

# OpenTheo

## Early Recognition



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In "Early Recognition," Steve Gregg examines the early recognition of Jesus by both Jewish and Gentile people. He discusses Jewish purification rituals, the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah by Anna and Simeon in the temple, and the visit of the Magi, among other topics. He also highlights themes of suffering and loss while examining the history of Israel as a type for the life of the Messiah.

## Transcript

All right, I'd like for you to turn with me today to Luke chapter 2. We will be beginning where we left off last time, beginning at verse 22. We will take some verses from Luke chapter 2 in this session, all the way up through verse 38. We're looking at Luke 2, verses 22 through 38.

And when we've looked at that material, we'll be turning over to Matthew and the very familiar story of the coming of the wise men. And only one more session after this will be completed with the early chapters of Matthew and Luke, and we'll be ready to move into the adult life of Jesus. But there is more to cover than we have yet covered.

Today, we could say that the materials before us present to us the earliest recognition of Christ by Jewish people and by Gentile people. Of course, the shepherds we've already studied, they were the first to know about Christ. Although they received a direct revelation from angels, it's not as if they had some kind of a discovery of him by accident or anything, as Simeon and Anna did in this particular story.

Or as the wise men. The wise men had some guidance too, although we don't fully understand the nature of their guidance. But we do see Jews and Gentiles acknowledge Jesus as Lord, right at the very opening of his life.

And so we'll first read about the Jewish people who recognized him, who were at the temple. We read in chapter 2 of Luke, in verse 21, that when Jesus was eight days old, as every Jewish boy needed to be, he had to go to be circumcised. And at that time, he was officially named.

His name was given Jesus, which was of course chosen for him not by the parents, but by God and communicated to the parents through an angel previously, before he was even born. Now while they were still in the region, Mary and Joseph had to make another trip to the temple, in addition to the one where they had taken Jesus to be circumcised. There were certain ritual laws associated with the firstborn son of a Jewish family.

And also they coincided with laws of purification for a mother having given birth to a son. The laws are found back in, I think in Leviticus, chapter 12, if I'm not mistaken. And the first parts of that chapter, which tell that when a woman gives birth to a child, she is unclean for the first seven days prior to the circumcision of a male child.

And then after the circumcision, she is unclean for an additional 33 days, altogether 40 or 41 days, for a male child. If it was a female child, for some reason, that never explains, she was unclean for twice as long. The uncleanness, no doubt, was associated principally with the postpartum bleeding, because any issue of blood in a male or a female body rendered a person unclean for a period of time.

If a man had internal bleeding that was visibly coming out any of his orifices, or a woman at her regular intervals, or after childbirth, if blood was coming from the body, this was considered to be a defiling thing temporarily, not sinful, just ceremonially defiling. And while a person had an issue of blood, or in the case of a man, according to the law, if he had an issue of semen that was out of the ordinary, this was considered to be a defiling trait, which would render a person unclean, that is, unable to participate in the worship community, and even unable to have physical contact with anybody without conferring defilement to them. It was said in the law that when a woman, for example, was in her menstrual period, that anyone who sat on the same bed that she sat on, or on the same chair, or touched her, or in any way came into direct or even indirect physical contact to a woman during the time of her uncleanness, that person was also unclean.

Now, there is no explanation of why it is that a woman was considered to be unclean twice as long after giving birth to a female child than she was after giving birth to a male child. The 40 days after a male child would correspond with the average length of time that a woman bleeds after giving birth to a baby, whether it's male or female. The bleeding does not continue longer in the case of females.

And therefore, there's obviously some symbolism to the practice, not simply the practicalness of waiting until the bleeding stops so she can go back to the temple. In any case, Jesus, in verse 21 of this chapter, was 8 days old. In verse 22, he is about 40 days old, 40 or 41 days old.

And there were two things that had to be done. One was the ritual of purification that the woman had to go through. This was done normally by the sacrifice of a lamb and a bird.

The bird could either be a pigeon or a dove, according to the ritual. It could be a pigeon

or a dove in addition to a lamb. But if a family was too poor to offer a lamb, then it was possible for the poor to substitute a second bird so they could offer two birds instead of a lamb and a bird.

We read in the narrative before us that that's what Mary and Joseph offered, was two birds, which suggests that Jesus was born into a poor home. There's not a great issue made of that at any point in the Scriptures, but there are hints of that, that Jesus was not an affluent person, neither in his upbringing nor in his later life. And the fact that his parents offered two birds suggests that they had to avail themselves of the special provisions for the poor in the law.

The purification of Mary after giving birth to a child was one of the things that had to be done, but there's another thing too. Instigated back in Exodus chapter 13. After the Exodus, God wanted the Jews in several ways to remember the Exodus, to remember how God had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh by slaying the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and sparing the firstborn sons of the Jews by the application of blood over the doors of their houses.

And so they were to celebrate and commemorate Passover in a number of ways. One way was through the regular yearly Passover celebration, a feast followed by a festival of seven days of unleavened bread. This in its various symbolism was to call to mind their deliverance at the time of the Exodus.

There was another way in which he wanted them to perpetually remember it also, and that was by dedicating the firstborn son of every family to the Lord. It was at the time of the Exodus that God made this rule. In Exodus chapter 13 he said, Every child, every male child that opens the womb shall be holy to the Lord, shall be consecrated to the Lord.

The expression who opens the womb means the first one to come out, the firstborn son. Other children would come out of the womb, but the firstborn child was considered to be the one that opened the womb for the first time. And therefore the firstborn, not only of children, but also of animals, were to be offered to the Lord.

Now in the case of a clean animal, like a lamb or a goat or an ox, the firstborn of any dam was to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord. In the case of an unclean animal like a donkey or a human, which obviously neither of them could be sacrificed to the Lord, the firstborn were to be redeemed by offering a lamb in their place. In the case of a donkey, provision was made in the law that you could either break the neck of the donkey so that it was clearly surrendered to the Lord and you didn't use the donkey yourself, you killed it, or else you could substitute a lamb for it.

If the donkey was worth too much to you and you didn't want to kill it, you could give a lamb in its place. Now of course for the firstborn son you couldn't break his neck, that

was not permitted in the law, nor could you offer him as a sacrifice, so the only thing left to do to consecrate the firstborn son to the Lord was to offer a lamb in its place. And so there was the ritual given in Exodus chapter 13, and it was when the child was 40 days old, which was the same occasion when the mother would go to be purified.

So in verse 22 of Luke we have two orders of business which brought Mary and Joseph back to the temple almost six weeks after Jesus' birth. Now this is all before the wise men came, and so we should understand that the coming of the wise men is wrongly represented when we picture them at the manger scene at Christmas time. The wise men did not come and see Jesus in the manger, as we will see when we get to Matthew chapter 2. They came when he was in a house, when he was considerably older.

Luke has skipped over from the visit of the shepherds to the time that Jesus was eight days old when he was circumcised, then skipped over another 33 days or so till Mary had to be purified and Jesus had to be offered to the Lord as it were a lamb or birds to be offered at the dedication. And so it says, When the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

That statement actually is quoted from... It's found in a number of places, but it's first stated in Exodus 13, 2. It's repeated a couple of other times in that chapter and it's found elsewhere also in the Old Testament. So it quotes the scripture. And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons.

And that quotation is from Leviticus 12, 2. So the first quotation has to do with their obligation to dedicate Jesus to the Lord as a firstborn son. The second quotation has to do with the ceremony involving the purification of a woman after the birth of a son. Both were done at the same time.

There were two items of business that the law required them to do at this time. Now this means that even though Mary and Joseph were not from that area and they lived in Nazareth and had only come down to Judea for the purpose of registering for taxation, but they'd been caught by the childbirth while down there and then since they were there, it seemed only right that they should stay around for the other ceremonies necessary, you know, the circumcision and the purification. They were already in the area and so they stayed around for about six weeks anyway.

And we have reason to believe from Matthew's account they stayed around even maybe longer, maybe a year or more in Jerusalem. Perhaps by this time Joseph had already found temporary work in Bethlehem as a carpenter, you know, since that's what he was in Nazareth. And since he had to stay around for about six weeks until the purification of Mary, he may have looked for, you know, for a job and found one.

And therefore, even after this, they remained in Bethlehem rather than going immediately back to Nazareth. In fact, they didn't go back to Nazareth at all until after they'd gone to Egypt and come back. So they were apparently, from the time they left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem to register for the tax, until the time they returned to Nazareth was probably a number of years.

The exact number is unknown to us. But they were absent from home much longer than their friends and relatives of their expected them to be. And they stayed in the Bethlehem slash Jerusalem area.

Bethlehem was in the area of Jerusalem. It was five or six miles from Jerusalem. So here they are in the temple and they're fulfilling their obligations according to the law.

Verse 25, Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

And for a sign which will be spoken again. Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Now there was one Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was of great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. And this woman was a widow of about 84 years who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in at that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Now we have here the seemingly accidental, although certainly providential, encounters with these two people, Simeon and Anna. These encounters took place when Mary and Joseph came to the temple on this particular day. Simeon was an inhabitant of Jerusalem, it says in verse 25.

Though it doesn't say that he was always in the temple and he must have been led there at that particular time by the Holy Spirit who was upon him to happen to make this

connection, have this divine appointment between this man and this unknown couple bringing their baby as many thousands of couples must have done in the course of any given month. But he happened to connect with them and know by revelation that this was the Messiah of which he had been informed before. Anna was an inhabitant of the temple.

She continued their day and night in fastings and prayers. She may have even taken up lodgings in one of the rooms there or she may have just come there whenever she was not sleeping at home. She continued regularly in fastings and prayers.

The impression is that both of these people are very old. Certainly Anna is said to be old. Anna is the same name, by the way, as Hannah.

It means grace. She was of the tribe of Asher and she is declared to be of great age, although her exact age is hard to calculate. It says that she lived with a husband for seven years after her virginity, meaning that she was a virgin when she married.

Her husband and she lived together for seven years after they were married and then she was widowed. Now, we don't know for sure, but there is a fair chance, given the customs of the time, she probably married at the age of 13 or 14. Therefore, if she was widowed seven years later, she must have been a widow at age 20 or 21 or so.

Now, the statement in verse 37 that she was a widow of about 84 years has been interpreted variously. Some people think that gives her total age. At this point, she was of the age of 84 years, though the wording almost sounds like she had been a widow for that long.

If so, at the very earliest, her widowhood would have caught her at about age 20 or 21 or older if she married older than 13 or 14. But she would have, at the very youngest, been a widow at age 20 or 21. And if she was a widow for 84 years, she would be in excess of 100 years old at this time.

She's a tremendous challenge to older people, I would think, today who might think that, because our society tends to communicate this, that when they get older, they really have very little to share and very little to contribute. Their productive years are over as their strength wanes. And, of course, we retire them and don't let them work after a certain age in their professions, and sometimes we even ship them off to retirement communities even if they're able-bodied and able in mind.

Because there's this general feeling in our society that when you get old and your natural vigor, your youthful vigor and beauty are faded, that those are things that the world values. You're not of much value anymore. But the Bible certainly reused that attitude, and Anna is a perfect example.

She was either 84 years old or in excess of 100 years old. In either case, she was

declared to be of great age, and yet she continued daily or regularly, continuing in the temple and fasting and prayers. Not only did she pray, but she fasted a great deal at that age.

And she was part of a believing community in Jerusalem because it says when she encountered Jesus, she went out and spoke about him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Israel or the consolation of Israel in Jerusalem. The redemption of Israel, of course, is a reference to Messiah coming. So she recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

Now, we have no specific words from her. We don't have any quotations of what she said. She just went and talked about Jesus to this community of believers that she was a part of, no doubt the believing remnant of Jews in that city.

She was no doubt very highly respected among them, and God chose for her to be able to be the one to communicate to those of her circle that the Messiah had come, one of the first female evangelists. Now, Simeon, on the other hand, we have specific words from him, and we'll take a closer look at those. Simeon, I have always understood to be an old man as well, partly because he's mentioned in association with Anna, who is clearly old, also because he says, now let your servant depart in peace, as if he's now ready to die, suggesting that his life had really very little reason to go on.

A young man, even having seen the Messiah, might still expect to live on and accomplish a few more things in his life. So the implication may be brought in that he was an old man, though he's nowhere said to be old. He might have been a man in his prime, for all we know.

It just says he was a man of Jerusalem. I'm of the impression he was old. Now, he was a righteous and devout man, just like the parents of John the Baptist were.

Throughout these early chapters of Luke, we are introduced repeatedly to those few people in Israel who were the faithful remnant. Now, we know that the general Jewish society of Jesus' time left much to be desired. Jesus was not pleased with it at all.

John the Baptist called the whole nation to repentance. Jesus did likewise, and Jesus indicated that a great number of them are facing the wrath of God. The nation had become very externalistic in its religious practices and very hypocritical, and even the best of religious people, in terms of the judgment of religious judges about such things, were really hypocrites and damned, as far as Jesus was concerned.

They would not escape the damnation of hell. Yet there was always, at this time as always in Israel's history, some who were the true believing remnant, and they were the ones, of course, who became disciples of Jesus. Now, people like Simeon and Anna probably never saw Jesus again.

Anna almost certainly died before Jesus did. I mean, she was 84 or more at the time he was born. We can hardly expect that she would have been around 30 years later when Jesus was ministering.

And therefore, we would have to say that she never learned about the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, possibly Simeon didn't either, certainly John the Baptist's parents didn't. But they were all saved because they belonged to that remnant of Israel who believed in God, and in their case, they were in that transitional period where they actually got to see the coming of the Messiah, but not the coming of the new kingdom. John the Baptist himself, although he was a generation younger than his parents, maybe two generations younger than his parents, really, since they were so old when he was born, he himself was living in the transitional generation.

He never got to see the kingdom of God. He got to announce that it was near, but he died before it was brought into reality. He never did get to see or hear the gospel of Jesus dead and resurrected.

And that is perhaps why Jesus said, of those born of women, there has arisen no greater prophet than John the Baptist, but the least in the kingdom is greater than he. Because John didn't come into the kingdom, he only got to announce that it was near. Anyway, these people were certainly saved by faith and recognized Jesus because they were believers already.

God honored them by allowing them to encounter Jesus. Now, Simeon was devout and righteous, and he looked for the consolation of Israel, which means he had a messianic hope. He was looking for the coming of the Messiah.

Furthermore, more than most Jews, he had reason to believe the coming of the Messiah was near. There were general prophetic indicators, of course, and then there was always that hope that every generation of Jews must have had, that maybe this generation, just like almost every generation of Christians, have had the hope that theirs would be the generation that would see Jesus come back. I don't think there's been a generation yet of Christians in the past 2,000 years who did not hope, and some of them actually expect, that Jesus would come back in their time.

But Simeon had more grounds for believing than most because the Holy Spirit had said to him that he would not die until the Messiah came, which would put him in a position to know for sure that he was living in the generation that would see the Messiah come. Now, the presence of the Holy Spirit on this man, and the presence of the Holy Spirit on Anna as a prophetess, is interesting because the prophetic movement had ended 400 years earlier. John the Baptist really was the first prophet that God sent to Israel after Malachi.

But there were a bunch of lesser prophets who didn't write books and probably didn't



publicly prophesize, but who got revelations. I mean, Zechariah's in the temple, who had an angel appear to him, and then later prophesied at the birth of John the Baptist. Mary and Elizabeth both prophesied.

Simeon had the Holy Spirit upon him, and the Holy Spirit had spoken to him. Whether he prophesied, no one knows, but he did on this occasion. But Anna is said to be a prophetess.

And so we can see that this was a time where, even though there were no major prophets sent until John the Baptist, there was sort of a prophetic spirit manifesting among some of the more devout, which was an indication that the coming of the Messiah was near, no doubt. And so Simeon was one of those people who had been hearing from God. And it says in verse 27, So he came by the Spirit into the temple.

In other words, he was specifically led there that day because Jesus would be there to encounter. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the customs of the law, which we just read about in verses 22 through 24, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. I suppose it's those words more than any other that give us the impression he's an old man.

Now I'm departing in peace, as if he'd been just kind of hanging on, getting older and older, and seemingly he couldn't quite die in peace until he'd had the promise of God fulfilled to him. Now he could. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

Now these words, again, manifest a certain aspect of the Jewish hope about the Messiah, but maybe it's very possible he didn't fully understand their import. We don't know to what degree he did or did not. But the Jews believed that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles.

But what they believed about it was the Messiah would elevate the Jews above all other nations, and the nations would come and worship at the feet of the Jews in the reign of the Messiah, that the Jews would actually reign over the Gentiles. A passage in Isaiah chapter 2 says that all the nations would flow into Mount Zion, and there they would learn God's law and learn his ways. And that was understood to be a reference to the Jews at Mount Zion being under their Messiah, the ruling race on the planet, and all the Gentiles coming and acknowledging the truthfulness of their God.

Well, in a sense, that did happen, but not how they thought. Because we, as Gentiles who have become Christians, have acknowledged the God of Israel. And we have acknowledged, we have, you know, forsworn the idolatry of our ancestors, and we've embraced the God of Israel, but not in the sense the Jews kind of expected.

They thought this would be something more visible, more centrally located around Israel, around Jerusalem, with the Jews themselves as obviously a prominent leading feature, whereas, of course, in the Church, although we have embraced the God of the Jews, the Jews themselves have, for the most part, rejected the God of the Jews, and for that reason the Jews are not that prominent in this kingdom. The prophecy is fulfilled. He has become a light to the Gentiles and a glory to the people of Israel.

But we have to understand that Israel is the Israel of God, this remnant, which included the man who was speaking himself and others like Anna. Now, more than that, verse 33 says, Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, and here's a prophecy, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against.

Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Now, Simeon seemed to realize what many Jews did not, that the coming of the Messiah would not be met with unanimous approval and acceptance by the Jewish people. Some would rise and some would fall.

Now, the word rising that is used here, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, this Greek word rising is used only for resurrection, elsewhere in the New Testament. And whether it means that he is referring to the final resurrection of the last day or not could be questioned because sometimes resurrection is used in a figurative sense. When a person is born again and becomes a believer, they have experienced the spiritual resurrection.

They've risen from the place of being dead in trespasses and sins, being alive in Christ. And it may be that that's what he has in mind, that some of the Israelites will rise from their stupor, from their death, from sin. They'll be born again.

Others will not. Others will speak against him. If that's how it's to be understood, it certainly came true.

It may even be an echo of Daniel chapter 12, which also uses the language of resurrection, but very possibly not talking about the final resurrection. Questionable. But in Daniel chapter 12, which is one of the hardest, well, it is the hardest chapter in Daniel to interpret.

Fortunately, it's short since it's so difficult. But of all the chapters in Daniel, certainly none is more difficult of interpretation than Daniel 12. And it says there in verse 2, Daniel 12, 2, And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall await some to everlasting life, some to everlasting shame and, excuse me, to shame and everlasting contempt.

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. The fact that it says many of those who sleep in the dust of the land or the earth will awake, but not all, suggests that this is not a reference to the physical resurrection at the end of time. Because Jesus said, in the resurrection at the end, all those who are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of life and some to the resurrection of damnation.

That Jesus said in John 5, verses 28 and 29. So it will not be a partial resurrection. Now, this statement might give encouragement to people who believe there's two resurrections.

One for the righteous and one for the unrighteous, but it doesn't say that either. It says many of those who sleep in the dust shall arise, and of those who arise, some will be to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt. So this does not divide the resurrection into a separate resurrection of the righteous on one occasion and a resurrection of the unrighteous on another.

He's talking about a situation where there's one event that awakens a lot of people. But some of them are awakened to life and others are awakened to condemnation. It is not unlike the Old Testament prophets to speak figuratively in terms that sound like resurrection.

For example, in Ezekiel chapter 37, the famous chapter about the dry bones, how the dry bones, in a vision that Ezekiel saw, assembled themselves and flesh came on them and these dead bodies resurrected from the dead. God said that that vision represented Israel, which were in Babylonian captivity at the time when Ezekiel saw that. And they were saying, our bones are dried and there's no hope for us.

And God says, no, I'm going to resurrect you. I'm going to bring you back to your land. And essentially the return of the Jews to their land after Babylonian captivity was symbolically depicted as a resurrection of dead bones into living bodies, into a great army.

And so we have at least one case we know where the Old Testament uses the idea of a resurrection to represent something other than literally the resurrection of the last day. Daniel may be doing the same thing. In fact, the details he gives in verse 2, if we tried to apply them to the resurrection of the last day, do not agree with what the New Testament tells us about it.

But if we take it figuratively, what would he be meaning? Well, that's up for grabs because it's a very difficult passage to interpret. But I'd like to suggest to you, he is possibly talking about the sorting out that took place after the coming of Christ, or shortly thereafter, between the wheat and the chaff, between the fruitful trees and the fruitless trees, between those that were God's sheep and those that were goats. And

Jesus in a sense awakened many people, but not all of them liked what they woke up to find in him.

The Pharisees were rudely awakened by Jesus. The chief priests were rudely awakened by Jesus, but this did not result in their salvation. They saw, but that's why their sin remained, Jesus said.

Jesus said, I've come so that the blind might see and that the seeing might become blind in John chapter 9. And the Pharisees said, are we blind then too? Are you saying we're blind? He said, if you were blind, you would have no condemnation, you'd have no sin. But because you say, we see, therefore your sin remains. The idea is that he brought revelation to them.

He awakened them from their stupor. But what they saw, they didn't always respond in the proper way to. Or as Jesus put it in John chapter 3, this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world.

And men love darkness rather than light. Those who do the truth come to the light, but those who hate the truth, they hate the light. They love the darkness.

And the idea is when the light comes, people have to make a decision. They're awakened to reality. And their decision in response to that, awakened from their stupor and being confronted with the reality of Jesus, results in one or two different decisions.

One would be the decision to awake to eternal life. And the other would be to awake to shame and everlasting contempt by rejecting Christ. Interestingly, the words in Daniel 12.2 which say many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake some to everlasting life may be intentionally echoed in Ephesians chapter 5. This is not certain, but there are some similarities in the wording and there may be an attempt to echo the words of Daniel 12.2 here.

In Ephesians 5.14, Paul has just said that Christians are children of the light and need to live as children of the light and walk like children of the light. And in verse 14 he says therefore he says awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you life. Now it's interesting that in the Daniel passage it says many will arise, many who sleep will awake.

Some will awake to everlasting life. And then it goes on to say, and those who turn many to righteousness and those who understand shall shine like lights, like the firmament forever. Remember Daniel goes on to say that statement.

It's possible that the ideas of Daniel 12 verses 2 and 3 are combined in this particular thing in Ephesians 5.14 which almost all scholars agree that Paul is quoting something. It says therefore he says. Then it gives us a little ditty here.

Now he says, who says it is not a direct quote from anything in the Old Testament. And scholars are fond of the opinion. I don't know that they have any proof of this from any other source but it just feels this way to them.

That we have here represented an early baptismal hymn. Almost every commentator on this passage in Ephesians would say something like this. That Paul is quoting probably an ancient hymn of the early church which was known to his listeners because they sang it regularly and probably one that was sung on the occasion of baptism.

I can't give you arguments in favor of that. But even if it is true, even if this is a hymn that was sung by the early church, where did they get the contents of it? It says therefore he says as if it is God who said it. It suggests an Old Testament or else a New Testament in the case of Jesus speaking.

An Old Testament or a New Testament origin. Now Jesus didn't say anything quite like this but Daniel said something a lot like this. And since Paul is talking about us being currently awakened in the light and that we're children of the light, he would if there is an allusion to Daniel 12 here, he would be using Daniel 12 as a reference to coming to spiritual life in Christ.

And then those who awake to everlasting contempt, well, they're the ones who responded differently to Christ. Confused? Okay. If you're nodding yes, then I'm satisfied.

Now, Luke chapter 2 again, and we're back at the words of Simeon, and that's what got us on this tangent. Simeon said to Mary that this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel. And as I pointed out to you, the word rising elsewhere in the New Testament, the Greek one, is always used of resurrection.

But he may be speaking figuratively of resurrection here. The idea is that some are going to rise to life through Jesus' influence. Others are going to fall over him.

They're going to trip and fall because he's a stumbling block to them. There's a passage in 1 Peter chapter 2 which quotes from Isaiah chapter 8. Don't you hate it when I do that? I get to turn into one place and I give you another reference that it's referring to and I expect you to keep track of all that. Well, write down in your notes and you can look them up later.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, there's a number in verses 6 through 8, there are three Old Testament passages all of which refer to Jesus as a rock or a stone. And Peter quotes them in rapid succession. The first one he quotes in 1 Peter 2.6 is taken from Isaiah 28.16. The next one he quotes in verse 7 is taken from Psalm 118, verse 22.

And the third one he quotes in verse 8 is from Isaiah 8.14. So, three Old Testament passages, two of them from Isaiah and one from Psalm, are given boom, boom, boom in rapid succession. And the reason that they're all given here together is because they all

speak of the Messiah as a rock or a stone. And so he says in verse 6, therefore it is also contained in the scripture, behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect precious and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame.

Therefore to you who believe he is precious but to those who are disobedient quote, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Now this is the quote from Psalm 118. And, verse 8, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

Now, it's Isaiah 8 and verse 14 that says that he would be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Many would fall or stumble over him. And very possibly Simeon is alluding to those prophecies also, seeing this Messiah this baby that he's holding in his arms would someday be a real stumbling block.

Many in Israel would fall not rise as a result of confrontation or contact with him. That he's destined to bring about the fall as well as the rising of many in Israel. There is a downside to this coming of the Messiah.

Not only was he going to redeem and console the faithful in Israel, he was going to separate between the sheep and the goats and the wheat and the chaff. And there would be some who would fall. Certainly that is characteristic of John the Baptist's recorded messages also.

That he's separating between these two elements within Jewish society. The one would fall and stumble and be burned and judged. The other would receive Christ and would rise and experience salvation.

Now in Luke 2.35 Simeon also says to Mary personally sort of as an aside, yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also. There can be little doubt how this was fulfilled. Almost everyone agrees that this probably points forward to the time when Mary stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son die and particularly where he was pierced.

Where she saw her son pierced and she would have been very empathetic, no doubt. And felt that as if her own soul was pierced. However, he was pierced with a spear, not a sword.

And Simeon says that Mary's soul would be pierced with a sword. Which means that he's speaking of course figuratively and he may not be pointing just to that one incident. Where she would sympathetically feel pierced as she saw her son pierced on the cross.

But also very probably that her heart would be broken many times. She'd feel as if she'd been stabbed in the heart. I mean, anyone who's experienced extreme grief can relate to the imagery of a sword piercing your soul.

I mean, just feeling like you've just been stabbed. In fact, we had a student here a couple of years ago who if anyone ever made a comment that was a little bit of a put-down or a

cut-off, he made this dramatic gesture of grabbing this, like someone had thrown a knife into his heart and pulling it out. You know, he just always wanted to dramatize how much someone had just stung him or insulted him with their words or something.

But it needed no explanation. The graphic representation he did of pulling a knife out, everyone understood exactly what that meant. You know, you feel like you've been stabbed in the heart in some situations.

And Mary certainly must have felt that many times. Especially as she saw the growing opposition to Jesus, mounting for probably almost a year before he was killed. And of course, when she heard of his arrest and saw him crucified, that would be the ultimate of her own experience of being pierced in the soul.

So, when she had received this mission of being the mother of the Messiah, and she had said back in Luke 1.38, Behold the maidservant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word. She had no way at that point in time of assessing exactly what the cost to her would be. She could imagine some things, but she didn't know everything.

She certainly didn't know about the crucifixion. And she gets a little additional information here about how this is going to affect her personally as the mother of Jesus. You know, I don't think so.

The question is, would this possibly refer to her death? There is no record of her death in scripture nor in church tradition. Of course, the Roman Catholics have the view that she never died. But that's a fairly late tradition.

It doesn't go back very far, just a few centuries back. Their belief was that she ascended alive into heaven sort of like Elijah and Enoch did. That's called the doctrine of the assumption of Mary.

But that's just what it is. It's an assumption. There's no records to suggest it.

It would seem to me that, I mean, obviously Mary died somehow and the Bible doesn't even go to pains to record it, which shows that she was not the center figure. But she may have been slain with a sword, but I think that more likely she probably died of old age, because the Roman sword was not applied against the church in a serious way until the time of Nero. And it's almost certain that Mary would not have been alive that long.

She must have died prior to that, of old age, if nothing else. Yes, John? The question, just for the sake of the tape, I'm going to repeat it because I heard it on the tape. The question is, the latter part of verse 35, where he says that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed, whether that's referring to Mary's own thoughts of her heart being revealed in connection with her own soul being pierced, or whether it's referring back to what was said in verse 34.

You'll notice that in the New King James and probably in some other versions, the first part of verse 35 is put into parentheses, as if that's sort of an aside. That would reflect the translator's opinion that the remainder of verse 35, after the parentheses closes, is a continuation of verse 34. So that, if that is correct, and it seems fair, in my opinion, to say so, that the statement would be, without the parentheses, the child is destined for the fallen rising of many in Israel, for a sign which will be spoken against that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

The reference to many hearts probably does point to those of Israel rather than to Mary herself. Her own soul would be pierced, but there'd be many hearts whose secret would be revealed, again, by the light. When the light comes, it reveals your heart.

If you're wicked, you try to hide yourself from the light. If you've got a clear conscience, you've got nothing to fear of the light. You come to light.

You welcome the light. The coming of light makes a division. And Jesus did reveal the thoughts of many hearts, especially those of the Pharisees.

He revealed them by reading them out loud. That was no doubt very embarrassing to them. Now, we talked about Anna already.

Let's go on over to Matthew chapter 2. We need to take the first 18 verses of Matthew 2. Chronologically, this comes next. There's a good chance, as I said earlier, that this was perhaps as much as a year or two after the birth of Jesus. The indicators of that are within the passage.

I'll point to them when we come to them. If this is the correct time interval, then there's a considerable gap between the last information we had about Jesus, namely when he was 40 days old at the temple, which is what we just read in Luke, and this, which was possibly a year or more later. But that's not the largest gap in the life of Jesus.

There's a huge gap from age 12 to age 30 that is silent about. So obviously, the gospel writers are being very selective and leaving out much that could be said. Now, Matthew records the coming of the wise men, or in the original language, they're called the Magi.

The Magi are regarded to have been a group of wise men and priests, probably of Persian origin. Some scholars think they might have been Arabian, but it seems to be the consensus of the majority that they were of Persian origin. Herodotus, the Greek historian 400 years before Christ, made reference to the Magi, said that they were a group of Medes that tried to rise up and overthrow the Persian Empire, but failed.

And somehow, I don't know the details of this, they became the priesthood of the Persian Empire. And the wise men, they were astrologers and, you know, of the pagan sort, wise men. There are some reasons to believe that these Magi may have come from Persia.



We'll talk about that as we look at the text, but let me say this. The story of the wise men, included here as it is by Matthew, not by Luke, is no doubt part of Matthew's overall purpose that is exhibited in his selection of material in his gospel. One of the themes that Matthew wants to get across to his Jewish readers, and there's much evidence that he wrote to the Jewish readership, was that the Gentiles were to be accepted on the same status as Jews.

In fact, in some cases, there were incidents in the life of Jesus where the Gentiles showed more openness to the Jewish Messiah than his own people had shown to him. Already in the genealogy that Matthew gave us in Chapter 1, we've seen that he listed certain Gentile women that were in the genealogy of Christ. Names that could have been omitted easily enough, but which Matthew clearly included in order to rattle the cage of his racist Jewish readers who tended to be thinking that, you know, God is not the God of the Gentiles, only of the Jews.

Now, the first story in his birth narrative of Jesus that Matthew gives has to do with the Gentiles coming and worshipping him, and this is set in contrast with the Jews themselves in Jerusalem. Because the Wisemen first come asking, where is he who was born king of the Jews? And rather than sparking a tremendous thirst and desire to know on the part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it just causes them all to get afraid. And even the Biblical scholars who direct them to go to Bethlehem don't go there themselves to take a look.

So we see in this story a contrast. Gentiles showing an interest in the Jewish Messiah, where the Jews are themselves disinterested. By the way, a little later in Matthew, in Matthew chapter 8, when a centurion shows tremendous faith, Jesus said, I haven't found this kind of faith in all of Israel.

Again, no doubt reported by Matthew to illustrate the fact that a Gentile often would be superior in faith to even the people who would be expected to have the faith. The Jews who had a long history of relating with God. Well, this story of the Wisemen presents to us the picture of the very first Gentiles to come and worship Jesus.

And this probably was still a very small child. We do not know that they were kings. You know the Christmas song, We Three Kings of Orient Are.

First of all, we don't know that there were three of them. And we don't know that they were kings. The number three is apparently a deduction from the fact that we're told that they gave gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There were three gifts. On the seemingly, to my mind, unfounded assumption that each man would carry only one gift, and only one man for each gift, that traditionally there have been said to be three Wisemen. Even names had been given to them.

The names elude me at the moment. They're just traditional. They're not biblical.

And yet, all of this is so much tradition, but we've come to see it as part of the baggage of the manger scene and of the Christmas traditions that we have. Much is not substantiated in Scripture. To say they were kings is not likely to be true, although the tradition may have arisen that they were kings.

Based on the prophecies of the Old Testament, in places like Psalm 72, that prophecy that when the Messiah comes, kings will come and bow down to him. That never happened in the lifetime of Jesus, unless these men were kings, which they probably were not. But, of course, the bowing down of kings to Jesus took place since his resurrection.

There have been many kings who have been converted to Christianity. Not as many as should be, but some have. The prophecy, for example, in Psalm 72, which is about the Messiah, Psalm 72, verse 8 through 11, says, He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts.

Yes, all kings shall fall down before him. All nations shall serve him. The reference to the kings of Sheba, which was down in southern Sinai, in Arab peoples down in the southern area of the Sinai Peninsula, coming and bringing gifts to him has led some to think that these wise men might have been kings of the Arab regions down there, and here we see them coming and bringing gifts.

But there's not any reason in the world, really, to say that this story of the wise men coming is intended to be the fulfillment of these prophecies in Psalm 72 or similar prophecies that talk about kings bringing their riches to him. Isaiah chapter 60 also talks about the Gentile kings bringing their riches to Jesus. But these prophecies are more or less fulfilled in the church, not in the lifetime of Jesus, but in his reigning since his ascension as king of kings and lord of lords.

The kings of the earth serve him whether they know it or not, and many of them have done so deliberately and become Christians. So the prophecies have been fulfilled, but we don't need to import this story of the wise men that is import into the story of the wise men, the idea that they were kings and therefore find fulfillment of those prophecies in it. Let's read the story, probably very familiar to us already.

Matthew 2, 1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the east, or magi from the east, came to Jerusalem saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east

and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together he inquired of them where the Christ, or the Messiah, was to be born.

So they said to him in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd my people Israel. The quote from Isaiah 5. Mike I knew that. Just testing you.

No, I knew it was Mike. I don't know why I said Isaiah. I've been saying Isaiah a lot in this session.

I guess he's on my mind. Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also.

When they heard the king, they departed and behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother and fell down and worshiped him, and not her though.

And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way." We'll stop there, although we're going to go further today. I want to just talk about the good stopping point for the story. Now these magi, they may have come in a great army.

There might have been dozens of them. We don't know. The idea there were three is, again, simply traditional.

There might have been two. But there might as easily have been ten or twenty or a hundred of them coming. The magi constituted a large priesthood in the east, in Persia.

And who knows how many representatives of them decided to make this trip. The mystery is not so much around who they were as to why they came. Now it says that they came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who is born king of the Jews? So they were responding to some indicator they'd had that a king had been born in Jerusalem.

Now these guys must have had enough political savvy to know that the Jews already had a king. Herod. Of course, Herod was old by now.

And as far away as Persia, they may have assumed that he was now dead and that his son, the next Herod, would be the king of the Jews. Anyway, they were they received an

indication from something in the sky. They said they'd seen his star in the east.

That means while they were in the east, they saw his star. And they'd come to worship him. Now, they didn't come to worship Herod the Great when he was born.

And they probably didn't care once they got there to worship Herod Antipas or Herod Archelaus, his sons. But the reason that they thought they should come and worship this particular king is because of the apparition that had appeared in the sky. Now what they saw in the sky has been the subject of much conjecture.

There are those who say, well, they saw Halley's Comet. Or they saw a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. Or they saw a supernova.

Or some other natural astronomical phenomenon. There have been attempts, in fact, to be able to date the birth of Jesus by known conjunctions of the planets about that time. And some have picked this date and some another date, depending on how they understood what this star was.

But the problem is, I don't think that we are led to believe this was a natural kind of a star or a natural phenomenon at all. The thing that tells me that most would be that there is some indication that they lost sight of the star when they came to Jerusalem. And that after they talked to Herod, they saw it again.

It reappeared to them. Furthermore, when they came to Bethlehem, this star led them to the right house. Now I know that for many centuries, many millennia, men have known how to navigate across seas using the stars and so forth.

But I'm not sure that anyone can navigate so well as to discover a particular house by the guidance of a star. Stars are billions of miles away. They are light years away from here.

It would be very, very difficult to identify which house in a particular village a given star was standing directly over. In fact, I would say it would be impossible to do so. There is certainly strong indication that what they saw was not a natural phenomenon at all, but something that appeared, and it looked like a star, but it was no doubt a supernatural thing.

It could have been an angel. It could have been some other thing that was not an angel, but some other bright luminous thing that indicated to them that something, they may have mistaken it for a star, but when it led and stood over a particular house, it's quite obvious this thing was not several billion light years away if it was standing over a given house where the child lived. Notice it is a house too, not the manger that they find him in.

Now, we cannot be sure what it was they saw. They called it a star for lack of a better

word. Whatever it was, it was probably not a natural phenomenon, but a supernatural.

It might have been an angel guiding them, even as the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire guided the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years. These men may have been guided by some analogous supernatural guidance system that God sent them. But even more curious is why they interpreted this phenomenon the way they did.

They were sitting in their houses in Persia, or in their astrological and astronomical observatory, and they saw this phenomenon, and they deduced somehow that this bode a significant event in Judea. In fact, they specifically knew that it had something to do with someone being born king of the Jews. How would the appearance of such a star, or whatever it was, communicate that particular information to these men? Well, we could say, well, they just had this elaborate tradition and this astrological means, which is all occultism and so forth, that interpreted that way.

The problem is that they were right. So if they got this information through astrology and through their traditions of occultic astrology, then it would seem to say that astrology worked, at least in this case. Now, by the way, it's not impossible that God could even work through something that he forbids people to be involved in.

I know of a case of a guy who got to be a good friend of mine when he was in prison, he was in jail, and some Baptists came to him, and he was involved in the occult, and he was practicing things like the I Ching, which is a Chinese form of divination, and these Baptists who visited him in jail were witnessing to him, and they told him that the practice of the I Ching was not right, it was of the devil, and that he should stop and he should believe in Jesus and give up this occultism. Well, after they left, he threw a hexagram and consulted the I Ching about this, and the I Ching confirmed what they said, and so he gave it up and became a Christian. We know that Saul went to a witch, something that people are forbidden to do, to conjure up Samuel.

Now, somebody who looked like Samuel appeared, I personally believe it was Samuel, others believe it was a familiar spirit impersonating Samuel, but whoever it was that appeared to him, he gave him a true prophecy. He said, you're going to be dead by this time tomorrow because you rejected the word of the Lord. Now, it sounds like Samuel, something he'd say.

If a demon said it, they happened to be telling the truth, it would appear that God really did speak through this seance. It's not impossible to do. I heard a story, I can't verify it because it was not a first-hand account, but I heard of a guy who, after he got converted, he continued using the, or attempting to use a Ouija board, and upon using it, or trying to use it, he found that it wasn't working for him anymore.

And on one occasion he inquired, he says, why aren't you working for me like you used to? And it spelled out the sentence, because you have the blood on you, or something

like that. Now, that wouldn't be God speaking so much as a demon speaking, if that's very true, but the point is, truth has sometimes been gleaned from occultic means when God has sovereignly overridden the demonic powers that normally use them. This is, this does not provide any rationale for the use of such things.

The use of any occult method is strictly forbidden by God. But that does not mean that God, in His sovereignty, would not be capable of overriding the natural powers that usually speak through such means, and to send Samuel himself at a seance, or to override the falling of the sticks of the I Ching to communicate that a man should give up his practice of the I Ching and accept Christ, or that he might override the superstitions of the astrologers, and yet somehow give them truth through their craft. It's not impossible, but I think there's a better explanation of how these men interpreted it the way they did.

There are two very intriguing possibilities. One is based on the assumption that these astrologers were not Persians, but Arabs. In the book of Numbers, there was an Arab prophet, and he was actually a false prophet, it would appear.

He was a man that God did not approve of, and yet God spoke to him sometimes, and spoke to him sometimes. There's another example where God will speak to somebody who's not regarded to be a true prophet, and sometimes that happens. The man's name was Balaam, and he's remembered in the New Testament as a wicked man, and one who prophesied for money, and not a good prophet or anything, and yet God really did speak to him sometimes.

And in the story of Balaam, he gave a prophecy in chapter 24 of Numbers, Numbers chapter 24, and in this prophecy, beginning at verse 15, Balaam said, "...the utterance of Balaam, the son of Beor, and the utterance of a man whose eyes are open, the utterance of him who hears the words of God and has the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down with eyes wide open, I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob.

A scepter, that is a king, shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of Tumul." Now, it was the Moabite king who hired him to prophesy, so it wasn't good news for his employer to hear that he's predicting somebody who would come and batter the brow of Moab. But he says, I see something, it's not near, it's far off, but I do see it in a vision. Now what I see is a star arising out of Jacob, that is out of Israel, and a king.

Well, of course, this prosody of Balaam may well have been preserved, it was certainly preserved in the Jewish literature, although it was not uttered in the presence of any Jews. They somehow got it from somewhere, probably the Moabites preserved this. The Moabites lived in the Arab regions, and no doubt later generations of Arabs may have known of this prophecy.

If this prophecy was preserved in the Arab societies for centuries, it may be that the wise men were from one of these Arab countries and knew of this prophecy. And when they saw this remarkable star, they said, ah, the scepter, the king of the Jews has been born, of which Balaam spoke. And they would have associated the star with the scepter, because that's what the two features of the prophecy, a star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.

And therefore the star would represent a scepter, would represent in other words the king's authority. And they could deduce from the prophecy, if it had been preserved through their traditions in their society, that a king of the Jews had been born. Now remember this prophecy in numbers was not uttered by Moses or to Moses or in the presence of the Jewish people.

This was uttered by a non-Jewish soothsayer in the presence of a pagan Arab king. And it was recorded by Moses later, but Moses must have gotten the information from the Moabites themselves and therefore they must have preserved it. So some have felt like the reason the wise men interpreted the star as a token of the birth of the king of the Jews was because of this very prophecy.

There's another possibility though that is intriguing. You know there were many other, many historians at that time confirmed that there was a general belief in Europe and also throughout the Orient that some significant ruler was going to appear in Judea about this time. I'm reading from, this is from Barclay's commentary on Matthew although this has been documented in several other sources I've read.

I just happened to zero out the page out of Barclay so I can give you these quotes. Suetonius and Tacitus, we've become acquainted with previously because they mention Christians and they mention Jesus and so forth, but in separate passages both of these Roman historians, non-Christians make interesting references to this expectation that was almost worldwide at the time that a Messiah would come from the Jews. Suetonius wrote in his Life of Vestation 4-5 that being I suppose Book 4, Chapter 5 he said, quote, "...there had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world." Tacitus in his book, Histories of the Empress Book 5 and Chapter 13 Tacitus made this statement that there was a firm persuasion at that very time the East was to grow powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire universal empire.

That's Tacitus. Now Josephus himself in War of the Jews said that there was a, the Jews had a belief at that time that about that time from their country should come become a governor of the habitable earth. Now Tacitus and Suetonius both say that throughout the Orient and the East, that's where the Wisemen were from, there was a general belief that men from Judea were going to arise and receive a universal empire worldwide.

The Jews, according to Josephus, had a similar expectation about that time. Now we can

understand where the Jews would get it. They would get it from Daniel Chapter 9, the prophecy of the 70 weeks.

It was just about that time that the 70 weeks were running out and they could expect that theirs was the generation that would see the fulfillment of that prophecy. But where would the people in the Orient get this idea? Well, almost 600 years before Christ, the Jews were carried into captivity in Babylon. Among them was Daniel who wrote the book of Daniel and the prophecy of the 70 weeks.

Babylon was later conquered by the Persians and Daniel served as the chief of the Wisemen under Darius and Cyrus, the Persian king. Now, consider this. If the Magi were Persian Wisemen, they were successors of those who had sat under the leadership of Daniel in their own country.

He was a Jew, but he was a ruler, a ruling Wiseman both under the Babylonian and the Persian rule. And the book of Daniel may well have been preserved among the Persians as well as among the Jews, since the Jews would preserve it because Daniel was a Jew. The Persian Wisemen may have preserved it because he was the leader of their caste.

He was the leader of their group in Persia. And it's very possible that the belief spread throughout the Orient through the influence of Daniel's prophecy, which had been uttered in Persia originally. Or actually it was in Babylon, but later conquered by the Persians.

That could have pointed to the 70-week prophecy could have pointed to that very time. It would have pointed to that very time. And the Wisemen of Persia would be expecting the Messiah, the king of the Jews to be born sometime soon.

And the appearance of this star in the sky was then just the signal that that was it. That was the thing that Daniel had predicted. That's the token of it.

They might even have been aware of Balaam's prophecy, and therefore associated the star with the scepter also. Hard to say. We can only guess.

But we know the Old Testament itself provides sufficient reason to believe that the men of Persia would, the Wisemen at least, would have some indication that this was the proper time. And even the Roman historians, Plutonium and Tasterius, agree that in the Orient, in the East, there was this general expectation at this time that significant rulers were going to come from Israel or from Judea. And so for the Wisemen to come at this time and say, where is he who is born king of the Jews? Could be explained possibly in terms of this background.

Now, some people have thought that this confirms the validity of astrology. Especially those who are into astrology. They like to use the stars and say, well, you see, these men were just students of the stars.



They were just astrologers, and look, it led them to Christ. Well, true and not true. Astrology led them to Jerusalem.

The Scriptures led them to Bethlehem. They came to Jerusalem. Astrology brought them into the vicinity of where Christ was, but the Scriptures had to be consulted before they could actually find Jesus.

And they came to Jerusalem, which was the natural place to come. It's even possible that they didn't follow the star all the way there. They said, we have seen his star in the East.

It may simply mean that when we were at home in the East, we saw this star. So we came here to Jerusalem, not because the star specifically was here, but we deduced there had been a king of the Jews born. Maybe they hadn't seen it since they left home, and they saw it again for the first time after their conversation with Herod, because it says they were filled with joy when they saw it again.

They probably came to Jerusalem just because that's where you'd expect to find the king of the Jews, and that's where he was, Herod, the king of the Jews. Herod was a guy who didn't like to talk about other kings of the Jews when he was in that position. We know that he killed three of his own sons, because they either were or he suspected them of plotting to become the next king of the Jews at his expense.

He even killed one of them just a few days before his own death, one who was plotting to take his throne. He also killed his own mother and two of his wives, because he suspected they were plotting against him. Therefore, his murder of the infants in Bethlehem hardly seems out of character for what is known of the guy.

And it is also obvious from that fact that when it says in verse 3, when Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. I can see why Jerusalem would be a little upset too. Don't talk out loud about a king of the Jews if you're not talking about Herod.

You're going to cause him to go berserk here. But Herod, being a shrewd politician, acted like he wasn't upset. And he gathered the chief priests and the scribes, and he said, where is the king of the Jews going to be born? He didn't know the scriptures.

And they told him in Bethlehem, quoting Micah 5, 2. And then he called the wise men. And it says in verse 7, he determined from them what time the star appeared. Keep that in mind.

He asked them what time the star appeared. It doesn't tell us their answer, but we know he got some kind of an answer. He found out how long ago the star first appeared.

No doubt trying to deduce how old the baby would be by now. Because it would have cost them some time, probably about six months maybe or so, coming across the desert.

Hard to say.

Maybe five months. I think it took probably five months to make the trip from Babylon to Jerusalem. So they would have been probably traveling for months at least.

And so Herod wanted to find out when the star first appeared, probably to find out and deduce the age of the child. Verse 8, he sent them to Bethlehem and said, you go search for them. When you find them, let me know so I can come and worship them too.

Apparently Herod's reputation was not known as far away as Persia. And therefore they didn't know that he was that he of course would not be inclined at all to come worship the child. And they took his words at face value initially.

And then they went out and it says in verse 9, they saw the star again. The same star that they'd seen in the east. Suggesting that maybe they hadn't seen it since then, since they left home.

And now they see the star and verse 10 says, and when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Now verse 9 at the end says, it went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was. This is what I was referring to when I said that it couldn't have been a natural star.

It stood over the exact house. Now notice Jesus is not called the babe here. Although he was called a babe in chapter 1. Or I take that back, not in chapter 1, but in Luke, in Luke's version, he was called a babe.

And here is a young child. He's probably a toddler at this point. And when they, verse 11, when they had come into the house they saw the young child with Mary his mother.

They didn't see Joseph, he was probably out working. And fell down and worshipped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Many people have tried to find symbolic significance to the gold, the frankincense, and myrrh. They said, well gold, that represents him as king.

Frankincense is like incense. It's part of what the priests would offer when they offered incense. Frankincense was a principal ingredient of their incense.

So this is a priestly thing. And then myrrh was used for embalming dead bodies and therefore it speaks of his death. So people have tried to find all kinds of esoteric secret hidden meanings to the gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Well, they honored Jesus as king and as priest and foresaw his death. Well, in all likelihood, they simply gave him these particular gifts because they were valuable. And these men were giving gifts fit for a king because that's what they understood him to be.

King of the Jews. To make any more significance out of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh is seemingly stretching. Verse 12, Then being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

And of course, that's the end of them as far as we hear from them. But there is a sequel. Verse 13, Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, take the young child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word.

And Herod will seek, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. And they were there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt I call my son.

A few points to make here. One is that the quotation from the prophet is from the prophet Hosea. Chapter 11, verse 1. When you look at the passage in Hosea, it's a bit perplexing because it's not a prophecy about the Messiah.

At least it does not appear to be one. It is a historical statement, not a prediction about anything. In Hosea 11, verse 1, God is reminding the Jews of their history.

And He says, When Israel was young, I loved him and I called my son out of Egypt. He's referring to the Exodus. Israel is being symbolically spoken of as God's son.

Because why? God told Moses, You go say to Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn. If you don't let Israel go, I'm going to kill your firstborn. Israel was regarded throughout that whole story as God's son.

And so Hosea, in speaking about it again in Hosea 11, 1 says, When Israel was young, in its infancy as a nation, God showed His love for it by calling them out of Egypt, in the Exodus. Now the passage in Hosea goes on and clearly is talking about Exodus because it talks about how He led them through the wilderness and so forth. It's very clearly a historical statement.

It has no appearance at all of being a prophecy about anything, much less the Messiah. And yet Matthew seems to be pulling a fast one on it. Here Jesus in His infancy goes to Egypt and Matthew says, Well, obviously He came out of Egypt later.

And so His very presence in Egypt allowed for the fulfillment of a prophecy that He would come out of Egypt because the prophet said, Out of Egypt I've called my son. And yet He doesn't seem to be quoting the prophecy in its proper context. Now, how do we work with this? There's two ways that you can resolve this.

One is to point out that when Jesus opened the understanding of His disciples that they might understand the scriptures in Luke 24, 45, that He let them see esoteric and secret

meanings of the scriptures that no one would ever have deduced from the context. And that they could see secret and hidden things because Jesus opened their understanding to understand them. Therefore, although no thinking person would have ever read Hosea and thought, Well, this is about the Messiah, or even would have recognized it as a prediction of anything because it's a historic statement, not a prediction.

Yet the disciples by inspiration saw the hidden meaning there and realized that it was about Jesus. That is a possible explanation that would vindicate Matthew in what he's done. And by the way, he does similar things throughout the rest of this chapter, quoting verses out of the Old Testament that are highly questionable as far as his usage of them.

But I don't question him. I believe he did it right. But the question is, how is it right? It's a bit perplexing.

The other way that you could understand this is simply that the apostles came to understand that the nation of Israel in its history in the Old Testament, its history was not random but was ordained of God as a distinct type. That Israel's history in many of its features was a type of Christ's own history. And that the history of Israel served as sort of a prophecy of the Messiah just like the sacrifices offered by Israel and the Passover served as sort of a prophecy of the Messiah's own death.

That certain things that were acted out and really happened historically, happened as deliberate types and shadows of what would eventually happen to the Messiah. And that Israel in its infancy as God's Son coming out of Egypt was a type of how the Messiah in his infancy would come out of Egypt. And Matthew seems to assume that the Riddlers will accept it.

So it must have been the general understanding among the early church that Israel's history served in many respects as a type of Christ. You know, it's interesting that Jesus' ministry began with his being tempted in the wilderness for forty days. Israel's history began after the Exodus with their being tested in the wilderness for forty years.

Jesus couldn't devote forty years to being tested. That would have forestalled his ministry too long. But a day for a year is not a bad ratio.

It sometimes is found in Ezekiel and a few other places in the Bible where God will designate a day to represent a year. Israel's history began with forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Jesus' ministry began with forty days of wandering in the wilderness.

And interestingly when Jesus was tempted three times by the devil in the wilderness, each time he quoted from Deuteronomy. All the quotes, every time he quoted scripture, it was always from Deuteronomy, which is a book that is written about the Jews' wilderness wandering. And there's more.

But the thing is, there are some things about the life of Jesus that seem to have been

foreshadowed and typified by things in Israel's history. And the Jews, or I should say the apostles, recognizing this, felt quite at liberty to cite things about the Old Testament history of the Jews and say this was, in a sense, prophetic of the Messiah himself. And so in quoting a historic statement from Hosea that when Israel, the nation was young, God called the nation out of Egypt and said when Jesus went into Egypt and came out that's a fulfillment of that.

He's not saying that Hosea actually contains an overt prediction, but that the bit of history that Hosea retells itself serves as a covert prediction in the sense that Israel's infancy has parallels with that of the Messiah, and that it is a type of Christ. That, I think, is probably Matthew's way of reasoning. Now, let's read on, verse 16-18.

Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts from two years old and under according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Now, that last line, children two years old and younger, according to the time that he determined from the wise men, is why I told you to keep an eye on, or keep your thoughts, verse 7. Because he inquired diligently from the wise men when the star appeared, and based on that information, he decided to kill all the children in Bethlehem, male children, under two years old, which means that the star must have appeared something like two years earlier, or maybe a little less, but the point is it would be probably between one and two years after Jesus' birth that this incident took place, because he didn't pick two-year-old sons as just an arbitrary figure. He picked it based on when the star appeared, and the star presumably appeared when Jesus was born, and therefore we deduce that maybe as much as two years had passed or close to it at this time.

Now, then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more. Now, this prophecy is from Jeremiah chapter 31. It creates a few problems, too, in its quotation, Jeremiah 31, 15.

And that is because in Jeremiah 31 the context is talking about the Babylonian captivity and the carrying away of the Jews out of their land. And the land is symbolically referred to as Rachel weeping for her children because they are no more. They are not there anymore.

Their land is abandoned. She is abandoned of her children. By the way, Isaiah the prophet sometimes talked about Israel that way, too, of losing all her children in the captivity, but getting more back, including Gentiles later in the church age.

There's prophecies in Isaiah 54 and I think another place in Isaiah that has that idea that the nation loses, the land loses its children, but gets more. This prophecy in Jeremiah is highly figurative and it seems to be in the context talking about the wiping out of the

Jews and carrying them off into Babylon and the land of Israel is left desolate. And it is as if Rachel is weeping over the loss of her children.

But in this context, it's the death of babies in Bethlehem. By the way, not a great number of them. According to some scholars, Bethlehem was so small a city that the sons under two years old, on the law of averages, there probably weren't more than about 20 or 30 male children that young in Bethlehem.

So it wasn't a huge massacre, although it was a great atrocity and a great injustice and very much like what Herod was likely to have done from secular historical sources. But the mention of Rachel weeping, no doubt, is something that Matthew feels compelled to mention because she was buried there. Now the inhabitants of Bethlehem were not descended from Rachel.

They were of the tribe of Judah. Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin and no more. She had two sons.

She died giving birth to Benjamin. The Benjamites, whose territory was right next to the tribe of Judah, and the Manassites and the Ephraimites, who were descended from Joseph, those were the ones who descended from Rachel. The children of Bethlehem were Judeans.

They were from Judah, who was Leah's son. These were not Rachel's children. These were Leah's children of anything.

But the reason that it mentions Rachel weeping is because in Genesis it tells us that when Rachel died, she died near Bethlehem, which at that time was called Ephrathah. There was a monument there outside Bethlehem marking her grave. And so Matthew sees a certain appropriateness about this prediction.

How that these children, these Jewish children, were wiped out and right under the nose, as it were, of the burial place of Rachel. And Rachel is weeping in the sense that we might say that Martin Luther would turn over in his grave if he saw what became the Lutheran denomination. John Wesley would turn over in his grave if he saw the Methodist today or something like that.

That kind of expression is obviously figurative. Obviously Rachel was not literally weeping inside of her tomb. But the idea is that here's Rachel nearby, near enough that were she alive she could see what was going on and would weep over it.

And he sees some cryptic reference to the slaughter of the infants in that prophecy about Rachel weeping. It's a curious quote. You know, one thing I would like to raise, it's not brought up in the text directly, but it's a thought.

Obviously God knew Herod was going to do this. He knew it well enough to tell Joseph to

get Jesus out of it. Why didn't he send angels to warn the other parents to get their kids out of it? Throughout history, Christians have had to lose children various ways, through sickness or even in persecution, have watched them slaughtered before their eyes.

But God has not always warned them or told them where to go to be safe, although in some cases he has. There are stories in church history of God warning people of coming dangers and telling them where to go. We have to see in this God's sovereign choices.

And a parent who loses a child has got to realize that God could have prevented it, God could have warned, but if he did not he has some better purpose for it. And that's the most we can say about this. Because we can't really know why God didn't warn all the parents, but it was in the will of God.

By the way, those children would have died some way or another anyway. They just happened to die as infants in this case. Many children do.

But we see that God could have delivered them all, and we should take comfort in the fact that if we lose loved ones, God could have delivered them, but didn't, and we have to rest in his sovereign will and his overriding judgment in such cases. We'll continue with Matthew chapter 2 and also get into Luke chapter 2 and finish that out. We'll finish out both chapters in our next session.

That'll bring us to the end of the childhood narratives of Jesus, and that'll leave only for tomorrow stories of John the Baptist and Jesus without Him.