

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 2

Ver. 1. *Now when Jesus was born*, etc.] Several things are here related respecting the birth of Christ, as the place where he was born,

in Bethlehem of Judea; so called to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zabulon, (^{<06915>}Joshua 19:15). Here Christ was to be born according to a prophecy hereafter mentioned, and accordingly the Jews expected he would be born here, (^{<0101>}Matthew 2:4-6 ^{<0104>}John 7:41,42) and so Jesus was born here, (^{<0103>}Luke 2:4-7) and this the Jews themselves acknowledge;

“Such a year, says a noted ^{f59} chronologer of theirs, Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem Juda, which is a “parsa” and a half, i.e. six miles, from Jerusalem.”

Benjamin ^{f60} Tudelensis says it is two parsas, i.e. eight miles, from it; and according to Justin Martyr ^{f61} it was thirty five furlongs distant from it. Yea even they own this, that Jesus was born there, in that vile and blasphemous book ^{f62} of theirs, written on purpose to defame him; nay, even the ancient Jews have owned that the Messiah is already born, and that he was born at Bethlehem; as appears from their Talmud ^{f63}, where we meet with such a passage.

“It happened to a certain Jew, that as he was ploughing, one of his oxen bellowed; a certain Arabian passed by and heard it, who said, O Jew, Jew, loose thy oxen, and loose thy ploughshare, for lo, the house of the sanctuary is destroyed: it bellowed a second time; he said unto him, O Jew, Jew, bind thy oxen, and bind thy ploughshare, for lo **aj yçm akl m dyl y** “the king Messiah is born”. He said to him, what is his name? Menachem (the comforter); he asked again, what is his father’s name? Hezekiah; once more he says, from whence is he? He replies **hdwhy µj l tyb akl m tryb ^m** “from the palace of the king of Bethlehem Judah”; he went and sold his oxen and his ploughshares, and became a

seller of swaddling clothes for infants; and he went from city to city till he came to that city, (Bethlehem,) and all the women bought of him, but the mother of Menachem bought nothing.”

Afterwards they tell you, he was snatched away by winds and tempests. This story is told in much the same manner in another ^{f64} of their writings. Bethlehem signifies “the house of bread”, and in it was born, as an ancient writer ^{f65} observes, the bread which comes down from heaven: and it may also signify “the house of flesh”, and to it the allusion may be in (^{<S4B6>1} Timothy 3:16) “God manifest in the flesh”. The time of Christ’s birth is here expressed,

in the days of Herod the king. This was Herod the great, the first of that name: the Jewish chronologer ^{f66} gives an account of him in the following manner.

“Herod the first, called Herod the Ascalonite, was the son of Antipater, a friend of king Hyrcanus and his deputy; him the senate of Rome made king in the room of Hyrcanus his master. This Herod whilst he was a servant of king Hyrcanus (so in the ^{f67} Talmud Herod is said to be *anwmçj tybd adb* [a servant of the family of the Asmonaeans) king Hyrcanus saved from death, to which he was sentenced by the sanhedrim of Shammai; that they might not slay him for the murder of one Hezekiah, as is related by Josephus, l. 6. c. 44. and Herod took to him for wife Miriam, the daughter of Alexander the son of Aristobulus, who was the daughter’s daughter of king Hyrcanus.”

This writer tacitly owns afterwards ^{f68} that Jesus was born in the days of this king; for he says, that in the days of Hillel and Shammai (who lived in those times) there was one of their disciples, who was called R. Joshua ben Perachiah, and he was, adds he, *yrxwnh wbr* “the master of the Nazarene”, or of Jesus of Nazareth. Herod reigned, as this same author observes, thirty seven years; and according to Dr. Lightfoot’s calculation, Christ was born in the thirty fifth year of his reign, and in the thirty first of Augustus Caesar, and in the year of the world three thousand nine hundred and twenty eight, and the month Tisri, which answers to part of our September, about the feast of tabernacles; which indeed was typical of Christ’s incarnation, and then it may reasonably be thought that “the word

was made flesh”, and **εσκηνωσεν** “tabernacled among us”, (^{<3114>}John 1:14). Another circumstance relating to the birth of Christ is, that

when Jesus was born — behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem; these wise men in the Greek text are called **μαγοι**, “Magi”, a word which is always used in a bad sense in the sacred writings; hence they are thought by some to be magicians, sorcerers, wizards, such as Simon Magus, (^{<4189>}Acts 8:9) and Elymas, (^{<4438>}Acts 13:8) and so the Jewish writers ^{f69} interpret the word **צωגמ** a wizard, an enchanter, a blasphemer of God, and one that entices others to idolatry; and in the Hebrew Gospel of Munster these men are called **μυρצκμ** “wizards”. Some have thought this to be their national name. Epiphanius ^{f70} supposes that these men were of the posterity of Abraham by Keturah, who inhabited a country in some part of Arabia, called Magodia: but could this be thought to be the name of their country, one might rather be induced to suppose that they were of the **μαγοι**, “Magi”, a nation of the Medes mentioned by Herodotus ^{f71}; since both the name and country better agree with these persons; but the word seems to be rather a name of character and office, and to design the wise men, and priests of the Persians. An Eastern ^{f72} writer says the word is of Persic original, and is compounded of two words, “Mije Gush”, which signifies “a man with short ears”; for such was the first founder of the sect, and from whom they were so called. But in the Arabic Persic Nomenclator ^{f73} it is rendered “a worshipper of fire”, and such the Persian priests were; and to this agrees what Apuleius ^{f74} says, that “Magus”, in the Persian language, is the same as “priest” with us: and Xenophon ^{f75} says, that the Magi were first appointed by Cyrus, to sing hymns to the gods, as soon as it was day, and to sacrifice to them. The account given of them by Porphyry ^{f76} is, that

“among the Persians they that were wise concerning God, and worshipped him, were called **μαγοι**, “Magi”, for so “Magus” signifies in their country dialect; and so august and venerable were this sort of men accounted with the Persians, that Darius, the son of Hystaspis, ordered this, among other things, to be inscribed on his monument, that he was the master of the Magi.”

From whence we may learn in some measure who these men were, and why the word is by our translators rendered “wise men”; since the Magi, as Cicero ^{f77} says, were reckoned a sort of wise men, and doctors among the Persians: who further observes, that no man could be a king of the Persians

before he understood the discipline and knowledge of the Magi: and the wisdom of the Persian Magi, as Aelianus^{f78} writes, among other things, lay in foretelling things to come. These came

from the east, not from Chaldea, as some have thought, led hereunto by the multitude of astrologers, magicians, and soothsayers, which were among that people; (see ^{<270D>}Daniel 2:2,10,27 4:7) for Chaldea was not east, but north of Judea, as appears from (^{<240H>}Jeremiah 1:14,15; ^{<240E>}Jeremiah 4:6) (^{<246D>}Jeremiah 6:22 ^{<240D>}Jeremiah 10:22 ^{<227D>}Jeremiah 25:9). Others have thought they came from Arabia, and particularly Sheba, induced hereunto by (^{<197D>}Psalms 72:10,15). But though some part of Arabia lay east, yet Sheba was south of the land of Israel, as is evident from the queen of that place being called the “queen of the south”, (^{<402D>}Matthew 12:42). The more generally received opinion seems to be most right, that they came from Persia, which as it lies east of Judea, so was famous for this sort of men, and besides the name, as has been seen, is of Persic original. The place whither they came was Jerusalem, the “metropolis” of Judea, where they might suppose the king of the Jews was born, or where, at least, they might persuade themselves they should hear of him; since here Herod the king lived, to whom it seems they applied themselves in the first place. The time of their coming was, “when Jesus was born”; not as soon as he was born, or on the “thirteenth” day after his birth, the sixth of January, as it stands in our Calendar; or within the forty days before Mary’s Purification; since this space of time does not seem to be sufficient for so long a journey, and which must require a considerable preparation for it; nor is it probable if they came so soon as this, that after such a stir at Jerusalem, after Herod’s diligent search and inquiry concerning this matter, and his wrath and anger at being disappointed and deluded by the wise men, that Joseph and Mary should so soon bring the child into the temple, where, it was declared to be the Messiah by Simeon and Anna. Besides, immediately after the departure of the wise men, Joseph with his wife and child were ordered into Egypt, which could not be done before Mary’s Purification. But rather this their coming was near upon two years after the birth of Christ; since it is afterwards observed, that “Herod sent and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men”, (^{<402E>}Matthew 2:16). This was the opinion of Epiphanius^{f79} formerly, and is embraced by Dr. Lightfoot^{f80}, to whom I refer the reader for further proof of this matter.

Ver. 2. *Saying, where is he that is born king of the Jews?* etc.] These words were spoken to the Jews, or rather to Herod the king, or his ministers and courtiers, or to each of them, as the wise men had the opportunity of speaking to them; who make no scruple of his being born, of this they were fully assured; nor did they in the least hesitate about his being king of the Jews, who was born; but only inquire where he was, in what city, town, village, house, or family. The reason of their asking this question is,

for we have seen his star in the east. By the star they saw, some understand an angel, which is not likely. The learned Lightfoot^{f81} is of opinion that it was the light or glory of the Lord, which shone about the shepherds, when the angel brought them the news of Christ's birth, and which at so great a distance appeared as a star to these wise men; others, that it was a comet, such as has been thought to portend the birth or death of some illustrious person: but it seems to be properly a star, a new and an unusual one, such as had never been seen, nor observed before; and is called his star, the star of the king born, because it appeared on his account, and was the sign of his birth, who is "the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star", (^{<f6216>}Revelation 22:16). This they saw "in the east"; not in the eastern part of the heavens, but they saw it when they were in the east, that is, in their own country; and according to the best observations they were able to make, it was in that part of the heavens right over the land of Judea; from whence they concluded that the king of the Jews was born; but the question is how they should hereby know and be assured that such a person was born? To this it maybe replied, that there is a prophecy of Balaam's which is thus expressed, "there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel", (^{<02417>}Numbers 24:17) which is owned by some Jewish writers^{f82} to be a prophecy of the Messiah; though the star there mentioned is considered by them as one of the Messiah's titles; hence one who set up himself, and for a while was by some received as the Messiah, was called by them **abkww** **rb** "the son of a star"; but when he was discovered to be an impostor, they called him **abyzww** **rb** "the son of a lie": but I rather take it to be a sign of the Messiah's coming, and the meaning is, when a star shall **Ærd** "walk" or steer its course from Jacob, or above, or over the land of Israel, then a sceptre, or sceptre bearer, that is, a king, shall rise out of Israel. Now this prophecy of Balaam, who lived in the east, might be traditionally handed down to this time, and be well known by these men; and who, observing

such a star appear over the land of Judea, might conclude that now the sceptre bearer or king was born^{f83}. Besides, Zerdusht or Zoroastres, the author of the sect of the Magi or wise men, and who appears to be a Jew by birth, and to be acquainted with the writings of the Old Testament, and with this prophecy, spoke of the birth of Christ to his followers; and told them when he should be born, a star would appear, and shine in the day, and ordered them to go where that directed, and offer gifts, and worship him. An Eastern writer, who affirms^{f84} what I have now mentioned, relates^{f85} the following speech as spoke by the wise men to Herod, when in conversation with him, about this matter:

“A certain person, say they, of great note with us, in a book which he composed, warned us in it, mentioning these things; a child that shall descend from heaven, will be born in Palestine, whom the greatest part of the world shall serve, and the sign of his appearance shall be this; ye shall see a strange star, which shall direct you where he is; when ye shall see this, take gold, myrrh and frankincense, and go and offer them to him, and worship him, and then return, lest a great calamity befall you. Now the star has appeared unto us, and we are come to perform what was commanded us.”

If this be true, we are not at a loss how they come by their knowledge, nor for a reason of their conduct. That the Jews have expected that a star should appear at the time of the Messiah’s coming, is certain, from some passages in a book of theirs of great value and esteem among them, in which are the following things: in one place it is said^{f86}

“The king Messiah shall be revealed in the land of Galilee, and lo a star in the east shall swallow up seven stars in the north, and a flame of red fire shall be in the firmament six days;”

and in another place,^{f87}

“When the Messiah shall be revealed, there shall rise up in the east a certain Star, flaming with all sorts of colours — and all men shall see it:”

once more it is affirmed as a tradition^{f88} that

“The holy blessed God hath determined to build Jerusalem, and to make a certain (fixed) star appear sparkling with seven blazing tails

shining from it in the midst of the firmament — and then shall the king Messiah be revealed in all the world.”

Now this expectation of the appearing of such a star at the coming of the Messiah takes its rise from and is founded upon the above mentioned prophecy. It is said ^{f89} that Seth the son of Adam gave out a prophecy, that a star should appear at the birth of the Messiah; and that a star did appear at the birth of Christ is certain from the testimony of the Evangelist, and seems to have some confirmation from the writings of the Heathens themselves. Some have thought that the star which Virgil speaks of, and calls ^{f90} “Caesaris Astrum”, “Caesar’s star”, is this very star, which he in complaisance to that monarch ascribes to him. Pliny ^{f91} makes mention

“of a bright comet with a silver beard, which was so refulgent that it could scarce be looked upon, showing in itself the effigies of God in human form.”

If the testimony of Chalcidius, a Platonic philosopher, taken notice of by many learned men, is genuine, and he not a Christian, ^{f92} it is much to the purpose, and is as follows:

“There is also a more venerable and sacred history, which speaks of the rising of a certain unusual star; not foretelling diseases and deaths, but the descent of a venerable God, born for the sake of human conversation, and the affairs of mortals; which star truly, when the wise men of the Chaldeans saw in their journey by night, and being very expert in the consideration of celestial things, are said to inquire after the birth of the new Deity, and having found the infant majesty, to worship him, and pay their vows worthy of such a God.”

The end proposed by them in taking such a journey is expressed,

and are come to worship him; that is, either to pay adoration to him as God, of which they might be convinced by the extraordinary appearance of the star, or be assured of by divine revelation or rather to give him civil homage and respect, as an illustrious person, as being king of the Jews.

Ver. 3. *When Herod the king had heard these things*, etc.] That is, the report made by the wise men of the appearance of an unusual star, and of the birth of the king of the Jews, which they affirmed with all certainty, without any hesitation,

he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Herod was troubled, his mind was disturbed and made uneasy, fearing he should be deposed, and lose his kingdom, to which he knew he had no just right and claim, being a foreigner; and “all Jerusalem”, i.e. all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who heard of this, were also troubled, and showed a concern at it with him; either feignedly, as knowing his jealousy, suspicion and cruelty; or in reality, because of tumults, commotions and wars, they might fear would arise upon this, having lost the true notion of the Messiah, as a spiritual king, saviour and redeemer. And hereby was fulfilled, in part, the famous prophecy in (^{<0490>}Genesis 49:10) according to the sense of one ^{f93} of the Targumists on it, who paraphrases it after this manner;

“Kings and governors shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor scribes, who teach the law, from his seed, until the time that the king Messiah, the least of his sons, comes, “and because of him”,
aymm[[^]wsmyty, “the people shall melt.””

that is, they shall be distressed and troubled, their hearts shall melt like wax within them; which was their present case, though perhaps the paraphrast may design the Gentiles.

Ver. 4. *And when he had gathered all the chief priests,* etc.] Here we have an account of Herod’s conduct at this juncture; he calls a council, assembles the sanhedrim, gathers together the more learned persons in the city to consult with them upon this matter,

the chief priests, all of which he gathered together, and which seem to be many; and were not only the then present high priest and his substitutes, but all the principal persons of the priesthood, who were chosen from the rest, into the great sanhedrim, or council: and by

the scribes of the people are meant a sort of letter learned men, whose business it was to keep and write out copies of the law, and other things, for “the people”; they were the fathers of the traditions, and interpreters of the law to them; and therefore are called “the scribes of the people”: as well also, because they were chosen from among the people, from any other tribe, and not from the tribe of Levi, from whom the priests were; so that one seems to design the “clergy”, and the other the laity, in this assembly. The Septuagint render **μυρj wç** “the officers of the people”, by this same word the scribes, and scribes of the people, in (^{<0416>}Numbers 11:16 ^{<0515>}Deuteronomy 20:5,8,9) (^{<0610>}Joshua 1:10 3:2; ^{<0833>}Joshua 8:33;

(⁶²¹Joshua 23:2, (⁶²¹Joshua 24:1). The learned Dr. Lightfoot ^{f94} conjectures, that the persons of note, who were present at this time, were Hillell the president of the council, Shammai the vice president, the sons of Betira, Judah and Joshua, Bava ben Buta, Jonathan ben Uzziel, the Chaldee paraphrast, and Simeon the son of Hillell.

He demanded of them, or asked them with authority, as the chief captain did, (⁴²¹³Acts 21:33) “where Christ”, ο χριστος, the Christ, the Messiah

should be born? that is, where was the place of his birth as fixed in their prophecies, where, accordingly, they believed and expected he would be born. Herod’s pretence, no doubt, in putting this question was, that he might be able to satisfy the wise men of the East about this matter; though the true reason within himself was, that he might know where this new born king was, in order to destroy him.

Ver. 5. *And they said unto him*, etc.] They answer without any hesitation, it being a generally received notion, and a thing well known among them,

in Bethlehem of Judea; and give their reason for it; for

thus it is written by the prophet, that is, the prophet Micah, in whose prophecy, (³⁸²Micah 5:2) it stands, and is as follows:

Ver. 6. *And thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda*, etc.] This prophecy, which the chief priests and scribes produced, as pointing at the place of Christ’s birth, is owned by both ancient and later Jews ^{f95} to be a prophecy of the Messiah. The difference between Micah and Matthew is easily reconciled. Bethlehem is called by Micah, Bethlehem Ephratah, and by Matthew, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, and both were one and the same place. Bethlehem Ephratah was in the land of Juda, as appears from the prophecy of Micah itself, from (⁸⁸²Ruth 1:2) and the Septuagint version of (⁶⁵⁰Joshua 15:60) and is described in this manner by Matthew, partly to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the land of Zebulun, (⁶⁵¹⁵Joshua 19:15) and partly because its other name Ephratah was now disused, and so unknown to Herod, who was unacquainted with the books and prophecies of the Old Testament. Micah says this place was

little among the thousands of Judah. Matthew says, “not the least”. But in this is no apparent contradiction, it might be “little” and yet “not the least”; besides, it might be “little” and “not little”, or “not the least” in different respects, and at different times; it might be little, mean, and contemptible as

to worldly splendour, riches, number of inhabitants, pompous buildings, etc. and yet not be little or mean, when considered as the place of the birth of many great persons, such as Booz, Jesse, David, etc. and especially Christ. It might be little in Micah's time, and yet not in Matthew's; especially since it had received a considerable additional honour by Christ's being born there. Moreover, the words in Micah may be rendered, by way of interrogation, "art thou little, or the least?" To which the answer in Matthew is, "no, thou art not the least", etc. or else the word **rbd** may be understood, and the text be translated thus; "it is a small thing that thou art among the thousands of Judah, for out of thee", etc. a great honour shall be conferred on thee, the Messiah shall spring from thee. Again, what Micah calls "thousands", are in Matthew called "princes"; the reason of this is, because the tribes of Israel were divided into thousands, and every thousand had its prince; so that though here is a difference in words, yet none in sense. What Micah styles "a ruler in Israel", Matthew expresses by "a governor that shall rule or feed my people Israel"; but in this there is no contradiction. Add to all this, that it should be observed, that the Evangelist is not giving a version of his own, but of the chief priests and scribes; and therefore was it ever so faulty, they, and not he, must be chargeable with it; for he has acted the part of a faithful historian in giving it in the words in which they cited it¹⁹⁶.

Ver. 7. *Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men*, etc.] As soon as he had got the intelligence of the place of the Messiah's birth, he called, or ordered the wise men to be brought into his presence, and that in a very private manner; lest the Jews, who knew his hypocrisy and deceit, should perceive his views, and enter into his designs, and so give the wise men some instructions, which would be prejudicial to the scheme he was forming in his own mind to destroy the young king; and having called them to him, he

inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. He took a good deal of pains in examining them, he sifted them, and inquired of them with much accuracy, and exactness, the precise time of the star's appearing to them, how long ago it was when it was first observed by them; that hereby he might exactly know the age of Christ, and the better execute the bloody design he had formed, should the wise men disappoint him; and the better detect an impostor, should another afterwards arise, and set up himself for the king of the Jews.

Ver. 8. *And he sent them to Bethlehem*, etc.] Having got out of them all that he could, and was for his purpose, he informs them of the place where they might find the person they came to inquire after, according to the account of it which the chief priests and scribes had given him; and then sends them away to Bethlehem, where Christ, according to prophecy, was to be born, and now was born. It may seem strange that neither any of the Jews, nor Herod, or any of his ministers and courtiers, should go along with these men to Bethlehem; since it was but a little way off, not above five or six miles from Jerusalem; and since the birth of such a person was no trivial thing, but an affair of great concern and importance. The Jews might not care to go, lest Herod should suspect that they were going to revolt from him, and set up this new born king against him; and it might be a piece of policy in Herod and his courtiers not to accompany them, for they might imagine that the parents of the child would be jealous and afraid of them, and would therefore conceal it, when they would be in no fear of strangers: and no doubt but the wise providence of God overruled and directed this matter, that so the young child Jesus might be preserved from the bloody designs of this tyrant; who often takes the wise in their own craftiness, and carries the counsel of the froward headlong. When he dismissed them he gave them this charge and these orders,

go and search diligently for the young child; go to Bethlehem, the place of his birth I have told you of, and there inquire and search in every house and family, omit none till you have found him;

and when you have found him bring me word again; give me a particular account of him, who are his parents, and where he dwells,

that I may come and worship him also: for they had declared, that the reason of their coming was to worship him; this he said hypocritically, in order to hide and cover his bloody intentions.

Ver. 9. *When they had heard the king*, etc.] With great care and attention, what he had told them of the birth place of the young child; the strict charge he had given them to search diligently for him, and then return to him with an account of the whole affair; and his expressions of respect to the new born prince, which they took to be said in great sincerity,

they departed; took their leave of Herod and his court, and set forward on their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem:

and lo, to their great surprise and joy,

the star, which they saw in the east, then appeared; for, it seems, it had for some time disappeared: it looks as if it had been only seen at the time of Christ's birth, and when they were in their own country; for both here, and in (~~AMP~~ Matthew 2:2) they are only said to have seen it "in the east", that is, when they were in the east country; so that it seems from that time they had had no sight of it, not while they were on their journey, nor at Jerusalem; nor was it necessary they should. When they saw it in their own country, according to their best observation, it was over the land of Judea, and they were persuaded of it, that it was a certain sign that the king of the Jews was born: they therefore determine upon and prepare for a journey to Jerusalem, the metropolis of the nation, and where the king kept his court, to inquire for him; nor needed they the guidance of the star to direct them to a place so well known; but being in quest of him in an obscure place, and without any guide, this star appears to them; and, which is something very extraordinary,

went before them, till it came, and stood over, where the young child was. This star had a motion, kept pace with them, and was a guide unto them, till it and they came to the place where Christ was; and then it stood directly over the house, so that they had no need to inquire of any person for him. It is certain from hence, that this star was indeed a very unusual one; its being seen in the daytime, its motion and standing still, its situation, which must be very low, and its use to point out the very house where Christ was, show it to be so; but though it was an unusual appearance, it should not be thought incredible.^{f97} Varro relates, that

“from the time Aeneas went from Troy, he saw the star Venus in the daytime, day after day, till he came to the field of Laurentum, where he saw it no more, by which he knew that those lands were fatal.”

The appearing of this star, and then its disappearing for a time, agree, in some measure, with the account the Jews give of the star which they expect will be seen at the coming of the Messiah; for they^{f98} say,

“after seven days that star shall be hid, and the Messiah shall be hid for twelve months — when he shall descend, the pillar of fire shall be seen as before, in sight, and afterwards the Messiah shall be revealed, and many people shall be gathered to him.”

Ver. 10. *When they saw the star*, etc.] Which by its appearance, size, brightness, etc. they knew to be the same with that which they had seen, when in their own country;

they rejoiced with exceeding great joy; a “pleonasm” or a redundancy of expression frequently used by the Hebrews, (see ~~4006~~ John 4:6) and the Septuagint there; setting forth the rapture, the excess of joy they were in upon the sight of the star. Very probably before this, their hearts were sad, their countenances dejected, and they greatly discouraged, having taken so great a journey, and as yet to so little purpose. They had been at Jerusalem, where they expected to have found him that was born king of the Jews; they had been at court, and conversed with men of the greatest figure and intelligence, and could get no tidings of him; people of all ranks and degrees seemed to be troubled at the account they brought; no body cared to go along with them to Bethlehem: all these circumstances no doubt were discouraging to them; but as soon as they saw the star their spirits revived, joy filled their hearts, cheerfulness appeared in their countenances; and they pursued their journey with inexpressible delight, till they came to the place where the illustrious person was they were seeking after.

Ver. 11. *And when they were come into the house*, etc.] Which they entered without making any inquiry, being fully assured by the star’s standing right over it, that this was the house, and here was the king of the Jews, whom they were come to worship; and having entered in “they saw” some copies read *ευρον*,

they found the young child, with Mary his mother; in her lap, or arms, or in the house with her, for by this time he might go alone. Joseph perhaps was not at home, but about his business; and which might be so ordered by the providence of God, that so these men might only see the mother of Christ, who had no real father as man; who had they seen Joseph, might have took him to be his proper father. Upon the sight of the young child,

they fell down on their knees or faces to the ground, agreeably to the custom of their country,

and worshipped him as a king; giving him the same civil honour and respect, as they were wont to do to their own kings and princes; which custom began with Cyrus: for so Xenophon^{f99} says, that

“when the people saw him, *παντες προσεκυνησαν*, they all worshipped him; either because some were ordered to begin this

custom; or else being amazed at the apparatus; or because he seemed to appear so great and beautiful; for before that time none of the Persians worshipped Cyrus.”

And when they had opened their treasures, that is, their purses, bags or boxes, in which they put those things they brought with them necessary for their journey;

they presented, or offered to him *gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh*: such things as they had; it being usual, not only with the Persians, but other eastern nations, to make presents to kings and great persons, when they made any addresses to them; which generally, among other things, consisted of gold, spices, myrrh, and the like, (see ^{<491>}Genesis 43:11 ^{<110>}1 Kings 10:2 ^{<9720>}Psalm 72:10-15). Which last passage referred to, being a prophecy of the Messiah, has been thought by some now to have had its accomplishment, together with (^{<2806>}Isaiah 60:6) where frankincense as well as gold is mentioned, “they shall bring gold and incense” or frankincense; upon which a noted Jewish writer ^{f100} observes, that gold and frankincense shall be brought privately as a present to the king Messiah. According to the Ethiopians, these wise men were three, whose names they give us; the name of him that offered the gold, was Annoson; he that offered the frankincense, was Allytar; and he that offered the myrrh, Kyssad ^{f101}. The Papists call them the three kings of Colen, and say they lie buried in that place.

Ver. 12. *Being warned of God in a dream*, etc.] It is likely they made a short stay at Bethlehem, might lodge there a night; at least laid themselves down a while to take some refreshment in sleep, after they had paid their respects to him that was born king of the Jews, and performed the whole business they came about; when in a dream they received a divine oracle, were admonished and counselled by God,

that they should not return to Herod: which would have been going back again, and out of their way; there being a nearer one from Bethlehem to their own country, than to go by Jerusalem, though Herod had charged them to return to him. Whether they had promised him they would, is not certain; it is probable they might; however, they thought it most advisable to hearken to the divine oracle; wherefore,

they departed into their own country another way. What became of these persons afterwards, and whether they were spiritually and savingly

enlightened into the knowledge of Christ; what a report they made of him when they came into their own country, and the success thereof, we have no account of, either in sacred or profane history.

Ver. 13. *And when they were departed*, etc.] That is immediately, or as soon as they were gone, or in a very little time after, probably the same night,

behold, the Angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream; it is very likely the same angel who appeared to him in such sort, (⁴⁰⁰²Matthew 1:20) “saying arise”, awake out of sleep, and rise from thy bed directly,

and take the young child and his mother. The angel does not say take thy wife and son; for though Mary was properly his wife, yet Christ was not properly his son. The child is also mentioned before the mother, not only because of his divine nature and office, in respect to which he was her God and Saviour; but because it was the preservation of the child that was chiefly regarded, and for which the providence of God was particularly concerned; wherefore Joseph is ordered to take them in proper carriages, and

flee into Egypt, which was near to Judea, and so a fit place to flee to; for a long and tedious journey would not have been suitable to the mother and her young child. Moreover, Egypt was out of Herod’s jurisdiction; here he could not come at them, or have any power over them; besides, hereby a prophecy after mentioned was to have its accomplishment. Hence it appears to be lawful to flee from danger, from tyrants and persecutors, when the providence of God opens a way for escape. The angel goes on with his charge,

and be thou there until I bring thee word: continue there, do not remove elsewhere, or return back, till I speak with thee, or order and command thee otherwise; and gives the reason for his appearing to him in such a manner, and giving such a charge;

for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him: no less a person than Herod the king, a bloody minded man, revengeful, desperate, and resolute in whatsoever he undertakes, “will seek”, diligently search and inquire for, not his parents, Joseph and Mary, who might have been safe, but “the young child”, who was born king of the Jews, and which gave him a great deal of uneasiness; and that not to worship him, as he told the wise men, but

to destroy him, to take away his life; to prevent which the angel was sent with this charge to Joseph: for though he was born to die for the sins of his people, his time was not yet come; he was to grow up to years of maturity, he was to be a preacher of the Gospel, to do many miracles and at last to lay down his life of himself, voluntarily, and not to be taken away from him without his knowledge and will.

Ver. 14. *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother*, etc.]

That is, as soon as he awoke out of sleep, and rose from his bed, he did as he was commanded, he prepared for his journey; and very opportunely had the wise men presented their gifts; the gold they brought served to defray the expense of this journey, and which no doubt was so ordered by divine providence for this purpose. Joseph was very punctual and expeditious in obeying the command of God; he took the young child and his mother,

by night, the very selfsame night in which he had this notice; and which season was the most fitting to depart in for secrecy, and most commodious and agreeable to travel in, in those hot countries: hence it appears very manifest, that the coming of the wise men, and the departure of Joseph with Mary and Jesus into Egypt, could not be within a fortnight after the birth of Christ, nor any time before Mary's Purification; since such a journey must have been very improper and unsuitable, at any time within that period; but rather Jesus must be about two years of age, whether something under, or over, it matters not, when Joseph with him

departed into Egypt: what part of Egypt he went into is not certain. The Jews say that Jesus went to Alexandria in Egypt, and which is probable enough; since this was a place greatly resorted to at this time by Jews, and where provision was made for their sustenance; though they greatly mistake the person with whom he went; for they say^{f102} that R. Joshua ben Perachiah, whom they pretend was his master, went to Alexandria in Egypt, and Jesus with him. However, this is an acknowledgment of the truth of this part of Christ's history, that he was in Egypt; as also when they blasphemously and maliciously say^{f103}, did not Ben Stada, by whom they mean Jesus, bring enchantments or magic, *μυγxmm μυρϙκ*, "out of Egypt", in a cutting in the flesh? To which wicked accusation Arnobius seems to refer^{f104}, when he says,

"perhaps we may meet with many other of these reproachful and childish sayings; as that he was a magician, that he performed all

these things by secret arts, and that he stole strange sciences, and the names of mighty angels, out of the temples of the Egyptians.”

Ver. 15. *And was there until the death of Herod*, etc.] Which was in a very short time; for Eusebius ^{f105} says, that immediately, in a very little time after the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem, the divine vengeance inflicted diseases on him, which quickly brought him to his end; so that, according to the learned Dr. Lightfoot ^{f106}, Jesus was not above three or four months in Egypt. Now all this was brought about,

that it might be fulfilled; not by way of accommodation of phrases to a like event; or by way of type, which has a fresh completion in the antitype; or as a proverbial sentence which might be adapted to any remarkable deliverance out of hardship, misery and destruction; but literally, properly, and in the obvious sense thereof;

which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, not Balaam, in (^{<0232>}Numbers 23:22) or (^{<0248>}Numbers 24:8) but in (^{<2810>}Hosea 11:1) “when Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt”: the meaning of which passage is, either in connection with the last clause of the foregoing chapter thus; “in a morning shall the king of Israel be cut off”, ρ [n]yk, “because Israel is a child”, a rebellious and disobedient one, acting a very weak and wicked part; “yet I have loved him, or do love him”, and “have called”, or “will call”, (the past tense for the future, frequent in the Hebrew language, especially in the prophetic writings,) “my son out of Egypt”; who will be obliged to retire there for some time; I will make him king, set him upon the throne, who shall execute justice, and reign for ever and ever; or thus, “because Israel is a child”, helpless and imprudent, and “I love him”, though he is so, “therefore I will call”, or I have determined to call

my son out of Egypt: who through a tyrant’s rage and malice will be obliged to abide there a while; yet I will bring him from thence into the land of Judea, where he shall live and “help” my “servant”, παιδος ^{f107}, “child Israel”; shall instruct him in his duty, teach him the doctrines of the Gospel, and at last, by his sufferings and death, procure for him the pardon of all his transgressions; of which there is a particular enumeration in (^{<0113>}Matthew 2:3,4,5,6,7). This is the natural and unconstrained sense of these words, which justifies the Evangelist in his citation and application of them to Christ’s going to Egypt, and his return from thence, as I have elsewhere ^{f108} shown.

Ver. 16. *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked*, etc.] Herod, having waited a proper time for the return of the wise men, and they not coming, concluded he was tricked by them; though, no doubt, when they promised to return, and bring him word how things were, they seriously meant and designed a performance; but having met with a divine oracle, which ordered them another way, they thought it most advisable to obey God rather than man. Upon this,

Herod was exceeding wrath; partly at the usage he met with from the wise men, who according to his apprehension had put a trick upon him; and chiefly because his scheme was broke, which was by them to come at the knowledge and sight of the young child, and privately dispatch him: and now he might fear, which increased his wrath, that the child would escape his hands, and in time be set up for king, to the prejudice of him and his family; wherefore, to prevent this, if possible, he

sent forth his officers and soldiers, of his own will, without any show of law or justice, acting herein as an absolute and tyrannical prince,

and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under. A most cruel and barbarous action, and agrees with the character given of him, that he was in the beginning of his reign, and it seems too in the latter end of it, *hmrmw μymd çya*, “a bloody and deceitful man”^{f109}: he slew, or ordered to be slain, “children”, infants who had done him no injury, nor were capable of doing any, and whose parents also had not disoblged him; he slew the infants at Bethlehem, because this was the place of the Messiah’s birth, the knowledge of which he had got from the chief priests and scribes; he slew all of them, that there might be no possibility of the young child’s escaping: and lest it should by any means escape to a neighbouring town or village, he slew all the children

in all the coasts thereof, in all the territories of Bethlehem, in all the towns and villages around it, as many as were

from two years old and under: for of such an age he supposed the newborn king to be; he knew he must be near that age, but could not exceed it,

according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men; of the appearing of the star to them, and when they concluded this great and famous prince was born. This cruel murder of the infants seems to be

hinted at by Josephus^{f110}, where he says, that “many slaughters followed the prediction of a new king”; and is more manifestly referred to by Macrobinus, a Heathen author, though the story is mixed and confounded with other things; who reports^{f111}, that

“when Augustus heard, that among the children under two years of age, whom Herod king of the Jews ordered to be slain in Syria, that his son was also killed, said, it was better to be Herod’s hog than his son.”

Killing of infants as soon as born, or while in their cradles, is by the Jews ascribed to one Lilith, which, R. Elias^{f112} says, is the name of a devil, which kills children; and indeed such an action is truly a diabolical one.

Ver. 17, 18. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken*, etc.] By the slaughter of the infants at Bethlehem was literally accomplished what had been predicted by

Jeremy the prophet, in (^{<3815>}Jeremiah 31:15).

in Rama was there a voice heard, etc. That this prophecy belongs not to the Babylonish captivity, but the times of the Messiah, appears from the whole context; which manifestly speaks of the miraculous conception of Christ, of the blessings of his kingdom to be enjoyed by his people, and of the new covenant to be made with them, as I have shown in another place^{f113}. Rama was not in Arabia, as Justin Martyr says^{f114}, but a town in the tribe of Benjamin, (^{<0685>}Joshua 18:25) and very near to Bethlehem in the tribe of Juda: between these two places, and near to both of them, was the grave of Rachel, (^{<0159>}Genesis 35:19) for which reason, and also because Rama belonged to Benjamin, a son of hers, and where, no doubt, many children were destroyed in this massacre, as well as at Bethlehem, Rachel is introduced in the prophecy representing the sorrowful mothers of those parts,

weeping for their children; whose distress and grief are signified by several words, “lamentation, weeping and great mourning”, to express the excessiveness thereof, for they

would not be comforted; they refused to hear anything that might be suggested to them for their relief, because their children

were not, i.e. were dead, were not in the land of the living, and no more to be enjoyed by them in this world. I cannot forbear transcribing a remark made by a noted Jew ^{f115} upon that passage in (⁴⁰³⁰Genesis 35:20). “And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave”; to show, says he, that Jacob saw that this thing was of the Lord, and that it would be an help to her children, as it is written, “a voice was heard in Rama”, etc. wherefore he set a pillar upon her; and to show that the affair of her grave, that this **dyt [I htyh** “belonged to the time to come”, he says, “that is the pillar of Rachel’s grave unto this day”: he means, **hl wagh μwy**, “the day of redemption”. And Rachel, in the passage of Jeremy, the Jews ^{f116} themselves own, means the congregation of Israel.

(See Gill on “⁴⁰²⁷Matthew 2:17”)

Ver. 19. *But when Herod was dead*, etc.] Who died, as before observed, a few months after this tragedy was acted; and, according to the ^{f117} Jewish writers, on the seventh day of the month Cisleu, and which answers to the twenty fifth of our November: and was afterwards observed as a day of rejoicing by the Jews. The account which Josephus ^{f118}, and from him Eusebius ^{f119}, gives of his miserable death, is as follows; a burning fever seized him, with an intolerable itching all over his body, and continual pains of the colic; his feet swelled with a dropsy; he had an inflammation in the lower part of his belly: a putrefaction in his privy parts, which bred worms; a frequency and difficulty of breathing, and convulsions in all his members; he had a voracious appetite, a stinking breath, and his intestines abounded with ulcers; when he found that all means made use of were ineffectual, and that he must die, he attempted to lay violent hands upon himself, but was prevented, and soon after expired in a very miserable manner. Now some time after his death,

behold an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. It may be the same angel who appeared in the same manner, and ordered him to go into Egypt, with the young child and his mother; and who now brings him news of the death of Herod, and bids him return to the land of Israel; which shows the watchful providence of God, and the useful ministry of angels, concerned in the preservation of the infant Jesus.

Ver. 20. *Saying, arise, and take the young child and his mother*, etc.] Joseph strictly observed and obeyed the divine command of the angel, who had ordered him to continue in Egypt, till he brought him word what he

should do, and where he should go: here he was with Mary and Jesus, when the angel bid him arise, and take them with him,

and go into the land of Israel. He does not bid him go to Bethlehem or Nazareth, or any particular place, but the land of Israel, where he might go even into any part of it, without fear; and gives this reason for it,

for they are dead which sought the young child's life; meaning either Herod only, the plural number being put for the singular; or including Antipater his son with him, who might be equally concerned in seeking the life of Christ; since he was next heir, and whom Herod^{f120} ordered to be slain about five days before his death; or else designing with him many of the executioners of the infants at Bethlehem, and thereabout; who might have been, as well as he, miserable instances of divine vengeance, for their concern in that barbarous tragedy.

Ver. 21. *And he arose and took the young child and his mother,* etc.] He exactly conformed in every circumstance to the orders given him, with respect to the persons he took, the place he went to, and the expeditiousness of doing it; and is an example of ready and cheerful obedience to the commands of God, worthy of imitation. We may learn from hence, as well as from some other instances already met with, a reason among others, why, though Mary was a virgin, and even if she was to continue so, yet she must be espoused to Joseph as her husband; that she might have one to take care of her and her young child, and be a means, under God, of preserving, protecting, and providing for them.

Ver. 22. *But when he heard that Archelaus,* etc.] This Archelaus was a son of Herod the great by Malthace Samaritan, and was appointed by him for his successor a little before his death, and was upon it declared king by the populace, the soldiers, and those that were in power; all which is affirmed by Josephus^{f121}, and confirms the account given by the Evangelist; with whose account agrees what the Jewish chronologer says^{f122}, that

“Archelaus, the second king of the family of Herod, reigned after his father’s death: and a little after he says, Caesar Augustus caused Archelaus to reign *swwdrwh wyba tj t* “in the room of Herod his father””;

which is the very phrase used by Matthew. Now this man was like his father, a very cruel wicked man; and, as the above chronologer says^{f123}, he

ordered his troops, and slew at the feast of the passover, in the temple of the Lord, “nine thousand persons”: though perhaps Josephus’s account is truest, who says ^{f124}, that he sent in his whole army upon the people, who had raised a sedition, and slew, whilst they were sacrificing, about “three thousand”; and this happened at the beginning of his reign, and indeed before he had scarce mounted the throne. And now the news of this might have reached the ears of Joseph, and be the reason why he

was afraid to go thither, into Judea, where Archelaus reigned.

Notwithstanding being warned of God in a dream, who never failed to advise him when in difficulty and distress, he did not go back again to Egypt, but

turned aside into the parts of Galilee; where Herod Antipas, another of Herod’s sons, was tetrarch or governor; who was a milder person, and not so cruel and tyrannical as Archelaus: besides, Galilee was an obscure place, where, Joseph might reasonably think, he should live with Mary and Jesus unobserved, and free from danger.

Ver. 23. *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth*, etc.] Which was a city of Galilee, and where Joseph and Mary had both dwelt before, (~~4025~~ Luke 1:26 2:4) here they came and fixed their habitation,

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. This affair of going into Galilee, and settling at Nazareth, was brought about with this view, to accomplish what had been foretold by the prophets, or prophet, the plural number being used for the singular, as in (~~4065~~ John 6:45 ~~4130~~ Acts 13:40). And indeed it is so rendered here in the Syriac, Persic, and Ethiopic versions; and designs the prophet Isaiah, and respects that prophecy of his in (~~2910B~~ Isaiah 11:1) “and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and **רִצְּחַן**, “a branch shall grow out of his roots”; a prophecy owned by the Jews ^{f125} themselves to belong to the Messiah, and which was now fulfilled in Jesus; who as he was descended from Jesse’s family, so by dwelling at Nazareth, he would appear to be, and would be “called a Nazarene, or Netzer, the branch”; being an inhabitant of Natzareth, or Netzer, so called from the multitude of plants and trees that grew there.

A Nazarene, as David de Pomis says ^{f126},

“is one that is born in the city Netzer, which is said to be in the land of Galilee, three days journey distant from Jerusalem.”

Now though Christ was not born, yet because he dwelt at Nazareth, and was educated there; hence the Jews frequently call him $\text{yr xwnh } [\text{wcy}$, “Jesus, the Nazarene”^{f127}”; and sometimes only yr xwnh , “the Nazarene”^{f128}. They also design him by $\text{rxn } ^\text{b}$, “Ben Netzer”^{f129}, of whom they say a great many evil things: and that Christ is often called Jesus of Nazareth, or the Nazarene, and his followers Nazarenes, from the place of his habitation, is known to everyone. One of Christ’s disciples is called Netzer in the Talmud^{f130}, and made to plead for his life, because his name signified a branch, according to (~~23100~~ Isaiah 11:1). Surenhusius observes^{f131}, that the form $\text{rmanç hm } \mu\text{wyql}$ “to fulfil what is said”, used by the Talmudists, and which he takes to be the same with this here, is used by them, when they allege not the very words of Moses, or the prophets, but their sense, which is deduced as a certain axiom from them; and thinks it is applicable to the present case.