



7-DAY CHALLENGE

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

MATTHEW 1 – 2



Using this Study

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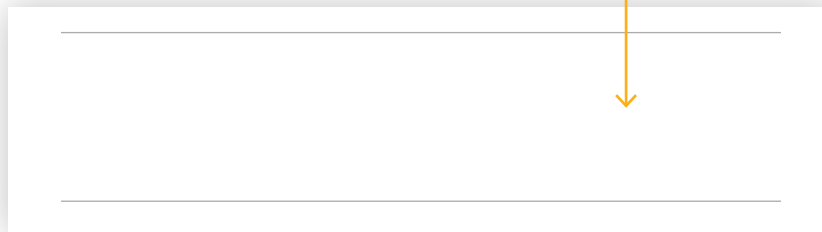
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DAY'S STUDY PAGE

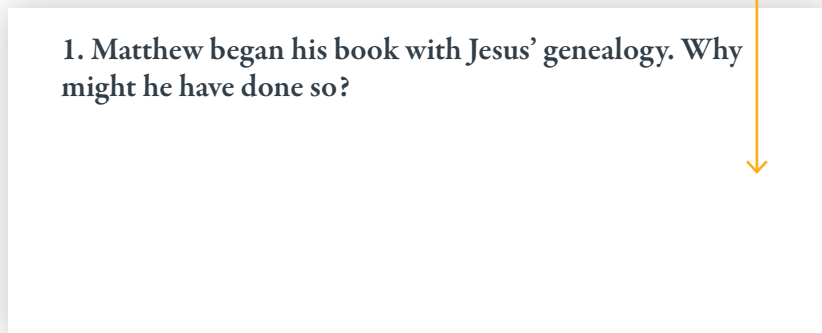
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ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Answer your questions directly inside this document

1. Matthew began his book with Jesus' genealogy. Why might he have done so?





THE BIRTH OF CHRIST - 7 DAY CHALLENGE

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Overview

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST - 7 DAY CHALLENGE

Our challenge begins



Every year the entire globe seems to reorient itself around colored lights, erecting evergreen trees indoors and desperately hunting for that oh-so-perfect gift. This “most wonderful time of the year” also brings its own brand of food, music and dress. (You do not see intentionally “ugly sweaters” worn outside the Yuletide season.) This confluence of external symbols can mean only one thing:

Christmas.

It might surprise you to learn the Christmas holidays are not actually a fabrication of some slick Madison Avenue marketing firm. While some of the newer traditions most certainly are, the core seeds to the holiday were actually planted more than two thousand years ago in the Middle East with the birth of a Jewish baby.

Jesus of Nazareth.

While that probably isn’t a shocking revelation, it still begs the question – what is the story? What exactly sparked all of the cheerful madness that blankets civilization every December 25th?

Hopefully, the next seven days will provide some insight into why the world collectively longs for “peace on earth and goodwill toward men” every year. Whether this walk through the birth of Jesus simply reacquaints you with the account or leaves you completely blindsided, it will definitely provide some timely context for the holiday season.

Thank you for taking this seven-day journey into God’s Word. We pray you are challenged and changed in a way that makes your life better both now and for eternity.

What to expect in this 7-day challenge:

For each day of the challenge, you will:

Pause to clear your mind.

Activate a thought.

Explore a Scripture passage.

Ponder some questions that connect the Bible to your life.

Consider scholarly insights on Scripture.



DAY 1

The Genealogy of Jesus

MATTHEW 1:1-18

Day 1 The Genealogy of Jesus

PAUSE AND PRAY

Take a deep breath and slowly exhale, clearing your mind of anything that might be cluttering it at the moment. Quiet the voices and noise. Once your mind is clear, pray for God to provide focus on and insight into what you are about to read.

ACTIVATE A THOUGHT

Is ancestry important?

Some cultures can recite their family tree back to the tenth generation while others barely pay lip service to their own flesh-and-blood grandparents. Whether you can trace your lineage to an ancient crown or have no clue who your biological parents might be, your lineage plays a role in who you are and where you find yourself today.

Additionally, every single person on the planet has someone in their family line that provokes embarrassment at best and outright denial at worst. From the incarcerated cousin to the uncle who made a small fortune by nefarious means and every misstep in between, not a single family can boast a pristine record.

Not even Jesus. (Wait, what?)

That's right. This isn't fake news. Even though Jesus of Nazareth lived without sin, His family line includes some definite shadiness (unless you find murder, prostitution and polygamy perfectly acceptable).

But you can choose which filter to wear when reading Jesus' lineage. One could easily read the list judgmentally. The better option, however, is to read through the lens of hope. Hope that your ancestry does not define you. Hope that God freely offers salvation to imperfect people.

Even you.

Heads up – Today is by far the longest of the seven days (as in it might take longer than 10 minutes). Jesus' family tree just happens to be more like a forest.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1-17

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

¹ This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah,

¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹² After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵ Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 1:1-17, answer the following questions:

1. Matthew began his book with Jesus' genealogy. Why might he have done so?

2. Give the background of each woman Matthew mentions in Jesus' genealogy.

Tamar – Genesis 38

Rahab – Joshua 2; 6:17

Ruth – Ruth 1; 4:13-17

“Wife of Uriah” – 2 Samuel 11; 12:15, 18, 24

Mary – Luke 1:26-56

3. Why might Matthew have chosen to include these particular women?

CONSIDER

Matthew's Genealogy: The Crown of Royalty

Matthew 1:1-17

God stands apart from us in every way. He is utterly holy and dwells in heaven's perfection, where there is no sin. We struggle constantly with sin and live in a broken world. God has all power, needs nothing, and knows everything. In our humanness, we are powerless and needy. There is much we do not know and cannot understand. **The God who created us did not abandon us in our broken world and sinful state. He did the unimaginable.** God sent His own Son to enter the world as a helpless baby, live a perfect life, and die a painful death. He did it for you!

The first chapter of Matthew builds the bridge between holy God and sinful man. Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, entered the world with the right human credentials: He was born into Abraham's family as rightful heir to David's throne. Matthew also presents Jesus' divine credentials. Jesus the Messiah was born of a virgin by the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit as God's promised Savior. Jesus was no ordinary baby. Fully God and fully human, Jesus Christ entered this world as a helpless infant. **God became a man to enable sinners to live a new life.** The book of Matthew helps us understand who Jesus is and what He has won for us.



The book of Matthew offers an indisputable claim that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the legitimate heir to David's throne.

Matthew's Specific Focus

Matthew wrote his genealogy to assure the Jewish people that Jesus is Messiah, the Christ. He identified Jesus' legal right to David's throne through His adopted father, Joseph. Proof of ancestry mattered in Israel. Genealogical records were used to prove ownership of land and an authentic place among God's people. In order to serve, priests had to prove an unbroken line of male

descent from Moses' brother, Aaron. The Israelites took ancestry extremely seriously.

The book of Matthew offers an indisputable claim that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the legitimate heir to David's throne. On the day Jesus entered Jerusalem in a royal procession, the people shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David." (Matthew 21:1-11) If Jesus had been an imposter, His enemies would have denounced this claim by disputing His genealogy. The validity of this claim contributed to their desire to crucify Him. The genealogical tables provided in Matthew and Luke offer proof that God kept His promises to send a deliverer through His people (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; 49:8-11; Isaiah 9:6-7; 53:1-12; Micah 5:2, 4-5).

Matthew and Luke both record Christ's ancestors. However, the two lists contain noteworthy differences. Both authors offer a specific emphasis, and neither list is exhaustive.

- Matthew's genealogy contains significantly fewer names than Luke's genealogy, which is more comprehensive.

- Matthew opened his book with his genealogy; Luke included his after the details of Jesus' birth and early ministry.
- Matthew's genealogy spoke to a primarily Jewish audience. He traced Jesus' legal right to David's throne going forward, starting with Abraham, the great patriarch of Jewish history. By contrast, Luke addressed Gentiles. Luke's genealogy starts with Joseph and works backward all the way to Adam (Luke 3:21-37). Luke intentionally linked Jesus, the second Adam, to the first Adam. Luke related God's Son Jesus to all mankind, not just the Jewish people.

The first genealogy in Scripture in Genesis 5 presents another interesting contrast to Matthew's genealogy. The repeated refrain, "and he died" highlights the sting of death that entered mankind through Adam's sin. **While Genesis 5 highlights death as the wages of sin, Matthew's genealogy emphasizes that Jesus came to "save his people from their sins."** Only Jesus Christ, the second Adam, could reverse the curse brought by the first Adam. Through faith in Christ, people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation can become a part of God's new humanity and His own family (John 1:12-13; 20:31; Galatians 4:4-7; 1 John 3:1-2; 5:11-12).

Matthew's Intentional Organization

Matthew's genealogy reflects a deliberate structure. Several names or generations are omitted to arrange the list into three cycles of 14 generations each. **Each group of 14 names represents a specific period of Israel's history.**

1:1-6a – The first approximately 1,000 years of Israel's history, from Abraham to David

1:6b-11 – Israel's kingdom period of about 400 years, from David until captivity in Babylon

1:12-16 – The 600 years of Israel's history from the return from exile in Babylon until the birth of Jesus

Matthew chose groups of 14 for another important reason. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet also served as numbers. Hebrew consonants have a numerical value. Authors sometimes repeated the "number" of a word to draw attention to it. In this case, the name "DVD" (David) has a numerical value of 14: $D+V+D = 4+6+4=14$. **Matthew was emphasizing that Jesus was a Son of David, qualified to be Messiah.** The three groups of 14 emphasized Jesus is greater than David himself.

Matthew's list, leading from Abraham to Jesus, emphasizes God's faithfulness over thousands of years. God kept His promises. Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne of David.

Matthew's Genealogy: The Jewels of Grace

Matthew sends a message in his genealogy beyond a list of names leading from Abraham to Jesus.

Matthew made a case for grace. Old Testament genealogies almost never mentioned women. Before Christ, the hardness of men's hearts meant women were given less legal status than men (Matthew 19:8). Old Testament law recorded under Moses offered Jewish women more rights and protection than other ancient cultures. However, in practice, men still regarded a woman as her father's or husband's possession.

The background stories of the five women who Matthew included in his genealogy make his choices even more extraordinary. Out of the five women, three were from Gentile backgrounds, and another was the widow of a Gentile. Three were widows. Mary was young and unmarried. **Matthew intentionally highlighted these unlikely ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God.** His departure from Jewish tradition points to God's grace. God's work does not depend on human worthiness but on God's perfect plan.

Tamar – 1:3

Genesis 38 tells Tamar's story. She was a Gentile girl who married Judah's oldest son, Er. He was so wicked that "the Lord put him to death." (Genesis 38:7). Ancient inheritance laws required a brother to carry on his deceased brother's family line through his brother's widow. Judah's next son, Onan, refused to do this and acted wickedly against Tamar. The Lord also put him to death (Genesis 38:8-10). Then Judah promised Tamar his third son, Shelah, but later refused to allow the marriage because he feared Shelah would also die. Judah superstitiously blamed Tamar for his sons' deaths. **Judah failed to honor his promise to Tamar, which placed her in a desperate situation without legal inheritance.**

Left as a widow in her father's home without prospects of marriage, Tamar used a sinful strategy to maintain her place in Judah's household. She disguised herself as a prostitute and became pregnant by Judah, her father-in-law. When confronted with his sin, Judah acknowledged his wrong treatment of Tamar. God's perfect story does not depend on the perfection of people, but His perfect ways. **Tamar's place in the genealogy of Christ illustrates God's grace toward people of all nations and backgrounds.**

Rahab – 1:5

The Bible plainly describes Rahab as a prostitute. Her story is recorded in Joshua 2. She lived in the wicked city of Jericho, the home of Gentile people whose sin polluted the entire land like a plague. Somehow, Rahab had heard how God miraculously delivered His children out of Egypt. When Hebrew spies came to assess the situation to plan for Jericho's destruction, **Rahab hid the Hebrew spies and declared her faith in the one, true God.** In Joshua 2:11, she said, "... for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." The spies promised to keep Rahab and her family safe when the city was destroyed.

God rescued this prostitute from a sinful Canaanite city and gave her a place in the family line of the Messiah. God opened Rahab's heart to believe in the power of Almighty God. She acted in faith, putting her own life in jeopardy for the sake of God's people.

Ruth – 1:5

The Old Testament book of Ruth tells this story. Ruth was also a Gentile with no place among God's people. An Israelite family from the tribe of Judah went to live in Moab during a time of famine. The two sons of this family married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. All the men in this family died, leaving three widows: Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi. **Ruth chose to leave her nation and people and be identified with God's people through her mother-in-law, Naomi.**

Ruth pledged her faith to God and Naomi with her beautiful words, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Ruth eventually married Boaz, an Israelite and her kinsman-redeemer, and became the great-grandmother to Israel's greatest king, David.

Uriah's Wife – 1:6


Matthew intentionally referred to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, as the woman who "had been Uriah's wife." Her story is told in 2 Samuel 11. King David committed adultery and impregnated Bathsheba. He then ordered the death of Uriah, whose actions had been above reproach. The child conceived in adultery died, but David later took Bathsheba as a wife. She gave birth to four sons, including the future King Solomon. Despite the gravity of David's sins of adultery and murder, God granted forgiveness when David acknowledged his sin and repented.

Mary – 1:16

Mary is listed in association with Joseph: "the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of

Jesus who is called the Messiah”. (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:30-35) **Mary was a young virgin of great virtue, chosen by God to bring the Messiah into the world.** She conceived by the Holy Spirit, which was a supernatural act. By a sovereign act of God, His Son grew in the womb of this young woman, completely apart from the usual means of human conception. God developed faith in both Mary and Joseph to accept His plan and the practical challenges it brought to their lives. She was likely in her early to mid-teens, the normal age for betrothal in her culture. Imagine the faith required to tell her parents what was happening. Understanding that Jesus was both fully God and fully human provides a necessary foundation to all the essential teaching about God’s plan to save sinners.

God’s Grace and Faithfulness

Matthew’s genealogy upholds God’s faithfulness and the undeserved grace He pours out on sinful people. God kept His promise to bring mankind’s deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. So much more than a list of ancient names, Matthew’s list calls us to reasonable faith in God. God delivers what He promises, and those promises are not deterred by the flaws and failures of people. God is gracious. God is faithful. Believing Him is a reasonable response. 

APPLY IT

What Jesus' genealogy means to us today



God keeps His promises

Throughout the Old Testament, God called a people to Himself and promised a deliverer. **At the right time and place in human history, the Son of God became a man.** Jesus came to solve mankind's greatest need in a way only He could. Only Jesus, the God-Man, could satisfy the demands of God and pay the price for the sins of the entire world.

Only Jesus could restore broken people to live the way God designed them to live. Because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells believers, giving new life that makes people a new creation. Jesus came to offer a new way to live. Are you living as a new creation because of what Jesus has won for you? Jesus came to set you free to live as God intended. Are you experiencing the joy of walking in fellowship with God?

God uses imperfect people to carry out His perfect plan

We do not add something to God that He needs or lacks. We do not deserve His love, yet He delights in loving us. **God does not offer a bright future only to people without a sinful past.** The reality is that everyone has a sinful past. Everyone needs a Savior. God can do great things through flawed people because of who He is.

In Christ, God provides the righteousness we lack. Jesus said, "For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Does your past make you feel unworthy of God's love or usefulness to Him? Will you accept God's grace, His personal love for you? In Christ, you are not bound by what you were, but you are a new creation in Him. Stand firm and confident in the forgiveness of Christ.



DAY 2

God Reassures Joseph

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Day 2

God Reassures Joseph

PAUSE

Take a deep breath. Exhale. Clear your mind of any preconceived notions about the birth of Jesus. Ask God to give you an open mind and clean slate as you explore the birth of His Son, asking Him to show you something new and personal about this ancient story.

ACTIVATE

The Greatest Story

People love “origin stories.”

These tales chart the fantastic events that transform a normal man or woman into someone extraordinary. Like Peter Parker becoming Spider-Man after gaining superhuman powers from a radioactive spider bite. Or Robin Hood becoming a steal-from-the-rich-and-give-to-the-poor master archer.

Entire nations build “origin stories” around their most revered leaders by stitching fact, fiction and fable together to create a somewhat mythical explanation and weight to the accomplishments of people like Alexander the Great, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela.

Then you have the most famous true origin story of all.

Jesus.

Despite having the most recognizable birth story in all of recorded history, few have actually read one of the two accounts written in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. How many have only heard the story thanks to the stirring recitation by Linus in *The Charlie Brown Christmas Special*?

Today, you have the opportunity to read the greatest origin story ever told. Whether it’s for the first or the hundredth time, this is the only story on earth that irrevocably changed both world and personal history.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18-25

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 1:18-25, answer the following questions:

1. How did Joseph respond to Mary's pregnancy?
2. What comfort and instructions did God give to Joseph?
3. What two names did God give to Mary's Son? What does each name mean?
4. How did Joseph demonstrate his faith?

CONSIDER

Jesus Christ: Born of a Virgin

Matthew 1:18-25

Matthew's genealogy confirms Jesus' human lineage and His rightful place as Israel's Messiah. The rest of Matthew 1 confirms Jesus' divine origin. **Though born of a woman, Jesus was indeed the very Son of God.** Matthew's account of Jesus' birth gives great insight into God's preparation of Jesus' human father, Joseph. Jesus' parents were people who walked with God. Jesus was not born into a rebellious home, but a faithful one. Matthew opens this section by preparing his readers for an important explanation, "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about ...".

Joseph's Distress – 1:18-19

God gave Joseph a high honor, but this privilege came with practical challenges. **Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married, but she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she and Joseph had sexual relations.** In Hebrew society, a future marriage was often arranged when the couple were still children. Betrothal was a binding agreement that lasted for about one year and could only be terminated by a divorce. Though recognized as "man and wife," the couple did not live together. A girl whose fiancé died during the betrothal period was known as "a virgin who is a widow." Under these stipulations, Joseph would have been required to divorce Mary if he chose not to marry her.

Mary's pregnancy created a serious crisis for Joseph. He had not known Mary sexually (Matthew 1:25). He was an honorable man, "faithful to the law," but also sensitive to Mary. Joseph did not want to publicly disgrace her. He made plans to divorce her quietly. God's grand plan to redeem mankind touched the lives of an honorable young couple anticipating their marriage. Mary would undoubtedly endure

rumors of immorality. Joseph faced a painful situation.

Joseph's Dream – 1:20-23

Joseph considered the facts and options before him. God did not leave Joseph in a confused state with only circumstantial evidence for his decision. **God intervened and communicated directly to Joseph.** An "angel of the Lord" appeared to Joseph in a dream. God addressed Joseph's confusion with a clear directive. "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." God erased any doubt about the origin of Mary's pregnancy. Joseph was to marry her. Both Mary and Joseph took a bold step of faith, for they both certainly faced suspicion regarding Mary's pregnancy.

The angel announced the name of the son to be born to Mary. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Jewish name Joshua, meaning "Yahweh is salvation" or "The LORD is salvation." In the Old Testament, Joshua led the nation of Israel across the Jordan and into the promised land. Jesus' work is far greater. Jesus Christ came to "save his people from their sins." He leads us from death to life. He came as a Savior to redeem people who needed to be saved. God's people are rescued from a lost and hopeless condition because of Jesus. Believers can boldly and gratefully proclaim they have been "saved."

In verses 22-23, Matthew linked this startling announcement to Old Testament prophecy, quoting Isaiah 7:14. **The name Jesus points to salvation from sin; the name Immanuel points**

to God's presence with us. Matthew connected God's promises to their fulfillment in Jesus to uphold God's eternal plan and utter faithfulness.

Joseph's Decision – 1:24-25

Joseph woke up from his dream and did everything the Lord had commanded. He took Mary home to be his wife. He did not consummate their marriage until after her baby's birth. And he named the baby Jesus, just as he had been instructed. **Joseph dared to believe God and took a bold step of costly obedience.**

Matthew opens his book with important details of God's grand story of salvation. Jesus Christ, God's own Son, was born just as God had planned and promised. He was born into the right family, at the right time. His supernatural birth brought deity to earth, as God came near in Jesus. **God became a man to enable sinners to live a new life.** The deliverance and forgiveness Jesus offers frees us from guilt and shame, releasing us to

serve God (Luke 1:71-75). What a God! What a Savior! 📖

Take to Heart

The authenticity and reliability of Jesus' human identity matters. God led Matthew to carefully validate Jesus' human credentials. Jesus was rightly born to be Israel's king. **This list of ancient names not only provides needed proof of Jesus' family line, but it also shines light on God's grace.**

Everyone listed in the human lineage of Jesus needed a Savior. God can use people with human limitations and failures because Jesus is the Savior all sinners need. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to "save his people from their sins."

The two sections in Matthew 1 stand in beautiful harmony and intentional contrast. **The human lineage of Jesus is set against the divine origin of Jesus.** Jesus' birth was supernatural. The amazing story of Jesus' virgin birth is woven into the very human account of a humble Jewish couple who faced their new reality with faith. Jesus entered the human world and impacted real people. God Almighty became Immanuel, "God with us."

APPLY IT

Learning from Joseph

With God's favor comes a call to faith

Joseph and Mary were given an inexpressible honor and privilege to be chosen by God as the human family to nurture His Son. With God's favor came immediate challenges and a personal call to faith.

God lovingly and tenderly strengthened them to trust Him and surrender to His plan. When obedience is difficult and costly, do you trust that God will lead you through? **God will do in us what He demands of us.** God revealed His plan to Mary. God reassured Joseph and told him what to do next. You may not understand the whole plan God has for you, but He will faithfully give what you need to take the next right step. What costly step of surrender and obedience is God asking of you? What unknown path is He asking you to take? Will you trust God with what you cannot explain or understand? Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. ... May your word to me be fulfilled." (Luke 1:38) God will build your faith and give you everything that obeying Him requires. God's power accomplishes what we cannot do in our human strength.





DAY 3

God's Plan for Mary

LUKE 1:26-38

Day 3

God's Plan for Mary

PAUSE

Take a moment and ask God to help you set aside your sense of what is physically possible and impossible in the world. Ask Him to open your mind to the possibilities of what loving God might offer and the lengths He might go to bring salvation to the world. Once you find that filter, read on.

ACTIVATE

Hard to believe?

It's incredibly hard to know what to believe today.

Go on the internet and you will find “proof” for diametrically opposed positions. Even the once incontrovertible proof of photos and videos can now be easily doctored, manipulated and fabricated to tell whatever story one wishes. Outlandish fiction presented as fact has now become the norm (the Holocaust never happened, the moon landing was a hoax, etc.) rather than the outlier (like The War of the Worlds radio show panic or publication of Hitler's diaries).

Which might make what you are about to read all the more difficult to swallow.

But that's okay because the account of Jesus' conception has never been a simple accept-it-at-face-value proposition. To fully understand the full length and breadth and depth of the following verses has always required a heavy dose of faith.

With that in mind, set aside any skeptical reactions as you read today's Scripture passage and choose to view it as the “Good News” it truly turned out to be.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-38

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

CONSIDER

Mary's Child: Human and Deity

Luke 1:26-38

Matthew clearly stated that Mary's child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Luke told the story from Mary's perspective while Matthew focused on Joseph. Luke's account explains Mary's own encounter with the angel Gabriel. Mary heard the news, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Mary's response to this shocking reality demonstrated humility and surrender, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Mary chose to make God's will her priority.

The reality of the virgin birth – a child conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit – represents an important truth that cannot be ignored. Jesus had to be human to die for sinners. Jesus had to be divine for His perfect death to cover the sins of humanity for all time. **The virgin birth represents both the humanity and deity of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.** Matthew introduces this pivotal truth early in his account, though its full significance has not yet emerged fully. 📖



DAY 4

Following the Star

MATTHEW 2:1-8

Day 4 Following the Star

PAUSE

You have made it halfway through the challenge. Celebrate! (It doesn't matter if it's taken you three or thirty days.) Ask God to help you see Jesus with new eyes, removing all of the Christmas pageantry and classical painting depictions of the Christ child to see Him as He truly was and is. Ready? Good. Read on.

ACTIVATE

Reacting to Jesus

Do you remember the first time you heard about Jesus?

If so, do you remember what exactly you felt? Was it wonder? Joy? Maybe even fear?

If you can't remember your feelings, can you remember the reaction of someone else when they first heard about the Son of God? Even a child cannot ignore the incredible story, audacious claims and incredible personal implications of God's Son being born on earth.

Which makes the next Scripture passage all the more instructive. It contains two vastly different reactions to the coming of the prophesied Messiah. See if you can spot them.

Then honestly assess which more accurately reflects your own reaction.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1-8

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 2:1-8, answer the following questions:

1. List the different people or groups in these verses and their responses to the news of Christ's birth.
2. What attitudes toward Christ and the Bible are common in our world today?
3. How has God drawn you to Himself, inviting you to seek Him and know Him?

CONSIDER

God Drew the Magi to Worship the King

Matthew 2:1-8

Why do some people seek God and others reject Him? Why are some sensitive to God's revelation of Himself in creation and others are not? (Romans 1:19-20) Every human is made in God's image. Though sin has marred our desire for God, mankind's highest purpose and ultimate fulfillment is found in fellowship with the Creator. **God promises that those who seek Him will find Him.** (Proverbs 8:17; Jeremiah 29:13; James 4:8) God reveals Himself and draws people to Himself. Some people seek God, while others turn away from Him. But all are held responsible for their choice.

Matthew 2 tells the story of men from a distant country who followed the light of a star to worship the infant King. But this chapter also recounts an evil earthly king who rejected heaven's King with murderous fury. The truth about Jesus the Messiah divides humanity into two camps – those who seek Him and those who reject Him. **God sent Jesus as the King of the world.** Like the Magi of Matthew 2, will you respond to the light God shines on you? The wisest and most fulfilling pursuit of your life is to know and walk with God. Jesus Christ, heaven's King, came to earth to make a way for you to do that.

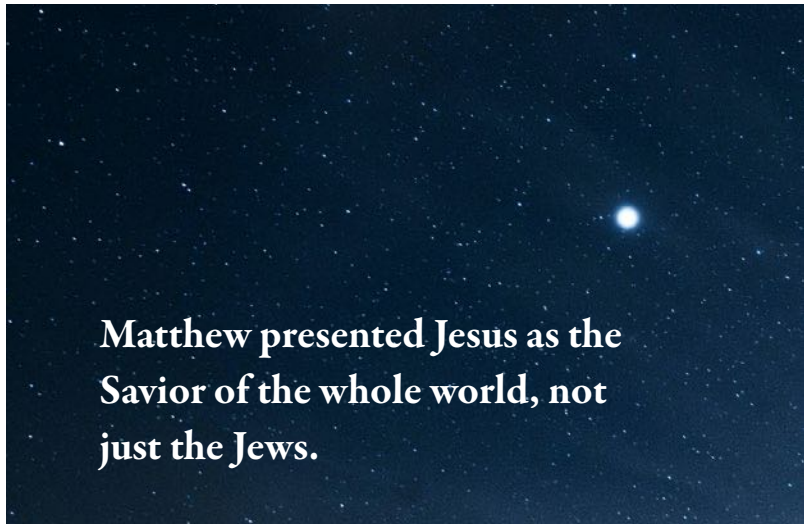
Matthew 1 introduced Jesus as the rightful heir to Israel's throne. Jesus the Messiah was born by God's decree and fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament. **Matthew wrote to an audience of Jewish Christians but presented Jesus as the Savior of the whole world, not just the Jews.** He included Gentile women in his genealogy and presented the story of the Magi – Gentiles who went out of their way to seek and worship Jesus.

The Magi's Pursuit 2:1-2

Matthew established the place of Jesus' birth and the political context into which He was born. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod. Matthew presented an amazing account that confirms Jesus' identity. **After Jesus' birth, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.** They entered Jerusalem, asked a deliberate question, and expressed a clear desire, "Where is the one who has been born king of the

Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

The account of the Magi raises as many questions as it answers. The details Matthew records seem intentionally few. Perhaps because there is not much we know about these visitors from the east,



Matthew presented Jesus as the Savior of the whole world, not just the Jews.

our focus lands on what we do know. **Their visit, their gifts, and their worship all point to the true identity of Bethlehem’s child, humanity’s Savior, God’s Son.**

Who were the Magi? Most information about them rises from extra-biblical sources. The Greek historian Herodotus describes the Magi as a tribe of the Medes who served a priestly function in the Persian Empire. They were known for studying the stars, as well as having expertise in philosophy, medicine, and natural science, explaining their common designation as “wise men.” The fact that they came from the east following a star could support that theory. Traditionally, some have assumed there were three wise men because three gifts were offered. Some have even assigned them names. Matthew offers none of these details but does recognize the significance of the visit, which certainly caused an uproar in Jerusalem.

What did the Magi see in the sky? Many have offered natural explanations for an astronomical phenomenon that drew them eastward. The 17th-century astronomer Johannes Kepler pointed to a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in 7 B.C. Some have suggested a supernova or some other natural wonder in the heavens. Others offer supernatural explanations, such as light from angels or even a manifestation of God’s shekinah glory. Beyond any explanation, God’s supernatural work through the star is evident. Numbers 24:17 says, “... A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel...” God purposely placed an unusual light in the night sky that captured the attention of these men and drew them to Bethlehem to worship His Son.

Why did the Magi associate the star with the birth of the King of the Jews? No one knows for sure. The Persian Empire was home to a large Jewish population following the Jewish exile. Certainly, the Jews anticipated the Messiah that God had promised. Matthew’s emphasis is not on explaining these details but exalting the King they came to worship.

Why would the Magi desire to worship this tiny King? Historical evidence would suggest Magi were involved in the magic arts and false religion, not the worship of the one, true God. Was their desire to recognize the greatness, if not the divinity, of the newborn King? Were they paying homage to royalty or offering true worship rightly due Jesus? Again, we do not know for sure. Regardless of God’s work in their hearts or what they understood, the Magi responded to the light they saw. These wise men traveled a great distance, overcame obstacles, and stayed the course until they entered the presence of deity clothed in humanity.

King Herod’s Panic – 2:3-8

Herod’s Distress – 2:3

The openness of the Magi to seek the newborn King stands in stark contrast to the response of others. **The arrival and question of this delegation greatly disturbed King Herod.** An insecure and unstable political leader, this Herod was known for insane jealousy and excessive cruelty. Herod the Great was called the “Idumean,” which means “Edomite.” Herod’s father Antipater was an Edomite who had converted to Judaism. Because Herod was not from the line of David, he was not considered a legitimate king by most Jews. He sought to maintain political power by keeping peace in Judea. Though he knew the Jewish Scriptures and followed the law, he was hated by the Jewish people he ruled. The temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt and beautified under his direction. An untrustworthy man who trusted no one, he killed his best-loved wife out of jealousy and executed two of his own sons. On his deathbed, he imprisoned 70 Judean elders in the Hippodrome in Jericho and ordered them to be executed upon his death to ensure that Judea would mourn his death. Instead, his sister released them, and Jerusalem rejoiced.

Herod's Experts – 2:4-6

Rattled by the question of the Magi, Herod consulted the Jewish religious leaders to confirm the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah. The chief priests and teachers of the law were experts on the Old Testament Scriptures. This panel of scholars quickly and correctly answered Herod's question. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea, according to Micah's prophecy, which they recited (Micah 5:2). They knew the Messiah was coming and the place to which He would come.

Herod's Deception – 2:7-8

Herod continued to gather information as he secretly called the Magi before him and inquired about the exact time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem to search for the child. **In an outright deception, he asked the wise men to report back to him so he could also go and worship the newborn King.**

Herod's attitude and actions reflect utter rebellion against God and His Son. He knew the details of the Messiah's birth but resorted to lies and ultimately murder in an attempt to overthrow God's preordained plan (Psalm 33:10-11; Proverbs 21:30). The intensity of his hatred reflected his evil ambition. 📖



DAY 5

Magi Visit the King

MATTHEW 2:9-12

Day 5 Magi Visit the King

PAUSE

Take a few minutes to ask God to reveal all the gifts He has given you. Start with thanking Him for the gift of life and then thank Him for each and every gift He brings to mind, from beauty in nature to a newborn baby and everything in between. Once your “thank you” list runs dry, begin reading.

ACTIVATE

What is in a gift?

It’s incredibly difficult to separate the Christmas holiday from gift giving. That’s why many culture warriors attempt to divorce the consumer-driven, Santa-centric side of the Christmas equation from the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

While the spirit of Christmas has definitely been infected by consumerism, it is impossible to separate the act of gift giving from the religious aspects. Gifts were given at Jesus’ birth! (Theologians still debate the timing of the Magi’s arrival – anywhere from 10 days to 2 years after Jesus’ birth. For the sake of shorter Christmas pageants everywhere, we historically lump the events together.)

Obviously, gifts play an important role in the arrival of King Jesus on the scene.

The real question then becomes: Do you see the Christ child as a wonderful gift, or something you want to return?

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:9-12

Read the scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 2:9-12, answer the following questions:

1. How did the Magi find their way to Jesus? What does this reveal about God?
2. What do you learn about worship and seeking God from the Magi?
3. What helps you humble yourself in worship before God?
4. How did God intervene to protect Jesus?

CONSIDER

The Magi's Worship

Matthew 2:9-12

The Witness of the Star – 2:9-10

The Magi left Jerusalem and followed the star to Bethlehem, a small town about 6 miles (nearly 10 km) from Jerusalem. The history of the town reached back nearly 2,000 years before Jesus' birth. Jacob's wife, Rachel, died in childbirth on the way to Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-19; 48:7). The town is best known as the family home of King David, Israel's greatest king (1 Samuel 16:1; 17:12). Ruth, great grandmother of David, married Boaz in Bethlehem (Ruth 4). Micah 5:2 clearly identified Bethlehem as the site of the Messiah's birth.

God's guidance of the Magi with the star reveals His absolute control of His creation. The sky God created served as a canvas for Him to draw worshippers into the presence of His Son. The star seemed to reappear, leading the wise men until it stopped over the very place where Jesus was. They were overjoyed to see the star and carefully followed its light, which guided them step-by-step. Though there is much we do not understand about the star or many of the details of this account, God clearly led them into the presence of His Son. **They faithfully pursued the star, and God faithfully led them.**

The Wise Men Worshipped the King – 2:11

When they came to the house where Jesus was and saw Jesus and His mother, Mary, they bowed down and worshipped Him. They opened their treasure boxes and presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The worthy worship of God's Son offers the clearest focus of this passage.

The Magi's worship reflected their joy and adoration, as they bowed in the presence of one greater. Bowing puts the physical body in a posture that expresses submission in the heart.

To bow, one's defenses are lowered in a humble position of humility and vulnerability.

Worship involves sacrifice. The Magi offered Jesus costly gifts, described as "treasures." These three specific gifts were worthy of a king:

- **Gold:** This most precious metal reflects **royalty, purity, and value.** The child Jesus was truly a King.
- **Frankincense:** This costly incense was used in **worship.** The child Jesus was worthy of worship.
- **Myrrh:** This sweet-smelling resin was used in embalming bodies for **burial.** Though a strange gift for a baby, this gift could point to Jesus' death. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea used 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus' burial (John 19:38-40). The child Jesus was born to die a sacrificial death to redeem mankind.

The Lord's Warning – 2:12

God guided the Magi to worship Jesus and to avoid Herod's trap. They were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and they returned to their country by an alternate route. **This is one of five dreams in Matthew 1-2 that God used to protect Jesus and His family.**

From start to finish, the account of the Magi reflects God's faithfulness. God placed a light in the heavens that caught their attention and awakened their hearts. He provided guidance that led them to the right place and the right posture before the infant King. They came from outside Israel's territory, traveling from a distant land seeking the King of the Jews. God led them to Jesus and back home again. This reveals that the God of eternity is accessible to all who seek Him. ☞

APPLY IT

God reveals Himself

Creation, God's Word, God's people, and God's Spirit actively reveal His sovereignty

The greatness of God reveals our need for Him. Sensitivity to conviction of specific sin reveals responsiveness to God. Are you drawn to and purified by God's Word? This passage reveals a variety of responses to the revelation of God's Son, Jesus. How has God revealed Himself to you? How responsive are you to God? So many times, human pride leads us to foolishly resist God's loving and gentle drawing to trust and follow Him. Rejecting what God is doing or saying to you further complicates your life. God is present and actively guiding you in the moments of your life. Do you seek His wisdom in your decisions? Do you turn to Him in prayer, naturally and often? Intentionally think about the greatness of God and His love for you. **As you respond to God, He will increasingly lead you to experience His faithfulness.**





DAY 6

Escape to Egypt

MATTHEW 2:13-18

Day 6 Escape to Egypt

PAUSE

As you near the end of this seven-day study, ask God to slow you down and speak to you through His Word. Specifically ask Him to help you see how today's Scripture passage might connect with, and even bring hope to, your own life and circumstances.

ACTIVATE

After the Celebration

Do you ever wonder what happens after the movie ends?

Typically, the credits roll following a happy ending where the newlyweds ride off into the sunset, the terrified teens survive the zombie apocalypse, or the world is saved from alien invasion.

But what happens in the next days, weeks, months and years? Does the couple fight? Do the teens give up juvenile ways to seize productive lives? Do the nations unite in peace after the threat of annihilation?

You might have noticed the typical Christmas narrative ended yesterday. Today, you will discover the aftermath of Jesus' birth.

Unfortunately, it ain't pretty.

Which probably makes the truth of Jesus' birth ring even more loudly than before.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:13-18

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 2:13-18, answer the following questions:

1. What possibly motivated Herod's hostility against Jesus?
2. How did God lead Joseph, and how did he respond? What do you learn from this?
3. What is the significance of Jesus' flight to Egypt and Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1?
4. What greater sin did Herod commit as a result of his insecurity and fear?
5. What insecurity or fear do you face today? What truth about God can you cling to?
See Proverbs 21:30.

CONSIDER

God Directed Joseph to Protect the King

Matthew 2:9-12

God intervened to protect Joseph, Mary, and Jesus as Herod's insecurity and murderous plans escalated. Herod did not hesitate to kill any rival. First, God redirected the Magi so they would avoid Herod. Next, He warned Joseph of impending danger.

The Flight to Egypt – 2:13-15


An angel of the Lord gave Joseph clear directions that they should leave Bethlehem and flee to Egypt because Herod planned to search for Jesus and kill Him. Joseph and his family were to remain in Egypt until they received further instructions. **Joseph obeyed immediately and left Bethlehem under the cover of night.** He stayed in Egypt until Herod died and the danger had passed.

Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” In its original context, this statement related to Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The Israelites were delivered from the bondage of slavery in Egypt by miracles and God's deliverer, Moses (Exodus 12:31-14:31). **Matthew draws an intentional parallel, connecting this reference to Jesus, who came to deliver God's people out of bondage to sin, which is our Egypt.**

God's overruling sovereignty preserved the life of His life-giving Son, despite opposition. Joseph and the Magi were warned by supernatural means, but no miracles are recorded regarding their escape to Egypt. Joseph and Mary journeyed about 225 miles (362 kilometers) with a young child. God could have rescued them any way He chose. However, He often accomplishes His sovereign purposes through ordinary means.


The Slaughter in Bethlehem—2:16-18

Herod's fury only increased when he realized the Magi had outwitted him. Herod ordered all boys less than 2 years of age in the vicinity of Bethlehem to be killed. Again, Satan's desire to stop God's redemptive plan through the Messiah was behind this murderous edict. **This insecure earthly king's vicious action could not thwart God's purposes.** Herod ordered children to be murdered to protect his selfish interests. Sin gave rise to more sin, as it often does. Bethlehem was a small village, so the number of children killed was likely fairly small. However many or few young boys died, the pain inflicted on those families was known by God.

God inspired Matthew to quote Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the sorrow of Rachel, Jacob's wife (Jeremiah 31:15). Jeremiah prophesied around the time that Judah was carried into exile in Babylon. Unfair slaughter is a sad part of Israel's history. The lament Jeremiah recorded expressed the sorrow of mothers whose families were murdered and carried off into exile during the conquest of Judea. “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” There is a pattern in biblical prophecy where one event in the short-term mirrors a later event. Matthew connected this sorrow with that of Bethlehem's bereaved parents. God acknowledged their pain. 

APPLY IT

Expecting Opposition



Jesus entered the world as a baby and immediately the forces of evil tried to snuff out the light He came to shine

Opposition to God's work within you and through you should be expected. Rather than a source of discouragement, opposition should be anticipated as you seek to trust and obey God. (Acts 20:19; James 1:2-15; 1 Peter 4:12) Do not be surprised when obeying God proves difficult. Life on this earth brings trials that challenge believers to believe God. Our love for self and sin makes obedience hard. Satan, the prince of this world, stands against God. Those who follow Christ are so out of step with this world that Scripture refers to them as aliens. (1 Peter 2:11) The battles you face to walk faithfully with God provide opportunities for Him to demonstrate His faithfulness. God's purposes will prevail.

His power within you provides all you need. What undeserved opposition are you facing as you seek to walk with God? How will you trust God to strengthen and guide you to walk steadfastly in faith? The Holy Spirit provides strength, direction, and wisdom to persevere in obedience to God.



DAY 7

Returning to Israel

MATTHEW 2:19-23

Day 7 Returning to Israel

PAUSE

Your weeklong journey through Scripture is nearly at an end. Resist the urge to race to the finish line for that achievement medal. Instead, take a deep breath, exhale and pray that God will help you savor and enjoy your final walk through His Word, revealing something new that can be applied to your life.

ACTIVATE

Significance

Once the mountains of goodies have been consumed, wrapping paper trashed and decorations put into storage for another year, one typically has a moment to sit down and ponder:

“What’s the big deal?”

When viewed through the prism of family gifts and feasts, one must ultimately conclude “not much” beyond some memories (and possible never-ending credit card payments).

When viewed through the prism of Jesus’ ultimate claims to be the only path to eternal salvation, though, the celebration of His birth can become the filter for your entire worldview.

Before dismissing the radical claims of Jesus, consider the final five verses of Matthew chapter two. They point to a simple but inescapable fact that this one child’s birth fulfilled all of the myriad prophecies given concerning the coming Messiah. Jesus fulfilled statistically impossible prophecies no person could ever knowingly fulfill on their own.

Today, as you close out the Christmas story as presented in the Gospel of Matthew (which is actually just the beginning of Jesus’ amazing story), honestly ask yourself:

“What’s the big deal?”

The answer may change your life. For eternity.

EXPLORE SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:19-23

Read the Scripture from the NIV translation below or the Bible of your choice.

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

PONDER

Questions

After reading Matthew 2:19-23, answer the following questions:

1. Why did Joseph not return to Judea?
2. What is significant about Jesus growing up in Nazareth? (See John 1:43-46.)
3. How are you helped to know that Jesus came from an unexpected place?
4. In what ways have you experienced God's guidance and protection in your life?

CONSIDER

God Tells Joseph to Return

Matthew 2:9-12

The Return to Nazareth – 2:19-23

God guided Joseph, one step at a time. Joseph followed God's instructions and obeyed. **After Herod's death, an angel of the Lord told Joseph it was safe to return to Israel.** When Joseph heard that Archelaus, one of the surviving sons of Herod the Great, was ruling in his place, doubts began to rise. Again, God made his way clear to Joseph. After being warned again in a dream, he moved his family to the town of Nazareth in the district of Galilee.

Matthew again makes a deliberate connection of these events with Old Testament prophets.

The exact source and meaning are not clear. The Messiah was to be called a "Nazarene." Many theories exist to explain this reference. The most likely answer is that Matthew is referring to the prophecy of a "Netzer" or "Branch" from the stump of Jesse in Isaiah 11:1. Jesus would be associated with a town that few would want to claim as their own. Jesus did not come to earth with credentials and a human background that earned Him respect (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:46). The greatness of God's Son did not rest on His hometown but in His deity. **God sent Jesus as the King of the world.** 📖

Take to Heart

Matthew 2 offers a bold contrast between two kings. Heaven's King came to earth in humble circumstances. Though He was the light of the world, few recognized Him. In stark contrast, a human king seized by insecurity and seeking recognition tried and failed to extinguish the light of the true King. **The King from heaven was ignored and rejected, but God shielded His Son and protected His mission.** No opposition can thwart the purposes and plans of God.

Judea's king and Israel's religious leaders failed to recognize that the King of Glory had entered their world. The people who were close by and should have been looking for Him were not actually looking for Him. And while those who had memorized the prophecies that announced the King failed to seek Him, God's sign in the heavens summoned worshipers from a distant land. The Magi followed the light of

God's star to the very place where they found the Messiah. They presented their gifts and bowed in worship. God drew them by a light in the heavens and continued to draw them ever closer, until they were in the presence of heaven's King. God draws people to the truth and opens their hearts to worship in truth. (John 4:23) Joseph listened carefully to God's directions and humbly obeyed. God led him and protected his family from harm. They fled to Egypt at night and sought refuge there until God called them to Nazareth. **God's warnings and instructions to Joseph were clear, and God provided just what he needed for the next step at the appropriate time.** The details God reveals give evidence of His sovereignty and omniscience. He knows everything. God faithfully leads His children and upholds His purposes, despite opposition.

APPLY IT

Light In Our Darkness



That light continues to shine as we grasp more and more of the wonder of Jesus

2 Corinthians 4:6 says, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” God’s light sovereignly drew the Magi into Jesus’ presence. **For believers, God shines His light to illuminate truth so we can see Jesus for who He really is.** That light continues to shine as we grasp more and more of the wonder of Jesus. Now, in this world, we see Jesus “dimly,” but one day we will see Him face- to-face. (1 Corinthians 13:12) The path of a believer only grows brighter as we move to the future. Though dark times enter this world, our hope is in Jesus. God calls you to walk in His light (Ephesians 5:8).

Congratulations!

You have completed the 7-Day Challenge.

We pray you have gained new insight into the origins of the Christmas story in the birth of Jesus and found the week both enlightening and hopeful. If that is true, please consider sharing this study with others.

If you would like to continue exploring God's Word, consider using one of Bible Study Fellowship's other free offerings.

- **James – Two-Week Study** – This timeless and timely book on dealing with trials offers tremendous spiritual encouragement and direction
- **Bible Study Fellowship App** – BSF's app walks chapter-by-chapter through a book or section of the Bible with daily Scripture readings and questions to help you explore God's Word in context. *app.bsfindernational.org*
- **Find a Group** – Meet in-person or online with people around the world to study God's Word together. *bsfindernational.org*

Thank you again for taking the 7-Day Challenge! We pray God met you in His Word and spoke to you through it.



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