

January 6, 2007 (LS)

**THE REVELATION OF THE RIVAL KING
MATTHEW 2.1-12**

While even the Gentiles recognize who Jesus is and come to worship him, the apostate son—Israel embodied in her leaders—considers Jesus to be a threat and is consequently fearful of his arrival.

A THE MAGI COME TO WORSHIP THE KING OF THE JEWS (1-2)

Herod the king?: Herod was a vassal king appointed by Rome. Named by Mark Antony to be “king of the Jews.” Octavian (who became Augustus) confirmed him as such when he became emperor.

A fearful, vicious ruler. Annihilated the Sanhedrian, the “supreme court” of the land; later slaughtered 300 court officers; murdered his wife Miriamme, her mother Alexandra, his eldest son Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus.

Herod was an Idumean/Edomite, a son of Esau. Cp. 1.6: David is king (and consequently his son).

This is a brother-brother battle like Cain & Abel, Esau & Jacob. “Esau” is trying to seize his forfeited birthright.

Magi from the east (1): Magi (singular = *magus* as in Simon Magus in Ac 8) - sometimes trans. “wise men” or “kings.”

Davies/Allison - *magus* “designated originally a member of a priestly caste of the Medes and Persians (Zoroastrians) who specialized in interpreting dreams ... Later the word came to be used of those who possessed superior knowledge and ability, including astrologers, oriental sages, and soothsayers in general....”

Daniel 2.2, 10 - Magi in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. “Wise men” he calls to interpret his dream. Probably connection here.

8th c. B.C. Israel, the northern kingdom goes into exile under Assyria. Late 7th and early 6th c. B.C. Judah, the southern kingdom goes into exile under Babylon, which eventually gave way to the Medes and the Persians.

Prophets, people during this time: Jeremiah (encouraged the people to go peaceably and establish themselves in the land), Daniel (became a high official in Neb’s and Darius’s courts), Ezekiel (prophesied the departure of the glory from the Temple moving to Babylone), and Esther (Jewish-Persian queen who saved the Jews and saw many conversions).

My thought: these Magi were products of the evangelism of people like Daniel, who basically became the chief of the magi in the king’s court. Why else would they come seeking the new-born “king of the Jews” in order to worship him? What do court officials from the east have to do with the Jews? Why do they care?

The *east*: the place of exile since the time of the Garden. Movement from east to west is a movement back to the Garden.

The star and the king (2): They saw *his* star in the East (or possibly “rising”) and had come to worship him.

Stars are associated with rulers in Scripture (and even in the pagan world). Cp. Gen 37, story of Joseph.

Explanations about the star: a nova (a star exploding), a comet, or the lining up of Saturn and Jupiter (which astrologists say occurred around 7 B.C.). Problems: (1) leading the magi and (2) resting over a particular house.

Biblical referent that probably explains: the glory cloud of God. Fire on the inside of the cloud giving light and warmth. Led the people of God through the wilderness and marked the place of the Tabernacle and camp of Israel.

B THE UNFAITHFUL SON IS TROUBLED (3)

Herod: Matthew is telling us of the condition of Israel at the time. Esau, a son of Isaac, despised his birthright (i.e., didn’t care about God’s covenant). Should have recognized the true seed and submitted, but sought to kill him. Herod does the same thing.

“Troubled” = terrified or “all shook up” inside. He was frightened. Why? Because those who rule by fear are always themselves afraid of losing power.

All of Jerusalem with him: all of Jerusalem troubled *with him*. The Jews, embodied in their leaders, reject their King.

But isn't this the son that God delivered from Egypt, his firstborn? Yes and no. Israel is now the unfaithful, apostate son. Jesus is the faithful son who, Matthew will tell us, is the one who is called out of Egypt (2.15).

C PROPHECY: CHRIST IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM (4-6)

Chief priests - included the heads of the 24 orders of priests set up by David during his reign. Represent worship in Israel. They were the ones offering prayers/sacrifices, in short, performing the Temple services in Israel.

Scribes - experts in the Law; a Law which they distorted with their oral law tradition. Render authoritative interpretations of the Scriptures. They were later considered to be the wise men or sages in Israel.

These are Herod's "wise men" who are with him in his rejection of Jesus.

"The Christ," the Messiah - Herod's inquiry reveals his knowledge that there is one coming to whom he owed allegiance.

The Christ = "King of the Jews." The King of the Jews is David and his son. Herod knows he is not that one.

Bethlehem - Rachel dies near when giving birth to Benjamin (Gen 35.16ff.). Place of birth for David (cf. 1Sam 16). Bethlehem was known as the "city of David" (Lk 2.4, 11).

Jerusalem later became "the city of David" when he drove out the Jebusites (2Sam 5). But David is born in Bethlehem. And so, his son, the heir to the throne and the one who conquers Jerusalem and makes it his city, will also be born in Bethlehem.

Prophecy of Micah with reference to 2Sam 5.2. Brings in the whole story. Micah: prophecies of impending exile of both Israel and Judah, the northern and southern kingdoms, represented by their capital cities, Samaria (in the north) and Jerusalem (in the south).

Rulers of both have become corrupt and need to be replaced. God will dispossess them all and replace them with the true king. In that time the mountain of YHWH will be established and the nations will flow into it desiring to obey God's word (cf. Mic 4.1-2). David replaces Saul; David takes Jerusalem by conquering the Jebusites (2Sam 5).

Bethlehem = "house of bread;" the Bread of Life born here and will feed the world.

B' THE UNFAITHFUL SON DECEIVES (7-8)

The rest of the story confirms what is alluded to in Herod's being "terrified:" he is seeking to deceive so as to destroy. But he himself will be deceived (cf. v. 16).

A' THE MAGI WORSHIP AND DEPART (9-12)

The star comes to rest over the child: Star leads them to a *house* (v. 11). This is the King's house. Scripturally, the Tab/Temple is YHWH's house/palace where his throne is above the cherubim and his glory fills. Jesus is the "new house of YHWH." The old house, the Temple will be "left desolate."

Return of the glory that left in Ezekiel 10. The glory that departed from the Temple and went to the east, in the land of Magi, has now come back. It is not as it was expected because it rests over a house in Bethlehem, over a child. He is now the place where you draw near to God. He is now the place where YHWH is enthroned.

Rejoicing at the presence of the King (10): Contrast with the terror of Herod and all of Jerusalem.

Glory in the house (11): Cp. Isa 60.1-9.

- *Gold* - fills the Temple
- *Frankincense* - the incense of Tab/Temple; place on tribute offerings of grain and the "face bread" in the Holy Place.
- *Myrrh* - anointing oil of priests (Ex 30.22ff.); also used for Jesus burial (Jn 19.39)

Obeying God rather than men (12) - depart another way.

(1) The gospel of the lordship of Jesus provokes fear as well as joy.

(2) The presence of God is found in the Person of Jesus.