

Journey, Road Trip, On the Run

Matthew 2:1,4-6,13-15,20-21, 22-23

Homiletical Outline

Dr. Pierre Cannings

- I. Inconvenient Trip - Bethlehem of Judea Matthew v. 1;4-6 Luke 2:1-5
 - a. Travel
 - i. Register as a Census
 1. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world
 - ii. Timeline 4 B.C. End of Herod's reign
 1. then Jesus must have been born quite late in Herod's reign. 5/4 B.C. is the most favoured suggestion, but see the comments at v. 2 for astronomical reasons for favouring 7/6 B.C.
 2. Possibly 80 miles
 - b. Geography - Bethlehem of Judea v.1- Micah 5:2
 - i. Bethlehem is only about five miles from Jerusalem. 'Of Judea' prepares for 'in the land of Judah' in v. 6
 1. was a Judean village located about five or six miles south-southwest of Jerusalem. Its importance in the OT, where it is usually called 'the city of David', derives principally from its association with King David.
 - ii. The close link between Bethlehem and Davidic sonship can be seen from Jn 7:42: 'Does not the Scripture say that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was'
 1. Bethlehem is the place of David's origin, so it would not be unnatural to imagine this 'son of David' as permanently domiciled there (cf. vv. 21–22).
 2. *Bê(-)lehem*, where David was brought up and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1–13; cf. 17:12, 15, 58; 20:6, 28),
 3. It emphasizes the connection between Jesus and the patriarch Judah (cf. 1:2–3)—so important because the Davidic Messiah was expected to come from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5; cf. Gen 49:9–10)
 - c. Prophecy Fulfilled
 - i. Chief Priest
 1. Chief priests' is used of the upper echelon of the priestly order: the chief priest (and his predecessors), the captain of the temple, those who headed the twenty-four courses into which the

priesthood was divided for service in the temple, the priest who had charge of the treasury, and other high-ranking priests. The scribes were the antecedents of the later Jewish rabbis. They functioned both as scholars of the law and as teachers, and they also had a role in the administration of justice, which in Jerusalem included a part in the highest levels of the Jewish political power structure

2. Their inactivity in comparison to that of the Magi may imply criticism, and their later hostility to Jesus may be seen as that much more reprehensible in the light of the evident scriptural knowledge of this grouping and their participation in events which pointed to the significance of the birth of Jesus

ii. Written by Prophet

1. Bethlehem, Land of Judah

- a. The form of Matthew's citation of Mic 5:2 is distinctive,
- b. in Bethlehem of Judea," is the first indication of a place name in Matthew's narrative; its theological importance can be seen in the way it anticipates the quotation of Mic 5:1 in v 6 (cf. also vv 5, 8), despite the slight difference between τῆς Ἰουδαίας and the γῆ Ἰουδα of the quotation.

2. Ruler- The language borrowed from 2 Sa. 5:2 for the final line expresses the conviction of 'all the tribes of Israel' that David is destined to be king

II. On the Run - Flee to Egypt v. 13-15

- a. Travel - Egypt - Almost as soon as he is born, the Son of man, who like Moses will grow up in Egypt, has no place to lay his head (cf. 8:20).
 - i. Egypt was the traditional refuge for Palestinian Jews seeking asylum. See, for example, 1 Kgs 11:40 (Jeroboam); 2 Kgs 25:26 and Jer 41:16-18
- b. Between 200-350 miles 30-45 days
- c. Joseph-
 - i. Got up Still Night - By night' reflects the nighttime occurrence of dreams, but also the immediacy of obedience in response to the urgency implied in the angelic directive. Night travel offers fewer witnesses.
- d. Remained until death of Herod
 - i. **4 B.C**
- e. Prophecy Fulfilled
 - i. Matthew was presumably the first to connect Hos 11:1 with the story of Jesus. He was in all likelihood led to it via Num 24:8,
 - ii. He was not naïvely oblivious of the switch in referents when he applied Hos 11:1 to Jesus, not to the people. We think this in part because, in the second place, Christian tradition before Matthew had portrayed Jesus as repeating or recapitulating certain experiences of Israel

- iii. Hosea is, of course, alluding to the historical exodus and not making a prophecy about the future. How then can Matthew say that the quotation is “fulfilled” (πληρωθῆ)? What we have here is a matter of typological correspondence—that is, a substantial similarity is seen to exist between two moments of redemptive history, and therefore the two are regarded as interconnected, forming one larger continuity; the earlier is thus seen to foreshadow or anticipate the latter, which then becomes a kind of realization or fulfillment of the former.

III. Free to Go - Go to Israel v.19-21

- a. Herod is dead - Herod, whose long reign began in 37 B.C. died in 4 B.C. His death signaled the possibility of return, not only of the holy family (cf. v 15)
- b. Threat is gone - A strong echo of language links the words of the angel here and in v. 13. But now the directive is to ‘go to the land of Israel’, and the reason this time is the death of Herod, not the threat of his action. The tie between Jesus and Moses is further underlined here by the echo of the language of Ex. 4:19–20

IV. On the Run Again – Go to Nazareth v. 22-23

- a. Archeleus Reigning- 4.B.C.- 6 A.D. this possibly happened at 5 A.D.
 - i. Archeleus- After Herod’s death his territory was divided. Archelaus was made Tetrarch of Judea and was a true son of his father. [Another son of Herod, Antipas, ruled in Galilee, and both John and Jesus were to have dealings with him at a later stage.](#)
 - 1. It was God’s will that they go to Galilee. To be sure, another son of Herod, Herod Antipas, ruled as ethnarch over Galilee and Perea. But he was a more tolerant ruler, and Galilee in his day became known for revolutionary sentiments that would never have been tolerated by his father
 - ii. Joseph’s fear of Archelaus appears to have been well grounded, as the son of Herod tended to follow the ways of his father. His subjects managed eventually to have him deposed by the Romans in A.D. 6.
 - iii. He was reputed to be the worst of the three brothers. His short reign was marked by scandal, by brutality, by tyranny. Matters got so bad that complaints lodged against him in Rome by a deputation of Jews and Samaritans succeeded in having him deposed and sent into exile in Gaul in A.D. 6.
- b. Went to Region of Galilee
 - i. Nazareth- **2:23** Fifteen miles to the west of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth was a quite insignificant town in biblical times and is never mentioned in the OT. Projections from archaeological evidence suggest a maximum population of no more than 500
 - ii. 106 miles travel

- iii. κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ, “he dwelt in a city called Nazareth.” The “city” is unknown from the OT or any sources earlier than the NT documents. Popular opinion in the metropolis of Jerusalem concerning this northern town may well be summarized by the question put by Nathaniel in John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
 - a. It is in Galilee that he inaugurates his ministry in fulfillment of Isa 9:1
 - b. Galilee’s large population of Gentiles symbolizes the universal significance Matthew sees in Jesus.
- iv. Fulfill Prophecy
 - 1. He shall be call a Nazarene
 - 2. The key to understanding what he says lies in the similarity between Ναζαρέτ, “Nazareth,” and Ναζωραῖος, “Nazarene.” The difficulty lies in discerning his intent behind Ναζωραῖος; and this is further compounded by the serious uncertainty about the spelling of Nazareth.
 - a. This seems too close to Matthew’s line to be coincidence. We should probably conclude that before us is an involved word play. ‘He will be called a Nazarene’ depends upon (a) the equation of ‘Nazarite’ and ‘holy’ one of God’; (b) the substitution of ‘Nazarite’ for ‘holy’ in Isa 4:3 and (c) the substitution of ‘Nazarene’ for ‘Nazarite’.
 - i. It is important to note that this conclusion suggests that the context addressed by Matthew was at least somewhat multilingual. An awareness that Ναζιρ(αιος) could function as an equivalent to ἅγιος was possible to a Greek speaker on the basis of Greek OT variants, but an awareness that the root *nšr* was used in Is. 11:1 and 42:6 (and its range of meanings) depends on access to Hebrew.
 - b. The main text linked with the *nšr* root is Is. 11:1: ‘There will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a sprout (*nēšer*) will blossom’. This is clearly a messianic text. If this were to be the text Matthew had in mind, it would take us back to the Davidic categories which were especially evident in 1:18–25 and 2:1–11
 - i. The most likely play on words in Matthew’s mind is in the similarity between the Hebrew word for “branch,” *nēšer*, and Nazareth. This view (Black, *Aramaic Approach*; Stendahl, *School*; Luz; Davies-Allison, but as a “secondary allusion”) traces Matthew’s “quotation” back to Isa 11:1: “There

shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse
and a branch



Exegetical Outline

Subject:

He comes, as did his people, out of Egypt to the promised land, through the trauma of the exile, to Galilee, breaking forth light to those sitting in darkness, as the prophet had foretold, to dwell in the unlikely town of Nazareth and so to be known as the Nazarene. Thus, according to Matthew, the plan of God unfolds. Nothing has happened by accident—all is in its proper place as it must be when the sovereign God brings salvation.

The situation, however, is similar to that recounted in 1:18–25. (1) Joseph learns a disquieting fact—in the one case that his wife is pregnant, in the other that Archelaus is king. (2) Divine revelation intervenes to make the rightful course of action under the difficult circumstances plain.

At the end of Mt 1–2 one is left with the impression that, at least concerning salvation-history, human choice matters little. Rather does all come down to the divine will. The events and movements of 1:2–2:23 are ‘determined’ by providence.

Body:

- V. Bethlehem of Judea Matthew v. 1;4-6
 - a. Travel
 - i. **2:5 To register with Mary.** It is uncertain why Mary went to Bethlehem. Was it to register along with Joseph? Usually women were not required to register, although in Syria women had to register for a poll tax. If Mary did not personally have to register, did she go to be with Joseph? Was it because of a conscious desire on her part to have her son born in David’s city and thus fulfill Mic 5:2? Was it to avoid scandal? Luke did not tell us the immediate reason for this, but ultimately he would say that it was due to God’s providence, for God’s Son had to be born in David’s city. As for Mary’s own thinking, we are not able to know her thoughts.¹
 - b. Bethlehem of Judea v.1-
 - i. Bethlehem is the place of David’s origin, so it would not be unnatural to imagine this ‘son of David’ as permanently domiciled there (cf. vv. 21–22). Bethlehem is only about five miles from Jerusalem. ‘Of Judea’ prepares for ‘in the land of Judah’ in v. 6, but without the archaizing that would have been involved in anticipating the language precisely.
 - ii. Despite Mic 5:2; Mt 2:5; and Jn 7:42, it is uncertain to what degree Jewish opinion looked to Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace.

¹ Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 106–107.

- iii. In Bethlehem' (cf. Lk 2:4, 15) is from stage II of the tradition, where Mic 5:2, although not explicitly cited, was presupposed. The close link between Bethlehem and Davidic sonship can be seen from Jn 7:42: 'Does not the Scripture say that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was
 - iv. *Bê(-)leḥem*, where David was brought up and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1–13; cf. 17:12, 15, 58; 20:6, 28), was a Judean village located about five or six miles south-southwest of Jerusalem. Its importance in the OT, where it is usually called 'the city of David', derives principally from its association with King David.
- c. Prophecy Fulfilled
- i. Chief Priest
 - 1. Chief priests' is used of the upper echelon of the priestly order: the chief priest (and his predecessors), the captain of the temple, those who headed the twenty-four courses into which the priesthood was divided for service in the temple, the priest who had charge of the treasury, and other high-ranking priests. The scribes were the antecedents of the later Jewish rabbis. They functioned both as scholars of the law and as teachers, and they also had a role in the administration of justice, which in Jerusalem included a part in the highest levels of the Jewish political power structure
 - 2. In Matthew, chief priests and scribes are only 'of the people' here, but chief priests and elders are 'of the people' in 26:47, and 'the elders of the people' is found on three occasions in the Jerusalem setting of the final part of the Gospel. Matthew stresses a leadership role in and responsibility for the people. While the role of the chief priests and scribes is quite neutral here, their inactivity in comparison to that of the Magi may imply criticism, and their later hostility to Jesus may be seen as that much more reprehensible in the light of the evident scriptural knowledge of this grouping and their participation in events which pointed to the significance of the birth of Jesus
 - ii. Written by Prophet
 - 1. Bethlehem, Land of Judah
 - a. The form of Matthew's citation of Mic 5:2 is distinctive, agreeing neither with the LXX nor with the MT Matthew's own work is to be seen in the shape of the quotation.
 - b. in Bethlehem of Judea," is the first indication of a place name in Matthew's narrative; its theological importance can be seen in the way it anticipates the quotation of Mic 5:1 in v 6 (cf. also vv 5, 8), despite the slight difference between τῆς 'λουδαίας and the γῆ 'Ιουδα of the quotation.

Bethlehem of Judea is located about five miles south of Jerusalem

- c. It emphasizes the connexion between Jesus and the patriarch Judah (cf. 1:2–3)—so important because the Davidic Messiah was expected to come from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5; cf. Gen 49:9–10)
- d. It had strong Davidic associations through David's ancestors (Judah) and his own anointing by Samuel; hence, it is elsewhere called "the city of David" (Luke 2:4, 11), a designation we might have expected Matthew to use here. But for Matthew the same theological purpose is accomplished through the designation "Judea."

2. Ruler- The language borrowed from 2 Sa. 5:2 for the final line expresses the conviction of 'all the tribes of Israel' that David is destined to be king, and leads to the anointing of David as king over Israel at Hebron. The David connection is thus underlined. The text is here applied typologically to the king of messianic expectation. The reference to 'shepherd my people Israel' can hardly avoid evoking the eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Magi should probably be understood as not distinguishing, in their use of 'king of the Jews', between king of the Judean kingdom and king over all Israel.

VI. Threat - Flee to Egypt v. 13-15

- a. Egypt - Almost as soon as he is born, the Son of man, who like Moses will grow up in Egypt, has no place to lay his head (cf. 8:20).
 - i. Egypt was the traditional refuge for Palestinian Jews seeking asylum. See, for example, 1 Kgs 11:40 (Jeroboam); 2 Kgs 25:26 and Jer 41:16–18
 - ii. The mother and the child are treated here as an inseparable unit (cf. vv. 11, 14, 19, 20). Egypt is the traditional place of refuge for those who must flee from Israel
- b. Joseph-
 - i. Got up Still Night - By night' reflects the nighttime occurrence of dreams, but also the immediacy of obedience in response to the urgency implied in the angelic directive. Night travel offers fewer witnesses.
- c. Remained until death of Herod
- d. Prophecy Fulfilled
 - i. Matthew was presumably the first to connect Hos 11:1 with the story of Jesus. He was in all likelihood led to it via Num 24:8, which reads, 'God led (ὠδήγησεν) him out of Egypt' (cf. 23:22). A messianic interpretation of this verse already lies to hand in the LXX, for the opening line of 24:7
 - ii. He was not naïvely oblivious of the switch in referents when he applied Hos 11:1 to Jesus, not to the people. We think this in part because, in the

second place, Christian tradition before Matthew had portrayed Jesus as repeating or recapitulating certain experiences of Israel

- iii. Hosea is, of course, alluding to the historical exodus and not making a prophecy about the future. How then can Matthew say that the quotation is “fulfilled” (πληρωθῆ)? What we have here is a matter of typological correspondence—that is, a substantial similarity is seen to exist between two moments of redemptive history, and therefore the two are regarded as interconnected, forming one larger continuity; the earlier is thus seen to foreshadow or anticipate the latter, which then becomes a kind of realization or fulfillment of the former.

VII. No Threat- Go to Israel v.19-21

- a. Herod is dead - Herod, whose long reign began in 37 B.C. died in 4 B.C. His death signaled the possibility of return, not only of the holy family (cf. v 15)
- b. Threat is gone - A strong echo of language links the words of the angel here and in v. 13. But now the directive is to ‘go to the land of Israel’, and the reason this time is the death of Herod, not the threat of his action. The tie between Jesus and Moses is further underlined here by the echo of the language of Ex. 4:19–20

VIII. Nazareth v. 22-23

- a. Archeleus Reigning-
 - i. Archeleus- After Herod’s death his territory was divided. Archelaus was made Tetrarch of Judea and was a true son of his father. Another son of Herod, Antipas, ruled in Galilee, and both John and Jesus were to have dealings with him at a later stage. But a move away from Bethlehem was prudent, and Antipas was a less threatened ruler. Galilee enters Matthew’s story as a less dangerous place to be than Judea; the larger shape of Matthew’s story will bear out this initial impression.
 - ii. Joseph’s fear of Archelaus appears to have been well grounded, as the son of Herod tended to follow the ways of his father. His subjects managed eventually to have him deposed by the Romans in A.D. 6.
 - iii. When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., his kingdom was divided among Philip, Antipas, and Archelaus, his three sons. Archelaus, who is mentioned nowhere else in the NT, gained charge of Judea proper, Samaria, and Idumea. He was reputed to be the worst of the three brothers. His short reign was marked by scandal, by brutality, by tyranny. Matters got so bad that complaints lodged against him in Rome by a deputation of Jews and Samaritans succeeded in having him deposed and sent into exile in Gaul in A.D. 6.
- b. He Was Afraid
- c. Warned by God
- d. Went to Region of Galilee
 - i. Nazareth- **2:23** Fifteen miles to the west of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth was a quite insignificant town in biblical times and is

never mentioned in the OT. Projections from archaeological evidence suggest a maximum population of no more than 500

- ii. κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ, “he dwelt in a city called Nazareth.” The “city” is unknown from the OT or any sources earlier than the NT documents. Popular opinion in the metropolis of Jerusalem concerning this northern town may well be summarized by the question put by Nathaniel in John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
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 - a. It is in Galilee that he inaugurates his ministry in fulfillment of Isa 9:1 (which Matthew then cites). Galilee’s large population of Gentiles symbolizes the universal significance Matthew sees in Jesus.
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- iii. Fulfill Prophecy
 1. He shall be call a Nazarene
 2. This seems too close to Matthew’s line to be coincidence. We should probably conclude that before us is an involved word play. ‘He will be called a Nazarene’ depends upon (a) the equation of ‘Nazarite’ and ‘holy’ one of God’; (b) the substitution of ‘Nazarite’ for ‘holy’ in Isa 4:3 and (c) the substitution of ‘Nazarene’ for ‘Nazarite’.
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 4. It is important to note that this conclusion suggests that the context addressed by Matthew was at least somewhat multilingual. An awareness that Ναζιρ(αῖος) could function as an equivalent to ἅγιος was possible to a Greek speaker on the basis of Greek OT variants, but an awareness that the root *nšr* was used in Is. 11:1 and 42:6 (and its range of meanings) depends on access to Hebrew. This does not at all imply that general readers knew Hebrew, but it does imply reader access to explanation from at least some in the community who might be in a position to illuminate the opacity by referring to the Hebrew Scriptures
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- a. The main text linked with the *nšr* root is Is. 11:1: 'There will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a sprout (*nēšer*) will blossom'. This is clearly a messianic text. If this were to be the text Matthew had in mind, it would take us back to the Davidic categories which were especially evident in 1:18–25 and 2:1–11
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Word Studies

Bethlehem-

Background

in the Synoptic Gospels. Each Gospel portrait adds a dimension to our understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus without which our overall picture would be incomplete.

The nature of the Gospels, however, presents obstacles to reconstructing the life of Jesus. As testimonies rather than biographies, the Gospels are less concerned about chronological and geographical details than a biographer would be. The location of some events are given in general terms, while the chronological linkage between events often can be vague or uncertain. In what follows, we will concentrate on key geographical settings in Jesus' ministry and leave aside the more complex discussion of chronology

Form/Structure/Setting

A. Chap. 2 is quite independent of chap. 1. To some extent, as Stendahl ("Quis") and others have noted, it serves to place the narrative in geographical context by calling attention to place names. We now reach the "whence?" (*unde*) in contrast with the "who?" (*quis*) of chap. 1. Perhaps even more important, however, is the stress on the *opposite reactions* to the Christ from his earliest days, as exhibited in the magi and Herod. The two stories are, of course, linked via the announcement of the magi (v 2) and their subsequent meeting with Herod (v 7). Chap. 2 is therefore a unity consisting of a story of acceptance and rejection. It is linked to chap. 1 only by the references to the birth: γεννηθέντος (v 1); τεχθείς (v 2); γεννᾶται (v 4). A gap of some thirty years exists between the end of chap. 2 and the beginning of chap. 3. It would thus be possible to skip from chap. 1 to chap. 3 without any loss of continuity. Nevertheless, as Schlatter points out, chap. 1 may raise in the reader's mind how this announcement of a new king is taken by the existing king.

B. Some have seen chap. 2 as structured around the four (or five, so Hengel and Merkel) OT quotations, which are in turn related to the four place names:

Matthew 2

OT Citation

Place Name

vv 1–6	v 6 (Mic 5:1–3)	Bethlehem
vv 7–12	v 11 (Ps 72:10–11; Isa 60:6)	
vv 13–15	v 15 (Hos 11:1)	Egypt
vv 16–18	v 18 (Jer 31:15)	Rama
vv 19–23	v 23 (Isa 11:1?)	Nazareth

N.B. The OT citation comes at the end of every pericope except in the first instance, where it occurs in the middle (v 6).

Four OT citations, each involving a different place name, are certainly an interesting feature of chap. 2. Nevertheless, the quotations give the impression of being added to an already formulated story line rather than giving rise to it. Moreover, granted the obvious importance of Bethlehem and Nazareth and the symbolic significance of Egypt (see below), Rama has no importance as a place name *per se* (although one might mention the exilic association of this passage from Jeremiah). Chap. 2 naturally divides into two parts: (1) the worship of the magi (vv 1–12) and (2) the wrath of Herod (vv 13–23).

Within vv 1–12 Lohmeyer finds six components arranged in a parallelism, i.e.; vv 1–2 match vv 9–10 (the leading of the star); vv 3–6 match v 11 (place of birth); and vv 7–8 match v 12 (command and failure to return). This analysis seems unconvincing because of the weakness of some of the suggested correspondences, and a simpler outline such as the following may be suggested: (1) the arrival and message of the magi (vv 1–2); (2) the troubled reaction of Herod (vv 3–8); and (3) the completion of the journey of the magi in the worship of the child (vv 9–12).

The OT citation in v 6, although of central importance, does not have much impact on the actual wording of the surrounding narrative, perhaps because in the narrative the quotation comes from the lips of the high priests and scribes. For this reason, it is not prefaced by an introductory formula stressing fulfillment—which is Matthew’s usual practice elsewhere in the Gospel and especially in the opening two chapters. The most interesting structural feature in this pericope is found in vv 11–12, where Matthew concisely presents the climax of the story through three aorist verbs (προσεκύνησαν, “they worshiped”; προσήνεγκαν, “they offered” [gifts]; ἀνεχώρησαν, “they departed”), each with an accompanying adverbial participle (πεσόντες, “having fallen to the ground”; ἀνοίξαντες, “having opened” [their treasure chests]; χρηματισθέντες, “having been warned”). Thus with a concise forcefulness, the evangelist recounts the fulfillment of the mission of the magi.

C. Although it need not be denied that a historical tradition underlies the passage, the genre of this pericope continues in the vein of haggadah wherein the historical narrative finds its primary purpose in the conveying of theological truth. The way in which the story is told is calculated to bring the reader to further theological comprehension of the significance of Jesus as well as to anticipate a number of themes or motifs that are to recur repeatedly in the Gospel

before the story is over. For the midrashic aspects, see *Form/Structure/Setting* §C on the second half of chap. 2.

D. In spite of the widespread hesitancy concerning the historicity of this pericope (e.g. Brown, *Birth*; Hill; Luz), there is no insuperable reason why we must deny that the tradition used by Matthew is historical at its core (see E. M. Yamauchi, “Episode”). We do not know the source of Matthew’s narrative; Luke apparently did not know the story or else he deliberately ignored it (cf. Luke 2:39).

There are some possible contacts with similar OT stories (e.g. the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon), especially involving Balaak and Balaam (Num 22–24). Balaak is the wicked king of Moab who wants to destroy Moses (for a comparison of the contents of Matt 2 with the story of Moses, see the next pericope); Balaam is a gentile wizard from the east, called a μάγος by Philo (*Vit. Mos.* 1.50), who surprisingly ended up saying good things about Israel rather than cursing her, thus frustrating the king’s evil intentions. Balaam furthermore refers in one of his oracles to the rising of a star (ἄστρον; cf. Matthew’s ἀστήρ) out of Jacob (Num 24:17; cf. Gen 49:10), which is to rule over many nations and possess a kingdom that will increase (Num 24:7). The elements in common with our pericope are striking: the wicked, threatened king; the strange non-Israelite “medium” who yet recognizes God’s presence in Israel; and the talk of a coming king together with the star symbolism. Yet, since Matthew makes no deliberate attempt to draw wording from the episode in Numbers, nor does he cite or allude to the OT passages, it may be that the similarities are coincidental. We cannot know with certainty that Matthew had the Balaak/Balaam material in his mind when he wrote this narrative. Brown (*Birth*) speculates that the source used by Matthew here is separate from the basic source (depending on Joseph in Egypt and Moses) used elsewhere in the first two chapters because of the lack of any reference to Joseph or to dreams. The two pre-Matthean stories came to be associated by the view that scribes who advised Pharaoh were magi (so Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.16). This, however, is to say much more than we can know.

E. Hellenistic parallels to various aspects of our pericope exist. It was commonly held that the birth (and death) of great men was heralded by the appearance of a star or a similar heavenly phenomenon. (See Rosenberg. Recorded examples are Alexander the Great, Mithridates, and Alexander Severus. For rabbinic examples referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Moses, see Str-²B 1:77–78.) Virgil relates how Aeneas was guided by a star to the place where Rome was to be founded (*Aeneid* 2.694). The giving of homage to a king by those from a distant country is, of course, a common motif in the ancient world. A striking parallel to our story is the coming of Tiridates, the king of Armenia, with representatives of other eastern kingdoms (described as magi by Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.1.16–17; cf. Dio Cassius 63.1–7; Suetonius, *Nero* 13) to pay homage (προσκυβεῖν, as in our passage) to Nero in A.D. 66, and their return by another route. Parallels such as these show that Matthew’s narrative was not as alien to his age as it is to ours. We may allow for some indirect influence of these parallels upon Matthew’s formulation of his narrative without concluding that it therefore contains nothing historical.

²Str-B H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck’sche, 1926–28)

Parallels in *Prot. Jas*³. 21.1–4 and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 77.4–78.2, are dependent on Matthew (so too Ign. *Eph*⁴. 19:1–3).

F. The Lukan counterpart to Matthew's narrative about the magi appears to be the story of the shepherds (Luke 2:8–20). The few superficial similarities can be explained by the similar circumstances. Otherwise, the passages and the respective underlying tradition are completely independent (contrary to Gundry's [*Matthew*] argument that Matthew's narrative is a transmutation of the Lukan tradition).⁵

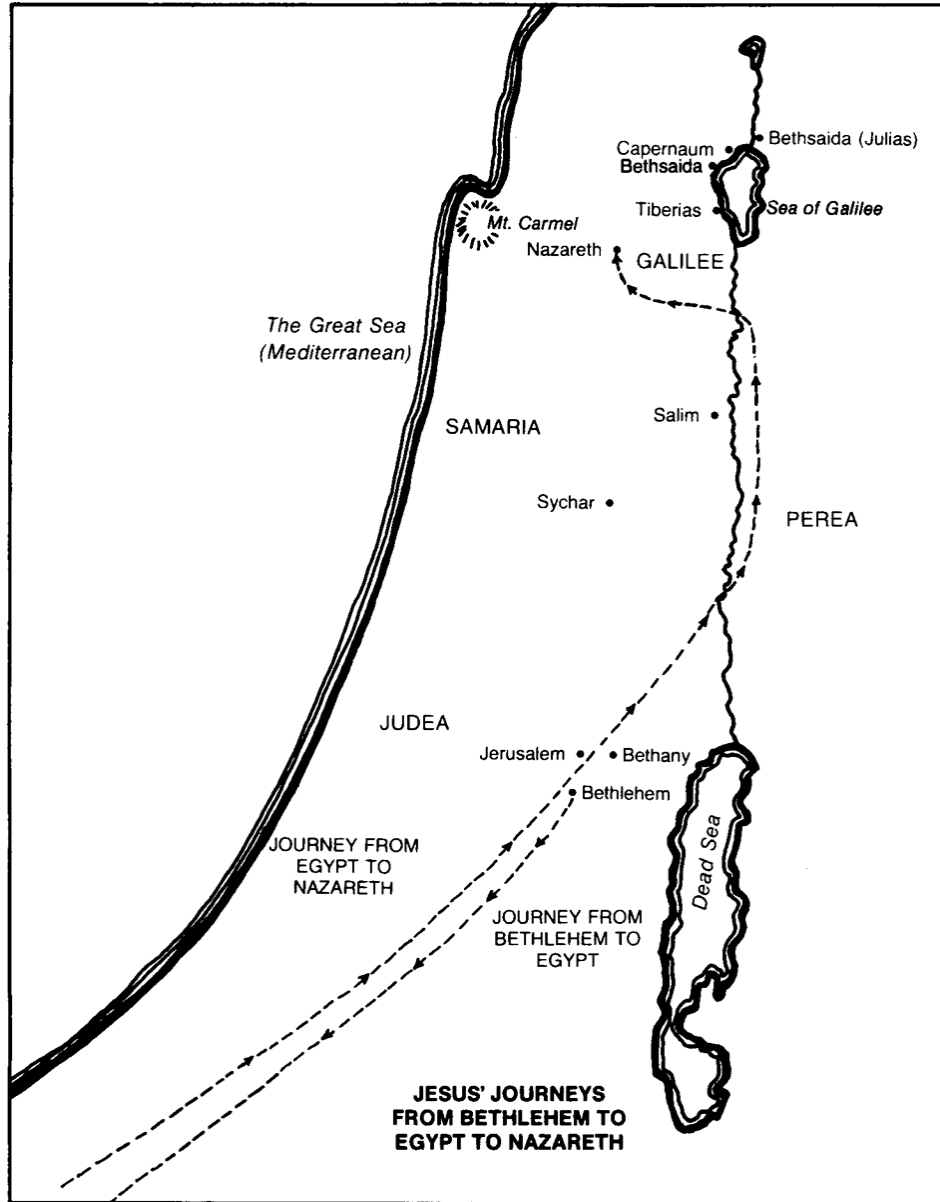
Background

3. HIS INFANCY (CHAP. 2)

³*Prot. Jas. Protevangelium of James*

⁴*Eph.* Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians

⁵ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 23–26.



a. *In Bethlehem (2:1–12)*

2:1–2. Though not all scholars agree on the timing of the arrival of the **Magi from the East**, they apparently came some time **after** the birth of **Jesus**. Jesus and Mary and Joseph, though still in Bethlehem, were now in a house (v. 11), and Jesus was called a Child (*paidion*, vv. 9, 11) rather than a newborn Infant (*brephos*, Luke 2:12).

The exact identity of the Magi is impossible to determine, though several ideas have been suggested. They have been given traditional names and identified as representatives of the three groups of peoples that descended from Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. More likely they were Gentiles of high position from a country, perhaps Parthia, northeast of Babylon, who were given a special revelation by God of the birth of the **King of the Jews**. This special revelation may simply have been in the sky, as might be indicated by their title "Magi"

(specialists in astronomy) and by the fact they referred to a **star** which they **saw**. Or this revelation could have come through some contact with Jewish scholars who had migrated to the East with copies of Old Testament manuscripts. Many feel the Magi's comments reflected a knowledge of Balaam's prophecy concerning the "star" that would "come out of Jacob" (Num. 24:17). Whatever the source, they came to Jerusalem **to worship** the newborn King of the Jews. (According to tradition three Magi traveled to Bethlehem. But the Bible does not say how many there were.)

2:3–8. It is no surprise that **King Herod ... was disturbed** when the Magi came to **Jerusalem** looking for the One who had been "born King" (v. 2). Herod was not the rightful king from the line of David. In fact he was not even a descendant of Jacob, but was descended from Esau and thus was an Edomite. (He reigned over Palestine from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. See the chart on the Herods at Luke 1:5.) This fact caused most of the Jews to hate him and never truly to accept him as king, even though he did much for the country. If someone had been rightfully born king, then Herod's job was in jeopardy. He therefore **called** the Jewish scholars **together** and inquired **where the Christ was to be born** (Matt. 2:4). Interestingly Herod connected the One "born king of the Jews" (v. 2) with "the Christ," the Messiah. Obviously Israel had a messianic hope and believed that the Messiah would be born.

The answer to Herod's question was simple, because Micah **the prophet** had given the precise location centuries before: the Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem** (Micah 5:2). This answer from **the people's chief priests and teachers of the Law** (scribes, κ⁶v) was apparently carried back to **the Magi** by **Herod** himself. Then Herod asked them when they had first seen their **star** (Matt. 2:7). This became critical later in the account (v. 16); it showed that Herod was already contemplating a plan to get rid of this young King. He also instructed the Magi to return and tell him the location of this King so that he might come **and worship Him**. That was not, however, what he had in mind.

2:9–12. The journey of the Magi from Jerusalem wrought a further miracle. **The star they had seen in the East** now reappeared and led them to a specific **house** in Bethlehem where they found **the Child** Jesus. Bethlehem is about five miles south of Jerusalem. "Stars" (i.e., planets) naturally travel from east to west across the heavens, not from north to south. Could it be that "the star" which the Magi saw and which led them to a specific house was the Shekinah glory of God? That same glory had led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years as a pillar of fire and cloud. Perhaps this was what they saw in the East, and for want of a better term they called it a "star." All other efforts to explain this star are inadequate (such as a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars; a supernova; a comet; etc.).

Nevertheless they were led to the Child and going in, they **worshiped Him**. Their worship was heightened by the giving of **gifts ... gold ... incense and ... myrrh**. These were gifts worthy of a king and this act by Gentile leaders pictures the wealth of the nations which will someday be completely given to the Messiah (Isa. 60:5, 11; 61:6; 66:20; Zeph. 3:10; Hag. 2:7–8)

Some believe the gifts had further significance by reflecting on the character of this Child's life. Gold might represent His deity or purity, incense the fragrance of His life, and myrrh His

sacrifice and death (myrrh was used for embalming). These gifts were obviously the means by which Joseph took his family to Egypt and sustained them there until Herod died. The wise men were **warned** by God **not to** return and report **to Herod**, so **they returned to their homes by another route**.

b. In Egypt (2:13–18)

2:13–15. After the visit of the Magi, **Joseph** was warned by **an angel of the Lord** to take Mary and Jesus and flee **to Egypt**. This warning was given **in a dream** (the second of Joseph's four dreams: 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22). The reason was **Herod** would be searching **for the Child to kill Him**. Under cover of darkness, Joseph obeyed, and his family **left** Bethlehem (see map) and journeyed into **Egypt**. Why Egypt? The Messiah was sent to and returned from Egypt so that the prophet's words, **Out of Egypt I called My Son**, might be **fulfilled**. This is a reference to Hosea 11:1, which does not seem to be a prophecy in the sense of a prediction. Hosea was writing of God's calling Israel out of Egypt into the Exodus. Matthew, however, gave new understanding to these words. Matthew viewed this experience as Messiah being identified with the nation. There were similarities between the nation and the Son. Israel was God's chosen "son" by adoption (Ex. 4:22), and Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son. In both cases the descent into Egypt was to escape danger, and the return was important to the nation's providential history. While Hosea's statement was a historical reference to Israel's deliverance, Matthew related it more fully to the call of the Son, the Messiah, from Egypt. In that sense, as Matthew "heightened" Hosea's words to a more significant event—the Messiah's return from Egypt—they were "fulfilled."

2:16–18. As soon as **Herod** learned that **the Magi** had not complied with his orders to give him the exact location of the newborn King, he put into action a plan **to kill all the male children in Bethlehem**. The age of **two ... and under** was selected in compliance **with the time ... the Magi** saw "the star" in the East. Perhaps this time reference also indicated that when the Magi visited Jesus, He was under two years of age.

This slaughter of the male children is mentioned only here in the biblical record. Even the Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37=100) did not mention this dastardly deed of putting to death innocent babies and young children. But it is not surprising that he and other secular historians overlooked the death of a few Hebrew children in an insignificant village, for Herod's infamous crimes were many. He put to death several of his own children and some of his wives whom he thought were plotting against him. Emperor Augustus reportedly said it was better to be Herod's sow than his son, for his sow had a better chance of surviving in a Jewish community. In the Greek language, as in English, there is only one letter difference between the words "sow" (*huos*) and "son" (*huios*).

This event too was said to be the fulfillment of a prophecy by **Jeremiah**. This statement (Jer. 31:15) referred initially to the **weeping** of the nation as a result of the death of **children** at the time of the Babylonian Captivity (586 B.C.). But the parallel to the situation at this time was obvious, for again children were being slaughtered at the hands of non-Jews. Also, Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem and **Rachel** was considered by many to be the mother of the nation. That is why she was seen weeping over these children's deaths.

c. *In Nazareth (2:19–23)*

2:19–23. **After Herod died ... Joseph** was again instructed by **an angel of the Lord**. This was the third of four times an angel appeared to him **in a dream** (cf. 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22). He was made aware of Herod's death and told to return **to the land** (v. 20). Joseph obediently followed the Lord's instruction and was planning to return **to the land of Israel**, perhaps to Bethlehem. However, a son of Herod, **Archelaus, was** ruling over the territories of **Judea**, Samaria, and Idumea. Archelaus, noted for tyranny, murder, and instability, was probably insane as a result of close family intermarriages. (He ruled from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6. See the chart on the Herods at Luke 1:5). God's warning to Joseph (again **in a dream**, Matt. 2:22; cf. 1:20; 2:13, 19) was not to return to Bethlehem, but instead to move back to the northern **district of Galilee** to the **town of Nazareth**. The ruler of this region was Antipas, another son of Herod (cf. 14:1; Luke 23:7–12), but he was a capable ruler.

The fact that the family moved to Nazareth was once again said to be in fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 2:23). However, the words **He will be called a Nazarene**, were not directly spoken by any Old Testament prophet, though several prophecies come close to this expression. Isaiah said the Messiah would be "from [Jesse's] roots" like "a Branch" (Isa. 11:1). "Branch" is the Hebrew word *nešer*, which has consonants like those in the word "Nazarene" and which carry the idea of having an insignificant beginning.

Since Matthew used the plural **prophets**, perhaps his idea was not based on a specific prophecy but on the idea that appeared in a number of prophecies concerning Messiah's despised character. Nazareth was the town which housed the Roman garrison for the northern regions of Galilee. Therefore most Jews would not have any associations with that city. In fact those who lived in Nazareth were thought of as compromisers who consorted with the enemy, the Romans. Therefore to call one "a Nazarene" was to use a term of contempt. So because Joseph and his family settled in Nazareth, the Messiah was later despised and considered contemptible in the eyes of many in Israel. This was Nathanael's reaction when he heard Jesus was from Nazareth (John 1:46): "Can anything good come from there?" This concept fit several Old Testament prophecies that speak of the lowly character of the Messiah (e.g., Isa. 42:1–4). Also the term "Nazarene" would have reminded Jewish readers of the similar-sounding word "Nazirite" (Num. 6:1–21). Jesus was more devoted to God than the Nazirites.⁷

Commentary Studies

I. 2:1;4-6

⁷ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "[Matthew](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 20–23.

In the larger shape of Matthew's narrative it is a little surprising to have the location and timing of Jesus' birth introduced for the first time here⁹⁸⁴ and not at the point where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus first enter the narrative, but the reference to Bethlehem and Herod, together with the mention of the birth of Jesus, achieves an introduction which identifies all the main reference points for the story to come in Mt. 2:1b–12. (The reader is thus prepared for an active role for Herod in what is to come, and knows at once that the chief priests and scribes speak truth when, in v. 5, they point to Bethlehem.) Matthew offers no comment on how it is that the birth happened to take place in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is the place of David's origin,⁹⁹⁵ so it would not be unnatural to imagine this 'son of David' as permanently domiciled there (cf. vv. 21–22). Bethlehem is only about five miles from Jerusalem. 'Of Judea' prepares for 'in the land of Judah' in v. 6, but without the archaizing that would have been involved in anticipating the language precisely.⁹¹⁰⁶

The Herod here is Herod the Great, who ruled as king from 37 to 4 B.C. He was a figure of heroic proportions, whose rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple represented a major feat of ancient architecture, but whose rule was tyrannical, ruthless, and cruel.⁹¹¹⁷

If Jesus was born while Herod still ruled, if Jesus' ministry began when he was 'about thirty' (Lk. 3:23), if Jesus' ministry emerged out of that of John, and if John's ministry began in A.D. 28–29 (Lk. 3:1), then Jesus must have been born quite late in Herod's reign. 5/4 B.C. is the most favoured suggestion, but see the comments at v. 2 for astronomical reasons for favouring 7/6 B.C.¹²

2:4 'Chief priests' is used of the upper echelon of the priestly order: the chief priest (and his predecessors), the captain of the temple, those who headed the twenty-four courses into which the priesthood was divided for service in the temple, the priest who had charge of the treasury, and other high-ranking priests. The scribes were the antecedents of the later Jewish rabbis. They functioned both as scholars of the law and as teachers, and they also had a role in the administration of justice, which in Jerusalem included a part in the highest levels of the Jewish political power structure.¹²¹³⁰

⁸⁹⁴ The need for this introduction impressed itself on Matthew as he formed Mt. 2:1–12 out of the originally independent Magi and Herod narratives (see Nolland, 'Sources').

⁹⁹⁵ 1 Sa. 16; 17:12, 58; 20:6.

¹⁰⁹⁶ The immediate point of borrowing for the whole phrase 'in Bethlehem of Judea' is from the answer of the chief priests and scribes to Herod in Mt. 2:5.

¹¹⁹⁷ Recently on Herod see N. Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse* (JSPSup 30; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); D. J. Bryan, 'The Herodians: A Case of Disputed Identity: A Review Article of Nikos Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty*', *TynB* 53 (2002), 223–38.

¹² John Nolland, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 107–108.

¹³¹²⁰ The word 'scribe' was capable of a great variety of senses sharing in common only the capacity to write, but Matthew is interested only in such scribes as fulfilled significant leadership roles related to their knowledge of the Law. The role of the Law in both religious life

In Matthew, chief priests and scribes are only ‘of the people’ here, but chief priests and elders are ‘of the people’ in 26:47, and ‘the elders of the people’ is found on three occasions in the Jerusalem setting of the final part of the Gospel.¹²¹⁴¹ Matthew stresses a leadership role in and responsibility for the people. While the role of the chief priests and scribes is quite neutral here, their inactivity in comparison to that of the Magi may imply criticism, and their later hostility to Jesus may be seen as that much more reprehensible in the light of the evident scriptural knowledge of this grouping and their participation in events which pointed to the significance of the birth of Jesus.¹²¹⁵²

Matthew pairs chief priests and scribes on three occasions;¹²¹⁶³ they form a trio with elders on two further occasions.¹²¹⁷⁴ Matthew also pairs chief priests and elders,¹²¹⁸⁵ chief priests and Pharisees,¹²¹⁹⁶ scribes and elders (perhaps),¹²²⁰⁷ scribes and Pharisees,¹²²¹⁸ and Pharisees and Sadducees.¹²²²⁹ The five terms involved identify the categories of Jewish leadership to which Matthew draws attention.¹³²³⁰ Outside these groupings he refers a significant number of times to Pharisees and to scribes separately, but Sadducees appear in only one incident,¹³²⁴¹ and elders¹³²⁵² and chief priests not at all. (The singular of the term translated chief priests is used of the high priest, who plays a significant role in the Passion Narrative.)

There is for the most part a reasonable logic to Matthew’s groupings: chief priests and elders come to the fore together in the Passion Narrative (the pairing is not found earlier) as key players in the political power structure in Jerusalem (and are occasionally joined by the scribes in this role); chief priests and scribes are linked only in Jerusalem (once as jointly the repositories of holy lore, once as objecting to the children’s adulation of Jesus *in the temple*,

and the wider life of the Jewish society meant that a knowledge of the Law was indispensable to a range of societal roles.

¹⁴¹²¹ Mt. 21:23; 26:3; 27:1.

¹⁵¹²² Since the events of Jesus’ ministry come a generation later, the comment is made of the grouping rather than with respect to individuals.

¹⁶¹²³ Mt. 2:4; 20:18; 21:15.

¹⁷¹²⁴ Mt. 16:21; 27:41; cf. 26:57.

¹⁸¹²⁵ Mt. 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1, 3, 12, 20; 28:11–12.

¹⁹¹²⁶ Mt. 21:45; 27:62.

²⁰¹²⁷ Mt. 26:57 (but the presence of the chief-priestly group might be assumed on the basis of the location in the house of the high priest).

²¹¹²⁸ Mt. 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 14 (variant), 15.

²²¹²⁹ Mt. 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12.

²³¹³⁰ Matthew also mentions priests (8:4; 12:4, 5—these have a subordinate and minor role), the prophets of the past (as those whose words from God are found in Scripture and are coming to fulfilment in the present; and as persecuted in their own time), John, Jesus, and some Christian figures as prophets in the present (10:41; 11:9; 13:57; 14:5; 16:14; 21:11, 26, 46), and prophets and wise men (23:34—in a trio with scribes as rejected envoys from God). Herodians might be included for completeness (22:16).

²⁴¹³¹ Mt. 2:22, 23.

²⁵¹³² In ‘tradition of the elders’ (Mt. 15:2) ‘elders’ is being used with a different sense (see there).

and once in a role indistinguishable from that of the chief priests and elders); the Pharisees and scribes come together in contexts concerned with issues of teaching and living; Pharisees and Sadducees are linked as perpetrators of evil and proponents of insidiously false views; and the chief priests and the Pharisees join together in recognising that Jesus was speaking against them and in calling for a guard over the tomb of Jesus.

Herod takes the Magi's language 'the king of the Jews' as having to do with Jewish messianic hopes and consults the chief priests and scribes in connection with their professional role as custodians of sacred lore. The Magi had asked, 'Where?'; Herod asks the same question.

2:5 The similarity of the use of Mi. 5:1 here to Matthew's formula quotations (see at 1:22—a fulfilment formula as such could not be put on the lips of the chief priests and scribes in this setting) raises the question of whether the present citation is a pre-Matthean feature of the account. Certainly the response 'in Bethlehem of Judea' must be an original feature. This might already involve implicit reference to Mi. 5:1, but it could also have a wider and less specific basis in typological reading of the story of King David,¹³²⁶³ perhaps in relation to the expectation that 'a shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse' (Is. 11:1; cf. v. 10).

2:6 The citation here is not at all close to the LX²⁷X, with only 'you, Bethlehem', 'are', (second) 'Judah', 'out of you will come',¹³²⁸⁴ and 'Israel' strictly in common. It is not much closer to the M²⁹T, but 'least' (following a minor conjectural emendation in word division), 'rulers' (with a conjectural pointing emendation), and 'ruler' (where the M³⁰T matches the participial form in Matthew)¹³³¹⁵ can be added to the agreements by working from a Hebrew base. From either the LX³²X or the M³³T 'shepherd' is available from the context in v. 4, but the clause in which it occurs owes its presence here to a merging into Mi. 5:1 of a clause from 2 Sa. 5:2 (or 1

²⁶¹³³ Bethlehem was where David was brought up and anointed king of Israel (1 Sa. 16:1–13; cf. 17:12, 15, 58; 20:6, 28—Davies and Allison mistakenly claim that "city of David" refers to Bethlehem in the OT [*Matthew*, 1:226]; it refers rather to Jerusalem). Apart from Micah 5:2 (where the reference to the messiah becomes explicit in the targum), there is only limited and late attestation for a Jewish belief in a Bethlehem origin for the messiah (see *y. Ber.* 2.4.5a; *La. Rab.* on 1:16). Mt. 2:5 and Jn. 7:42 both treat the birth of the messiah in Bethlehem as a Jewish and not a distinctly Christian tradition.

²⁷LXX Septuagint

²⁸¹³⁴ But B* C read 'out of whom' (MT has 'out of you').

²⁹MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

³⁰MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

³¹¹³⁵ A further influence on the word choice here could be from the use of this term in the LXX clause in 2 Sa. 5:2 following that which is inserted into the Matthean quotation (see below), but this remains uncertain because there is no clear indication of reference to the LXX.

³²LXX Septuagint

³³MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

Ch. 11:2): ‘will shepherd my people Israel’ (the second person singular form in Samuel becomes third person in Matthew’s use of it).¹³³⁴⁶

Matthew has replaced ‘Ephratha’ with γῆ Ἰούδα. He may well have thought of ‘Ephratha’ as unhelpful to his readers as a way of specifying the location of Bethlehem. The link with Judah is available from the following line, to be used as a substitute. γῆ Ἰούδα may have the sense ‘[in the] land of Judah’ and be a gloss in LX³⁵X style,¹³³⁶⁷ but two things suggest the need to look for an alternative explanation: this LX³⁷X idiom usually has a definite article with γῆ; and γῆ is found here in Matthew in the nominative where the genitive would be expected. It may therefore be better to treat γῆ Ἰούδα as in apposition with ‘Bethlehem’ and take the sense as ‘district of Judah’. Matthew’s interest in Judah is as the tribe from which the royal line came (cf. at 1:2).

‘Not at all’ in line 2 and ‘for’ in line 3 function together. Mi. 5:1 (M³⁸T and LX³⁹X) contrast the paltry stature of Bethlehem with the dignity that accrues to it in virtue of being the place of origin of the liberating king. In Matthew this has become a denial of what would *appear* to be the paltry stature of Bethlehem in virtue of being the place of origin of the liberating king. The result is much the same. ‘Rulers’¹³⁴⁰⁸ in line 2 and ‘one who rules’ in line 3 are cognate terms in Greek, so the rendering of the Hebrew in the latter may have influenced the rendering of a rather more ambiguous Hebrew word in the former. Bethlehem is, of course, not a ruler, so a considerable looseness of expression needs to be allowed for (‘... least among [those from whom issue] the rulers of Judah’).

The language borrowed from 2 Sa. 5:2 for the final line expresses the conviction of ‘all the tribes of Israel’ that David is destined to be king, and leads to the anointing of David as king over Israel at Hebron. The David connection is thus underlined. The text is here applied typologically to the king of messianic expectation. The reference to ‘shepherd my people Israel’ can hardly avoid evoking the eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹³⁴¹⁹ The Magi should probably be understood as not distinguishing, in their use of ‘king of the Jews’, between king of the Judean kingdom and king over all Israel.

How this traditional restoration hope functions in relation to the larger shape of Matthean expectation is not fully clear. It does, however, seem unlikely that Matthew would have made the investment that he evidently has in tracing the contours of traditional Jewish hopes, as they

³⁴¹³⁶ ‘From me’, which is found in both the LXX and the MT (‘go forth from me’) may have dropped out in anticipation of the use of ‘me’ in the insertion from 2 Sa. 5:2. The loss of ‘of Israel’ (‘ruler of Israel’) is likely to be similarly motivated.

³⁵LXX Septuagint

³⁶¹³⁷ Cf. Ru. 1:7; 2 Ch. 17:6; 35:19a; Ne. 5:14; Am. 7:12; (Is. 26:1); etc.

³⁷LXX Septuagint

³⁸MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

³⁹LXX Septuagint

⁴⁰¹³⁸ ἡγεμόσιν is regularly translated ‘princes’ or ‘governors’, but the former suggests members of the royal family in a manner not implied here, and the latter tends to make a reader think of a governing function analogous to that of the governor of a Roman province.

⁴¹¹³⁹ See Ez. 34:4–16; 37; Ho. 2; Mi. 5:1–9; 2 Esdr. 13:34–50; 2 Bar 77–86; Ps. Sol. 17; *m. Sanh.* 10:3; cf. Mt. 19:28.

emerge out of that salvation history which he outlines up to the present, if he expected nothing to come of the restoration of the twelve tribes.

Though he fails to share the information with his readers, Matthew's confidence in the appropriateness of his citation is likely to have been strengthened by other features of the context of Mi. 5:1. In particular 'whose origin is from of old, from ancient days' in v. 2 fits well the sense of programmed divine destiny which permeates the genealogy, and 'until the time when one who is about to give birth bears a child' in v. 3 gives the same prominence to the birth of the child of destiny as Matthew has already in 1:18–25 and is continuing to provide in 2:1–12. The universally-to-be-recognised significance of the messiah, which Matthew is marking with his Magi account, is well paralleled in 'he will be great to the ends of the earth' in Mi. 5:4.⁴²

1 The use of the genitive absolute τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος, "after Jesus had been born," enables the name of Jesus to occur first (as it also did at the beginning of 1:18). γεννηθέντος links with chap. 1, especially the ἐγέννησεν of 1:16. The aorist participle indicates that the birth had already occurred when the magi arrived in Jerusalem.

ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας, "in Bethlehem of Judea," is the first indication of a place name in Matthew's narrative; its theological importance can be seen in the way it anticipates the quotation of Mic 5:1 in v 6 (cf. also vv 5, 8), despite the slight difference between τῆς Ἰουδαίας and the γῆ Ἰούδα of the quotation. Bethlehem of Judea is located about five miles south of Jerusalem and is to be distinguished from Bethlehem of Zebulun, far to the north (Josh 19:15). It had strong Davidic associations through David's ancestors (Judah) and his own anointing by Samuel; hence, it is elsewhere called "the city of David" (Luke 2:4, 11), a designation we might have expected Matthew to use here. But for Matthew the same theological purpose is accomplished through the designation "Judea." In addition to the geographical location, the evangelist provides a general date with the words ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως, "in the days of Herod the king" (Luke is more precise in dating; see Luke 2:1). Herod the Great is in view here, and since his death occurred in 4 B.C. the birth of Jesus must be placed earlier. (The discrepancy with the numbering of years by the designation A.D. results from an error of the sixth-century scholar Dionysius Exiguus, who was responsible for the calculations that moved

⁴² John Nolland, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 112–115.

the Western world away from dating according to the year after the foundation of Rome.) The specification “king,” here and in v 3, stands in deliberately marked contrast to the magi’s reference to the “king of the Jews” (v 2) whom they seek.

ἰδοῦ, “look,” is a favorite device of emphasis in Matthew, especially in chaps. 1 and 2. “Magi” (μάγοι) has four general meanings according to G. Delling (*TDN*⁴³T 4:356–58): (1) members of a Persian priestly class; (2) possessors of supernatural knowledge and power; (3) magician; and (4) deceiver or seducer. In the NT the word refers to possessors of secret wisdom, and in our passage it probably connotes astrologers, that is, men who gained special insight into world affairs from their observation of the planets and stars (hence, the common translation “wise men”). Some (e.g. W. K. L. Clarke, *Divine Humanity* [London: SPC⁴⁴K 1936]; Mann) have seen a veiled polemic against occultism and magic in the magi’s worship of the newborn king (cf. Ign⁴⁵. *Eph*⁴⁶. 19). This is at best an undertone of the passage, since Matthew gives no hint that this was in his mind. What *is* in Matthew’s mind is that Gentiles, those considered alien to God’s purposes, exhibit an openness to God’s purposes (even through the instrumentality of their own craft) and an eager receptivity toward the newborn king. This is obviously a sign of what Matthew will repeatedly call attention to in his narrative (e.g. 8:11; 21:43). The argument of some (e.g. Mann) that the magi were Jews rather than Gentiles is not convincing. The whole tenor of the passage, and not simply the designation “magi,” suggests non-Israelites. Matthew would have to indicate that they were Jews for his readers to draw this conclusion. Their knowledge about the messianic king, however, was certainly gained from prior Jewish contact. Only later Christian tradition designates the magi as kings (cf. Isa 60:3), three in number (corresponding to the three gifts), and assigns them names (see Metzger) and personal characteristics.

ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν, “from the east,” is perhaps deliberately vague because of the prototypical character of the magi. If we presume a historical kernel to the narrative, four areas may be mentioned as possibilities: (1) Parthia; (2) Babylon; (3) Arabia (for a detailed survey, see Brown, *Birth*, 168–70, who, however, regards the magi and the east as idealizations); and (4) Egypt. Since the magi in Matthew’s narrative have some knowledge of Jewish messianic expectation, they must have had some contact with Jewish thinking. While this could have occurred in Persia or Arabia, Babylon had a settled Jewish community and seems the most likely candidate (cf. Dan 2:48; 5:11).

The magi, apparently unfamiliar with the Micah passage cited by the high priests and scribes, make the natural assumption that the new king was to be born in the capital city. Hence they go εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, “to Jerusalem.” They do not go to Herod but are only summoned to him (v 7) after he has heard of their purpose (v 3). The fact that they come to Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem suggests that we misunderstand the reference to the star if we take it to mean

⁴³*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

⁴⁴SPCK Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge

⁴⁵Ign. Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians

⁴⁶*Eph.* Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians

that they were actually led by and “followed” the star in the most literal sense (cf. *Comment on v 9*).⁴⁷

4 It is unlikely that the neutral word for “gathering,” συναγαγών, connotes in any sense the synagogue, as some have argued. To capitalize in this way on the identical root is to over-interpret. Nor is this gathering sinister, except in the case of Herod himself. The plural ἀρχιερεῖς, “chief priests,” is common and explainable: it includes living past high priests and members of the family of the ruling high priest as well as leading priests in charge of the large corps of priests employed in the temple cult and related activities. The γραμματεῖς, “scribes,” are the learned scholars of Scripture. τοῦ λαοῦ, “of the people,” which modifies both nouns, refers to the Jewish nation over which Herod ruled. These experts are precisely the people one would expect Herod to consult. They would certainly have composed an important part of the Sanhedrin, but a meeting of that body itself is not meant (cf. the lack of reference to the elders). The imperfect tense of ἐπυνθάνετο, lit⁴⁸. “were asking,” is regularly used for this verb. See BD⁴⁹F §328. ὁ χριστός, “the Messiah,” is the correct interpretation of the king sought by the magi (v 2) as being the eschatological king of the Jews.

5 The answer of the experts, ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας, “in Bethlehem of Judea,” agrees with the fact recorded in v 1. The difference between τῆς Ἰουδαίας, “Judea” (the common expression), and γῆ Ἰούδα, “land of Judah” (the quotation), is not significant. Since the formula introducing the quotation is not the same as those employed by the evangelist elsewhere (see *Introduction*), it and the quotation that follows are probably meant by Matthew to be understood as a part of the answer given by the experts. But the use of the quotation is also obviously consonant with Matthew’s purpose (as is his own apparent alteration of the text-form). The report that some of the crowd in John 7:41–42 know that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem should be no surprise. The knowledge is not limited to the experts, yet Herod understandably wishes to have the most authoritative answer possible (and perhaps also to get their reaction to the entire affair). The fact, however, that Jesus’ hometown was Nazareth rather than Bethlehem constituted a problem, as can be seen from the Johannine passage. This problem was certainly still raised by Jews in Matthew’s day and probably accounts for Matthew’s emphasis on Bethlehem in chap. 2 and the inclusion of the explanation of how Jesus came to dwell in Nazareth. But this does not mean that the early Christians found it necessary to invent a tradition about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem (cf. Luke 2:4, 15).

6 The form of Matthew’s citation of Mic 5:2 is distinctive, agreeing neither with the LX⁵⁰X nor with the M⁵¹T Matthew’s own work is to be seen in the shape of the quotation. Most of the differences are minor. Thus, Matthew omits the reference to Ephrathah and substitutes γῆ

⁴⁷ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 26–27.

⁴⁸lit. literally

⁴⁹BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

⁵⁰LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵¹MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

Ἰούδα. The reason for this difficult reading, which stands in apposition to Βηθλέεμ, is unclear. It is possibly a theological alteration to remind the reader of Jesus' descent from Judah (with the messianic implication) as in 1:1, 2. On the other hand, it may simply have been caused by the use of Ἰούδα at the end of line 2 in the citation. In any event, in this instance Matthew has not let the reading of the citation affect the surrounding references to "Bethlehem of Judea." A second minor difference is in Matthew's use of ἡγεμόσιν, "princes," and ἡγούμενος, "a ruler," in lines 2 and 3, where the LX⁵²X has χιλιάσιν, "thousands," and ἄρχοντα, "ruler," respectively. Behind χιλιάσιν is the Hebrew עָלָם, 'lḥ, which with different vowels can alternatively be rendered ἡγεμῶν (as LX⁵³X does in other places); obviously Matthew prefers the notion of "ruler." ἡγούμενος may then be explained as a synonym for ἄρχοντα, chosen to agree with the ἡγεμόσιν of the previous line.

The most significant change by far is Matthew's reversal of the statement of both LX⁵⁴X and M⁵⁵T that Bethlehem is small among the thousands of Judah. Given Matthew's sense of the fulfillment that has occurred in Bethlehem, the initial statement of the prophet must now paradoxically be reversed: hence, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη, "by no means the least." But the change may involve more than simply a liberty on the evangelist's part. If in the M⁵⁶T the initial ל were read as the negative particle (אֵל, lō') i.e. with the slight change of לִיּוֹתֵל, *lihyôt*, to לִיּוֹתֵל, *lō' hēyôt*, a reading is produced that coincides with Matthew's Greek rendering of the passage. This reading, given its appropriateness in a reference to the birth of the coming ruler, could possibly already have been circulating in Matthew's time. (See Allen, Lohmeyer-Schmauch, Klostermann.)

The last line of the quotation is similar to Mic 5:3 (LX⁵⁷X), "and he will shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord," but probably is dependent upon 2 Sam 5:2 (cf. 1 Chr 11:2), where the Lord says to David that he "will shepherd my people Israel" (Matthew's wording is in verbatim agreement with the LX⁵⁸X of the latter). It was rabbinic practice to combine quotations referring to the same thing, particularly when linked by a key word or common concept, in the present instance "ruling" and "shepherding." The messianic king, the Son of David, would shepherd his people. The special appropriateness of a Davidic context for Matthew is obvious. In Luke's narrative, the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is more explicit (Luke 1:32–33, using the language of 2 Sam 7:12–16).

The application of the quotation, unlike the formula quotations of the first two chapters, is straightforward, involving no dimension of *sensus plenior* or deeper fulfillment. Its meaning is obvious: the Messiah (the verse was understood as messianic by the Jews) is to be born in Bethlehem, the very place where Jesus' birth had already occurred. The Messiah is to "shepherd

⁵²LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵³LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵⁴LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵⁵MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

⁵⁶MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

⁵⁷LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

⁵⁸LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

my people Israel,” which recalls the statement in 1:21 that “he will save his people.” The people of the Lord are thus the people of the Messiah.⁵⁹

‘In Bethlehem’ (cf. Lk 2:4, 15) is from stage II of the tradition, where Mic 5:2, although not explicitly cited, was presupposed. The close link between Bethlehem and Davidic sonship can be seen from Jn 7:42: ‘Does not the Scripture say that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?’

Bê(-)leḥem, where David was brought up and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1–13; cf. 17:12, 15, 58; 20:6, 28), was a Judean village located about five or six miles (Josephus, *Ant.* 7:312, incorrectly has 20 stades = 2½ miles) south-southwest of Jerusalem. Its importance in the OT, where it is usually called ‘the city of David’, derives principally from its association with King David. It is also where the story of Ruth (cf. Mt 1:5) is set. The town appears only rarely in later Jewish literature (e.g. Demetrius in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9:21; Asc. Isa⁶⁰. 2:7, 8, 12; 3:1)—perhaps in response to Christian claims for it (cf. Origen, *C. Cels.* 1:51). Despite Mic 5:2; Mt 2:5; and Jn 7:42, it is uncertain to what degree Jewish opinion looked to Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace. The targum on Mic. 5:2 mentions the Messiah (cf. Tg Ps.-J. on Gen 35:21), but rabbinic sources generally supply only scanty and late evidence (*y*⁶¹. *Ber.* 2:4:5a; *Lam. Rab.* on 1:16), and the Psalms of Solomon fail to mention the city of David. All this, along with Jn 7:27 (‘when the Messiah appears, no one will know where he comes from’), makes possible the supposition of C. H. Dodd: ‘so far from the Nativity stories in Matthew and Luke having been composed for apologetic purposes, in order to meet a generally held belief that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem, it was the fact that Jesus was actually born there that revived in Christian circles interest in a prophecy which played little part in contemporary Jewish thought’.⁶²⁴ On the other hand, only the infancy materials in the First and Third Gospels put Jesus’ parents in Bethlehem, and they do not agree on the details. In Luke, Joseph and Mary are visiting the city when Jesus is born. In Matthew they are living there. The rest of the NT may

⁵⁹ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 28–30.

⁶⁰Asc. Isa. Ascension of Isaiah

⁶¹*y. Jerusalem Talmud.*

⁶²⁴ *Interpretation*, p. 91. Cf. M. Wilcox, ‘Jesus in the Light of His Environment’, *ANRW* II:25:1 (1982), pp. 142–3.

presuppose Nazareth as Jesus' place of birth (Mk 6:1, 4; Jn 1:46; 7:41, 52). Further, had Jesus in fact been born in Bethlehem, would not the NT have perhaps got more service out of the prophecy in Micah? Finally, Jewish tradition makes Bethlehem the birth home of the messianic child, Menahem b. Hezekiah (y⁶³. *Ber.* 2:4:5a). This, as has been suggested, might reflect an old report concerning the rebel leader Menaḥem (Josephus, *Bell.* 2:433–48), a report against the facts, an attempt by someone to validate Menaḥem's messianic credentials.⁶⁴⁵ In any case, one must reckon seriously with the possibility that the placement of Jesus' birth in the city of David owes more to apologetics than history.⁶⁵⁶

The purpose of the qualification, 'of Judea' (cf. 2:5), could be to make it quite clear that Bethlehem in the south is meant, not the Bethlehem in Zebulun seven miles north-west of Nazareth (cf. Josh 19:15). But Matthew elsewhere adds the superfluous 'of Galilee' to 'Nazareth' (21:11—there was no other Nazareth), and in Jn 7:42 Bethlehem needs no qualification (cf. Lk 2:4). Perhaps, then, 'of Judea' stresses that the birth of 'the king of the Jews' (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) took place in a city of Judea (τῆς Ἰουδαίας), the land of the tribe of Judah (Ἰούδα; cf. 1:2–3). Or maybe it helps determine the outline of the Messiah's movements: from Judea (2:1) to Egypt (2:14) to Israel (2:21) to Galilee (2:22). (For Chrysostom,⁶⁶ *Hom. on Mt*⁶⁷. 6:5, Gen 49:10 is being recalled.)⁶⁸⁷

The article before 'Judea' is a remnant from the original adjectival use of the word (cf. Mk 1:5; Jn 3:22; BD⁶⁹F§ 261.4).

ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως. Compare Lk 1:5, and contrast 1:6, where David is king. Herod reigned from 37–4 B.C. ἐν (ταῖς) ἡμέραις + proper name in the genitive is a biblicalism, frequent in the LX⁷⁰X. In the NT it is found in Mt 2:1; Lk 1:5; 4:25; 17:26, 28; and 1 Pet 3:20 (cf. Rev 2:13).

⁶³y. *Jerusalem Talmud.*

⁶⁴⁵ So e.g. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p. 277.

⁶⁵⁶ Further discussion (with bibliography) in Brown, *Messiah*, pp. 513–16.

⁶⁶Chrysostom, **John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (trans. of *Commentarius in sanctum Matthaeum Evangelistam*, in PG 57 and 58), in NPNF 10.

⁶⁷*Hom. on Mt.* **John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (trans. of *Commentarius in sanctum Matthaeum Evangelistam*, in PG 57 and 58), in NPNF 10.

⁶⁸⁷ As a rule the OT has 'Bethlehem of Judah', *bêt(-)lehem yějûdâ* or Βηθλέεμ (δῆμου (τῆς)) Ἰούδα (Judg 17:7, 8; 19:1, 2, 18; Ruth 1:1, 2; 1 Sam 17:12; cf. Asc. Isa. 2:7). This makes one wonder why Matthew (or his source) chose 'of Judea'. No persuasive explanation seems forthcoming. Sometimes the OT has (τῆς) Ἰούδα for 'of *yěhûdâ*' (as in the aforementioned texts), sometimes τῆς Ἰουδαίας (e.g. 1 Sam 17:1; 27:6, 10; Isa 1:1). Matthew, who, unlike Luke, consistently takes 'Judea' in the narrow sense to refer to the southern division of Palestine, has Ἰουδαία eight times (Mk: 4; Lk: 10). Ἰούδας (= the tribe) occurs only in the quotation in 2:6 (*bis.*)

⁶⁹BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

⁷⁰LXX Septuagint

Herod the Great, about whom we learn the most from Josephus, *Ant.* 14–18, probably died shortly before the Passover in 4 B.C.⁷¹⁸ So, according to Matthew (cf. 2:15, 19–20), Jesus must have been born shortly before this, probably between 7 and 4 B.C. Matthew’s concern, however, is not with chronology. Herod matters for two reasons. First, in his attempt to slaughter the Messiah he is like the Pharaoh of Jewish tradition, who sought to kill the first redeemer, Moses. Secondly, Herod, although he could boast no royal genealogy, was a king, and our evangelist is interested in contrasting his rule and kingdom with the rule and kingdom of Jesus the Davidic Messiah.

ἰδοὺ μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν. ‘Behold’ is redactional (see on 1:20) and arouses attention: the magi are extraordinary visitors. **μάγος**⁷²⁹ (Mt: 4, Mk: 0, Lk: 0; elsewhere in the NT only Acts 13:6, 8; cf. the rabbinic *māgōš*) designated originally a member of a priestly caste of the Medes and Persians (Zoroastrians) who specialized in interpreting dreams (Herodotus 1:120, 128, etc.; Strabo 15:3:15; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 4:5:2; Dio Chrysostom 49:7).¹⁷³⁰ Later the word came to be used of those who possessed superior knowledge and ability, including astrologers, oriental sages, and soothsayers in general (Aristotle, frag. 27; Josephus, *Ant.* 10:195, 216); it also became a label for all ‘sorcerers’ and ‘magicians’ (Dan 2:2, 10 LX⁷⁴X; T. Reub⁷⁵. 4:9; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3:93) and, finally, for ‘quacks’, ‘deceivers’, and ‘seducers’ (Sophocles, *OT* 387; Plato, *Rep.* 572e; cf. γόης).

Matthew does not identify his magi. ‘From the east’ could call to mind (1) Arabia (so Justin, Tertullian, Epiphanius, the Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus; Arabia is ‘east’ in the biblical tradition: Gen 10:30; Judg 6:3; Job 1:3; Isa 11:14; Ezek 25:4, 10; Demetrius, in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9:29:3; and in Isa 60:6 gold and frankincense are associated with Midian, Sheba, and Ephah; cf. 1 Clem⁷⁶. 25:1–2); (2) Babylon (so Celsus, Jerome, Augustine; Daniel links Chaldeans and magi in 2:2, 10; the ‘land of the east’ is Babylon in As. Mos⁷⁷. 3:13); or (3) Persia (so Clement of

⁷¹⁸ See Schürer I, p. 326, n. 165, and the literature cited there, to which add: J. Van Bruggen, ‘The Year of the Death of Herod the Great’, in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, NovTSup 48, ed. T. Baarda et al., Leiden, 1978, pp. 1–15; O. Edwards, ‘Herodian Chronology’, *PEQ* 114 (1982), pp. 29–42; and P. M. Bernegger, ‘Affirmation of Herod’s Death in 4 B.C.’, *JTS* 34 (1983), pp. 526–31.

⁷²⁹ Lit.: E. J. Bickerman, ‘Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis and the Magi’, *Athenaeum* 56 (1978), pp. 239–61; E. Beneveniste, *Les mages dans l’Ancien Iran*, Paris, 1938; J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, 2 vols., Paris, 1938; M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, London, 1979 (index, s.v., ‘magus’, ‘priests’); G. Dellings, *TWNT* 4, pp. 360–3; G. Messina, *Der Ursprung der Magier und die Zarathuštische Religion*, Rome, 1930; J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, London, 1913, esp. pp. 182–253; A. D. Nock, ‘Paul and the Magus’, in *Beginnings* 5, pp. 164–88; also in Nock’s *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols., ed. Z. Stewart, Oxford, 1972, 1, pp. 308–30; idem, ‘Greeks and Magi’, in *Essays* 1, pp. 516–26; M. Smith, *Magician*, pp. 71–4.

⁷³⁰ Paul, pp. 104–12, 116–25, identifies Matthew’s magi with followers of Zarathustra. This permits one to find in the text a demonstration of the superiority of Christianity over Zoroastrianism.

⁷⁴LXX Septuagint

⁷⁵T. Reub. Testament of Reuben

⁷⁶1 Clem. 1 Clement

⁷⁷As. Mos. Assumption of Moses

Alexandria, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, early iconographic tradition).¹⁷⁸¹ A choice among these three alternatives is impossible, although if 2:11 does allude to Isa 60:6, one would be inclined to opt for Arabia, for that OT text speaks of Midian and Sheba (cf. also Ps 72:10).

Most modern commentators see the undescribed¹⁷⁹² and mysterious magi as representatives of the best wisdom of the Gentile world, its spiritual elite: and while the Jewish leaders reject their Messiah, the Gentiles from outside the Land of Israel are anxious to greet him (cf. Augustine in P⁸⁰L 38, col. 1035). Because, however, μάγος carries an unfavourable sense elsewhere in the NT (Acts 13:6, 8; cf. Did⁸¹. 2:2 and Acts 8:9, 11), and because the magi appear as sinister figures in early Christian sources (e.g. Ignatius,⁸² *Ep⁸³h* 19:3),¹⁸⁴³ and because the parallels with the traditions about Moses seem to put the magi on a par with the wise men and sorcerers and charmers of Pharaoh, Matthew could be carrying on a polemic against astrology or at least telling his readers that at the advent of the Messiah the power of the magi (astrologers) was broken.¹⁸⁵⁴ This interpretation, which was maintained by Justin, Tertullian, and Origen, fails for four reasons. To begin with, the magi, unlike the Egyptian sorcerers, do not contend with Jesus. They simply give him gifts and offer worship—and indeed rejoice greatly so to do (2:10). Beyond this, the magi do not co-operate with Herod. They are in fact shown to be of upright character when they are the recipients of a divine warning and respond in obedience (2:12). Thirdly, we might expect, if the proposed interpretation were true, to find in the text ‘magi from Egypt’—this being required to drive home the parallelism between Matthew’s magi

⁷⁸¹¹ Full discussion in Brown, *Messiah*, pp. 168–70. If the wise men be thought of as coming from Babylon or Persia, they might represent the overlords of the exile who now prostrate themselves before a Jewish king. But if the magi be supposed to hail from Arabia, perhaps one should recall the strange story in *y. Ber.* 2:4:5a, in which an Arab is the first to know of the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem. Incidentally, Matthew and his source may not have shared the same thought concerning the magi’s home.

⁷⁹¹² Contrast Gos. Naz frag. 28 (in Hennecke 1, p. 151), in which the magi’s dress is described in great detail, and their complexion said to be dark.

⁸⁰PL Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols., Paris, 1844–64.

⁸¹Did. Didache

⁸²Ignatius, Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*

⁸³*Eph* Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*

⁸⁴¹³ But the Fathers were interested in opposing astrology—it is telling that the star is dropped in Justin, *Dial.* 78—while the reception of the primitive ‘science’ in certain quarters of Judaism warns us that Matthew need not have shared the concern of later ecclesiastical writers; see Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* 1, pp. 236–9, and J. H. Charlesworth, ‘Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Palestinian Synagogues’, *HTR* 70 (1977), pp. 183–200. Note *b. Šabb.* 156a: according to Ḥanina b. Ḥama, ‘the stars make one wise, the stars make one rich, and there are stars for Israel’. If the Treatise of Shem goes back to ancient times (a disputed issue), it would be an important witness to the impact of astrology on certain Jewish circles; see Charlesworth 1, pp. 473–86. According to Chrysostom, *Hom. on Mt.* 6:4, some Christians inferred from Mt 2 that astrology could be trusted.

⁸⁵¹⁴ So Clark (v); Davies (v); Mann (v).

and the magicians who withstood Moses. Lastly, although the sorcerers of Pharaoh became astrologers or magi in some of the later legends about Moses (see p. 195, n. 2⁸⁶), our work in Excursus I has shown that the story of the magi was initially separate from the story of Herod's persecution of the infants. And in the latter, the rôle of the Egyptian wise men was occupied not by astrologers but by 'the chief priests and scribes'

4. Mt 2:1–12 offers a transmutation of a traditional motif—the superiority of the Jewish hero to foreign wise men. One thinks of Joseph's ability to interpret Pharaoh's dream when the Egyptian magicians and wise men could not (Gen 41), of the duels between Moses and Aaron and the sorcerers and wise men of Pharaoh (Exod 7–10), and of Daniel's success in revealing and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream while the king's own enchanters are reduced to silence (Dan 2). The First Gospel too has a story in which foreigners must acknowledge the superiority of their Jewish counterparts. The magi do not know what is known by the chief priests and scribes, namely, where the Messiah should be born. They thus must seek enlightenment from the Jews. Beyond this, however, the traditional theme is turned on its head. For although the Jews excel in knowledge, they do not put their knowledge to its proper end; it is instead Gentiles who honour Jesus.

καὶ συναγαγὼν πάντας τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς τοῦ λαοῦ. In Josephus, *Ant.* 2.205, 234, Pharaoh is informed of the coming deliverer by 'sacred scribes' (ἱερογραμματεῖς). Oddly enough, and in contrast with Matthew, Eusebius (*H.E.* 1:8) tells us that Herod learned where Jesus should be born from the magi. The verb συναγω (Mt: 24; Mk: 5; Lk: 6) is a Matthean favourite. Here it foreshadows 26:57: 'the scribes and the elders had gathered'.

'Chief priests' (ἀρχιερεῖς: Mt: 25; Mk: 22; Lk: 15) refers not to the present and past high priests alone but to an established college.³⁸⁷⁸ It included the current high priest and his predecessors, the captain of the temple, the heads of the weekly courses, the directors of the daily courses, the temple overseers, and the temple treasurers. Matthew's association of this group with Herod may have been encouraged by his knowledge that the king personally selected several high priests (Josephus, *Ant.* 15:22–41, 319–22). Because the 'chief priests' are found to the synoptic tradition above all in the passion narratives, their presence at the beginning of our gospel foreshadows their rôle at the end. 'The chief priests and scribes' (cf. 16:21 (with elders); 20:18; 21:15; 27:41 (with elders)) designates the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Whether we are to think of a meeting of the Sanhedrin is unclear. It would in any

⁸⁶22 Cf. Schweizer, *Matthew*, pp. 36–7, and F. Zinniker, *Probleme der sogenannten Kindheitsgeschichte bei Matthäus*, Freiburg, 1972, p. 167. This explains the internal tensions noted on p. 191. In *b. Sanh.* 101a and *Exod. Rab.* on 1:22, Pharaoh is informed of the birth of Moses by astrologers. The presence of astrologers in some of the infancy legends about Moses could have encouraged the introduction of the magi into stage II. Cf. Brown, *Messiah*, p. 117, n. 46.

⁸⁷³⁸ Lit.: Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, pp. 160–81; Schürer; 2, pp. 275–91; G. Schrenk, *TWNT* 3, pp. 265–84.

event be historically incredible. Herod opened his reign by massacring its members (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:175; cf. *b*⁸⁸. *B. Bat.* 3b).

The ‘scribes’ (=sōpēřim), later known as the ‘sages’ (hăkāmîm), were the ‘teachers of the law’ (Lk 5:17; Acts 5:34; cf. Ezra 7:6, 11; Neh 8:1), the ‘lawyers’ who interpreted the legal principles of the Torah, taught the people, and administered justice—functions which at one time in Israel’s history belonged to the priests.³⁸⁹⁹ They were Judaism’s spiritual and intellectual leaders (cf. Eccles 38–9; Josephus, *Ant.* 20:264), its most prominent citizens (cf. Mt 23:6–7; Mk 12:38–9; Lk 20:46). They lived chiefly in Judea, close to the capital (cf. Mt 15:1; Mk 3:22); but there must also have been scribes in Galilee, even before A.D. 70 (cf. Mk 3:22; 7:1; *m*⁹⁰. *Šabb.* 16:7; 22:3; *b*⁹¹. *Šabb.* 146a). It is usual to identify the scribes as a professional class, not a party: thus some of the Pharisees were scribes, not all scribes Pharisees (cf. Mk 2:16; Acts 23:9). Nonetheless a case can be made for identifying the scribes and Pharisees in the first century.⁴⁹²⁰

Matthew never criticizes the scribal office as such (cf. 13:51–2; 23:34), only scribal hypocrisy and misplaced priorities (cf. Humme⁹³l, pp. 17–18). In fact, our author has eliminated some of Mark’s disparaging references to scribes by substituting ‘Pharisees’ and ‘elders’ (as in 9:11; 26:47; 27:1; cf. Bonnar⁹⁴d, p. 227). Perhaps he himself had been a Jewish scribe at one time. However that may be, after accepting Jesus as the Messiah, he almost certainly joined a group of Christian scribes, a ‘school’.⁴⁹⁵¹

On λαός see on 1:21. Jesus should ‘save his people from their sins’ and govern his people Israel (2:6). The people, however, led astray by their leaders, have not, at least as a body, recognized their saviour and king. Hence there is a contradiction between the divine intention and the human response. For this reason Matthew contains grim elements of tragedy. His people’s rejection of the Messiah so troubles the author that the Christian joy so prominent throughout the NT—especially in Luke—Acts (e.g. Lk 1:44; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; 10:17; etc.)—makes itself felt only very rarely (2:10; 13:20, 44; 28:8), and the threat of judgement comes to the fore.

⁸⁸*b. Babylonian Talmud*

⁸⁹³⁹ Lit.: Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, pp. 233–45; Schürer 2, pp. 322–36; Westerholm, pp. 26–39; J. Neusner, ‘The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism’, *ANRW* II.19–2 (1979), pp. 37–41; *CHJ* 3, forthcoming.

⁹⁰*m. Mishnah*

⁹¹*b. Babylonian Talmud*

⁹²⁴⁰ E. Rivkin, ‘Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, Hypocrites: A Study in Synonymity’, *HUCA* 49 (1978), pp. 135–42; idem, ‘Scribes and Lawyers in Judaism’, *CHJ* 3, forthcoming.

⁹³Hummel R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium*, 2nd ed., Munich, 1966.

⁹⁴Bonnard **P. Bonnard, *L’Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, 2nd ed., Neuchâtel, 1970.

⁹⁵⁴¹ Cf. Stendahl, *School*, passim; Bornkamm, in *TIM*, p. 50, n. 5; Hummel, p. 159; Fenton, p. 230; Zumstein, pp. 156–63. On the Christian scribes of Matthew’s community see Suggs, pp. 120–7; E. Schweizer, ‘Matthew’s Community’, in Stanton, *Matthew*, pp. 133–5; van Tilborg, pp. 128–41; Luz 1, pp. 60–1.

ἐπυνθάνετο παρ' αὐτῶν ποῦ ὁ χριστὸς γεννᾶται. Compare 2 Chr 32:31 LX⁹⁶X. The issue of geography is once again emphasized. ΠΥΝΘΑΝΟΜΑΙ (always for *dāraš* in the LX⁹⁷X) appears only here in Matthew (Mk: 0; Lk: 2). The redactor prefers αἰτέω (fourteen times) and ἔπερωτάω (eight times). On the imperfect with verbs of asking see BD⁹⁸F § 328. παρὰ with the genitive occurs only five or six times in Matthew, three times in Mt 2 (4, 7, 16). It is from Mk 12:11 in Mt 21:42, from Matthew's special source in 18:19, and 20:20 is textually doubtful. For its elimination from sentences taken over from Mark see 16:1 = Mk 8:11 and 21:34 = Mk 12:2. The presence of a source behind 2:4 is indicated.

'Christ' (see on 1:1) = 'the king of the Jews' (2:2). Compare the interchange in the passion narrative (26:63, 68; 27:11, 17, 22, 29, 37) and the intimate link between χριστός and kingship in the LX⁹⁹X (1 Βας 2:10; 2 Βας 22:51; Ps 2:2; 17:51) and the Apocalypse (11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6).

5. Compare Jn 7:42; Prot. Jas.¹⁰⁰ 21:2; Justin, *Dial.* 78; 1 *Apol.* 34. Whether 2:5–6 constitutes a formula quotation has been debated. On the one side, the verb, πληρόω, is absent;⁴¹⁰¹² on the other, how could one expect it, since the quotation is on the lips of Jewish authorities? Whatever the outcome of the issue, it does not affect interpretation of the text.

οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ. There is no spokesman for the scribes; they speak instead as an impersonal unit.

ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας. See on 2:1. According to Jerome,¹⁰² *Comm. on Mt*¹⁰³. on 2:5, Bethlehem 'of Judea' is 'an error on the part of the copyist. We believe that, as we read in the Hebrew, "Judah" and not "Judea" was originally written by the evangelist'. This is probably an incorrect reference to the OT text, not a reference to a Hebrew gospel.⁴¹⁰⁴³

οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται. This expression is appropriate coming from scribes. Compare *kikēn kātûb* (cf. 1QS 5:15; CD 11:18; 2Q25 1:3; L. Proph. Mal¹⁰⁵. 2; 1 Cor 15:45).

διὰ τοῦ προφήτου.⁴¹⁰⁶⁴ See on 1:22. The singular is used even though the citation is a conflation of sentences from two different books, Micah and 2 Samuel. Perhaps owing to the conviction that 'a single teaching cannot be deduced from different scriptural verses' (*b*¹⁰⁷. *Sanh.*

⁹⁶LXX Septuagint

⁹⁷LXX Septuagint

⁹⁸BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

⁹⁹LXX Septuagint

¹⁰⁰Prot. Jas. Protevangelium of James

¹⁰¹⁴² This is not because the fulfilment is yet to be ('who will shepherd my people Israel'); for in 1:22 and 21:4 the evangelist employs fulfilment formulas before the events signified have come to pass.

¹⁰²Jerome, Jerome (Hieronymus), *Commentariorum in Matthaeum libri IV*, in vol. 7 of D. Vallarsi, *Opera omnia*, Verona, 1769, pp. 1–244 (also in PL 26).

¹⁰³*Comm. on Mt.* Jerome (Hieronymus), *Commentariorum in Matthaeum libri IV*, in vol. 7 of D. Vallarsi, *Opera omnia*, Verona, 1769, pp. 1–244 (also in PL 26).

¹⁰⁴⁴³ p. Vielhauer, 'The Gospel of the Nazaraeans', in Hennecke 1, pp. 140–1.

¹⁰⁵L. Proph. Mal. Life of the Prophet Malachi

¹⁰⁶⁴⁴ 'Micah' is named in a few Syriac and Coptic mss., 'Isaiah' in it^a.

¹⁰⁷*b. Babylonian Talmud*

34a), composite or merged quotations are few and far between in rabbinic sources.⁴¹⁰⁸⁵ In the NT they are common (cf. Mt 21:5; 27:9–10; Mk 1:2–3; Rom 11:8–10; 1 Cor 15:54–5). It is difficult to say whether the early church’s freedom to mix quotations was encouraged by a similar tendency on the part of Jesus (cf. Mk 10:6–8; 11:17; 14:62; Lk 10:27).⁴¹⁰⁹⁶

6. The quotation follows neither the LX¹¹⁰X nor the M¹¹¹T of Mic 5:2.⁴¹¹²⁷ The differences are in fact sufficient to tempt one to speak of an ‘interpretation’ instead of a ‘quotation’ of Scripture. The text has been freely altered by Matthew in order to make it best serve his ends. (Against 2:5–6 being derived from a Christian testimony book, the translation vocabulary seems characteristically Matthean; see below.) For messianic interpretations of Mic 5:2 see the targum on Micah and Tg. Ps.-J. on Gen 35:21.

καὶ σὺ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα. The unexpected γῆ Ἰούδα (one expects the genitive, γῆς) replaces ‘Ephrathah’ (M¹¹³T) or ‘house of Ephrathah’ (LX¹¹⁴X). ‘Ephrathah’ (cf. Gen 35:19; 48:7) would likely have meant little to Matthew’s audience. ‘Judah’, by way of contrast, is full of meaning. It emphasizes the connexion between Jesus and the patriarch Judah (cf. 1:2–3)—so important because the Davidic Messiah was expected to come from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5; cf. Gen 49:9–10 LX¹¹⁵X; the targums on Gen 49:9–10; T. Jud. 21:2; 24:5; Heb 7:14; *b*¹¹⁶. *Sanh.* 98b). ‘Land of Judah’ anticipates the ‘Judah’ from Mic 5:2 which is quoted in the next line (cf. also 1 Sam 17:12). The repeated appearance of γῆ (Mt: 43; Mk: 19; Lk: 25) in Mt 2 (2, 6, 20, 21, always for Palestine) makes one aware of the chapter’s geographical orientation.

οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα.⁴¹¹⁷⁸ *šā ’îr lihyōt bē’ alpê yēhûdâ* appears in the M¹¹⁸T. The LX¹¹⁹X has: ὀλιγοστός εἶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰούδα. οὐδαμῶς (a NT *hapax legomenon*; in the LX¹²⁰X only in 2, 3, 4 Maccabees) has no basis in either OT text. The OT in fact remarks upon Bethlehem’s insignificance. Matthew’s denial can only mean that because the Messiah has come into the world at Bethlehem, he has brought the city greatness. ἐλάχιστος (Mt: 5; Mk: 0; Lk: 4) is an independent translation of the Hebrew *šā ’îr* (‘little’, ‘insignificant’). Compare 5:19; 25:40, and 45, where other things qualified by ‘the least’ become important. As

¹⁰⁸⁴⁵ The *hāraz* method is different: the different biblical texts are separated at least by conjunctions; see E. E. Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, Edinburgh, 1957, pp. 49–51.

¹⁰⁹⁴⁶ On the phenomenon of composite quotations, esp. as it relates to the hypothesis of early Christian testimony collections, see further Fitzmyer, *Background*, pp. 60–89.

¹¹⁰LXX Septuagint

¹¹¹MT Massoretic Text

¹¹²⁴⁷ Stendahl, *School*, pp. 99–101; Lindars, *Apologetic*, pp. 192–4; Gundry, *OT*, pp. 91–3; Rothfuchs, pp. 60–1; Soares Prabhu, pp. 261–7.

¹¹³MT Massoretic Text

¹¹⁴LXX Septuagint

¹¹⁵LXX Septuagint

¹¹⁶*b. Babylonian Talmud*

¹¹⁷⁴⁸ D it Tert Cyp have μη = *non* for ουδαμως.

¹¹⁸MT Massoretic Text

¹¹⁹LXX Septuagint

¹²⁰LXX Septuagint

for ἡγεμῶν (Mt: 10; Mk: 1; Lk: 2), the M¹²¹T has *ʿalpê* ('thousands', 'clans'; cf. the LX¹²²X, χιλιάσιμ); but the Hebrew consonants could be pointed to give *ʿallûpê* = 'princes'. This explains Matthew's reading. He is working with the Hebrew.

ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος. *mimmēkā lî yēšē' lihyôt mōšēl bēyisrā' ēl* appears in the M¹²³T. The LX¹²⁴X reads: ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ. 'For' is a logical addition given the previous changes: the 'not at all least' requires clarification. The rational Matthew is explaining. The participial form of ἡγέομαι is the equivalent of the M¹²⁵T's *mōšēl* = 'ruler' and the LX¹²⁶X's ἄρχοντα = 'leader'; it is chosen because of its resemblance to ἡγεμῶν (cf. also perhaps Ps 68:27). Jesus, not those Herod has gathered, should lead Israel.

ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ. This reproduces 2 Sam 5:2 = 1 Chr 11:2, save 'who will govern' replaces 'you will govern'; otherwise there is agreement with both the LX¹²⁷X and M¹²⁸T: 'you shall shepherd my people Israel'. Matthew's interest in Davidic Christology is here emphasized, for 2 Sam 5:2 and its parallel are addressed in the OT to David (cf. Ps 78:70–1). In addition, Moses was remembered as a shepherd (Isa 63:11; LA¹²⁹B 19:3, 9; *Mek.* on Exod 14:31; *Exod. Rab.* on 2:2), so the quotation nicely fits Matthew's Moses-Messiah typology.

The switch from Micah to Samuel was probably motivated by a desire to underline Jesus' status as the 'Son of David' (so Soares Prabhu¹³⁰, p. 266); and it permits the re-use of a key word already introduced, λαός (1:20; 2:4; cf. Rothfuch¹³¹s, p. 61).

To a first-century Jew, reference to a ruler come forth to 'shepherd my people Israel' would have conjured up the eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Ezek 34:4–16; Mic 5:1–9; Ps. Sol. 17; 4 Ezra 13:34–50; 2 Bar¹³². 77–86; *m*¹³³. *Sanh.* 10:3), an expectation apparently shared by Matthew (19:28). Israel's blindness would then be only for a season (see on 23:37–9). The alternative is to suppose that for Matthew the church of both Jew and Gentile had already come to supplant once and for all the place of Israel in salvation-history.⁴¹³⁴⁹ Yet surely the OT promises of restoration—such as are found in Ezek 37

¹²¹MT Massoretic Text

¹²²LXX Septuagint

¹²³MT Massoretic Text

¹²⁴LXX Septuagint

¹²⁵MT Massoretic Text

¹²⁶LXX Septuagint

¹²⁷LXX Septuagint

¹²⁸MT Massoretic Text

¹²⁹LAB Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)

¹³⁰Soares Prabhu G. M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew*, AnBib 63, Rome, 1976.

¹³¹Rothfuchs W. Rothfuchs, *Die Erfüllungszitate des Matthäus-Evangeliums*, Stuttgart, 1969.

¹³²2 Bar. 2 Baruch

¹³³*m. Mishnah*

¹³⁴⁴⁹ For the view that repentance is no longer a possibility for Israel see Trilling, *Israel*, passim, and L. Gaston, 'The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles', *Int* 29 (1975), pp. 24–40.

and Hos 2—would have prohibited this thought. If Paul could write that ‘God’s wrath has come upon them [the Jews] at last’ (1 Th 2:16) and still hold out hope for their final redemption (Rom 11),⁵¹³⁵⁰ and if the Qumran sect could think of most Jews as outside the covenant and yet expect to see ‘all the congregation of Israel ... join the Community and walk according to the laws of the sons of Zadok the Priests, and of the men of their covenant’ (1QS 1:1–2),⁵¹³⁶¹ the same could have been true for Matthew: the Jewish destiny could still be open. As the prophet foresaw, the Lord will ‘say to Not my people, “You are my people” ’ (Hos 2:23).

Why does the evangelist not go on to quote the rest of Mic 5:2? Mention of one ‘whose origin is from of old, from ancient days’ would have admirably suited the purposes reflected by the genealogy; and 5:3 (‘until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth’) would have been to the point coming after 1:18–25. Maybe the readers are supposed to fill in for themselves.¹³⁷

II. 13-15

13. This verse has an almost perfect parallel in 2:19–20. The common structure is: genitive absolute + ‘behold’ + ‘the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph saying’ + ‘rise, take the child and his mother’ + command to move to a designated land + an explanatory ‘for’-clause.

ἀναχωρησάντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων. For the construction and vocabulary see on 1:20. The magi were warned of Herod in a dream, but no angel appeared. Because one appears to Joseph, this points to his importance. The opening verb links 2:13–15 to what precedes (cf. on 1:18 and 2:1) and continues the homeophony: ἀνεχώρησαν/χώραν/ἀναχωρησάντων. Does the present tense, φαίνεται (cf. 2:19 but contrast 1:20, which has the aorist), imply simultaneity, that is, does it make the angelic appearance concurrent with the magi’s departure?

Contrast G. N. Stanton, ‘Aspects of Early Christian-Jewish polemic and Apologetic’, *NTS* 31 (1985), pp. 377–92.

¹³⁵⁵⁰ See Davies, ‘Paul and the people of Israel’, in *JPS*, pp. 123–52 (pp. 125–7 on the authenticity of 1 Th 2:16), and D. C. Allison, ‘Romans 11:11–15: A Suggestion’, *PRS* 12 (1985), pp. 23–30. For the Pauline origin of 1 Th 2:16 see further G. Lüdemann, *Paulus und das Judentum*, München, 1983, pp. 25–7, and K. P. Donfried, ‘Paul and Judaism. 1 Thess. 2:13–16 as a Test Case’, *Int* 38 (1984), pp. 242–53.

¹³⁶⁵¹ See further Sanders, *Paul*, pp. 240–57.

¹³⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*](#), vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 239–244.

ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ. ἐγερθεὶς (see on 1:24 and cf. 2:14, 20, 21) + imperative is a Semitism, being the equivalent of *qûm* + imperative. The LX¹³⁸X typically translates the idiom by ἀναστὰς + imperative (Gen 13:17; Deut 17:8; Josh 1:2; cf. Lk 17:19; 22:46; Acts 9:11; T. Jo¹³⁹b 24:10; Par. Jer. 1:3). 1 Chr 22:19 is an exception. παράλαβε recalls 1:20 and 24. Joseph is still the only active character in the family of Jesus. For the imperative of παραλαμβάνω (only in Matthew in the synoptics) see also 2:20 and 18:16. On ‘the child and his mother’ see on 2:11.

καὶ φεύγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον. Compare Gen 46:2–4. Almost as soon as he is born, the Son of man, who like Moses will grow up in Egypt, has no place to lay his head (cf. 8:20).

If the faithful followers of Jesus must flee when the tribulations of the latter days fall upon them (10:23; 24:16; cf. 3:7; 23:33), they can take comfort in this, that they are only suffering the same fate as did their master and his family (cf. 10:24–5).

Egypt was the traditional refuge for Palestinian Jews seeking asylum. See, for example, 1 Kgs 11:40 (Jeroboam); 2 Kgs 25:26 and Jer 41:16–18 (Gedaliah’s friends who departed from Geruth Chimham ‘near Bethlehem’); Jer 43:1–7 (Jeremiah); Josephus, *Ant.* 12:387 (Onias IV); 14:21 (‘principal men among the Jews’); 15:46 (a frustrated attempt by Alexandria); Josephus, *Bell.* 7:409–10 (Sicarii); and *b*¹⁴⁰. *Sanh.* 107b (Joshua b. Peraḥyah) (cf. also Zech 10:10; Rev 12:4–6).

Little weight is to be placed upon the fact that Jewish sources speak of the travels of Jesus in Egypt (*b*¹⁴¹. *ʿAbod. Zar.* 16b–17a; *b*¹⁴². *Sanh.* 107b; *b*¹⁴³. *Šabb.* 104b; cf. Origen, *C. Cels.* 1:28). This tradition was presumably passed on principally out of a desire to make Jesus’ false teachings derive from Egyptian soothsayers, not Jewish rabbis, and it scarcely supplies independent evidence for an historical journey of Jesus’ family in Egypt. More plausible but still very improbable is M. Smith’s proposal that primitive polemic against Jesus as a magician led to the assertion that he must have gone down to Egypt to learn magic; Christians then responded by having Jesus go to Egypt as an infant, before the time when he could have learned anything.¹⁴⁴³

Some have found in the exile to Egypt a harking back to the story of Jacob, who was persecuted (by Laban) and who (unlike Moses) fled to Egypt.¹⁴⁵⁴ Yet given the theme of exile, which *does* have its parallel in the traditions about Moses (not to mention numerous other heroes), and given belief in Jesus’ birth in Nazareth or Bethlehem, the sequence, birth in Palestine, exile in Egypt, return to Palestine, was inevitable. When one adds that the other correlations between Mt 1–2 and the legends about Jacob depend mostly upon sources of

¹³⁸LXX Septuagint

¹³⁹T. Job Testament of Job

¹⁴⁰*b. Babylonian Talmud*

¹⁴¹*b. Babylonian Talmud*

¹⁴²*b. Babylonian Talmud*

¹⁴³*b. Babylonian Talmud*

¹⁴⁴³ Smith, *Magician*, pp. 47–8, 150–1. But if Smith is right, why did Christians not just simply deny that Jesus went to Egypt in the first place?

¹⁴⁵⁴ D. Daube, ‘The Earliest Structures of the Gospels’, *NTS* 5 (1959), pp. 174–87; C. H. Cave, ‘St. Matthew’s Infancy Narrative’, *NTS* 9 (1963), pp. 382–90; M. M. Bourke, ‘The Literary Genus of Matthew 1–2’, *CBQ* 22 (1960), pp. 160–75.

rather late or uncertain date (such as *Midrash Rabbah*), it becomes difficult to find the background of the Matthean infancy narrative in the stories about the patriarchs.¹⁴⁶⁵

Apoc. Ada¹⁴⁷m 5:78. 18–26 from Nag Hammadi reads thus: ‘He came from a virgin womb. He was cast out of his city, he and his mother; he was brought to a desert place. He was nourished there. He came and received glory and power. And thus he came to the water.’ If this text is indeed from a document wholly unacquainted with the NT (so e.g. G. MacRae in Charlesworth¹⁴⁸h 1, p. 709), the parallels with Mt 1–3 are remarkable.

καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἂν εἴπω σοι. Compare Exod 24:12. The appearance of the angel in 2:19–20 is here prophesied. Both ἐκεῖ (Mt: 28; Mk: 11; Lk: 16) and ἕως ἂν (Mt: 9–10; Mk: 3; Lk: 2–3) are often redactional.

μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό. Compare Exod 2:15 and Mt 16:27 (redactional). The angel who appears to Joseph is reasonable: his imperative is followed by an explanatory clause which makes the command sensible. For μέλλω with the infinitive, used to express imminence, see BD¹⁴⁹F § 356. Concerning ἀπολέσαι, the genitive articular infinitive may well betray the redactor’s hand; see 3:13; 11:1; 13:3 (diff. Mk 4:3); 21:32; 24:45 (= Lk 12:42). Direct purpose is indicated (cf. 13:3): seek in order to kill. Because ἀπολύω also appears in the passion narrative (27:20), it adds to the parallelism between the initial persecution of Jesus and the last days in Jerusalem.

14. Joseph obeys the angel’s command to the letter: he rises, he takes, he goes, and he returns, just as instructed. See the remarks on 1:24–5.

The parallel in 1 Kgs 11:40 is interesting: ‘Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam; but Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon’. See further Soares Prabh¹⁵⁰u, pp. 226–7.

Matthew gives none of the details we might expect from other narrators, such as the route Joseph took to Egypt, or how long the family resided there, etc. The evangelist sticks to the barest essentials. If we could somehow recover the pre-Matthean tradition, Mt 2 might show itself to be an abbreviated version. In any event, Matthew’s conciseness, his leaving so much unsaid, could not but stimulate later apocryphal fantasy; see, for instance, Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 6:20; Gosp. Ps.-Mt. 18–25; Arabic Infancy Narrative 9–26.

ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς καὶ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον. Compare 1:24; 2:13. The vocabulary is taken over from earlier verses.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Further discussions and criticism in Vögtle, ‘Kindheitsgeschichte’ (see p. 256), pp. 165–7; Brown, *Messiah*, pp. 544–5; Nolan, pp. 82–3.

¹⁴⁷ Apoc. Adam Apocalypse of Adam

¹⁴⁸ Charlesworth J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., New York, 1983, 1985.

¹⁴⁹ BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

¹⁵⁰ Soares Prabhu G. M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew*, AnBib 63, Rome, 1976.

Why is the time of flight recorded? (The magi, one infers, must also have travelled at night, although Matthew fails to remark on this.) (1) The *Passover Haggadah* puts the exodus at night. Yet if this were pertinent, the note of time should come in 2:21, when the family *leaves* Egypt, not here, when they enter it. (2) Given the other parallels between Mt 2 and the passion narrative, it might not be fanciful to observe that Jesus was later overtaken by his enemies at night (Mt 26). (3) Joseph must escape by night to avoid being seen; he must go under cover of darkness (cf. 28:13). The danger of the situation is thereby made plain. (4) Because Joseph is warned ‘in a dream’, are we not to think of him getting up in the middle of his sleep to carry off Mary and Jesus without a moment’s delay? Again, the danger of things would be the point.

In the passion narrative Jesus will declare that, if he willed it, more than twelve legions of angels would come to his aid: but the time has come for something else, the fulfilment of Scripture (26:53–4). In Mt 2, on the other hand, the time of the crucifixion lies far ahead, and Jesus must be saved for what is to come. This is why the angelic command to flee and Joseph’s keeping Jesus safe from harm are for the moment necessary.

15. This verse anticipates 2:19–21: the stay in Egypt will be ended by Herod’s death—just as Moses’ stay in Midian was concluded when the king of Egypt died (Exod 4:19 LX¹⁵¹X).

καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς τελευτῆς Ἡρώδου. τελευτή (LX¹⁵²X: 26–7) is a NT *hapax legomenon*. Compare Exod 4:19 LX¹⁵³X: ‘the king of Egypt died’ (ἔτελεύτησεν).

ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος. See on 1:22. The following brief citation of Hos 11:1¹⁵⁴⁶ agrees with the Hebrew: ‘out of Egypt have I called my son’ (*mimmiṣrayim qārā ’tî libēnî*). The LX¹⁵⁵X has: ‘Out of Egypt I summoned his children’ (μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ). Unless one posits use of a non-LX¹⁵⁶X Greek version (cf. Aquila’s translation) or a Christian testimony book, Matthew’s knowledge of Hebrew here seems evident.

ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου. Although Hosea was much mined for early Christian testimonies (Dodd,¹⁵⁷ *Scriptures*¹⁵⁸, pp. 75–78), Matthew was presumably the first to connect Hos 11:1 with the story of Jesus.¹⁵⁹⁷ He was in all likelihood led to it via Num 24:8, which reads,

¹⁵¹LXX Septuagint

¹⁵²LXX Septuagint

¹⁵³LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁴⁶ Stendahl, *School*, pp. 101–2, Gundry, *OT*, pp. 92–4; Rothfuchs, pp. 62–3; Lindars, *Apologetic*, pp. 216–17; Soares Prabhu, pp. 216–18; Brown, *Messiah*, pp. 219–21.

¹⁵⁵LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁶LXX Septuagint

¹⁵⁷Dodd, C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, London, 1952.

¹⁵⁸*Scriptures* C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, London, 1952.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Dodd, *Scriptures*, p. 103, suggests that the words of Hosea’s prophecy might first have been applied by Christians to the deliverance of God’s people in Christ for, according to Rev 11:8, the place where Jesus was crucified is spiritually called ‘Egypt’. This is highly speculative.

‘God led (ὠδήγησεν) him out of Egypt’ (cf. 23:22).¹⁶⁰⁸ A messianic interpretation of this verse already lies to hand in the LX¹⁶¹X, for the opening line of 24:7 (‘water shall flow from his buckets’, so M¹⁶²T) becomes in the LX¹⁶³X, ‘a man will come forth from his seed’. This makes 24:7 a potential reference to the Messiah¹⁶⁴⁹—a possibility strongly reinforced by the fact that other verses in Balaam’s oracle were given a messianic interpretation by Jews and Christians (see p. 234). So having been sent to Num. 24:7 by the story of the magi and the star, Matthew’s attention was then directed to Num 24:8, which seemed a good proof text for the tradition about Jesus’ departure to and return from Egypt. That the evangelist then went on to quote the very similar Hos 11:1 and not the verse in Numbers must be put down to the mention of ‘son’ in the former. (No influence from Gen 46:3–4 is to be detected.)

It is exceptional for a formula quotation to refer forward to an event yet to be narrated, so Matthew’s placement of the quotation here rather than after 2:21 has puzzled commentators. Yet Egypt is the geographical focus of 2:13–15, and Hos 11:1 names Egypt. 2:19–21, on the other hand, is oriented towards the land of Israel, and an appropriate scriptural proof at that juncture would have to name Israel or the land. So Hos 11:1 could not go after 2:21. In short, Matthew’s placement is determined by the naming of Egypt in Hosea’s prophecy, not by the movement envisaged (cf. Stendahl (v), p. 97). If one further asks why the quotation is not placed after the first mention of Egypt, that is, in 2:13, the answer must be because it would destroy the perfect parallelism between 2:13–14 and 19–21.

The application of Hos 11:1 to Jesus inevitably seems to us gratuitous. In its original context the verse unambiguously refers to Israel: ‘When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called my son’. But three points should give us some sympathy for Matthew’s use of this OT Scripture. To begin with, the evangelist was, we are strongly inclined to think, perfectly aware that ‘Out of Egypt, etc.’ was originally spoken of Israel. He was not naively oblivious of the switch in referents when he applied Hos 11:1 to Jesus, not to the people. We think this in part because, in the second place, Christian tradition before Matthew had portrayed Jesus as repeating or recapitulating certain experiences of Israel. See 4:1–11 with our comments. Thus there was Christian precedent for the hermeneutical move behind 2:13–15. Indeed, if Jesus’ talk of ‘the Son of man’ depended in part at least upon a collective interpretation of Daniel’s ‘one like a son of man’ (see the excursus after 8:20), if he viewed his own person and work as the focus or heart of the renewed and restored people of God, it would have been natural for his followers to draw parallels between his story and the story of Israel. Finally, in ancient Jewish sources concerned with eschatological matters, the redemption from Egypt often serves as a type for the messianic redemption, and the prospect of another exodus is held forth: before the

¹⁶⁰⁸ For this and what follows see Lindars, *Apologetic*, pp. 216–17. For those familiar only with the LXX, Matthew’s quotation would have seemed closer to Num 24:8 than to Hos 11:1. This explains the scribal note in the margin of α , which ascribes the text to Numbers.

¹⁶¹LXX Septuagint

¹⁶²MT Massoretic Text

¹⁶³LXX Septuagint

¹⁶⁴⁹ Cf. Lindars, *ibid.*, who also calls attention to the Peshitta (‘a mighty man shall proceed from his sons’) and Targum Onkelos (‘a king shall grow great, who shall be reared from his sons’), both of which appear to him to be independent of the LXX.

consummation, the pattern, exodus/return, will repeat itself (cf. Isa 40:3–4; 42:14–55:13; Ezek 20:33–44; Hos 2:14–15; 1 Macc 2:29–30; 1QS 8:12–18; Mt 24:26; Acts 21:38; Rev 12:6, 14; Josephus, *Ant.* 20:97; *Bell.* 2:259, 261; 7:438; S¹⁶⁵B 1, pp. 85–88). Given this expectation, it would have been no large step for our author to find it foreshadowed in the life of Jesus. In other words, the eschatological exodus and return to the land would be anticipated in the story of Mt 2.

2:15 contains the first appearance in Matthew of the ‘Son (of God)’ title. Because the present context (Mt 1–2) emphasizes Jesus’ rôle as Messiah and king, it is notable that Jewish kings were sometimes called ‘sons’ (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps 2:7; 89:26–27) and that ‘Son (of God)’ just may—although this is disputed—have been a messianic title in pre-Christian Judaism (cf. 4QpsDanA^a; 4QFlor. 10–14). Also significant is the recurrence of ‘Son of God’ in 4:3 and 6, where Jesus again repeats the history of Israel. For Matthew, ‘Son of God’ must have to do in part with Jesus as the personification or embodiment of true, obedient Israel.¹⁶⁶⁰ If God could call Israel his ‘first-born son’ (Exod 4:22–3), how much more Messiah Jesus.¹⁶⁷

Comment

13 ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ, “Look, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream,” is typical of the Matthean infancy narrative (cf. 1:20; 2:19–20). The historical present tense of φαίνεται, lit¹⁶⁸. “appears” (along with ἰδοὺ, “look!”), adds vividness to the narrative. The pattern of the narrative is stereotyped (see above on 1:18–25, *Form/Structure/Setting* §A). τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ, “the infant and his mother,” becomes a stock phrase in chap. 2 (cf. 2:11, 14, 20, 21). The threat to the child is imminent: μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν, “for Herod is about to seek.” This draws attention to the importance of both the angelic revelation and Joseph’s obedience. Herod’s purpose is τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό, “to destroy him.” This intent is in full accord with what is known of Herod’s character and reflects his perception of his threatened status. The verb ἀπολέσαι, “to destroy,” anticipates its recurrence in the passion

¹⁶⁵SB H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols., Munich, 1921–1961.

¹⁶⁶¹⁰ Cf. T. de Kruijf, *Der Sohn des lebendigen Gottes*, AB 16, Rome, 1962, pp. 56–8, 109. Kingsbury, *Structure*, pp. 40–83, has failed to develop this aspect of Matthew’s Son of God Christology.

¹⁶⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew](#), vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 259–264.

¹⁶⁸lit. literally

narrative (27:20), where, in that instance, it is the chief priests and elders who are the acting subjects.

14 The account of Joseph's obedience echoes closely the wording of the angelic command in the preceding verse. Egypt is chosen because it is convenient and removed from Herod's power (and perhaps for the exodus typology it makes possible). It does not seem very likely, contrary to Brown (*Birth*), that Egypt here shows the influence upon Matthew of a "flight to Egypt" tradition (two OT instances are given: 1 Kgs 11:40 and Jer 26:21 [LX¹⁶⁹X 33:21]; and one instance from Jos¹⁷⁰. *Ant*¹⁷¹. 12.9.7). Later rabbinic tradition knows of Jesus' sojourn in Egypt and attributes his supernatural powers to the magic he learned there. This story probably stems from a passing acquaintance with the Christian tradition rather than from direct dependence upon Matthew. The suggestion, on the other hand, that Matthew writes to counter the Jewish tradition (McNeile, Allen, Grundmann) is unlikely.

15 The fulfillment quotation (see *Introduction*) anticipates the narrative and belongs properly at the end of v 21, after the account of Herod's death and Joseph's return to the land of Israel. Its occurrence here lends symmetry to the structure of chap. 2 (see above, *Form/Structure/Setting* §B), where vv 19–23 focus on Nazareth. More importantly, the premature quotation serves as the signal of the theological import of the presence of the holy family in Egypt by its explicit reference to the exodus. This placing of the quotation also has the advantage of putting the exodus motif prior to the exilic motif (vv 16–18). Gundry denies that the exodus motif is present, arguing instead that what is meant is only the preservation of God's Son in Egypt and that this explains the placing of the quotation after v 14. This hypothesis, however, is strained in view of the actual content of the quotation.

In the formula quotations, ὑπὸ κυρίου, "by the Lord," occurs only here and in 1:22, where in both cases the quotation speaks of the Son of God. See *Comment* on 1:22. The quotation here is from Hos 11:1, but in a form agreeing more with the M¹⁷²T than with the LX¹⁷³X (which has μετεκάλεσα, "I summoned," for Matthew's ἐκάλεσα, "I called," and τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ, "his children" [i.e. Ἰσραήλ, "Israel"]) for Matthew's τὸν υἱόν μου, "my Son"). Matthew has altered the LX¹⁷⁴X text for his own purposes, made use of a Greek text more faithful to the M¹⁷⁵T (which reads ἰβְנִי, *libnî*, "my son"), or here reflects knowledge and use of the Hebrew text. No serious problem exists here since there is no essential difference between the collective singular and the plural, and Israel's sonship is assumed throughout the OT.

Hosea is, of course, alluding to the historical exodus and not making a prophecy about the future. How then can Matthew say that the quotation is "fulfilled" (πληρωθῆ)? What we have here is a matter of typological correspondence—that is, a substantial similarity is seen to exist between two moments of redemptive history, and therefore the two are regarded as interconnected, forming one larger continuity; the earlier is thus seen to foreshadow or

¹⁶⁹LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁷⁰Jos. Josephus

¹⁷¹*Ant.* Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

¹⁷²MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

¹⁷³LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁷⁴LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁷⁵MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

anticipate the latter, which then becomes a kind of realization or fulfillment of the former. The fulfillment motif is of course central to Matthew's whole perspective, given the eschatological significance of the Christ, here seen as God's unique Son. Thus, in the similarity of the son of God, Israel, and the Son of God, Jesus, both in Egypt of necessity and both delivered by divine provision, Matthew sees Jesus as living out and summing up the history of Israel. In Egypt, in the exodus, and in the wilderness (see 4:1–11), Jesus is the embodiment of Israel, not only anticipating her victories but also participating in her sufferings (cf. Isa 63:8–9).

To round out Matthew's perspective, we must add that since Israel's history has now reached its goal, which gathers together all previous threads, the earlier exodus now finds its counterpart and its climax in the eschatological deliverance of God's people from their sins (1:21; cf. the Greek text of Luke 9:31 for the most obvious exodus typology in the Gospels). This conception of the final salvation in exodus terminology is found in the OT (e.g. Isa 11:11; Hos 2:15; 12:9; Mic 7:15) as well as in rabbinic tradition (see Str-¹⁷⁶B). It is certainly also in Matthew's mind, given the obvious parallels between Moses and Christ in our passage. Another passage that may be in Matthew's mind is Num 23:22 (and 24:8), where, in Balaam's oracles, God is said to bring the promised one out of Egypt.¹⁷⁷

2:13 φαίνεται ('appears') is the first of many historic presents in Matthew. Where reproducing Markan material, Matthew rarely carries these over from Mark but generates his own. He seems to use them to create emphasis or to mark structure. Here it is to mark structure: the historic presents here and in v. 19 identify the starting point for subsections of the unit (in v. 16 τότε ['then'] serves this function).

The noncompliance of the Magi with Herod's directive delays but does not eliminate the threat to the infant Jesus.¹⁵¹⁷⁸³ As in 1:20, the intervention of the angel is timely. And, as there, the angel provides a supporting reason for the directive. On the 'angel of the Lord', the form of his intervention, and the shared construction which links 1:20; 2:1, 13, 19, see at 1:20. The use of παραλαμβάνειν links the angelic words here and in v. 20 to 1:20, but the sense changes from 'take in marriage' (1:20) to 'take along on a journey' (2:13, 20).

The mother and the child are treated here as an inseparable unit (cf. vv. 11, 14, 19, 20). Egypt is the traditional place of refuge for those who must flee from Israel.¹⁵¹⁷⁹⁴ The rampage of

¹⁷⁶Str-B H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck'sche, 1926–28)

¹⁷⁷ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 35–37.

¹⁷⁸¹⁵³ In the source form it is likely that the angelic intervention comes between Herod's instruction to his deputies to search for the child and their arrival in Bethlehem (see Nolland, 'Sources').

¹⁷⁹¹⁵⁴ See 1 Ki. 11:40; 2 Ki. 25:26; Je. 26:21; 41:16–18; 43:5–7; Ze. 10:10; Jos., *Ant.* 12.387; 14:21; etc.

Herod in v. 16 and the angelic message of v. 20 are prepared for here: Herod will make his attempt to destroy the child, and further direction will come later. Natural reader suspicion of the emptiness of Herod's words in v. 8 has already been encouraged by v. 12; now it finds retrospective confirmation in the angelic statement about Herod's present intentions. His intentions are evil, and he is not to be diverted by the lack of a report from the Magi.

Threat to the life of a child intended for some important destiny is a common enough feature of ancient narratives,¹⁵¹⁸⁰⁵ but here the more important point of comparison is the threat to the life of the infant Moses,¹⁵¹⁸¹⁶ and beyond that it seems likely that we are intended to see in this threat a prolepsis of that threat to Jesus' life which would ultimately result in the crucifixion.

2:14 Note the repetition of language from 1:24 (see there). Joseph's obedience is underlined by the reuse in the report of the action of most of the words of the angel's directive ('by night' is added, and 'departed' replaces 'flee'). 'By night' reflects the nighttime occurrence of dreams, but also the immediacy of obedience in response to the urgency implied in the angelic directive. Night travel offers fewer witnesses. 'Departed' has been used in connection with the Magi (vv. 12, 13), but more importantly for Matthew its use links Jesus' movement to Egypt to his later movements to Nazareth (v. 22) and to Capernaum (4:12–13).¹⁵¹⁸²⁷ In each of these movements Matthew identifies a fulfilment of Scripture.

In this verse it first becomes evident that Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives cannot be fully harmonised. Lk. 2:39 would not have tied the timing of the return to Nazareth to the completion of the requirements of the Jewish law subsequent to a birth if Luke had known that

¹⁸⁰¹⁵⁵ The motif of the flight of the threatened child is found in stories about Cyrus (Hdt., 1:108–13), Mithridates (Justin, *Epitome* 1.37.2), Gilgamesh (Aelian, *Nat. anim.* 12.21), and Abraham (see Str-B 1:77–78; 3:34–35); the death of other children plays a part in stories about Moses (Ex. 1:8–2:10; Jos., *Ant.* 2.205–9; *Ps.-Philo* 9:9–16), Cyrus (as above), Abraham (as above), Augustus (Suetonius, *Aug.* 94.3), Nero (Suetonius, *Nero* 36), Romulus (Livius 1.3–6). See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:258–59, for further examples. France, 'Herod', 107 n. 43, makes the important observation that, apart from the case of Moses, 'indiscriminate killing of children' is found only in the case of Augustus (and here only as an unrealised intention).

¹⁸¹¹⁵⁶ See especially the comments at Mt. 2:16 below. The Matthean text also draws on a subsequent threat by Pharaoh to the life of Moses. Ex. 2:15 (and cf. 4:20) provides the closest point of verbal comparison for Mt. 2:13 (and cf. at v. 20). The probability of a secondary allusion to the flight of Joseph to Israel (cf. Gn. 46:2–7) depends on the dating of midrashic developments of the story, which make Joseph's journey to Egypt a flight from the murderous intentions of Laban (see L. Finkelstein, 'The Oldest Midrash: Prerabbinic Ideals and Teaching in the Passover Haggadah', *HTR* 31 [1938], 291–317; Daube, *Rabbinic Judaism*, 189–92; Bourke, 'Genus', 167–72; Cave, 'Infancy', 387–88). If present, it could be thought to play only a minor role. The language of 1 Ki. 11:40 reports Solomon's attempt to destroy Jeroboam, his flight to Egypt, and his sojourn there until the death of Solomon in language which is strikingly similar to the final part of Mt. 2:13 and the opening part of v. 15. If there is any deliberate link, it can only be that in each case we are dealing with the interplay between rival claimants to the throne.

¹⁸²¹⁵⁷ The movement statement here is complicated by the need to have Jesus return to Galilee before making the move to Capernaum.

he should leave room for a period of exile in Egypt. Conversely, Matthew would not have felt the need to offer a particular reason in 2:22 for the holy family's going to Nazareth if he had been aware of the Lukan view that the family normally resided there. But these are not serious problems to harmonisation in the kind of literature where sequencing and time links are frequently part of narrative technique rather than reflecting a concern with historical detail.

2:15 This verse deals with the time Joseph, Mary, and Jesus spent in Egypt, in anticipation of v. 19. Meanwhile the tragedy of vv. 16–18 will take place back in Bethlehem. On the set of formula quotations of which this is the second see the comments at 1:22; on 'by the Lord' see those at 1:23.

Not the stay in Egypt, but the call out of it is connected to Ho. 11:1: the sojourn in Egypt has as its purpose the call out of Egypt in that it allows for the necessary passage of time until the right conditions for the call are established (cf. the way in which 'all this' functions in 1:22). Matthew may have placed the text here rather than after v. 20 because close juxtaposition of the angel's words and the quotation would have tended to put the two items of quoted speech in competition.¹⁵¹⁸³⁸ The text form follows the M¹⁸⁴T closely and is quite different from the LX¹⁸⁵X.¹⁵¹⁸⁶⁹

The quotation establishes an Israel typology: as a little later in adult life Jesus will be called upon to relive the wilderness temptations of Israel (4:1–11), so now as an infant he retraces in his own life the foundational experience of Israel in being called by God out of Egypt.¹⁶¹⁸⁷⁰ The language of sonship will recur in 3:17; 4:1–11; etc. As Matthew unfolds his story, he will gradually clarify the specific content to be given to sonship in the case of Jesus.¹⁶¹⁸⁸¹¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³¹⁵⁸ The fulfilment formula (suitably adapted) and quotation could have come after Mt. 2:21. Matthew's choice of location allows a formula quotation to be linked with each major subdivision in vv. 13–23.

¹⁸⁴MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

¹⁸⁵LXX Septuagint

¹⁸⁶¹⁵⁹ The LXX uses the compound verb μετεκάλεσα for 'called', the plural τὰ τέκνα ('the children') and the third person αὐτοῦ ('his').

¹⁸⁷¹⁶⁰ Prophecy had used the Exodus pattern to speak of the return from Exile, and this in turn had become the language of eschatological expectation (see Is. 40:3–4; 42:14–55:13, passim; Ez. 20:33–44; Ho. 2:14–15; 1QS 8:12–18; etc.). Matthew's typology goes beyond this but is a development from it.

¹⁸⁸¹⁶¹ Those who look for divine sonship already in 1:18–25 come to this verse with a focus on 'my son' which is not justified by the development of the narrative to this point (see Nolland, 'No-Son-of-God', 3–12). At this point there is no emphasis on 'my son' as distinct from any other designation for Israel, but having introduced the terminology, Matthew will make extensive use of it later.

¹⁸⁹ John Nolland, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 121–123.

III. 19-21

Herod, whose long reign began in 37 B.C. died in 4 B.C. His death signaled the possibility of return, not only of the holy family (cf. v 15) ¹⁹⁰

2:19 The time period passed over cursorily in v. 15 now comes to an end, and the scene moves briefly to Egypt (with a historic present marking the start of the new subunit), where the angelic communication anticipated in v. 13 now takes place. On the pattern of construction which links 1:20; 2:1, 13, 19 and shared features, see the discussion at 1:20.

2:20–21 A strong echo of language links the words of the angel here and in v. 13. But now the directive is to ‘go to the land of Israel’, and the reason this time is the death of Herod, not the threat of his action. The tie between Jesus and Moses is further underlined here by the echo of the language of Ex. 4:19–20 in which God directs Moses at Midian, and Moses obeys (cf. at v. 13). The plural ‘those who were seeking’, where the only obvious referent is Herod, is best explained as signalling this link. ¹⁷¹⁹¹⁴ The language of Joseph’s obedience takes up every word of the angel’s directive (cf. at v. 14).

‘Israel’ (rather than something more precise) is the appropriate counterpart to ‘Egypt’, but probably more is involved. Though both Matthew and Luke use ‘Israel’ quite frequently, the full phrase ‘the land of Israel’ is not found elsewhere in the NT. OT uses are particularly concentrated in Ezekiel. Exile and Restoration are frequently in focus (privilege lost and regained). Ez. 20:42 could be particularly in mind: ‘You shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your ancestors’.

It is likely that Matthew’s neatly structured source form ended here. In the source Herod and Joseph are the chief actors. We first learn how Joseph accommodates himself to the unexpected pregnancy, then about Herod hearing by rumour of a messianic birth and setting in train plans for the discovery of the child. The angel who had illuminated the pregnancy situation for Joseph and directed him regarding the proper response steps in again to direct Joseph about removing his family from danger. Then follows the unsuccessful search which leads Herod to indiscriminate slaughter. Finally, the danger passed, Joseph is directed to return with the family to Israel. ¹⁷¹⁹²⁵ Matthew, however, feels the need to link these materials into a tradition which

¹⁹⁰ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 38.

¹⁹¹¹⁷⁴ Moses is told, ‘Go back to Egypt. For all those who were seeking your life are dead’. In response, ‘Moses took his wife and his sons ... and went back to the land of Egypt’. In exact wording, Matthew and the LXX share εἰς ... τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν ... λαβ[... παιδι[... εἰς.

¹⁹²¹⁷⁵ For further details see Nolland, ‘Sources’.

located Jesus' origins in Nazareth.¹⁷¹⁹³⁶ So it becomes necessary for him to continue the story in vv. 22–23.¹⁷¹⁹⁴⁷¹⁹⁵

20 The first part of the verse further maintains the pattern by being in verbatim agreement with v 13. The words εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ, “into the land of Israel,” constitute an obvious echo of the exodus narrative. The delay of the further revelation, i.e., to go to Galilee (v 22), also “by a dream,” is necessary to underline the exodus typology.

The sentence τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου, “for they who were seeking to kill the child died,” agrees nearly verbatim with Exod 4:19 (see above, *Form/Structure/Setting* §C), and this may account for the plural. More probably the plural is meant to refer to Herod’s servants (who after Herod’s death were no longer in power) rather than to the chief priests and scribes of 2:4 (as Brown, *Birth*, and Gundry, *Matthew*, argue). ψυχή is regularly used in the NT for “life.”

21 The recording of the obedience mirrors the wording of the command in v 20 (cf. v 14, mirroring v 13). On εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ, “into the land of Israel,” see *Comment* on the preceding verse.¹⁹⁶

19. The demise of Herod the Great introduces the concluding section of the infancy narrative, Jesus’ return from exile to Egypt.

τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου. The verb (Mt: 4, Mk: 2, Lk: 1), which is redactional in 9:18 and 22:25, recalls Exod 2:23: ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ βασιλεύς (Pharaoh). What the angel foresaw before Joseph left Israel, namely, the death (τελευτῆς) of Herod (2:15), has now come to pass.

¹⁹³¹⁷⁶ See Mk. 1:9, 24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk. 1:26; 2:4, 39, 51; 4:16, 34; 18:37; 24:19; Jn. 1:45, 46; 18:5, 7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 24:5; 26:9. In Matthew the tie to Nazareth plays only a very modest role, since Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum already at 4:13. The hometown of 13:54 is probably Capernaum, but it could be Nazareth because of the presence of family members there, and Jesus is identified as ‘the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee’ in Mt. 21:11 and ‘Jesus the Nazorean’ in 26:71. Otherwise Capernaum is Jesus’ home base.

¹⁹⁴¹⁷⁷ Davis, ‘Tradition’, 407, points to the emphasis on the feelings and motivation of Joseph in v. 22, which distinguishes the development in vv. 22–23 from that in vv. 13–21.

¹⁹⁵ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 126–127.

¹⁹⁶ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 39.

When exactly Herod died is not stated, and the guesses of the commentators as to how long we should think of the family's stay are just that—guesses. The apocryphal gospels supply various reckonings—'no little time' (Gosp. Ps.—Mt. 25), at least one year (Latin Gos. Thom¹⁹⁷. 1–3), three years (Arabic Gospel of the Infancy 25–6).

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ. Compare 1:20; 2:13.

20. The first half of this verse—which has its twin in 2:13—depends upon Exod 4:19b and 20a while the second half draws upon Exod 4:19c:

Particularly striking is the plural in Mt 2:20: 'those seeking ... have died'. Herod is the only immediate antecedent. This might be explained as a 'rhetorical' or 'allusive' plural (BD¹⁹⁸F § 141), with references to Herod's coactors in 2:3–4. But it is easier to believe that the language of Exod 4:19 has been retained without perfect grammatical adjustment, in order to make the parallel with the sentence from the story of Moses unmistakable.

λέγων· ἐγερθεῖς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ. So also 2:13.

καὶ πορεύου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραήλ. The verb (Mt: 29; Mk: 1; Lk: 51) replaces the 'flee' of 2:13. The time of flight is ended for Herod has died. Matthew cannot use the ἐπιστρέφω of Exod 4:20 because Joseph, unlike Moses, is not returning to the place he left—his destination is somewhere new, Nazareth.²¹⁹⁹⁴

τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου. See above and p. 193. 'To seek the soul' (= *bāqāš + nepēš*) of someone means to seek to kill him (cf. 2:13 and Rom 11:3 = 1 Kgs 19:14). It is a good OT idiom (Exod 4:19; 1 Sam 20:1; 22:23; 1 Kgs 19:10; Prov 29:10; Jer 4:30). The RS²⁰⁰V rightly renders, 'those who sought', for the present participle can connote antecedent time (cf. Jn 12:17; Acts 4:34; Rom 9:30; Gal 1:23; BD²⁰¹F § 339:3).

21. This is the original conclusion of the pre-Matthean narrative. Again the response of Joseph matches perfectly the angel's command.

ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεῖς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ. So also 2:14. Compare Exod 4:20: 'Moses, taking (ἀναλαβών) his wife and his children (τὰ παιδία) ...'.

¹⁹⁷Gos. Thom. Gospel of Thomas

¹⁹⁸BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

¹⁹⁹²⁴ 'Land of Israel' is found in the NT only in Mt 2:20 and 21; it does, however, occur in the LXX (Judg 6:5; 1 Βας 13:19; Ezek 20:38), and *'ereš yisrā'ēl* is a standard designation in rabbinic literature for Palestine, including Galilee (see SB I, pp. 90–I).

²⁰⁰RSV The Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

²⁰¹BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς γῆν Ἰσραήλ.²⁰²⁵ ‘To go into the land’ is a thoroughly biblical phrase with a rich history and a number of possible connotations; see Exod 12:25; Lev 14:34; 19:23; Num 32:9; Deut 4:21.²⁰³

IV. 22-23

ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἀντὶ Ἡρώδου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ.²⁰⁴⁶ Compare 3 Βας 3:7: ἀντὶ Δαυῖδ τοῦ πατρὸς μου. From whom Joseph is supposed to have learned of Archelaus we are not told. The situation, however, is similar to that recounted in 1:18–25. (1) Joseph learns a disquieting fact—in the one case that his wife is pregnant, in the other that Archelaus is king. (2) Divine revelation intervenes to make the rightful course of action under the difficult circumstances plain.

In indirect discourse the present tense with verbs of saying takes up the temporal point of view of the speaker. Similarly here the present tense (‘rules’) with a verb of perception (‘hearing’) reflects the temporal point of view of Joseph (BD²⁰⁵F § 324). For Ἰουδαία see on 2:1.

²⁰²²⁵ κ B C 157 pc sa have εἰσηλθεν (so NA²⁶). HG prints ηλθεν, following D L W 0233 0250 f^{1.13} Maj Aug. Although he has sometimes dropped it from his sources, Matthew often has εἰσέρχομαι + εἰς (Mt: 27; Mk: 23; Lk: 31)—and it is occasionally redactional, as in 5:20 and 7:21.

²⁰³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*](#), vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 270–272.

²⁰⁴²⁶ Against κ B C * W eth, Ηρωδου is placed before του πατρος αυτου in Maj and C³ D L 0233 0250 f^{1.13} latt co Eus Aug. Maj, followed by HG against NA²⁶, is probably original, for while neither 1:18 (τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας cf. Mk 11:10) nor 2:11 (Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) can be proven to reflect a redactional tendency (because Matthew may be influenced by his source in one verse or the other or both), the order in 4:21—Ζεβεδαίου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν—is certainly editorial (contrast Mk 1:19–20).

²⁰⁵BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

The genitive is usually used with verbs of ruling (BD²⁰⁶F § 177). Matthew likes ἀκούω+ὅτι: Mt: 9; Mk: 3; Lk: 0 (cf. the Hebrew *šāma' + kī*).

When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., his kingdom was divided among Philip, Antipas, and Archelaus, his three sons. Archelaus, who is mentioned nowhere else in the NT, gained charge of Judea proper, Samaria, and Idumea. He was reputed to be the worst of the three brothers. His short reign was marked by scandal, by brutality, by tyranny.²⁰⁷⁷ Matters got so bad that complaints lodged against him in Rome by a deputation of Jews and Samaritans succeeded in having him deposed and sent into exile in Gaul in A.D. 6.

If Joseph cannot take Mary and Jesus back to Judea, to the house in Bethlehem, this is because, presumably, the identity of the messianic child might somehow become known, and Archelaus' response would be like his father's—he would kill Jesus. It is worth recalling that, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 17:213–18; *Bell.* 2:1–13), Archelaus ordered a massacre immediately after the death of his father.

According to our text, Archelaus 'reigned' (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18:93) in place of his father. This is strictly incorrect and reminds one of the similar problem in 14:9 = Mk 6:26, where Herod the tetrarch is called 'king'. Archelaus was an ethnarch (Josephus, *Ant.* 17:317; *Bell.* 2:93; extant coins). The kingship was only a prospect for him, contingent upon his proving himself worthy in the eyes of the emperor. Matthew, however, wishes to continue the theme of the conflict of kings. Thus the son takes the place of his father, and Jesus, the true king, still has a rival.

ἐφοβήθη ἐκεῖ ἀπελθεῖν. In contrast to all that has gone before, human initiative now plays a role in Matthew's story. The adverb, ἐκεῖ, here the equivalent of ἐκεῖσε, 'thither', is frequent in the LX²⁰⁸X for *šām* or *šāmmā* but typically comes after, not before, a verb of motion.

χρηματισθεῖς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ. See on 1:20 and 2:12. This is the third and final dream in 2:13–23, and it is about to be followed by the section's third and final formula quotation.

ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας. Note the three successive uses of εἰς and the progressive geographical restriction: 'into Israel' (2:21), 'into the district of Galilee' (2:22), 'in a city called Nazareth' (2:23). 'Galilee' (see on 4:12) prepares for 3:13, where Jesus comes to the Jordan from Galilee.

23. The pressure on Jewish Christians to come up with a proof text for Jesus' having lived in Nazareth must have been considerable. The town was of little account and nothing in the OT or Jewish tradition prepared for its connexion with messianic events. To what extent non-Christian Jews turned Nazareth into a reproach we do not know; but early believers in Jesus certainly would have felt a difficulty (cf. Jn 1:46). Moreover, given the belief in the significance of Bethlehem and in Jesus' birth there, the prominence of Nazareth in the gospel tradition would have been all the more puzzling. Mt 2:23 is, therefore, an attempt to come to grips with a difficult fact.

²⁰⁶BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

²⁰⁷²⁷ See Schürer I, pp. 353–7; E. Gabba in *CHJ* 3, forthcoming; and Smallwood, pp. 102–19. In Smallwood's judgement, Mt 2:22–3 reflects Archelaus' unpopularity towards the conclusion rather than the beginning of his reign (p. 114, n. 37).

²⁰⁸LXX Septuagint

καὶ ἔλθων κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λιγομένην Ναζαρέτ.²²⁰⁹⁸ A participial form of ἔρχομαι + κατοικέω—compare 4:13; 12:45—might be labelled a Septuagintism (cf. Gen 13:18; 1 Bas 31:7; 4 Bas 16:6; Lk 11:26; Acts 7:4). λεγομένην is typical of Matthew’s style (see on 1:16). Luke also calls Nazareth a πόλις (1:26; 2:4, 36). One expects κώμη. But between πόλις and κώμην the NT does not always make a sharp distinction (cf. Mk 1:38 and Swet²¹⁰e, p. 27; the LX²¹¹X occasionally translates ἴρ with κώμη). Certainly Lu²¹²z 1, p. 133, is mistaken when he finds in the use of πόλις in Mt 2:23 evidence for Matthew’s ignorance of Palestine.

The small, insignificant Nazareth (cf. Jn 1:46), an agricultural village about fifteen miles straight west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee, does not appear in the OT, Josephus, the Talmuds, or the Midrashim. This led some earlier scholars to deny its existence.²²¹³⁹ They argued for invention by Christians, who created a city, ‘Nazareth’, to correspond to the adjective, ‘Nazarene’, which adjective originally had other than a patrilial meaning. Today few if any would be found supporting such an assessment. Certainly not every single small village in Galilee should be expected to demand record in our extant sources; and in any case *nšrt* has turned up on a third or fourth century A.D. Jewish inscription of priestly courses found at Caesarea in 1962.³²¹⁴⁰

ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι. See on 1:22. This introductory formula is marked by two peculiarities. Why is the word not (as elsewhere) ‘through the prophet’ but rather ‘through the prophets’ (plural)? And why is the expected λεγόντων displaced by ὅτι? These two problems are almost certainly to be related to a third, namely, that ‘he will be called a Nazarene’ cannot be found in the OT. What is the explanation? By writing of ‘the prophets’ (cf. 26:56; Jn 6:45; Acts 3:18, 21, 24; Rom 1:2), Matthew alerts us to expect something other than the verbatim quotation of one particular Scripture: he is not just reproducing an OT text. The displacement of λεγόντων probably serves the same purpose. For although ὅτι *recitativum* is found in Matthew (e.g. 4:6; 21:16), our author shows a marked tendency to drop it from Mark (cf. Neiryneck, *Agreements*, PP. 213–16); and the unexpected replacement of λεγόντων—2:23 is the only formula quotation with ὅτι—must point to an unusual status *vis-à-vis* the other fulfilment citations. 26:54 supports this contention. ‘How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that (ὅτι) thus it is necessary to be?’ In this verse ὅτι introduces a remark of scriptural substance, not a sentence found in the OT, and this fact is in part signalled by the unspecified reference to ‘the Scriptures’ (plural). This offers something close to what we propose to find in 2:23: a quotation which rests upon or alludes to more than

²⁰⁹²⁸ C K N W Γ (Δ) 0233^{vi} 0250 f^{(1).13} 28 565 pm lat co have -ρεθ. P^{70vid} has -ρα. -ρετ appears in κ B D L 33 700 892 1241 1424 pm. The external evidence is rather evenly divided and a decision impossible—unless one prefers as a matter of course the testimony of κ and B.

²¹⁰Swete H. B. Swete, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London, 1927.

²¹¹LXX Septuagint

²¹²Luz U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 1. Teilband: Mt 1–7*, EKKNT I/1, Zürich, 1985.

²¹³²⁹ For names and details see Moore (v) and Soares Prabhu, pp. 197–201.

²¹⁴³⁰ See M. Avi-Yonah, ‘A List of Priestly Courses from Caesarea’, *IEJ* 12 (1962), pp. 137–9; idem, ‘The Caesarea Inscription of the Twenty-Four Priestly Courses’, in *The Teacher’s Yoke*, ed. E. J. Vardaman and J. L. Garrett, Waco, 1964, pp. 46–57.

one OT text ('the prophets') and whose wording does not exactly match any particular Scripture (ὅτι). The alternative is to suppose either that Matthew found 'he will be called a Nazarene' in a source and, not knowing whence it came, satisfied himself with a vague reference to 'the prophets' (so Lindars,²¹⁵ *Apologeti*²¹⁶, p. 196) or that the words come from a lost apocryphon (Chrysostom,²¹⁷ *Hom. on Mt*²¹⁸. 9:6; Bengel²¹⁹, p. 84). But for reasons soon evident, neither of these options is necessary.³²²⁰¹

In having no perfect OT parallel although prefaced by words which might be taken to indicate otherwise, Mt 2:23 is not alone. Ezra 9:11–12 quotes a command purportedly delivered to the prophets, but no such command is found in the OT. In the NT, Jn 7:38; Rom 11:8; and Jas 4:5 attribute to Scripture sentences that at best paraphrase the substance of several OT passages. There is also a rabbinic example in *b*²²¹. *Ketub.* 111a.

Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται. Even though grammatically awkward, the subject of this sentence appears to be Jesus, not Joseph. Compare the conclusion of chapter 1: 'he called his name Jesus'.³²²²²

Jesus' identity as Ναζωραῖος (so Mt 26:69 v. 1; 26:71; Lk 18:37; Jn 18:5, 7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 26:9) or Ναζαρηνός³²²³³ (so Mk 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk 4:34; 24:19; Jn 18:5 D) was already part of the pre-Matthean tradition. Hence our first question does not concern etymology but Matthew's interpretation. Of what OT text(s) are we to think?

²¹⁵Lindars, B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, London, 1961.

²¹⁶*Apologetic* B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, London, 1961.

²¹⁷Chrysostom, **John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (trans. of *Commentarius in sanctum Matthaeum Evangelistam*, in PG 57 and 58), in NPNF 10.

²¹⁸*Hom. on Mt.* **John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (trans. of *Commentarius in sanctum Matthaeum Evangelistam*, in PG 57 and 58), in NPNF 10.

²¹⁹Bengel **J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (trans. of *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, 1742), 2 vols., Philadelphia, 1864.

²²⁰³¹ According to E. Zuckschwerdt (v), p. 70, if Judg 13:5–7 be the text behind Mt 2:23 (see below), then ὅτι might not be part of the introductory formula but instead belong to the quotation (Judg 13:5 LXX B: ὅτι ναζιρ θεοῦ ἔσται). Yet this would leave us with another problem: why no λεγόντων? Still, it is just possible that an early scribe, finding 'through the prophets λεγόντων ὅτι' before him, did not recognize that ὅτι was part of the quotation and therefore omitted λεγόντων as redundant.

²²¹*b. Babylonian Talmud*

²²²³² Without real reason, Allen, pp. 17–18, supposed that the phrase might be a gloss. Cf. McNeile, p. 22.

²²³³³ Cf. the variation between Εσσαῖος and Εσσηνός in the mss. for Josephus, *Ant.* 13:311 and the different readings in Greek versions of the OT for 1 Chr 5:19 (Αγαρηνοί/Αγαραιοί) and 2 Esdr 1:8 (γ/τασβαρηνου/γανζαμβραιου).

(1) Mt 2:23 almost certainly has to do with a play on the word, *nāzîr*.³²²⁴⁴ (On the Nazarite, a holy person who consecrated himself or herself to the service of God by taking a special vow which required abstinence from wine and the keeping of uncut hair, see esp. Num 6; Judg 13:5–7; 16:17; Amos 2:11–12; 1 Macc. 3:49–52; Acts 18:18; 21:17–26; *m*²²⁵. *Nazir*).³²²⁶⁵ To begin with, there is in the LX²²⁷X an interchange between *ναζαραῖος θεοῦ* and *ἅγιος θεοῦ* and (see A and B for Judg 13:7; 16:17). This is significant because Jesus was known as ‘the holy one of God’ (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69; cf. Acts 3:14; 1 Jn 2:20; Rev 3:7). Moreover, in Mk 1:24 we find this: ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth (Ναζαρηνέ)? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are, the holy one of God’ (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ). Here ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ and ‘holy one of God’ are in parallel and we clearly have a word play: Jesus, the ‘holy one of God’ (= *nāzîr*), is from Nazareth.³²²⁸⁶ So already before Matthew—indeed, in one of his primary sources—‘holy one of God’ and ‘Nazarite’ and ‘Nazareth’ were associated. Then, secondly, in Luke’s infancy narrative words originally spoken of Samuel the Nazarite are spoken of Jesus (cf. 1 Sam 2:26 with Lk 2:52; 1 Sam 2:1–10 with Lk 1:46–55; 1 Sam 2:34 with Lk 2:12). Thus even though Jesus, no ascetic, hardly satisfied the OT requirements for being a Nazarite, this did not prevent his followers from thinking of him in such terms to some extent. Jesus was, after all, consecrated to God’s service, a bearer of the Spirit, and a charismatic leader. Beyond this, Jesus took an oath to refrain from drinking wine until the coming of the kingdom of God (Mk 14:25 = Mt 26:29), and shortly thereafter he refused the offer of wine mingled with myrrh (Mk 15:23; cf. Mt 27:48).³²²⁹⁷ Thirdly, if *Ναζωραῖος* is to be related to *ναζαραῖος*, the precise form of Mt 2:23 can be explained. Isa 4:3 M²³⁰T reads, ‘He will be called holy’.³²³¹⁸ Now we have already noted the interchange between ‘Nazarite’ and ‘holy one of God’ in the LX²³²X. If ‘Nazarite’ is substituted for ‘holy’ in Isa 4:3, the resulting sentence is, ‘he will be called a Nazarite’. This seems too close to Matthew’s line to be coincidence. We should probably conclude that before us is an involved word play. ‘He will be called a Nazarene’ depends upon (a) the equation of ‘Nazarite’ and ‘holy’ one of God’; (b) the substitution of ‘Nazarite’ for ‘holy’ in Isa 4:3 (cf. the LX²³³X variants in Judges); and (c) the substitution of ‘Nazarene’ for ‘Nazarite’. Although complex, this conclusion is consistent with our interpretation of the introductory formula: the

²²⁴³⁴ So also McNeile, p. 22; Schaeder (v), p. 883; Schweizer (v); Sanders (v); Zuckschwerdt (v)—citing other authorities in agreement (p. 69, n. 19) and calling special attention to the possible allusion to Judg 13:5 in Mt 1:21b—; Soares Prabhu, pp. 205–7; Brown, *Messiah*, p. 224; Allan (v).

²²⁵*m. Mishnah*

²²⁶³⁵ See SB 2, pp. 747–51, and J. C. Rylaarsdam, *IDB* 3, s.v. (with literature).

²²⁷LXX Septuagint

²²⁸³⁶ See F. Mussner, ‘Ein Wortspiel in Mk 1:24?’, *BZ* 4 (1960), pp. 285–6; Schweizer (v).

²²⁹³⁷ On the possibility of connecting Mk 14:25 and 15:23 with a Nazarite vow see M. Wojciechowski, ‘Le naziréat et la Passion (Mc 14:25a; 15:23)’, *Bib* 65 (1984), pp. 94–6.

²³⁰MT Massoretic Text

²³¹³⁸ LXX: ‘they will be called holy’ (ἅγιοι κληθήσονται).

²³²LXX Septuagint

²³³LXX Septuagint

use of ὄτι instead of λεγόντων hints that the following quotation cannot be found word for word in the OT; it is at best a free rendering.³²³⁴⁹

Our conclusion is not to be resisted by the doubt often entertained over the derivation of Ναζωραῖος and its (latinized?) synonym, Ναζαρηνός. It might be remarked that the two words are not naturally derived from *nāzîr*. But this is to confuse the issue. The etymology of Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός and the question of what Christians made of the two words are two different problems with not necessarily one answer.

(2) Many have found the key to Mt 2:23 in Isa 11:1: 'A shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (*nēšer*) will grow out of his roots'.⁴²³⁵⁰ An allusion to this verse is favoured by several considerations. First, Isa 11:1 has to do with the Davidic line, a leading theme of Mt 1–2. Secondly, in Mt 1:23, Isa 7:14 is quoted, and the evangelist could readily have identified the 'branch' of Isa 11:1 with the 'Immanuel' of Isa 7:14. Thirdly, Isa 11:1–10 appears to have been a source of early Christian testimonia (Rom 15:12; 1 Pet 4:14; Rev 5:5; Dodd,²³⁶ *Scriptures*²³⁷, p. 83); and 11:10 is quoted—albeit in Greek—in 12:21; further, Matthew may have recalled 11:2 ('the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him') when he wrote of Jesus' baptism. Later Christian writers also interpreted Isa 11:1 ff. of Jesus (Justin, *1 Apol.* 32; *Dial.* 126; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3:9:3)—and the targum refers it to the Messiah. Fourthly, *šemaḥ*, a synonym for *nēšer*, appears in several OT messianic prophecies: Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. By way of this second word, Matthew could have thought of the 'branch' as belonging to several prophetic disclosures, whence the plural 'prophets' of 2:23.⁴²³⁸¹ Fifthly, *nēšer* was used of the Messiah in Judaism (S²³⁹B 1, p. 94, to which add *T. Jud.*²⁴⁰ 24:6 and 4QpIsa^a 3:15–26).⁴²⁴¹² Sixthly, *nšr*, which is vocalized in the M²⁴²T as *nēšer*, may have been pronounced as *Νάζαρ* in first century Hebrew (so Rüger (v), p. 262)—and this is strikingly close to the form for Nazareth in Mt 4:13 and Lk 4:16

²³⁴³⁹ Most who see *nāzîr* behind Mt 2:23 wish to see an allusion to Judg 16:17: 'I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother's womb' (so e.g. Soares Prabhu and Brown). This is unnecessary. Isa 4:3 is the only text which needs to be brought into the picture. Judg 16:17 is not the only OT text about Nazarites, and the variation between 'Nazarite' and 'holy one of God' in the LXX tradition occurs in more than one place. Interesting nonetheless is Zuckschwerdt's (v) explanation of the vocalization of Ναζωραῖος: Matthew read the *nzr* of Judg 13:5, 7 and 16:17 with the vowels of *qādôš*, 'holy'.

²³⁵⁴⁰ So B. Weiss, pp. 57–8; Schlatter, p. 49; Schniewind, p. 20; SB I, pp. 93–4; Caspari (v); Gundry, *Commentary*, p. 40; Rüger (v).

²³⁶Dodd, C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, London, 1952.

²³⁷*Scriptures* C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, London, 1952.

²³⁸⁴¹ Cf. Gundry, *Commentary*, p. 40. Note also the recurrence of another synonym, *sōreš* (cf. Isa 11:1) in Isa 53:2.

²³⁹SB H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols., Munich, 1921–1961.

²⁴⁰*T. Jud.* Testament of Judah

²⁴¹⁴² *nēšer* also occurs in non-messianic contexts in the OT: Isa 14:19; 60:21; Dan 11:7. Note should also be taken of its non-messianic yet pregnant usage in 1QH 6:15; 7:19; 8:6–10.

²⁴²MT Massoretic Text

(Ναζαρά). Finally, in *b*²⁴³. *Sanh.* 43a, in a debate between Jewish judges and five disciples of Jesus, one disciple, by name *Nēšer*, defends himself by citing Isa 11:1.⁴²⁴⁴³ The judges respond by citing Isa 14:19 ('you are cast out, away from your sepulchre, like a loathed branch'). Although unhistorical and late, this rabbinic tale probably reflects the ease with which 'Jesus the Nazarene' (*Nôšrî* in the Talmud) or 'the Nazarenes' (*Nôšrîm* in the Talmud; cf. Acts 24:5) could be associated with Isa 11:1.

Because the evidence for supposing 'Nazarite' and Isa 4:3 to lie behind 'he will be called a Nazarene' is so strong, it is a bit disconcerting to find so many reasons supporting the dependence of Mt 2:23 on Isa 11:1. Perhaps we should speak of a secondary allusion. Might our evangelist have found 'Nazarene' to be coincidentally similar to more than one OT key word or text? This possibility is the more inviting since 'he will be called holy' (Isa 4:3) follows immediately upon a prophecy about the 'branch' (Isa 4:2). (The targum takes the *šemaḥ* of Isa 4:2 to be the Messiah.)

Against finding an echo of Isa 11:1 in Mt 2:23, one might, following Jerome, remark that the *šādē* (š) in *nēšer* does not match the zeta (ζ) in *Ναζωραῖος*, so the one cannot be derived from the other. (The Semitic š is regularly represented by the Greek sigma (ς).) This observation, even if it were correct, which it is not,⁴²⁴⁵⁴ simply muddles etymology with the Matthean interpretation. Whatever its origin, *Ναζωραῖος* was to hand in the tradition; and our initial question, as already stated, is what Matthew made of it, not how the word came into being. Which is to say: even if *Ναζωραῖος* was not in the first place formed with an eye towards Isa 11:1, the word may well have prompted the gospel writer to think of Isaiah's *nēšer*. A second objection is also less than decisive. It is this: Isa 11:1 cannot be the key text because while the connexion between *nēšer* and *Ναζωραῖος* appears only to one knowing Hebrew, Matthew is writing in Greek. Yet this is to overlook Matthew's procedure elsewhere. Already in Mt 1 he has apparently used gematria based upon the numerical value of *dwd*. Likewise, 'you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (1:21) depends upon a pun apparent only in Hebrew. So Matthew was not above scattering items in his Greek text whose deeper meaning could only be appreciated by those with a knowledge of Hebrew. Indeed, it might even be that Matthew found authorial delight in hiding 'bonus points'⁴²⁴⁶⁵ for those willing and able to look a little beneath the gospel's surface.

(3) Two other passages from Isaiah have merited attention. The *nšyry* of Isa 49:6 is traditionally read as a passive participle. This results in the sentence, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel'. *nšyry* could, however, be construed as an adjectival form of *nēšer* (cf. Isa 11:1) or as a patronymic, 'Nazarene'. In this case, the verse could be referred to Jesus: 'and a Nazarene to restore Israel'.

²⁴³*b. Babylonian Talmud*

²⁴⁴⁴³ Discussion in J. Maier, *Jesus von Nazaret in der talmudischen Überlieferung*, Darmstadt, 1978, pp. 232–5; also Klausner, pp. 28–30.

²⁴⁵⁴⁴ See Moore (v), pp. 427–9; Schaefer (v), p. 884.

²⁴⁶⁴⁵ This is France's phrase; cf. 'Quotations' (v), p. 250. He rightly sees the possibility for more than one level of meaning.

Isa 42:6 might also be pertinent. 'I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and have kept you' (*'eššarkā*). The object of this declaration is the servant.

Favouring an allusion to Isa 42:6 and 49:6 are four observations. The first is Matthew's general interest in the servant songs of Isaiah.⁴²⁴⁷⁶ The next is the use of 'call' in both passages (LX²⁴⁸X only for 49:6). A third is the occurrence of 'a light to the nations' in both 42:6 and 49:6, a phrase used of Jesus in Lk 2:32. The final fact is the early and well attested Christian interest in the first few verses of Isa 42 and in all of Isa 49: these passages were important sources for early Christian *testimonia* (Mt 12:18–21; Lk 2:32; Acts 13:47; 17:24–25; 26:18; 2 Cor 6:2; Gal 1:15; Phil 2:16; Rev 7:16; 12:12).

Considering these several facts, one can hardly exclude altogether the possibility of an allusion to Isa 42:6 or 49:6 or both. Yet having already concluded that Isa 4:3 and perhaps 11:1 lie in the background, too many texts are beginning to come into the picture. For this reason we are forced to issue a verdict of unproven for the dependence of Mt 2:23 on Isa 42:6 and 49:6.

(4) Even less persuasive is the attempt to find the explanation of our crux in Jer 31:6–7: 'There shall be a day when watchmen (*nōšērîm*) will call in the hill country of Ephraim, "Arise and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God". For thus says the Lord, "Sing aloud ... and say, 'The Lord has saved his people, the remnant of Israel' ".⁴²⁴⁹⁷ Although Matthew has already quoted from this chapter (31:15 in Mt 2:18), and although, as we have argued, the evangelist may have seen all of Jer 31 as a typological forecast of the Messiah's advent, and although 'The Lord has saved his people' recalls Mt 1:21, no material connexion obtains between 'watchmen' and Jesus of Nazareth. Contrast Isa 4:3, which appears in a prophecy about the 'branch', and Isa 11:1, which has to do with the offspring of David, and Isa 42:6 and 49:6, which have to do with the servant of the Lord. If Matthew expected his readers to catch an allusion to Jer 31:6, did he not expect too much?

(5) Gen 49:26 reads, 'May they [the blessings of Jacob] be on the head of Joseph and on the brow [or: crown] of him who was separate from [or: a prince (*nzyr*) among] his brothers' (cf. Deut 33:16). *Sipre* on Deut 33:16 and *Gen. Rab.* on 49:26 interpret this to mean that Joseph was a 'Nazarite'. But *nzyr* could be read as 'prince'. A Joseph—Jesus typology could then make Jesus the prince among his brothers, the wearer of the crown (cf. Klausner²⁵⁰, *Jesus*, p. 230). There is, however, no trace of such a typology in Matthew (Jesus is descended from Judah: 1:3); and Gen 49:26 does not seem to have been interpreted of the Messiah in Judaism.

Having now examined the possible texts upon which Mt 2:23 might draw, we may sum up thus. The primary dependence is upon Isa 4:3, with the substitution of 'Nazareth' for 'holy'. There is perhaps also a secondary allusion to Isa 11:1. Possible but unproven is dependence upon Isa 42:6 or 49:6. Improbable is any allusion to either Jer 31:6–7 or Gen 49:26. (Our examination also renders problematic another interpretation, one which goes back to Jerome

²⁴⁷⁴⁶ See esp. D. Hill, 'Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology', *JSNT* 6 (1980), pp. 2–16. In favour of the influence of Isa 42:6 and 49:6 on Mt 2:23 is Gärtner (v).

²⁴⁸LXX Septuagint

²⁴⁹⁴⁷ See Zolli, 'Nazarenus' (v) and Albright and Mann, pp. 20–2.

²⁵⁰Klausner Klausner, J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. of Hebrew original, 1922), New York and London, 1925.

and was popular in the nineteenth century and which should be noted for the sake of completeness.⁴²⁵¹⁸ Jn 1:46 implies the meanness of Nazareth (cf. perhaps Jn 19:19 and Acts 24:5); and it seems likely that the inhabitants of Nazareth—and therefore Jesus—were looked down upon because of their humble residence. Thus ‘Nazareth’ might be connected with reproach and in this sense be regarded as the object of prophecy, specifically, those prophecies about the suffering servant who is scorned and despised by men.)

Having considered Matthew’s interpretation of Ναζωραῖος, it remains to remark briefly on the etymology of the word and its variant, Ναζαρηνός. The most straightforward explanation would seem to be derivation from the name of a town, Nazareth: Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός = ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ (cf. Mt 21:11; Jn 1:45; Acts 10:38). This would fit in with the common Jewish custom of distinguishing individuals according to the place from which they come (as in Mk 15:21 and 43), and it is Matthew’s assumption. There is further no difficulty standing in the way of accepting this account for Ναζαρηνός; for Ναζαρά was one form of ‘Nazareth’ (see on 4:13), and elsewhere in the NT we find Μαγδαληνή for one from Magdala and Γαδαρηνός for one from Gadara (Mt 8:28; 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mk 15:40; etc.). But Ναζωραῖος is problematic. Among other things, the ω does not well match the second α in the various forms of ‘Nazareth’,⁴²⁵²⁹ and the θ or τ ending in four of the five forms of ‘Nazareth’ is not represented.⁵²⁵³⁰ Moreover, (a) Ναζωραῖος resembles Σαδδουκαῖος and Φαρισαῖος, names of religious groups, (b) in Acts 24:5 Christians are ἡ τῶν Ναζωραίων αἵρεσις,⁵²⁵⁴¹ and (c) there is a similarity between Ναζωραῖος and one of the names of the Mandeans, *nāṣōrāyē* ‘(guardians’, ‘observants’)—all of which has led some to think Jesus and perhaps John the Baptist belonged to a pre-Christian sect, the ‘Nazarenes’ (see n. 2²⁵⁵⁹). This, however, is to speculate unduly, for there is no insuperable difficulty in accepting a derivation of Ναζωραῖος from Ναζαρέθ or its Semitic equivalent, as several authorities have demonstrated.⁵²⁵⁶² So it seems more prudent to accept

²⁵¹⁴⁸ Cf. Zahn, p. 117; Lagrange, p. 39; Tasker, p. 45; Bonnard, p. 30; France, ‘Quotations’ (v), pp. 247–8. We pass by Eusebius’ explanation (*Dem. ev.* 7:2), which links Mt 2:23 with Lev 21:12. For still other accounts of Mt 2:23 see Strecker (*Weg*, pp. 61–3: a Matthean formulation without any OT textual basis), Smith (v) (there is a connexion with Lam 4:7), and Rothfuchs (p. 67: the reference is back to the formula quotations in 2:6, 15, and 18, to the providential hand of God there implied).

²⁵²⁴⁹ Cf. Black, p. 198. But Schaeder (v), p. 882, argues first that the second α in Ναζαρηνός reproduces the ‘full’ form of a *šewa* vowel and then gives examples of ω for the *šewa* simplex, which explains the form, Ναζωραῖος. And according to Rüger (v), pp. 261–2, a parallel to the variation between Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός may be found in the alternative forms of the place name, *dābērat/dābōr*.

²⁵³⁵⁰ Cf. Kennard, ‘Capernaum’ (v), p. 131. But *nāṣōr* for ‘Nazareth’ may have been known; see Rüger (v).

²⁵⁴⁵¹ Syrian Christians adopted this as their self-appellation. Furthermore, a Jewish-Christian sect descended from John the Baptist’s followers reportedly was known as *Νασαραῖοι*; see Epiphanius, *Haer.* 18:1; 29:1; 29:6–7.

²⁵⁵²⁹ For names and details see Moore (v) and Soares Prabhu, pp. 197–201.

²⁵⁶⁵² Schlatter, pp. 49–50; Moore (v); Albright (v); Schaeder (v); Rüger (v).

the simplest solution: Ναζωραῖος = ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέθ. This entails further that any connexion with *nāz̄r* or *nēšer* should be regarded not as primary but as secondary, the result of homeophony noticed once Ναζωραῖος and Ναζαρηνός had already come into existence.

(iv) *Concluding Observations*

(1) The special Matthean concerns which run through Mt 2:1–12 (see above, pp. 252–4) are also to the fore in 2:13–23. Even the theme of Davidic sonship continues in so far as stress is laid on Jesus' kingship; and perhaps the notion of Jesus as saviour of the Gentiles is implicit in the move to Galilee (v. 22), for in Matthew Galilee is 'of the Gentiles' (4:15).⁵²⁵⁷³ Particularly prominent in the second half of chapter 2 is the extension of the geographical interest, an interest which marks all of Mt 2 and which shows up the unity of the chapter. The movements of the messianic family are given in detail and each is reinforced by an appeal to Scripture. (All the formula quotations in Mt 2 include place names; contrast 1:23.) Thus we learn not only the whence and whereto of the Messiah (Bethlehem and Nazareth), but also where he was in between (Egypt) and what Scriptures were thereby fulfilled. The importance of the OT for Matthew could hardly be made more evident. One gains the impression that, in his mind, every significant detail of the Messiah's life and ministry could be found—foretold or foreshadowed—in the OT.

(2) There is in 2:13–23 a Jesus/Israel typology, a typology which will be taken up once again in chapters 3 and 4 (where Jesus passes through the waters of baptism and then enters into the desert). In 2:15, for instance, the 'son' of Hos 11:1, originally Israel, becomes Jesus. And behind the quotation of Jer 31:15 in 2:18 there apparently lies, as argued, a typological equation of Jesus with Israel: in Jeremiah's prophecy of return for the exiles Matthew discerns a cipher for the Messiah's return to Israel. We may say, then, that while Jesus culminates Israel's history in chapter 1, in chapter 2 he repeats it. Jesus is not only the last redeemer who is like the first redeemer, Moses, he is not only the messianic king who is like the great king, David, but he is also like Israel in that he experiences exodus and exile and return; and Scriptures originally pertaining to Israel can be transferred to him.⁵²⁵⁸⁴

(3) At the end of Mt 1–2 one is left with the impression that, at least concerning salvation-history, human choice matters little. Rather does all come down to the divine will. The events and movements of 1:2–2:23 are 'determined' by providence.⁵²⁵⁹⁵ There are, in Mt 1–2, five formula quotations, and these, taken together, seemingly imply that the unprecedented occurrences surrounding the Messiah's advent were 'determined' long before they happened. Moreover, to make sure that all goes according to plan, there is the angel of the Lord, who,

²⁵⁷⁵³ It is questionable whether the references to Egypt further the Gentile theme; cf. Luz I, p. 129.

²⁵⁸⁵⁴ Brown, *Messiah*, p. 217, observes that the three names in the formula quotations in 2:1–18—namely, Bethlehem, the city of David, Egypt, the land of the Exodus, and Ramah, the mourning place of the exile—evoke the whole history of Israel by calling to mind three decisive moments in her history.

²⁵⁹⁵⁵ For this and what follows see K. R. R. Gros Louis, 'Different Ways of Looking at the Birth of Jesus', *Bible Review* 1 (1985), pp. 33–40.

when someone is not acting out the script, will intervene to put things right (1:20; 2:12). Our gospel's 'deterministic' interpretation of history also seems manifest in its proem, the genealogy, in which we find the ancestral line of Jesus neatly divided into 3 × 14 generations, and in which the movement towards the Messiah appears inevitable. In short, then, one comes away from Matthew's first two chapters with the feeling that history is divinely run from first to last. At the same time, it must be said that the evangelist was nevertheless not naively persuaded that 'God's on his throne—all's right with the world'. In 2:16–18 there is a terrible tragedy, the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem; and Matthew, by substituting τότε for ἴνα in 2:17, betrays his reluctance to ascribe suffering or evil outcomes to the Lord God. Beyond this, there runs throughout Matthew's gospel a strong eschatological expectation—a sure sign of dissatisfaction with the world as it is. The conclusion, therefore, is that while history is, for our evangelist, the arena of God's mighty acts, it is also the arena of much else: there is darkness as well as light. God's will is not always done (cf. 6:10b), and this will be true until the end of the age comes²⁶⁰

22 The present tense of Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει, "Archelaus reigns," reflects the direct discourse of the original report. Joseph's fear of Archelaus appears to have been well grounded, as the son of Herod tended to follow the ways of his father. His subjects managed eventually to have him deposed by the Romans in A.D. 6.

The same words, χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ, "having been warned in a dream," are found in v 12. By means of this last occurrence of the dream motif, Matthew again stresses the continuing divine protection of the child (cf. 1:20; 2:13). It was God's will that they go to Galilee. To be sure, another son of Herod, Herod Antipas, ruled as ethnarch over Galilee and Perea. But he was a more tolerant ruler, and Galilee in his day became known for revolutionary sentiments that would never have been tolerated by his father.

In the statement ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας, "he departed to the region of Galilee," the narrative reaches its last stage. As pointed out above (*Form/Structure/Setting* §C), in the sequence Israel-Galilee-Nazareth (v 23), we move from the general to the more specific. It is in keeping with this sequence that Matthew, employs τὰ μέρη, lit²⁶¹. "the regions," in referring

²⁶⁰ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*](#), vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 272–283.

²⁶¹lit. literally

to Galilee. The mention of Galilee is theologically important for Matthew as we shall see in 4:12–16. There he again writes, now of Jesus, ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, “he departed into Galilee” (4:12). It is in Galilee that he inaugurates his ministry in fulfillment of Isa 9:1 (which Matthew then cites). Galilee’s large population of Gentiles symbolizes the universal significance Matthew sees in Jesus.

23 κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ, “he dwelt in a city called Nazareth.” The “city” is unknown from the OT or any sources earlier than the NT documents. Popular opinion in the metropolis of Jerusalem concerning this northern town may well be summarized by the question put by Nathaniel in John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Matthew now faces the difficulty that the Messiah was brought up in such an unpromising location. But he is able, by some rabbinic wordplay, to turn an apparent disadvantage into an advantage. In Matthew’s affirmations of Nazareth with its negative connotation, Grundmann and Tasker (depending on Jerome) see a deliberate allusion to Jesus as the despised servant of God, but the connection is not compelling. A further possibility (Lindars, *NT Apologetic*, 195–96; Hill) related to the servant theme is found in the revocalizing of the consonants *nšr* (נצר) in Isa 49:6 (cf. 42:6, with *nšr* in the sense of “protect”) with the resultant reading “branch” (see below) or even “Nazorean.” This is an attractive speculation and has the added advantage of an obviously messianic context, but it remains at best a guess.

ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν, “so that what was spoken through the prophets was fulfilled.” In the fourth fulfillment formula quotation (and fifth OT quotation) of the nativity narrative, Matthew presents words not found in the OT or indeed in any pre-Christian extrabiblical writings known to us. It cannot be accidental that the introductory formula here is the most general of all the formulae used by Matthew (see *Introduction*). In five of the ten formulae quotations, Matthew gives a prophet’s name; in the remaining five he invariably refers to “the prophet” (τοῦ προφήτου). Only here among the formula quotations does he use the plural τῶν προφητῶν, perhaps implying that he has in view a motif common to several prophets (cf. 26:54, 56), although the specific wording is found in none (cf. the same phenomenon in Ezek 9:10–11; for rabbinic parallels, see Str-²⁶²B 1:92–93). The proposal that Matthew quotes a source unknown to us, although possible, is hardly necessary. What is found in the prophets is generally ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται, “that he shall be called a Nazarene.” Matthew’s introductory formula, lacking the expected λεγόντων, “saying,” does not in fact point to a specific quotation consisting of the words “he shall be called a Nazarene.” The ὅτι, “that,” is thus not, as it is elsewhere (e.g., 4:6), a recitative ὅτι that introduces quoted words. If Matthew is able eventually to account for Galilee (4:12–16) as the place of Jesus’ ministry, he is able also to account for Nazareth as the place where Jesus lived. Here Matthew’s ingenuity is impressive. The key to understanding what he says lies in the similarity between Ναζαρέτ, “Nazareth,” and Ναζωραῖος, “Nazarene.” The difficulty lies in discerning his intent behind Ναζωραῖος; and this is further compounded by the serious uncertainty about the spelling of Nazareth.

²⁶²Str-B H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck’sche, 1926–28)

The end of the name is uncertain; in the NT the name occurs mainly in the form Ναζαρέτ or Ναζαρέθ, but twice as Ναζαρά (cf. Matt 4:13). More problematic is the fact that the middle consonant is rendered by a ζ in Greek. Is this meant to reflect a צ? (The usual Greek rendering of צ is by ς.) During his ministry Jesus acquired the title “the Nazarene” (Mark regularly uses the form Ναζαρηνός; Matthew always uses Ναζωραῖος, even in passages drawn from Mark; Luke uses both forms). Matthew therefore means at least that Jesus was called “the Nazarene” (as were his followers after him: Acts 24:5, τῆς τῶν Ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως, “the sect of the Nazarenes”). It is doubtful that the omission of the definite article by Matthew is significant. Matthew thus associates the title with the name of Jesus’ hometown Nazareth, despite the phonetic difficulty of transliterating the צ with a ζ, instead of the usual ς (thus Albright, Schaeder, Moore, Schlatter, Str-²⁶³B, Luz).

But Matthew almost certainly means more than this. We may presume that the reference to “the prophets” has something to say theologically. Two possibilities have been favored by scholars—namely, Matthew means to allude to (1) Jesus as a “Nazirite,” or (2) Jesus as the promised *nēser* (נצר), the messianic branch.

(1) The meaning of “Nazirite” (favored by Bonnard, Sanders, Schweizer, Schaeder, Zuckschwerdt, Davies-Allison) is dependent on the passage in Num 6:1–21 (cf. Judg 13:5, 7), where a person separates himself from others through a special vow involving abstinence from strong drink, not cutting his hair, and avoiding contact with the dead. Although the description may fit John the Baptist (cf. Luke 1:15), it seems singularly inappropriate for Jesus, who, according to Matthew, was accused of being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (11:19) and who raised the dead by touching them (9:23–26). Because of a reference in Epiphanius (*Haer.* 29.6) to a Jewish sect of *Nasaraioi* deriving from the disciples of John the Baptist (and a related self-designation of the Mandaeans, *nāṣōrayyā*), it has been argued that Matthew’s word originally described a larger movement (“observants”; from נצר, *nāṣar*, “to guard, protect, observe”), out of which Christianity eventually came; they were called Nazarenes because of the similarity of their perspective to that of John the Baptist (see Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 2nd ed., 198–200). But it is highly doubtful that this is what Matthew meant by the word since he hardly presents Jesus as primarily an observant (cf. 11:12). Since *Nāzī* becomes synonymous with “holy,” it has also been argued that it is therefore an appropriate designation for Jesus. Thus Brown (*Birth*; see too Schweizer and Zuckschwerdt) explains 2:23 by a combination of two texts involving a synonymy between “holy one” and “Nazirite.” Isa 4:3 (LX²⁶⁴X), “they [M²⁶⁵T “he”] will be called holy,” is thought to be combined with Judg 16:17 (LX²⁶⁶X), “I am a holy one [M²⁶⁷T and

²⁶³Str-B H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck’sche, 1926–28)

²⁶⁴LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁶⁵MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

²⁶⁶LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁶⁷MT The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

LX²⁶⁸X^A, “Nazirite”] of God.” Matthew then understood Nazirite for “holy” in Isa 4:3. But while “holy one” is an appropriate description of the Messiah (cf. Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34), this cannot be construed as “holiness” in the Nazirite sense. Appeal has been made to the extraordinary birth of Jesus and his consecration to the service of God in his mother’s womb as further parallels. But if this is what Matthew had in mind, the “quotation” should have appeared in the birth narrative of chap. 1. A further difficulty in this view is the LX²⁶⁹X spelling of Nazirite (Ναζιραῖος) which leaves the ω of Matthew’s spelling unaccounted for, although this is not insurmountable given the phonetic liberties that were allowable. The suggestion of some that the ω is to be traced back to the vowels of *Qādôš*, which were put with the consonants *nšr*, is only clever speculation.

(2) The most likely play on words in Matthew’s mind is in the similarity between the Hebrew word for “branch,” *nēšer*, and Nazareth. This view (Black, *Aramaic Approach*; Stendahl, *School*; Luz; Davies-Allison, but as a “secondary allusion”) traces Matthew’s “quotation” back to Isa 11:1: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch [*nēšer*; LX²⁷⁰X ἄνθος] shall grow out of his roots.” The distinct advantage of this view is the messianic content of the Isaiah passage, which in turn should be related to the quotation of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23. The messianic figure of Isa 11:1 is the Emmanuel of Isa 7:14. Phonetically, the Hebrew of *Našrat* (Nazareth) and *nēšer* have the same middle consonant; that consonant is reflected in the ζ of the two words in our verse. To be sure, the ω of Ναζωραῖος remains without satisfactory explanation, as in every reckoning. The word *nēšer*, although only occurring in Isa 11:1, became an important designation of the Messiah in the rabbinic literature and targums, and was also interpreted messianically by the Qumran community (1Q²⁷¹H 6:15; 7:6, 8, 10, 19). Other prophets also spoke similarly of a messianic “branch” or “shoot,” although using different words (cf. Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12). These words form a unified concept in looking to the fulfillment of the promises, and the mention of one doubtless brought the others to mind automatically (see Str-²⁷²B 1:94). This may well be the explanation of the plural “prophets” in Matthew’s introductory formula.

If this theory is correct, then we must believe that Matthew’s Greek readers did not realize the wordplay until they became acquainted with the meaning of *nēšer* in Hebrew. This, however, is precisely the kind of material that is quickly passed on orally and may have become common knowledge in the community. In this connection it should also be remembered that this is a secondary meaning. The primary meaning, Nazareth/Nazarene, is evident to every Greek reader. If this messianic *nēšer* underlies Matthew’s Ναζωραῖος, it is doubtful that further parallels with the verb *nāšar* (“watch, observe, keep” in Isa 42:6; 49:6), as argued by

²⁶⁸LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁶⁹LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁷⁰LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

²⁷¹1QH Hôdāyôt (*Thanksgiving Hymns*) from Qumran Cave 1

²⁷²Str-B H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck’sche, 1926–28)

Gärtner, were really in Matthew's mind. They point rather to the exegete's ingenuity as much as to the complex interrelationship of messianic ideas in the prophets.

Explanation

The response of Herod to the infant Christ stands in intentionally sharp contrast with that of the magi in the preceding passage (2:1–12). The message of the gospel demands decision and necessitates a division between those who accept and reject that message—a motif that will occupy Matthew throughout his narrative. In Herod's attempt to kill the infant King, we encounter evil for the first time in the narrative. In Matthew's perspective, evil continually stands in opposition to the purposes of God, who in Christ brings the kingdom. The resistance to the Christ comes to a climax in the crucifixion narrative of which, to some extent, our passage is an anticipation. At the same time, abundantly evident in our passage is the protection of the holy child by divine guidance. The gracious purposes of God cannot be thwarted; neither the bondage of Egypt nor the tragedy of the exile could thwart them. In the history of Israel, God repeatedly brought salvation to his people, and he has now brought them to the time of fulfillment—eschatological fulfillment in one who relives, sums up, and brings to fruition all the history and experience of his people. Thus the events that surround this child are related to all that preceded, as fulfillments of earlier anticipations. The messianic Branch, the promised descendant of David, toward whom all pointed, is now in the world. He comes, as did his people, out of Egypt to the promised land, through the trauma of the exile, to Galilee, breaking forth light to those sitting in darkness, as the prophet had foretold, to dwell in the unlikely town of Nazareth and so to be known as the Nazarene. Thus, according to Matthew, the plan of God unfolds. Nothing has happened by accident—all is in its proper place as it must be when the sovereign God brings salvation.²⁷³

2:22 The present tense of βασιλεύει (lit²⁷⁴. 'he reigns') is not a historic present; it reflects the keeping of original tenses for the indirect report of what has been heard (analogous to the same phenomenon in indirect speech). The breadth of the term 'Israel' means that Matthew

²⁷³ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 1–13](#), vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 39–42.

²⁷⁴lit. literally

can present vv. 22–23 as a fine-tuning of the imprecise directive of v. 20. Where in Israel? Not in Judea; rather, somewhere in Galilee. Joseph’s choice lands finally on Nazareth. After Herod’s death his territory was divided. Archelaus was made Tetrarch of Judea and was a true son of his father.¹⁷²⁷⁵⁸ Another son of Herod, Antipas, ruled in Galilee, and both John and Jesus were to have dealings with him at a later stage.¹⁷²⁷⁶⁹ But a move away from Bethlehem was prudent, and Antipas was a less threatened ruler. Galilee enters Matthew’s story as a less dangerous place to be than Judea; the larger shape of Matthew’s story will bear out this initial impression.

ἀκούσας (‘having heard’) is used to point to Joseph’s motivation, as it has been earlier for Herod’s (v. 3).¹⁸²⁷⁷⁰ It is also one of a series of terms which creates a strong structural link between vv. 22–23 and 4:12–14: ἀκούσας ... ὅτι ... ἀνεχώρησεν ... εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν καὶ ... ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς ... πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τοῦ προφήτου (‘having heard ... that ... he departed ... to Galilee and ... he came and dwelt in ... [so that] what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled’).¹⁸²⁷⁸¹ 2:22–23 is also linked back to 2:15 and 1:22 by the use of the prophetic fulfilment formula and back to 2:19, 13, 12 and 1:20 by the dream revelation motif.¹⁸²⁷⁹² The high proportion of language which is shared here is one of the reasons for suspecting total Matthean creation. Most likely, Matthew thinks of vv. 22–23 as a supplement to vv. 19–21, not as a quite separate unit.¹⁸²⁸⁰³ The addition of vv. 22–23 strengthens the measure of parallelism with 1:18–25 (formula quotation), 2:1–12 (closely linked dream revelation verbally, departure statement), 2:13–15 (formula quotation, departure statement), and 2:16–18 (formula quotation).

If we take Matthew’s use of ἀπελθεῖν (‘to depart’) seriously, then Joseph would have had to have travelled to Galilee without entering Judea. Also, the time frame for hearing about Archelaus and the second dream revelation of v. 22 would need to be placed between the

²⁷⁵¹⁷⁸ His reign is said to have been inaugurated with the slaughter of 3,000 people (Jos., *War* 17.342–44). Strictly speaking, Matthew should not have used βασιλεύει (lit. ‘He reigns as king’) for Archelaus as Tetrarch, but, for the purposes of Matthew’s narrative, there is the same conflict of interests for Archelaus as there had been for Herod, and Matthew feels no need to draw attention to the difference of status between the two figures (there is a similar problem at Mt. 14:9).

²⁷⁶¹⁷⁹ See Mt. 4:12; 14:1, 3, 6; Lk. 3:19; 13:31; 23:7, 8, 11, 12, 15; etc.

²⁷⁷¹⁸⁰ ἐφοβήθη (‘he was afraid’) for Joseph also corresponds to ἐπαράχθη (‘he was disturbed’) for Herod.

²⁷⁸¹⁸¹ Note also that both formula citations deal with a location. It might well be that Matthew is also encouraging his readers to see a parallel between the move to Galilee based on the threat posed by Archelaus in 2:22–23 and the return to Galilee based on the threat implied by John’s arrest in 4:12–14. (In the latter case the threatening ruler is actually also ruler of Galilee, but this need not affect the parallelism at the literary level.)

²⁷⁹¹⁸² The link between Mt. 2:22 and 2:12 is particularly close: they have in common χρηματισθεῖς ... κατ’ ὄναρ ... ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὴν ... (‘warned ... in a dream ... they departed to the’). For a more detailed statement about the relationship between the forms of the dream revelations and the likely source implications see the comments at 2:12.

²⁸⁰¹⁸³ The very abbreviated form in which the dream revelation is presented allows it to function as little more than a footnote to that in Mt. 2:19–20.

getting up and taking of v. 21 and the entry into Israel at the end of the same verse. The departure statement at the end of v. 22 then becomes a reiteration of 'entered the land of Israel'. (The translation above reflects this approach.) The alternative is that ἀπελθεῖν is not a well-chosen verb for the role which Matthew needs it to play and that the flow of thought assumes a verb meaning something like 'remain', 'live', '(re-)settle'.

On the question of harmonisation with Luke here see the remarks at v. 14.

2:23 Fifteen miles to the west of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth was a quite insignificant town in biblical times and is never mentioned in the OT. Projections from archaeological evidence suggest a maximum population of no more than 500.¹⁸²⁸¹⁴

Each of the three subsections of 2:13–23 ends with one of Matthew's formula quotations (on the formula quotations in general see at 1:22). The formula here is distinctive in three respects: only here do we find the plural 'prophets', a use of ὅτι, and the failure to provide an opening λέγοντος (lit²⁸². 'saying', but treated as redundant in the translation). ὅτι could play a number of different roles: introducing direct quotation, introducing indirect quotation, or being the first of the quoted words (meaning either 'that' or 'because'). The three changes taken together suggest that Matthew is deliberately being imprecise and thus favour taking ὅτι as introducing the gist of whatever Scriptures he has in mind and not any exact wording (so: indirect quotation). That no OT text actually uses Matthew's term 'Nazorean' offers further support for this choice.

It is hardly likely that Matthew is claiming that there is a hidden reference to Nazareth in the OT. What from the OT does he have in mind, and how does the presence in Nazareth point to it?

NT texts give the name in three forms, all of which Matthew uses (though he has the name only three times): Ναζαρέτ (here), Ναζαρά and Ναζαρέθ. The related adjective comes in two forms, Ναζαρηνός, (in Mark and Luke) and Ναζωραῖος (Matthew, Luke-Acts, and John).¹⁸²⁸³⁵ Though the town was continuously occupied from the seventh century B.C., the name does not occur in Jewish writings until many centuries into the Christian era. It is, however, mentioned in a third- or fourth-century Jewish inscription found at Caesarea,¹⁸²⁸⁴⁶ where the spelling is *Nṣrt*. In the Christian Palestinian Aramaic of the Jerusalem church lectionary the name is found as *Nāzōrat*.

²⁸¹¹⁸⁴ Technically Nazareth should not be called a πόλις (lit. 'city'), but in popular use the distinction between πόλις and κώμη is not always sharply maintained.

²⁸²lit. literally

²⁸³¹⁸⁵ Scholars have at times questioned whether this form has an origin quite separate from any connection with Nazareth, and have suggested that the link with Nazareth is a secondary Christian confusion. The argument depends on the unexpected vowel pattern. These scholars can point to a Jewish Torah-observant sect of Νασσαραῖοι mentioned by Epiphanius (*Haer.* 29.6.1) and to the obvious similarity of one of the names of the Mandaeans: *nāṣōrāyyā*. Wagner, 'Herkunft', 273–82, has recently argued that originally the reference was to Jesus as one who was characterised as committed to keeping (using the root *nṣr*) the law. The arguments have, on the whole, not been found persuasive, and, in any case, they have no bearing on how Matthew intends the term.

²⁸⁴¹⁸⁶ See M. Avi-Yonah, 'A List of Priestly Courses from Caesarea', *IEJ* 12 (1962), 137–39.

Matthew may have been drawing on a folk etymology of the name Nazareth, but, if so, no evidence for it has survived. The spelling variants suggest that Matthew would have felt free to relate the name Nazareth to quite a range of Hebrew forms using either the *nšr* root ('keep watch, guard, protect; keep, preserve; comply with, observe' + 'sprout, shoot' for the cognate noun *našer*) or the *nzr* root ('dedicate oneself; forsake, desert; treat with awe; fast; restrain; live as a Nazirite, abstain' + 'prince' for the cognate noun *nāzîr* [besides 'Nazirite']).¹⁸²⁸⁵⁷ To go further we need to be able to correlate the possibilities here with OT materials.

The main texts which have been suggested fall into two categories (connected to the two Hebrew roots identified above).¹⁸²⁸⁶⁸ The two Nazirite figures for whom links to Jesus would be possible are Samson and Samuel, for whose births there was a particular intervention by God (see Jdg. 13:2–7; 1 Sa. 1–2).¹⁸²⁸⁷⁹ The range of relevant texts can be expanded here by noting that the LX²⁸⁸X at times transliterates *nāzîr* as Ναζῖρ(αἰος) and at times translates it as ἅγιος ('holy'), and that textual variants move easily from the one to the other. This opens up the possibility that Matthew is interested in a text which has ἅγιος in the LX²⁸⁹X (translating the Hebrew *qdš*) but which he can regard as equivalent to Ναζῖρ(αἰος). Along this track Is. 4:3 offers itself. The M²⁹⁰T reads, '(He) will be called holy (*qāḏōš*)'. The context is eschatological and contains the idea of a preserved remnant. And, once we allow synonyms, it also offers (in v. 2) *šmḥ* ('branch'), which is used in similar ways to *našer* ('sprout, shoot').

The main text linked with the *nšr* root is Is. 11:1: 'There will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a sprout (*nēšer*) will blossom'. This is clearly a messianic text. If this were to be the text Matthew had in mind, it would take us back to the Davidic categories which were especially evident in 1:18–25 and 2:1–11. Related texts use *šmḥ* ('branch').¹⁹²⁹¹⁰ Other features of the semantic range of *nšr* may also be exploited in the search for links. In Je. 31:6–7 the root refers to watchmen who will announce that God has saved his people. Unless one were already confident of a link with Mt. 1:21, this tie must look tenuous.¹⁹²⁹²¹ More can be said in favour of a link with Is. 42:6: 'I have called you ... I have kept [using *nšr*] you; I have given

²⁸⁵¹⁸⁷ Though normally the ζ of the Greek would stand for z in the Hebrew or Aramaic, it can also correspond to š (cf. Brown, *Birth*, 207–8). Vowel movements in transliteration between the languages are complex, not always consistent, and not fully understood.

²⁸⁶¹⁸⁸ An alternative approach which is occasionally advanced depends on making the connection not with texts but with what is claimed to be a scriptural theme. Based on the insignificance of Nazareth, the thrust becomes, 'He shall come as a humble and unrecognised messiah'. This seems unlikely to represent the Matthean intention.

²⁸⁷¹⁸⁹ Despite 1 Sa. 1:11, Samuel is not specifically identified as a Nazirite in the MT, but he is in a fragmentary Hebrew text of 1 Sa. 1:22 found at Qumran.

²⁸⁸ LXX Septuagint

²⁸⁹ LXX Septuagint

²⁹⁰ MT Masoretic Text (of the OT)

²⁹¹¹⁹⁰ Is. 4:2; Je. 23:5; 33:15; Zc. 3:8; 6:12. Brown, *Birth*, 212, identifies uses of a number of further synonyms which may be pertinent.

²⁹²¹⁹¹ The link is proposed by Zolli, 'Nazarenus', 135–36.

you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations'. Preserved from the threat posed by Herod, the infant Jesus can fulfil the role of the Isaianic servant.¹⁹²⁹³²

Matthew's other formula citations in this section have been concerned to link the infant Jesus typologically to the history of Israel. Neither a tie with Samuel nor with Samson makes a good fit with the other typological links.¹⁹²⁹⁴³ Though it requires a move from typological reiteration to prophetic anticipation, Is. 4:3 offers a rather more attractive option. But it is a tortuous journey to reach it from 'Nazorean'.¹⁹²⁹⁵⁴ Despite the help from LX²⁹⁶X transliteration and the more straightforward equivalence of Greek ζ for Hebrew z which an appeal to *nzr* offers, *nšr* seems to provide the most likely link in Matthew's mind. Since Matthew is careful not to make his appeal precise and has a propensity for merging traditions, there may be no need to choose between Is. 11:1 and 42:6: preserved from the threat to his life posed by Herod, Jesus will be able to take up the ministry of the Isaianic servant and will come to be confessed (by at least some) as the Davidic messiah.¹⁹²⁹⁷⁵

It is important to note that this conclusion suggests that the context addressed by Matthew was at least somewhat multilingual. An awareness that Ναζιρ(αίος) could function as an equivalent to ἄγιος was possible to a Greek speaker on the basis of Greek OT variants, but an awareness that the root *nšr* was used in Is. 11:1 and 42:6 (and its range of meanings) depends on access to Hebrew. This does not at all imply that general readers knew Hebrew, but it does imply reader access to explanation from at least some in the community who might be in a position to illuminate the opacity by referring to the Hebrew Scriptures²⁹⁸

²⁹³¹⁹² Gärtner, *Rätselfhaften Termini*, defends this link. He also points to Is. 49:6, where the corrected form *nšwry* could be taken adjectivally and made subject, not object: 'a preserved [one] to restore Israel'.

²⁹⁴¹⁹³ A stronger case can be made for a link between Jesus and Nazirite holiness more broadly in early Christian tradition than for a Matthean appeal to such a link.

²⁹⁵¹⁹⁴ The most attractive form of this view is that of Brown (*Birth*, 223–25), who in effect sees a merging of Jdg. 16:17 and Is. 4:3. But there is nothing to connect the Matthean Jesus to the Nazirite category (not even anything stronger than the link with the Holy Spirit to connect him with the category of the holy).

²⁹⁶ LXX Septuagint

²⁹⁷¹⁹⁵ In Matthew's telling the only one who actually calls Jesus a Nazorean is the anonymous maid of 26:71.

²⁹⁸ John Nolland, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 127–131.