

Matthew:

2:1: Now, after Jesus was born [circa 4 B. C.] in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem saying,

Jesus was born at the beginning of the Feast of the Lights called also the Feast of Dedication. It was a military holiday based on the Maccabean Wars which started in 167 B. C. and finally on December 25, 164 B. C. they gained religious freedom. After cleansing the temple on that day, they worshipped and celebrated until January 1st.

Herod the Great:

There was a good reason why Herod was called the Great. He was a business, building and political genius. He was an inventor, a world champion wrestler, a great soldier and one of the greatest conversationalists in the world at that time. He was described as tall, strong and athletic, with small ears, well molded nose, black hair, brown eyes and golden skin. He was one of the greatest horsemen and hunters of his day. He killed more lions and other wild game than any one at that time. Of himself, he never had a statue made or a picture painted that he may not offend the Jews. To Rome and to his friends, he always remained loyal.

How he became a Jew:

Simon Hasmon, the younger brother of Judas Maccabee, a Hasmonaean ruled Judea from 143-134 BC. After Simon's death his son John Hyrcanus (134-104) conquered Idumaea (the land south of Judah including such cities as Hebron in the north and Beersheba in the south), Samaria and part of Galilee and added them to his realm. After his death his two sons ruled, Aristobolus I for one year followed by his brother, the unscrupulous Alexander Jannaeus, 103-76 BC. After the death of Jannaeus, his wife, Solome Alexandra took the helm for nine years until 67 BC, a brief golden age. After her demise, strangled by her son, Aristobolus II, civil war occurred between her two sons, the ambitious Aristobolus II, and the weak Hyrcanus II supported by Antipater the Idumean, the father of Herod. ((Antipater and his sons, Herod and Phasael born in Idumaea, a land belonging to Judaea and having become Jews through accepting and fulfilling the religious requirements of Judaism (the main requirement being circumcision), were qualified to enter Jewish politics)). Aristobolus II and Antipater via Hyrcanus II both sought the support of Pompey who at that time was conquering Syria and making it a Roman province. After interviewing both in 63 BC, Pompey came to the conclusion that Antipater was a man that Rome could trust. However, Aristobolus II rejected this decision and so took up a defensive position in Jerusalem against the Romans. However, after a three month siege Pompey stormed the well-fortified temple area and Judaea fell into his hands. While Aristobolus II as a captive was taken to Rome, Hyrcanus II was made the high-priest and given titular leadership of Judea, but Antipater possessed the real power.

As a Politician:

Pompey (Pompeius Magnus) in 60 BC entered into a rulership-agreement with Julius Ceasar and Marcus Licinius Crassus, called the First Triumvirate. Since Crassus was the only one of the three without a great military record, he set out for Parthia to gain a reputation. On his way there, he sacked the temple and pillaged Jerusalem in 53 BC. (This occurred while Antipater and Herod were trying to convince the Jews

that the Romans were great people. This incident will not be forgotten by the Jews and will be used as an excuse to revolt in 40 BC.). At the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, Crassus was defeated and captured by the Parthians. Crassus being one of the wealthiest men of his day tried to buy his release with a large amount of gold. The Parthians answered that they didn't need gold, but since Crassus appreciated gold so much, they would give him even more. So, they poured molten gold down his throat. This left only Caesar and Pompey. Eventually, Pompey maneuvered with the Senate to strip Caesar of his army and power. Caesar, realizing this betrayal, disregarded Pompey and the Senate and crossed the Rubicon with his army in January of 49 BC. Crossing the Rubicon meant civil war with Pompey and the Senate. Realizing this, Caesar remarked as he was about to cross, "The die has been cast" meaning there is no turning back. Herod being a genius and a good military man himself obviously realized that Caesar was by far the greater general. All the same, both he and his father supported financially their friend, Pompey. (Antipater and Herod believed strongly in the principle of loyalty, and so they always remained loyal to Rome and to their friends). After Pompey was defeated in 48 BC at the Battle of Pharsalus, Antipater and Herod found themselves in a difficult political situation. However, soon after, an opportunity to resolve this difficulty occurred. In 48 BC, Caesar had entered Egypt with a force of only 4000 soldiers and soon found himself surrounded by 20,000 Egyptians. Antipater and Herod immediately raised an army and rescued Caesar. In gratitude, Caesar made Antipater the procurator of Judea, and gave Roman citizenship to Antipater and his heirs. Just when all was going well, Caesar was assassinated by the Roman senators on March 15, 44 BC and the year after, Antipater by the Jewish priesthood.

The assassination of Caesar in 44 BC brought about civil war in Rome. Eventually, Caesar's nephew, Octavian and Caesar's cavalry commander, Mark Anthony ally, go to battle against and defeat the two armies led by Brutus and Cassius (two of the assassins of Caesar) at the Battle of Philippi in October of 42 BC. Herod who was a good friend with Cassius had supported him financially in this war against Octavian and Mark Anthony. This was the second time that Herod had helped finance the losing side of a civil war in Rome. This again placed Herod in a difficult political situation with the Romans. Fortunately for Herod, there was a power struggle between Octavius, Mark Anthony and Sextus Pompey. Thus, there was no opportunity for Rome to deal with Herod. Then in October of 41 BC the Peace of Brundisium took place between Octavian and Mark Anthony. By this agreement, Octavian was given the western portion of the empire and Anthony was given the eastern portion. With the eastern part of the empire under his control, Anthony who also was an old friend of Herod, a friendship which began during Caesar's reign, made Herod and Phasael joint rulers over Judea. So, even though Herod had supported Cassius against Anthony and Octavius, he was able to bring about reconciliation with his old friend, Mark Anthony.

However, instability in Rome and the lack of truth in the souls of the Jewish people at that time led to dissatisfaction and unrest. So, Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II (of the Hasmonian family), taking advantage of this situation, conspired with the Parthians to overthrow Roman government in the Middle East. As a result of this conspiracy, the Parthians invaded in 40 BC and overran the provinces of Syria and Judea and made Antigonus a priest-king; Phasael was captured and murdered; Herod barely escaped to Rome. In Rome, Herod on the motion of Octavius and Mark Anthony was declared the King of the Jews and was given a Roman army to drive out the Parthians which he did after 3 difficult years of fighting.

It was now 37 BC and Herod had only five years to relax before another major civil would occur in Rome. This war would be between the western part of the Roman Empire and its leader, Octavius Caesar and Mark Anthony, the ruler of the eastern portion. Again Herod found himself in a very difficult situation.

Who should he support? The decision to support Mark Anthony was based upon his strong belief in loyalty. So, when Mark Anthony was defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Herod found himself in danger of losing his kingdom. After the battle, Octavian went to Rhodes to refit his ships; Herod sailed to Rhodes and confronted Octavian. There Herod was reconciled to Octavian; they become friends for life.

As an Entrepreneur:

He was in control of much trade that existed between east and west. At that time he had as many as 100 caravans. Several times he had given much of his money away, but was always able to make another fortune. Because of the civil wars in Rome, he supplied on three different occasions large sums of money first to Pompey, then to Cassius and finally to Mark Anthony. In 25 BC there was a famine in Palestine: Herod fed the Jews for a year or so with Egyptian grain. This he purchased with some tax money, but mostly with his own funds. The Olympic Games at this time were defunct in Rome. So, he restarted these games paying for the first two with his own fortune.

As an Engineer and Builder:

As the greatest engineer and builder of his age, he built not only the city of Caesarea, but its harbor as well. The harbor alone was such an engineering marvel, that some said it should have been the 8th wonder of the world. In order to secure water for his new city, he had to construct an aqueduct bringing water from the foothills of Mount Carmel. In this new city he built many buildings including a hippodrome. On Mount Zion he built the famous Temple of Herod (began in 20 BC). One ancient remarked that if a person had not seen this temple, he has not seen a beautiful building. The sun rays struck the white and yellow marble in such a way giving it a heavenly appearance. He not only constructed the temple in Jerusalem but also built a hippodrome, a theater, amphitheater (28 BC) as well as the sewage system for the city. He rebuilt Samaria (27 BC) and renamed it Sebaste; he built the city Caesarea Philippi, north of the Sea of Galilee and started many building projects in the Galilee area as well which provided many contracting opportunities for Joseph. In Palestine he built many palaces and numerous forts. Fort Masada for example brings awe to people even today. Outside of Israel he built many structures in Athens and Rhodes. His building projects kept the Jewish people well employed and brought great prosperity to Judea.

As a Madman:

In 29 BC Herod puts Mariamne, the only woman he ever loved on trial on a trumped-up charge of adultery. She was found guilty and executed. At that time Mariamne was 25 and had born him 5 children after 7 years of marriage. Alexandra, Mariamne's mother declared Herod mentally unfit to rule and so declared herself queen and was swiftly executed by Herod without a trial. The following year Herod executed his brother-in-law, Kostobar for conspiracy. Because of his paranoia, in 6 BC., Herod accused his two favorite son, Alexander and Aristobulos, his sons from Mariamne, of conspiracy and had them executed. This left Antipater, his eldest son as his heir whom he also killed just five days before his death. Circa 5 BC, he ordered the death of all boys two and under to be killed in and around the Bethlehem area (Matthew 2:16)). Also about this time, there were a couple of Pharisees who did not like the Roman Golden Eagle hanging over the temple gate so they persuaded forty young men to tear it down. Herod's troops caught these men and even though Herod was dying, he crawled into court and unto his throne and sentenced them to death. To dramatize the executions, they were killed in different way: some by bow and arrow, some by decapitation, some were dropped into boiling oil, several were

hung, several crucified, some rolled over a fire like a rotisserie. Since these were some of the key young men of the land, the word got around. Then while he was dying, he ordered all the Jewish nobility to be locked into the hippodrome and for the building to be burned down at his death.

All during Herod's life, he faced tremendous pressure and stress. This stress eventually produced mental illness in Herod and possibly had an effect on his physical health as well. So, toward the last few years of his life, ancient historians described his illness as rapid mood changes, delusions of persecutions, uncontrolled outbursts, hypertensive cerebral attacks, attempted suicide, heart and kidney function deteriorated, poisons accumulated in the blood stream. His mouth had become ulcerated, his breath foul; there were constant pains in the stomach accompanied by near constant diarrhea for the last three years of his life; his scrotum had become gangrenous and filled with maggots.

The Dynasty of Herod the Great:

At his death, his kingdom was split into two tetrarchies and one ethnarchy. Antipas and Philip II both received a tetrarchy while Archelaus received an ethnarchy. Antipas' domain was composed of both Galilee and Perea. Since Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a city of Galilee he lived under the jurisdiction of Antipas. This explains why Pontius Pilot sent Jesus Christ to Herod Antipas for trial and sentencing, but when the Lord would not entertain him with miracles, Antipas sent him back to Pilot. Since Perea was located on the east side of the southern portion of the Jordan River, Antipas also had jurisdiction over John the Baptizer. On one occasion John questioned how Antipas could rule the Jewish people and at the same time be in violation of the Jewish laws regarding marriage. This offended Herodias who had eloped with Antipas while being the wife of Philip I. For this reason, Herodias conspired to have John the Baptist executed. On the other hand, Philip II benevolently ruled his lands north and east of Galilee and remained in power until his death in 34 AD. His tetrarchy consisted of Syrians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs and a few Jewish people. Archelaus, the full brother of Antipas, was given half of Herod's kingdom, an ethnarchy (ruler of a nation) consisting of Samaria, Judea and Idumea. Archelaus had a reputation for great cruelty, and this fact was known by Joseph. So, when Joseph had come out of Egypt he decided not to return to Bethlehem, a city in the ethnarchy of Archelaus but to live in the tetrarchy of Antipas the fox, a nickname given to him by the Lord himself. Both Archelaus and Antipas were removed by Roman Emperors: Archelaus in 6 AD was removed by Octavian for murdering too many of his subjects and Antipas was banished by the mad emperor Caligula in 39 AD for allegedly conspiring against Rome. Archelaus was sent to a pathetic little town on the other side of the Alps, Vienna Gaul (France); Antipas and Herodias to Lyons, Gaul another undesirable town not far from Vienna.

Whereas Herod Antipas, Herod Archelaus and Herod Philip II affected the lives of John the Baptist, Joseph and the Lord Jesus Christ, the grandson and great grandson of Herod the Great, Agrippa I and his son, Agrippa II affected the lives of the apostles. Agrippa I, not a friend of Tiberius, found himself in a Roman Dungeon in 36 AD. Fortunately for him, Tiberius died the very next year. Caligula the next ruler and close friend of Agrippa I not only released him from prison, but also gave him the former tetrarchy of Philip II. Galilee also was added to his domain by Caligula after the banishment of Antipas in 39 AD. When Caligula was assassinated in 41 AD, Agrippa I was in Rome. Upon his recommendation to the Senate, Claudius was made the next Roman Emperor. In gratitude, Claudius gave Agrippa also the lands of Samaria and Judea. Thus, upon receiving these lands, he almost controlled as much as Herod the Great. However, it was about this time that Agrippa I murdered James, the brother of John and tried to provide the same fate for Peter. Justice sometimes comes quickly as it did in his case for in 44 AD while he was in Caesarea and there receiving the adulation of a god, he was struck down by an angel of the Lord. He was the last powerful ruler of Herod's dynasty. When Herod of Chalcis, a brother of Agrippa I

died, Agrippa II, the son of Agrippa I was given Chalcis, a small area between Phoenicia and Syria and responsibility over the temple and priesthood. In 53 AD Emperor Claudius also gave him the former kingdom of Philip II. When Nero succeeded Claudius, he added some other small properties to Agrippa II's domain. The temple in Jerusalem was both completed (63 AD) and destroyed (70 AD) during his reign. It was this last Agrippa that Paul had met. Paul was not only well known among the Christian community, but also was known by all the powerful people in the Roman Empire. This being the case Festus, the Roman governor of Judea arranged for Agrippa to meet Paul who was at this time (circa 60AD) imprisoned in Caesarea. Paul used this opportunity to present the gospel to Agrippa II, but to no avail.

Circa 4 BC a fraternity of scholars from the ancient land of the Medes possibly a hundred or so came to Jerusalem to worship the one descended from the family of David, one born to be the king of the Jews. Being a very old and famous fraternity having their beginning among the Medes, Persians and Chaldeans, they were given an audience with King Herod. To Herod's shock and consternation they announced that the rightful heir to the throne of David had been born. Herod by contrast was not born into his royalty, but a royalty that he and his father had fought hard to achieve. Now, he was coming to the end of his life and so wanted to establish a lasting dynasty. Nothing would prevent him from securing his throne for his offspring. So, he, after careful interrogation of both the magi and Jewish theologians in Jerusalem, ascertained the exact age and location of this one named Jesus in order that he may remove this threat to his dynasty.

The magi were called wise men that is scholars, a fraternity that existed before the days of Daniel. They were astronomers, astrologers, physicists, chemists, they explored all areas of medicine and all other fields related to chemistry. There were also theologians in this fraternity and Daniel was once a member and even ruled as their president, the only Jew to have ever been a member for it was strictly a gentile fraternity (possibly because Daniel was given a gentile name and education under the Chaldean system).

Once they had discovered through astronomy that Jesus Christ had been born they sought him out (possibly information passed down to them from Daniel). On this trip to Jerusalem, possibly the entire fraternity came along with their three leaders. This demonstrates that gentiles were seeking Jesus while the Jews were ignoring the whole affair.

2:2. "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw [calculated that this is] His star in the east [the other side of the Mesopotamia] and have come to worship Him."

The Magi came over a thousand miles to worship the King of the Jews, yet the Jewish leaders just a few miles away in Jerusalem did not bother to even investigate the matter.

Herod worked very hard to acquire this kingdom, and he was not about to hand it over to someone born king of the Jews. Unfortunately, Herod did not know that Jesus Christ would not rule until his 2nd Advent.

No gentile or gentile fraternity ever came to worship Herod. Furthermore, most of the Jews in his kingdom despised him. Now, the most famous gentile fraternity in the ancient world has come to worship a Jew from the viewpoint of his humanity who has been born in the line of David. Furthermore, this birth is so important that even the heavens are declaring his birth.

Herod now had a great kingdom which he wanted to leave to his Herodian descendants to accompany Caesar's line. (Both he and Octavius wanted to leave behind a dynasty. However, neither line lasted very long.) The last of Caesar's line was Nero. The last of the Herodian line was Agrippa III who died in the ashes and gas from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.)

2:3. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled [under a lot of stress], and all Jerusalem with him [Herod informed the Jewish leadership].

Herod felt fairly secure with his kingdom since he was made king by SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus: The Senate and the Roman people) until this news came to him. You should recall that at this time, Herod was suffering from both physical and mental illness. He is not a happy man. Also, the leadership of Jerusalem was stressed out upon hearing this news about the Messiah since they were very corrupt and involved in a lot of evil activity which they did not want stopped.

2:4. Gathering together all the chief priest and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah would be born.

The Chief priests and scribes were the religious leaders, and so knew all the verses containing information regarding the Messiah yet, none of them ever went to Bethlehem to investigate; they had no interest in truth. Religious people are never interested in learning about God and his truth since all religious systems are systems of works which function in opposition to God's grace plan.

2:5. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

2:6. 'And you Bethlehem, Land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah for out of you shall come forth a ruler [the Messiah] who will shepherd my people Israel.'" [Micah 5:2]

At the 2nd Advent Jesus Christ will call out to the Jews, the scattered sheep of Israel who will respond to his call as a shepherd and gather around him. All of his life Herod tried to shepherd the Jews, but they would never respond to his leadership. One historian counted over 50 revolts in the 39 years in which he ruled them (44 BC-5 BC). The good shepherd has to die for his sheep (suffer substitutionary spiritual death: while being separated from fellowship with the Father, he was punished for the sins of mankind) during the 1st Advent that he may gather them at the 2nd Advent.

Herod feels that he can easily seize this child since he had a system of fortifications and communications in that area. Of the eleven forts which Herod had built, four of them were around Jerusalem and one of them, Fort Herodiam was just four miles southeast of Bethlehem. Herod had both a day and night system of signaling. For example if an enemy were to cross the Euphrates, he would receive that information within about 6 hours signaling all the way to Jerusalem. In between these forts he would use Idumean cavalry.

2:7. Then, Herod secretly called the magi [after he had inquired of the Jewish leadership about the place of birth] and determined from them the exact time the star appeared [from this information, Herod was able to determine the age of Christ].

Herod is now putting two and two together. First he listened to the Jewish theologians who probably gave him an extensive development of the story, but only a part is recorded for us and that is the part which is quoted from Micah 5:2. Herod cleverly keeps the two groups separated so that neither group

would come to know his plan to murder the new born. He had previously, sent out the magi that he might be able to bring in the Jewish Theologians. Now that he has the information obtained by the high priests and scribes, he calls the Magi back. So, he relayed the information about the Messiah's location to the Magi and sent them on their way.

For forty years Herod has had problems with Jewish nationalism. The Hasmonians (the descendants of Judas Macabeas and his brothers) in particular have caused him a lot of trouble; they have murdered his father, Antipater and killed his brother, Phasael (brought in the Parthians). In 40 BC, they along with the Parthians had driven him out of his kingdom and only by his sheer genius was he able to get it back. So, he decides to kill this child since he doesn't want any spark to ignite the powder barrel again.

By the way we get the English word magician from this word, Magi. The Magi appeared to perform miracles, but it was merely their application of scientific information. For example they did not determine the time of the birth of Christ through magic, but rather through their understanding of astronomy related to probable information handed down to them through the prophet, Daniel when he was the president of their fraternity.

2:8. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child [perhaps a year or a year and half old], and when you have found him, report to me so that I too may come and worship him."

Herod playing the wily fox decided not to go himself, but to commission these magi to locate the Messiah for him. He felt that through the use of his cavalry patrols and through the use of his forts for signaling, he would not lose sight of these Magi even if they should try to betray him. Several hundred men could not get lost in the type of system that Herod had set up. He had used this system to keep track of his caravans about 200. This system had never failed. And once they had located the Messiah, he would simply move in.

2:9. After hearing the king, they went their way. And the star which they had seen in the east went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

This is the first time they have seen the star since they had seen it in the East. After seeing it in the East, knowing its course, they were able to plot the direction. This procedure brought them to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, they would need more details in order to locate the child. Micah 5:2 provided the details they needed in order to continue their quest for the King of the Jews. At some point as they approached Bethlehem, they located the star again which they then followed to the exact location of the house that Joseph and Mary were now staying in.

2:10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great happiness.

This does not mean that they were all believers. Undoubtedly some were and some were not. In any case, they all recognized that a great future king had been born.

2:11. After coming into the house [not a manger], they saw the young child [not a baby] with Mary, his mother, and they fell to the ground and worshiped him. [Both unbelievers and believers can worship a king.] Then opening their treasures, they presented to him gifts of gold, frankincense [incense used by the nobility] and myrrh [a very expensive perfume used by the wealthy and by kings].

When the Shepherds came, they came to a manger. When the Magi came, they came to a house. The Shepherds were the only ones who had celebrated the birth of Christ, and did so since they had been invited by the angel Gabriel. On the other hand, the Magi came on their own accord about a year to a year and a half later. When the Magi first saw the star in the east, the shepherds were worshipping the new born Christ in the manger.

The Magi have come from a place where some of the greatest treasures of the ancient world had been located. When Nineveh fell in 612 BC most of their treasures were taken by the Medes. If you will recall there were three great nations that destroyed the Assyrians, the Scythians, Medes and the Chaldeans. The Scythians were interested in strong men for slaves, beautiful women for wives and good horses and animals, but not gold. The Chaldeans took the least amount of booty for they were mostly interested in land; the Medes took most of the art treasures both gold and silver and the exquisite jewelry back with them into the high plateau country of their homeland in the Zagros Mountains. The Magi having originated from among the Medes acquired many of these treasures. It was these treasures of gold artifacts and possibly coins which they presented to Christ.

These things could be used for travel or for sustenance in a foreign country like Egypt. Also they brought frankincense (gum used as incense) and myrrh (gum used for aromatic purposes) two very valuable perfumes. The shower had not yet been invented. So many ancients used perfumes in the place of a shower. At this time historically the Egyptians, Medes were a very clean people, but even so perfumes were used to remove any unpleasant odors. Many ancients wooed through the nose gate as well as through the eye gate as brought out in the Canticles of Solomon. No respectable person of means would travel without these things. Frankincense was incense used by people of nobility. So, the frankincense speaks of the unique person of Jesus Christ. Myrrh was used for the burial of kings which emphasized his death.

2:12. And having been warned [by God] in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

How they got out of this trap is not known. Possibly, they crossed the Jordan and traveled north and then east across northern Mesopotamia back to their country or they might have gone down to Petra and then followed a caravan route through the Arabian Desert back to their own country.

Petra was first held by the Idumeans and later by the Nabateans. Petra was very important since this is where east met west. In Petra there were many products from China and India. The Romans after the time of Augustus finally learned the monsoon system and the currents. So, they eventually went themselves down the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean to the location of modern day Bombay. Before that, Petra was the Bombay. In Petra there were several secret caravan routes through the Arabian Desert to the Mesopotamia region.

2:13. Now when they had gone [when the Magi had departed for their country], behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until which time [indefinite period] I tell you for Herod intends to search for the Child to destroy him"

Timing is important. The angel commanded Joseph to get up in the middle of the night and to move out as quickly as possible. Joseph must get out before Herod seals off all the roads around Bethlehem. The

dream occurred at night and before dawn Joseph was gone (He obeyed the command to get up and to flee).

Since Joseph was a builder, not a common laborer, he probably had the means to live in Egypt. If not, he could sell some of the artifacts given by the Magi for his family's stay in Egypt.

2:14. So, Joseph got up and took the Child and his mother while it was still night and left for Egypt.

Even though Joseph trusted the Lord for his safety, he still followed a rational plan of escape. Some Christians think that trusting the Lord gives them an excuse for being irrational and irresponsible.

2:15. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Hosea 11:1] "Out of Egypt I called My Son" [in the passage, it refers to the Jewish people; prophetically, it refers to the humanity of Christ].

2:16. Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged [through a tantrum: mentally ill] and sent forth [his military] and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity from two years old and under according to the time which he had determined from the magi.

Herod was very thorough in this military operation to kill the young boy.

Though Herod ascertained that the humanity of Christ was between a year and a year and a half old, he added a bit to make sure he would get him. Though he was told that Christ was born in Bethlehem, he included the vicinity around Bethlehem to make sure that the young child would not escape. He probably had his military close down all the escape routes and then did a house by house search and kill.

Disaster is turned into blessing by the grace of God. These Jewish children were all taken to heaven. If they had grown up in the homes of their religious Jewish parents who for the most part were extremely negative to the gospel, they may not have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:17. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah [31:15] the prophet was fulfilled:

2:18. "A voice was heard in Ramah [As what happened in Ramah, happened in and around Bethlehem], weeping and great mourning, Rachel [idiom for Jewish mothers] weeping for her children. And she refused to be comforted because they were no more [her children no longer existed]."

This was a prophecy given by Jeremiah over 500 years before about Ramah, a town about 12 miles north of Jerusalem and what happened there. In 586 BC this was the location where Nebuchadnezzar gathered all the captives for deportation to Babylon. All those not fit for the trip, those who were too old, too young and the infirm were killed. Perhaps thousands of little boys were killed.

2:19. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

Herod was 69 when he died. Before he entered his sixties, he was in perfect health. In his sixties his health progressively deteriorated until his death. Just before his death, one of his physicians told him that soaking in the hot springs near the Dead Sea could cure him of all his ailments. So, he took the doctor's advice and there a group of physicians lowered him into some very hot springs, a painful

experience which did not seem to work. Not giving up, they warmed up a great big tub of anointing oil, and when it was extremely hot, dropped him into it. They say that you could hear Herod scream all the way across the Dead Sea.

2:20. "Get up, take the Child and his mother and go into the land of Israel for those [four men] who sought the Child's life are dead."

Herod the Great, Alexander, Aristobolus and Antipater had to die before it would be safe for Joseph to return back to the Land. Alexander and Aristobolus, the sons of Mariamne, the original heirs had already been executed by Herod on what appeared to be trumped up charges of conspiracy. (Herod during his last few years of his life had become mentally ill.) Then, just four days before Herod's death, he attempted suicide: he was suffering so much pain he asked his cousin to bring a knife and an apple. After his cousin had left the room, he began to stab himself, but his cousin hearing the cries of pain, ran in and took the knife from him. However, the word got out that Herod was dead. At the time, Antipater his eldest son was in jail awaiting his sentence. Antipater, hearing the false rumor that Herod had successfully committed suicide, commanded the jailer to let him out since he was now the king. So, the jailer fearing for his life did so. Then, Antipater immediately went to Jericho to Herod's summer palace, and as soon as he entered proclaimed himself king. Upon hearing Antipater's proclamation, Herod still very much alive, commanded his guards to kill him. Herod lived another 4 more days. In which time, he dictated a new will in which he made Archelaus his heir.

Herod had a grand funeral. His crown jewels were placed on his golden casket where his corpse was propped up in a sitting position with his hand wrapped around his scepter. The funeral procession started from his palace in Jericho to a hill about 10 miles away. His entire military organization participated since they had protected his kingdom all those years. The royal guard was followed by the Thracian regiment, followed by the Germans, the Galatians, then the full army, and finally the Idumean Cavalry. It was magnificent as it was strung out for about 10 miles. About 10,000 slaves carrying wine, spices and fruit were employed to serve those in the procession. It took all day and all walked. He was finally laid to rest on a site at his palace, Herodian.

2:21. So, Joseph got up, took the Child and his mother and came into the land of Israel.

2:22. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid [concerned about the safety of his son] to go there. Then after being warned [by God] in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee,

Herod the Great willed his entire kingdom to Archelaus, the son of one of his younger wives (The Arabs had permitted him to have seven wives.) When the Jews heard that Archelaus was the heir, they were horrified for they knew that he was very cruel person. In reaction they organized a delegation of distinguished Jews which was sent to Rome to seek an audience with King Octavius. Before King Octavius they pleaded not to make Archelaus king. Octavius in the end compromised with them giving Archelaus only half of the kingdom, but promising Archelaus that he could have the entire kingdom according to his father's will if he ruled properly, but he didn't. The other half he divided up giving one fourth to Herod Antipas and a fourth to Herod Philip II.

Joseph wary of Archelaus, decided to live in Nazareth which was located in the tetrarch of Herod Antipas, a wily, but benevolent ruler who would carry on the building projects started by his father. This helped Joseph who was a building contractor.

2:23. and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets [Isaiah 11:1]: "He shall be called a Nazarene [the Hebrew Nazarene is derived from Natser which means a branch or root].

Christ is the branch. Israel under the 5th cycle of discipline is called a 'stump.' The stump will grow again starting at the 2nd Advent and Christ the branch will rule over it. This is called a prophecy by paronomasia.