

Lessons from the Magi

Matthew 2:1-8: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ² 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. ³ When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. ⁵ And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, ⁶ 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 my people Israel. ⁷ Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁸ 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.”*

I. Verse 1—“Jesus was born in Bethlehem”

A. In the second chapter, we see the actual birth of the Lord Jesus.

1 **Matthew 2:1** says, “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (**בֵּית לֶחֶם**, **house of bread**) of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men (**magi**) from the east to Jerusalem.”

B. This new section is the actual entrance of the Lord Jesus on the earth. Now, certain important characters will appear on the scene of the stage of chapter 2. When “action” is called, we will start to see certain individuals and scenes that show His appearance on earth.

C. The Lord Jesus is immediately in a conflict where His life is threatened because He is rejected and despised by the Jewish leaders.

1 They know the Scriptures and can tell others where the Messiah is to be born, but, they have no interest in finding the Messiah.

2 They are indifferent to their Messiah’s coming.

a. The Lord Jesus will be persecuted by part of the Gentile world.

b. The Lord Jesus will be worshipped by another part of the Gentile world.

c. There will be an effort to kill the Lord Jesus as a small child, but God will protect Jesus by having His parents bring Him to Egypt.

d. The Lord Jesus will be concealed during His youth in a far-away place of Galilee.

D. Right away, we are told in verse 1 that the Lord Jesus is born in **Bethlehem of Judea**.

1 As a matter of fact, there were two Bethlehems.

a. There was this Bethlehem in the land of Judea as part of the land given by Joshua to the tribe of Judah.

b. However, the other Bethlehem was part of the land given by Joshua to the tribe of Zebulun.

c. Bethlehem of Judea was so unimportant that it was not even mentioned by Joshua.

2 The other Bethlehem of the tribe of Zebulun was mentioned by Joshua in **Joshua 19:15**.

3 Bethlehem of Judea was a city in the tribe of Judah that was 6 miles from Jerusalem (about a 2 hour walk today).

a. Bethlehem is an Arab town and not a very nice place. Today, it is under heavy Israeli protection because it is a dangerous place.

- 4 We know Bethlehem from the Book of Ruth as the place where Naomi was from. This would also be where Ruth would follow Naomi and would eventually marry Boaz. Eventually, she gave birth to the grandfather of King David.
 - a Bethlehem became the place of David's birth, and since both Mary and Joseph were from David's lineage, Herod's decree to tax and count every Jewish person meant they had to go back to Bethlehem—the land of their descendants. That is why the Lord was born in Bethlehem.
- E. Bethlehem is an interesting place because of two main points.
- 1 The first was the **striking insignificance** of Bethlehem at that time.
 - 2 The second was the **striking significance** of what Bethlehem would become in the future.
 - 3 It was Bethlehem's **Great Current Insignificance** at that time and its **Great Future Significance**.
 - 4 It was precisely **those two aspects** of the city of Bethlehem that was captured by the prophet Micah when He said in **Micah 5:2**.
 - a **Micah 5:2** says, *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though **thou be little** among the thousands of Judah, yet **out of thee** shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."*
 - b This Scripture in **Micah 5:2** is what is quoted in verse 6 of **Matthew 2**. Notice how Micah seems to point the finger at Bethlehem when he said, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah."
 - a) We can imagine Bethlehem saying, "Who? Me? I am so insignificant."
 - b) We can see Micah saying, "Yes, you, Bethlehem. You are the chosen to be significant."
 - c Not only was Bethlehem so insignificant as a city that Bethlehem is not even mentioned by Joshua as one of the cities of Judah, but when Nehemiah lists the cities in Israel, he does not mention Bethlehem in **Nehemiah 11**.
- F. The city of Bethlehem was like Saul when he was humble before Saul became proud.
- 1 **1 Samuel 10:21-22** says, *"²¹ When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. ²² Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff."*
 - a Saul felt so insignificant that when Samuel looked for him; he just hid himself.
 - b That was a real moment of "You, Saul," and we can imagine Saul saying, "Who? Me? I am so insignificant."
 - c Samuel was saying, "Yes, you Saul. You will be so significant."
 - 2 Saul was like the city of Bethlehem in that at first, he was so insignificant; in the future, Saul became significant.
 - 3 Bethlehem was like David when they were looking for that special son of Jesse who would be king. Jesse was presenting all his important sons, and everyone was passing over David because he was that one son that was so insignificant in **1 Samuel 16:8-12**.
 - a **1 Samuel 16:8-12** says, *"⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the*

LORD chosen this. ¹⁰ Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. ¹¹ And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. ¹² And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.”

4 David was like the city of Bethlehem—at first, so insignificant, but later, he was more significant.

G. This was the great point about Bethlehem that was captured by the prophet Micah in **Micah 5:2**.

1 The verse says, “*But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*”

H. Bethlehem was **at the first so insignificant**, but **later in the future became significant** because it would be the birthplace of the King.

I. This is exactly what we are going to see about Jesus. He like the city of Bethlehem will at the first be so insignificant, but later, He will become so significant.

1 This is what we see of Him today. He seems so insignificant—especially in the land of Israel among the Jewish people. But, that will change in the future when He will become significant.

a. **Zechariah 12:10** says, “*They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*”

J. When the Jewish people see that Jesus has saved them from their enemies and they cry out to Jesus that He is “The Lord is my God,” then Jesus will have the supreme significance for the Jewish people.

II. Verse 1—“*In the days of Herod the king*”

A. He was called Herod the Great, and he was the son of Antipater who appointed by Caesar to be the ruler over this area for about 40 years before the Lord was born.

III. Verse 1—“*There came wise men*”

A. Now, we see that a very unusual group comes onto the stage, and they are called wise men from the East. The actual word used to describe these men is “Magi.”

B. The Magi were a group among the Persians and Medes who were close to the king. They cultivated astrology and medicine.

C. It is amazing to see them coming from the East to look for God because their culture did not promote the knowledge of the true God. The best verses to describe them are **Ephesians 2:12-13**.

1 The verses say, “¹² *That at that time ye were **without Christ**, being **aliens from the commonwealth of Israel**, and **strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope, and without God in the world:* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were **far off** are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*”

D. These Magi were not like the norm. These Magi were not satisfied in their lost condition without God. They were reaching out to God when they left their home in search of the King of the Jews.

E. No one floats or drifts to God. Anyone who wants to find God can find Him when they reach out beyond their comfort zone.

IV. Verse 1—*"Wise men from the east"*

- A. These Magi are identified in verse 2 simply as coming from the East. The Arabs were called people from the East.
- B. We love the book of Job as describing a man who God showed off as a man who loved God. Job suffered greatly and kept trusting God. There is no indication that Job was a Jewish person, but we are told who Job is in the third verse of the Book of Job.
 - 1 **Job 1:3** writes, *"His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that **this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.**"*
 - 2 Job was the greatest of all the men of the East, and he was an Arab.
- C. There are others who are described as from the East. When the Israelites planted their crops, we are told that the Amalekites and the Midianites invaded the land and took the harvest. They came with a group of people called the children of the east.
 - 1 **Judges 6:3** says, *"And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and **the children of the east**, even they came up against them;"*
- D. These Magi were coming with a burning question in verse 2 of *"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"*
- E. When we read that we say, "What? Arabs are looking for the newborn King of the Jews? How did they know anything about the King of the Jews?"
- F. They knew about the King of the Jews because it all goes back to during the Babylonian Captivity—a period when the children of Israel were taken captives to the east.
- G. During that time, the King of the people of the East had a very strange dream of an image. None of the Magi could interpret the dream even though it was their job. As a result, the furious king ordered for all the Magi to be killed.
- H. It just so happened that a Jewish captive named Daniel was made a part of the Magi, but Daniel interpreted the King's dream with God's help. For that, Daniel was made president of the Magi of the people of the East.
 - 1 **Daniel 2:48** says, *"Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon."*
- I. Daniel set himself to give these Magi the knowledge of God and especially the hope of the coming King of the Jews.
- J. Before Daniel's promotion, there was a spiritual famine that the people of the East had been struggling with.
 - 1 Daniel looked around and saw idols and hundreds of books that talked about anything except God.
 - 2 Daniel saw that the Magi were religious, but they did not know God. So, Daniel decided to change all that.
- K. Daniel worked to teach the Magi the words of God. Can't you just see Daniel starting with Genesis 1 and teaching the Magi about how God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it in just 6 literal days?
 - 1 Can't you see Daniel teaching those Magi how that Creation happened just a few thousand years ago?
 - 2 Can't you see Daniel teaching those Magi how their first parents, Adam and Eve sinned against God and set the course for their children for being cast into hell in judgment?

- 3 Can't you just see Daniel then teaching those Magi that God said, "No! I will send the Redeemer who will rescue man from his sins and turn his course from hell to Heaven?"
 - 4 Can't you just see Daniel teaching them their this Redeemer was going to be the King of the Jews that would be born as the **Genesis 3:15** seed of the woman?
 - 5 Can't you just see those Magi eating up Daniel's teaching like they were starving souls who had just been given food?
- L. Daniel was building into those Magi that great expectation for the coming King of the Jews who would be their Redeemer. Daniel was making those Magi to look for and search for that coming King of the Jews who would be their Redeemer.
- 1 Daniel was making them realize that their only hope from the destruction of their souls was this coming King of the Jews.
- M. This all happened hundreds of years earlier, and Daniel is now gone. These Magi taught their children what Daniel taught them, and their children taught their children what Daniel taught hundreds of years earlier.
- 1 These Magi in verse 1 who came from the East were the great, great, great spiritual grandchildren of the souls Daniel won to the Lord. These are Daniel's fruit; Daniel won spiritual souls from the children of the East.
 - 2 Daniel could look at these Magi in verse 1 and say, "Those Magi are my spiritual grandchildren."
- N. But, all this leads us to understand what Daniel was doing in Babylon when he was taken captive, It can be pretty depressing to be conquered and carried away slave to a foreign country. It is clear that Daniel did not sit in Babylon and say, "I don't know why I am here around all these heathen people. I'm just going to let the heathen Babylonians be cast into hell where they belong, and I will go to my own people."
- 1 That was not Daniel. Daniel never saw his role in life to be insulated and isolated. Daniel saw those Babylonians on their way to hell. Daniel knew that God so loved the people of the East, and Daniel wanted them to know God.
 - 2 Daniel was just like Joseph who also did not cry with the "Woe is me" about why he was in Egypt instead of being back in Canaan with his family. Joseph did more than just make sure the Egyptians did not perish for lack of food. Joseph made sure the Egyptians did not perish for eternity for lack of knowing God.
 - 3 Daniel was an **expectation** builder who built into the Magi people around him **the expectation** of the coming Messiah King of the Jews who would save them from their sins.
- O. These Magi are typically characterized as three kings because that is what the song says, "We three kings of orient are."
- 1 There must have been more than one, and they must have been wealthy to have made this journey with all these gifts. they truly made a sensation in the city of Jerusalem from their question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?"
- V. Verse 1—*"From the east to Jerusalem"*
- A. When the star led them to Bethlehem, they came to Jerusalem. We can see them traveling into the country of the Jewish people, and as they were being led to Bethlehem, they were in the capital of the Jewish people. This was the city of the King of the Jews.
- 1 They might have thought, "Great. Here is the city of the King of the Jew. There must be a huge line to see the newborn King of the Jews. I hope we can get in to see Him also."
- B. That is how the Magi thought, but it was not reality. There was a sad question that filled their hearts as they wondered, "If we as people of the East so far from the Jewish people

have come to worship the King of the Jews, why don't the Jewish people worship the King of the Jews?"

- 1 They would also quickly realize that the King of the Jews was not to be found in Jerusalem.
- C. Those Magi looked at themselves and thought, "We are not Jewish, yet with all our desire we come to the King of the Jews."
 - 1 Those Magi represented all the nations or "Goyim" of the world. That is the wonderful title of the Lord Jesus in **Haggai 2:7**.
 - a. **Haggai 2:7** says, "*And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.*"
 - 2 The Lord Jesus is called, "The desire of all nations."
- D. We can imagine the Magi ask themselves all of the following questions:
 - 1 "Why is the King of the Jews not important to the Jews?"
 - 2 "Why is the King of the Jews not famous among the Jews?"
 - 3 "Why does the King of the Jews have no reputation among the Jews?"
- E. These verses are the answers to their questions:
 - 1 **Philippians 2:7**—"*But made himself of **no reputation**, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*"
 - 2 **John 1:10**—"*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and **the world knew him not.***"
 - 3 **John 1:11**—"*He came unto his own, and **his own received him not.***"
 - 4 The world **knew Him not**, and the Jews knew Him, but **received Him not**.
 - 5 That was how the world and how the Jews were described.
- F. There is a relationship between those two groups of the Jews who received Him not and the world who knew Him not.
 - 1 The world knew Him not because the Jews received Him not. If the Jews had received Him, they would have done the job of making the world know Him.
 - 2 You can see this in the Magi who represent the world.
 - a. There was one Jew who did receive Him as Jehovah Jesus, and the name of that Jew was Daniel.
 - b. Because of that one Jew, the world around him—specifically the Magi—knew God and came to worship Him as the King of the Jews.
- G. That shows us the strategy of Satan.
 - 1 There is no people that are a higher priority for Satan to keep in unbelief than the Jewish people.
 - a. Satan knows that God has designed for His Jewish people to bring the Gospel to the world; if Satan can keep the Jewish people from receiving the Lord Jesus, then Satan can keep the world from knowing God.

VI. Verse 2—"*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*"

- A. Now the Magi are going all around Jerusalem with their question in verse 2.
 - 1 **Matthew 2:2** says, "*Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east [or, when first it rose], and are come to worship him.*"
- B. We can imagine the Magi asking the Jewish people where to find the new born King of the Jews. It is possible that the people said, "Ask the rabbis. They will know."
- C. That question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" shows such contrasts
 - 1 There is the contrast of the King of the Jews being so well known and yet so concealed. To those seeking Gentiles, the King of the Jews was so well known.
 - a. To the Jewish leaders, the King of the Jews was so concealed.

- D. We will find that their question (“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”) will cause Herod to massacre children.
- 1 That question of “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” shows the contrast of hate and fear and love and worship.
 - a. To Herod, the King of the Jews was hated and feared, but to the Magi, the King of the Jews was loved and worshipped.
 - b. He was despised and yet honored.
 - 2 The wise men came to Christ, but before they came, Christ came to them when He sent the star to guide them.
- E. That question (“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”) shows the contrast between having so little and gaining so much more and having so much and losing so much more.
- 1 The Magi had so little. They only had a star, but they gained so much more when they came to Christ. The Magi had so little and gained so much more.
 - 2 On the other hand, the scribes had so much. They had the Scriptures, but, they did not have the star. Sadly, they lost Christ.
 - 3 The Magi with the star and not the Scriptures still found the heart of the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 4 Whereas, the scribes with the Scriptures and without the star lose the heart of the Scriptures.
- F. The Magi had the star because they believed God, and you can see their belief in their question, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”
- G. The Magi did not ask the question, “Was the King of the Jews born?”
- 1 They are completely sure that the King of the Jews is born. They are simply asking where He is born. That is belief. That is faith.
 - 2 God revealed to them that the King of the Jews was born, and they did not doubt Him.
- H. To the Jewish people, it was obvious that these Magi were going to find the King of the Jews.
- 1 It always amazes me that as the Magi became famous in Jerusalem as the ones who were determined to find the King of the Jews. We don’t read of any Jews saying, “I am going with those Magi because I want to find the King of the Jews.”
 - a. The Jews let the Magi go find the King of the Jews, and later there would be the sad cry in **John 19:15** which says, “*But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.*”
- I. In some churches that are not focused on the Lord Jesus, you feel like the Magi asking the question, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”
- J. Verse 2 says, “*We have seen his star in the east.*”
- 1 That is so precious because they are talking about a star that guided them.
 - 2 Imagine all those miles through desert being guided by a star and never worrying that the star might leave them abandoned in the desert.

VII. Verse 2—“*We have seen his star*”

- A. We don’t know what they might have been. It could have been an alignment of planets like Jupiter.
- B. The star guided them. This is a reminder of how precious to see how God takes care of His people. The Bible mentions all of the various ways that He did so:
- 1 By a star that guides
 - 2 By a raven that brings food
 - 3 By a cloud that gives shade

- 4 By a pillar of fire that gives warmth
- C. The star is like the Scriptures that lead to Christ.
 - 1 The star is also like the conscience that leads to Christ.
- D. The Magi knew the prophecy from Balaam that a star would come out of Jacob. For them, the star was only the symbol of the true star which was the Lord Jesus Himself.
 - 1 **Numbers 24:17** says, *“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.”*
 - 2 Those are important words “in the east” because they emphasize to us that the star was seen in the east. God goes to great lengths—like all the way to the East to bring His saving Gospel to the lost.
 - 3 It was to their believing hearts that the star guided them.
 - 4 They had so many stumbling blocks in their way as they came to the Lord Jesus.
 - a. First, they found the new-born King of the Jews was not at Jerusalem. Second, they found on the throne of Judah a worldly-minded old tyrant. Third, they found the representatives of the sanctuary of Judah, and the holy city itself, indifferent and unbelieving. Fourth, they were directed to the poor village of Bethlehem. Fifth, in Bethlehem itself they were directed to a poor cottage. Last, they found, not a child of two years of age, but an infant recently born, surrounded by what betokened extreme poverty, under the care of a homeless couple.
 - b. All these stumbling-blocks had to be removed by the testimony of the Scriptures which they had heard, by the witness of the Spirit in their hearts, by the sublime spectacle of Mary and the holy child, and by the communications of the believing shepherds. Thus, the heathen and carnal elements in their astrological impressions effaced, and only what was true remained. The star in the sky had guided them to the Sun of the spiritual firmament.
- E. For these Magi, the Messiah seemed so remote, so hidden, and so disowned.
 - 1 So remote in a unknown village of Bethlehem
 - 2 So hidden in an animal stable
 - 3 So disowned by indifference by His own Jewish people

VIII. Verse 3—“Are come to worship Him”

- A. They came to adore Him and to bow before Him.
- B. How strange to see here the Gentile Magi coming to worship the Lord Jesus!
- C. This is prophetic as it shows the interest of the Gentile world in the Lord Jesus.
 - 1 They are the continuation of the Gentile world coming to the God of Israel. As they fall in line with Eleazar and Rachab and Ruth and Naaman and Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, they will be followed by believing centurions, a Syrophoenician woman, and eventually the majority of converts from Paul’s ministry.
 - 2 Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles really took off when he had a dream of a Gentile Macedonian man saying to Paul in **Acts 16:9**.
 - a. The verse says, *“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”*
- D. Most of the Gentiles were given up to idolatry, but there was a certain part of Gentiles symbolized by these Magi who were not satisfied with their idolatry and they longed after the Savior.

- E. These coming Gentile Magi were in themselves the fulfillment of the prophecies of **Psalm 72:10** and **Isaiah 60:3**.
- 1 **Psalm 72:10** says, *“The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.”*
 - 2 **Isaiah 60:3** says, *“And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”*
- F. They had a really long way to come, and we have just a step to come to church.
- 1 They might have said, “What is the rush? Since He is the King of the Jews and the King of Kings, we can just wait until we learn of Him here. Why should we go follow a star into the desert to lead us who knows where?”
 - 2 But, they did not say that. Instead, they said, “Let’s go. Vamanos. Rapido.”
 - a. **Hosea 6:3** says, *“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD.”*
 - 3 The way to find God is to look hard for God.
 - a. **Jeremiah 29:13** says, *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”*