

2:1 *Wise men*- Probably Jews from Babylon who had seen the similarity between the 'star' and the Messianic star out of Jacob whom Balaam had prophesied (Num. 24:17). Perhaps they are called here *magos*, sorcerers, magic men, because this is the image they presented to Herod, rather than stating they were Jews in search of Judah's Messianic King. Daniel had once been counted amongst the 'wise men' of Babylon (Dan. 2:48).

2:2 The star did not take them directly to Bethlehem. It may have disappeared for a while, so they went to Jerusalem, assuming the king was to be born there. This would indicate they were ignorant of Mic. 5:2, the prophecy of Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, or had at least failed to interpret the prophecy properly. Seeing that stars do not move across the sky over time in a way which can be followed on earth over a period of days or weeks, it's clear that again (see on :1), things are being described as they appeared to an observer on earth. It could be that they first saw the 'star' two years previously (see on 2:16).

*Born King*- Some kings become kings by revolution or war, others are born into a kingly line. They clearly understood that this king was in the kingly line of Judah- a direct descendant of David.

2:3 *Disturbed*- "All Jerusalem" were "troubled", whereas the birth of Messiah was to be a time of joy for Israel and "to all people" (Lk. 2:10). The despised and lowly shepherds rejoiced, but "Jerusalem", perhaps referring to the Jewish ruling class, were "troubled". They rejected the good news of the Gospel because it threatened their little power structure. "All Jerusalem" cannot be taken literally because there were some in the city awaiting the birth of Messiah and joyful at the news of His birth (Lk. 2:38).

2:4 *Of the people*- The priests are repeatedly described in the OT as the priests of *Yahweh*. Now they are merely the priests of the people, just as the OT "the feasts of Yahweh" become 'feasts of the Jews' in the Gospels. They hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own religion, meeting the basic religious needs of humans, rather than accepting His Truth for what it was. Biblically there was to only be one chief priest- but Israel now had several, hence the plural *chief priests*.

*Be born*- Gk. *gennaō*. Messiah was procreated, gendered, beginning within the womb of Mary- a concept incompatible with theories of a literal pre-existence of Christ.

*Where Christ should be born*- Herod understood that the wise men were seeking the Messiah. This indicates that they were Jews who understood Messiah to be the King of Judah in David's line.

2:6 *Are not the least*- Emphasis on the word "not". She was perceived as the least, but she was not in God's sight. This is so typically His style- to use the most despised and lowly in order to do His work.

2:8 *He sent them*- They followed this providential leading, and then the star re-appeared and

confirmed them in the path (:9). Divine guidance is rarely constant, there are times when it appears to leave us and we are left to work and order our path on our own initiative, and then guidance reappears to confirm us.

*Search diligently-* The same Greek word as in 2:7 concerning how Herod enquired diligently about Jesus. The impression is given that Herod wanted the wise men to as it were be his agents; his diligence was to be theirs. It could be that he was simply lazy to himself go to Bethlehem to see the child when it was far from confirmed that the child was in fact there.

2:9 The star gave varying degrees of guidance- it led them to Palestine, and then to Jerusalem in general. Then it disappeared. Now it specifically pinpointed the building in Bethlehem. Divine guidance is rather similar in our lives.

2:10 *They rejoiced-* Because the star had disappeared but had now reappeared.

2:11 *Gold, frankincense and myrrh-* These three gifts are typically what was offered to kings and there are several references to kings being presented with these three things. The extent of the wise men's conviction was therefore very great. This is how much it can cost us to accept that Jesus really is Lord and King of our lives- financial expense, risk, long travel...

Note the absence of any reference to Joseph. His amazing obedience and immediacy of response to God's word wasn't rewarded by any permanent recognition. He played his role without recognition, and this is the lesson to us in our largely unrecognized and humanly unappreciated lives.

2:12 *Warned-* The Greek implies 'to be answered', so it seems they had prayed to God for guidance- and now received it.

*Departed-* As Joseph the next night likewise had an Angelic message, immediately responded and 'departed' to another country. Their obedience was an example for Joseph and Mary to follow. 2:13,14 Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

2:13 *Will seek-* The Hebrew idea of 'seeking' includes the idea of worship- which was exactly Herod's pretext for wanting to locate Jesus.

*To destroy-* If Joseph hadn't been obedient, would God's whole plan in the Lord Jesus have been destroyed? Presumably so, or else the whole impression given of command and obedience would be meaningless, for Joseph would've just been acting out as a puppet.

2:14 *Joseph*- That same hour of the night (assuming dreams happen at night), Joseph obeyed the strange call. The observation has been made that Matthew's record has much to say about Joseph, and Mary is presented as passive; whereas in Luke, far more attention is given to Mary herself. The suggestion has been made by Tom Gaston that Joseph gave eyewitness testimony which was used by Matthew, and Mary gave such testimony to Luke.

*Arose and took*- In exact obedience to 2:13 "arise and take". See on 1:25.

*Departed*- See on 2:12.

Be aware that when it comes to *prophecy*, in the sense of foretelling future events, the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

2:15 *By the prophet*- One of many NT statements of the nature of inspiration of the OT writers. God spoke *dia* the prophets, they were a channel *for His word*, they were not speaking merely for and of themselves.

The emphasis is that *Joseph* fulfilled this prophecy- the grammar states that *he* was in Egypt until he was told to return. Hos. 11:1,2 speaks of how Israel were disobedient to this call: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt... But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me". The implication again is that Joseph had the freewill to obey this call or not- and he was obedient. For the call to leave Egypt had not been answered by Israel and it was no foregone conclusion that it would have to be by Joseph.

2:16 *Was mocked*- The record doesn't give the impression that the wise men did what they did because they were mocking Herod. Rather did they fear him and obeyed God's desire to foil his evil plot. But Herod perceived what they did as mocking him, and the record states things from the perspective of how he perceived things [as with the language of demons]- see on 2:1.

*Was angry*- An example of where the Bible teaches us basic human psychology. He felt mocked by the wise men, although actually they hadn't mocked him, he just perceived it that way- and so he took out his anger against them on the babies of Bethlehem. He transferred

his anger from one to another. And that explains why the woman behind the till was so angry with you for no reason this morning- because she was transferring onto you the anger she felt against her mother / partner / neighbour arising from an incident [probably a misunderstanding and wrong imputation of motives] which happened last night.

*According to the time-* This would suggest that when he asked them when the star had first appeared, they replied 'about two years ago'. It would seem they had been planning their journey, or perhaps even making it, for two years.

2:18 *In Rama-* But the focus of the massacre was Bethlehem. Clearly a reference to one event is being applied to another, and this is how Matthew understood the 'fulfilment' of prophecy.

*Would not be comforted-* The words are used about Rachel's husband Jacob weeping for Joseph, a clear type of the Lord, and refusing to be comforted because he 'was not' [Gen. 37:35- cp. the brothers' explanation about Joseph's supposed death, that "one is not", Gen. 42:13]. This again is rather out of strict context because Rachel died before Joseph's supposed death (Gen. 35:19). The literary argument seems to be that *if* she had then been alive, *then* she would have wept as Jacob wept for her son Joseph. Jacob's weeping [on behalf of Rachel] for the death of Joseph / Jesus was ultimately misplaced because Joseph was safe in Egypt. And so the weeping of 'Rachel' for the Bethlehem babies was done whilst Jesus was in fact safe in Egypt. This could explain the semantic link between the quotation of 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' and then this quotation about Rachel weeping as Jacob wept for Joseph, when in fact he was safe in Egypt. Jer. 31:15,16 reports Rachel weeping for her children who had been lost, and then being told to stop crying because they would come again from the Gentile land where they had been taken. In other words, she was being told that the children she thought were dead and gone were actually alive- in a Gentile land. Which was exactly the case with Jacob's mourning for Joseph which is clearly the basis for the mourning of 'Rachel' here. But then the problem is that the women this verse is applied to in Matthew 2 had lost actual children by real physical death. It's all a very complicated argument, and very forced and unsatisfactory to Western eyes and ears because the context appears to always be so inappropriate and the facts don't quite fit. Only parts of the picture fit. But this is very much the style of Jewish *midrash* [commentary] on the Old Testament. It probably would've been more persuasive, interesting and intriguing to first century Jewish ears than it is to ours in the 21st Century.

2:19 *Was dead... behold... appears-* Not 'appeared'. The inconsistent use of tenses isn't the grammatical mistake of an uneducated, uninspired writer. This device is common in the Gospels. It focuses attention upon the Angel appearing, and encourages us to re-live the moment, as if to say, 'And wow, lo and behold- an Angel appears!'. The Gospels were initially intended for public reading, even performance on street corners, as the majority of people in the first century world were illiterate. So this kind of device is just what we would expect.

2:20 *They are dead-* Herod was not alone in wanting Jesus dead. The "they" presumably

referred to the Jerusalem leadership of 2:3 [see note there].

2:22 The implication could be that Joseph had no other information apart that from Herod had died, but on crossing the border, he learnt that Herod's son was reigning- and Joseph feared to go further. Therefore, so I read the record, God made a concession to Joseph's weakness and told him to go to the backwater of Galilee. He "turned aside" into Galilee suggests in the Greek that he 'withdrew himself', as if pulling back into obscurity. The same Greek word is found in Mt. 12:15: "Jesus withdrew himself from there". He likewise "withdrew into a desert place" (Mt. 14:13), "withdrew [from the crowds]" (Mk. 3:7), "withdrew" when the crowds wanted to crown Him King (Jn. 6:15), judges "withdrew" and talked privately amongst themselves (Acts 26:31). So the picture seems to be that God intended Joseph to raise Jesus somewhere other than Galilee, perhaps in Bethlehem or Jerusalem. But Joseph feared Archelaus, and therefore he was given a 'plan B', to withdraw and fade away into the obscurity of Nazareth. But in God's perfect way, the upbringing in Nazareth could also fulfil His plans and this explains the otherwise rather forced interpretation that Jesus lived in Nazareth so that He would be a 'Nazarene' (see on 2:23). God works oftentimes with us in the same way. He makes concessions to our weaknesses, and whilst the plan Bs, Cs and Ds don't fit as snugly into His prophetic intentions as plan A might have done- they still fit. Because He makes them fit. And that in my opinion explains the slight sense we get in some parts of the record here that events are being 'made to fit' Bible prophecies. And we see it in our own lives. We may take a plan C or D, e.g. a sister may marry an unbeliever, and this doesn't mean that God's purpose with her finishes, but rather that [e.g.] Bible teaching about marriage just doesn't fit as snugly to her experience as it might have done otherwise.

2:23 *Prophets*- It was not specifically spoken by plural prophets that Messiah was to be called "a Nazarene" because He would grow up in despised Nazareth, but that was the implication of the prophecies that Messiah was to be despised of men. See on 2:22 for some thoughts about this apparent 'forcing' of the prophetic fulfilment here.

*A Nazarene* - The town was despised spiritually as incapable of producing a prophet (Jn. 1:46; 7:52), and yet in Hebrew it meant 'town of the shoot', and the shoot was a title of Messiah (Is. 11:1). Again this is typical of God's style- to invest the most spiritually despised with the highest spiritual calling.