

>>>>>> Matthew – Lesson 02 <<<<<<<

1) Ok, let's jump back into chapter 1 where we left off last time.

Matthew 1:18–25 (NASB 2020)

Conception and Birth of Jesus

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, since he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had thought this over, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” ²² Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: ²³ “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND THEY SHALL NAME HIM IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he named Him Jesus.

2) We are all quite familiar with this story however, there are a few things that we should look at to be true to one of our three purposes for the study – namely Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah.

3) First, we find here Matthew's first prophecy. Verse 23 states.

²³ “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND THEY SHALL NAME HIM IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”

4) This is from Isaiah 7:14.

- a) This one of those verses that has had a lot of controversy attached to it through the years.
 - b) The contention is of course with the word in the Hebrew (ALMA) which is translated virgin in the LXX.
 - i) The actual Hebrew word for virgin is betulah and most Hebrew scholars contend that the most correct translation of alma is young woman.
 - c) There are a couple of other considerations that one should really look at before panic sets in.
 - d) **First**, the LXX was a translation that took place in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE.
 - i) Most scholars today place the Isaiah translation in the 2nd century BCE.
 - ii) This of course means that this translation was accomplished 200 plus years before the birth of Jesus and the Christian era began,
 - iii) Most importantly the translation was by Jewish Hebrew scholars of the time.
- (1) Meaning of course that they had no Christian bias toward the virgin or young maiden wording.

- e) **Second**, looking at the definition given – a young woman or maid – what we know is that in the time of Isaiah’s writing and through the first centuries of the CE this assumed though not stated, a status of virginity.
- 5) Now, what we have recorded here in Matthew’s gospel is God’s plan accomplished – I think we can all agree on that.
- 6) That leads me to a comment I found that is absolutely on point to set all this aside.
- 7) It is one of the better explanations of why the virgin birth was so important to and how it is the fulfilment of God’s plan.

Jesus Christ, God’s Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. The infinite, unlimited God took on the limitations of humanity so he could live and die for the salvation of all who believe in him.⁶

- 8) For those of us who love logic and explanations that truly have substance this is about as good as it gets.
- 9) I want to touch on one other aspect of this passage that I think is important.
- 10) Joseph and where he was in all this.
 - a) First, as you may be aware, marriages in that time and the Jewish culture were quite different than today.
 - i) The process began with engagement just like today however, that engagement was a legal binding thing, and it lasted 1 year.
 - ii) For Joseph to “to send her away secretly” which by scripture was his decision, he would be required to legally divorce her.
 - iii) From what I found, divorce was a public thing since it had to be done by official document – a get.
 - (1) The consensus is that what Joseph planned to do was not give a public reason for the divorce and keep it as private as he could.
 - (2) If he made known the real reason, Mary could have been stoned to death under Rabbinic law.
 - (3) Divorce was from what I gather not secret or private.
 - iv) There is one other alternative here. The word translated divorce in many translations can be and is translated send away in other translations.
 - (1) This could mean that he simply was hiding her until she had given birth
 - (2) One way or the other, Joseph’s compassion was considering her and trying not to cause her harm or disgrace if it were possible.
 - v) What the angel commanded him to do was really a big ask for that couple from a community perspective.
 - b) Thankfully, Mary and Joseph both believed God and did as they were asked or commanded, and God’s plan’s fulfillment was underway.

⁶ Bruce B. Barton, Matthew, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 15.

11) Next, Matthew gives us a one sentence statement regarding Jesus' birth.

12) He then focuses on the importance of that birth and how it was seen by some major "players" of the day – the Magi, King Herod, and the Jewish people.

Matthew 2:1–12 (NASB 2020)

The Visit of the Magi

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR FROM YOU WILL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." ⁹ After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over *the place* where the Child was *to be found*. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And after they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And after being warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, *the magi* left for their own country by another way.

13) Now, let's look at some of the facts or not facts that surround this narrative.

How many Magi (wisemen) were there?

- a) We really don't know – more than one is all we can say for sure because the noun is plural.
- b) We may have gotten the "three" from the three gifts but beyond that we really can't say.
- c) According to one source, 12 Magi would be what the Orient customs would assume.

Was Jesus still in the manger or is this later?

- d) There are a couple of things in the passage that really give us the answer.
- e) First, Jesus is referred to as a child rather than an infant.
- f) Second, the Magi enter a house – not the same as a stable.

14) So, how to we get all this to fit together:

- a) Luke tells us that after the 8 days he was given the name Jesus, and it was time for his circumcision.

- b) Then Luke tells us that when the days of purification were completed Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem to the temple (5 miles north of Bethlehem) to present the offering for their firstborn male
 - i) This was a period of not less than 40 days.
 - ii) One would assume that they would not have stayed in the stable for 40 plus days but would have found lodging in Bethlehem
- c) Now, we get into a little bit of a quandary
 - i) Luke tells us that they then returned from completing everything to their hometown of Nazareth.
 - ii) Matthew says that they came to Nazareth after they fled to Egypt.
- d) So, did the Magi go to Bethlehem or to Nazareth? In truth, we are not told. What we are told in verse 9 is:

⁹After hearing the king, they went on their way; and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on ahead of them until it came to a stop over *the place* where the Child was *to be found*.

- e) They followed the star until it came to a stop – Bethlehem or Nazareth?
 - i) I want to make a comment here on the star. Stars as we know them cannot be associated with a specific space or place.
 - (1) If I am in Ft Worth and look at Arcturus when it is directly overhead.
 - (2) If I were then transported immediately to Shreveport, it would still be directly overhead as far as my eye could tell. There would be a slight difference in hour angle but that would not be able to pinpoint anything to the naked eye.
 - (3) My point is that this is probably not a “star” as we think of or know them.
 - (4) It is another God given phenomenon that would be much closer to earth so that it would be discernible when it stopped over one place as opposed to another.
- f) Since they do not return and report to Herod where they found Jesus, he assumes it is Bethlehem and kills all the boys 2 years and younger in that region.
 - i) Region here could have included Nazareth since it is only 50 miles as the crow flies from Bethlehem but probably did not because it was NOT in his province.
 - ii) This has bearing on what we will read next.

15) Having said all that, here are some takeaways from this passage:

- a) First, we have another prophesy fulfilled – verse 6 tells us this clearly.

⁶ ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR FROM YOU WILL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”

- b) Second, the Magi worshiped the child.
 - i) We would have to assume at this point the Herod nor the Magi had any idea of the significance of this child.
 - ii) The magi comment to Herod was “who is born king of the Jews”.

- (1) To my mind this says earthly king but not of just a province but of the entire Jewish nation.
- iii) Again, the idea of the Messiah at this time was one of a mighty warrior who would overthrow Israel's enemies – not of a savior who would die on a cross some thirty plus years on down the road.

16) Moving on...

Matthew 2:13–23 (NASB 2020)

The Escape to Egypt

¹³ Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him.”

¹⁴ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He stayed there until the death of Herod; *this happened* so that what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

Herod Slaughters Babies

¹⁶ Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent *men* and killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. ¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead.” ²¹ So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned *by God* in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, ²³ and came and settled in a city called Nazareth. *This happened* so that what was spoken through the prophets would be fulfilled: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

17) We might note here in relation to what we were discussing in the last passage that the angel came to Joseph as soon as the Magi had left.

18) Now, if we combine that with what Herod does and the fact that he considers all boys 2 years old and younger, we can see the time in from Jesus' birth until all this takes place is not very well defined.

19) However, more importantly, Matthew sites three different prophecies in these verses.

a) First, from Hosea 11:1

¹ When Israel *was* a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.

i) This one is clear and really requires no explanation.

b) However, the second from Jerimiah 31:15 we have

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
and she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more.”

i) **Ramah** is a historical town in ancient Israel, most commonly identified as a city in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, located near Jerusalem and close to Bethlehem^{3 7 10}.

(1) The name "Ramah" literally means "height" or "high place," and several places in the Bible bear this name,

(2) But the Ramah referenced in the phrase "A voice was heard in Ramah" is generally understood to be the one near Bethlehem, not far from Rachel's tomb.

3. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/2-18.htm>

7. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/31-15.htm>

10. <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/117239/a-voice-is-heard-in-ramah>

ii) **Rachel** refers to the biblical matriarch, the beloved wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin¹²⁵⁶⁸.

(1) Rachel is a central figure in the Book of Genesis, known for her beauty, her long struggle with infertility, and her deep devotion to her family.

(2) She died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and was buried near Bethlehem.

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel>

2. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rachel-bible>

5. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/rachel/>

6. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/rachel>

8. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/rachel/>

c) The third prophesy is not found directly in the Old Testament.

i) This is likely a thematic fulfillment of Him being despised or of low reputation as Nazareth was considered insignificant and looked down upon.

ii) We see this clearly in John 1:46

John 1:45–46 (NASB 2020)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and the prophets *also wrote*: Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good be from Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

20) Finally in this passage, we deal with the Nazareth vs. Bethlehem question once more.

- a) Now, if Joseph and Mary were headed back to Bethlehem then this would fit fine since Nazareth and Bethlehem were in different provinces, even though they were only 50 miles apart.
 - b) This is also a reason we might conclude that Mary and Joseph stayed in Bethlehem after Jesus' birth.
 - i) If they fled from Bethlehem to Egypt and returned there, they would still be in the province of Judea being reigned over by Archelaus Herod's son.
 - c) This still fits even with the Luke narrative if we consider what Luke is saying that their return to Nazareth was after staying in Egypt which of course, he does not mention.
- 21) I know this is a lot but, again, I think the most important thing for us here in this study of these passages is the fulfilled prophesies.