

WALKING WITH THE WISE MEN

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Do you enjoy jigsaw puzzles? Some people can go for hours looking for pieces, searching for the proper fit.

When we come to the Scripture, it sometimes can become overwhelming—similar to putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Where do the pieces fit?

Matthew would be a master at making jigsaw pieces fit together. In fact, when we read his Gospel, that's precisely what he does. In chapter two, Matthew traces the childhood of Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth. He takes the Old Testament promises about the Messiah and shows us how they fit together in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem.

Each person in chapter two is a part of the Christmas fabric, making a complete puzzle in fitting the pieces of God's Messiah together.

As we study chapter two, we will follow the outline below:

The Wise Men Who Sought the Truth (vv. 1-6)

The Wicked Man Who Shunned the Truth (vv. 7-18)

The Worshipped Man Who was the Truth (vv. 19-23)

I. The Wise Men Who Sought The Truth (vv. 1-6)

Chapter two opens with men on a quest. Matthew identifies “Wise men from the east” (v. 1). About these men we know little. We get the impression their chief motivation for journeying eastward was the star (v. 2). Probably, they were professional astrologers but not like the kind we see today—hucksters attempting to get your money to tell your future.

Instead, these men were philosophers, doctors and scientists of the time. We know they were prominent researchers for they knew of the Jewish Messiah (v. 2). **The bottom line is, they came seeking.** Smart men always are men who seek. Wise men search out the truth.

“Where is He?” was the first question from their lips. In fact, that is the first question in the New Testament—“Where is He?” When it comes down to it, that's the very first question in life: “Where is He?” Smart people will always ask, as did the wise men of old, “Where is He?”

Have you considered that question? If not, you are avoiding the most important question you'll ever consider: “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”

The star put them on a trail toward Jerusalem. “We have seen his star,” they said. Though strange to us, that's the means by which God chose to speak to them.

Note also, God spoke to them in a language they understood. He continues to do so today.

God meets you where you are. You may not understand God's language. But fret not; *God understands yours!*

In the midst of their motivation by a star, they experienced aggravation from a scoundrel. Herod—perhaps the most suspicious, ruthless King the ancients knew at that time.

Three words could summarize this man: clever, cruel and crafty. Herod even murdered his own wife and son. We'll look once again at him later.

Additionally, the wise men were educated by Scripture. They intuitively knew from their study where the long-awaited Messiah would be born.

Of course, so did all the priests Herod assembled (v. 4). “Bethlehem of Judea,” they uttered in one accord. The Prophet Micah had foretold it (vv. 5-6; Micah 5:2).

The difference between the Wise Men and the priests was simple. The Wise Men traveled a long, dangerous journey over the hot desert plain,

*Wise men
search out
the truth.*



Reflection Connection

Do you think family heritage is important? In what ways? Poll the study group and explore how many have studied their family trees. Have them share the results.

seeking out the Messiah. The priests wouldn't travel five short miles to explore the prophecy's fulfillment.

Basically, they had the right Scripture. But it was only in their head not their heart.

The Apostle Paul would make clear that true Christian faith is embedded in the heart (Romans 10:9).

Know that a person can be ever so close to the truth but lost just the same. Genuine faith is genuinely in the heart.

II. The Wicked Man Who Shunned the Truth (vv. 7-18)

Herod was in power for forty years and was known as "Herod the Great". He was great in keeping order. He was a great builder who built the temple in Jerusalem, generously pouring tremendous amounts of capital to build the Temple.

He was a great manager, feeding the Jewish people in a time of great famine.

But as we noted earlier, Herod was a scoundrel. He systematically killed anyone who might possibly pose a threat to his power and position. He even murdered his wife, his own mother and three of his sons. Caesar Augustus once said that it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son.

Thinking forward for a moment, when Herod was old and realized death was imminent, he had a group of Jerusalem citizens arrested and imprisoned.

Upon his death, they were to be executed to guarantee tears on the day of his death.

When Herod heard from the Wise Men from the East of the king born who was being called King of the Jews, his first impulse was to have the baby put to death. Later, when he was unable to find Him, he ordered that all male babies under the age of two be slain.

The pagan Magi had worship on their hearts. The Jewish Herod had murder on his. What a strange situation that was.

If the birth of Jesus was a political threat to Herod, it was a religious threat to the Jewish leaders.

Note, on the one hand, we see faith in the non-Jewish Magi and their quest for the faith revealed through the Jewish people.

On the other hand we see the non-faith of the Jewish people. Such a topsy-turvy world into which the Son of God was born. Is it any different today?

Those who were His own people refused to receive Him as the Messiah, while Gentiles, represented by the Magi, would be the ones to turn to Him and become the new Israel.

The pagan Magi had worship on their hearts.

Reflection Connection

What do you think was going through the Wise Men's mind as they approached the manger where Jesus lay? Do you think they had a grasp of precisely what the Old Testament said about the Jewish Messiah? Why or why not?



Reflection Connection

Herod was a scoundrel who put to death his own family members. How should Christians respond to immoral behavior in governmental officials?

Reflection Connection

Herod had all the children of Bethlehem who were under two years of age killed. Why two years? Do you think this makes the story of the Wise Men less about Christmas? Why or why not?

The Apostle John writes: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not”. The Herods of this world shunned Him!

“But,” John continues, “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:11-12).

The Herods may have shunned Him but the Magi embraced Him!

The magi were wise in searching for Jesus as the Messiah and wiser still to worship Him. Their gifts stand appropriate: “they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.” (v. 11).

Herod was wicked and fully revealed his lostness by shunning Jesus and doing everything he could to make sure Jesus Christ was not to be, under any circumstances, King of the Jews.

How miserably he failed!

III. The Worshipped Man Who is the Truth (vv.19-23)

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” That was the question that burned in the hearts of the magi. They had one focus, one purpose in mind: to find the Messiah.

All of us have heard the hymn “We Three Kings”. The idea that there were three came from the number of gifts they brought (v. 11). Legend has it that their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. But, it is only legend. Scripture doesn’t give the number.

Whatever their names and no matter the number, they surely had it right: **Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, Whom they were seeking, was the promised Messiah and One worthy to be worshipped.**

As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.

Well after the Wise Men head home to tell their friends they’d found Jesus, Whom they were seeking, Joseph got another visit from an angel.

Listen to the angel’s words in Joseph’s dream: “the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt...” (v. 13).

Now, what would Egypt have to do with Christmas and whether Jesus, the baby worshipped, is the Truth?

First, Egypt reveals His preservation. There God would miraculously take care of Jesus who became a “fugitive” from the injustice of Herod. The life Jesus possessed was a life lived according to the plan of God. Christmas in Egypt means our Lord’s preservation.



Reflection Connection

Joseph received many dreams upon which he depended to understand what God's will was. Are dreams necessary now for God to speak to us? Why or why not? Discuss how the Bible has taken the place of dreams for God to guide us.

Wrap Up

How like the Wise Men we all need to be—seeking for truth, seeking for the Christ. Nothing could stand in their way to finding Him. Also, when they did find Him, they did the only thing that can be done when we see Jesus for Who He really is: they worshipped Him.

But how unlike Herod we ought to be. He never wanted to know who Jesus was though he desperately wanted to know where Jesus was. But the only plans on his mind were to wickedly slaughter Him, not worshipfully surrender to Him.

When God saves you, He brings you out of spiritual Egypt. Would you give your life to Him today? Won't you forfeit ever spending another Christmas without Jesus as Lord and Savior?

Secondly, Christmas in Egypt reveals our Lord's identification. Since Egypt is so often in Scripture a picture of bondage and sin, Jesus in Egypt means He came down and He lived in this world of sin but God always preserved Him in it. He never once gave in to temptation though being tempted in every way just like us (compare Hebrews 2:15).

That's what Christmas is all about. **He identified himself with humanity.** Jesus had a human nature. He identified with us. In Egypt is revealed His preservation in a world of bondage and sin. Also, it reminds us of His identification with both our sin and our sorrow.

Finally, salvation is revealed. "Out of Egypt have I called my Son," Matthew quotes the Scripture's prophecy (v. 15; Hosea 11:1).

Christmas in Egypt. Now this is a strange prophecy.

Notice the word "fulfilled." It occurs three times in this chapter alone. Matthew, like the jigsaw master he is, reveals that when Jesus came back out of Egypt. He was fulfilling this prophecy. God setting Israel free from Egyptian bondage—the Exodus—is the clear focus of Hosea's prophecy.

Matthew now reminds us what God did for the nation of Israel in the exodus from the land of Egypt. He wants to do for the whole world in the birth of Christ. This is Christmas.

Furthermore, in His cross, salvation brings us out of the land of Egypt. What a story!

There are two words particularly that are helpful when we consider Jesus revealing salvation. **First is the word redemption.** This is a word meaning "to buy back." Going back to Hosea for a moment, there the story is about Israel's spiritual life as mirrored in the life of the prophet himself. Hosea is commanded to marry Gomer who later prostitutes herself.

She ruins her life and Hosea's. Hosea ends up "buying her back" for half of a slave's price. He takes her home.

Though she sinned grievously against Hosea, he loves her still. This incredible story is the story of God's love for us.

The word "restoration" is also significant as we ponder the salvation Jesus revealed while in Egypt. Hosea not only bought Gomer back, he brought Gomer home and fully restored her to her place as his wife.

The one the Wise Men sought and the wicked man shunned, is the One we must serve. Why? He is the Truth. He saved us by redeeming us and restoring us to favor with God.

Golden Greek Nugget

"Wise men" here translates from the Greek *magoi*. The same term is employed of Bar-Jesus in Acts 13:6 who is described as a "sorcerer" and even a false prophet. In Matthew's use, however, it seems to reveal these men as astrologers. Who were they?

It's very difficult to say precisely. But we do know they were serious about finding Jesus. Also, we are not certain there were three of them. Three comes from the number of gifts they presented (v. 11).

Reflection Connection

What one single truth may we learn from the Wise Men about seeking truth?

