

## Transcription Notes on The Book of Matthew, Auditing the Master

recognizable features of the Messiah would be that he would be the son of David. Don't you suspect that this is probably the prime, if not one of the prime, reasons why Matthew includes the genealogy?

But we have a problem with that. What is that problem? If they trace it through the male line, through Joseph, and if Joseph is a son of David, is there any connection with ancestry here with David if it goes through Mary? This is a challenging question. We can, perhaps, answer it, though, because of the Torah. The Torah is the Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible, Torah meaning law, or the word of the law. We find in there a definite regulation that one should marry within his own tribe. This is so any inheritance that would come via the woman would remain in the tribe rather than going to some other tribe. I think the first one to suggest this was Eusebius around 300 A.D. This would seem to suggest very strongly that Mary was also related to the tribe of Judah to which David belonged.

(Verse 18). That isn't the only problem, though, because we find "the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise." The word "birth" in Greek is our word "genesis." Writing to a Jewish readership, there would seem to be very little question that Matthew was relating a new genesis here. The word would remind his readers of the opening book of the Bible. "The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph." Our modern term "engagement" would probably best suit that. It was a period in which the couple would promise to one another. It was regarded with as much sanctity as the marriage-period itself. So that any violation of it morally was treated with the same severity as if it had been adultery during marriage. 1115

When the news reaches Joseph that Mary is "with child," how do you think the average husband would greet that news? They aren't even married yet. The news comes to Joseph that his wife-to-be in this very sanctified period of promise is pregnant. Under the Jewish law, what would be the most severe measure that Joseph could take against Mary? Stoning. Publicly. He could have chosen and elected to have exposed Mary publicly and had her executed. But Joseph is as important an aspect of this great account of the introduction of Jesus humanly on earth as Mary. We get an insight into his thinking. Remember that Joseph is just you or I in the sense of going through the same reaction that one would have with this sort of news. This shows some of the quality and character of Joseph.

(Verse 19). It says that "Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example." We see right away that he doesn't want to take the extreme measure, He wanted "to put her away privily," and go through divorce proceedings, but quietly. 1119

(Matthew 1, Verse 20). "While he thought on these things." That isn't exactly Joseph being a philosopher. The Greek word suggests agony. "While he agonized about these things." It gives us a view of what was really going on in his thinking. At that point, "an angel of the Lord appears unto him." "Angel," actually comes from a Greek word, *angelos*. It means "messenger" and is virtually inseparable from the message that the messenger delivers. It is this inseparable message and messenger that comes to Joseph in what appears to him as "a dream," addressing him as the "son of David" and saying, "Forget what you're thinking," which was a normal conclusion any husband 1120

would come to, "Because Mary is with child but what is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." How many husbands would exactly buy that? It really flies in the face of the entire biological history of man.

Therefore, this event itself has become one of the most difficult to believe for anyone reading it. The virginity of Mary at the time of the birth of Jesus has been ridiculed by some, accepted religiously by others without question, and many of the rest of the readers somewhere in between. But let's go on with what this message is as recorded by Matthew.

1721 (Verse 21). "She will bring forth a son," his identity already established to the point that a name is given to him by the angel. That name really is a very common Hebrew name. It's the same name as Joshua received in the Old Testament. Joshua was not his original name. It was first Oshea, "help" or "salvation," (p. 64, J. R. Dummelow, "The One Volume Bible Commentary"). Joshua was a given name. It means something very close to our term "savior." The explanation of the angel is that this name really will define his mission "to save his people from their sins."

Now we come face to face with one of the characteristics of Matthew. When we look at the gospel from an overall point of view, you see it over and over again. It may reveal to us what inspired Matthew to put pen to papyrus and record the gospel or good news. This is in Verse 22.

1722 (Verse 22). He explains that "all this was done." What is he talking about when he says "all this"? The virgin birth of Jesus. He is about to give us what he considers absolute proof that the virgin-birth occurred. It occurred as a result of prophecy. Does that tell us at what elevation Matthew holds in prophecy? If he's using this as proof of one of the most unbelievable, incredible, events recorded in the annals of man's history, then how does he view prophecy? Does he view prophecy as a man-product or as revelation from God?

If he's writing this book for the Jews, it shows he is bringing in his big guns right from the beginning to show his Jewish readers that this is it! We can be fairly assured that he felt that what he is about to say would not be disputed, or at least be a matter of severe controversy in his audience. His famous statement which he says so often "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet."

1723 Verse 23 is taken from the Book of Isaiah (7:14). We are really in the middle of a controversy. Even at the time Matthew was writing, he obviously felt this was a major point. Look at it from a common-sense point of view. If that particular prophecy was extremely controversial when Matthew wrote this book, do you think he would have included it as his first means of proof of his whole statement in the gospel? Suppose you or I were average Jews of that period, and we'd picked up the gospel of Matthew or heard it read, and he came to this point. If we'd thought it a matter of controversy, do you think we'd even continue the book? We'd probably laugh and close it up right there.

So, I think we have a very strong indication here that Matthew, at least, felt what he was reading from the Old Testament was proof-positive for his readers. However, in the late first century and early second century, this became a matter of such tremendous controversy that it has lasted

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all the way up until our day. Even many ministers of other denominations today discounting completely that verse in Isaiah as having any Messianic implications. We find right in the first century Jewish writers responding to the tremendous impact of what Christian thinkers and writers were saying. They go back to Isaiah and say, "Wait a minute, Isaiah really didn't use a Hebrew word that means "virgin" in every case. It can mean "virgin," but he elected a word with more of a general meaning. Therefore, it could just mean "a young girl."

Of course, there isn't much news in the fact that a young girl shall conceive and bear a child. Where is the news value on that? Do you think that would get the headline in any of our newspapers today? That would immediately remove any sense of a special nature to the prophecy. Others have argued, however, why would he say "a young girl would conceive" when that was a daily occurrence? When he begins by saying that the Lord Himself will give you a sign, there is no sign about "a young girl conceiving." But there certainly is a sign or a wonder about a virgin conceiving because that is simply unheard of. These are some of the early Jewish and Christian arguments in a debate that began before the first century was through on this point. It's still going on. We can't solve it. There are some scholars who would even say, whether it means virgin or not, it wasn't in the mind of the prophet. He wasn't really predicting something to occur many years later. It was the birth of his own child that was involved.

With all the clouds that have formed around the light which Matthew himself sent at the time of his writing, I think, suffice it to say—and I think this is undeniable—that Matthew was writing at a period of history much closer to the point of the prophecy than the period in which we sit today. He is definitely convinced that early Old Testament prophecy is a prediction of a virgin conceiving. He utilizes that point to make his first impressive point in the opening of his book. So in Verse 23 we find him quoting Isaiah.

(Verse 24). And "Joseph after being raised from his sleep does exactly what he was told."

(Verse 25). And there are no marital relations between Joseph and Mary until this child is born. In the polite Elizabethan English, "he knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS."

What can we tell about Joseph, then? He was kind, patient. He was perceptive and receptive. He was obedient, too, wasn't he? And he listened.

Chapter 2 is entirely original with Matthew. No other gospel has what we read in this Chapter. Without Matthew's record we would be ignorant of the following facts. 21

(Verse 1). "Jesus was born in Bethlehem." Does that ring any bells? Let's assume that we are a first century Jewish audience. We've been handed a copy of Matthew's gospel. It says, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea." What does that mean to us? What does that immediately conjure up in terms of our history? David's birthplace was in Bethlehem. Again, what does that say to those who are expecting a Messiah? Our thoughts are already focussed on David, aren't they, back in Bethlehem? You remember it was in the fields of Bethlehem that Ruth gleaned after Boaz. And Ruth is in the Messianic genealogy, even though she was not a Jewess. She was a Moabitess.

Nevertheless Ruth is in the ancestry of Jesus. I'm sure you realize that without her, the entire Bible would be Ruthless. (I suspect that thought may have occurred to you earlier.)

We are able to date the general time when Jesus was born, the general chronology, because it gives Herod the king as being the reigning monarch. There are a lot of Herods. It is like the name Caesar. It's a dynastic name. This is Herod the Great. Again we have a the problem with chronology. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. What you obviously see is a rather insoluble point. How could Jesus have been born in the days of Herod the Great, if Herod died four years before the generally accepted birth date of Jesus? Very frankly, it couldn't have happened. Not that Jesus wasn't born in

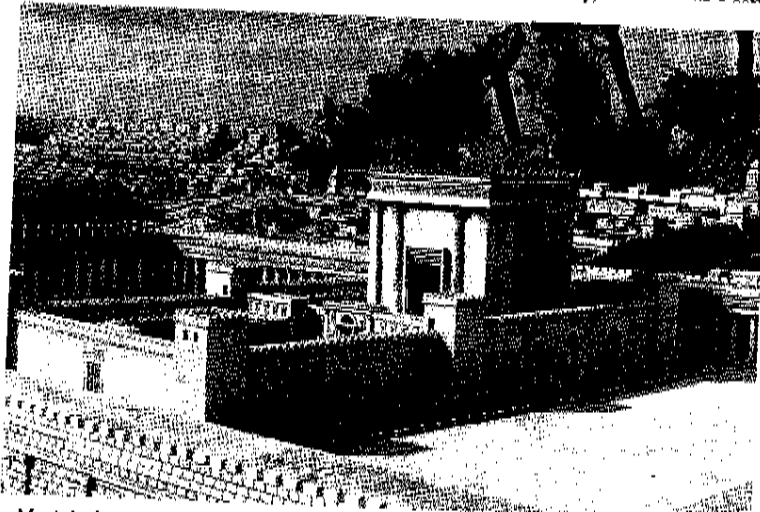
the days of Herod the Great. That is undoubtedly accurate. But whoever figured out our calendar figured it out inaccurately. It has been determined that it is possible that Jesus was born as early as 7 B.C. but certainly no later than 4 B.C. if he were born during the time of Herod the Great.

Herod was a weird king. He had that combination of plus and minus that exists in human nature wherever you run into it. Herod certainly brought the nation of Jews to a peak of prosperity and beauty. He had cities in Palestine that rivaled any in the Roman world.

The capitol of Syria/Palestine was in Caesarea on the Mediterranean. He built that city right from the ground up. It was described by Josephus (historian, 37/38-100 AD). Coming from the sea it was just a magnificent white marble city that caught the sun and sparkled for many miles into the Mediterranean. My wife, Janet, and I have dug at that spot. There's not much on the surface but I know some of you have seen the theater on television because Leonard Bernstein has conducted many orchestras in the theater which has been excavated at Caesarea.

As a matter of fact, one of the stones that was found in the theater had inscribed on it the name *Pilate* and the name *Tiberius Caesar*. It is the only epigraphical evidence of Pilate that has been uncovered in the Holy land, other than coins. It was found right in that theater. Herod built the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, far exceeding Solomon's in its magnificence. It was all white stone and then gilded, covered with gold. So that Josephus said, when the sun came up in the morning and hit that Temple, if one didn't shield his eyes, he would be temporarily blinded because it flashed. From a distance, the Temple of the Jews looked like a snow covered mountain but with sun glinting off the gold. This is what Herod did on the plus side.

On the negative side, as you will learn, he went around killing and slaughtering. He murdered members of his family and was very suspicious that someone was plotting his assassination or attempting to replace him. This we know of Herod's character from other records of the period.



Model of Herod's Temple

Photograph © 2001 by Todd Bolen

(Verse 2). Therefore, when we see that "wise men" suddenly show up, have an audience with Herod and say to him, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" How would a man like Herod receive any news about another king of the Jews? After all, that's what he was. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east." Practically every king of that period employed soothsayers. Chaldeans from the area of Babylon, whose very profession was to predict, were astrologers, stargazers and prognosticators. They would attempt to give their particular employer, king or governor, some insight into the future so he could plan. I'm sure if this kind of profession were recognized today widely, the stock exchange would employ a few of them.

212  
**Every event  
in the New  
Testament is  
a fulfillment  
of what was  
written in  
the Old  
Testament.**

Herod must have been impressed by the three. I'm sorry, I said three, but if you will notice no number is given. So you see I was influenced by the Christmas carol which has no Scriptural authority here. Nor does it say they were kings, just wise men from the east, following what they felt was a guiding, directing star.

(Verse 3). When it says "he was troubled," Herod was basically troubled much of the time. Again, behind that word, you can see what's going on in his thought.

(Verse 4). So, "he calls the chief priests and scribes." Herod is not a Jew. He's really a foreign ruler. One of his parents was Idumean, or from Edom. The other of his parents may have been Arab. Herod really never was received by the Jews very fondly. He had support of the Roman emperors, however. He was a close friend of Caesar Augustus, and Augustus gave him his position. He had been a close friend of Mark Antony before that. You can see how clever a politician he was. Herod apparently was able to shift his allegiance from Mark Antony over to Augustus just in time so Augustus could back him.

He calls the chief priests and scribes and he says, "Now tell me what tradition do we have anywhere that a Messiah is to be born? Is there anything that I can tell about a geographical location, or what?"

Verse 5 is the answer that the Bible scholars of the nation give. "They say to him, in Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet." Now, here's the quote. You know how Matthew does this. This is his characteristic. It's happening because prophecy said it would happen.

That seems to be the key reason why Matthew wrote his gospel. To show his generation, and, of course, future generations like us, that every event in the New Testament is a fulfillment of what was written in the Old Testament, therefore, dovetailing both Testaments into what would eventually become the Bible. But now Matthew is virtually saying this happened because it's a fulfillment of prophecy.

Can the Old Testament stand alone then, as far as Matthew's point of view is concerned? It can't. It is prophecy. But prophecy needs to have the Old Testament comprehended; it needs to be fulfilled. Can the New Testament stand alone? No, not without the fulfillment. Prophecy is the key to the fulfillment. They are inseparable.

***In one way, Jesus' birth is the most spiritually conspicuous in all history.*** This quotation comes from Micah 5, Verse 2. It is the only verse regarded by the first century Jews, at least, as giving any geographical location for a coming Messiah, Bethlehem named specifically.

There is one thing we should just think about as far as the virgin birth is concerned, despite all the intellectual turmoil around all the arguments relating to it. If Jesus, as an individual, has had such a tremendous impact on humanity—uplifting the standards of humanity, healing all the wounds and illnesses that humanity had been unable to solve up to his time—then from the standpoint of what we might call spiritual criticism (since the fountain rises no higher than its source), could Jesus have had any source other than the most pure origin available on earth? Could Jesus have emerged on the human scene in disobedience to the Ten Commandments? Could there have been, in other words, immorality, as some critics have urged, connected with the conception of Jesus on earth?

In one way, Jesus' birth is the most spiritually conspicuous in all history. Isn't that star in the heavens which the wise men thought they were following astrologically really symbolic of prophecy? Isn't it essentially prophecy that led the wise men? Herod wanted to know why they were even there. And he went to the chief priests and scribes and the chief priests and scribes went where for their answer? To prophecy. So, once again, we see the high regard for prophecy which Matthew had, and all the New Testament writers have.

So Herod hears that prophecy indicates Bethlehem is the spot. The wise men needed help. They followed the star as far as they could and then wanted to know where this Messiah-king was to be born. Herod consults prophecy and finds out that it is Bethlehem. It is really prophecy that directs the wise men to Bethlehem.

(Verse 8). Herod, who wants to know exactly where this child is located, says the wise men are "to bring news back to him where this child is located." Do the wise men obey Herod? No, fortunately.

(Verse 11). They go to Bethlehem and "find the young child with Mary his mother, falling down, and worshiping him, presenting gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh." If there is deeper meaning to those gifts of the wise men to an infant, what perhaps, could it symbolize? Or we would be reading something into it that we shouldn't?

***Commentary Two*** **I**n Isaiah 60, I think you will find how the tradition began that these wise men were kings.

(Verse 1). I'm sure you're familiar with its opening verse, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee." What parallel might exist already? Light and the star, perhaps.

(Verse 3). Then we find that "the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." See how kings entered into the tradition here. It so happens that an early Christian writer saw this and suggested that the coming of the wise men was prophesied here in Isaiah.

In Verse 6 it says, "The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD." So, we do have early Christian commentators seeing a connection between these passages and the coming of the wise men.

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-163) is the first commentator we know of to introduce this concept.

Here's what one of our greatest American Bible scholars of recent years has written. Here's what he suggests. He goes beyond what the text would tell us but it's an interesting thing to consider. We're talking about Professor William Foxwell Albright. Professor Albright has made the comment, first, "that myrrh is used at the anointing of a king." The wise men bring myrrh. Does this have any implication of the Messiah? Remember they said (Matthew 2:2), "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

Also, Albright says that "magical charms were written with myrrh ink," and adds "the items brought by the wise men were regarded as the tools of a trade. Offerings of the magi would not be gifts of homage," he suggests, "but a declaration of dissociation from former practices."

Suggesting what? That these wise men made their living off of magical charms. See, "magi" and "magic." Although at that time those weren't related, but magi were wise men and some of the results they were able to come up with later got the term "magic."

Were these wise men bringing what represented the tools of their trade and dissociating themselves from them at the inauguration of a new era represented by the infant child who was to bring the Christ-solution to mankind?

Remember the magi were very concerned about astrology, predicting the future. If they were convinced that here was a child that came as a direct result of the fulfillment of prophecy, then those who were truly wise men would exercise the option to go for this new method and give up the old.

That, again as I indicate, is just an idea presented by Professor Albright. He is a man I have found to be of deep insight and probably the most respected scholar of recent years. He passed away a few years ago and anything you can get authored by Professor Albright is worth studying. For one thing, he had a very deep humility in the presence of the Scripture.

(Verse 12). "The wise men leave and go back to their own country." It does not say which country that is.

Verse 13 gives us the next indication we have of divine direction, which is symbolized by the appearance of an angel, where Joseph, again, gets a communication which tells him to "flee into Egypt, and stay there until Herod is no longer around."

(Verse 14). They do that.

***Egypt represented bondage and Moses had freed the people from bondage in one way.***

(Verse 15). Notice what Matthew does again. He goes to prophecy and sees this trip into Egypt as one that not only was fulfilled in earlier Scriptural times, such as when Joseph went down to Egypt and then Israel was called out of Egypt by Moses' receptivity. But also that Jesus would repeat that very same thing. Egypt represented bondage and Moses had freed the people from bondage in one way. Is this child who is coming out of Egypt going to free mankind from a universal bondage that has restricted his normal activity by the manacle known as sin, disease, and death? Is this the mission of this child? All that, perhaps, implied just by use of the earlier Scripture which is found at Hosea 11, Verse 1.

(Verse 16). Herod's brutal reaction to the wise men failing to return was what has been called "the slaughter of the innocents." "All male children two years old and under are slaughtered by Herod's fiat."

(Verse 17). Again, Matthew reaches back into Scripture and sees a prophetic direction signal, taken from Jeremiah, "spoken by Jeremy the prophet."

Verse 18, "saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children." Rachel was the wife of Jacob, one of Jacob's wives. She died in childbirth, giving birth to Benjamin. Rachel was buried and her traditional tomb is still outside of Bethlehem. When you mention Rachel, it means Bethlehem, in that sense, the location. "Rachel weeping for her children in Bethlehem."

Herod the Great does pass away in 4 B.C.E. You cannot believe the funeral which was given to him. Josephus, who was born just a few years after Jesus' crucifixion, about 37 or 38 C.E., wrote "The Wars of the Jews and The Antiquities of the Jews." It used to be discounted. But more and more what Josephus has said is being proven by archeology to be correct.

Josephus records the funeral procession of Herod the Great. It apparently stretched for twenty-four miles. Roman legions were involved. His private, elite guards were involved. The coffin was solid gold. He was buried at Herodium which is one of the many fortresses he built around the Holy Land. He was really scared somebody was going to get him. He had strategic locations all over the Holy Land fortresses. One of them was at Herodium.

He took a very natural hill, lopped the top off, so that it was shaped conically. You can visit there today and go up on the top. As a matter of fact, in the book "Come See the Place" there is a photograph on the top of Herodium where his palace has been excavated. It has a beautiful view of everywhere. You can see the Dead Sea. You can see Jerusalem. This was for obvious reasons. You could see who was coming, somewhere in that location, according to Josephus, Herod is buried.

You know what has occurred recently over the finding of Philip II's tomb. Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Those of you who have had the "National Geographic" subscriptions or have the "Magazine of Archeology" will have seen the magnificent things that were found in that tomb.

We had the privilege of seeing it in the Museum at Thessalonike in Greece. If they find Herod the Great's tomb you can be sure with his great sense of classical commitment, that his funeral