

Matthew 2:1-23

“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, 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ [Messiah] should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem of Judea, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel [Micah 5:2]. Then Herod, when he had privily [secretly] called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 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. When they 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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 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, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. 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. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: 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 [Hosea 11:1]. Then Herod, when he saw he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was

spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not [Jeremiah 31:15]. But when Herod was dead, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 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 [Isaiah 11:1].”

True Servants of God in Unexpected Places

Matthew chapter 2, beginning in verse 1, “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, 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.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And when he gathered all the chief priests and the scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, ‘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.’ Then Herod when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 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.’ When they heard the king, they departed and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they had 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 gifts to him, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then being divinely warned in a dream that

they should not return to Herod they departed to their own country another way.” (verses 1-12) J.C. Ryle makes the point that these Magi, wise men, expected the Christ, but it's not known whether this expectation came from the 10-tribes of Israel, or from Daniel's prophecies, or whether they were Arabs, Persians or Babylonians. [Comment: If they were Persians, as suspected, the Parthian Empire ruled in the area of Persia, and no longer the Persians. The Parthian Empire, suspected to be members of the lost 10 tribes of Israel, particularly Ephraim and Manasseh, was the arch-enemy and nemesis of the Roman Empire, the only Empire able to stand up against Rome as an equal or better, militarily.] But whoever they were, they were true servants of God, Yahweh. Jesus does, throughout all the ages, have 'hidden ones' who are his. Remember God's statement to Elijah who was complaining of being the only servant of God left. Yahweh told him there were seven thousand of his servants left ***'who had not bowed the knee to Baal.'*** Also the Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without any help from outward means. There are hidden believers traveling the road to salvation, which the visible Church knows nothing about. These Magi, wise men, are proof of that.

The Fulfillment of four Old Testament prophecies are recorded in Matthew 2

- 1.) He was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Jotham's reign, 750-735BC)
- 2.) He was to be called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1, 750-735BC).
- 3.) There was to be weeping in Rama (Jeremiah 31:15, 600-585BC).
- 4.) He was the Root from the Stem of Jesse, and therefore to be called a Nazarene (Isaiah 11:1, 735-680sBC).

Matthew here is writing to show that this is the Messiah, this is the Son of God. Then as the chapter went on, Matthew in the last part of chapter 1, he then even shows in the birth of Jesus Christ, there was something very unusual about him. Of course it was supernatural, his conception. This is indeed the Messiah he is writing about, showing the fulfillment of the prophecies, he's not just a man, he's very human, but yet he's also God, he's God-man, the Son of God, incarnate, Emmanuel

as we saw in the end of Chapter 1, the prophecy, Emmanuel, God with us.

Visit of the Magi, wise men

Christ's Coming Brings Opposition, Christ Coming Into Our Lives Also Brings Opposition, Spiritual Warfare

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

These wise men came in the days of Herod the Great. One thing Herod didn't want was competition, he would not tolerate it. He killed many in his own family because he was afraid of competition. These '*wise men*' came looking for a king, and it wasn't Herod they were looking for! How did the '*wise men*' know about the Messiah's birth? Numbers 24:17, the prophecy of Balaam may be a clue. If the whole city of Jerusalem, not just Herod, was troubled, there may have been far more than just "three wise men." There could have been a whole slew of them. Herod made the Mafia look like choir boys, the original Don Carleone, a real 1st century Mafia Don. When this occurred it was a very short time after the birth of Christ (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/messianicmovement/festivalsloflights2.htm>). I think verse 11, verse 16, gives us a sense that it's a bit of time later. Just as we go on, there were different things as we'll see that just demonstrate there's something going on with this man's life, not just the good things, but also the bad things---the fact that darkness at times surrounded his life, some of the evil, some of the ugliness that was around him and his environment, just the opposition against him. Matthew is showing, this man is the Messiah. He was clearly the Son of God. And you know, in a strange way, when I have Christ in my life, it's true also in my life, not just the blessing on my life proves that I'm a Christian, not just the fact that he's healing my heart and healing my life and giving me victory, and there's this work of the Spirit of God in me, something very real, but also the fact that I have opposition. The fact there's also some ugliness that comes my way, and there's a battle and there's warfare. This just proves Christ is in me too. You know, when somebody accepts Christ in our church, through maybe a friend

or maybe during a service, after the service, I'll meet with them in the back room, I'll often say, 'You know, you're a Christian now, you're just getting started,' and we'll talk about what that means. But I'll mention to them, 'You know you've also entered into the battle, and you have an enemy. And you'll see now, and maybe you didn't have any experiences like that before, but Christ is in you, and there is going to be opposition (see the Matrix, <http://www.unityinchrist.com/Does/TheMatrix.htm>), *'fight program'*, *But here's the deal. As it happens in your life, it only proves all the more, that something very real has happened in you. Something very real is going on in your life, the fact that these things are going to come your way. And the truth is too, God is going to use it to the good, he's going to mature you, he's going to perfect you, he's going to build you up and strengthened you through it.'* But maybe you're a new-believer too, and you've had some, man, maybe some evil come your way, some opposition and some hardship. It goes with being a Christian, Christ is in you, and there's light and there's dark, and the spiritual darkness is very much against Christ. And we'll see that here as Matthew writes.

Just Who Were These Magi?

Well, as he lists there in verse 1, after the birth of Christ, some unusual men briefly come into the life of Christ when he was very young. Again, probably he's definitely less than two, maybe even a year or less than a year, we don't know for sure. The Magi, maybe you have another translation, but the word "wise men" comes from the Greek word *Magi*, and *Magi* is actually the Greek word that's listed in this text. People conjecture that these guys were kings, three kings. But they weren't actually kings, and there were a lot more of them than three. They were Magi, and it's a good guess they were from Persia. It's a good guess that's where they've come from, they've come from the East. I'm going to quote from Stephen Collin's book, **"Parthia, The Forgotten Ancient Superpower And Its Role in Biblical History"**, © 2004, pp.126-133, selected paragraphs. "As discussed in the previous chapter, the Magi were powerful members of the Parthian bicameral body that elected Parthian monarchs and wielded great influence within the empire. One assembly was composed of members of the royal family (Arsacids), and the other consisted of the priests (the "Magi") and influential Parthians of non-royal blood (the "Wise Men"). the Magi and Wise Men were jointly known as the

Megistanes. Matthew 2:1 states that “wise men from the east” came to worship Jesus. The term “Wise Men,” which appears in Matthew 2:1, is not a generic description of these visitors, but was the proper title of Parthian Megistanes. The Greek word translated “wise men” is “magian,” literally meaning “Persian astronomer or priest,” from which we derive the word “Magi.” **Parthia governed Persia at the time of Christ, so the “Wise Men” cited in the Bible were Parthian nobles and/or priests...**While the traditional “Christian” accounts of this episode celebrate the coming of “the three wise men,” the Bible does not limit the number of visiting Magi-Wise Men to three men. Indeed, biblical events and realities of that time argue for a *much larger* contingent of Parthian Magi...The arrival of the Magi’s caravan in Jerusalem was a **very public affair** because “all Jerusalem” was “troubled” by their arrival. What was it about the Magi’s caravan that scared the Roman leaders and the whole city of Jerusalem? The Magi, a delegation of high Parthian officials, came to Jerusalem in a caravan loaded with costly treasures and escorted by a strong force of armed Parthian soldiers! Since the Magi were high officials of the Parthian government, they would routinely travel with a substantial escort of Parthian soldiers to guarantee their protection. Since they were traveling with many costly treasures to present to the newborn Messiah, their escort may have been unusually large...Josephus records that treasure caravans bringing expensive offerings to Jerusalem from Jews living in Parthian territory did so with “many ten thousand men” as escorts. In ancient times, traveling with expensive items was dangerous. There was danger not only from brigands, but also from local satraps who might use their armies to conquer a treasure train passing through their territories. If Jewish commoners from Parthia were allowed to travel to Jerusalem with the equivalent of several infantry divisions as escorts, would an important delegation of Parthia’s ruling class and a treasure train of gifts have been accompanied by any fewer armed escorts? If the Parthian column had included “many ten thousands” of soldiers, it would have justified the widespread fear in Jerusalem caused by their arrival. In the previous chapter, we learned that ancient Chinese historical accounts recorded that the Parthians sent 20,000 cavalry just to escort a Chinese ambassador into Parthian territory...Their caravan was so huge that it was a “cause celebre” in Jerusalem. The whole city was in an uproar over their arrival, and that argues for a **very visible and impressive** Parthian caravan arriving in Jerusalem. The sheer size of the caravan, its treasures and its escorts awed King

Herod and the whole city to the point they were all “troubled.” This indicates that the Parthian caravan had so many armed escorts that many feared it was an invasion force coming to besiege Jerusalem and start a new Roman-Parthian war. However, their announced reason---coming to visit a royal-born Messiah---could have electrified a city of Jews who intensely wanted the Messiah to come and free them from Roman rule! The Jewish hierarchy understood the Parthians were looking for the Messiah as they quickly looked for the Messianic prophecies to locate the city of His birth.” “Since Joseph and Mary actually lived in Galilee (*Luke 2:4*), the fact that they were in a house in Bethlehem indicates that this must have been weeks after Jesus’ birth while Mary was regaining the strength to make an overland trip back to Nazareth. Their flight to Egypt took them completely out of Herod’s area of jurisdiction.” [ibid. p. 134] ...Collins goes on to describe why the “star” which led them had to have been an angel, stars just don’t move along, and then stand directly over a child in a town or city. Also the word “star” has been used Biblically to denote an angel (Job 38:7, Revelation 1:20; 12:3-4). Collins goes on to prove that the Parthians were composed of the 10-tribes of Israel which had been driven out of the land of Israel by Assyria in 721 BC, and later moved north and east, forming up into the Parthian Empire, a very powerful military rival to the Roman Empire. The current eastern border at the time of Christ between the Parthian Empire and the Roman Empire was the Euphrates River. So these guys could have come east from what had been the region of Babylon and the Babylonian Empire, which became the Persian Empire, and by the time of Christ has fallen into the hands of the Parthian Empire.

Discerning The Signs Of The Times, Then And Now

Collins says about the Parthians, “While it is not surprising that Jewish leaders during Herod’s reign were sufficiently familiar with the prophetic writings to pinpoint for Herod exactly where the Messiah would be born, **it is surprising that God was working so closely with members of the Parthian ruling class! This makes no biblical sense unless: (A) the Parthians were descended from the ten tribes of Israel and (B) the Magi (Parthian priests) included some Levites.** During His ministry Jesus Christ asserted that He had not been sent to the gentiles, but only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel...” [ibid. p.139] So these men have a certain way of looking at life. They had discerned though, they’ve discerned

something, and that is the King of kings has been born, so they come. And there's a picture to me of being discerning of the times, the times we're in. And with that they make certain decisions, and they direct their lives in a certain way. They come a great distance, and they direct their path a certain way. Of course, rather than causing excitement in Jerusalem, they cause alarm [and we have seen why]. The people are alarmed, in fact it says there of Herod in **verse 3**, that **"he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."** They're not excited. You would think they would be excited. These guys come, *'The King of the Jews!'* You'd think the Pharisees and religious leaders would be *'All right! Let's go!'* But the whole city is troubled. Now why is the whole city troubled? Of course it has to do with the Romans, has to do with their relationship with the people of Israel they are over. And of course there was a lot of trouble with uprisings (and now several divisions worth of Parthian soldiers have come into Jerusalem with a contingent of Megistanes, they have come marching into Jerusalem asking *'Where is the newborn King of the Jews?'*). And Herod was an evil man. And so there's fear, a good guess is because, they're saying *'King of the Jews,'* and this isn't going well with Herod and the Romans. This is going to cause maybe a backlash. And that is a picture for you and I as Christians, as God's people, it is vital, absolutely vital that we're discerning of the signs of the times, the days that we live in. You know, the sons of Issachar, right, in **1st Chronicles chapter 12, verse 32**, the sons of Issachar, ***'who had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.'*** And it is vital that we are discerning, looking at the signs of the times, and therefore knowing what we ought to do. It is so brutally dangerous to not be discerning of the times, it is so foolish not to discern, but just to go along with society and culture, just saying, *'Hey, this is great,'* and yet not seeing the writing on the wall [see <http://www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-magazine/beyond-today-magazine-january-february-2016> and read this January-February 2016 issue, it's all about this Biblical theme about "the handwriting on the wall."]. But the signs of the times, the signs of the times, we have to discern the signs of the times, and where we're heading if something doesn't change. So indeed it's time to pray, it's time to seek the face of God, it's time for us as God's people to repent of our own sin. And truly, if things don't change, the signs of the times are telling me it's not going to be easy being a Christian. That's what the signs say, if I'm discerning. It's not going to be easy in Massachusetts, it's not going to be easy to be a pastor. But it's

really been put on my heart and I've been thinking a lot about discerning the signs of the times, so important for you and I. So the question to you is, are you discerning that? It's foolish not to, and just to go along with the society around you.

The Scribes and Priests, False Worshipers

“And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule [*shepherd*] my people Israel. Then Herod when he had privily [secretly] called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 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.” (verses 4-8) The scribes and priests were filled with “head knowledge” but had no real heart for God. They knew precisely where the Messiah, the Christ, was to be born, Bethlehem, and approximately when. But did they travel to Bethlehem to search out the Messiah so **they** could worship him?---**no**. The spiritual diligence of the Magi was evident, as seen by the fatigue that an eastern desert traveler would encounter, greater than most realize. Just ask some of our boys back from Iraq what crossing the desert would be like without their jeeps, Humvi's, trucks and water-tankers. Ever hear of a camel-spider? Look that baby up on www.google.com. This journey to find the Messiah took faith. And when they found Jesus, he was a baby, in a very humble setting, having no outward signs he was the Messiah. And yet they're bowing down to him, presenting precious gifts to him. And these very gifts, now that I think of it, may have provided for his, Joseph's and Mary's unexpected journey to and stay in Egypt. God always provides, and especially for the needs of his only begotten Son and his parental guardians. These scribes and priests, on the other hand, didn't even have to search the Scriptures to know where the Messiah was to be born, they were so well versed in them. They knew right off the top of their heads, Micah 5:2, it was to be in Bethlehem. But their head knowledge was academic. Here was this group of Magi, looking for the Messiah, Herod asks the scribes and priests to find out, so he, Herod in feigned cooperation with these 'wise men' can

tell them where to look---so that when they have found him they can report back to him---so in reality he can go and kill the baby Messiah, King of the Jews. This sly fox Herod did not want to alarm the parents of Jesus, Yeshua, so he was going to use these friendly Magi to search him out, and then have them report back to him. And then, as we see later, he would have gone and slain Jesus. Well, **verse 4**, Herod hears. Now it's interesting that he actually does this, he gathers the religious leaders together, says, **'Now when is this Christ supposed to be born here? Tell me, when, where, give me some details.'** They then respond and they tell him that it's according to Micah, in this city of Bethlehem, it's just a village at the time, he's supposed to be born in Bethlehem, and they read to him the prophecy. **Micah chapter 5, verse 2**, it says, **"Whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting."** And that says something about this guy, **"whose going forth is from old, from everlasting."** They should have understood then that this man that was to come, the Messiah, was more than just a man, he's the God-man. Well upon learning from the religious leaders, Herod then secretly consults the Magi, brings them into his palace we presume, **'Hey, listen guys, got a lot of talk going around, tell me...you go find this little baby, King of kings, when you find him, come back to me. Man, this is exciting, I want to go and worship him with you also.'** Of course, the fact that he would want to kill the baby, you know, the Gospel account of Herod is very accurate. Because historically we know him to be a very evil man, I'm sure there were plenty of times, he was evidently a short guy, four foot four, but a guy who liked to build. You can go, as we go on trips to Israel, you can see today even incredible ruins of things Herod built. But he's vicious. Josephus tells us that Herod in his rage over rivalries in his family and jealousies, has put to death his wife Miriam, and her two sons, and went also on to kill his own son Antipar, who was heir to the throne. Then he put to death the brother and mother of Miriam, Astrobolus and Alexandra, and then he put to death Miriam's grandfather, John Hercanus. So the guy was paranoid, and the guy was vicious. Caesar Augustus is so often quoted as saying *"It's safer to be Herod's pig than to be his son."*

The Magi Were Real Worshippers Of The Baby Messiah

"When they 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. When they saw

the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 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, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

(verses 9-12) The star appears again. This must have been a supernatural “star,” as it moved as a guide to them. Stars don’t do that [but glowing holy angels do]. But they’re *overjoyed* at its appearing again to guide them. They find the house Joseph and Mary had already moved to with Jesus from what must have been a smelly sheep-fold, which in that area were made out of caves, used to hold sheep for the past 1,000 years. For that is where the Magi find Jesus, Yeshua, in a house. Note, when they saw the young child Jesus, with Mary his mother, they fell down and worshipped him. They didn’t worship Mary, they worshiped Jesus, Yeshua, and presented him with precious gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then God warns these Magi in a dream not to return to Herod, but to take another route home. Fortunately in verse 12, these guys are kind of tuned in, they’ve been divinely warned in a dream. How did that happen, and what did it mean? We don’t know for sure, but these guys are discerning enough that when this experience happens, they know that God’s got their attention, and they’re not to go back the same way and to talk to Herod. So they go on their journey home a different way. Just imagine the things that would have happened [if God had allowed it, that is]. But they were discerning again, and they went back East a different way. You know, discerning is good, understanding we’ve got a devil that’s after us. We’ve got this lion that’s after us. All these things going on, you want to discern the signs of the times, but also just the voice of God and what I should do and not do...Because there are people that want to come in [into his church congregation], and they want to stop us. And the more you do what’s right, and there’s no doubt, these people have certain agendas, these groups out there, they make it clear they that they want to silence the Church, they want to humiliate the Church, and they want to put fear in the Church, the churches that are standing up and being a voice [for the Truth of God]. Yet we need to be discerning. At this point, discernment is needed, it’s so needed. *‘Well this guy’s [Herod] setting us up, we need to go home the other way.’*

Flight Into Egypt

Verses 13-15, “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 and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.’ When he arose he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt, 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.’” Well, again, very clear picture, isn’t it? It says an angel of the Lord comes to Joseph in a dream, and we would assume, a good guess, it’s probably Gabriel, because of the other times, in Luke chapter 2 with Mary, and also with Zachariah. It’s probably the angel that came to him earlier as we noted. But he comes again at a very key moment. As we saw last time, Joseph was heading down a certain road thinking ‘I’m going to put away Mary. I know she says this is the deal here, but I’m going to put her away. I love her, and I’m going to do it honorably.’ And right there as he’s thinking that, Gabriel the angel shows up and says ‘**Whoa, whoa, this is God, this is a work of God, you need to keep Mary. You know, she’s going to have the Holy One of God.**’ Well now at this other time, to this step-father, an angel says ‘**Listen, listen, Joseph, take the child, take his mother, go to Egypt. Because Herod’s out to kill him, you’ve got to know that. Stay there until I bring you word.**’ So you have this picture of a father being discerning. And then it’s so important, you know, David’s words in **Psalm 37, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD.”** And then how it’s needed in church families, you know, Dads in tune with God, not just going with what feels right to you. But if you’re a man in the Word of God, you’re a man listening, you’re a man of prayer. And you know, prayer is more than one way, it’s two ways. ‘What are you saying to me? I want to know, be led by you Lord.’ Watching the circumstances in your life, too, and the events, having that peace of God guiding your steps also. It’s so important. Joseph is a man that discerns too, and he takes his family off to Egypt and protection, ‘It’s not easy, ok, I’m going to Egypt, different culture, away from family.’ But it’s great, he’s got a heart to hear and goes as God leads. Maybe he doesn’t understand, but he has to trust the Lord. The lesson, **you have to persevere, you’ve got to persevere.** And it isn’t necessarily easy, sometimes it’s hard. **You don’t have to understand, you just have to move on and let God work it**

out. He's God. But you know this Dad is discerning, and you know, parents, we have to be discerning. There's things that are coming your way, and there's things that are coming at your kids, there are things that your kids are being influenced by, and you've got to be discerning. Parents, you need to be thinking about the things that are going on and the consequences and what it's going to mean to our children in the end. And here's a father, Joseph, Jesus' step-dad, that understands, and so he makes certain decisions, and he does maybe what's not easy, and it's hard on the family. And I know there's plenty of families doing that right now too, going *'Boy, this isn't easy. Would have been a lot easier to go along, now I've got to make all these changes, and take on this, remove that, but I'm concerned for my kids and what they're being influenced by and what's coming their way.'* [The Puritans, Separatists in England that had moved to Holland to avoid King James' harsh persecution had to be discerning. They had to discern that the Dutch freewheeling lifestyle would absorb their children and pull them away from their faith. So they finally decided it was time to move, and move they did, to the New World, and founded Plymouth Plantation. Same identical kind of discerning. See <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/saga.htm>] And so Joseph is discerning, and then they go off to Egypt. And it's according to prophecy, **"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" (Hosea 11:1)** You know the Old Testament declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and he would be from Nazareth. It was prophesied. Let's go to the end.

Herod's Wrath

Verses 16-23, "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 born in Bethlehem and all the districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet saying, 'A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more.' And when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 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.' Then he arose, took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel." Now Joseph is about to be real discerning, he's learning. **"And 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, 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.'"**

1. Lesson: Rulers of this world are seldom if ever friendly to God's cause. Trouble awaits the Messiah as soon as he enters the world. He and his parents had to flee to Egypt, and you can see why. Herod, in a blind rage, tries to kill the baby Messiah by having all the male infants and toddlers from two years and under killed in Bethlehem and its surrounding environs. Then on the way back from Egypt, Joseph is told to avoid the Jerusalem area altogether and settle his tiny family in a backwater city in Galilee, Nazareth, little more than a town by today's standards.

2. Lesson: Rulers are not immortal. True believers in Jesus, Yeshua should never be greatly moved by persecution. What goes around comes around, as the saying goes. Herod dies. God has a way of dealing with those who mistreat his own, sooner or later. Vengeance belongs to God, as the proverb goes, and we're not supposed to dabble in it. Quite the opposite, Jesus said that we are supposed to pray for those who spitefully use us, and pray for those who persecute us and hate us (see Matthew 5:20-48). **"The mirth of the wicked is brief" (Job 20:5).** The Lord lives forever and his enemies are only human and are but for a moment in time---get God's perspective. This is an unusual prophecy for Ramah, Old Testament Ramah. Ramah was as far north of Jerusalem as Bethlehem was south of Jerusalem. When Herod gave orders to the Captain of the Guard to slay all the children two years old and under, the general probably asked, *'Where should I begin?'* Herod probably drew a circle around Jerusalem's radius encompassing Ramah to the north and Bethlehem to the south, thus that evil Herod killed a whole slew of male babies and toddlers. You can just imagine all the crying, screaming and wailing between Ramah and Bethlehem.

Return to Nazareth

“But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 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.” (verses 19-23)

J. Vernon McGee says this about “He shall be called a Nazarene,” “The Hebrew word for Nazareth was *Netzer*, meaning a branch or shoot. There’s not a prophecy in the Old Testament directly saying that he would come from Nazareth, but it does go back to the Hebrew word *Netzer*, which means branch. The Hebrew *Netzer* means branch, and of course you go back to the Old Testament, there’s a lot of prophecies about the Branch, the Branch, **Zechariah 6:12-13, “And speak unto him, saying, ‘Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’** And so that’s in context of what Matthew means there.” That’s what J. Vernon McGee had to say about this passage. It was also important to get the Christ child out of Egypt as soon as possible once Herod was dead, as he was supposed to live under the Mosaic Law perfectly, the only human being ever to do so, without sin. So he couldn’t be allowed to linger or live in Egypt long enough to learn anything of Egyptian culture or lifestyle. Archelaus was another Herod and very brutal. Joseph, knowing the political rulers over his country like we know the ones over ours, discerned Jerusalem wasn’t a safe place to go back to and raise Jesus, Yeshua in. So, we have a dad that’s discerning. Now may God give us more and more godly dads that are really discerning about the well-being of their children, what God calls godly seed, in this time we live in. [condensed down from a transcript of a sermon on Matthew 2:1-23, given somewhere in New England, with extra information culled out of J. Vernon McGee’s and J.C. Ryle’s commentaries on Matthew.]

related links:

Christian Home-Schooling resources:

<http://www.bibleschools.net>

<http://www.libertyonlineacademy.com>

in Central Massachusetts:

<http://www.MastersChristian.org>

The Separatists of Plymouth Plantation had to be discerning when they were living in Holland. See

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/saga.htm>