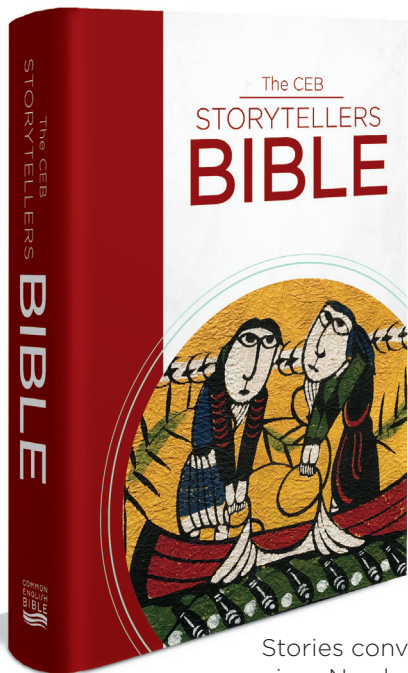


The CEB

STORYTELLERS
BIBLE

SAMPLE FROM
DANIEL and **MATTHEW**





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October 17, 2017

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The supplementary material in this Bible comes from the acclaimed Storyteller's Companion to the Bible, which was endorsed by Madeleine L'Engle.

This uncorrected proof of The CEB Storytellers Bible includes a portion of Daniel and Matthew.

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"In a day when unquestioning literalism is on the increase, it is a delight to receive a book that takes biblical storytelling seriously and gloriously! The writers and editors are indeed to be commended for their willingness to understand biblical imagination and narrative richness. This book should be a real mind-stretcher and encourage many people to return to the Bible with newly opened eye." —Madeleine L'Engle

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PREFACE TO THE CEB STORYTELLERS BIBLE

On December 1, 1988, I sent a proposal for a new series of books to Paul Franklyn at Abingdon Press. My idea for the series was to provide all the information that anyone might need to tell Bible stories. Paul and I discussed the possibility of such a series and the specific material that would be important to include in each volume. Each volume would include the text of a biblical passage along with commentary by a scholar aimed at giving the background (literary, historical, geographical, and cultural) to help tell the story. In addition, each passage would be followed by a sample retelling of that story, or one based on the passage if the text wasn't narrative, and within the body of the retelling in shaded boxes there would be retellings of *midrashim* (Jewish interpretive stories) related to that passage.

The result of our conversations was a series entitled *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*. It wasn't just intended for clergy but for Sunday school teachers, parents, grandparents, and anyone else who wanted to tell Bible stories. Each volume featured the work of a different scholar and a variety of storytellers. The idea was not that the reader would memorize the retelling of any given story or *midrash* but that those included would spark the imagination of the reader and lead them to create a wholly new retelling of their own.

I am grateful to those scholars with whom I was privileged to work and all that I learned from them. For some this was their first major publication, and each has continued to make significant contributions to our ongoing conversations about how we understand the Bible. Their imaginative work has inspired many readers to follow their example across the years. Also, I rise up and bless the names of the numerous sages of blessed memory who contributed the *midrashim* and parallel stories in each volume. I am especially grateful for the work of Dennis Smith, who took over the basic editorial responsibility for the New Testament volumes. Without his intelligent guidance and tireless efforts the series would never have reached completion.

It delights me that Abingdon has chosen to make the resources from *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible* available in *The CEB Storytellers Bible*. This Bible is for anyone who is interested in telling and reading Bible stories. Most study Bibles focus on the details of specific verses or the context for whole books of the Bible. But Jesus taught with stories.

A revolution has occurred in the reading of biblical narrative, and this Bible is a part of that revolution. Scholars are taking seriously the fact that the narratives of the Bible are precisely what they appear to be: stories—stories that convey truth through plot, character, and point of view. This Bible will help readers see the big themes and important truths of the Bible. It will also help readers tell the Bible's stories in contemporary language.

The CEB Storytellers Bible features:

- Major articles about narrative in the Bible and how to tell Bible stories
- Introductions to the narrative parts of the Bible (e.g., “A Narrative Introduction to Genesis” and “Reading the Parables”)
- Extensive commentary on and analysis of the stories themselves
- Story-based commentary from rabbis and early church fathers, showing that this is not a new way to read the Bible but an ancient way
- Index of the stories of the Bible

Madeleine L’Engle endorsed volume four of the original series with a quote that nicely captures our reason for making this Bible: “In a day when unquestioning literalism is on the increase, it is a delight to receive a book that takes biblical storytelling seriously and gloriously! The writers and editors are indeed to be commended for their willingness to understand biblical imagination and narrative richness. This book should be a real mind-stretcher and encourage many people to return to the Bible with newly opened eyes.”

Plus, it will help preachers and teachers do their job every week.

As you read these scriptures let me encourage you to look at them and listen to them with an eye and ear for retelling them. My hope is that the work we prepared so long ago will be helpful to you as you enter the worlds of scripture and find in them stories that last, perhaps even your story.

Michael E. Williams
General Editor

DANIEL

Jerusalem taken by the Babylonians

1 In the third year of the rule of Judah's King Jehoiakim, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and attacked it. ²The Lord handed Judah's King Jehoiakim over to Nebuchadnezzar, along with some of the equipment from God's house. Nebuchadnezzar took these to Shinar, to his own god's temple, putting them in his god's treasury.

1:3-21 Submit Us to This Test

Excellence is specially given by God to those who keep the faith.

Daniel 1 serves as an introduction to the series of stories that comprise the first half of the book. Like the other stories in Daniel 1-6, chapter 1 is a "court tale," a story originally told for the instruction of young people training for careers in the royal court. (Other biblical examples of this genre are found in the Joseph stories and the book of Esther.) The court tales in Daniel explore the difficulty of being a faithful Jew in the service of a non-Jewish Empire, a theme sounded in a foreboding overture in verse 2, where the reader learns that some of the worship vessels of Yahweh's temple have been carried into exile in Shinar (the ancient name of Babylon) and placed in the treasuries of the Babylonian deities. Thus from the very beginning of the tale, the storyteller reminds us that Judah's political domination by the foreign empire poses a serious religious threat as well. As Daniel progresses, the stories grow increasingly pessimistic about the intentions and competence of foreign rulers. The threats to Daniel and his friends become more severe, and their rescues increasingly miraculous.

Daniel 1:3-4 describes Daniel and his friends as young "Israelite" exiles from the royal family who are attached to the Babylonian imperial court in the manner indicated by 2 Kings and the Babylonian records. Verse 21 says that Daniel served "until the first year of Cyrus," the Persian king who conquered the Babylonian heartland in 539 BCE and soon thereafter allowed Judean exiles to return to a Persian-ruled Jerusalem. In the narrative time of the book, then, Daniel's career exactly corresponds to the length of time Judeans spent in Babylonian Exile, as the storyteller reckoned it. As the reference to Cyrus attests, the narrator speaks from a time after Babylonian Exile has ended.

The precise coincidence of Daniel's long career and Babylonian Exile was significant for the book's original readers. The exile had been a political and religious disaster for those who endured it. In the ancient Near Eastern world, religion and politics were tightly intertwined. Gods were thought to have specific geopolitical jurisdictions. They patronized particular kings, who, in turn, supported and protected religious institutions and practices devoted to the royal deities. The relative strength or weakness of deities was judged in part by the military-political fortunes of the monarchs they backed. The violent end of Davidic rule in 587 BCE thus prompted a theological crisis for Judean Yahweh-worshippers, especially those deported to Babylonia, where, according to conventional thinking, their god had no jurisdiction. "How could we possibly sing the LORD's song on foreign soil?" the psalmist asked (Ps 137:4) on behalf of exiled Judeans who were confronting a spiritual crisis of unprecedented scope and intensity.

In a narrative world set in this exilic past, Daniel's original readers could encounter and identify with faithful Jewish ancestors who had managed somehow to cope with the people's greatest disaster to date. It is likely, then, that the faith community that finally collected, edited, and published these Daniel tales was itself experiencing a political-religious crisis that seemed as severe as Babylonian Exile had been.

The crisis that moves the plot in Daniel 1 is prompted by Daniel's surprising request not to be given the daily royal ration of food and wine. His first request is denied by the eunuch who managed the internal operations of the palace. Daniel revises his proposal and takes it to the guard who is given charge of the young Judeans' education. This time, Daniel proposes a ten-day trial diet of vegetables and water to see if the Judeans can stay "fat" and healthy without eating the luxurious dishes provided by the king. The guard agrees and, after the ten-day trial, allows Daniel and his friends to continue their unusual diet throughout the three-year period of education.

Daniel's reason for rejecting the royal ration is not completely clear. Traditional interpretations have assumed that he is concerned about eating "unclean" gentile food. Careful observance of dietary laws became a widespread practice in Judaism sometime after the exile ended, perhaps even after the court tale underlying Daniel 1 first was told. But dietary laws were central to Palestinian Jewish life by the time this story was incorporated into the published book of Daniel (probably around 167 BCE), so it is likely that original readers of the book understood Daniel's rejection of the royal ration as a commitment to keep kosher. Kosher laws would not have required Daniel to refuse Babylonian wine, however. Nor would they necessarily restrict him and his friends to a diet of vegetables and water (vv. 12, 16). Daniel's proposal exceeds even the strictest interpretation of dietary law.

Perhaps Daniel's refusal to defile himself with wine is meant to identify Daniel and his friends with ancient nazirites, Yahweh worshippers who took a special vow of loyalty that included total abstinence from intoxicating beverages. Samson (Judg 13:3-5) and Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), the only two nazirites specifically identified in the Hebrew Bible, had been set apart by Yahweh to start liberating Israel from the grip of foreign oppressors (Judg 13:5; 1 Sam 2:1-10). But the allusion to these legendary nazirites in Daniel 1 is soft, at best. A stronger allusion is made in verse 4, where the Israelite courtiers are described as young men "free from physical defect," a technical term elsewhere applied to ritual sacrifices and the priests who offer them (Lev 21:17-23, in a chapter concerned with things that "defile" priests). The storyteller thus hints that Daniel and his friends are not just observant Jews, but extraordinary Jews, specially consecrated for some important sacrificial service to God and God's people. By inviting the audience to identify with these larger-than-life characters, the storyteller calls us to heroic faith.

The trial by food is loaded with political-economic symbolism. The Judean courtiers substitute water and vegetables for the wine and food (presumably including meat) provided by the king. By their diet, they identify with those below their own sociopolitical rank and put themselves and their Babylonian coconspirator at risk. The average Judean farmer's diet was primarily vegetarian. Meat was eaten on special occasions or as a last resort when crop supplies were short. The emperor's table, however, was regularly supplied with luxury foods, the fruits of an imperial system designed to draw wealth from the outer reaches of the empire in to the political-economic center. The physical condition of those who dined at the royal table—that is, that they were fatter and better looking than commoners were (cf. vv. 10, 15)—was a visible sign of their social-political superiority and a symbol of prestige for the monarch who supported them. The eunuch who managed palace operations was right to fear the wrath of the king if he let Daniel eat a simpler diet, and if thus Daniel became sickly and thin (v. 10). Anything less than a properly "fattened" class of courtier school graduates would have been a public insult to the king.

The story thus poses a dilemma. To avoid defilement, Daniel believes he must reject the luxurious food of the king and eat the subsistence diet of peasants. Without divine intervention of some sort, Daniel's pious plan would wind up insulting the king and endangering the Judean courtiers and their Babylonian overseers.

Two important questions arise from this trial by food. First, can God's people live without the patronage of a foreign imperial system that generates and controls enormous wealth? Second, can Jews working in a non-Jewish government be faithful to their God without provoking the wrath of the non-Jewish king? The story's answer to both questions is yes.

Daniel and his friends not only survive without the luxurious royal ration, they grow fatter and better looking than their student colleagues who accept the ration. And, by seeking a compromise after his request at first was denied, Daniel is able to show the skeptical Babylonians that Jewish courtiers could observe Jewish religious practices and still meet and exceed royal expectations. The storyteller is clear, however, that such excellence is specially given by God to those who keep the faith.

Finally, the story gives no indication that the king ever learns of the trial by food. But the Jewish heroes, the Babylonian guards, and the storyteller's audience know and understand that the superior physical condition and intellectual power of Daniel and his friends has nothing to do with the rich provisions of the king. Their "fatness" and insight do not symbolize the strength and goodness of the foreign monarch and his imperial system, as Nebuchadnezzar no doubt believed; but rather are signs of the greatness and mercy of Israel's God. Though the king is unaware of what actually transpired, the reader understands that, in the extraordinary health and skill of faithful Jews, the might of the foreign empire has been measured against the power and willingness of Israel's God to save. And by that standard, the empire will always come up short.

Training for royal service

³Nebuchadnezzar instructed his highest official Ashpenaz to choose royal descendants and members of the ruling class from the Israelites—“good-looking young men without defects, skilled in all wisdom, possessing knowledge, conversant with learning, and capable of serving in the king’s palace. Ashpenaz was to teach them the Chaldean language and its literature.”⁵The king assigned these young men daily allotments from his own food and from the royal wine. Ashpenaz was to teach them for three years so that at the end of that time they could serve before the king.⁶Among these young men from the Judeans were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.⁷But the chief official gave them new names. He named Daniel “Belteshazzar,” Hananiah “Shadrach,” Mishael “Meshach,” and Azariah “Abednego.”

Test

⁸Daniel decided that he wouldn’t pollute himself with the king’s rations or the royal wine, and he appealed to the chief official in hopes that he wouldn’t have to do so.⁹Now God had established faithful loyalty between Daniel and the chief official;¹⁰but the chief official said to Daniel, “I’m afraid of my master, the king, who has mandated what you are to eat and drink. What will happen if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men in your group? The king will have my head because of you!”

¹¹So Daniel spoke to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:¹²“Why not test your servants for ten days? You could give us a diet of vegetables to eat and water to drink.¹³Then compare our appearance to the appearance of the young men who eat the king’s food. Then deal with your servants according to what you see.”

¹⁴The guard decided to go along with their plan and tested them for ten days.¹⁵At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king’s food.¹⁶So the guard kept taking away their rations and the wine they were supposed to drink and gave them vegetables instead.¹⁷And God gave knowledge, mastery of all literature, and wisdom to these four men. Daniel himself gained understanding of every type of vision and dream.

Since Daniel and his friends were to be taught the language and knowledge of the Chaldeans in three years, some of the ancient sages said that, if a student doesn’t make progress in the study of Torah in three years the student will never learn it. Other sages are more lenient and give the student five years. (*Sefer Ha-Aggadah* 421.180)

Result of the training

¹⁸When the time came to review the young men as the king had ordered, the chief official brought them before Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹When the king spoke with them, he found no one as good as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they took their place in the king’s service.²⁰Whenever the king consulted them about any aspect of wisdom and understanding, he found them head and shoulders above all the dream interpreters and enchanters in his entire kingdom.²¹And Daniel stayed in the king’s service until the first year of King Cyrus.

2:1-19 Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream, Part I

Evil human leaders, by the power of God, can be redeemed.

Daniel 2 contains a story within a story. On the whole, this chapter, like the other stories in Daniel 1–6, is a court tale, a story originally told to teach proper conduct in royal court—in this case, to teach Jewish officials how to behave in a non-Jewish imperial government. It is also a miracle story, the faithful hero relying on supernatural intervention to save the lives of his Jewish and non-Jewish professional colleagues. The story emphasizes God’s power and willingness to give insight to the faithful in times of deep confusion and dread, and it comes to an astonishing climax with a surprise confession by Israel’s quintessential imperial enemy.

Embedded within the miraculous court tale are the report and interpretation of a revelatory dream. The dream uses vivid and mysterious imagery to tell, in very broad outline, the history of the imperial domination of the Jews, from the beginning of Babylonian Exile in the early 500s BCE to the persecution under the Syrian emperor Antiochus IV (167–164 BCE). The dream has many similarities to the apocalyptic visions in Daniel 7–12 and, therefore, is a key literary link between the court tales in the first half of the book and the visions in the second half. It is the strongest stitch binding the two major parts of the book together.

Daniel 2 exhibits several curious tensions and apparent inconsistencies, beginning in the first verse, with the date of the king's dream "in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's rule." Nebuchadnezzar's second year would have been 603 BCE, about six years before he first invaded Judah and carried the Judean royal family and other Jerusalem officials off to Babylon. In chapter 1, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered a three-year period of education for Daniel before he entered court service. Chapter 2 assumes that Daniel is already an official wise man in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar. This discrepancy between chapters 1 and 2 may mean that these two stories circulated independently before they were collected in the book as we now know it. Furthermore, it appears that the person who finally compiled the book was much more interested in the theological insights of the Daniel stories than with the logical consistency of minutiae.

The most striking literary feature of this chapter is that it begins in Hebrew (chapter 1 is also written in Hebrew) and suddenly shifts to the Aramaic language when the king's advisors speak in verse 4. There is no obvious reason for the Babylonian courtiers to respond to the king in Aramaic, especially since the story has the king speaking in Hebrew(!) in the verses immediately preceding. If the only point is that the advisors spoke "in Aramaic" (v. 4a), then it is difficult to explain why the Aramaic continues to the end of chapter 7, long after the courtiers' speech has ended. The text suddenly shifts back to Hebrew in 8:1, again for no apparent reason.

It also is surprising that Daniel, the foreign captive, gets a private audience with the king and apparently convinces him (v. 16) to postpone the death order that the king had issued in a rage, when his Babylonian advisors failed to report his dream (vv. 8–12). It was a bold and, one would think, memorable initiative for a foreigner at court to take. Yet nine verses later, Daniel must be introduced to the king through a high-ranking official, as if Daniel's skill at dream interpretation were just discovered (v. 25). In the preceding verse (v. 24), Daniel must intervene with the chief executioner to halt the executions of the sages, an order presumably put on hold the day before, after Daniel's successful audience with the king in verse 16. Finally, the king's lavish gratitude for Daniel's dream interpretation (vv. 46–48) is dumbfounding, given the fact that Daniel predicted the permanent destruction of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (vv. 34–35, 44–45).

These tensions in the story suggest that storytellers have revised and expanded the tale a few times before it took its present shape. The dream report and interpretation (vv. 31–45) and the psalm of thanksgiving (vv. 20–23) probably were added to an earlier, more streamlined version of the story. The additions and revisions disrupted the narrative flow of the original court tale and gave rise to the apparent inconsistencies in the plotline.

The story begins on a foreboding note, with the report that Nebuchadnezzar's "dreams made him anxious, but he kept sleeping," a description that foreshadows Daniel's confusion, terror, and physical illness at the apocalyptic visions he receives later in the book (7:15, 28; 8:17–18, 27; 10:8–9, 15–17; see also Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation, 4:5). The king's reaction to the dreams he dreamed foreshadows a central point of the story, stated explicitly in Daniel's prayer (vv. 20–23), that God "knows what hides in darkness" and gives illumination in times of deep confusion and fear.

The king summons "the dream interpreters, enchanters, diviners, and Chaldeans to explain his dreams to him" (v. 2). The terms for these soothsayers are an eclectic set of professional titles from the Egyptian, Hebrew, Akkadian, and Aramaic languages, and generally refer to professional prognosticators. Throughout the ancient Near East and particularly in Mesopotamia, dreams were widely thought to carry messages from the gods, warning favored humans of impending disaster, informing them of some future boon, or advising them on important decisions. Babylonian kings, particularly the last king, Nabonidus, relied heavily on dream interpretation to guide royal policy. Dream interpreters, therefore, played an important role at court, functioning for these ancient kings somewhat as pollsters do for modern presidents. Nebuchadnezzar's nightmares were like an unexpected series of disastrous polls and focus groups, and he was right to lose sleep. It is not surprising that he convened his top advisors and demanded immediate answers—an interpretation of the new figures and a projection of future trends (vv. 2–4).

The advisors' brief audience with the king is loaded with irony from the very first words the courtiers speak. "Long live the king!" the Chaldeans proclaim (v. 4). (Here, "Chaldeans" apparently is

meant to be a generic term for the whole list of professional forecasters mentioned in v. 2.) The greeting is typical. But once the true interpretation of the king's dream is revealed, these words of the Babylonian experts are shown to be ironic hyperbole, a false promise, an ignorant prediction. As Daniel correctly says later, in his doxological prayer (vv. 20-23), "the God of heaven" alone transcends the ages (v. 20). God alone has power to change the times and seasons, and God indeed deposes kings and sets them up (v. 21). It is a point made later in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (vv. 31-35) and its divinely revealed interpretation (vv. 36-45). The God of heaven has set up Nebuchadnezzar as "king of kings" (vv. 37-38), and God will bring his kingdom down (vv. 39, 44). Only in the days hereafter, when Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and those that follow are toppled and utterly crushed, will the God of heaven set up an indestructible kingdom that will stand forever (v. 44). The contrast drawn by Nebuchadnezzar's dream is between the limited power of earthly rule and the limitless sovereignty of the God of heaven. So the would-be dream interpreters have failed from their very first words. By their formulaic greeting, "Long live the king!" they have offered what only the God of heaven can give. They have begun their task of dream interpretation by contradicting the central message of the dream! From the moment they open their mouths, they prove themselves incapable of perceiving or understanding the message that the God of heaven has given their king.

Nebuchadnezzar's apparent suspicion that his experts are incompetent leads him to make a bizarre request, prompting the life-threatening crisis that moves the plot. He issues a draconian public decree that the advisors must tell him the dream and its interpretation or else be torn limb from limb, with their "houses" (probably literally and figuratively: their dwellings and their families) laid in ruin (v. 5). Ironically foreshadowing the final outcome of the story for the Jewish wise man Daniel, the king continues the decree with a promise of gifts, rewards, and great honor, if the Babylonian dream interpreters succeed (v. 6). It is apparent to the reader by verse 5 that the king expects the Chaldeans to guess not only what he has dreamed, but to interpret the dream as well; a realization that is completely missed by the king's experts until verse 10. Once they realize the impossible demand the king is making, they correctly protest: "No one on earth can do what the king is asking! . . . What the king is asking is impossible! No one could declare the dream to the king but the gods, who don't live among mere humans" (vv. 10-11). Without knowing it, they have anticipated the outcome of this outrageous trial and identified its true significance: Daniel's success has a supernatural origin, and the interpretation he offers is a trustworthy word of God. Nebuchadnezzar's impossible demand prompts a crisis that cannot be resolved by natural insight and human skill, even though Daniel is endowed with both (v. 14). Confusing and fearful times such as these call for supernatural solutions, divine intervention, and heavenly revelation.

The Chaldeans' refusal to take the king's challenge sends Nebuchadnezzar into a violent rage (v. 12), and he issues a second decree. In his first proclamation, the advisors' fate was open and in their control (vv. 5-6). In the second, their fate is sealed; their doom, certain (vv. 12-13). But now their failure poses a wider threat. The first decree endangered those who were summoned and commanded to interpret the king's dream. The second orders death to all the "sages," whether they had been asked to interpret the dream or not (v. 13). Only through prudent and discreet questioning is Daniel able to discover the reasons for the death sentence (vv. 14-15), a narrative detail that underlines Daniel's innocence and highlights the injustice now suffered by the Jewish wise men, who must bear the fatal consequences of imperial actions taken without their prior knowledge or consent.

Daniel's quick thinking and decisive action buys him the time he needs to find a way out of this conundrum. After a successful personal appeal to the king (v. 16), Daniel enlists his Jewish companions to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this "mystery," a Persian term that refers to a secret that cannot be known without divine revelation (vv. 17-18). The mystery is revealed in a "vision by night" (v. 19; cf. 7:2, 13; 8:26) and Daniel offers a prayer of thanksgiving to the God of heaven. (See the next chapter for detailed commentary on the prayer.)

Daniel then intervenes with Arioch, the chief executioner, to save the lives of the Babylonian sages. Their failure had put Daniel's life in danger. Now, he uses his God-inspired success to save their lives (v. 24). Daniel takes the opportunity provided by his audience with the king to evangelize for the God of heaven, restating what the Babylonian advisors already said, that no human could answer the king's request (vv. 27-28). After Daniel's correct dream report and trustworthy interpretation (vv. 29-45), Nebuchadnezzar falls on his face to worship Daniel and orders that grain and soothing offerings be made to him (v. 46). Perhaps Daniel should offer a rebuke, but he is prudently stunned by the next development.

Most astonishing is the confession Nebuchadnezzar makes in verse 47. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor who destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and who exiled a substantial portion of

Jerusalem's population in 587 BCE, became Israel's quintessential enemy. That he would confess Israel's God as the supreme deity, the true sovereign of all the earth, and the authentic source of wisdom and insight, is incredible! His conversion, not recorded elsewhere, is virtually unheard of in many other historical sources of the period. But in the narrative world of Daniel 2, even this astonishing reversal is possible and desirable.

Like his model Joseph (Gen 41:37-45; cf. also Esth 8:1-2), Daniel is rewarded with promotion, gifts, and authority to rule a large and important part of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (v. 48). He requests promotions for his Judean friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (a narrative detail that links chs. 2 and 3). The story ends with the notice that Daniel remained at the king's court.

In one sense, this story is about the deliverance of God's people in a time of trial. But in an equally important sense, it is about the absurd, yet persistent hope that evil human leaders, by the power of God, can be redeemed. In the miraculous rescue of the Babylonian advisors and the incredible conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, the storyteller expresses a radical hope for universal human redemption, with a passion and power rarely seen. If Israel's prototypical enemy, the destroyer of God's temple, could come to faith, and his royal functionaries be saved by the insight given to a courageous and faithful Jew, what other twists might history take? What other surprising allies will surface? No matter how deep their night and frightening their circumstances, no matter how powerful and wicked their enemy might be, God's people yet can dare to hope for their own salvation and for the conversion of those who oppress them, because the God of heaven is ever willing and able to redeem.

An impossible challenge

2In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, he had many dreams. The dreams made him anxious, but he kept sleeping. ²The king summoned the dream interpreters, enchanters, diviners, and Chaldeans to explain his dreams to him. They came and stood before the king.

³Then the king said to them: "I had a dream, and I'm anxious to know its meaning."

⁴The Chaldeans answered the king in Aramaic:^a "Long live the king! Tell your servants the dream, and we will explain its meaning."

⁵The king answered the Chaldeans: "My decision is final: If you can't tell me the dream and its meaning, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be turned into trash dumps. ⁶But if you do explain the dream and its meaning, you'll receive generous gifts and glorious honor from me. So explain to me the dream as well as its meaning."

⁷They answered him again: "The king must tell his servants the dream. We will then explain the meaning."

⁸The king replied: "Now I definitely know you are stalling for time, because you see that

my decision is final ⁹ and that if you can't tell me the dream, your fate is certain. You've conspired to make false and lying speeches before me until the situation changes. Tell me the dream now! Then I'll know you can explain its meaning to me."

¹⁰The Chaldeans answered the king: "No one on earth can do what the king is asking! No king or ruler, no matter how great, has ever asked such a thing of any dream interpreter, enchanter, or Chaldean. ¹¹What the king is asking is impossible! No one could declare the dream to the king but the gods, who don't live among mere humans."

¹²At this, the king exploded in a furious rage and ordered that all Babylon's sages be wiped out. ¹³So the command went out: The sages were to be killed. Daniel and his friends too were hunted down; they were to be killed as well.

God reveals the mystery

¹⁴Then Daniel, with wisdom and sound judgment, responded to Arioch the king's chief executioner, who had gone out to kill Babylon's sages. ¹⁵He said to Arioch the king's royal officer,

While Hebrew was clearly the holy language to the Sages, some were quick to defend Aramaic, as well. One example they offer is in Daniel 2:4 when the Chaldeans spoke to Nebuchadnezzar in Aramaic saying, "Long live the king!" (*Genesis Rabbah* 74.14)

II ^aThe book switches into Aramaic at this point, returning to Hebrew in 8:1.

MATTHEW

1:1-25 The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus

Matthew's story of Jesus begins with a genealogy that emphasizes the role of women and the dual paternity of Jesus as Son of God/Son of David.

The opening line of Matthew serves as the title of the work: "A record of the ancestors [in Greek: the book of the beginning (genesis)] of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham." Like Mark, Matthew includes in this introduction some of the most significant titles assigned to Jesus, "Christ," "son of David," "son of Abraham." Unlike Mark, however, Matthew begins in the past with a genealogy of Jesus's ancestry. Thus Matthew's story explicitly and self-consciously acknowledges its indebtedness to other stories—the stories of God's dealing with the children of Abraham and of David.

This passage, Matthew 1:1-25, divides naturally into two rhetorical units, 1:1-17 and 1:18-25. The three names in 1:1, Christ . . . David . . . Abraham, are repeated in verse 17, Abraham . . . David . . . Christ, and form an *inclusio* that any hearer would recognize. Matthew 1:18 repeats the reference to "genesis" (see 1:1) and proceeds to explain how the ancestry from Abraham to Jesus can be traced through Joseph, whom the narrator goes to great lengths to argue is not the biological father of Jesus. We shall take up each unit in turn.

Ancient listeners, and even some modern ones, would have been fascinated by this story that begins with the "record of the ancestors of Jesus," language that recalls that of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. But still the modern reader may rightly ask, Why does Matthew begin with a genealogy? The summary at the end of this first unit discloses that "there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ" (1:17). While scholars have noted the difficulties with wringing a 3 x 14 plan from a list that contains only 41 names, Matthew sees in this 3 x 14 schema the key to "holy history." The numbers are significant. Fourteen is, of course, a multiple of seven, the number of perfection (seven days of creation, Sabbath rest, and so on). Thus in these three discrete periods of Hebrew history—ancestral period, monarchy, exile—there are six periods of seven generations according to Matthew's reckoning. Hence the advent of the Messiah is appropriately the beginning of the seventh (and final?) period, the messianic period. Further, the name "David," which in Hebrew was spelled without vowels, has the numeric value of 14 (D-4; V-6; D-4). It is as though DAVID is written across Jewish history. Matthew seems to be arguing that if his audience had only seen what he had seen, they would not be able to escape the conclusion that all the factors of history were converging on the appearance of Messiah at this very time.

The pattern in Matthew's genealogy is: A is the father of B, B is the father of C, and so forth, moving from Abraham to Christ. (To this, one might contrast Luke's genealogy, which moves in the opposite direction from Jesus to Adam with the pattern, Z is the son of Y, son of X, and so forth.) Two breaks in this pattern are noteworthy and surely would have arrested the attention of the hearers of the story.

First, four women are mentioned in the genealogy, breaking the patrilineal rhythm and representing an anomaly in ancestral lineages. Further, these women are not the great matriarchs of Israelite faith, though they do come from different periods: Tamar from the ancestral period, Rahab from the time of the conquest and settlement, Ruth from the period of the judges, and Bathsheba from the Davidic monarchy.

These women never appear together in another list from antiquity. How might the ancient audience have sought some common thread in their appearance here? While many answers have been proposed to this question, two are most compelling. First, these women are all non-Israelites. Tamar, whose story is told in Genesis 38, though never identified as a foreigner as such in the biblical text, was clearly recognized as such in postbiblical Jewish texts. Jubilees 41:1 refers to her as an Aramean. Rahab was a Canaanite who lived in Jericho. Ruth was from the despised race of Moab, spawned from Lot's incestuous relationship with his elder daughter (see Gen 19:30-38). Bathsheba is identified as the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, another non-Israelite.

These women also shared a checkered sexual history. Tamar played the prostitute to seduce her father-in-law, Judah, when he refused to send his last son to be her husband. Rahab was a prostitute who ran a brothel in Jericho, though she was heralded in later Christian texts as a mother of the faith (see Heb 11:31). Ruth was presumed by later rabbis to have engaged in a little seduction of her own when in the middle of the night she uncovered the “feet” of Boaz on the threshing floor, (a)rousing him from sleep. And, of course, the illicit union of David with Bathsheba produced a stillbirth before it produced an heir in Solomon.

While androcentric interpretation of these women has tended to highlight their sinfulness, a more sensitive reading might note that in a patriarchal society where the rights and privileges of women were severely limited, each of these women did what was necessary to survive—ensuring an heir (Tamar), making a living as an unattached woman (Rahab), securing a husband and an heir (Ruth), and surviving the sexual advances of the most powerful person in the monarchy, the monarch himself (Bathsheba). More important, these women were used mightily by God in the history of salvation that for Matthew culminates in the birth of the Messiah. The stories of these four women then point to the story of a fifth woman, Mary, herself the victim of sexual innuendo in subsequent debates.

The second significant break in the genealogical pattern is precisely here in reference to Mary: “Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ” (1:16). Up to this point in the genealogy, the active voice of the verb “to give birth” had been used, as in “Abraham was the father of Isaac,” and so on down the list. Here for the first time a passive voice is used, “of whom Jesus was born.” And while Mary in Matthew is presented neither as a Gentile nor as unchaste, nonetheless the birth of Jesus to an unwed (though betrothed) mother is irregular at the least.

The second unit in this section, 1:18-25, attempts to answer questions that surround the birth of Jesus, especially questions concerning Jesus’s dual paternity as “son of God” and “son of David.” The virginal conception of Jesus is asserted, not argued, by Matthew. What Matthew does provide is scriptural warrant for Joseph not to divorce Mary by citing Isaiah 7:14 in 1:22-23. This citation, part of the scripture formula employed by Matthew elsewhere in his Gospel (as in Matt 2:15, 17-18; 2:23b; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10), has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Some have accused Matthew of simply reading a messianic prophecy back into a text that in its original historical context has no messianic overtones. While this may be true, one should recognize that (1) Matthew stands in a long Jewish exegetical tradition of treating this passage messianically and (2) what sets Matthew’s interpretation apart from that of other contemporary Jewish interpreters is not his messianic interpretation but his identification of the Messiah as Jesus.

In its original context the “sign” Isaiah offers Ahaz in Isaiah 7:14 is most likely a reference to one of Isaiah’s own children, during whose infancy the kings of Syria and Israel would fall. During the compilation of the book of Isaiah (long noted for its complicated composition history), this “non-messianic” text in Isaiah 7 was placed in close proximity to what is clearly a messianic text in Isaiah 9 (“A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders . . . and endless peace for David’s throne and for his kingdom”), inviting subsequent interpreters of Isaiah to give the first reference to a child in 7:14 a messianic reading in light of the second reference in 9:6-7. The Greek translators of this passage in the third century BCE did exactly that, making more explicit the messianic overtones by depicting the birth of this child as a supernatural event, translating the rather innocuous Hebrew word *alma* (“young woman”) with the more theologically loaded Greek term *parthenos* (“virgin”). Matthew takes the next step in this messianic exegesis by identifying “a virgin” as “the virgin” and identifying this messianic figure with Jesus. Thus, the divine sonship of Jesus is demonstrated by his virginal conception. And of course the name Emmanuel, “God is with us,” given to Jesus here through the prophecy of Isaiah, is fulfilled at the end of Matthew’s Gospel through Jesus’s words to his disciples, “I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age” (28:20).

The second point Matthew makes is that Jesus is also “son of David.” Here, though, is the problem: If Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus, how is it that Jesus can enjoy the benefits of Joseph’s Davidic lineage, that is, the other part of his dual paternity? Matthew provides a subtle but persuasive answer. In the message to Joseph, the angel of the Lord informs him that “[Mary] will bear a son; and *you* shall give him the name Jesus” (emphasis added). The naming of Jesus by Joseph is significant, because in Jewish law, when a father names a child, it makes him the child’s legal parent (see *Mishna Baba Batra* 8:6). This legal status as son bestows all the paternal benefits that a biological son would enjoy. Jesus is joined to the Davidic lineage through Joseph’s legal adoption of him, symbolized by the naming.

The first unit answers who Jesus is: he is the Messiah, “son of David,” “son of Abraham.” The second unit describes how he received dual paternity: he was born to a virgin, but legally adopted by a descendant of David. Jesus is shown to have all the requisite credentials and pedigrees for Messiah. And so Matthew’s story of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, has begun.

Genealogy of Jesus

1 A record of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:

²Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

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

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Aram.

⁴Aram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab.

Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon,

whose mother had been the wife of

Uriah.

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asaph.

⁸Asaph was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram.

Joram was the father of Uzziah.

⁹Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

¹⁰Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amos.

Amos was the father of Josiah.

¹¹Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers.

This was at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹²After the exile to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Achim.

Achim was the father of Eliud.

Great men in the Greco-Roman world were often thought to be of divine parentage. Here Alexander the Great is claimed to be a descendant both of the divine Heracles and the god Zeus, who is said to have visited his mother in the form of a thunderbolt: “As for the lineage of Alexander, on his father’s side he was a descendant of Heracles through Caranus, and on his mother’s side a descendant of Aeacus through Neoptolemus; this is accepted without any question. And we are told that Philip [Alexander’s father], after being initiated into the mysteries of Samothrace at the same time with Olympias [Alexander’s mother], he himself being still a youth and she an orphan child, fell in love with her and betrothed himself to her at once with the consent of her brother, Arymbas. . . . The night before that on which the marriage was consummated, the bride dreamed that there was a peal of thunder and that a thunder-bolt fell on her womb, and that thereby much fire was kindled, which broke into flames and traveled all about, and then was extinguished. . . . Moreover, a serpent was once seen lying stretched out by the side of Olympias as she slept, and we are told that this, more than anything else, dulled the ardor of Philip’s attentions to his wife, so that he no longer came often to sleep by her side, either because he feared that some spells and enchantments might be practiced upon him by her, or because he shrank from her embraces in the conviction that she was the partner of a superior being.” (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 2.1-3.2 [first century CE]; from Boring, Berger, and Colpe, 37, no. 6)

¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary—of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ.

¹⁷So there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to Babylon to the Christ.

Birth of Jesus

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn't want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. ²⁰As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord

appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²²Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

²³Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,

And they will call him, Emmanuel.^a

(Emmanuel means "God with us.")

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

Quintilian, a first-century CE Roman rhetorician, argued that background information on a celebrated hero, such as a listing of ancestors, was indispensable for narrating the hero's achievements: "In the first place there is a distinction to be made as regards time between the period in which the objects of our praise lived and the time preceding their birth. . . . With regard to things preceding a man's birth, there are his country, his parents and his ancestors, a theme which may be handled in two ways. For either it will be creditable to the objects of our praise not to have fallen short of the fair fame of their country and of their sires or to have ennobled a humble origin by the glory of their achievements." (*Institutio oratoria*, 3.7.10) (from LCL)

2:1-23 The Visit of the Magi

Wise men from the east seek the place of the Messiah's birth, and Herod responds with the massacre of the innocents.

Matthew 2:1-23 consists of two sections: 2:1-12 is the story of the magi's search for the Messiah and Herod's response to them; 2:13-23 details the migration of Joseph to Egypt, Herod's massacre of the Hebrew children, and the return of Joseph and his family to Nazareth.

The unit begins with magi, or astrologers, coming from the east to Jerusalem to inquire about the "newborn king of the Jews" (2:1). Though the term *magi* could be heard as a pejorative reference to magicians or sorcerers (see Acts 13:6), their appearance here seems much more positive. Indeed, they are pious seekers after the "king of the Jews." And they are Gentiles; the phrase "king of the Jews" is used of Jesus only by Gentiles in Matthew (as in Matt 27:11, 29, 37). Why have these Gentiles come to Jerusalem? Because "We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him" (2:2). Rather than rejoicing at the news the magi bring, Herod, and indeed "everyone in Jerusalem," is frightened (2:3). He summons "the chief priests and the legal experts and ask[s] them where the Christ [is] to be born" (2:4). They answer by naming Bethlehem and quoting scripture (Mic 5:2 with 2 Sam 5:2).

In addition to the explicit citation of scripture, the first part of this story draws heavily on the Old Testament for its imagery of a Messiah descended from David. In Numbers 22-24, the king of Moab, Balaam, called for a famous visionary named Balaam to come from the east (Num 23:7) to use his magical arts against Moses. Instead of cursing Moses, however, Balaam had this positive prophecy: "a star comes from Jacob; a scepter arises from Israel" (Num 24:17).

|| ^aIsa 7:14

This passage was understood not only to predict the emergence of the Davidic monarchy, but also, in later Judaism (by the time of Matthew), to refer to the coming of the Messiah. In fact, by the time of the second Jewish revolt in 135 CE, the revolutionary Simon ben Kosibah was hailed by his followers as “Bar Kochba,” which means “son of a star” and was meant to refer to his identity as “Messiah.” So though the characters in the story, the magi, may not understand the significance of seeing the child’s star, the audience, both *in* the text (Herod and “everyone in Jerusalem”) and *of* the text (the first and subsequent readers), would no doubt catch the allusion here to the messianic prophecy in Numbers 24.

Matthew knows that during his earthly ministry Jesus came only to minister to the “lost sheep, the people of Israel” (10:5-6), but he finds a compelling way to include Gentiles in his story of salvation from the beginning. These pious Gentiles come to Jerusalem because they have received a revelation through pagan astrology, and they have responded to this “natural revelation.” But their revelation is incomplete; they are unable to locate the “king of the Jews” without the aid of the Jews who have the scriptures, which reveal the birthplace of the Messiah. Here is the irony: the Gentiles know of the birth through their pagan sciences and wish to pay homage to the new king; the Jews, through their scriptures, know of the place of the birth, but refuse to worship the new king. Here then is the gospel in miniature: Gentiles come to Jews to learn about God’s redeeming work in Jesus Christ. Or as Paul put it: “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

Herod secretly summons the magi and sends them to Bethlehem (2:7-8). He deceives them with promises of his own desire to see the new child: “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him” (2:8b). To focus exclusively on the number of magi or the symbolism of their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as has been common in the history of interpretation of this passage, is to miss the overall argument of the text. If the first part of this unit (2:1-8) records the implicit hostility at the news of the Messiah’s birth, the second half (2:9-12) records the proper response to the news: the magi pay homage to the newborn king. They may be the first to worship Jesus, but they are not the last: a person with leprosy (8:2), a ruler (9:18), the disciples (14:33), a Canaanite woman (15:25), the mother of James and John (20:20), an unnamed woman (26:6-13), the women at the tomb (28:9), and the disciples, in the Gospel’s final scene (28:17), all pay homage to Jesus. The appropriate response to Jesus from womb to tomb is to give him the same kind of reverence one would give God.

Herod’s first plan is spoiled by two dreams: one in which the magi are warned “not to return to Herod” (2:12), and another in which Joseph is warned to take his family to Egypt to escape Herod’s wrath (2:13). The flight to Egypt (2:13-15) is explained in a fulfillment formula typical of Matthew: “This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ‘I have called my son out of Egypt’” (2:15). The text cited is Hosea 11:1, in which “son” refers to Israel, but also in the background here is the story of another dreamer named Joseph who traveled to Egypt (see Gen 37) and the subsequent story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus will likewise make an exodus from Egypt back to the promised land, but not before Herod executes his horrendous “Plan B.” In a story reminiscent of the story of Moses’s birth, Herod, like the Egyptian pharaoh, “sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger” (2:16; see also Exod 1:15-22). Like Moses’s birth, the birth of Jesus in Matthew is accompanied by deep grief and lament, not by canticles of joy (as in Luke). Several points must be made about this text. First, the parallels between Moses and Jesus do not end with this story. The forty days of Jesus’s testing in the wilderness (4:1-11) echo Moses and the Israelites’ wandering around in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, in which he says he came not “to do away with, but to fulfill” the Law (5:17), echoes Moses’s reception of the Law on Mount Sinai. In fact, many hold that the overall structure of Matthew is intended to reflect the books of Moses. Just as there are five books in the Pentateuch attributed to Moses, so Matthew contains five major discourses by Jesus, each of which is brought to closure with the same formulaic expression, “when Jesus finished” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The “five books of Jesus” correspond to the “five books of Moses,” and Jesus is depicted as the new Moses who comes to complete Israel’s story of redemption.

Second, the action of Herod in Matthew is in keeping with what we know of his paranoia from other texts. Josephus recounts how Herod, fearful of the influence the Hasmonean dynasty still wielded through his wife Mariamne, ordered intermittent executions of members of his own family beginning with his sons and culminating with the execution of Mariamne herself (see Josephus, *Antiquities*, book 15).

Finally, we should note that the fulfillment formula that occurs at the end of this passage is different from all the other fulfillment formulae in Matthew’s infancy narrative. The text reads: “This

fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and much grieving. Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were no more’” (Matt 2:17-18). The fulfillment formulae usually begin with the Greek word *hina*, “so that,” indicating that the event occurred in order that scripture would be fulfilled (as in Matt 1:22; 2:15; 2:23). In our text the causal, “in order that,” has been replaced by a simple “This fulfilled.” The change is theologically significant. Matthew does not suggest that the murder of the children took place *in order that* scripture might be fulfilled; no, the cause of the children’s death was Herod’s wickedness, not some divine mandate that prophecy be fulfilled. So rather than trying to explain the brutal event, Matthew found some solace in this passage from Jeremiah. Rather than offering some glib explanation for this tragedy, Matthew encourages his audience to interpret this horrendous event against the backdrop of scripture. The encouragement of suffering with those in the past provides some solace for those grieving in the present.

The unit ends when Herod dies (see the rather extended and gruesome description of his death in Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.6.5), and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return. Joseph is told in a dream to “go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead” (2:19-20). This respite from the threat of death is, as we know, only short-lived. Joseph soon learns that Herod’s son, Archelaus, has taken over Judea and leaves again, this time for Nazareth in Galilee. So Jesus leaves Judea to escape death; ironically, the next time Jesus returns to Judea, there are new enemies (from the same old unholy religious/political alignment), and he does die. But Jesus, like Samson, who is also a “Nazarene/nazirite” (Matt 2:23; see also Judg 13:5, 7), will deliver his people through the efficacy of his death.

Coming of the magi

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. ²They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

³When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. ⁴He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶*You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the
rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who
governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel.”^b*

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.”

⁹When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

The story of Moses’s birth and miraculous escape from the slaughter of Israelite male children was quite popular among the Jews and was often retold. This version, by Josephus, comes from the first century CE: “One of the Egyptian priest-scholars—people who can predict the future with great accuracy—announced to the king that there would soon be born among the Israelites someone who, if he reached adulthood, would bring down the dominance of the Egyptians and build up the Israelites, and would surpass everyone in virtue and win everlasting fame. The king was alarmed at this news, and on the advice of the scholar, ordered that every newborn Israelite boy should be done away with by being drowned in the river. He also ordered that pregnant Hebrew women should be watched when they went into labor, and that the Egyptian midwives should watch out for their deliveries.” (*Jewish Antiquities*, 2.205-6; from Miller, *Born Divine*, 130)

|| ^bMic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2

Escape to Egypt

¹³When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” ¹⁴Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. ¹⁵He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: *I have called my son out of Egypt.*^c

Murder of the Bethlehem children

¹⁶When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. ¹⁷This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

¹⁸*A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much grieving.
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.*^d

Return from Egypt

¹⁹After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰“Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” ²¹Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. ²³He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

Ministry of John the Baptist

3 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing, ²“Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” ³He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said:

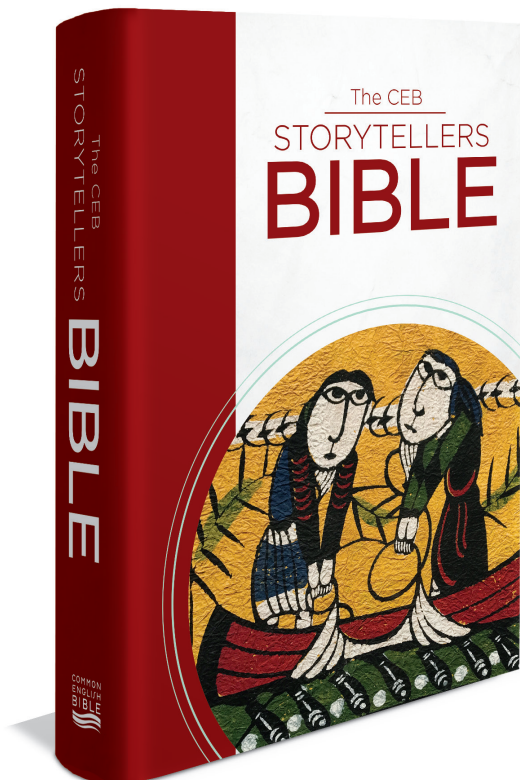
*The voice of one shouting in the wilderness,
“Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.”*^e

⁴John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

⁵People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him. ⁶As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁷Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, “You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? ⁸Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. ⁹And don’t even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham’s children from these stones. ¹⁰The ax is already at

There are several parallels between Matthew’s story and the stories that circulated about the divine portents that accompanied the birth of the emperor Augustus as catalogued, for example, by Suetonius: “Having reached this point, it will not be out of place to add an account of the omens which occurred before he was born, on the very day of his birth, and afterward, from which it was possible to anticipate and perceive his future greatness and uninterrupted good fortune. . . . According to Julius Marathus, a few months before Augustus was born a portent was generally observed at Rome, which gave warning that nature was pregnant with a king for the Roman people; thereupon the senate in consternation decreed that no male child born that year should be reared; but those whose wives were with child saw to it that the decree was not filed in the treasury, since each one appropriated the prediction to his own family.” (Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, “The Deified Augustus,” 2.94 [early second century CE]; from Boring, Berger, and Colpe, 43–44, no. 14.)

|| ^cHos 11:1 ^dJer 31:15 ^eIsa 40:3



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