; 3:7; 5:9; 19:1,6,16. These are just a few. The child must be named Jesus, meaning Savior.

Verses 22,23.

That this is fulfillment of prophecy is here explained. It is specifically noted that it was God, speaking through the prophet (not named), that made this promise of the Messiah which was now to be fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. (Isaiah 7:14).

The name Emmanuel - "God with us" - refers to the character of the child and a testimony of His deity. The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. Only a sinless person could die for other's sins. Only a person without a sinful nature (inherited from Adam) could live without sin. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin, only Jesus fulfilled these requirements.

Verses 24,25.

This concludes the story begun in verse 18 where they did not live together. Now, Joseph takes her into his home as the angel of the Lord directed him. It is stated that they had no sexual relations until after she gave birth to a son, and they agreed to name Him Jesus. The statement gives no reason. It was by their choice - possibly by their holy respect for the child she was bearing. Possibly also this would make it impossible that anyone could accuse Joseph of being the father.

Other Scriptures mention Jesus as Mary's firstborn. We are also told about brothers and sisters of Jesus several times in all four Gospels and acts (Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31,32; Luke 8:19,20; John 7:3,5,10; Acts 1:14). It is only natural for them to have their own children. This would in no way lessen the uniqueness of Jesus' birth. Only Catholics require her to remain a virgin.

Matthew 2:1-3. The Wise Men.

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Verse 1.

Jesus is the rightful heir to David's throne. It is appropriate that both Gentiles and Jews pay Him homage. This is the first mention that the place of Jesus' birth was Bethlehem of Judea; the city of David. It is also mentioned that Herod was the King. Jesus was born a short

time before Herod's death. According to historical records, Herod died in March or April of 4 B.C.

At some unspecified time after Jesus' birth, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. Though no further information is included about their country of origin, several things can be surmised. The term "wise men", or "magi" as some translate it, was used to identify men who studied the stars - astronomers. They were found in Babylon (mentioned by Daniel), and were considered the priestly caste.

These "wise men" were deeply concerned with religion and related fields of human behavior and belief. This included the study of the movement of the heavenly bodies and how they might influence events on earth. Signs, portents, and omens come to mind. They also computed the seasons, time measure, and the calendar.

It can also be surmised that they had had contact with Jews in the period, around 8th to 6th centuries B.C., when the Medes and Persians ruled the area and took many back to their own country. More is known about Daniel and his friends, and their great influence among the Babylonians during their captivity. This would include some people accepting belief in one true God, emphasis on good over evil, and the hope of Messiah.

As a result, they considered it important to recognize the new star (when it appeared) as the Messiah's. Thus, their trip to Judea to pay homage to the newborn king of the Jews. The number of the wise men is not mentioned. Some have suggested that because there were three gifts, there must have been one bringing each gift. Whatever the number, they arrive in Jerusalem with one question: they have seen His star in its rising and have come to worship Him - so where is He, the newborn king of the Jews?

They have no doubt about the birth of the one to be called king of the Jews. They only have to find out where he is. They suddenly arrived, asking the question of whoever they met. This quickly arouses the populace to great concern and confusion.

As to the star these men saw - there have been several possible explanations: the planet Jupiter, or its conjunction with Saturn, a comet, an illusion, or a guiding star within the heart.

What we do know is that it was an actual phenomenon. God provided what these watchers of the stars saw. It was a unique creation with that single purpose. Beyond that is idle speculation.

That they recognized it as "his star" could have been the result of an interpretation of Daniel 9:25. The greatest emphasis centers on the purpose of their journey - they have come to worship Him. No time need be wasted about all the unknown incidental details.

Verse 3.

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. From what is known about Herod, it was a natural response to feel threatened by the mention of another king of the Jews. He had fought for years to receive this title from Rome. Would even the suggestion of another king cause those fanatics that hated him to riot and try to overthrow his cruel and despotic reign. From what is mentioned, the people of Jerusalem were also alarmed and frightened - not by the magi or their question. What they truly feared was Herod's reaction to what he would consider a threat to His power. They had already seen what vengeful actions he was capable of.

It might be helpful to take a short look at this man. He has been referred to as Herod the Great. Earlier there had been many rulers under Rome, in various regions of Palestine.

There had been much fighting, and many thousands of Jews were killed. In 63 B.C., Roman armies captured Jerusalem to settle wars between two factions trying to rule. To settle the issue, the Romans chose Antipater, governor of Edom, as the procurator of Judea. He then was allowed to appoint his son Herod as tetrarch of Galilee in 47 B.C.

In 40 B.C., the Parthians invaded and civil war broke out. Herod fled to Rome where he was granted being king of Judea. He was given an army to subdue the area, and he finally succeeded in 37 B.C. Emperor Augustus gave him all of Palestine after that. Struggles against his enemies continued throughout his reign. He was 70 when he died in 4 B.C.

Herod was not born a Jew, but instead in Edom. When that area had been conquered by John Hyrcanus, the Jewish religion was instituted there. Some mention is made that Herod practiced the Jewish religion. He is, however, more devoted to his worldly power, pomp, and circumstance, wealth, and all the amenities that Hellenistic culture could provide. According to the contemporary Jewish historian, Josephus, Herod was a strong and capable ruler, as well as shrewd, crafty, and cruel. He was a well-practiced public speaker and a decisive military leader. He was also efficient in his diplomacy with Rome and collecting tribute for the Empire.

He was also a great builder. Outside Jerusalem, he built an amphitheater for drama, and a hippodrome for athletic events. Neither of these were accepted or appreciated by devout Jews, but had a negative effect. He also built himself a fancy large palace to the western side of the city.

In order to gain popularity, Herod remodeled the 2nd Temple, Zerubbabel's, originally built in 516 B.C., 70 years after Solomon's Temple was destroyed. Herod began in 19 B.C., but it was not completed until long after his death. Great progress had been made by the time Jesus and his disciples had frequented it 30 some years after Herod died.

He also had at least 10 wives and 12 children during his life. As he grew older, he saw anyone who had any claim to power as a threat, especially anyone who was in the royal line in his own family. By the time the wise men visited Jerusalem, he had had many in his own family executed. This included one wife, a brother in law, and three of his own sons, as well as many others he suspected of plotting against him (such as a high priest or one of his generals). His suspicion and cruelty increased almost to paranoia.

It has been suggested that this visit happened in the last year of Herod's life. All this leads up to the actions he takes as a result of these wise men looking for the newborn king of the Jews.

Next lesson - what Herod does.

Matthew 2:4-12.

Lesson III

The Immediate Action of Herod

Matthew 2:4-12. The Wise Men Find the Child.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7 ¶ Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

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

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Verse 4.

Now having heard the wise men, Herod calls together all the chief priests, and scribes of the Jews to tell him what the Scriptures say about where the Messiah was to be born. Herod knew enough about the Jews that their hope of deliverance was in the Messiah who would be also the king of the Jews - they are the same person. Herod knew enough that somewhere in the Old Testament the birthplace was prophesied.

Verses 5,6.

The experts in the Scripture told him that they had the answer: Bethlehem of Judea (from Micah 5:2) -

By no means least of the princes of Judah;

For out of you there shall come a ruler

Who will shepherd my people Israel.

Though small and of little importance in comparison to the larger cities, it will be of the greatest value because the promised Messiah is to be born there. Verse 6 also reflects II Samuel 5:2 where David is called upon to be the shepherd of God's people, Israel. David's life reveals several things that prefigure the Christ's life and death. First, he was born in Bethlehem, descended from Abraham. Second, his name, meaning "being beloved". Third, being God's anointed to a royal position. Fourth, a struggle of humiliation and defeat that resulted in glorious exaltation.

The term shepherd used to describe the manner of his rule showed one of leadership with caring for his people's welfare. This would be in sharp contrast to every other king's manner and motivation about ruling, especially Herod's. At no point does concern for the people enter his mind.

Verse 7.

Herod then secretly requests to meet with the wise men, to gain as much information as possible from them. Rather than ask about how old the child would be, he deviously pretends to be intrigued by the wise men's special interest - study of the stars. He questions them about the first appearance of the special star. However, his purpose was the opposite of theirs - he wanted to see to it that the child was destroyed.

Verse 8.

He sends them off to Bethlehem. However, when they have carefully searched and found the child, they are to report back to him about the location. He adds, cunningly, that his only motive was also theirs - that he may also come and worship Him.

Verse 9.

After the interview with Herod, they went toward Bethlehem, then they became aware that the star they had seen in their own country (in its rising) was now going ahead of them. This was no fixed star - it was moving toward Bethlehem. No further explanation is given. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the star stopped moving and stood still over a house. The very dwelling place where the long-sought child was. That God created a light to guide these wise men to His Messiah seems perfectly proper and logical - requiring no attempts at some other - or possibly pseudo-scientific - explanation (though many can be found).

Verse 10.

Literally - at sight of the now motionless star over the house, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!" The whole purpose of the journey, their hearts' desire, was at hand. Only the true God of heaven and earth could have guided them here. Now they are to see the miracle child also provided by God. What greater joy could there be!

Verse 11.

They enter the house and see the child. Mary was holding Him. They cast themselves to the ground and worshipped Him. After worshipping the child for a proper amount of time, they bring forth what gifts they have brought unto this special purpose: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This also shows their wealth and implies a journey with beasts of burden. There were possibly attendants, and provisions for the complete journey. Add to that their generous willingness to travel a difficult and long journey, bearing expensive gifts.

All of this was to see, worship, and give to a recently born child in a country different in every way from their own. Yet, through supernatural means, they have come this far in order to worship and give their valuable gifts, brought in treasure chests.

The gold was valuable and would serve well the needs of the holy family (especially when they traveled to Egypt). This was in honor of the value and royalty of the child, born to be king of the Jews, though He was born in the most unnoticed and humble of circumstances, as seen from the worldly point of view.

Frankincense was a specific form of incense made from the juice of the Bosivellia tree found in Southern Arabia and Somalia (East Africa) . In Scripture, it is most often mentioned with reference to meal offerings only for Jehovah. The fragrant smoke that rose toward heaven was symbolic of the prayers and thanksgiving offered by the priests and the people to their God. Here it is given to the Son of God.

Myrrh was made from the wood of the Balsamodendron tree in Arabia. It was generally used as a perfume, especially in wedding ceremonies, and finally as part of the preparation of a body for burial. This was presented to make the Child's life more pleasant, and also made provision for the care of His body, when He died by His own choice for us.

This event shows that God provides knowledge of His salvation even to Gentiles. This record written for Jews by Matthew would show the universal offer of His salvation, to every race, nationality, religion, or creed. All are sinners and need a Savior.

Verse 12.

God knew Herod's heart and warned the wise men in a dream not to return to him, so they took a different route in returning to their home country. The revelation of God in a dream is often mentioned in Scripture. Though no date is recorded, later it is mentioned that Herod intended to kill all children 2 years and younger, that the wise men had seen the rising star 2 years previously.

How long the journey took, and how soon they began after seeing the star, is not mentioned. The fact that they see the child in a house, shows some period of time has passed since the birth in the stable. That is all we are told, so any attempt to fix an age or date remains speculation.

Matthew 2:13-15. Flight to Egypt.

13 ¶ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Verse 13.

After the wise men left the holy family, it was only a brief time when an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph. He warned Joseph of the murderous plan of Herod to have the child killed. He must immediately make preparations to take the child and his mother to Egypt as quickly as possible.

Though nothing is mentioned about Joseph and Mary's reaction to the wise men's visit, we can imagine that it greatly encouraged them. It also confirmed the promises of the angels of God that appeared to them both before the child's birth, as well as the shepherds that came shortly after the birth, praising God in the highest for the gift of God.

Here again, God is providing for and protecting them. That they had to leave their nation as the result of the king's fear and cruelty was a further humiliation to the holy child. Why Egypt? It was not too far away, and was outside of Herod's domain. There were a great many Jews living there (Jeremiah 43:7; 44:1; Acts 2:10), and they would be accepted. It is not impossible that they had relations or acquaintances there. And finally the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1.

Verse 14.

Joseph obeyed the Lord, and set off for Egypt. In spite of the darkness, the difficulty of getting mother and child ready, and preparing all the necessities to be carried, it was all done without question. No details of the journey or the stay are recorded - not even the length of

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

