

Matthew 2:1-12 – King of the Jews

Matthew established that Jesus had the right genealogy to be the Christ, the Messiah. The meaning of the name “Jesus” reminds us of what the angel said to Joseph. Jesus will save his people from their sins. He is also Immanuel. Jesus is God with us. After one chapter, we see that Jesus is in the royal line of David but he is no ordinary king. David may have saved Israel from the oppression of the Philistines, but Jesus would save people from their sins. That prompts a question. Who has the power to save people from sin? That sounds like a Sunday School question. God has the power to forgive sin, cover sin, and free us from sin. The original readers must have been alerted that Jesus might not be what their idea of the Messiah was supposed to be. He was so much more!

Read Matthew 2:1-6.

In verse 1, where was Jesus born? Many children have been taught this each year at Christmas, through the Bible’s account of Jesus’ birth and through Christmas carols. ESV, NASB, and NIV have “after Jesus was born”. KJV has “when Jesus was born”. When was Jesus born? You may be tempted to say that he was born in 1 AD, but most scholars place the year of his birth between 6 and 4 BC. When did Herod (the great) die? How long after Jesus was born, did the events of verses 2:1-12 take place? Who was Herod the King? “In the days of Herod” gives an approximate idea of when Jesus was born. (2:1)

In verse 1, what happened after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of king Herod? Who were the wise men? ESV and KJV have “wise men”. NASB and NIV have “magi”. The only other place in the NT where this word occurs is in Acts 13:6-8. Bar-Jesus was called a false prophet and a magician. In the Greek translation of the OT of Daniel 2:2 and 2:10, the “magicians” were called as part of the team to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream. BDAG says that the word was Persian, and later Babylonian, meaning a “wise man and priest, who was expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams and various other occult arts”. TDNT says that these wise men may have been astrologers from Babylon where they learned of the Messiah from the exiled Jews. How many “wise men” were there? To assume that their number was the same as the number of gifts is just an assumption. According to D. A. Carson, the idea that they were kings may come from OT passages like Psalm 68:29, 31; 72:10–11; Isaiah 49:7; 60:1–6. Where were the wise men from? (2:1)

In verse 2, why did the wise men come to Jerusalem? D. A. Carson notes that “worship” can also mean “pay homage”. R. T. France notes that the phrase “king of the Jews” does not appear again in Matthew until chapter 27, the account of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. What did the wise men see that triggered their trip to Jerusalem? There are many theories on what the wise men saw. We don’t have time to go into all the theories. Some see an allusion to Numbers 24:17. ESV and NIV have “star when it rose”. KJV and NASB have “star in the east”. The word “east” here is the same as in verse 1 where it said that the wise men were “from the east”. BDAG says the word can refer to “rising” or “east”. The choice of “rose” may come from the desire to avoid wise men from the east seeing a star in the east and then coming to Jerusalem. (2:2)

In verse 3, why was king Herod troubled? Why was all Jerusalem troubled? Verse 4 reminds me of Nebuchadnezzar assembling all the wise men to interpret his dreams. Who did Herod assemble? What did Herod want to know? (2:3-4)

In verse 5, the priests and scribes knew the answer. Where did they say the Christ was to be born? What was the basis for their answer? What verses are referenced in verse 6? See Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2. John 7:42 reveals that it was generally known that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. (2:5-6)

Read Matthew 2:7-12.

Why did Herod secretly pull the wise men aside? What did Herod tell the wise men to do? Did Herod have any authority over them? What big lie did Herod tell? In verse 9, what happened when the wise men started toward Bethlehem? Consistent with verse 2, ESV and NIV have “when it rose”. KJV and NASB have “in the east”. (2:7-9)

In verse 10, why did the wise men have great joy? Verses 9-10 could give the impression that when they saw the star of the King of the Jews, they automatically went to Jerusalem where they assumed the child would be. On their 5-6 mile trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star appears to have guided them to where Jesus was. Some believe that the star did not lead the wise men to Bethlehem but it just appeared that way to them. Those who do not believe in God’s miraculous works are in this camp. What words from the text indicate that the star did guide them to Jesus? (2:10)

In verse 10 and 11, Jesus was in a house. Why is this not a contradiction to Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2:1-20? What did the wise men see and do when they entered Jesus’ house? What was the significance of their gifts? It is nice to think that the wise men worshiped Jesus because they knew that he was “God with us” or the Son of God. As we noted in verse 2, “worship” can also mean “pay homage”. At a minimum, they did recognize him as the King of the Jews. The queen of Sheba came to king Solomon and offered him praise and gifts. See 1 Kings 10:1-13. (2:11)

In verse 12, why didn’t the wise men return to Herod as he had requested? If the wise men were Gentiles from outside Judea, Samaria and Galilee, what is the significance of their visit to Jesus to offer gifts? How would the average person on the streets of Jerusalem view astrologers from a foreign country? (2:12)