

Matthew 1-2 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

A good argument could be made that what we are about to read are in fact, the most read words in all the world and all history.

The Bible is far and away the biggest seller of all time, and more NT's are printed than entire Bibles.

When people pick up the Bible, the first place they often go to is the beginning – so Matthew 1 is the passage they inevitably turn to.

And that may explain why some people, upon giving the Bible a try, give up in frustration so quickly – because the first 17 verses of Matthew are a long list of mostly hard to pronounce names.

But there's a really good reason for this list of names.

Matthew wrote his gospel to a Jewish audience.

And his purpose was to *prove* to his readers that Jesus was their Messiah, their King Who would usher in the Kingdom of God.

This is why he refers to the Kingdom *32 times*, far more than any other gospel writer.

He also uses the phrase, "*that it might be fulfilled which was written by the prophets*" or something similar, **23 times**.

Mark, Luke, and John don't use such phrases.

Matthew was an interesting character and an unusual choice to be one of Jesus' disciples.

His career began as a *tax-collector* for the Romans.

In ch. 9 we read that he was sitting in his tax booth when Jesus came by and issued a simple invitation to follow Him.

One of the burdens those conquered by the Romans had to endure was to pay the Empire taxes.

These taxes were levied on all kinds of things; from foods & supplies to travel.

Matthew sat in a tax-booth, meaning he assessed taxes on those who passed by, probably the merchants who carried goods along the road his booth was located on.

The Romans bid out the job of collecting taxes to the locals who would compete for the job because while it may have been a despised position, it was nevertheless rather lucrative.

The Romans would estimate the amount of taxes a given collector ought to get from his position, and every so often the tax-collector would have to bring this amount to the Roman officials.

No one knew what this rate was but the Romans and their tax-collectors, so the collectors would add on an extra fee for their own purse.

Being a tax-collector meant keeping careful records as well, so Matthew would have been a skilled scribe – a talent that would serve well as a writer of one of the Gospels.

Besides the story of his call by Jesus in ch. 9, Matthew is mentioned only in passing in the Gospels.

His name is given in the list of the 12 disciples, but that's about all that is said of him.

Tradition says that after the Resurrection he spent 12 years in the Land of Israel, helping to establish the Church, then traveled to other lands to preach the gospel.

It's estimated by conservative scholars that Matthew wrote his gospel in either the 50's or 60's.

There's a popular view of the origin of the gospels among more liberal scholars that says there was a prior written gospel from which *both* Matthew and Mark drew *their* gospels, but this earlier record has disappeared.

They hold this view because of the many *similarities* between both Matthew & Mark; sometimes whole sections are repeated word for word and it appears that one copied from the other, or that both copied from a prior source.

Since Mark is the shorter version, it's assumed that his gospel came first and then Matthew embellished on it a bit.

This view is a classic example of a modern filter & bias being applied to the ancient world. *And* it neglects the historical context of the gospels themselves.

In the Book of Acts we read about the habit and pattern of the early Church; the believers met in the

temple to hear the Apostles teach on the life and doctrine of Christ.

They did not have NT's and no written account of the life of Jesus; what they had was a growing oral tradition; the Apostles would tell about an event in the life of Christ and his teaching would be communicated word for word, which was memorized by those listening.

This is the way education took place in the world of that time – oral tradition & memorization. It wasn't long before the whole life of Christ had been formalized in a set oral story taught by the Apostles and memorized by the Church.

But as the Apostles grew older and realized their presence and influence would pass from the scene, they realized the need to formalize the story of Christ in an even more concrete way – so Matthew penned his gospel, which was nothing more than a written record of the oral tradition of the Apostles about Jesus.

Mark, who wasn't an Apostle, but was a friend of Peter's, built his gospel on this same oral tradition.

Even Luke, who came along a bit later, used the accepted oral tradition as the *basic foundation* for his gospel.

These three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are referred to as the *synoptic* gospels, because they are a basic, chronological overview or synopsis of the life & teaching of Christ.

John's gospel is different. John wrote after the previous 3 were already in circulation.

His whole goal was to fill in important details about the person of Jesus left out by the previous three accounts.

This is why John's gospel mostly contains material not given in the other gospels, because he didn't draw from the oral tradition but from his own experiences with Jesus.

As we begin, keep in mind that Matthew wrote this to a Jewish audience with the intent of proving Jesus was their Messiah & King.

So he begins his story with a *genealogy* because it was important to establish His *pedigree*, His line of descent from His ancestors; which affirms His *claim* to the throne of Israel.

The Outline of Matthew

- I. Jesus' Early Years 1-2**
- II. Jesus' Galilean Ministry 3-18**
- III. Jesus' Judean Ministry 19-20**
- IV. Jesus' Last Week 21-27**
- V. The Resurrection 28**

Matthew 1

- I. Jesus' Early Years 1-2**

A. *The Genealogy of Jesus*

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

Matthew is going to give the generation by generation genealogy of Jesus, but he sums it all up by condensing it down to His two main Jewish ancestors; Abraham and David.

Abraham secures Jesus' *racial* claim as a Jew.

David secures His *regal* claim to the throne.

²Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.

When Jacob was on his deathbed, he'd prophesied that the royal line would flow from Judah, not one

of the other 11 brothers.

³Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.

Now, we need to stop right there because Matthew names someone here who would have caused his Jewish readers to say, “What?”

He mentions a *woman*, Tamar!

Women were *not* included in genealogies because they weren’t considered important enough.

No – let me restate that; women were not included in genealogies because for the most part they were *despised*!!

Jewish men of that era would regularly pray a prayer that went like this: “Lord, I thank you I was not born a Gentile, a dog, or a woman.”

That’s how poorly women were esteemed & valued in that culture.

So an official record like a genealogy would *never* include women because it would be seen as degrading to one’s dignity.

Why then, did Matthew include *a woman* in the genealogy of Jesus, and all the more, why did he include *a woman* if his aim was to prove and validate His claim as Messiah-King?

Simple – he didn’t include *a woman*; he includes **FOUR** women!!!!!!

And take a careful look at the four he names:

V. 3 = Tamar

V. 5 = Rahab & Ruth

V. 6 = “her *who had been the wife* of Uriah” = Bathsheba

These ladies weren’t exactly the cream of the crop, if you know what I mean.

They had dubious reputations and there’s a good chance they were all *Gentiles* to boot.

Tamar certainly was. Rahab was a *Canaanite*. Ruth was from *Moab*, and Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah *the Hittite*.

So, why would Matthew put these women in Jesus’ genealogy?

Well, while Jesus had come as the Messiah-King to inaugurate the Kingdom of God & renew the throne of David, he wanted everyone to know that the Kingdom would be very different from what they had expected.

The Jewish concept of the Kingdom of God was that the Messiah would come as a political & military leader who would liberate them from the Romans and rule with an iron fist.

They were looking for a glorious & powerful *earthly* kingdom.

Jesus came to inaugurate a spiritual kingdom of love and grace where the focus would not be on the rich & powerful but on the poor, weak, & despised.

Matthew knew that well because He’d experienced the Kingdom *first hand* by following Jesus for 3 years.

You see, before he was known as *Matthew*, he was called *Levi*, a despised tax-collector.

He was a traitorous, turn-coat Jew who worked for the hated Romans.

He was an outcast from Jewish social life who hung out with the other social misfits & exiles; the publicans, sinners, and prostitutes.

He was sitting at his tax-booth one day when Jesus came by and issued a simple invitation, “Come and follow me.”

Levi set down his quill, took up his coat, turned his back on his ill-gotten gains & lecherous lifestyle & from that day on was a faithful follower of the King of kings.

Over the next 3 years, he watched how time & again, other social outcasts were drawn to the uncompromising love and holiness of Jesus, while the religious fakers rejected Him.

Whenever I read the stories of Jesus and see the outcast and disenfranchised drawn to Him like a moth to a flame, I’m struck by the seeming paradox that the Holy Lord of Righteousness would be so *attractive* to such rank sinners.

And how can the very ones who appear to have it *all together*, the religious leaders, the men who have all their theological ducks in a row and who have all the *outer trappings of holiness*; how can they be so angry and hostile toward Him, as though He presented some kind of *threat* to them – like their program was endangered by His presence?

To be sure, it wasn't that *all* sinners were drawn to Jesus, nor that *all* the religious leaders rejected Him. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethia were notable exceptions. But those sinners who *acknowledged* their sin *as* sin and saw how it was destroying them, these saw in Jesus hope for help and came to Him. They knew He was pure, but that purity didn't threaten or repel them – it gave them hope of change; *real* change. And coupled to Jesus' purity was a profound love and acceptance that moved them to *want* to change and to believe that with His help, they *could* change. When did Jesus issue the invitation to Matthew – *after* he'd set down his quill & *left* his tax booth or *while* he sat in the middle of it? Jesus invites us to follow Him in the middle of where we're at. To *respond* to the invitation means to *leave* our sin, of course, just as Matthew had to step out of his thieving lifestyle. But Jesus doesn't say, "Clean up your life *then* follow Me." He says, "Follow Me, and as you do, we'll clean up your life together." That love and acceptance had totally transformed Matthew's life. And he'd seen it transform many other people's lives as well, including a lot of women, and *such women* the dignified & self-respecting people of the day would have *nothing* to do with. So when Matthew gives Jesus' genealogy, he includes the name of 4 Gentile women of dubious reputation to let his readers know the kind of Kingdom Jesus came to rule over; it's one of love and grace which turns sinners into saints.

**⁴Ram begot Amminadab,
Amminadab begot Nahshon,
and Nahshon begot Salmon.**

**⁵Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab,
Boaz begot Obed by Ruth,
Obed begot Jesse, (14)**

**⁶and Jesse begot David the king.
David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife of Uriah*.**

**⁷Solomon begot Rehoboam,
Rehoboam begot Abijah,
and Abijah begot Asa.**

**⁸Asa begot Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat begot Joram,
and Joram begot Uzziah.**

**⁹Uzziah begot Jotham,
Jotham begot Ahaz,
and Ahaz begot Hezekiah.**

**¹⁰Hezekiah begot Manasseh,
Manasseh begot Amon,
and Amon begot Josiah. (14)**

¹¹Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

**¹²And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel,
and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.**

**¹³Zerubbabel begot Abiud,
Abiud begot Eliakim,
and Eliakim begot Azor.**

**¹⁴Azor begot Zadok,
Zadok begot Achim,
and Achim begot Eliud.**

¹⁵Eliud begot Eleazar,

Eleazar begot Matthan,

and Matthan begot Jacob. (12 – Jesus makes the 13th generation)

16 And Jacob begot 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, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

42 generations from Abraham to Jesus!

When we were in India, Jayant, the director of the training center in Delhi told a true story about a Hindu Brahmin who had converted to Christ not long before.

Indian society is divided up into different castes; different social & economic levels that are reinforced by Hinduism, the main religion of India.

The top most caste is the priest caste, known as the Brahmins.

This Brahmin priest was visiting Delhi and checked into an upper-class hotel.

In the drawer in his room he found a Hindu holy book, called a *Gita*, a *Quran*, and a *NT Bible*.

He'd never read a Bible before and was curious so he opened it to the first chapter of Matthew and began to read. He was blown away by these first 17 verses.

He reasoned; here is a man who can count his genealogy back for 42 generations!

He must be a VERY important man!

I am a Brahmin, and I can only count my ancestors back to 3 generations; my father, grand-father and great-grandfather.

I don't know *anyone*, I have never even *heard* of anyone who knows their ancestry back more than a few generations.

This Jesus of the Christians must be a *very important person* that such a careful record of His generations was kept. I must learn more about him.

So, armed with this conviction, he read the rest of Matthew as quickly as possible.

This became like fuel on the fire of his curiosity, so he read through the other 3 gospels as well, and when he finished John, he gave himself to Christ.

Then he devoured the rest of the NT as quickly as He could and began his search for a healthy Christian fellowship to attend.

So – even the genealogies of the Bible prove important in the record and testimony of God.

B. Jesus' Parents & His Birth

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew gives a brief summary of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the Messiah.

By the way – “Jesus Christ” is not His first & last name.

Jesus was his name; actually ‘Yeshua’ or as we translate it in English ‘Joshua’ which was a common name for that time; equivalent to our *John*.

Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew ‘*Mesiach*’ which we transliterate as ‘Messiah.’

This is a *title*, not Jesus’ last name.

Actually, people of that time were referred to either by their father’s name or by their city of origin.

So Jesus could have been called *Jesus ben Joseph*, but since Joseph was not His father, He was called *Jesus of Nazareth*.

The designation ‘Jesus Christ’ didn’t become common till after the resurrection and the ministry of the Apostles in the days of the early church.

Mary would have been between 12 & 14 at this point.

Her marriage to Joseph which had likely been arranged years before by her parents has entered its final stage of preparation known as betrothal, which lasted one year.

We know that their ancestral hometown was Bethlehem, but for some reason, both of them were living in the little village of Nazareth up in the northern province of Israel, known as *the Galilee*.

The reason they were there was probably because that's where the work was.

You see, the Romans had set about building a brand new massive regional center called *Sepphoris* just a few miles north of Nazareth.

Many laborers were needed in the project and since Joseph was a construction worker, he went where the work and wages were – that would be Sepphoris.

Nazareth served as kind of a *work camp* for the Jewish laborers who were commissioned by the Romans to build the city.

Tradition says that Joseph was a *carpenter*, but recent discoveries have discovered that the word used in Matthew 13:55, describing Joseph as a *carpenter* is better understood as referring to a *builder* or *craftsman*, and may point more to Joseph being a *stone-mason* than a *wood-worker*.

Anyone touring the ruins of Sepphoris today will tell you that there would have been a far greater need for *masons* than carpenters there.

In fact, some of the most well preserved mosaics in the holy land are found in abundance at Sepphoris.

Matthew point of emphasis here in v. 18 is that Mary's pregnancy was due to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

It became a common slight on Jesus' reputation, even during His own lifetime, to question His parentage.

We see Jesus' opponents making jabs at His supposed illegitimate birth in John 8 (19, 48).

Ancient Jewish records from that time show that it was the common rumor that Jesus' father was a Roman soldier who'd forced himself on Mary.

Matthew was concerned to make it clear that the Holy Spirit was the agent of Mary's pregnancy.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Since we covered this in depth on Sunday, I'll not comment further but leave to you to get a copy of the message if you missed it.

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, -

Notice here how the angel identifies Joseph – he is the son of David – he is in the prophetic and royal line leading to the Messiah.

This was part of Joseph's very concern and reason why he felt he had to put Mary away and distance Himself from this child she would bear.

He could not be connected to it because he was in the royal line and Mary's child was not his.

. . . do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

The name *Jesus, Joshua, Yeshua*, means "Yahweh is salvation."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Here is one of the many times Matthew identifies some part of the story of Jesus as being a fulfillment of the prophetic voice and testimony to the coming Messiah.

Matthew is quoting Isaiah 7:14 here.

Though the angel had told Joseph to name the child 'Jesus', Matthew says He will be called Immanuel – God with us.

Matthew is condensing the whole story of Christ down to this simple truth; that while Jesus was a real man – a child born of a woman by a miraculous virgin birth, this Child was at the same time, nothing less than God incarnate.

24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Matthew greatly summarizes the rest of the nativity story and simply says that Joseph followed

through on the betrothal, married Mary, but withheld normal marital relations with her until after Jesus was born.

Joseph's giving a name to Mary's Son was a way of saying that he accepted the Child into his home and family.

By the way, the clear inference to what Matthew says in v. 25 is that after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary engaged in normal physical intimacy as husband and wife.

If Matthew had intended to say that Mary *perpetually* remained a virgin, he would have said that Joseph and she did NOT have such relations; on the contrary, he said they were not intimate "till" after Jesus' birth. ^[1]

MATTHEW 2

C. *The Wise Men & Herod* 2:1-18

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

Matthew mentions a key player in the story of Jesus' early days – *Herod the Great*.

Herod was a megalomaniac of epic proportions who virtually single-handedly transformed Israel from a nameless backwater to a urbane and modern nation.

His extensive and elaborate building projects became known all across the Roman Empire. Many of them exist to this day; Masada, the Jewish temple, Herodium, and Caesarea are the main sites built by Herod.

Joseph & Mary had returned to their ancestral home of Bethlehem because of the Roman command to take a census. While they were there, Jesus was born.

Matthew tells us that something remarkable took place in Jerusalem while Mary & Joseph waited for her to recover from the ordeal of giving birth.

Bethlehem is only 4 miles south of Jerusalem and one day some important dignitaries from the East arrived in the capital city.

The word used here for wise men is a Persian word – *Magi*, and refers to what we would call "astronomers."

These men had been looking into the sky in their native land of Persia when they saw a sign that provoked their curiosity.

As they researched it, they discovered that the sign was a portent of a sovereign who would rise among the Jewish people who was a Person to be honored by all.

So they came to Israel in search of the One the heavenly sign pointed to.

Exactly what the Magi had drawn their insights from is not known, but many Bible scholars believe that the prophet Daniel may have left such a record for the astronomers of Persia to refer to.

When the Magi reached Israel and moved toward the point where the star pointed, they drew near to Jerusalem, the center and capital of Jerusalem where the temple stood.

They reasonably concluded that the priests of Israel and Herod would be as concerned with these things as they were. It turns out they were mistaken.

³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

What troubled Herod was the comment of the Magi that they'd come seeking the One who had been *born* - King of the Jews.

History tells us Herod was totally paranoid as it related to the throne – and, really, he had every reason to be.

You see, he'd stolen it from several of those who ought to have had it.

He'd even resorted to murder to get and keep it.

And he'd not been born to it – He'd *bought* it from the Romans.

Motivated by his great paranoia and cruelty, he murdered a good portion of the Jewish

Sanhedrin, his favorite wife, his mother-in-law, and three of his own sons!
His great fear all along was that someone from the royal dynasty of David would rise up, rally the Jews, and rebel against him.

So, the news of the Magi was terribly disturbing to him; and when Herod was upset, so was the rest of Jerusalem, because Herod was in the nasty habit of throwing his political weight around and terrorizing the populace whenever he was in a foul mood.

There's a true story about Stalin that is a measure of his cruelty; one night in Moscow there was a dog barking that would not stop.

Stalin was annoyed and sent out one of the palace guards to shoot the dog and its owner!
That's the kind of guy Herod was, only worse!

Herod knew no one would mourn his passing when he died, so he gave the order that when he died, the palace guard was to go out and slay a couple dozen of Jerusalem's most beloved citizens so there would be mourning at his passing!

Fortunately the order was never followed through on.

But this gives you an idea of why when Herod was troubled, all of Jerusalem was as well.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

Interesting isn't it, that the religious leaders and scholars could quote chapter and verse of the prophecies in Micah 5:2, regarding *where* the Messiah was to be born – but they showed no interest in seeking Him themselves.

This is not unlike some Bible students today who can parse the Greek of the original text, develop a neat systematic theology, and outline the text with skill, but fail to see how it all points to Jesus Christ.

They have lost **The Word of God** in the *words* of the Bible.

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

Herod had no desire to worship Jesus; this Child was a threat to his rule, a competitor to be squashed just as Herod had ruthlessly squashed so many previous upstarts.

He called for the Magi *secretly* because he was paranoid there might be yet another palace conspiracy going on that would try to use the Magi to their own ends.

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen 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 exceedingly great joy.

Matthew's record here seems to indicate that the sign which had originally appeared to them when they were star-gazing in Persia, had since disappeared.

But once they leave Jerusalem, and start the 4-mile trek to Bethlehem, the star reappears to guide them and affirm they are headed in the right direction.

11 And when they had come into the house, . . .

Note that – they had come in to the what? The house!

You see, Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus are no longer in the stable.

The crowds that had filled Bethlehem for the census have all gone home leaving ample room either in the inn or with one of Mary or Joseph's relatives who lived there in Bethlehem.

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Because 3 gifts are mentioned, this has led to the tradition that there were 3 magi, but that's actually never said.

The words “when they had opened their treasures” implies there were *more* than 3.

Chief among the gifts given to Jesus were gold, a gift befitting a king; frankincense, a gift appropriate for a priest, and myrrh, a costly embalming spice.

These gifts, were treasures, each of them being of considerable economic value.

But they were also gifts appropriate to who the Magi understood this King of the Jews to be.

Have you ever had to buy someone a gift and you have a hard time deciding what to give?

When you give a gift, you want it to be appropriate to the person it’s going to.

When the Magi had prepared to make the long journey to Israel to worship this one that had been prophesied, they’d no doubt considered what gifts would be appropriate.

The prophecies helped them decide.

A king gets gold; a priest gets incense, and a prophet, well, he gets myrrh because prophets are usually martyred for their message.

Jesus, the Messiah is Prophet, Priest, and King.

I’ve often wondered how Mary and Joseph handled this visit by the Magi and their reaction on seeing the Child – they fell down and worshipped, and then placed lavish riches at their feet.

12 Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you 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 for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Matthew quotes this as a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1.

Remember that Herod is waiting in Jerusalem just a few miles away for the Magi to return to him with the identity and location of the Child.

When he realizes they’ve left without telling him – he’ll be mightily ticked.

So once more Joseph has a special dream in which he’s warned he needs to flee.

We awakes, packs up his wife and her child, and they boogie down to Egypt until Herod croaks.

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men,

“Deceived” is not really the best translation here; the word means *tricked*, and Matthew means this from Herod’s perspective, not the motive of the Magi.

They were only obeying God in not going to Herod.

But from Herod’s paranoid view, they’d *tricked* him and so were part of the conspiracy to steal his throne.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

In v. 7 we read that Herod had inquired of the Magi when they had originally seen the star.

A trip from Persia would have taken a long, long time.

First of all, the Magi would have seen the star, and then verified it’s sighting over several nights.

This would be followed by a deep investigation into their records to determine what it meant, if anything.

Then once they discovered it’s significance as marker of an important birth, they would have to gather the resources to stage an expedition.

Traveling at the pace they would in those days, this means their journey, from start to finish at Bethlehem could indeed have taken a couple years!

So Herod sent out his troops with the command to slay every boy they could find in and around Bethlehem, 2 years and under.

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping

for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”

This is a quote from Jeremiah 31:5, in which the prophet speaks of the lament of the mothers of Israel when their children are torn from them in the destruction that will take place when Babylon comes.

What was foreshadowed in that tragedy finds its ultimate fulfillment in Herod's slaughter of the innocents.

What makes Herod's act all the more heinous was that *he knew* he was seeking to kill the Messiah!

D. Going Home To Nazareth

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead.”

Once the threat to Jesus was removed by Herod's death it was safe to return to Israel.

In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus says that Herod died of, “ulcerated entrails, putrefied and maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions,” and a breath so foul no one could share the same room with him.

Nothing the physicians did could provide relief and he died in terribly agony, literally rotting to death!

Each time Joseph received direction from God, it came in the form of an angel who appeared to him in a dream.

I spent some time trying to figure out what the significance of that was, and came up with – nothing!

Really, why Joseph's revelations came in the form of a dream when others had direct visions from God probably has some great meaning, but it's beyond my meager interpretive ability to glean what it is.

21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

As soon as the little family arrived back in Israel they found that the throne had passed to Herod's son. Only time would tell if he was cut from the same cloth or came from a different mold from his father.

But the Lord gave them clear directions, again through a dream, that they were to return to the region of Galilee from where they'd originally come.

They returned to their digs in Nazareth.

Matthew says this was in fulfillment of what the prophets had said about the Messiah, that he would be called a Nazarene.

In Isaiah 11:1 we read a very clear messianic prophecy –

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

The word 'rod' is the Hebrew word 'natsar' (naw-tsar) and means *sprout* or *shoot*.

Jesus was this 'natsar' prophesied by Isaiah, and doubly so because not only was He from the line of Jesse, David's father, but He grew up in Nazareth, and would be known as Jesus of Nazareth.

He was the Nat-sar-ene from Nat-sar-eth.

Nazareth means, “sprout town – beanfield.” It was the proverbial “hick-town” of the time and region.

It was the original *Oxnard!*

In John 1:46, when Philip was trying to convince his friend Nathaniel that they'd found the Messiah, he told him his name was Jesus of Nazareth.

Nathaniel's reply was an incredulous, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Matthew turns that whole idea of the lowliness of the city of Nazareth around and shows how God moves to fulfill the word of prophecy so surely that it will even come to pass in something as simple as the place where the Messiah grows up.

And He will be known as Jesus *of Nazareth!* Christ from *Beantown*. Messiah from *Hickville*.

The Sovereign King of the Universe who humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation so that He could identify with the smallest, the weakest, and most underprivileged member of this world.

The entire early life of Christ is one seeming paradox after another.

Here He is, God incarnate, and when He comes in to the world *He* made, He enters through the womb of a Jewish peasant girl.

His first crib is a feeding trough, His first blankets, whatever rags His foster father was able to scrape together at the last minute.

Though He is in fact the ruler of heaven, while still an infant He has to flee to Egypt from a petty tyrant named Herod.

Then He grows up, not in the cosmopolitan center of power, wealth, & education, but in a little backwater burg.

This is not the route to the throne we would chart – but it's the route Jesus took, because His Kingdom is not about force and domination, intimidation and physical power.

He rules in righteousness and love.

His kingdom seeks to lift up the weak and downtrodden, to give sight to the blind and to set those bound by sin -- free.

Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus – the sweetest name

Nazareth, beanfield.

Is the name of Jesus *lessened* by the addition of Nazareth, or is the name Nazareth *exalted* by the addition of the name of Jesus?

We are not much in and of ourselves – as Mike Rozell says, really, we are just a hunk of clay, and handful of dust.

But this clay has been animated and given life by God, and Jesus has put his name on us!

[1] This denies the Roman Catholic dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary. This is an unbiblical doctrine, which did not appear earlier than the fifth century after Jesus. It should be placed with the dogmas of Mary's Immaculate Conception, assumption into heaven, and present role as a mediator for believers. Each one of these is man's invention, meant to exalt Mary in an unbiblical manner. [Guzik]