



Who is Ruler?

Matthew 2

Matthew 1 presents Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah.¹ The Messiah would be “ruler over Israel” and “his greatness [would] reach to the ends of the earth” (*Micah* 5:2, 4).

Born in Bethlehem

Read *Matthew* 2:1-12. Besides “the child” (Jesus) and “his mother Mary,” the main characters in this passage are the Magi² and King Herod.³



1. Why did the Magi come to Jerusalem?⁴ What did they want to do? (2:2)
2. When King Herod heard about the Magi’s visit, how did he feel? Why do you think he felt this way? What did King Herod do, and why? (2:3, 7-8)

According to Old Testament prophecy, the promised Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6; *Micah* 5:2, 4). Matthew constantly refers to fulfilled prophecy to show that Jesus is the Messiah.

3. How might King Herod’s attitude and actions apply to leaders and rulers today? How might Herod’s attitudes and actions apply to us personally?⁵
4. This passage shows a contrast between the Magi and others. What is significant about “Magi from the east” coming to worship Jesus?⁶ What attitude is evident by their gifts?

 “May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him” (*Psalms* 71:11, *NIV*)

Called Out of Egypt

After the Magi left, an angel told Joseph to take “the child and his mother” (Jesus and Mary) to Egypt because Herod intended to find Jesus and kill him (2:13). So Joseph took them to Egypt, and they stayed there until the death of Herod.



¹ *Christou* (‘Messiah’ or ‘Christ’) – anointed one. The Old Testament prophecies said that *the* Messiah (a great king in the line of David) would deliver God’s people and establish God’s rule.

² ‘Magi’ – the term covered a variety of men interested in astronomy, astrology, dreams, magic and books. These men may be considered ‘wise men’ (*ESV, NLT*), though the Bible prohibits astrology and occultic magic (*Deuteronomy* 18:9-14; *Isaiah* 47:12-15). ‘from the east’ – possibly Babylonia, Persia, or the Arabian desert.

³ Herod the Great ruled Palestine from 37 to 4 BC (under Roman authority). Herod was a cruel leader, especially in his later years when he was extremely insecure. Herod had many people put to death, including his wife and two sons.

⁴ The Magi saw and followed a ‘star’ (2:2; 9-10). Various naturalistic explanations have been offered for the ‘star,’ including planetary conjunctions (e.g. Jupiter and Saturn), supernova, and comets. Since verse 9 says the star moved and stopped over the place where Jesus was, a supernatural explanation seems more appropriate.

⁵ In general, people do not like to give up control and submit to authority, even to the King of Kings.

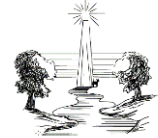
⁶ Jesus received worship *not* from Herod, the state authority; or the Jewish religious leaders, who had the Scriptures; but from Gentiles from another land. Jesus came not for the proud, but for the humble - the humble from all nations.

📖 "And so it was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'." (2:15b)⁷

Offered as Hope

Read Matthew 2:16-18. Of course, Herod's actions resulted in great sorrow. By quoting Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew ties this experience to the Jews' sorrow after Judah was destroyed.⁸ However, the original prophecy also presented hope. The Jews would be restored to the land (31:16-17).

5. What types of things bring sorrow and despair to our lives? How does Jesus provide hope? What is that hope?



The hope of Israel's full restoration to the land prefigures the hope of full salvation in Christ.⁹

Despised and Rejected

Read Matthew 2:19-23.¹⁰ Joseph took Jesus and Mary to live in Nazareth¹¹ – "to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that He will be called a Nazarene" (2:23, HCSB).¹²

📖 "[Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain ...
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53: 3a, 5, NIV)



Reflection/Application

- Who or what is ruler in your life? Who is "king?" Whom or what do you serve or worship?
- With reference to Jesus, are you more like the Magi, Herod, or the chief priests and teachers of the law (who apparently, at the time, were indifferent to the child born in Bethlehem)?
- Brothers & sisters, Jesus (the King of Kings) is Ruler of your life. In what ways is this evident in your daily life? Reflect on Matthew 22:37-39 and daily commit to follow the King.

⁷ In its original context, this prophecy (from Hosea 11:1) referred to Israel's exodus from Egypt. God called Israel 'my son.' How was this prophecy 'fulfilled?' Fulfillment does not always mean realization of a prediction. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures in that they pointed to him. This includes 'typological' fulfillment. Many Old Testament persons and events prefigured New Testament occurrences. Here, the exodus of God's 'son' from Egypt, followed by establishment of the old covenant, prefigured the exodus of God's Son from Egypt, followed by the inauguration of the new covenant. In many ways, Jesus is the ideal and true Israel, to whom the Scriptures point.

⁸ Judah's destruction and exile brought much weeping and mourning. Ramah was located north of Jerusalem. Many Jews passed through Ramah on their way to exile in Babylon (*Jeremiah 40:1*).

⁹ In the context of Jeremiah 31:15-17, the prophet speaks of the 'new covenant' (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*) which points to Jesus Christ. As followers of the King, our hope is in Christ. See Romans 8:18-25 and 1 Peter 1:3-9.

¹⁰ After Herod died (in 4 BC) three of his sons ruled different parts of Palestine. Archelaus, who was tyrannical and cruel, ruled over Judea and Samaria for a period 10 years (4 BC – AD 6). Galilee and Perea were ruled by his half-brother, Herod Antipas (4 BC – AD 39). He was also cruel, but relatively weak, so Galilee was safer.

¹¹ Nazareth was Joseph and Mary's former home, before the birth of Jesus (*Luke 1:26-27; 2:39*).

¹² Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, so the words 'He will be called a Nazarene' are not a direct quotation. Interpretations vary but the statement probably summarizes a theme of prophetic expectation. The Old Testament prophets did not say the Messiah would live in Nazareth, but they did say he would be despised and rejected (*Psalms 22:6-8, 12-18; 69:8, 20-21; Isaiah 49:7; 53:2-3, 8*). Since Nazareth and Nazarenes were belittled and despised (*Luke 1:46; Acts 24:5*), this reference may point to Jesus being despised.