

# The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XI : THE VISIT OF THE MAGI / THE SLAYING OF THE INNOCENTS

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
2:1-18				

## Introductory Note

As we study the gospels, it must be remembered that each author wrote for a specific purpose and with a particular audience in mind. *Their purpose was not to provide a step-by-step biography of the Lord but rather to present the Lord to each audience as the Holy Spirit led.* It is for this reason we cannot be overly dogmatic as to the timing of certain events or order of circumstances. Today's lesson provides an excellent illustration of this: if we were to continue in Luke's writings, it would appear that the order of events after the birth of Christ was the circumcision, the presentation in the temple (with Simeon and Anna, see lesson 15), the parents' return into Galilee, then a silent period of about twelve years (Luke 2:39-41). But by comparing Luke's account with Matthew's we realize that between the temple presentation and the family's return into Galilee there was the visit of the Magi and Herod's slaughtering of the children around Bethlehem (today's lesson). Could we have imagined these events transpired simply by reading Luke 2:39? When and where are other non-noticeable gaps? We must be submissive to the fact that (1) the Lord *chose* what He wanted us to know about the earthly ministry of Christ and that (2) there *will* be areas of uncertainty. This is stated confidently and without apology, and *in no way implies errors, inaccuracies or partial revelations. We have everything that the Lord intended us to have to meet His purposes.*

## The Visit of the Magi

**v1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, :** two historical references are made here by Matthew which coincide with Luke's account: that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that He was born during the reign of Herod. Matthew makes mention that Bethlehem is in Judea, not so much to distinguish it from the Bethlehem west of Nazareth (mentioned in Josh 19:15 as being in Zebulon's area, and therefore in Galilee) but to tie the city of Jesus' birth with the prophecy of Micah which follows (v5,6).

**behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, :** not long after the birth of Christ there appeared wise men (Greek *magoi* from the singular *magos*; Latin *magi* from the singular *magus*). The Greek word is really a transliteration of an Iranian original, and in some translations is brought directly into the English, often capitalized. It is the word from which we get our word *magician* and is used in that negative sense (*sorcerer*) in Acts 13:6,8 to describe Bar-jesus, a false prophet that withstood Paul. The root of the Iranian word means *great*, and is also kin to the Greek word *megas* (Latin *magnus*). The meaning in that sense may be found in several English words, such as *megaphone* which is what *magnifies* a person's voice. In the original Iranian sense, the *wise men* were probably knowledgeable in the sciences (as well as the forbidden arts) and looked upon as *great men*.

For the first time in the NT (and we may note very early in the NT narratives) the Gentiles receive the message from God and believe. While we know very little about these men for sure, the following are opinions which I have come across:

- **They were of Persian origin.** The first known mention of these people is found in the writings of the pre-Christian historian Herodotus, and is a reference to one of the tribes of the Medes. Because of their study in astronomy (astrology?) the name *magi* became to be applied generally to the entire like-minded priestly caste among the Medes and Persians. Their teachings were both good and bad, a mixture of truth and knowledge with superstition. "Though many of his theories would today not unjustly be regarded as below the level of scientific knowledge and more nearly akin to superstition, and though his religion can scarcely be called even an approach to Christianity - there was no place in it for redemption from sin through an atoning sacrifice - , the magus was by no means merely a nonsense peddler. He generally believed in only one God, in man's duty to practice the good and shun the evil, in the necessity of prayer, and in the nobility of manual, especially agricultural, labor." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] In support of this is the following:
  - the Iranian origin of the word
  - in the earliest pictures of Christian art preserved, the wise men are wearing Persian robes
  - early Christian writers agreed they were Persian: Clement of Alexandria, Diodorus of Tarsus, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Juvenius, Prudentius, others
  - between 700-500 BC many Jews were deported to the cities of the Medes and the surrounding countries (2 Kings 17:6; 1 Chron 5:26; Esther 1:1; 9:2; Acts 2:9-11) who could have passed along the belief in the coming Messiah
- **They were of Babylonian origin.** In support of this is the following:

- some early Christian writers agree with this, including Origen among others
- the Chaldeans had their “wise men” as well (Dan 2:2,10,27)
- through the Jews deported to Babylon (Daniel and his friends being among them), the expectation of the Messiah would have been passed along
- the Babylonian *magus* were astrologers / astronomers as well, and is credited with establishing the foundation for the planetary world-system, time computation, and the calendar

How many wise men arrived? The number three has been derived from the three gifts offered. This is possible but has no true scriptural support.

Were these men kings? Some point to Ps 72:10 and Isa 60:3 as support for this, but the verses provide no true scriptural support. Nor does the song’s line “We three kings of Orient are...”, no more than “But little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.” Nevertheless tradition as far back as Tertullian states these men were kings.

Other unsupported tradition / folklore:

- their names were Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar
- one came from India, one from Egypt and one from Greece
- they represent the three families of Ham, Shem and Japheth
- they were later baptized by Thomas
- their bones were discovered by St Helena, were placed in the church of St Sophia at Constantinople, were later transferred to Milan and finally brought to the great cathedral of Cologne

**V2 saying, *Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*** : not for a moment does the wise men doubt the fact of the birth, the question was the location. “That a king of the Jews had been born was their inference from the star they had seen, and what they said was in effect thus: that a king has been born somewhere in this land we know from a star we have seen arising, and we desire to know where he can be found.” [Nicoll, *Gk NT*]

Note the absence of the guiding star, else they would have had no reason to inquire as to the place of birth. The wise men apparently saw His star, travelled in faith to the approximate location, then God provided the star again to accurately pin-point the house of the Lord.

***For we have seen His star in the east, :*** several theories concerning the star:

- a star of extraordinary brilliance
- the planet Jupiter, often associated with the birth of kings and therefore called the king-planet
- the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn
- a comet
- a luminary hanging low in the sky
- the word used is taken allegorically to refer to an angel’s guidance; reference is made to the book of Revelation in which some take the meaning of “stars” to be a picture at times of angels
- the word used is figurative, meaning the star of destiny, of hope, one’s guiding star within the heart, etc. This can be dismissed immediately since this star was something visible with the human eye (v2, 7, 9, 10)

These all fall short in one area or another. Matt 2:2 would lean towards the first four ideas, especially considering that the phrase “*in the east*” is better rendered “*in its rising, when it arose*” which is a common Greek expression for the first appearance of a star upon the horizon. But this then would not suit the star leading and hovering over the house of Jesus as found in v9. The light hanging low in the sky could fulfill v9 but would not coincide with v2. If the “star” is an angel, why was that just not stated? The best that can be said is that it was a supernatural miracle which the Lord used to “speak” to the Magi.

Another question is the reason why the Magi associated the star with the birth of the Messiah. Undoubtedly the expectation of the coming Messiah was not limited to the Jews (e.g. John 4:25) but this does not explain the fact that they called it “*His star*.” Did they calculate the approximate time using Daniel 9:25 then associate the timing with the star? Did the star appear in a particular section of the heavens which they linked to the happenings in Judea? Did they use Balaam’s prophecy of a star coming forth out of Jacob (Num 24:17)? Nothing can be said definitely. An interesting Rabbinical legend does state that when Abraham was born wise men of Nimrod arrived to celebrate the birth. Upon leaving they witnessed a brilliant star which devoured four other stars, which they interpreted to mean the child would be powerful. Some would therefore argue that centuries later they interpreted another brilliant star in like manner.

***and are come to worship Him. :*** this is the beauty of Matthew’s account. In the midst of all our unanswered questions, the emphasis of the passage becomes clearer. All of our curiosity concerns items which the Lord considers unimportant, while the

instruction to be found is that the Lord Jesus is One to be worshipped. “I do not profess to be able to settle the question. I content myself with expressing general acquiescence in the idea thrown out by Spinoza in his discussion on prophecy ... that in the case of the Magi we have an instance of a sign given, accommodated to the false opinions of men, to guide them to the truth. The whole system of astrology was a delusion, yet it might be used by Providence to guide seekers after God.” [Nicoll, *Expositor's Gk NT*]

**v3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, :** the wise men did not immediately seek out Herod, but Herod rather heard the questions from those in Jerusalem. By this time Herod is quite probably sixty-nine years old, and so jealous of his throne that he had murdered most of his own immediate family, including several wives and sons. Caesar Augustus stated he would rather be Herod's hog (Greek, *hus*) than to be his son (Greek, *huios*) for he would then have a better chance of life. Herod, in the pretense of being a Jew (he was an Edomite or an Idumean) would not touch a swine under the Jewish laws, yet murdered two of his sons in 8 BC and another one five days prior to his death in 4 BC. “On hearing the bad news the old king stirs up the dying embers of his energy and goes into action. In fact, he becomes very active: he assembles, summons, sends, perceives, is enraged, kills ... and then dies! ... Herod is no laggard. He is a killer. The *thoroughness* he displays is matched only by the awakened wrath of which it is the product. Note also this *hypocrisy*: “that I too may come and worship him” (verse 8), and his *cruelty*: the destruction of Bethlehem's infants (verse 16).” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

*frightened* = literally *to shake, to stir up, to trouble, to agitate*. Figuratively it's used to mean *upsetting, throwing into confusion and alarm*. The same word is used of the disciples on the sea of Galilee when they saw Jesus walking towards them on the water and they thought they saw a ghost (Matt 14:26). It is also used to describe Zechariah in the temple when the angel appeared (Lk 1:12).

**and all Jerusalem with him. :** the thought is generally promoted that the Jews in Jerusalem was troubled by the presence of the wise men or their question concerning the birth of their King. Rather more plausible is the fact that they were troubled by what they knew to be Herod's reaction to a supposed Contender to the throne. If this is why the Jews were troubled, it was justified as the story later indicates.

**v4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. :** living at a time of the expectation of the Jewish Deliverer, Herod knew this King of the Jews and the Messiah (Christ) was the same Person. The question posed by Herod is theoretical in nature. He did not say “where *was* the Messiah born” or “where *will* the Messiah be born,” but rather he uses the present tense, “where *is* the Messiah to be born?” Either Herod was still using pretense with the leaders to avoid unnecessary probing, or it merely refers to the fact that Herod himself did not believe there was a Messiah to be born. Just the fact that the people may *think* there's a king born is enough to terrify Herod.

“*All the chief priests and scribes*” possibly refers to the entire Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. “*Had gathered together*” could be translated *convened* and is the same word used in John 11:47 where the meeting is definitely of the Sanhedrin (a council = Greek *sunedrion*). This was therefore not just a select few Jewish leaders but rather Herod probably summoned an emergency meeting of the entire Sanhedrin to get his question answered. Vincent in his Word Studies disagrees however, stating the elders who were also members of the Sanhedrin are not mentioned. Nicoll in the Expositor's Greek NT also says they were probably only the leading Jewish religious leaders and not the Sanhedrin, as well as Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

**v5,6 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel. :** without hesitancy the leaders quote the spirit of Micah 5:2. It was a well known fact among the Jews that the Messiah would come forth from Bethlehem (Jn 7:42). The quote given is more of a interpretation than a translation, resembling neither the Hebrew nor the LXX. The main change however from the literal quotation is from “*who are little to be among*” to “*are by no means the least among*.” The meaning of both is the same: “*though you Bethlehem are but little, yet you are by no means least, for Israel's Ruler shall come forth from you*.” Even at the time of Herod, Bethlehem was nothing more than a small cluster of houses.

The last line of Matthew's quote (literally, “*who shall shepherd My people Israel*”) is not found in Micah but closely resembles 2 Sam 5:2. The context of 2 Sam 5 is that of the anointing of David King over Israel. The tribes come to David with their unanimous request to be their king, strengthening the appeal by quoting what the Lord had earlier said to David, “*You shall be shepherd of my people Israel*.” The Sanhedrin correctly applies this to the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Hendriksen points out David as a type of Jesus by:

- born in Bethlehem, 1 Sam 16:4,12,13; Lk 2:4
- being “beloved” which is the meaning of the name “David,” 1 Sam 13:14; Mat 3:17
- being God's anointed, 1 Sam 16:13; Ps 2:2; Isa 61:1; Lk 4:18,21
- receiving royal position and honor, 2 Sam 7:13; Lk 1:32,33
- the course of each was bitter humiliation followed by glorious exaltation, 2 Sam 15:23; 22:17-20; Jn 18:1; Mat 28:18

**v7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. :** to proceed with his plot, Herod wished to arouse no more suspicion and fear than possible. The initial meeting with the Sanhedrin / Jewish leaders could not have been done in secret, but the second meeting with the wise men was secretive in their summoning as well as secretive in their meeting.

Note Herod's deceptive wisdom here: he does not inquire of the child's age but rather feigns interest in the Magi's specialty, the stars. Herod wished to know as much as possible about the potential competitor; he already knew where he was born, now he could approximate the age of Jesus.

*"enquired of them diligently"* = *learned accurately*, having the idea of *ascertained to the last point*, denoting the exactness of the information Herod probed from the wise men. Wuest: "Then Herod, having called the learned men secretly, ascertained accurately from them..."

**v8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. :** as if sending out private detectives, Herod orders them to conduct a thorough search, and presupposing that they would be successful, that they should report back to him.

**v9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. :** the star they had originally seen now appeared again. We are not told where the star was between then (v2) and now (v9). Whatever this star was, it now moved north to south, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, until it pointed out the very house of Jesus.

**v10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. :** possible reasons for their joy is they now saw the star which originally began the journey; they now knew with no doubt that God was leading them, not only by natural means but by His prophetic word; they knew that their journey would soon end at the King that had been the object of their search.

**v11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: :** incorrectly, the Magi are often shown with the shepherds in adoration of the baby Jesus in the manger. Obviously their journey from the east was not a quick one. That they were present at the manger is to be rejected, if for no other reason than if the wise men would have arrived prior to the purification of Mary in the temple, the offering would have probably been something better than the two birds (see lesson 15). Another indication of a lapse of time is the fact that Jesus is called here a young child (Gk, *paidion*) whereas in Luke He is referred to as a babe (Gk, *brephos*).

Between the time of Jesus' birth and the arrival of the wise men, the family had left the inn-stable (most probably very soon after the Child's birth) and had found lodging in a house. A. T. Robertson states this could refer to the family moving from the stable to the inn, but then why would Matthew not have used the word for inn that Luke used? The word for *house* is used to refer to *a building, a habitation or dwelling, a household or family*.

Note whenever the child and mother is mentioned together (v11, 13, 14, 20, 21) the child is always mentioned first, placing the emphasis where it properly belongs.

It is true that the word for "*worshipped*" is not always used in reference to the Creator; it is used as given to Peter (Acts 10:25), to the church of Philadelphia (Rev 3:9), and to an angel (Rev 19:10; 22:8). But when this is given to Peter, there is a rebuke (Acts 10:26) as well as when John falls to worship his angel guide (Rev 19:10; 22:9). This worship by the wise men receives no rebuke. While undoubtedly their knowledge of the identity of the Child is not as complete as our knowledge, they in at least a sense see God in this child, and worship Him.

**and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. :** the gifts offered are not only wealthy but worshipful and warm-hearted. What these picture differs according to who is being read, but many follow Origen's over-simplified statement that the Magi brought *gold as to a king; myrrh as to one who was mortal, and incense as to God*. From a practical standpoint, it was these gifts which undoubtedly provided the financial resources for the trip into Egypt as well as the stay and return trip to Nazareth.

**gold:** used extensively in the ornateness of the tabernacle / temple; used of such non-holy items as bracelets, necklaces, and earrings; there are "gods of gold" mentioned in scripture (e.g. the golden calf); is one of the objects of covetousness by the rich; and even used to decorate the great harlot in John's vision. Frequently used to teach us that there are things more precious than gold.

**frankincense:** literally meaning "*pure incense*." The OT word is derived from a root meaning *white*. The incense comes from an incision made in the bark of a certain tree which inhabits south Arabia and east Africa, which produces a fresh juice with a white or milky color. Used variously: in meal offerings, wedding processions, and is listed among the items of commerce in Rev 18.

**myrrh:** probably derived from a small tree found in Arabia with odoriferous wood. Used for the purpose of perfuming a bed or garment, prescribed for certain young ladies to make them more desirable, used lavishly in bridal processions, and mentioned as an ingredient in the making of anointing oil. It was also mingled with wine as an anaesthetic and was also used in preparing the body for burial. In general it could be said that it was to make man's life more pleasant, his pain less dreadful, and his burial less repulsive.

**v12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. :** being honest and generous themselves, it is not surprising the wise men on their own did not perceive Herod's wickedness. But the Lord did not will that the Magi would be harmed, nor that the life of His Son would be taken before His time, so He warned the wise men in a dream of Herod's true intentions.

*"being warned"* is used in some places as *to give a response to one who asks or consults*; and is therefore here used to mean "*to*

receive an answer.” The passage implies that the wise men sought counsel of God, and Wycliffe translates it *and answer taken in sleep*. “Divine guidance comes only to prepared hearts.”

**v13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. :** the sword spoken of by Simeon already begins to pierce the heart of Mary. Why Egypt? At least four reasons could be given: Egypt was close, where Persia or Babylon would have been a tremendous trip; many Jews lived there (Jer 43:7; 44:1; Acts 2:10) and the family may have even been able to stay with acquaintances; Egypt was out of Herod’s domain; and to fulfill the prophecy of Hosea 11:1.

**v14 When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt: :** as in 1:24, Joseph immediately obeyed the difficult command and departed in the night unto Egypt.

**v15 and was there until the death of Herod: :** no mention is given as to the length of the stay nor where they lodged. “Herod died of a loathsome disease in 4 BC, a short time after the perpetration of this terrible crime. He had sought relief for a little while in the mineral baths of Callirhoe. There he attempted suicide which was prevented. At the same time, he ordered thousands of the most prominent Jews to be shut up in the circus of Jericho, to be executed at the hour of his death, that there might be no lack of lamentation in the land. But Salome [Herod’s wicked sister] to whom he entrusted the bloody order, when his death was announced set the prisoners free.” [Shepard, *The Christ*; quoted in Pentecost, *Words and Works of Jesus*]

**that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son. :** quoted from the Hebrew version Hosea 11:1 which sets forth the Jews as a type of Hosea and Gomer:

- as Hosea married Gomer, Jehovah had become Israel’s Husband
- as Gomer had been untrue to Hosea, Israel had become untrue to her Husband
- as Gomer has become enslaved by her lovers, so Israel would be enslaved by the nations which it was putting her trust
- as in his tender love Hosea redeemed and restored Gomer, so Jehovah would restore the remnant of Israel

While Israel was still under the bondage to Egypt prior to Moses, the Lord had already set His heart upon her and called her out of Egypt (Hos 11:1). By using this in reference to Jesus, the Lord is making Israel as a type of the Messiah:

- Israel is called the Lord’s son (Ex 4:22)
- as the cruel king Pharaoh tried to destroy Israel, so another king was attempting to destroy Christ
- as when the Jews left Egypt Jehovah protected them, so here God protected His Son on the way, during His stay, and on His way out of Egypt
- more than a type but prophetically speaking, if Israel had been destroyed in Egypt, the Messianic prophecies would never have been fulfilled. Therefore as the Levites were in the loins of Abraham (Heb 7:5,9) so Jesus was in the loins of His earthly ancestors, the Jews.

## ***The Slaying of the Innocents***

**v16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, :** in all probability Herod did not wait long prior to him concluding that he would never see the Magi again. “Mocked” usually has the sense of *to mock, to poke fun of, to ridicule* in the gospels. The word may also mean *to trick, to delude*. Wuest: “Then Herod, having seen that he was deceived by the learned men...”

**and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. :** enslaved to his passions, Herod immediately orders the murder of the infants. At a very early date Christianity began to regard these infants as the first martyrs, and there was the *Feast of the Holy Innocents* celebrated in the Greek Church on December 29 and in the Latin church on December 28. Some have taken this to be retribution because the local parents failed to do homage to the Messiah, but this is nowhere mentioned as even a remote reason for the slaughter.

How many? While we tend to picture thousands, there may possibly have been no more than fifteen or twenty considering the size of Bethlehem and even taking into account the surrounding area. This is by no means an attempt to lighten the terrible crime committed.

Can the age of Jesus be determined by Herod’s order? As previously studied, Jesus was probably born very soon to the death of Herod (see lesson 13). “Perhaps this question can best be answered by a counter-question: Basing our answer upon what we have learned about King Herod, the proud, cruel, jealous tyrant who was ever ready to destroy anyone whom he suspected of being a threat to his power, who was rebuked repeatedly by the Roman government for his shocking barbarity, and who right at this very moment was livid with rage, which of the following two interpretations of his command to the soldiers best expresses what he meant?: (a) ‘Since I have found out from the magi that the so-called king of the Jews is about two years of age, there kill all the male infants of two years and under.’ or (b) ‘Since I have been informed on good authority that the potential aspirant to my throne

is about two months old, therefore, in order to make certain that he cannot escape, kill all the boy babies of two years and under.' The answer is obvious. When it came to killing, Herod always allowed himself a very wide margin." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Herod's barbarous act was not unheard of in pagan antiquity where the life of the newborn was at the mercy of the father or the state. "A few months before the birth of Augustus, a prodigy presaging the nativity of a king for the Roman people, having taken place, the frightened Senate decreed that none of the children born that year were to be brought up. At a later era, Nero was so upset by the appearance of a comet that he ordered the execution of leading Roman citizens, whose children were driven from the city and died of hunger and exposure." [Unger, *Archaeology and the NT*] And have we advanced when we consider the Chinese leaving children on window sills to die, or the abortion situation in America?

**v17,18 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. :** quoted almost word-for-word from the Hebrew text of Jer 31:15. Ramah was located on the border between Israel and Judah in OT times, five miles north of Jerusalem. It is said that Ramah is the location that foreign conquerors ordered the defeated multitude to be assembled for deportation to far away lands. Because of its location it was able to represent both the northern and southern kingdoms. Rachel as well pictures both Israel and Judah. Being Jacob's favorite wife, she bore Joseph the father of Ephraim and Manasseh (portraying the northern kingdom of Israel which was often simply referred to as Ephraim), and she bore Benjamin (portraying the southern kingdom, Judah and Benjamin). Note Bethlehem was also the burial site of Rachel (Gen 35:19). In Jeremiah 31, Rachel is portrayed as still alive and weeping due to the weeping of her children, Israel and Judah. She mourns bitterly for they are being deported and killed by the worldly powers, first Assyria then Babylon. The chapter in Jeremiah is not all negative however, there are many words of consolation. Jehovah had loved His remnant with an everlasting love (31:3) and He who scattered them would also regather them (31:10,16,17). Rachel should therefore stop weeping (31:16) for Ephraim is His darling child (31:20). After they repent (31:18,19) He will make a new covenant with His people (31:31) forgiving their iniquity (31:34). The remnant will indeed return to one day bring forth the Branch of Righteousness (31:38; 33:14,15).

The parallel drawn by Matthew is this: as Rachel wept for her children being killed and deported, so the parents surrounding Bethlehem was weeping for their children who were no more. The cruel worldly power had again robbed Rachel of her children. Some were dead, at least three had fled into Egypt. But consolation could have been found when the Branch of Righteousness returns from Egypt to save those who repent. "Their children were the first casualties in the warfare that had inevitably to be waged between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God and His Christ; and their own sorrow was akin to that of Mary, whose heart was destined to be pierced as she saw her Son tread the way that must lead Him directly to the cross - but also through death and resurrection." [Tasker, *Matthew*]