

SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HISTORY DRIVING THEOLOGY:
A LITERARY, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE MATTHEAN BIRTH NARRATIVES

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Relevance of the Study

With the release of "The Nativity Story"¹ in 2006, the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke made it to the silver screen and reached millions of moviegoers across the globe. The film takes much of the Gospel narratives at face value though often preserving tradition (as with the scene of simultaneous worship of the Christ child by shepherds and magi) over a historical-critical approach. At the same time, certain characters, such as the humorous magi, are developed much more than the Biblical account. Regardless, the harmonization of the two Gospel birth narratives in the form of film has brought more focus on Jesus' birth than with any previous multimedia production. Rather than a skeptical approach of a historical-critical scholar, the movie presented the birth of Jesus from a faith perspective.

The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) aired a special on the birth of Jesus during November 2005 as part of their news documentary, *Dateline: NBC*. The title of the story was "The Birth of Jesus: A Question of Faith or History?"² As correspondent, Keith Morrison, states, "It's a story many Christians all over the world believe word for word—but how much is history? Wars have started over the question of whether the

¹*The Nativity Story*, 101 min., prods. Wyck Godfrey and Marty Bowen, dir. Catherine Hardwicke, (Hollywood: New Line Home Entertainment, 2006), digital video diskette.

²Keith Morrison, "What is the Real Christmas Story?," *NBC Dateline* (aired 11 Nov 2005), n.p. [cited 3 Jan 2008]. Online: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10005045/>.

Nativity story was to be taken literally or as an allegory, a myth.”

The television special focused on the historicity of the birth narratives, including interviews with such renowned scholars as John Dominic Crossan, Craig Evans, and Ben Witherington and writer, Lesley Hazleton. While scholars such as Evans and Witherington represent a more conservative background, the more skeptical scholars demonstrate how the discussion of the birth narratives has changed over time. Hazleton, author of *A Flesh-And-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother*, remarks in an interview with Morrison, “The Gospels, you have to remember, were not written as history. They were written as theology; they were written in Greek outside of Palestine.” Morrison narrates, “And it’s this theology written some 80 years after Jesus’ birth that grew into the biggest religion in the world—two billion people—and became the foundation of Western civilization. That happened even if the Nativity story didn’t unfold exactly as it’s told by the Gospel writers.” John Crossan focuses upon the significance rather than the historicity of the events: “The most important debate is this: Whether you take it literally or whether you take it metaphorically, what meaning are you taking from it?”

The circle of scholars focus upon several aspects of the Matthean and Lukan birth narratives, including the virgin birth, the Lukan census, the magi and moving star, the flight to Egypt, and the birth in the geographical location of Bethlehem. Crossan continually points to a metaphorical understanding although he focuses on the significance rather than the literary strategy. Insisting that Matthew wrote his birth narrative to present Jesus as the new Moses, Crossan says that Matthew thought, “I will have a story in which Herod, the new pharaoh, tries to kill all the children of Bethlehem

in order to kill Jesus. In plain language, it's a parable. Matthew knew what he was doing.”

These comments from Crossan illustrate much of the modern view of the birth narratives of Jesus: that they were theologically contrived. With the publication of Raymond Brown's *Birth of the Messiah*³ in 1977, the scholarly world saw the most detailed analysis of the Synoptic birth narratives to date and concludes with this same skepticism. Although Brown believes that Matthew began with a narrative and later added the fulfillment quotations to bring out the theological implications of the events of Jesus' birth, there were several elements that were contrived based on his understanding of OT prophecy and two or more narratives were conflated. This thought has been echoed by such recent publications as James D.G. Dunn's *Jesus Remembered* (2003)⁴ where he allows only eight pages to focus on Jesus' birth out of 1,019 pages which cover the life of Jesus. Such skepticism has also infiltrated more conservative scholars such as N. T. Wright who does not spend more than one page on the birth events in his three volumes of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*.⁵ John P. Meier's massive three-volume work on the historical Jesus entitled, *A Marginal Jew*,⁶ casts many shadows of doubt on elements of the birth narratives, including a birth at Bethlehem.

³Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

⁴James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); *The Resurrection and the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

⁶John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

One of the most recent books to be published concerning the life of Jesus is from John Shelby Spong whose book, *Jesus for the Non-Religious* (2007), reveals its opinion on the birth narrative from the title of the second chapter: “There Was No Star Over Bethlehem.” Not only quoted in the body of the text in this chapter but also printed in bold under the title of the chapter are Spong’s words that sum up his view: “Birth stories are always fanciful. They are never historical. No one waits outside a maternity ward for a great person to be born.” This reflects the intense skepticism of his approach throughout the chapter. He continues by saying, “It is, therefore, essential to begin this search for the reality of the man Jesus by looking at the biblical narratives that purport to tell of his birth, which for far too long have been mistakenly read as history.”⁷

The above examples have shown that when it comes to the birth narratives, most modern-day scholars and writers view them as little more than a figment of the Gospel writer’s theological imagination. While some scholars concede that there are minimal elements of historicity, many of them believe that the birth narratives were written in light of their belief in the resurrection, beginning with a theological starting point that resulted in the creation of birth accounts. In other words, their theology was driving their sense of history whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Purpose of the Study

Because Mark is considered the earliest Gospel by most scholars and it does not contain a birth narrative (nor does the Gospel of John unless one includes the theological description of the “Word” becoming flesh in the prologue), many believe that Matthew

⁷ John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious: Recovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2007), 15–16.

and Luke added their birth narratives as a means of explaining the beginnings of the biographical sketch of Jesus. Consequently, one reads two birth accounts that have been theologically contrived, based upon their understanding of a post-resurrection Jesus.

Is this necessarily true? The focus of this dissertation is on the Matthean birth narrative. While the question of the Lukan narrative centers on the census and the annunciation, the Matthean narrative contains elements such as the genealogy, magi and moving star, flight to Egypt, massacre of the children of Bethlehem by Herod, and the return to Nazareth which are often the subjects of intense scrutiny. The numerous OT quotations used in Matthew's Gospel further the modern scholarly view that Matthew created his account of the birth narratives to match his post-Easter theological understanding. The primary question at hand is whether Matthew's theology influenced his writing of history or whether his understanding of a historical account influenced his theology. In other words, what was Matthew's purpose in writing his account of the birth narrative? How does it fit into the larger context of the Gospel? Did he create the narrative based on his theological presuppositions of the identity of Jesus or did he receive the information from reliable sources to write his account and bring out the theological implications? Even if Matthew thought his account was a presentation of historical events, can the account be considered historical today?

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that while Matthew had a theological purpose for including the narrative, he received historical information from reliable sources on which to base his account. These historical events further drove Matthew's theology as he presents Jesus as the Messiah in his Gospel. Furthermore, this study will

demonstrate that the elements within the account are historically plausible, granted that one is not closed off to a supernaturalistic worldview.

Organization and Methodology of the Study

Chapter 1 brings the reader up to date regarding the numerous scholarly discussions of the Matthean birth narrative. This gauges the scholarly opinion of the past and the present on this important issue. Such scholarly selections date from the Church Fathers to the modern era. In addition to presenting selected scholarly views on the Matthean birth narrative, this chapter also provides a historical backdrop to the selected scholars in order to show how theological schools of thought have impacted their thinking. This includes a look at diverse scholars from rationalism to reductionism. While not every scholar can be included in this section, those that have had the greatest impact on birth narrative and historical Jesus studies are included. By way of looking at the mistakes and discoveries of other scholars, it benefits current discussion and provides a more accurate perspective on the issue.

Chapter 2 begins the in-depth analysis of the narrative through the lens of the hermeneutical triad. The first feature of this triad is the literary component. In order to determine whether or not Matthew believed his own account to be historical, it is crucial to examine just how he presents the information, including his use of literary devices. This chapter will include discussion of Matthew's possible sources for the narrative, exegetical and syntactical analysis, Matthew's use of dream sequences as a transitional device, and other literary devices. The purpose of this chapter is to explain Matthew's literary approach to the birth narrative, revealing the trustworthiness of the sources, his use of the sources, and demonstrating how he uses the various literary elements

throughout to achieve his purpose. This purpose, while not ignoring historicity, is primarily focused on theology.

While Chapter 2 examines each of the literary features in detail to demonstrate that Matthew's primary purpose was theological, Chapter 3 expounds upon the theological implications of the birth narrative. It shows that Matthew's primary purpose in writing his Gospel was to provide a theological framework for understanding Jesus as the long-awaited Christ. By looking at Matthew's use of Jesus' genealogy, virgin birth, birth in Bethlehem, journey of the pagan magi to find the Christ, reaction of Herod the Great, flight to Egypt, and numerous OT quotations, this chapter investigates the possibility that Matthew wants the reader to understand this birth as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah.

The historical component of the hermeneutical triad is perhaps the most debated and doubted in any discussion of Matthew's birth narrative. Chapter 4 evaluates legitimate explanations surrounding the historical aspects of Matthew 1–2. The discussion includes a look at the various features of the narrative mentioned in the previous chapter, however, in light of their historical plausibility from a modern perspective. Such an analysis will include a discussion of Matthew's treatment of historical sources, the possibility of the supernatural, the likelihood of specific elements in the account based upon history and other cultures, and astronomical observances. Instead of dismissing the account as theological creation, the chapter calls for a renewed emphasis on the possibility of historicity.

The conclusion will summarize the findings of the above research, tying together the literary, theological, and historical analysis to determine whether Matthew began with

a theological presupposition and creatively wrote a “history” of Jesus’ beginnings or whether he began with what he considered a historical account and wrote in such a way to highlight its theological implications of who Jesus is and why he came. It will also present the historical reliability of the account, whether or not Matthew viewed it as historical.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL AND MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE MATTHEAN BIRTH NARRATIVE

In order to better understand where scholarship on the birth narratives has arrived, it is pertinent to examine from whence it has come. Over time, it is evident that the responses to Matthew 1–2 have varied, moving through phases of creedal formulation, heretical explanation, supernatural theologizing, naturalistic criticism, historical pessimism, and historical optimism. Much has been written in regards to the origin of Jesus with few agreements. As is the case for most issues in religion, presupposition and worldview impact the understanding of the nature of the canonical birth narrative. Before delving into issues of literary, theological, and historical analysis, it is important to first survey the various approaches to the Matthean birth narrative since the first century.

The Early Church Fathers

The early church fathers are an important source for the discussion of the Matthean birth narratives since they are among our earliest sources outside of the canonical Gospels, ranging from the early second century through the fifth century. The starting point for the church fathers is that of absolute commitment to the faith. There is widespread agreement on some aspects of the birth narratives while there is a divergence of opinion on aspects such the origin of the magi.

Genealogy of Jesus

While there was not as much emphasis on the genealogy itself as there was on the virgin birth, the church fathers saw some differences between the genealogy of Matthew and that of Luke. Some, such as Hilary of Poitiers, indicate that Matthew traced the lineage from the tribe of Judah while Luke traced the lineage from the tribe of Levi. Africanus, in his *Letter to Aristides*, believed that whereas Matthew traced the lineage of Jesus through the pedigree of Jacob from David through Solomon, Luke traced that of Heli from Nathan the son of David.¹

Although Augustine does not say that Luke traced Jesus' lineage through Mary and Matthew traced it through Joseph, he points out that Luke seems to concentrate on the priestly lineage of Christ and does not follow the royal lineage in the genealogy but those who were not kings, such as Nathan instead of Solomon. He follows a similar thought to that of Africanus: Matthew traced the natural father of Joseph (Jacob) while Luke traced the adoptive father of Joseph (Heli) since Matthew repeats "...begat..." all the way down to Joseph. Even if Luke had used the same term, it would not necessarily mean a natural begetting since the same is used of spiritual begetting but Luke only mentions "Joseph, the son of Heli," making it a clear distinction.

According to Augustine, the genealogy is broken up into a series of forty men

¹*The Epistle to Aristides* 1.1–3 (ANF 1:125–6). He argues that the priestly tribe of Levi allied with the kingly tribe of Judah because of Aaron marrying Elizabeth and Eleazar marrying the daughter of Phatiel (Exod 6:23–25). Africanus indicates that one Gospel writer traced Jesus' ancestry through his natural father while the other through his legal father. He explains that Matthan, father of Jacob, and Melchi, father of Heli were married to the same woman. Apparently, Matthan died after begetting Jacob and Melchi took the widow as his wife and beget Heli. Matthan is a descendant of Solomon while Melchi is a descendant of Nathan, "Thus, then, we shall find Jacob and Heli uterine brothers, though of different families."

since that is the number given by Scripture regarding tribulation (Acts 14:22) and the number is used for prayer and fasting, the solemn assembly, and many other events and practices in the OT. Matthew gave three groups of fourteen which would have resulted in a total of forty-two. Jechonias is mentioned twice, being “a prefigure of a corner” from one generation of Jerusalem to Babylon. Christ is the real cornerstone and if one excludes the repetition of Jechonias and the mention of Christ, the number is forty.²

Where did these genealogies come from? Africanus indicates that up until Herod the Great’s appointment as king of Judea, the genealogies of the Hebrews had been registered in the public archives. Because Herod knew that the lineage of the Israelites had nothing to do with him and was burdened with insults concerning this, he burned the records. Thus, he could clear himself since the lineage of the Hebrews could not be traced. However, a number of people kept private records, including family members of Jesus from Nazara and Cochaba, Judean villages, as well as other parts of the country. These genealogies came from a source Africanus refers to as “the Book of Days.”³

Virgin Birth

The early church fathers, from Ignatius (end of 1st century) to Augustine (5th Cent.), agree upon the doctrine of the virgin birth, the union of an earthly lineage from the seed of David with that of a divine origin as the eternal Son of God. Upon examining the Matthean birth narrative, each of the fathers sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the Isa

²*The Harmony of the Gospels* 1.2, 2.3.5–7, 2.4.9–10 (NPNF 1:78, 104–6).

³*The Epistle to Aristides* 1.4–5 (ANF 1:126–7).

7:14 prophecy as Matthew indicates. Much of the support for this is from the idea that the prophecy given to Isaiah indicated a sign that would take place in the birth of a child. If the child was born from the natural conception in a young woman, what type of miraculous sign would this be? Instead, the translation of the LXX and Matthew as παρθένος (“virgin”), is the correct understanding. Irenaeus points out that this translation in the LXX was made by Jews before the advent. He also argues that if Joseph was Jesus’ natural, physical father, Jesus could not be king or heir, according to Jeremiah. Jechoniah and all of his offspring were disinherited from the kingdom (Jer 22:24–28; 36:30–31).⁴ Augustine gives a creedal statement regarding the virgin birth: “This then we religiously believe, this we most firmly hold fast, that Christ was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.”⁵

Origen makes mention of the fact that there are claims of an illegitimate birth of Jesus from the union of Mary and a soldier named Panthera.⁶ Origen complains that Celsus avoids the quotation of Isa 7:14 in reference to Christ’s birth. To argue against the “young woman” translation of עַלְמָה, Origen points to the same word being used in Deut 22:23–24, which discusses the penalty for a man having sexual relations with a young woman who is also a virgin betrothed to another. Furthermore, he thinks it odd to

⁴*Against Heresies* 3.21.1–6 (ANF 1:9–10); *Dialogue with Trypho* 1.84 (ANF 1:241); *Against Marcion* 3.12–13 (1:331–2).

⁵*Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 1.10 (NPNF 1:249).

⁶*Against Celsus* 1.28, 32. (ANF 1:408, 410). The earliest Rabbinic tradition is texts of the Tannaitic Period (to 200 CE), called the Ben Pantera texts, regarding healing in the name of Jesus son of Pantera (*t. Hul.* 2:22, 23; *y. Sabb.* 14d; *y. Abod. Zar.* 27b). Some also hold validity for the *Toledoth Yeshu* or “Life of Jesus.” For more discussion of rabbinic texts, see Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 172–6.

consider it a sign from God for a young woman to give birth to a son. In addition, he asks which would be better considered Emmanuel: a virgin-born son or a son born of the union between a man and a young woman.⁷

Chrysostom indicates that although Joseph did not take part in the conception of Jesus, God gave him the part of father by allowing him to name Jesus. He further explains why Jesus was called thus instead of Emmanuel. He points out that the text indicates, “his name shall be called” rather than “you shall call.” The outcome of the events of His life will cause him to be called Emmanuel (Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew* 4.6, 5.2–3).⁸

Magi and Moving Star

What about the star and the magi? Justin Martyr connects Isa 7:14 with the events surrounding the magi. The interpretation of the birth in Isa 7:14 referring to Hezekiah’s son fails since he could not fulfill the words of “Before the child knows how to call father or mother, he shall take the power of Damascus and spoils of Samaria.” None of the Jews fulfilled this. Christ fulfilled this by the fact that the Magi were from Arabia, which was also Damascus of Samaria, although that region changed from Arabia to Syrophenicia. The Magi were imprisoned by evil but were freed when they came to worship Christ.⁹

There is no solid agreement on the origin of the magi. While Justin Martyr,

⁷*Against Celsus* 1.34–35 (ANF 1:411).

⁸Manilio Simonetti, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1–13*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 17–20.

⁹*Dialogue with Trypho* 1.77–78 (ANF 1:237–8).

Tertullian¹⁰, and apparently Celsus¹¹ point to Arabia, Chrysostom indicates Babylon as the origin (Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew* 8.1)¹² and Africanus posits Persia, describing strange events happening there where a star appears before the king over the pillar of Pege and a voice was heard, indicating that a child was begotten by “extraordinary generation.”¹³

Origen says that the star the Magi followed was a new one, unlike any other well-known celestial body but “partaking of the nature of those celestial bodies which appear at times, such as comets, or those meteors which resemble beams of wood, or beards, or wine jars...” He points out that such celestial bodies were widely known to have appeared to indicate bad or good circumstances so it should not be unbelievable for this to happen at Jesus’ birth. Along with Irenaeus,¹⁴ he points to Num 24:17 (LXX) as a prophecy of the star of Jesus. Origen also believes that the Magi were struggling with their powers of sorcery due to God’s divine power and the star appeared to them, convincing them that it was significant in their failure. They possessed the Scriptures and saw the star as a signification of Num 24:17 and sought the man spoken of in the prophecy. They were ignorant of the place of his birth but followed the star, bringing gold for a king, myrrh as to a mortal, and incense as to a God.¹⁵

¹⁰*Against Marcion* 3.12–13 (ANF 1:331–2).

¹¹*Against Celsus* 1.58–60 (ANF 1:422–3).

¹²Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, 33.

¹³*Narrative of Events Happening in Persia on the Birth of Christ* 1.1 (ANF 1:128–30).

¹⁴*Against Heresies* 3.9 (ANF 1:422–3).

¹⁵*Against Celsus* 1.58–60 (1:422–3).

Chrysostom agrees that the star was not ordinary since it not only moves but also beckons and guides. It has the ability to hide itself, appear, and stand still. He posits that Egypt and Babylon represented the whole world to which salvation had come in the person of Jesus Christ. The magi came from Babylon, returned with the message, and the family of Jesus was led to Egypt. While Palestine plotted the death of Christ, Egypt received him. In the same way, Palestine plotted the death of Jacob and Egypt received him as shown in Gen 45:25–46:7. Although Chrysostom indicates that the magi were from Babylon, he also indicates that they escaped to the land of the Persians in order to be commissioned by God to teach them (Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew* 7.3–4, 8.1–2).¹⁶

Gregory the Great indicated that a star was given to the magi instead of an angel because the angel preached to the Jews as those who were capable of reason but the Gentiles needed a sign because they were not prepared to make full use of reason. He says that this is what Paul meant in 1 Cor 14:22 where he speaks of prophecy given for believers but signs for unbelievers (Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.1).¹⁷

While most early church fathers agree that God’s warning to the magi in a dream was to protect them and the child from Herod, Tertullian uses a figurative interpretation. Rather than protecting them from Herod in telling them to go home another way, this was a command to “walk otherwise,” meaning that they were no longer to trust in astrology.¹⁸

¹⁶Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, 26–27, 31–33.

¹⁷Ibid., 22.

¹⁸*On Idolatry* 1.9 (ANF 1:66).

What about the gifts of the magi? Most early church fathers see much symbolism in the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Similar to Origen (described above), Irenaeus indicates that the gift of myrrh was because of His death for the human race, gold for a king, and frankincense because He was God made known in Judea and declared to those who did not believe.¹⁹ Gregory the Great points out that the gold symbolizes wisdom (Prov 21:20 LXX). The incense is like a prayer to God for a sweet smell for Him (Ps 141:2 or 140:2 LXX). The myrrh indicates a mortification of the body, a striving unto death for God (Song 5:5). This myrrh keeps the body from decomposing and when we set it apart for the Lord, our fleshly minds will not be allowed to cause decomposition through decadence (Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.6).²⁰

Tertullian indicates that the magi are often considered kings in the East and Damascus was part of Arabia before it became Syrophenicia. Its riches were given to Christ with the giving of gold and spices “while the spoils of Samaria were the magi themselves” since they gave up idolatry to worship Him.²¹

Chronology and Location of Birth

How did the church fathers put the account together chronologically, specifically as it relates to Luke’s account? Justin synthesizes the two Gospel accounts by indicating that Joseph went from Nazareth, where he lived, to Bethlehem on account of the first census taken in Judaea under Cyrenius. His family was of the tribe of Judah, which lived

¹⁹*Against Heresies* 3.9.2 (ANF 1:422–3).

²⁰Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, 28–29.

²¹*Against Marcion* 3.12–13 (ANF 1.331–2).

in that region. Justin indicates that because there was no lodging in Bethlehem, “he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him.”²²

According to Tatian’s harmony, the events of Luke 1:5–80 (annunciation and birth of John the Baptist) begin the birth story of Jesus, followed by Matt 1:18–25 (overview of the birth of Jesus), then Luke 2:1–39 (annunciation story and birth of Jesus). Then, the events of Matt 2:1–23 (magi, Herod, and flight to Egypt) took place, followed by Luke 2:40–52 (boy Jesus in the temple).²³

Augustine places Matt 1:18 before including Luke 1:26–34 and then Matt 1:19–21. Both Gospel writers place the birth in Bethlehem but do not cover the same parts of the story. This does not mean that there is discrepancy, only omission of a part of the story by each one that the other covers. He places Luke 1:5–36 before Matt 1:18–25 and then Luke 1:57–2:21. This is followed by Matt 2:1–12 before going back to Luke 2:22–39. Next, he includes Matt 2:13–23 before including Luke 2:40–52.²⁴

What about the birth at Bethlehem versus Nazareth? Origen defends the quotation of Mic 5:2 in Matt 2:6 regarding the belief that there is a cave (also mentioned by Justin Martyr) and manger at Bethlehem where Christ was born that is talked about by many in the surrounding areas, even by enemies of the faith. The belief that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem was already held among Jews as is evidenced by the chief priests and

²²*Dialogue with Trypho* 1.78 (ANF 1.237–8).

²³*Diatesseron* 1.1–3.36 (ANF 2.65–83).

²⁴*Harmony of the Gospels* 2.5.14–17 (ANF 1.107–12).

scribes informing Herod. Origen also uses John 7:42 to indicate that the Christ was to be born at Bethlehem. He says that in the same way lies were spread regarding the disciples stealing Jesus' body, there were those who discounted the birth at Bethlehem.²⁵

It is clear that apart from the developed heresies of those such as Celsus, Arius, and Marcion which were focused primarily on Christology, the early church all agreed upon the virgin birth of Christ, the reliability of the genealogy in Matthew, and the historicity of the strange events in Bethlehem. The sources for this narrative in Matthew's Gospel were often thought to be from Joseph and Mary but what is clear is that the early church saw these events as historical and explained theologically with references from the OT.

Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Sources²⁶

There is much disagreement over the dating of the NT apocryphal and pseudepigraphal sources but most of these sources are believed to be from the fourth century. It is evident from the texts that most of these sources are based on the canonical Gospels as they contain much of the same basic information that serves as a structure but then elaborates upon and fills in many blanks left by the canonical accounts.

The Protevangelium of James begins with the story of Mary's birth and betrothal to Joseph.²⁷ The annunciation to Mary is very similar to that in the Gospel account in

²⁵ *Against Celsus* 1.51 (ANF 1.418–9).

²⁶ These sources are included after the Early Church Fathers because of the disagreement over the dating, most appearing from at least the fourth century. Because there are several very early Church Fathers who appear early in the second century, that section is included first.

²⁷ Anna and Joachim, parents of Mary, were distraught over the fact that they had no children. Remembering the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel, Anna prayed to God and her

Luke, including much of the wording. The same is true of Joseph's reaction to the pregnancy. She is supposedly sixteen at the time of her pregnancy. Joseph and Mary are both scrutinized by the temple officials and given a drink of the water of the ordeal of the Lord (Num 5:11ff) and sent away to the hill country. They both returned unharmed and the temple officials stopped judging them.

Journeying to Bethlehem, Mary was at the point of labor. About three miles from Bethlehem, Joseph "found a cave there, and led her into it; and leaving his two sons beside her, he went out to seek a midwife in the district of Bethlehem." After seeing nature stand still in the heavens and on earth, Joseph met a midwife who followed him back to the cave. When they happened upon the cave, a cloud filled it and then a light shined inside. When it disappeared, the child appeared. The midwife met Salome and told her about the miracles she saw. Salome's response is very similar to that of doubting Thomas: "As the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth." When Salome thrust her finger, it appeared to be "dropping off as if burned with fire" because of her unbelief. Mary prayed for her and she was restored as soon as she touched the infant.

prayer was answered. After Mary was born, Anna and Joachim offered her to God at the age of three and she lived and served in the temple. Much of the heralding of her forthcoming birth is like that of the annunciation to Mary in the Gospels, including an angel who brought the message to her and her husband separately. The fact that the story takes place near the temple indicates that Mary and Joseph both lived in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

When Mary was twelve years old (some texts indicate 14), the widowers of Judea came to the temple, bringing their rods and the one to whom the Lord showed a sign would marry Mary. When Joseph took his rod, a dove came out of it and flew upon Joseph's head. This signified Joseph as the rightful man to marry Mary. The text indicates that Joseph was older, fearing he would be the laughing stock of Israel for taking such a young wife, and that he had previous children. It also indicates that "the priest remembered the child, Mary, that she was of the family of David, and undefiled before God" [*The Protevangelium of James* 1.9–10 (ANF 1.363)].

When the Magi appear, the story is similar to the Matthean narrative except that they explained to Herod, “We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear.” Furthermore, the slaughter of the innocents included a search for John [the Baptist], which resulted in Zacharias becoming a martyr, slain at the altar of the Lord and his blood turned to stone.²⁸

Like *The Protevangelium of James*, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*²⁹ the birth of Jesus is also elaborated further in that the child stood up immediately upon birth and the birth process was described as “no spilling of blood” and “no pain in bringing him forth.” “Moreover, a great star, larger than any that had been seen since the beginning of the world, shone over the cave from the evening till the morning. And the prophets who were in Jerusalem said that this star pointed out the birth of Christ, who should restore the promise not only to Israel, but to all nations.” After three days, Mary placed Jesus in a stall and was adored by the animals. This was to fulfill Isa 1:3 and Hab 3:2. On the sixth day, they entered Bethlehem and on the eighth day, the child was circumcised. After the days of purification, they went into the temple and dedicated Him. Most manuscripts indicate that when the second year was past (one manuscript has two days were past and another has on the thirteenth day), Magi came to Jerusalem. After the events described in Matthew 2, the story moves on to several miraculous stories of Jesus’ childhood while in

²⁸*The Protevangelium of James* 1.11–24 (ANF 1.363–6).

²⁹It also mentions Joachim and Anna and the fact that they had been together twenty years without children. It elaborates the story in *Protevangelium* concerning the annunciations to the parents, the birth of Mary, and her dedication to service in the temple. The same test mentioned in *Protevangelium* is given to Joseph and Mary with the water but they are told to walk around the altar seven times but they were not drunk so they were found blameless [*The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 1.1, 12 (ANF 1.369, 373–4)].

Egypt. Then, they return to Nazareth. Afterward, they move to Capernaum on account of the enemies of Jesus and finally return to live in Bethlehem of Judea.³⁰

The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary describes Mary as the “ever-virgin Mary, sprung from the royal stock and family of David, born in the city of Nazareth, was brought up at Jerusalem in the temple of the Lord.” The story follows that of *The Protevangelium of James* and *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* in most details.³¹

Protevangelium indicates that Joseph had previous children. *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* indicates that he had James, Joseph, Judah, and Simeon and two daughters.³² In *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*, however, the children are named Judas, Justus, James, and Simon and the daughters are Assia and Lydia. The account is written as if Jesus told the story to his disciples. Joseph’s previous wife is described as having died (Joseph lived forty years unmarried and forty-nine married to his previous wife before she died). Mary is described as being twelve when lots were cast to determine Joseph as her husband. At age 14, she conceived while Joseph was at work. Jesus said, “And I chose her of my own will, with the concurrence of my Father, and the counsel of the Holy Spirit.” The birth is said to take place in a cave in Bethlehem near the tomb of Rachel. Joseph is described as dying in Nazareth at the age of 111. The story goes on to

³⁰*The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 1.13–16 (ANF 1.375–6).

³¹Joachim is described as from Nazareth but Anna as from Bethlehem. Mary is described as age fourteen when she was given to be engaged. The rod test given to Joseph, mentioned in the other sources, was based upon Isa 11:1–2 [*The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* 1.1, 7 (ANF 1.384–6)]. All three of the apocryphal books describe Joseph as old and that he went to prepare a home for them when Mary conceived. The description of the annunciation in all three is taken from Luke’s Gospel as is the annunciation to Joseph in his dreams from Matthew’s Gospel.

³²*The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 1.42 (ANF 1.382).

describe Joseph's prayers and woes (compare to Job 3) leading up to his death although he did not feel pain.³³

Much of *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour* is taken from the Matthean and Lukan accounts as well as *The Protevangelium of James*. The birth took place in a cave in Bethlehem. In this story, the midwife beheld the cave illuminated by bright light. She was an old lady suffering from palsy but was healed when she touched the child. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day in the cave. The foreskin was put in a jar and given to a man who dealt in nard. This was the same ointment that the sinner, Mary, poured on Jesus in Luke 7:37-8. Ten days after the circumcision, Jesus was brought to Jerusalem and on the fortieth day after His birth, he was taken to the temple to be presented.

The magi were said to have come as a result of the prediction of Zeraduscht (Zoroaster). An angel appeared to them in the form of the same star which had guided them. The magi took the swaddling clothes to their country and set fire to it, but it was not burned. Then, they worshipped it and placed it among their treasures.

Mary, Joseph, and Child fled to Egypt and encountered a demoniac boy who was exorcised and restored to health by means of one of the cloths that had washed Jesus. They also encountered an idol which was made to talk by Satan who recognized Jesus: "A God has come here in secret, who is God indeed; nor is any god besides Him worthy of divine worship, because He is truly the Son of God." After speaking, the idol fell over. The two incidents are said to fulfill Hos 11:1.³⁴

³³*The History of Joseph the Carpenter* 1.2, 5, 8, 10, 14, 16 (ANF 1.388–91).

³⁴*The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour* 1.3, 5, 7–8, 10–12 (ANF 1.405–7).

The Gospel of Thomas, also known as the *Infancy Story of Thomas*, is mentioned by name in Origen's writings and is quoted by Irenaeus. The stories of the first and second Greek forms take place during Jesus' childhood in Nazareth, beginning when he was five. The Latin Form gives stories of Jesus when he was two at the time they fled to Egypt and then to Nazareth around age 5.³⁵

Again, it would appear that the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical sources borrowed the basic structure and characters of the story from the canonical Gospels. While this does lend an air of incredulity for these elaborated accounts, it also gives credence to the idea that the basic structure of the story was already in place. What was left was to fill in the gaps and give them theological explanations.

Middle Ages through Renaissance

Following the period of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, which many claim to have begun in the fourth century but their proliferation did not cease until much later, the history of the world went through many changes. The Middle Ages brought about many allegorical interpretations of Scripture as well as more Christological discussions. The Reformation and Renaissance ushered in a renewal of an emphasis upon the original languages of the NT and an exegetical focus. While it is impossible to give a complete history of interpretation during this time period, specific influential individuals have been selected for observation in how they view the birth narrative in Matthew.

³⁵*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 1.1–4 (ANF 1.398–400). The stories have nothing to do with the canonical birth accounts but are focused on miracles performed during childhood.

Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm of Canterbury did no exegetical work on the birth narrative in Matthew but concentrated his efforts on enhancing the Christology of Jesus as the God-Man in the 11th Century. An important element of this was the fact of the virgin birth. He says that God could have created a human being by four methods: 1) man and woman procreation (normal method); 2) from neither man nor woman (Adam); 3) from man but not woman (Eve from Adam); 4) from woman but not man. “In order, therefore, that he should prove that this method too is within his competence and that it has been kept in reserve for the very undertaking which we have in mind, it is pre-eminently fitting that he should take the man who is the object of our quest from a woman without the man.” Furthermore, Anselm indicates that since it was from a virgin woman (Eve) that sin found its way into the human race, it is only fitting that from a virgin woman (Mary) could come the cure.

Anselm does say that it was not necessary for Christ to be conceived of a virgin but it was fitting. God could have made a way for a just offspring to come from a sinful parent where the faith of the parent could have made her clean for conception. In this virginal conception, Anselm is clear that it was the Holy Spirit who aided the conception of a man from a woman. God made Christ in a sense from Adam although not through Adam but through His own power.³⁶

³⁶*Anselm of Canterbury: Major Works*, Oxford World’s Classics, eds. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 323, 376, 377, 381.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas collected works of several church fathers including Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, and Hilary. He compiled the commentaries of these fathers into a commentary of his own known as the *Catena Aurea*. Very little of Aquinas' own work is included in the commentary but his selective use of the fathers gives a glimpse at his own beliefs concerning the birth narratives in the volume on the Gospel of Matthew. He indicates that his intention is to bring out not only the literal but also mystical meaning of the text. Much of this is revealed in glosses, thought to be from Aquinas, included in the text.

He indicates that the Gospel was written in Hebrew and that the genealogy emphasized Jesus as the son of David, the son of Abraham for apologetic purposes against the Jews who did not believe Jesus was of the seed of David. He clarifies through the use of the church fathers that Jesus was indeed truly human and truly the Son of God who existed before all ages. Following Jerome, Aquinas indicates that the four women mentioned in the genealogy are an example of the way Christ came through sinners for sinners to put away the sins of all. He quotes Ambrose as indicating that Ruth was included for the fact that Boaz married a Moabite, which was condemned for Israelites by the Law, but this prefigured the inclusion of the Gentiles into the plan of salvation.

Aquinas looks to Eusebius and Africanus for an explanation of why Luke has Heli as father of Joseph while Matthew has Jacob. Matthan and Melchi had a son by the same wife, Jesca. Matthan, who traced his lineage through Solomon, had a son through her named Jacob and then died. Melchi, who was of the same tribe, took the widow as his wife and begat Heli. Jacob married the widow of Heli after his death and begat Joseph.

He was the son of Heli by the law but by nature Jacob's son. In this way, both Matthew and Luke are correct.

The mysterious division of the three groups of fourteen is discussed by various church fathers with a gloss most likely by Aquinas himself that the fourteen signified the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit doubled to show the grace needed for soul and body to salvation. The three groups of fourteen are: Abraham to David (including David); David to the carrying away (not including David but the carrying away to captivity included); carrying away to Christ (if Jeconiah is included, then the carrying away is included). This threefold division shows that the first division included those before the law, the second as those under the law, and the third as those under grace.

Aquinas makes it very clear that Jesus was born of a true virgin, one without carnal knowledge. Taking his cue from Jerome once again, Aquinas notes that the promise made to Ahaz in Isa 7:14 was that the child in his time was to be called Emmanuel because God was present with him in delivering him from the two hostile kings. Afterward, He shall be called Jesus or Savior, because He will save the entire human race. Furthermore, although the text indicates that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary "until she had brought forth her first-born Son," the word, "until," has different meanings. There are times when it refers to an infinite time (Isa 46:4; Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 15:25). Therefore, Mary did not know her husband carnally before or after Jesus' birth.

Aquinas' gloss informs the reader that the mention of three gifts by the magi does not necessarily mean there were only three but this number prefigured the coming to the faith of the nations sprung from Noah's three sons, faith in the Holy Trinity, the threefold

sense of Scripture (historical, moral, allegorical), or Logic, Physic, and Ethics. He also believes that they came less than a year from the time the child was born or he would have been found in Egypt. There is no solid opinion of the origin of the magi, however, though mention is made of the possibility of them being descendants of Balaam and recognizing his prophecy (Num 24:17). It appears that Aquinas believes the star was supernatural and created for a witness of Christ. The alteration of the quotation from Mic 5:2 (Bethlehem Ephrathah to Bethlehem of Judah) by the Jewish leaders was either from ignorance or to clarify the prophecy to Herod who was considered a foreigner. For the quotation in Matt 2:23 regarding Jesus as a Nazarene, Aquinas follows Jerome in that Matthew is not following a particular prophecy since he uses the plural (“prophets”) but a general sense of Scripture pointing out that He is holy (Nazarene) or possibly from the idea of the branch (נֹצֵר) in Isa 11:1.³⁷

Martin Luther

Martin Luther indicates that Jesus’ coming was a fulfillment of Gen 4:9-10 because a foreigner (Herod) had ruled over the Jews for thirty years and it was time to return the rule to the tribe of Judah. The magi “certainly” came from Arabia or Sheba because of their gifts which were precious in that country. Their art was magic, which is human reason aided by the devil combined with real natural arts.

While the stars are enough for a sign to the magi, such practices by astrology should not be trusted in general. Besides, God created a new star to show that the power

³⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers I, St. Matthew* (ed. and trans. John Henry Newman; Southhampton: Saint Austin, 1997), 21:1–90.

of the future does not lie in the stars themselves. Luther admits that there are chronicles and histories of Romans and Greeks where the births of great men were foretold by signs in the heavens. However, he denies that the magi understood the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:17) as the star since the star himself was Christ.

Luther lists three classes of disciples. First, are the priests and scribes who should have been the first to joyfully hurry to Bethlehem but their hardness of heart and fear of Herod prevented them (He indicates that when it speaks of “all Jerusalem” being troubled along with Herod, it did not mean literally every inhabitant but merely a majority of them). Second, are the Herod and his people who searched the Scriptures and found the truth in the coming of Christ but sought to bring it all to nothing. The third class is made up of the magi who left everything to find Christ. He further holds them up as a model of faith in that they believed the prophecies in spite of difficulties that faced them.

Luther justifies the change from “little” to “in no wise least” when Matthew quotes from Mic 5:2 by stating that the Evangelist looks more at the spiritual value which is also meant by the prophet but not clearly expressed. The statement regarding the “goings forth” being from everlasting is explained as why Christ had to die and rise again in order to be a true natural man but also have a spiritual life in eternity where he would reign.

Luther sees a spiritual significance in the birth story. Herod’s reign over his people signifies the reign of sin in one’s soul. He gives more than a passing glance at Herod representing the pope who did not like anyone else having the truth. The star is the

preaching of the Gospel. The magi are the first fruit of the Gentiles converted to the Gospel. Jerusalem is the Christian church where God's people are gathered.³⁸

John Calvin

John Calvin indicates that the Βίβλος of Matt 1:1 only applies to the first half of the chapter, the genealogy. He sees four points of difference between the genealogies given in Matthew and Luke: 1) Luke lists the names from last to first while Matthew begins with the source of the genealogy; 2) Luke traces the genealogy to Adam while Matthew traces it from Abraham; 3) Luke follows the natural descent of Jesus while Matthew follows the legal descent; 4) the two Gospel writers often give different names to the same people. The descent, though not naturally from Solomon, was counted his son by legal succession since it was a kingly descent. After the Babylonian captivity, the same people are mentioned with different names since the royal authority had been “extinguished.” The three by fourteen structure of Matthew's genealogy can be explained partially by a memory aid and partially by the presentation of a threefold condition of the nation. Calvin attributes the difficulty of the last set being only thirteen names instead of fourteen to the probability of error among those who transcribed the text through the years.

According to Calvin, Matt 1:18–25 explains the way the birth of Jesus was made known to Joseph rather than going into detail on how and where it took place. Joseph's love of justice bound him to recognize the crime which he supposed Mary had committed but his gentleness of disposition prevented him from carrying out the law to the utmost

³⁸*Sermons of Martin Luther I*, 2d ed. (ed. and trans. John Nicholas Lenker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1.2:324–3.132:374.

extent. Calvin explains the quotation of Isa 7:14 as having two distinct promises of God in its original context. The description in Isa 7:16 indicates that the kingdom will be forsaken before the child is old enough to know right from wrong. This promise points to all of the children of the time of Isaiah's prophecy. The actual text of Isa 7:14 points to a promise about a particular child who would bear the name of God. The actual use of הַעֲלֵמָה is to describe a virgin since it means "hiding" (taken from the verb הָלַךְ), which describes a virgin. Additionally, the miraculous birth requires something out of the ordinary: no human father. In fact, there is no mention of a man. Yet, the names given to children were provided by the mother but done by the authority of the father. Although the virgin was instructed in the second person to call the child "Emmanuel," the change by Matthew to the third person merely reflects the idea that since the name was made known, all who are godly have the same right to make this confession that God is with us.

Calvin describes the magi as being from Persia since this was the name given to astrologers and philosophers in that region. The star was not a natural one but an extraordinary one since it did things natural stars cannot do. It resembled a comet though it was not one. Calvin is quick to point out that astrology alone could not have guided the magi to Christ within the limits of nature alone but required aid of the Holy Spirit. He says that Herod would have known about the prophecies but was so attached to his own power and the Jews were so broken by the long years of suffering without power that they could not believe that grace had come. The change in wording from the description in Mic 5:2 of Bethlehem Ephrathah, distinguishing it from another Bethlehem which was in the tribe of Zebulun, to Matthew's quotation describing Bethlehem of Judah was to

magnify God's grace by pointing out the insignificant and unknown town where Christ was to be born.

Calvin rejects the symbolism of the three gifts of the magi as representing gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, and myrrh for burial. Instead, he sees them as three gifts that simply reflect Persian custom and produce. The flight to Egypt and the return to Israel can be seen as the head of the church (Jesus) coming out of Egypt just as the body (Israel) had been brought out. Calvin indicates that Macrobius relates the Bethlehem massacre in the second book of *Saturnalia* but Josephus passed over the story much in the same way he did not recount the massacre of the Sanhedrin which took place around the same time. He also finds it probable that the magi were warned early of the impending birth of Christ and they left early enough to arrive shortly after he was born. Because of the adverb, *Tότε*, which does not always denote uninterrupted time but can occur when there is great distance between events, Calvin believes that Herod may have thought the situation over for a year and a half before ordering the massacre of children two years of age and under.

The discussion of being a Nazarene is an allusion to the town of Nazareth, not a strict etymology. The meaning is that Jesus was set apart (Numbers 6) and fulfilled the foreshadowing among the Nazarites who were the firstfruits to God. Samson was an inferior antitype while Christ is the original model. The use of "prophets" by Matthew in citing this prophecy is excused because the book of Judges was written by many prophets.³⁹

³⁹John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke I* (CC 16; trans. William Pringle; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1943; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 84–107, 127–38, 154–65.

Erasmus

Erasmus concentrated his discussion of the birth narrative as an explanation of the beginnings of the savior of the world. He states his purpose: “I shall write this narrative especially for the sake of the Jews so that they do not evade the truth, for theirs is a rebellious nation and slow to believe.” Erasmus continues by explaining that Jesus is the one true Messiah and that the Jews have no reason to wait for another.

Erasmus paraphrases the account in Matthew 1–2, describing the background of each of the members of the genealogy. Additionally, he interprets the parts that appear ugly on the surface (such as Tamar’s union with Judah) as glorious in their purpose: “the mystery that lies concealed below the story’s unseemly surface is useful for the work of the gospel, in as much as Perez, too, was a type of the church and the synagogue, because he was born first, even though his brother, stretching forth his hand, was preparing to leave the darkness of the womb first.” Rahab and Ruth foreshadowed the idea that sinners and Gentiles will be joined to Christ as a result of faith. David’s union with Bathsheba was not without sin but it “was not done without a presentiment of the future” in the way that it foretold of Christ’s desire for the Gentile church.

Erasmus explains that the genealogical list given by Matthew is Joseph’s, however, it would also be Mary’s since they would have been of the same tribe and family (David) in accordance with the law (Gen 24:2–4; 28:1–2). The genealogy was broken up into three sets of fourteen (Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile, Babylonian exile to Christ). He does not explain if any of them are counted twice or not counted to make the number an even fourteen in all three sets.

It is clear that Erasmus believes that Mary gave birth to Jesus while a virgin. He holds to the text in Matthew, positing the Holy Spirit as the agent of conception rather than Joseph. According to Erasmus, it is the same angel, Gabriel, who announces the conception to both Mary and Joseph. He paraphrases the words of Gabriel to allude to a perpetual virginity: “and she will be even more chaste after she has given birth.” Gabriel also explains the reason for the name Jesus not being a contradiction of the prophecy in Isa 7:14 that He will be called Emmanuel: “When they at length have experienced his efficacious teaching, the power of his miracles, the present energy and strength and force of the divine Spirit manifesting itself in a new way in those who have believed, rightly they will cry out ‘God is with us’.”

Erasmus distinguishes the Bethlehem of Jesus’ birth (in the region of Judea) from the Bethlehem in Galilee. He points to Gen 49:10 as a prophecy of Jesus’ birth during the reign of Herod since Herod was an Idumean rather than Jew by birth and the scepter was not to depart from Judah until the one comes to be sent. Erasmus refers to the Magi as being from the region of Persia and indicates that God used a star to signify the birth of Jesus since they looked to the stars for guidance. The star is a fulfillment of Balaam’s prophecy in Num 24:17. This star left the magi briefly when they were about to enter Jerusalem so that their questioning would spread the word among the people without betraying the exact place to Herod. When it reappeared, it hung so low that it pointed out the exact location of the child. Erasmus uses terminology to suggest that Jesus was still an infant in a cradle when the Magi arrived. Their three gifts reflected the three Persons of the Trinity as well as pointed out mortality, priesthood, and kingship.

The same angel that warned the magi in a dream to not return to Herod also warned Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt. The massacre of the children in Bethlehem served as an example that those who believe the gospel will suffer at the hands of ungodly princes while also exemplifying that those kings who would destroy the gospel will not succeed. Furthermore, Jeremiah's prophecy of the weeping of Rachel expresses the grief of the mothers of the boys massacred by Herod through the persona of Rachel. Erasmus explains the reference to Jesus as a "Nazarene" as a prophecy from long ago. He indicates that there is hidden meaning: "in the Hebrew language Nazareth takes its name from a flower, because it was here that the purest little flower, consecrator of all virginity, was conceived by a virgin."⁴⁰

John Lightfoot

John Lightfoot, who wrote a commentary on Matthew based on the *Talmud* and *Hebraica* in the mid-17th Century, defends the missing names in the genealogy of Jesus, pointing out that Joram was wicked (2 Kings 8:18) and that his sons names were dashed out to the fourth generation. This omission exemplifies one of the ways Lightfoot explains the 3 x 14 structure of the genealogy. He further points to several Jewish examples of following certain numerical structures to show that Matthew was not alone in doing so. He also defends the virgin birth by pointing out that the use of Isa 7:14 is not contradictory since *הַמְּלֵכָה* was understood as an "untouched virgin." The prophet was bringing comfort to King Ahaz in two ways. First, he was saying that an untouched virgin

⁴⁰*Collected Works of Erasmus 45, Paraphrase on Matthew* (ed. Robert D. Sider; trans. and ann. Dean Simpson; Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974), 29-58.

would bring forth a child before the family of David would perish. In other words, there is no need to worry. Second, he indicated that one day, God would bring about a birth of the Christ from an untouched virgin before the house of David perished.

Lightfoot recognizes the magi as being from the region of Arabia but that “from the east” is likely an emphasis of “the heathen lands” just as he interprets Matt 12:42 as “a heathen queen” when Matthew speaks of “the queen of the south.” He indicates that the star probably disappeared once the magi reached the land of Judea since Jerusalem would have been a city well known but then it reappeared to guide them by night to Bethlehem. Lightfoot indicates that the family stayed so long in Bethlehem (two years) since they knew that was the place where the Messiah was to be raised. Only the angel’s warning made them move on. Regarding him being called a Nazarene, Lightfoot acknowledges that it could have been taken from the נָצְרָת, or branch, of Isa 11:1 as well as Samson being a type of Christ. He only adds that “Nazarene” also hints at the separation and estrangement from others as a despised person by men. He emphasizes the plural reference to the prophets as indicating that all of them pointed to Christ as despised.⁴¹

While the Middle Ages tended to focus more on the theological implications of the birth narrative, the Renaissance and Reformation focused on the details of the text itself. The belief in the virgin birth of Christ is solid and the sense of historical events being portrayed in Matthew’s Gospel is held intact. There are various interpretations of the events of the birth narrative in what they meant and how the OT prophecies such as

⁴¹John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica Matthew—I Corinthians II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1.1:9–2.23:45.

Num 24:17 did or did not have an effect on explaining the events themselves. From the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and Reformation, it appears that there is widespread agreement that Matthew wrote what he believed to be historical events. The point of departure lies in the theological significance of the various components of the narrative (genealogical records, magi and star of Bethlehem, fulfillment quotations).

Nineteenth Century Lives of Jesus

While there were those in the Enlightenment period who began to cast shadows of doubt upon the believability of Scripture, little work is found in great detail on the birth narratives until the nineteenth century, which spawned a number of so-called “lives of Jesus,” comprehensive scholarly treatment of Jesus’ life on earth. Many of these also simply overlooked the birth narratives, seeing them as later additions which could not be trusted, and began with the baptism and ministry of Jesus. Perhaps the greatest reason for this starting point was the Markan priority approach to the Synoptic problem which had gained much ground. Despite this, some scholars chose to address the birth narratives, whether they believed them to be historical or not.

Source Criticism and the Virgin Birth

One of the first to provide not only a comprehensive “life of Jesus” but also to make comment on the birth narratives is Friedrich Schleiermacher. In search of a source for Matthew’s birth narrative, he acknowledges that John took Jesus’ mother to his own home after the crucifixion and she became close to the disciples during this time. She could have spoken of the early events in Jesus’ life, but the question still remains as to why John would not have these in his Gospel if he was closest to Mary. So, he does not

believe that the source is from Mary's conversations with the disciples. He further explains that the accounts from Matthew and Luke must have come from two different circles and are intertwined in the Gospels in such a way that both cannot be correct.⁴²

Sanday sees the differences between the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke as an indication of their independent witness but they both converge in establishing "that Joseph had no share in the parentage of Jesus" but the Spirit took direct action in place of a human father. While Luke's account can be traced in all probability through a circle of women in the company of Mary, Matthew's account is less historically reliable. The phrase, "Mary pondered these things in her heart," is one of the indications that the details were intimate and not widely released until much later. The circle of women, specifically Joanna, from which Luke's narrative formed is taken from Luke 8:3; 24:10 (John 19:25; Acts 1:14).

Sanday gives three possibilities for the source of the Matthean genealogy. First, it could have had existence independent of the Gospel and been incorporated into it by the editor. It may have ended originally with "And Joseph begat Jesus." Second, the reading might be the result of textual corruption that originally read "Joseph the husband of Mary begat Jesus the one who is called Christ." This seems to account for the Coptic Version. Third, the reading of the Syriac-Sinaiticus may be of Ebionite origin. Nevertheless, Matthew's genealogy tends to be artificial, given the 3 x 14 structure.⁴³

⁴²Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus* (Lives of Jesus Series; ed. Leander E. Keck; trans. S. Maclean Gilmour; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, 46–49, 71.

⁴³W. Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 192–4, 196, 199–202.

C. A. Briggs points out that Mark and John do not mention the infancy of Jesus because they are both limited to the testimony of the primary authorities themselves. The annunciation to Joseph, birth of Jesus, and the remainder of Matthew 2 was not original to Matthew or Mark but later additions inserted by the author of the canonical Matthew. The story of the annunciation to Joseph and birth of Jesus was taken from a longer poem and given by the author of Matthew in prose with the exception of 1:20–21, which is a piece of the poetry. The use of the poetry to show Jesus as the Messiah of prophecy was not in the source, oral or written, but used by the author of Matthew himself. He also indicates that Luke found his source in an original poem, which was written originally in Hebrew. So, both Gospel accounts take their sources from two independent and original poems.⁴⁴

David Friedrich Strauss gives a skeptical view of the birth narratives, beginning with the differences in names in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. He dismisses Augustine's appeal to levirate marriage in explaining Heli and Jacob (fathers of Joseph) since the names prior to them in the lineage are different as well. Strauss's conclusion regarding the two genealogies is that they are not historical: "a conviction...that Jesus, either in his own person or through his disciples, acting upon minds strongly imbued with Jewish notions and expectations, left among his followers so firm a conviction of his Messiahship, that they did not hesitate to attribute to him the prophetic characteristic of Davidical descent, and more than one pen was put in action, in order, by means of a genealogy which should authenticate that descent, to justify his recognition as the

⁴⁴C. A. Briggs, *New Light on the Life of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 159–62, 164.

Messiah.”

Strauss sees five discrepancies between the annunciations in Matthew and Luke: “1) the angel of the Lord appears in Matthew while the named angel, Gabriel, appears in Luke; 2) In Matthew, the angel appears to Joseph while he appears to Mary in Luke; 3) the angel is seen in a dream in Matthew while he is seen while awake in Luke; 4) in Matthew, Joseph receives the communication after Mary is pregnant while in Luke, it is made to Mary before her pregnancy; 5) in Matthew, the communication was made to Joseph to reassure him while in Luke, it was made to prevent all possibility of offense.”

Specifically regarding the virgin birth, he takes the view of criticism for the interpretation of Isa 7:14 in that the OT passages had only an immediate reference but came to be regarded by men of the NT as predictions of Jesus due to their limited manner of thinking. His explanation, which he attributes to “historical truth,” is that Jesus was the legitimate offspring of an ordinary marriage between Joseph and Mary. Like others in the ancient world, the story was mythologized as supernatural.⁴⁵

Schleiermacher insists that Christ must be born sin-free in order to redeem humanity but this could be done by a divine act apart from the idea that he “was begotten without the cooperation of a man.” Mary’s influence would still have to be accounted for unless one believes she was sinless or that she was merely a channel through which He was born. He sees a contradiction that cannot be reconciled in that Matthew presents the hometown of Mary and Joseph as Bethlehem whereas Luke portrays it as Nazareth. He prefers Matthew’s account as more historical in nature than Luke’s apart from the

⁴⁵David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 2d ed. (Lives of Jesus Series; ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. George Eliot; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 118, 122, 129–30, 140–1.

supernatural elements in it because in Luke's account, there is clear reworking with the comparisons of the parents of John and Jesus as well as the poetic songs.⁴⁶

Briggs harmonizes the two Gospel accounts to show that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Joseph had gone up with his wife from his home in Nazareth to Bethlehem because of the census to be registered in the ancestral home. After the birth and visit of the shepherds in Bethlehem, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and presented in the temple on the fortieth day after his birth. The magi came to Bethlehem and the family fled to Egypt after Herod's threat of massacre. They returned to Palestine after Herod's death to their former home in Nazareth.⁴⁷

Events of Matthew 2

Alfred Edersheim defends the historicity of the canonical birth narratives by giving different possibilities of the origin of the magi and indicating that they would have gone to Jerusalem to inquire information from the official head of the nation. He defends Matthew's interpretation of Mic 5:2 as pointing to the birthplace of the Messiah by showing that *Targum Jonathan* (as well as Jer. Ber. II.4, p. 5a) indicates a widespread knowledge of this interpretation. He further gives likely explanations for the star including a comet but dismisses several explanations ranging from haggadic to those of Kepler. Rather than appearing over a specific house, he believes that it appeared over Bethlehem. Furthermore, he defends against accusations of fiction in regards to Herod's massacre of the children at Bethlehem due to lack of evidence outside the Gospel. He

⁴⁶Schleiermacher, *Life of Jesus*, 50, 52, 59.

⁴⁷Briggs, *New Light on the Life of Jesus*, 167–70.

indicates that Bethlehem was very small and could have escaped the attention of many writers, including Josephus, who tends to suppress anything to do with Jesus. He also points out that the horrific actions are in accord with Herod's nature.⁴⁸

Strauss indicates that the star of Balaam (Num 24:17) was thought to be a messianic prophecy in Judaism. Over time, this star was thought to be literal and this was used in the story of Jesus. The magi were used because of the magus Balaam being the one who prophesied. There were many during Jesus' time who thought the births of great people were preceded by astrological signs. The gifts given by the magi correlate to those referenced in Isaiah 60 (Cf. Psalm 72) where people far away will come to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah with offerings of gold, incense, and other gifts. The slaughter of the innocents was necessary in the story because the ancients saw the birth of great men surrounded by danger. Furthermore, there is a connection with the Exodus story. Strauss sees the birth at Bethlehem as mythical, based upon the prophecies and points out that there is no evidence outside the birth narratives that Jesus was born in Bethlehem; it was Nazareth.⁴⁹

Edersheim believes that rabbinic tradition looked for a different event surrounding the birth of the Messiah than a few magi paying homage. Similarly, the Balaam prophecy (Num 24:17) is not likely to have been understood as an appearance to a few magi. The fulfillment of Isa 60:6 in bringing gold and incense is unlikely since the description

⁴⁸Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 1:203–15.

⁴⁹Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 174–6, 184–90.

would have been “grossly literalised” and the other part of the prophecy was not fulfilled nor does the passage refer to the Messiah but to Jerusalem “in her latter-day glory.”⁵⁰

The nineteenth century brought a wave of skepticism in regards to the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. Many scholars dismissed the explanations provided by the early church fathers and fathers of the Reformation for the supposed discrepancies between the accounts of Matthew and Luke. Strauss represents this skepticism best by his insistence that the Gospel writers were so influenced by the Messiahship of Jesus that they did what was necessary to make it appear that He came from the seed of David and was born in Bethlehem. In other words, Strauss represents the nineteenth century lives of Jesus (with exceptions such as Edersheim) as those who hold to Matthew’s starting point being theological and ending with a created history.

Monographs of the Birth Narratives: Virgin Birth Revisited

While the lives of Jesus covered the entire extent of Jesus’ life, allowing only a brief examination of the birth narratives, the twentieth century brought about a return to the emphasis of the virgin birth and some of the most comprehensive treatments of the birth narratives in history. Some scholars, such as J. Gresham Machen, sought to defend the virgin birth, while others, such as Jane Schaberg, insisted that Jesus was the result of an illegitimate relationship. The late twentieth century brought about the massive work by Raymond Brown which continues to be one of the most influential scholarly approaches to the birth narratives.

⁵⁰Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 208–9.

Paul Lobstein

Lobstein's comments reflect the scholarly shadows of doubt concerning the accounts: "Whatever we may think of the historical trustworthiness of the two first chapters of Matthew and Luke, we cannot doubt that, in the minds of the Apostles and of the two first generations of Christians, the life of Jesus began at the baptism of John and ended at the resurrection (Acts i.22; x.37; xiii.24)." He goes on to say that "our two Gospels are not only different, they are contradictory...It is impossible to reconcile our two traditions without doing violence to the texts, without resorting to arbitrary hypotheses, and without resting content with possibilities which will never amount to historical certainty." He insists that both Evangelists found older documents containing the genealogies and attempted to piece them together with many other contemporary traditions regarding the childhood of Jesus.

Lobstein points out that Rom 1:3 and Gal 4:4 seem rather to "exclude than to imply the idea of the miraculous birth." Acts 2:30, Acts 13:23 John 6:42, and John 7:5 all point to a natural generation. He claims that the birth narratives are the physical explanation of the divine sonship of Jesus. Because there were influences from the OT stories of exceptional births (Isaac, Samuel), the miraculous birth story is "not so much the result of dogmatic thought as the fruit of popular imagination."⁵¹

Louis Matthews Sweet

Sweet argues against scholars such as Lobstein who emphasize the discrepancies in the birth narratives and allege that separately untrustworthy documents should not be

⁵¹Paul Lobstein, *The Virgin Birth of Christ: An Historical and Critical Essay* (trans. Victor Leuliette; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 41–43, 46, 52, 54–56, 65–66, 72.

given credence in regards to common facts. He indicates that this results in an impossibility of any consideration of historicity: “[t]he same treatment which has been accorded to the Infancy narratives would not only disintegrate the New Testament, but leave most other historic documents a matter of shreds and patches.”

Sweet further says that the virgin birth took place historically and that as a result of this historical fact, came the doctrine of the Incarnation. He says, “All conceivable theories which are made to account for the origin of these narratives as legends are compelled to resort either to Hebrew Messianism, or to Heathen Mythology.” His work shows how these two alternatives are on opposite ends of the spectrum and the fact that critics resort to two extremes shows how desperate they really are. Furthermore, the attempt to mix the two religions is equally weak since syncretism is a sign of religious decadence which could not have been the case in the beginnings of Christianity: “That Christianity, the most potent and revolutionary faith that ever entered the world, should be touched at the very beginning of its triumphant career with this mark of senility is unbelievable.”

Sweet gives four reasons why the account in Matthew is primitive: 1)The impersonal use of “Holy Spirit” belongs to the earliest age of Christianity when the OT use of the creative power of God and the NT use of the Spirit as a Person are just beginning to mesh; 2)The phrase “Herod the King” indicates that the later signification “Herod the Great” was not in use yet, pointing to an earlier writer; 3) the conception of salvation is Messianic rather than Christian; 4) the expression and idea of *angelos kuriou* is Hebraic. “These four items of evidence are certainly adequate proof that we have no late document—if not late, it cannot well be mythical.”

Sweet believes that “the two narratives of Matthew and Luke are fragments of one common narrative,” based on “unity of thought, viewpoint, feeling, and atmosphere.” The details of Jesus’ birth are left out of Mark’s Gospel because he was focused on the career of Jesus based on the sermons of Peter. John’s concern was that the eternal Christ was embodied in the historic Jesus. John was more interested in the Incarnation itself than the virgin birth. Furthermore, Paul says nothing to contradict the idea of a virgin birth.⁵²

G. H. Box

On the other hand, Box sees much midrash in the birth narratives. He says that the artificial and Midrashic character of the genealogy is shown in the 3 x 14 structure and is given for didactic purpose to show the royal power gained in David, the loss at captivity, and the recovery in the Messiah. The structure is probably based on the numeric value of the name, David. The underlying fact of the genealogy is the Davidic descent of the family of Joseph. The genealogy is didactic rather than historical in purpose and accords with the approach throughout the rest of the Gospel, thus making it difficult to say that it was taken over and added to by the compiler.

Regarding the virgin birth, the citation of Isa 7:14 was assumed by the fact of the narrative rather than the narrative suggested by the citation. This is the only place where *παρθένος* is rendered in the LXX for the Hebrew *הַמְּלֵאךָ* whereas the majority of instances of *παρθένος* correspond to the Hebrew *בְּתוּלָה*. The application of Emmanuel was not for the nature of Jesus but his work. The purpose of both 1:18–25 and 2:1–23 is apologetic.

⁵²Louis Matthews Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ According to the Gospel Narratives* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1907), 227–36, 291, 295, 300–7, 326–7, 329.

The details of Matthew 2 were regarded as fact but assimilated to earlier models and display Midrashic elements showing the parallel between Israel and Jesus.

After exploring several heathen parallels, Box agrees with Sweet that there have been several supernatural birth stories but none like the virgin birth of the NT. Against the idea of heathen influence, Box points out that the Jews took great pains to distance themselves from their pagan neighbors such as the Maccabean revolt and conflicts with the Roman government. “On the view that the narratives embody authentic history, it is obvious that they must either directly or indirectly depend upon the authority of Joseph and Mary themselves.” Contra Sweet, “[B]elief in the Virgin Birth of Our Lord is rather in the nature of effect than original cause or occasion” in relation to the doctrine of Incarnation. The earliest creeds indicate Incarnation and this reality “is safeguarded by belief in the Virgin Birth as a fact.”⁵³

Vincent Taylor

Taylor examines the evidence of the doctrine of the virgin birth in other NT documents including Paul’s letters, Acts, Hebrews, Mark, and even the hypothetical source, Q, finding little to no evidence of this doctrine in the other sources. There are not so much two independent narratives of the Virgin Birth but two independent witnesses to what was originally one tradition. Luke’s narrative may go back to Mary but Matthew’s is doubtful in going back to Joseph. While the source for Matthew’s narrative is uncertain, an inference playing upon a nucleus of historic fact or inference without

⁵³G. H. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus: A Critical Examination of the Gospel Narratives of the Nativity, and Other New Testament and Early Christian Evidence, and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1916), 12–20, 172–3, 191–2.

historic foundation, Taylor insists “that the First Evangelist knew of, and believed in, the story of the Virgin Birth” and “the belief was shared by his readers, and had been held sufficiently long for some of its problems to be raised.” The two very different narratives arise out of the same belief, being independent witnesses to the existence of the virgin birth belief in the early Christian community. It appears that the two Gospels were probably written within months of each other. “The farthest point therefore to which we can trace the existence of the Virgin Birth as a public tradition is some little time previous to the composition of the Third Gospel” (since Luke appears ignorant with regards to a tradition of Virgin Birth). The idea of a private authoritative tradition requires answers to the question of the date of the two Gospels, the possibility of error in the Gospels, the alternative theories on the origin of belief in the Virgin Birth, and the theological aspect of the tradition.

Like Box, Taylor believes that the genealogy is more likely the composition of the Evangelist and constructed for didactic purpose rather than historical. He says that the virgin birth was already known by Matthew’s readers but he used the birth narratives to answer questions regarding the position and attitude of Joseph. While Sweet defended the virgin birth against alternate theories, Taylor says that such criticism is not a sure way of establishing the historicity of the virgin birth. Instead, the virgin birth is best analyzed based on doctrinal evidence. “All that we can reach is a primitive belief, generally accepted within NT times, which presumably implies an earlier private tradition.” Historical and scientific analysis alone cannot determine the historicity of the narrative but must include doctrinal. While doctrinal evidence cannot prove historicity, the failure

of its congruence would be fatal to its historicity: “What is doctrinally irrelevant is not likely to be historically true.”⁵⁴

Elwood Worcester

Worcester believes that the earliest sources of the narratives were Paul’s preaching of the cross and resurrection, followed by the accounts of the life of Jesus by the Gospel writers. To meet the Messianic claim of Jesus, the original Apostles and others who represented the old Jewish tradition appended the genealogies to the Gospels. Because the connection to “an ancient Hebrew ancestor lost all significance and importance,” the “Christian consciousness felt itself impelled to go back to the very source and beginning of Jesus’ life to represent him as called into being by the direct act of God and as filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.” Finally, the idea of preexistence came through Paul but was elaborated in the Gospel of John, being completely “outside the sphere of history.” The idea in the Father’s words to Jesus at the baptism regarding “begetting” spurred the narratives of the birth and childhood of Jesus to be written. “No word of Jesus intimates any knowledge or suspicion that he was born otherwise than by the usual channels through which human life is propagated, nor did any rumor of irregularity of birth come to the knowledge of his contemporaries.” Only after the secret claim of his being the Messiah was betrayed by Judas Iscariot was Jesus forced to confess before Caiaphas, ultimately sealing his fate.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Vincent Taylor, *The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), 100–104, 116–9, 120–9.

⁵⁵Elwood Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord* (New York: Scribner’s, 1932), 270–5.

J. Gresham Machen

Machen's work is one of the conservative stalwarts of the twentieth century concerning the virgin birth. He demonstrates that the formation of the tradition of the narrative was firmly established at the beginning of the second century and any alternate theories of explaining the origin of the virgin birth tradition are unsatisfactorily explained. While there are differences between the two narratives and certain events are silent in one while they appear in the other, Machen insists that there is a difference between this and a contradiction between two assertions. "Far from being in contradiction, therefore, the two narratives supplement each other in the most remarkable way. Neither is thoroughly comprehensible without the other." Machen harmonizes the two accounts by indicating that Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem on account of the census, Jesus was born and visited by the shepherds, and then taken to Bethlehem to be circumcised eight days after his birth. Forty days after the birth, his parents presented him in the Temple at Jerusalem and then they returned to Bethlehem where the magi came to visit. Lastly, there was the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth. The Lukan account is from Mary since her "inmost thoughts are revealed" while the account in Matthew could have been from Joseph but did not become common knowledge until after his death since the virgin birth would have given rise to "slander and misunderstanding." Joseph could have entrusted the account to someone who would be silent until the proper time.

Machen defends the historical reliability of the two birth narratives by attacking naturalism as a presupposition of many of the scholars of his time. Further, more time would have been needed to invent the birth narratives. "And we must continue to insist,

even in the face of widespread opposition, that if the virgin birth is a fact at all, it belongs truly to the realm of history.” In regards to some of the specifics of the Matthean narrative, Machen points out the likelihood that magi in the East would have known about a Hebrew prophecy due to the fact that Suetonius and Tacitus indicate an expectation of world-rulers from Judea throughout the East. He interprets the movements of the star as figurative rather than literal, resulting in a natural phenomenon as a possibility.⁵⁶

Thomas Boslooper

According to Boslooper, Strauss failed to prove that the narratives were mythical in character but he did expose “inadequacies of both the old supernaturalistic and the current naturalistic interpretations.” He says that Sweet’s attempt at answering the liberal interpretations of scholars such as Strauss “was no more than the attempt to reply to the criticisms of the liberal scholars. He failed to establish any real evidence.” Boslooper concludes that the canonical accounts of the virgin birth may be generally described as “Christian sources in a primarily Hellenistic mode of thought cast in a Jewish setting and designed to make a universal appeal” or a “Christian Midrashic Haggadah.” Matthew’s use of prophetic fulfillment quotations, the tie to the Davidic line, and the location of Bethlehem for the birth narrative are to present Jesus as the coming redeemer of Israel. The flight into Egypt connects Christ with the Jewish tradition of redemption while the massacre at Bethlehem shows that Christ could identify with the sufferings of Israel but

⁵⁶J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 2d ed. (London: James Clarke & Co., 1958), 194–5, 197, 200–02, 213, 219, 223, 226, 380.

was “immune to these aggressors” while the Gentile mind is able to see “the motif in antiquity of the Evil One who sought the destruction of the newborn babe.”⁵⁷

Raymond Brown

Raymond Brown provides the most comprehensive commentary on the birth narratives to date. His work is the reference point from which most modern scholars return for a discussion of the events surrounding Jesus’ birth.⁵⁸ He sees three difficulties in a scholarly analysis of the infancy narratives. First, there is a perception that the infancy narratives greatly differ from the rest of the Gospels. Second, historicity is problematic due to the differences between the two canonical narratives. Third, the problem of historicity is best handled by seeing the narratives as “vehicles of the evangelist’s theology and Christology.” This latter point leads Brown to his discussion of the development of Christology where the greatness of the resurrection led the Gospel writers to reflect on Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God during His ministry. This identity is pressed back beyond his baptism and beginning of ministry to a pre-existence in the Johannine Prologue and back to His conception in Matthew and Luke. Because of the problem of corroborating witnesses and the problem of conflicting details, Brown cannot hold to a historical understanding of the birth narratives: “Indeed, close analysis of the infancy narratives makes it unlikely that either account is completely historical.”

Brown indicates that Matthew worked from two existing genealogies to compose

⁵⁷Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 96–98, 116–7, 228, 231, 236.

⁵⁸Although Brown’s work can technically be considered a commentary, it is included in the monograph section since it is written entirely on the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke.

his own to which he added Joseph and Jesus, creating “theological and structural emphases.” The four women in the genealogy are a Matthean addition to show previous examples of scandal combined with divine intervention.

Rather than the formula citations in Matthew’s birth narrative giving rise to the narratives, Brown believes that they were added to an already existing narrative; they were the product of Matthew’s hand. Brown borrows from Stendahl⁵⁹ in describing Matt 1:18–25 as the “who” and the “how” of Jesus’ identity. The “who” is given in the naming of Jesus before the birth, a key point in Matthew’s Christology which was already emphasized in the genealogy. The “how” is the method of showing Jesus as the “son of David” through the legal paternity of Joseph. By naming the child, Joseph claims Jesus as his own; Mary is the vessel for the virgin birth. “Joseph is the one through whom Jesus is begotten as son of David, and Mary is the one through whom he is begotten as Son of God.” While the MT of Isa 7:14 does not refer to a future virginal conception, the LXX replaces *neanis* (“young woman”), the normal Greek translation for *alma* with *parthenos* (“virgin”). Instead of the LXX translator pointing to a virginal conception of the Messiah, however, Brown indicates that all he may have meant was that a woman who was currently a virgin would conceive a child with her husband through natural means.

While Matt 1:18–25 answered the “who” and “how” questions, Matthew 2 answers the “where” and “when” questions. Jesus relives the Exodus and Exile of the history of Israel. The rejection by Herod and the Jewish leaders and the worship by the Gentile magi are a portrayal of the conversion of Gentiles and the persecution by Jews in

⁵⁹See Krister Stendahl, “Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1—2,” in *Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* (ed. Walther Eltester; Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1960).

the time of Matthew as well as a reflection of the passion of Jesus where the Jews plotted and killed Him. Brown sees historicity as very improbable because of the erratic movements of the star, the lack of knowledge displayed in the narrative of the animosity between Herod and the priests and scribes, the ignorance of Herod concerning the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem though John 7:42 indicates it was widely known, the fact that the suspicious Herod makes no attempt to follow the magi, and the failure of Josephus to mention the slaughter in Bethlehem. Furthermore, Brown notes the impossibility of Matthew's narrative to harmonize with Luke's narrative and the conflict with the accounts of Jesus' ministry where it is virtually unknown that He was born in Bethlehem (John 7:40–42). While the background of the pre-Matthean narrative of the birth was patterned after the stories of Joseph in Egypt and Moses, the background surrounding the magi and star "is offered by the episode centered on Balaam in Num 22–24."⁶⁰

Jane Schaberg

Jane Schaberg represents the feminist interpretation of the birth narratives: "My claim is that the texts dealing with the origin of Jesus, Matt. 1:1–25 and Luke 1:20–56 and 3:23–38, originally were about an illegitimate conception and not about a miraculous virginal conception. It was the intention—or better, *an* intention—of Matthew and Luke to pass down the tradition they inherited: that Jesus the messiah had been illegitimately conceived during the period when his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph."

⁶⁰Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 26, 29–31, 36, 70, 74, 105, 138, 148–9, 179, 183, 188–9, 193.

Pointing out that *παρθένος* is used twice to translate *הַיְדִי* in the LXX of Gen 34:3 in reference to Dinah after Shechem raped her, Schaberg posits an alternate interpretation of Matthew's use of Isa 7:14. She says that Matthew's use of *παρθένος* is in reference to the rape or seduction of a betrothed virgin as he was thinking about the law in Deut 22:23–37. “My proposal, then, is this: that the problem before Matthew was to make theological sense of the tradition concerning an illegitimate pregnancy.” Matthew used Isa 7:14 LXX to elucidate Deut 22:23–27, ensuring that the illegitimacy of Jesus would be read as “a story of one who relived and lived within Israel's covenant history with God.” Schaberg also sees allusions to the Deuteronomy passage in Luke 1:27 and 1:48: “The virgin betrothed to a man (1:27) was sexually humiliated. But her humiliation, like the barrenness of Hannah [and Elizabeth] was ‘looked upon’ and reversed by God.”

Schaberg accepts that Mary's pregnancy between her betrothal and marriage to Joseph is historical. She also accepts that Joseph was not the biological father. She believes that it is possible that the basis for the tradition, which is that Jesus was illegitimately conceived but portrayed as if Jesus was conceived of a holy spirit and that his name was Jesus because Mary was saved from her plight, stemmed from Mary or Jesus' brothers or sisters rather than Joseph who is not in the stories of the ministry. “Early Christian theologizing...on the basis of the core of that story and to counter rumor, produced the traditions used by Matthew and by Luke.”⁶¹

⁶¹Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 1, 70–3, 100, 151–5.

Edwin Freed

Freed reveals his approach early in his introduction, stating that the development of traditions probably began with some followers of Jesus believing he was the Messiah, then some later believed he rose from the dead, and finally, a few came to believe he must have had a supernatural birth as well. “The tradition of Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem arose in Christian tradition; and after that happened, it continued to survive on the presumed authority of Old Testament scripture. No Jewish sources speak of Bethlehem as the place of the Messiah’s birth before the fourth century A.D.” Once the disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, they naturally began to believe he was born in Bethlehem because of 1 Sam 16:18; 17:12; 17:15. “The passage in Micah means no more than that the expected messianic king would come from the family of David whose home had been in Bethlehem. It does not mean that Bethlehem was known to be the place of the Messiah’s birth.”

“The story that a special star arose in the east, moved westward to Jerusalem, then southward to Bethlehem, and stopped precisely over the place where the baby Jesus was is too much to believe.” Freed believes that Matthew was most influenced by the story of Balaam but could have been influenced by legends such as a king named Nimrod who saw the birth of Abraham in the stars [Ginzberg, Louis, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959–68)].⁶²

The more comprehensive treatments of the birth narratives, which came about primarily in the 19th and 20th Centuries, show a division of thought regarding their

⁶²Edwin D. Freed, *The Stories of Jesus’ Birth: A Critical Introduction* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 13, 79–80, 92, 94.

historicity. Furthermore, there are widely differing opinions on whether Matthew intentionally fabricated his story or not. There are midrashic interpretations as well as historical-scientific interpretations. Depending on whether one is looking at Sweet or Machen in their discussion of the historicity of the narratives, or one is looking at Lobstein or Schaberg in their discussion of a radical fabrication of the story, it is obvious that the splintering of opinions grew more widespread in this time period.

Twentieth Century Commentaries on Matthew

The twentieth century also brought about many important commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, building upon the research and analysis of the scholars of the past and shedding new light on the discussion of sources, historicity, and theological explanation of the birth narrative of Matthew 1–2. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 as well as advancement in the knowledge of Hebrew thought and astronomical studies, these commentaries provide the breadth and depth of understanding necessary for a clearer picture of the birth of Jesus.

Genealogy and Virgin Birth

W. C. Allen provides one of the first detailed exegetical looks at Matthew from the International Critical Commentary series. He sees the genealogy as compiled by the editor for the purpose of the Gospel. The division into three groups of fourteen has a purpose: “In David the family rose to royal power. At the Captivity it lost it again. In the Christ it regained it.” Allen derives his view of the 3 x 14 from Box who points out that the name of David has a number value of $4 + 6 + 4 = 14$. He believes that the author of the Gospel gained knowledge of the names in vv. 13–16 from an unknown source that

may be Christ's family. He also indicates that there is no reason to think that the genealogy ever existed apart from Matthew's Gospel.⁶³

Plummer indicates that, according to the early church fathers and apocryphal gospels, there seems to be no question that Jesus descended from David and it is quite possible that Mary did as well. "That there are errors in both lists of names is neither unlikely nor very important. Errors respecting matters of far greater moment can be shown to exist in the Bible, and there is nothing that need perplex us if errors are found here."⁶⁴

According to Gundry, Matthew reverses the order of naming his genealogy from that of Genesis. By naming Jesus at the end, he is showing him as a fulfillment of the OT. Gundry dismisses the various attempts to explain the inclusion of the four women in the genealogy. Mary could not be prefigured by them because there are other OT women who would have been chosen. They could not have been chosen for their ill-repute alone because of the inclusion of Ruth, the likelihood of arousing more suspicion over Jesus' own birth, the fault lying with Judah and David rather than Tamar and Bathsheba, and the Jewish high regard for Rahab. The three sets of fourteen are based on the numerical value of David's name. Matthew links vv. 18–25 with the genealogy by pointing out how Jesus came to have the legal link with David since Joseph named him but was not his physical

⁶³Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912; repr. 1947), 2, 5, 7.

⁶⁴Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 1–3.

father.⁶⁵

Hagner says, “Matthew has taken his historical traditions and set them forth in such a way as to underline matters of fundamental theological importance. Thus he grounds his narrative upon several OT quotations and provides a strong sense of fulfillment. The literary genre of these chapters, as we shall see, is that of midrashic haggadah, designed to bring out the deeper meaning of the present by showing its theological continuity with the past.

By showing a chiasmic structure between 1:1 and 1:17 with Christ...David... Abraham and Abraham...David...Christ, Hagner points out that the record of the beginning of Jesus (1:1) is referring to the first seventeen verses as an independent unit. One way of looking at the 3 x 14 genealogical structure is to think of them as six sevens and the coming of Christ as the seventh seven. The number 14 could also allude to Daniel’s seventy weeks of years (9:24). Hagner doubts the connection to the numerical value of the Hebrew name “David” since the Gospel was written in Greek.

The explanation of Matthew’s genealogical list differing from Luke’s is most likely that Matthew’s was a legal descent while the other traces biological descent. “These genealogies, like much of the content of the Gospels, are to be taken as interpreted history—i.e., factual and not fictional data, conceived and set forth with theological goals, these in turn informed by the eschatological fullness now inescapably present to these writers.” The four women mentioned in the genealogy prefigure Mary by

⁶⁵Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 13, 15, 19.

the surprise and scandal surrounding the Messiah's lineage, showing that God can work in the most unusual ways.⁶⁶

Luz indicates that many refer to Matthew 1–2 as the prologue but more modern scholars see the prologue extending through Matthew 4:17 since Matt 4:18–22 involves the story of the disciples at sea, providing a transitional section between Jesus' birth, baptism, and temptation and the inclusion of the disciples. Luz points out that there is no comparison of the prologue with OT books because it would be closer to compare it to a biography. The fulfillment quotations of the prologue point to a deeper level of meaning, calling attention to the purpose. The prologue mirrors the Gospel as a whole: In the prologue, he is led out of Israel into Egypt and then to the desert. In the narrative, he goes into Galilee and into Jerusalem and back to Galilee where He appears to the disciples.

Luz believes that Matt 1:18–2:23 existed prior to Matthew and that the common agreements between Matt 1:18–25 and Luke 1–2 in regards to the use of the birth stories in developing Christology points to the probability that these convictions existed before the Matthean and Lukan birth narratives. The irreconcilable differences between the stories in Matthew and Luke point to literary independence.

Jesus is at the center of Israel's history, being Abraham's son as well as the Messiah. The theme of the Gospel is that Jesus is the son of David and Israel's Messiah. Of the various interpretations as to the inclusion of the four women in the genealogy, Luz chooses the one that emphasizes that all four were non-Jews, foreshadowing the salvific inclusion of the Gentiles from the "son of Abraham." Luz finds it difficult to believe that

⁶⁶Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993), 2, 5–10.

the Greek-speaking readers of the Gospel would be able to perceive the numeric code of 3 x 14 in David's name.⁶⁷

Albright and Mann believe that the genealogy in Matthew appears just as Matthew received them from tradition despite formal inconsistency in the fact that Matthew and Luke claim Davidic descent through Joseph while also positing virgin birth. The Greek ἐγέννησεν denotes legal inheritance and descent rather than physical. Matthew assumed Mary's husband was the legal father of Jesus. There is early widespread acceptance of the virgin birth among Luke, John, and early church fathers. There is no evidence that the genealogy was separate from the gospel. A Jewish Christian such as Matthew normally dealt faithfully with the traditions received. The description in Mark 6:3 of Jesus as "son of Mary" is possible evidence for what rabbinic sources describe as "of his mother" when a father was unknown.⁶⁸

Plummer says that the virgin birth did not belong to the mainstream of Apostolic Tradition. Matthew's narrative came from Joseph while Luke's came from Mary, showing independent attestation. While it is difficult to harmonize the differences, there is nothing in them contradictory, thus "[t]hey confirm the general trustworthiness of each narrative, for neither can have been based on the other." They both agree on a Virgin-birth, that Joseph and Mary were espoused when they were made known of the Divine plan, that the child was to be called "Jesus," that He was to be born in Bethlehem, and

⁶⁷Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Hermenia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; ed. Helmut Koester; trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 71–73, 75, 82–85.

⁶⁸W.F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 3, 9–10.

that He was to be raised in Nazareth.

Each Evangelist portrays and believes the account to be historical. The Virgin-birth is not required to make sense of the history of the ministry, passion, and resurrection. Both narratives are very Jewish in tone and it is not likely that within Judaism, one would invent them since marriage is seen as highly valued. “Both S. Mark and S. John confirm the Virgin-birth, though they do not mention it. Mark calls Jesus the ‘Son of Mary’ (vi. 3) and the ‘Son of God’ (i.1), but he nowhere calls Him the Son of Joseph. John sometimes corrects the earlier Gospels, but he does not correct the Virgin-birth (i.14).” There is nothing improbable that Luke received his source from Mary and Matthew his source from Joseph.⁶⁹

Schweizer believes that the entire genealogy is probably the product of a Christian interpretation prior to Matthew. The ancient way of reckoning includes the first and last elements in a series (Abraham to David = 14; David to Josiah, the last free king = 14; Jehoiakim, the first king of captivity to Jesus = 14). The purpose of the genealogy is in v. 17: all of history is in God’s hands and its goal has been Jesus. The mention of the four women is to show that all of them were aliens or outcasts which demonstrate God’s embracing of Jews and Gentiles alike. The crucial point of Joseph’s fatherhood is legal rather than biological. “Whether we can affirm this faith, not the historical accuracy, is the question put to us by our text.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹Plummer, *Matthew*, 3–5.

⁷⁰“Ob wir dazu, nicht zu einer unverbindlichen historischen Streitfrage, ja sagen können, ist die Frage des Textes.” See Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 7–10.

Throughout Matthew's narrative, the quotation follows the event, focusing on the life of Jesus as illuminated on the basis of previous Scripture. It is easiest to understand that Christian study of Scripture linked OT texts with the life of Jesus in various stages and Matthew used the twelve introductory formulas, including those in the birth narrative, to emphasize these. The miracle of the virgin birth is supposed by Matthew, making it obvious that it was known previously as part of the tradition of his community, most likely oral tradition. The use of Isa 7:14 is probably also previous material since it is presupposed by Luke 1:31. Referencing Matthew and Luke, Schweizer surmises, "Their accounts, therefore, are largely in agreement in what they are really trying to say, but are historically irreconcilable."⁷¹

The commentary by Davies and Allison is one of the most thorough exegetical treatments on the Gospel. They treat the genealogy of Matthew as the work of the evangelist because of its uniform presentation of three stages of fourteen generations. Like Allen, Davies and Allison follow Box in holding to the 3 x 14 pattern as a reflection of the numerical value of David's name. They claim that Haggadic legendary material concerning Moses determined the content of Matthew's narrative in 1:18–2:23. On the other hand, there were a few historical elements such as the names of Jesus and his parents, his birth in Palestine near the end of Herod the Great's reign, and the family residence in Nazareth. The redactional elements of the story come from the five OT fulfillment quotations throughout the narrative. Removing these elements, the story remains as the virginal conception by the Holy Spirit, the birth in Bethlehem, and the

⁷¹"Ihre Erzählungen stimmen in dem, was sie wirklich aussagen wollen, daher within zusammen, sind aber historisch unvereinbar." See Schweizer, *Matthäus*, 10–14.

visit by the Magi who followed a star. Davies and Allison believe that these elements went through three stages of development. The first stage gave the elements of the story with features from the Mosaic legends. The second stage expanded the Mosaic narrative toward a Davidic Christology. The third stage, representing the redactional stage, included the formula quotations, 2:22–3, and Matthean style and vocabulary.⁷²

Hagner says that nothing more can be said of Matthew's sources for the birth story except for the tradition circulating in the early Church. While he does not create the story, he uses the tradition and maximizes the fulfillment of Isa 7:14. The selection and emphases of the two Gospel writers is not contradictory but reflective of their own theological interests. Parallels in *Prot. Jas.* 14.2 and Justin, *Apol.* 1.33.5 are dependent upon Matthew.

Hagner believes that Matthew builds his narrative in Matt 1:18–25 on the quotation of Isa 7:14 in midrashic fashion so that the wording is seen in the angelic revelation and fulfillment. He denies strict midrash of the birth narrative but describes it best as “midrashic haggadah.” He explains it as “*midrashic* in the sense that the OT quotation is of key importance and phrases of it are utilized in the surrounding narrative; *haggadah* in the sense that the story is not told for the sake of the facts alone, but in order to illustrate their deeper meaning, that is, the theological significance of Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises.” This historical element depends largely on one's worldview. If one is open to God's acting in the world, there is no reason to doubt Matthew and Luke's story since they present it as a vital component of their respective Gospels. While

⁷²W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew I, 1–7* (ICC 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 149, 163, 192–5.

Hagner believes the story is properly considered a birth narrative, he admits that the “focus of the passage is on matters other than the actual birth itself,” primarily the naming of Jesus.⁷³

Luz indicates that the announcement of Jesus’ birth and the giving/interpretation of Jesus’ name are the central focus of Matt 1:18–25. While there are midrashic elements, this section is not midrash in the sense of genre because the focus is not the OT quotations but they explain the story itself. The vocabulary suggests some reworking by Matthew but not in totality. Verse 18a refers back to v. 1 and uses the language of v. 16, pointing to the possibility of redaction. The change of the pronoun in the quotation of Isa 7:14 could come from Matthew since he tends to quote from the LXX when not following a source. There are similarities between the text and 21:1–7. The fulfillment quotations of Matt 1:22–23 can be removed from the context yet there are many links between the quotation and the rest of the pericope. The language and content in the dream sequences have many similarities and suggest redaction. The language of 1:20–21 follows the form of a “birth announcement” in the OT. In conclusion, Luz believes Matthew reworked the pericope but the story probably belonged to a pre-Matthean oral cycle of stories.

Luz believes that the virgin birth is theological in nature with no historical background. Because the angel says things to Joseph in 1:20 that he already knows, the hypothesis that Joseph believed Mary had committed adultery but wanted to show her kindness and gentleness is the best interpretation. Matthew probably implied Jesus’ identity with God as the form of God revealed to man with the naming of Emmanuel. For

⁷³Hagner, *Matthew*, 14–17.

Matthew, the virgin birth was not the central concern but merely a vehicle of expressing Jesus as Emmanuel.⁷⁴

Events of Matthew 2

While Allen accepts the main outline of the story of the Magi in Matthew's Gospel as "historical probability," he sees a "legendary atmosphere" around the star which tends to move and rests over the place where Jesus was born. He says that it is more likely that the editor was treating this story of the star as literal fact. On the other hand, the editor believed he was writing factual events for the story as a whole. "Descriptive detail may in some small measure have crept into it from the Old Testament or from analogous literary or folklore stories, just as they have certainly been used to embellish the story in its later history in the Church. But these, if they exist at all in Mt.'s account, are mere literary embellishments of a story which in outline is intrinsically probable in view of the atmosphere of thought of the period described." Other than the "supposed impossibility of the central fact recorded," Allen sees no reason to doubt that the birth narrative tradition originated with Jesus' family.⁷⁵

Plummer also sees legendary resemblance in the star which moves irregularly but this can either be simply a retelling of what the Magi claimed they saw or simply an explanation of how the heavens "led" them to the Child. "The Old Testament is not the source of the star or of the gifts; for the Evangelist, in spite of his great fondness for fulfillments of prophecy, does not quote either Num. xxiv. 17 for the one, or Ps. lxxii. 10,

⁷⁴Luz, *Matthew*, 90–96, 100.

⁷⁵Allen, *Matthew*, 14–15, 21.

15, Cant. iii.6, Is. lx. 6 for the other. The gifts mentioned are intrinsically probable, independently of any prophecy or previous narrative. We may believe that the Evangelist knew that the Star of Balaam's prophecy indicated the Messiah Himself, as even the Targums interpreted it. It was Christians who, under the influence of this narrative, misinterpreted Balaam's Star as meaning the star which guided the Magi; and it was Christians who, under the influence of Ps. lxxii., turned the Magi into kings."⁷⁶

Albright and Mann indicate that there is nothing in the story that says the magi need to be identified as Gentiles. The fulfillment quotation "that it might be fulfilled" is absent from Matt 2:1–12 in connection with Numbers 24 or Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72. "The absence of the formula would be notable enough if...Matthew's quotations were mere proof texts. If, as we have maintained, his quotations are to be seen in context, then the omission of the formula is striking as casting doubt on how far the evangelist regarded the account as historical." Albright and Mann point to the possibility that later scribes removed the fulfillment quotation in fear that many Gnostics would seize on this passage because of the hint of Jesus acknowledging the legitimacy of astrology. They see no reason to question the historicity of the flight to Egypt since there are many examples in the OT of people fleeing there. Likewise, they see no reason to doubt the historicity of the slaughter of the innocents since the population was around 300 and the slaughter was small in number, attracting little attention such as that of Josephus. The incident is also in line with the character of Herod.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Plummer, *Matthew*, 12–13.

⁷⁷Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 15–19.

According to Davies and Allison, the location of Bethlehem for the birth owes more to apologetics than to history since the rest of the NT (besides Luke) seems to assume Nazareth as the birthplace. The magi are Gentiles although there is no clear cut choice among the alternatives when it comes to origin (Arabia, Babylon, or Persia). Davies and Allison slightly prefer Arabia because of what they perceive to be an allusion to Isa 60:6 in Matt 2:11, pointing to Midian and Sheba. The star which the magi followed is most likely an allusion to Num 24:17 although the idea of magi seeking the birth of a king by the signal of a star is not completely out of the realm of historical possibility since this has happened in many cases throughout ancient times. Matthew has set the seeking pagan magi in contrast to unbelieving Jews (Herod and the religious authorities in Jerusalem), a theme which recurs throughout the Gospel. Davies and Allison explain the three gifts of the magi on the basis of “the firstfruits of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations and their submission to the one true God,” probably derived from Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72. Additionally, they see a possible Jesus/Solomon typology.

Regarding the flight to Egypt, Davies and Allison indicate that “he recapitulates not only the experience of Israel but also the experience of ‘the hero with a thousand faces’,” a reference to the multiple stories throughout ancient times of the danger to a hero or savior soon after birth. Matthew found the quotation of Hos 11:1 by way of Num 24:8 since he has already understood the star in light of Num 24:7. Although the maniacal violent actions of Herod are possible based on what other ancient sources indicate about his personality and acts, Davies and Allison do not see that this proves the historicity of the Bethlehem slaughter: “[T]he agreement with the legends about Moses makes it possible to see the haggadic imagination rather than the sphere of history as the source of

our tale.” As mentioned earlier, they believe that Matt 2:22–23 is a redactional addition to the original ending of the narrative because of the correlation with 4:12ff. Matthew adds these verses to finally place Jesus in Nazareth since this will coincide with what the rest of the NT indicates as Jesus’ place of origin. The final formula quotation concerning Jesus’ return to Nazareth is primarily dependent upon Isa 4:3, substituting “Nazareth” for “holy” and possibly secondarily dependent upon Isa 11:1, indicating a wordplay with “branch.”⁷⁸

Gundry examines the magi and star and indicates that “[i]t would be a mistake to think that because Matthew fails to quote Num 23:7; 24:17–19 explicitly he has little or no interest in them... Contrary to the opinion of some, the rising of the star represents the coming of a king in both Numbers and Matthew.” According to Gundry, Matthew’s magi are derived from Daniel 2. Matthew groups all Jerusalem with Herod as the central antagonists to Jesus although the leaders of Jerusalem were primarily to blame. References to Bethlehem of Judea in 2:1–2 and 5–6 are to accentuate the area of the kings of Judah and heighten the kingship of Jesus rather than clarify which Bethlehem he is referencing. The gifts of the magi are derived from the OT such as the gold and/or frankincense to a superior king (Ps 72:10–11, 15; Isa 60:2–3, 6; Ps 72) and myrrh and frankincense (Cant 3:6; 4:6).

While there are typological connections with Moses throughout, Joseph’s dream came from the story of the patriarch by the same name as well as the going to Egypt. “The location of Bethlehem in southern Palestine and the tradition of southwesterly

⁷⁸Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 226, 228, 234–5, 238–9, 249–51, 258–9, 262, 265, 274, 280.

escape to Egypt made it easy for Matthew to bend the dominical material in this direction.” Jesus personifies collective Israel in the quotation of Hos 11:1. Matthew does not portray Jesus as God’s Son merely as acting on His behalf but his emphasis on virgin birth, Jesus with his people, and worship and offering of sacrifices to Jesus, point to the idea of Jesus as not only functional deity but essential deity.

The harmonization of Luke and Matthew “supports creativity on Matthew’s part.” This is seen in the difficulty in time between the ceremonies in the Temple forty days after Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:39) and the slaughter of the innocents, flight to Egypt, and residence there until Herod’s death. On the other hand, Gundry sees two ways Matthew avoids fiction: “1) his embellishments rest on historical data, which he hardly means to deny by embellishing them; 2) the embellishments foreshadow genuinely historical events such as the vindications of Jesus as God’s Son in the resurrection and in the calamities befalling the Jewish nation after Jesus’ lifetime.” Gundry appears to correlate various parts of Matthew’s nativity with Luke’s, stating that Matthew changed parts of the Lukan tradition to fit his story (angels to star, sword that pierced Mary’s heart to the sorrow of the infants’ mothers, the sacrificial slaying of the turtledoves to the slaughter of the infants, the great joy of the magi to the great joy of the shepherds).⁷⁹

Plummer concludes that there are several aspects of Matthew and Luke’s accounts which would be expected in the other. “But in this matter each writer gets beyond his own special sympathies and point of view; and this is a valuable confirmation of the

⁷⁹Gundry, *Matthew*, 26–40.

trustworthiness of what he has written. Neither of them can be justly suspected of having imagined and given as history just what suited his own peculiar standpoint.”⁸⁰

Schweizer insists that if one follows Matthew in dating the birth to Herod’s reign, it must be 7 BC since that is when a special conjunction of stars took place. If one decides to agree with Luke, he must disagree with Matthew due to the census date of 6/7 AD. Matthew portrays Jesus throughout as the new Moses. The fact that Josephus never mentions the slaughter in Bethlehem argues against the historicity of the event.⁸¹

Regarding Matthew’s narrative, Hagner says, “In spite of the widespread hesitancy concerning the historicity of this pericope (e.g., Brown, *Birth*; Hill; Luz), there is no insuperable reason why we must deny that the tradition used by Matthew is historical at its core (see E. M. Yamauchi, “Episode”). We do not know the source of Matthew’s narrative; Luke apparently did not know the story or else he deliberately ignored it (cf. Luke 2:39).” While there are strikingly similar features between Matthew’s narrative and that of Balaam in Numbers 24, Matthew makes no deliberate attempt to draw from Numbers nor does he cite or allude to these passages. While there are numerous parallels of birth narratives during and before Matthew’s time such as that of Alexander the Great, Mithridates, and Alexander Severus which may have served to influence Matthew’s formulation of his narrative, it is not necessary to conclude that the account is non-historical. “The Lukan counterpart to Matthew’s narrative about the magi appears to be the story of the shepherds (Luke 2:8–20). The few superficial similarities can be explained by the similar circumstances. Otherwise, the passages and the respective

⁸⁰Plummer, *Matthew*, 19.

⁸¹Schweizer, *Matthäus*, 17, 20, 21.

underlying tradition are completely independent (contrary to Gundry's [*Matthew*] argument that Matthew's narrative is a transmutation of the Lukan tradition)." "In short, disagreement (which is different from formal contradiction) between the evangelists says nothing about the historical value of the traditions, since neither writes with the expectation that readers will eventually be concerned to fit everything together into an harmonious whole."⁸²

There is no historical core to Matthew 2, according to Luz, but a Christological emphasis in that God is with Jesus and those around Him. Matthew emphasizes the worship of Gentiles and the rejection by Jews, which foreshadows the passion narrative. The point of the magi in the story is also to show the readers' identification with them rather than the Jewish leaders. Only incidentally is the story meant politically as Jesus is the nonviolent king of peace. God's guidance and plan is emphasized throughout.⁸³

As with the comprehensive treatment of the birth narratives, the commentaries of the 20th Century indicate an array of opinions on the historicity of the events and the theological versus historical starting point of the birth narrative in Matthew. Some believe that there is a historical core (Hagner) while others believe that there is a Christocentric core (Luz). More emphasis is placed upon the haggadic and midrashic elements though there are still some conservative scholars, such as Hagner, who disagree.

Recent Works on the Matthean Birth Narrative

While there have been a number of journal articles as well as updated

⁸²Hagner, *Matthew*, 25, 26, 35.

⁸³Luz, *Matthew*, 114–5.

commentaries on the birth narratives and the Gospel of Matthew, three specific works are worth briefly mentioning in order to find the pulse of modern-day interpretation. This includes John Meier's first volume of *A Marginal Jew*, James D. G. Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*, and John Shelby Spong's *Jesus for the NonReligious*.

John Meier

John Meier produced a massive three-volume work on the life of Jesus. In the first volume, *A Marginal Jew: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, he addresses the birth narratives. After briefly looking at the derivation of Jesus' name, he dives head-first into the problems surrounding Jesus' birth and lineage. Claiming that the infancy narratives stand in relative isolation, that there were no living eyewitnesses to the birth when the narrative was written, and that there are tensions between Matthew's and Luke's birth accounts, Meier concludes that this is not reliable information on the historical Jesus. Furthermore, he notes that Jesus was likely born in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem. While he rejects the birth at Bethlehem, he does not see any reason to discard Jesus being from the lineage of David because there were no beliefs that tied resurrection with the Davidic messiahship. On the question of the virginal conception, Meier admits that historical evidence cannot make a judgment either way. He does indicate that the countertradition of Jesus being illegitimate was not clearly attested until the middle of the Second Century and is probably the "polemical reaction to the claims of the Infancy Narratives." In summary, regarding the narratives in Matthew and Luke, Meier concludes that "[b]oth narratives seem to be largely products of early Christian reflection on the

salvific meaning of Jesus Christ in light of OT prophecies.”⁸⁴

James D. G. Dunn

One of the most respected scholars in the field of NT, James D. G. Dunn, has recently published a chapter in his massive work, *Jesus Remembered*, entitled “Why Not ‘Beginning from Bethlehem’?” that elicits further doubt on their reliability in historical significance. Taking much of his information and viewpoint from Brown’s *Birth of the Messiah*, Dunn explains why his own work on the life of Jesus begins with the story of John the Baptist rather than the events surrounding Jesus’ birth. He cites several reasons including: 1) the birth narratives made no impact on those who became disciples of Jesus; 2) the birth narratives are theologically contrived; 3) Jesus is presented as Son of David and Son of God, which appears to be derived from a post-Easter understanding and written back into the gospel story with the birth narratives; 4) there are little to no historical facts that can be ascertained from the birth narratives.

Dunn states that the birth narratives doubtfully constitute the impact made on Mary: “More weighty is the evidence of the accounts themselves, that they have been in considerable measure contrived to bring out various significant allusions and theological emphases, not least by Matthew and Luke themselves.” One of Dunn’s first charges of theological creation concerns the story of the journey of the magi and the moving star that guided them: “I have in mind, in particular, in Matthew’s case, the fulfillment quotations so characteristic of his Gospel, the magi’s’ star (2.2, 7-10) no doubt intended to evoke Num 24.17 (‘A star will come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall arise out of

⁸⁴John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 213–20.

Israel'), the recognition of the significance of Jesus' birth by Gentiles (2.2, 11)...” Dunn questions the historicity of such events based on the tendency of Matthew to insert fulfillment quotations from the OT to explain the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Furthermore, he says, “Matthew's moving star does not evoke a strong impression of historical credibility. If, instead, we attribute such detail to the symbolical imagination of the story-teller, how much of the story remains as a viable historical account?”

Dunn uses the Jesus–Moses typology as another piece of evidence against the historicity of the birth narrative: “Likewise, the heavy typologizing particularly in regard to 2.13–18 (Herod as Pharaoh, Jesus as Israel in Egypt) leaves it very uncertain whether we can discern any historical events underlying the present story.” He implies, once again, Matthean creativity in the account of the Bethlehem slaughter: “The ‘slaughter of the innocents’ is hardly out of character for Herod, but it is also unlikely to have escaped the notice of Josephus.” He suggests that Josephus' comments on a Roman attack on villages surrounding Sepphoris, following the death of Herod the Great, could have been the traumatic event that strengthened the tradition behind Matt 2:16. Dunn's view on this journey is much the same as his view on the connected themes: “And the whole Egyptian episode, including Joseph and Mary's return to settle in Nazareth, does seem somewhat contrived.”⁸⁵ As is evident, Dunn does not believe that the Matthean birth narrative can be trusted historically.

John Shelby Spong

Former bishop, John Shelby Spong, recently published a book regarding the life

⁸⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 340–8.

of Jesus in which he explains the events surrounding the birth narratives. He begins by given an emphatic negative answer to the question of whether Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He indicates that the birthplace of Bethlehem as well as the virgin birth tradition are elements of a “developing interpretive process” that did not appear in Christian written tradition until fifty or sixty years after Jesus’ earthly life had come to an end. Spong describes the birth narratives as that which has for far too long been “mistakenly read as history.”

Spong indicates that the story of the magi would not be defended by any “reputable biblical scholar today.” The story is an interpretation of Isaiah 60 in the account of the kings who brought gold and frankincense. The myrrh came from the story of the queen of Sheba bringing spices to Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13). The connection is that the kings of the Isaiah story are from Sheba. Furthermore, he describes the star which the magi followed as “simply not credible except when we travel into the story of make-believe. They are premodern fantasies.”

He doubts the massacre at Bethlehem by indicating that very few kings would even take notice of the birth of a commoner and would certainly not be worried about a threat to his own kingdom: “These motifs in Matthew’s original birth story of Jesus are clearly not history, but rather reflect the growing power of claims made well after Jesus’ death that he was somehow the heir to the throne of King David, a popular prerequisite for the Jewish messiah.” He concludes by indicating that Matthew’s narrative is a Moses story removed from a Jewish past and threaded into the birth story of Jesus.⁸⁶

⁸⁶John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the NonReligious* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 15–21.

Conclusion

Looking at the way scholars from the early church through the modern period have viewed the birth narratives, it is apparent that while early in its history only a few exceptions of heresy cast shadows of doubt upon the believability of the Matthean birth narrative, the post-Enlightenment period has produced many more naysayers within the scholarly world. From a position of history driving theology to a position of theology driving history, skepticism has pervaded recent scholarly discussions. While there are many critical scholars who point to a historical core, these same scholars also often point to midrashic and haggadic embellishments of the birth narratives, thus introducing what could be considered a “history driving theology driving history” approach.

In order to determine whether scholars have truly been “enlightened” by the shift of these positions or whether a naturalistic worldview has caused such skepticism, it is necessary to look at Matthew’s birth narrative afresh. Beginning with an examination of Matthew’s literary features will help determine the purpose behind his story, followed by a look at the theological implications of the birth narrative, and finally a critical examination of its historicity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE MATTHEAN BIRTH NARRATIVE

Having laid a foundation of historical scholarly treatment for the Matthean birth narrative, it is imperative to freshly examine the text first through the lens of literary purpose and design in order to determine whether Matthew wrote his narrative with a historical account in mind but brought out theological emphases or whether Matthew began with a theological starting point and creatively crafted a story about Jesus' birth to fit that framework. A literary analysis is not as concerned with historical background as it is with the text as it stands. Several features of the text, including sources, themes, characters, setting, literary devices, and textual criticism reveal Matthew's literary skill and intent. While many works have included the theological meaning in the section on literary analysis, the present work will devote a separate chapter to the theological implications of the passage. This chapter will enable the reader to become more acquainted with Matthew's literary characteristics and overall approach to his Gospel for the purpose of aiding in the determination of whether he was purposely writing a work of fiction or simply shaping what he thought to be a historical account into a form that presents theological conclusions he derived.

Textual Criticism

The first issue to resolve is the precise text itself from a textual-critical view. For such a large amount of text, there are very few verses in question with most of the issues

revolving around the spelling of names in the genealogy (1:7-8, 10), the exact name in reference to Jesus Christ (1:18), the word for “birth” (1:18), reference to the son or firstborn son (1:25), and the inclusion of “song of grief” along with wailing in the quotation from Jer 31:15.¹ These variants have little impact on the text itself and its meaning, contributing very little to the purpose of this dissertation. Two variants, however, require a closer examination due to their textual ramifications.

The first of these is found in 1:11 where the genealogy reaches Josiah. The given text of the UBS 4th edition reveals that Josiah begat Jechoniah. The alternate reading is that Josiah begat Joakim (or Jehoiachin) and Joakim begat Jechoniah. Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (early manuscripts) as well as a majority of witnesses, including Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine agree with the given text while later manuscripts point to the alternate reading. Therefore, external evidence points to the given text. While a more detailed look at the sources for the genealogy will come later, it is important to indicate that much of the internal evidence debate surrounding this variant depends upon copyists’ opinions of the source. Since 1 Chronicles 3 provides a genealogy of David’s descendants, there is reason to look there for a possible source for Matthew’s genealogy. In 1 Chr 3:15–16, it states that Jehoiakim was the second born son of Josiah and that he begat Jechoniah. Because of the tendency to conform to the 1 Chronicles genealogy, it is likely that the alternate reading was a later change or attempted “correction” to

¹The given text of the UBS 4th Edition is followed for reasons of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts holding to this wording and no internal evidence that would point to a particular reason for adopting one over the other.

Matthew's genealogy. Furthermore, the 3 x 14 structure of Matthew's genealogy would be lost with the addition of a fifteenth generation.²

The second variant worthy of examination for this dissertation is found in 1:16. The given text of the UBS 4th edition describes Joseph as "the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." The oldest and most reliable witnesses agree with this, including P1, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and several Church Fathers. There are several alternate readings. First, Joseph is described as "to whom being betrothed the virgin Mary bore Jesus, who is called Christ." This translation is supported by some Greek and Old Latin witnesses. Second, the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript supports a reading of Joseph "to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, begot Jesus who is called the Christ." Third, the Curetonian Syriac manuscript reads Joseph "to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, she who bore Jesus the Christ." Fourth, one of the Coptic manuscripts reads Joseph "the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus who is called Christ." While there are more variants, these suffice to demonstrate that the given text has the support of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts while the alternate readings are late and diverse in their wording. This points the external evidence largely in favor of the given text. Regarding internal evidence, it is much easier to explain the alternate readings as explanations of the given text. The first alternate seems to be concerned with clarifying Joseph's betrothal to Mary rather than husband of Mary. More importantly, each of the alternate readings tends to emphasize the virginity of Mary which will be explained in

²See also Metzger's explanation on Matt 1:11 where he gives the text an "A" rating in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 2.

1:18–25. For this reason, the given text seems to be the more difficult and accurate reading.³

Gospel Starting Point Comparison

Now that the variants have been briefly discussed and the text of Matthew 1–2 established, the discussion turns to the purpose of the birth narrative in Matthew. In order to determine this, it is important to first compare Matthew’s Gospel beginning to that of other Gospels. Mark’s Gospel begins with the phrase Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου [Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ]. From this, the Gospel quotes from Isa 40:3 and Mal 3:1 to introduce John the Baptist as the one preparing the way for the Lord’s coming in Jesus Christ. From that point, the story turns to Jesus’ baptism and temptation before His ministry begins and He calls the first disciples. There is no story of His birth or childhood. In fact, the first piece of information the reader learns of Jesus is that he came from Nazareth in Galilee “in those days” (1:9). In other words, the Gospel begins with the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Mark’s purpose appears to be that he wants to present the account of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection, not worrying with His beginnings. Much emphasis throughout is on the actions of Jesus with fewer discourses.

Luke’s Gospel begins with a prologue, revealing a recipient named Theophilus to whom the Gospel was written in order to reassure him of what he has been instructed. Much has been made of Luke’s prologue in regards to its emphasis on accuracy with the compilation of sources and the eyewitness testimonies.⁴ After laying the foundation for

³See further discussion once again in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 2.

⁴For a very good discussion of this, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 116–24.

the reliability of his Gospel, Luke begins his own birth narrative with the annunciation story of John the Baptist before relaying the annunciation of Jesus' birth, followed by the birth narrative of Jesus and His presentation in the Temple. The story fast-forwards from the days surrounding His birth (Luke 1–2:38) to His visit to the Temple at the age of twelve where Mary and Joseph find Him teaching (Luke 2:41–50). Luke 2:39–40 serve to bridge the two time periods by indicating that He returned to Galilee and grew up in the town of Nazareth: Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐκραταιοῦτο πληρούμενον σοφία, καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦν ἐπ' αὐτό. Similarly, Luke 2:51–52 also bridge the account of Jesus at age twelve to the beginning of His ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, which Luke takes careful aim to pinpoint the exact time period and who was reigning at the time (3:1–2). In this bridge, Jesus is said to go again to Nazareth with His parents and again, Luke describes His growing up: Καὶ Ἰησοῦς προέκοπτεν [ἐν τῇ] σοφία καὶ ἡλικία καὶ χάριτι παρὰ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων. In both bridge verses, there is an emphasis on the growth of wisdom and grace. The remainder of the beginning of Luke's Gospel follows closely with that of Mark, including the baptism, temptation, and ministry in Galilee.

John's Gospel is different in its approach altogether, not being one of the synoptic Gospels. The beginning prologue is heavily theological, presenting Jesus as God in the flesh (John 1:1–18). The story then picks up with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus before the calling of the first disciples. The account turns radically away from the other Gospels at this point where Jesus performs the first sign: the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2).

As can be seen, Matthew and Luke are closest in the ways they begin their Gospel accounts as opposed to the beginnings of Mark and John since Matthew and Luke both

devote two chapters each to birth narratives. While the so-called Gospel genre is best explained as presenting the good news of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mark 1:1; Rom 1:1–6, 16), Matthew and Luke saw fit to include the birth of Jesus as part of the “gospel” message.⁵ There is a large gap of time left unfilled between the birth narratives of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry as introduced in Mark 1, Matthew 3, Luke 3, and John 1:19 so little is known of the childhood and early adulthood of Jesus. The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke focus on the events immediately surrounding His birth and soon thereafter. The differences lie in the approach of the birth narratives themselves.

Birth Narrative Comparison: Matthew and Luke

Despite the tendency to harmonize the two accounts for the sake of apologetics or merely for dramatic presentation, from a literary standpoint, the birth accounts in Matthew and Luke are radically different. While Matthew’s account focuses more on Joseph, Luke’s account focuses more on Mary. Matthew’s account begins with a genealogy (1:1–17) while Luke does not include a genealogy until Chapter 3, outside of the birth narrative itself (Luke 3:23–38). The two genealogical lists are different in names and starting points. Luke’s genealogy begins with Jesus and goes backward to Adam while Matthew’s list begins with Abraham and goes forward to Jesus. While Matthew’s narrative begins with the genealogy, Luke’s begins with a prologue, indicating the careful research done to certify the validity of his entire account (1:1–4) before picking up the

⁵Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 99–107; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 21. Both of these sources have good descriptions of the Gospel genre.

birth story with the foretelling of John the Baptist's birth (1:5–25). The events immediately surrounding the birth of Jesus are confined to Matt 1:18–25 (with post-birth events being presented in Matthew 2), while in the third Gospel, they consist of Luke 1:5–2:20 (through 2:40 if one includes the events surrounding Jesus' circumcision). The inclusion of the events surrounding John the Baptist's birth as well as the Magnificat of Mary and Zechariah's prophecy account for much of the text in Luke.⁶

In addition to the pre-birth materials, there are other events and characters which are unique to each Gospel account. Luke's account includes a census, which brings Joseph to Bethlehem, the visit by the shepherds, the presentation of Jesus at the Temple and return to Nazareth, and the teaching in the Temple at age twelve. Matthew's account includes the magi and moving star, Herod's massacre of the children in Bethlehem, and the flight of the family into Egypt. Some scholars, such as Raymond Brown, believe that the two accounts are not only different in details but also contradictory, focusing much on how each writer moves the family to Bethlehem.⁷

Why are the two birth narratives so different in their approach? For this chapter, we will concentrate on the literary purpose of Matthew versus that of Luke. A detailed analysis of Luke's purpose is beyond the scope of this work but will be briefly discussed

⁶For a brief but good explanation of the significance of John the Baptist as an example of divine intervention even before birth and his close link with the ministry of Jesus, see Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 110.

⁷Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 35–36.

here before going into more detail on Matthew's purpose. Luke gives his purpose in the prologue (1:1–4), stating that he has taken painstaking measures to verify the reliability of the accounts he received in order to compile an “orderly account” to insure Theophilus of the truth concerning the things he has been taught. Luke, admittedly not an eyewitness, arranged an account of the details surrounding Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection as well as the events of the early church in the book of Acts, using eyewitness accounts.⁸

Plummer sees Luke as investigating everything “from the beginning” as pointing to the promise of the birth of the forerunner, John the Baptist (Luke 1).⁹ Marshall believes it may refer to the birth stories but more likely refers to “Luke's lengthy researches.”¹⁰ Fitzmyer believes that it refers to the beginning of the apostolic tradition.¹¹ Bock rightly criticizes Fitzmyer for not explaining why he chose the apostolic tradition. Instead, Bock agrees with Plummer: “If one notes the emphasis on fulfillment in the infancy material and thus Luke's unique contribution in regard to this period of Jesus' life, then it would seem natural that Luke intends to refer back to this beginning. Though Jesus' ministry does not begin until after John the Baptist, the fulfillment starts with John's coming to earth. Luke viewed his new material on the infancy as contributing to the church's

⁸Again, see Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 116–24; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 105–8.

⁹Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, 5th ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922), 4.

¹⁰I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 42.

¹¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)* (AB 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 298.

information about Jesus.”¹² Luke’s prologue to the book of Acts (1:1–3) also gives credence to this purpose.

Guthrie points out that there are many passages in Luke’s Gospel which portray an emphasis on a universal gospel message. Some of these can be seen in the birth narrative (the angel’s message of goodwill in 2:14; Jesus as the light to the Gentiles in 2:32).¹³ Additionally, the genealogy in Luke 3 traces Jesus’ ancestry back to Adam, the first man from whom all of humanity descended. Evidently, the birth narratives in Luke contribute to the overall purpose of presenting the life and death of Jesus as the Savior of the world.

Literary Structure of Matthew

In order to determine the purpose of Matthew’s birth narrative, it is essential to examine its literary relationship with the rest of the Gospel by analyzing the Gospel’s structure. Does the birth narrative belong in the literary structure of the Gospel? Matthew tends to move Jesus’ ministry along by geographical divisions notated by change in place names. The Gospel appears to be divided generally as such:

Genealogy and Events Surrounding Jesus’ Birth	1:1–2:23
Baptism and Temptation of Jesus	3:1–4:11
Galilean Ministry	4:12–18:35
Judean Ministry	19:1–20:34
Jerusalem: Teaching, Arrest, Death, Resurrection	21:1–28:15
Ascension and Great Commission	28:16–20

¹²Darrell L. Bock, *Luke I, 1–9:50* (BECNT 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 61.

¹³Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 102.

Many scholars have identified Matthew's alternating use of narrative and discourse throughout the Gospel.¹⁴

Infancy Narratives		1:1–2:23
Preparation for Ministry		3:1–4:11
Galilean Ministry		4:12–18:35
Narrative	4:12–4:25	
Discourse	5:1–7:29	
Narrative	8:1–9:34	
Discourse	9:35–10:42	
Narrative	11:1–12:50	
Discourse	13:1–52	
Narrative	13:53–17:27	
Discourse	18:1–35	
Judean Ministry		19:1–25:46
Narrative	19:1–22:46	
Discourse	23:1–25:46	
Jerusalem Events (Passion/Resurrection)		26:1–28:20

Others have suggested a three-fold division based on the phrase, Ἀπὸ τότε ἦρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς repeated in 4:17 and 16:21:¹⁵

The Person of Jesus Messiah	1:1–4:16
The Proclamation of Jesus Messiah	4:17–16:20
The Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Messiah	16:21–28:20

Still, some scholars have identified Matthew as relating to the five books of the Torah, dividing his Gospel into a sort of Pentateuch with alternating narrative and discourse material in each and a formula quotation (καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς)

¹⁴Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 57–60. See also Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *CBQ* 23:4 (Oct 1961): 403–35 for a chiastic use of the discourse and narrative sections.

¹⁵J. D. Kingsbury, “Structure of Matthew’s Gospel and His Concept of Salvation-History,” *CBQ* 35:4 (Oct 1973): 451–74.

to round out each section (7:28–29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1):¹⁶

Preamble/Prologue	1:1–2:23
Book I	3:1–7:29
Book II	8:1–11:1
Book III	11:2–13:53
Book IV	13:54–19:1
Book V	19:2–26:2
Epilogue	26:3–28:20

In each of these structural theories for Matthew’s Gospel, the birth narratives play a role. Using the idea that Matthew moves his Gospel along by geographical details matches the way the birth narrative flows. There is movement within 1:1–2:23 based on geography (Bethlehem–Egypt–Jerusalem–Nazareth). While more will be said about this later, it is enough to establish the point for now that the geographical movement of the Gospel as a whole is not uncharacteristic of the birth narrative itself.

Using the alternating narrative and discourse theory, while the infancy narratives and the preparation of Jesus’ ministry do not alternate a discourse and narrative section, the beginning of the alternation is with the Galilean ministry in 4:12–25, which is followed by a discourse in 5:1–7:29. While some might point out that the birth narratives would interrupt the alternating sequence of narrative and discourse, it should be remembered that 3:1–4:11 is also a narrative section (which is not a debated passage as far as belonging in the Gospel) so that either way, there are two or three narrative sections in a row (1:1–2:23; 3:1–4:11; 4:12–25). Furthermore, one can see that the alternation is within the Galilean and Judean ministries. Although the passion narratives

¹⁶Benjamin. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930) cited in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew I, 1–7* (ICC 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 59. See pp. 58–61 for a good overview of the most popular theories on structure.

follow a discourse section in 23:1–25:46, there is special attention given to the passion narratives outside of a Judean ministry, thus not necessarily fitting them neatly into the alternating pattern. Admittedly, the narrative section on Jesus' preparation for ministry could have served this purpose as an *inclusio* at the beginning of the Gospel without the birth narratives, but the use of *inclusio* in 1:23 and 28:20 (Jesus' presence) cause difficulties in eliminating the section on this basis.

At first glance upon examining Kingsbury's three-fold division, it appears that the inclusion or exclusion of the birth narratives would not affect the structure at all since the structure is based on the phrase repeated in 4:17 and 16:21. However, if it is included, it does further explain the person of Jesus Messiah and there is no phrase which separates 1:1–2:23 and 3:1–4:16 according to the way his theory divides the Gospel. Furthermore, if the last section of Kingsbury's structure includes the death of Jesus, would the birth of Jesus be all that out of place in the first section?

The fivefold division based upon the phrase repeated (καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς) at various points throughout the Gospel does not necessarily pose threats to the inclusion of the birth narrative. The phrase does not appear until 7:28–29 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. While it is obvious that the phrase appears at the end of each section and would be hard-pressed to appear at the end of a birth narrative since Jesus would not necessarily be old enough to speak (at least not to the extent that He does in each of the other sections), it is more telling that Bacon's divisions include a prologue and epilogue. The passion narratives make up the epilogue and would cause an imbalance if the prologue was eliminated. While much of this is obvious, one of the best reasons for inclusion of the birth narratives in this scenario is upon the basis of the divisions

themselves. If Bacon is basing the fivefold division not only upon the phrase repeated throughout, but also pointing to the fact that Matthew wanted to make a sort of Pentateuch with his Gospel, the inclusion of a birth narrative that reveals many parallels between Jesus and the author of the Pentateuch (Moses) would not be a stretch. In fact, if the events of the birth narrative are historical, it would be inexplicable why Matthew would not include them to further demonstrate Jesus as the new Moses and the Gospel as the new Law (Matt 5:17–19).

Based upon structure, the birth narratives set the stage for Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. They are a sort of preamble to His ministry or an explanation of His person. A deeper examination of the literary features of the birth narrative itself is necessary for a fuller understanding of its purpose and relation to the rest of the Gospel.

Literary Style and Vocabulary

There is much debate over whether Matthew's Gospel appeared originally in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek based on quotations by church fathers including Papias and Irenaeus.¹⁷ The external evidence of church father testimony points toward the fact that there was either an original Hebrew or Aramaic version of the Gospel while there still remains the fact that only Greek versions have been found in existence. Internal evidence demonstrates that the current Gospel of Matthew is written in a comprehensible Greek apart from any clear evidence of translation although there are some Semitisms throughout, pointing to an author who would be familiar with Hebrew language and

¹⁷For a good survey of the issue, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 7–33.

customs.¹⁸ The point here is not to belabor the issue of the original language of the Gospel but to point out some characteristics in the style of the birth narratives as compared with the rest of the Gospel. What is a prime example of someone writing with Hebrew customs in mind and is telling regarding the style of Matthew is his use of formula citations.

There are some fourteen formula citations in the Gospel of Matthew which indicates that something fulfilled what was already prophesied in an OT passage. Five out of the fourteen appear in the birth narratives, which only make up two of twenty-eight chapters! Clearly, the use of these formula citations is characteristic of the Gospel writer and not only points to the fact that the style of the birth narratives is very much like the rest of the Gospel but also make them the quintessential examples of the formula citations.¹⁹

Vincent Taylor points out that the literary style of the first two chapters of Matthew is just as polished as the rest of the Gospel, indicating that it has always been a part of the Gospel. The vocabulary is also characteristic of the entire Gospel. The “mode of treatment” in the first two chapters corresponds with the rest of the Gospel in that he describes the new faith as the fulfillment of the old. Picking twelve quotations that stand out (1:22f; 2:5f; 2:15; 2:17f; 2:23; 3:3; 4:14ff; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4f; 27:9), Taylor indicates that each is preceded by “in order that that which was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled” or something similar, they are quoted in this Gospel alone (except for

¹⁸Ibid., 72–73.

¹⁹See Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 97–98 for a list of the formula citations in Matthew and their comparison with the use by other Gospel writers.

3:3), and most are based upon the Hebrew whereas the remaining quotations in the Gospel (except for 11:10) are from the LXX. These characteristic quotations are throughout the Gospel, indicating the genuineness of the first two chapters.²⁰

Hawkins' thorough examination of the vocabulary of Matthew's Gospel is invaluable. Out of ninety-five unique words and phrases in Matthew (occur at least four times in the Gospel; they are not found in Mark or Luke or they occur at least twice as often as in Mark and Luke put together), twenty-five are in Chapters 1 and 2. Even without the forty occurrences of γεννάω, sixty-seven out of 864 unique words and phrases in Matthew appear in the first two chapters.²¹ While there are many unique words and phrases within the first two chapters of Matthew, they can be explained largely by the fact that the first two chapters deal with Jesus' birth and his beginnings are rarely even mentioned throughout the rest of the Gospel.²²

²⁰Vincent Taylor, *The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), 92–95.

²¹J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae: Contributions to the Study of the Synoptic Problem*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 4–9. The twenty-five unique words include: ἀνατολή, ἀναχωρέω, ἀργύρια (plural), ἀστήρ, γεννάω, δῶρον, ἐγερθεῖς, ἡγεμών, ἰδοῦ (after gen absolute), κλαυθμός, λεγόμενος, μάγος, μετοικεσία, ὄναρ, ὄπως, παρθένος, πληρώω (used of Scriptures), προσκυνέω, προσφέρω, ῥηθέν, συνάγω, σφόδρα, τότε, φανοῦμαι, χρυσός.

²²Using Libronix Digital Library System 2.0 (Libronix Corporation: 2000-2002), the following words are worth pointing out in Matthew's birth narrative: ὄναρ ("dream") appears 6 times in Matthew with 5 of the 6 in the birth narratives (1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22; the other in Matt 27:19) and no other time in the NT. διενθυμέομαι ("consider or think") occurs only in Matthew in 1:20 and 9:4. λάθρᾳ ("secretly") appears only twice within Matthew's Gospel and both times are in the birth narrative (1:19; 2:7). δειγματίσαι ("disgrace") only appears in Matt 1:19 and Col 2:15. γαστήρ ("child") appears only three times in Matthew (1:18; 1:23; 24:19). Μνηστευθείω ("betrothed" or "engaged") appears only once in Matthew (1:18) and then only appears in Luke 1:27; 2:5. δεκατέσσαρες ("fourteen") occurs only three times within Matthew and all in the same verse (1:17). μετοικεσίας ("deportation") occurs only in Matthew (1:11, 12, 17 twice). γένεσις ("birth" or "genealogy") occurs only twice in Matthew (1:1, 18) as well as Luke 1:14 and James 1:23; 3:6. μάγος ("magi") appears only three times within Matthew (2:1, 7, 16) and twice in Acts (13:6, 8). οὐδ'αμῶς ("no means") appears only in Matt 2:6 (twice).

Looking at the various words in Matthew 1–2, Knox posits that there is no editorial revision different than he has done in the rest of the Gospel. He points out that the use of *κύριος* (1:20, 22, 24; 2:13, 19) to describe God is not Matthean since elsewhere in the Gospel, he is never referred to as such except for 28:2. This indicates that the fulfillment formula is older than Matthew, assuming a fixed form before he received it. The fulfillment formula is the same or very similar to that used in 4:14ff; 8:17; 12:17ff; 13:35; 21:4f; 27:9 and all of these differ from the LXX. The first four show fulfillment in the general outline of Jesus’ ministry while the last two center on the last days of Jesus. “The appearance of this collection is not without interest as suggesting a general ‘biographical’ interest in the career of Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, which was swamped by the later desire for more detailed prophecies or the growing interest in typology.”²³

A more detailed analysis of the formula citations will come later in this chapter but for now, its purpose serves to demonstrate the emphasis on Hebraic thought as a focus in Matthew’s Gospel, particularly in the birth narrative itself. Matthew’s style does not radically differ in the birth narratives from the rest of his Gospel except in places where the vocabulary can be explained by the differing subject matter of the birth narratives.

Structure of Matthean Birth Narrative

A closer examination of the parts of the birth narrative in Matthew should begin with a discussion of its overall structure since the structure often plays a role in

²³Wilfred L. Knox, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospels 2, St. Luke and St. Matthew*, ed. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 121–8.

determining purpose. The birth narrative, as well as Gospel, begins with an introductory statement describing the following as the Βίβλος γενέσεως of Jesus Christ. The exact nature of this phrase will be discussed below and has an impact on how 1:1 fits into the structure.

Davies and Allison acknowledge the structuring of the genealogy according to fourteen generations. They indicate that the birth of Jesus (1:18–25), comprising Act I of the drama, “represents a conflation of two different patterns, the pattern shared with MT 2.13–15a and 2.19–21 and the pattern shared with Gen 16, Judg 13, and Lk 1.”²⁴ Act II includes six scenes: 2:1–2; 2:3–6; 2:7–8; 2:9–10; 2:11; 2:12. Act III includes three scenes, each concluded by a formula citation: 2:13–15; 2:16–18; 2:19–23.²⁵

Brown adapts and expands Stendahl’s formula of the Who (Matthew 1) and Where (Matthew 2):²⁶

1:1–17:	The <i>Quis</i> (Who) of Jesus’ identity
1:18–25:	The <i>Quomodo</i> (How) of Jesus’ identity

²⁴A. note of circumstance (1:18b–19; 2:13; 2:19)

B. appearance of the angel of the Lord in a dream (1:20a; 2:13; 2:19)

C. command of the angel to Joseph (1:20b; 2:13; 2:20a)

D. explanation of command (γάρ clause; 1:20c; 2:13; 2:20b)

E. Joseph rises (ἔγερθεις) and obediently responds (1:24–5; 2:14–15; 2:21)

A. description of circumstances (Gen 16:1–7; Jdg 13:2; Luke 1:5–10; 1:26; Matt 1:18–20)

B. the angel of the Lord appears (Gen 16:7; Jdg 13:3; Luke 1.11; 1:26 – 28; Matt 1:20)

C. angelic prophecy of birth, including child’s future deeds (Gen 16:11–12; Jdg 13:3–7; Luke 1:13–17; 1:30–33, 35–37; Matt 1:20–21)

D. account of the issue of things (Gen 16:13–16; Jdg 13:19–25; Luke 1:18–25; 1:38; Matt 1:24–25)

²⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 196–7, 224, 257.

²⁶Krister Stendahl, “*Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1–2,*” in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche*, ed. W. Eltester (Festschrift J. Jeremias; BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 94–105; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 53–54.

- 2:1–12: The *Ubi* (Where) of Jesus’ birth
 2:13–23: The *Unde* (Whence) of Jesus’ destiny

Taking these into consideration and expanding them further, the following is a working outline for the narrative:

Genealogy of Jesus	Matt 1:1–17
Introductory statement	Matt 1:1
Genealogy: Abraham to David	Matt 1:2–6a
Genealogy: David to Jeconiah	Matt 1:6a–11
Genealogy: Jeconiah to Jesus	Matt 1:12–16
Genealogical summary statement	Matt 1:17
Birth of Jesus	Matt 1:18–25
Introduction	Matt 1:18a
Joseph’s dilemma: Mary’s conception	Matt 1:18b–19
Joseph’s dream: Angelic instructions	Matt 1:20–23
Joseph’s obedience: Naming Jesus	Matt 1:24–25
Journey of Magi to Bethlehem	Matt 2:1–12
Journey from the East	Matt 2:1–2
Encounter with Herod	Matt 2:3–8
Magi’s Arrival and Presentation of Gifts	Matt 2:9–11
Angelic Warning	Matt 2:12
Escape and Settlement	Matt 2:13–23
Flight to Egypt	Matt 2:13–15
Slaughter at Bethlehem	Matt 2:16–18
Return from Egypt	Matt 2:19–23

Literary Analysis of the Genealogy (Matt 1:1–17)

Βίβλος γενέσεως (Matt 1:1)

While the section is labeled “Genealogy,” it is important to begin by discussing more in depth what exactly the statement in Matt 1:1 means. Does Βίβλος γενέσεως refer to the genealogy, the entire birth narrative of Matthew 1 and 2, or to Matthew’s Gospel as a whole?

Plummer finds Matt 1:1 as the heading to the first two chapters but not to the entire Gospel. According to his view, Matthew had the LXX of Genesis in mind as Gen 5:1 covers not only the genealogy of Adam to Japhet but also the time of Noah (Gen 5:1–

6:8).²⁷ Waetjen sees Matthew as presenting Jesus as “the culmination of the historical process of Israel’s begetting” but whose origin is beyond the genealogy and “one who begets a new beginning.” Therefore, although the immediate reference of 1:1 is to the genealogy, the “book of generation” must also refer to the “new history originated by him and presented by the evangelist in his gospel composition.”²⁸ Davies and Allison follow this thinking, presenting seven key reasons for taking 1:1 as referring to the entire Gospel: 1) In Gen 2:4 and 2) 5:1, the phrase in the LXX introduces more than a genealogy; 3) the NT often refers to the coming of Jesus as a new beginning or counterpart of the Genesis creation account; 4) the OT book of Genesis has already received its title by the time of Matthew’s writing and could have influenced Matthew; 5) throughout the NT, Βίβλος always refers to a book; 6) it was custom for these types of writings in Judaism to open with a sentence, introducing the content of the work; 7) Judaism pointed to an “eschatological redemption and renewal as a new beginning.”²⁹ Brown points out that 1:18–25 explain 1:16, thus making it difficult to believe that 1:1 covers more than 1:2–17. Furthermore, the related verbal form of γενεσις is used throughout the genealogy and the noun form appears again in verse 17.³⁰

The uses of the phrase in the book of Genesis and the impact of Genesis on the Gospel writers (John 1:1) cannot be ignored. Matthew’s Gospel does portray Jesus as a

²⁷Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 1.

²⁸Hermann C. Waetjen, “The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel According to Matthew,” *JBL* 95.2 (1976): 215.

²⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 150–3.

³⁰Brown, *Birth*, 58–59.

new beginning (Matt 5:17) and there are many parallels between Jesus and the author of Genesis (Moses). Perhaps Matthew was thinking of Genesis when he opened his Gospel but the immediate context points to the phrase as an introduction to the genealogical list. Matthew's use of γενεσίς appears in 1:1 and 1:18. This second use of the term in 1:18 is used to describe Jesus' birth. As Hagner points out, there is a chiasmic structure between 1:1 and 1:17 with Christ...David...Abraham and Abraham...David...Christ, demonstrating that the record of the beginning of Jesus (1:1) is referring to the first seventeen verses as an independent unit.³¹ This literary device makes it difficult to apply 1:1 beyond the first seventeen verses. The phrase would, therefore, be best interpreted as "the record of the genealogy" in relation to the immediate context but Matthew probably had a play on words in mind so that the reader would also be thinking of "a book of *the new beginning*." Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ would then be a genitive of product in the immediate context since the following verses portray the genealogy of Jesus and a subjective genitive in the larger scope of the Gospel.³²

While a more detailed examination of the theological purpose of the genealogy will appear in the following chapter, suffice it to say that Matthew's purpose here is to show Jesus as a new beginning (see above discussion). This new beginning points to the new beginning of Israel brought about by one man. This is why Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham rather than Adam and emphasizes Jesus as descending from

³¹Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993), 5; cf. W. Barnes Tatum, "'The Origin of Jesus Messiah' (Matt 1:1, 18a): Matthew's Use of the Infancy Traditions," *JBL* 96.4 (Dec 1977): 524–5.

³²Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 106, 113; Brown, *Birth*, 59.

the seed of David since he wants to show from family record that Jesus is rightly the Messiah (Matt 1:1).

Genealogical Structure: Three Divisions of Fourteen

A related question is the unique structure of the genealogy which appears as three divisions of fourteen generations. Matthew presents them from Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian exile, and the Babylonian exile to the Messiah (Matt 1:17). Augustine indicates that the genealogy is broken up into a series of forty men since that is the number given by Scripture regarding tribulation (Acts 14:22) and the number is used for prayer and fasting, the solemn assembly, etc. Matthew gave three groups of fourteen which would have resulted in forty-two. Jechonias is mentioned twice, being a prefigure of a corner from one generation of Jerusalem to Babylon. Christ is the real cornerstone and if one excludes the repetition of Jechonias and the mention of Christ, the number is forty.³³ The mysterious division of the three groups of fourteen is discussed by various other church fathers with a gloss most likely by Aquinas himself that the fourteen signified the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit doubled to show the grace needed for soul and body to salvation. The threefold division shows that the first division included those before the law, the second as those under the law, and the third as those under grace.³⁴ Both Augustine and Aquinas have demonstrated the overemphasis on the allegorical method and there is very little biblical evidence for this type of reasoning from Matthew

³³*Harmony of the Gospels*, 2.4.9-10 (ANF 6:105-6).

³⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers I, St. Matthew*, ed. and trans. John Henry Newman (Southampton: Saint Austin, 1997), 38-39.

and most scholars dismiss these ideas. While the number forty is used in the NT and even in Matthew in regards to Jesus' fasting in the wilderness, there is no reason to equate the number here as meaningful. Additionally, Matthew takes special care to emphasize the 3 x 14 structure which would be a total of forty-two. While there is double-counting to make each division include fourteen names, Matthew does not seem at all concerned with coming out with a total of forty but the emphasis is on the three divisions of fourteen. Aquinas' view of the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit is even more far-fetched and overworked with symbolism.

Box indicates that the artificial and Midrashic character of the genealogy is shown in the 3 x 14 structure and is given to illustrate the gain in David, the loss in captivity, and the recovery in the Messiah. The emphasis on Davidic descent is further shown by the probable structure based on gematria.³⁵ Box's argument has much more substance regarding the numeric value of David since there is much emphasis in the 3 x 14 structured genealogy on Jesus as the Son of David.

Hagner says that the structure of three fourteens could be seen as six sevens and the coming of Christ is the seventh seven or could allude to Daniel's seventy weeks of years (9:24) "since by reckoning a generation of thirty-five years, the same number, 490 is reached. Thus, after three periods of seventy weeks of years, God sends his Messiah into the world." Because Hagner believes the Gospel was written in Greek, he does not believe gematria is the key to the structure.³⁶ Even as Matthew emphasized a 3 x 14

³⁵G. H. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus: A Critical Examination of the Gospel Narratives of the Nativity, and Other New Testament and Early Christian Evidence, and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1916), 12–16.

³⁶Hagner, *Matthew*, 6–7.

structure rather than a total of forty names as Augustine described, Hagner seems to be emphasizing a 6 x 7 structure whereas Matthew never mentions this. Instead, we only read an emphasis on the three divisions of fourteen. Furthermore, as Brown indicates, although the Gospel appears in the Greek language, there is another example of a NT writer whose work is in Greek but probably makes reference to a Hebrew name's numerical value (Nero Caesar in Rev 13:18).³⁷

Waetjen opposes this explanation due to the missing name in the third division. Instead, he appeals to the parallel in the Messiah Apocalypse of 2 *Baruch* 53–74 where twelve episodes are described, each representing a specific period in biblical history (the first being the sin of Adam and the twelfth being the time of restoration when Zion is rebuilt). Twelve episodes have already taken place but two are yet to come. The thirteenth episode is described as the most tragic in history but yet the Messiah is said to come after this, which would be the fourteenth. Waetjen claims that Matthew might possibly be aware of the apocalypse but appears to be aware of a twelve plus two interpretation of historical epochs. “Not only is this the scheme which provides a plausible meaning for the numerically structured genealogy; it furnishes the key to the supposed discrepancy between the statement of 1:17, that there are fourteen generations from the Babylonian Captivity, and the actual number of thirteen generations that is listed in the genealogy.” Jesus the Messiah would count as the end of the third division and fourteenth generation but also as the beginning of a fourth division as the new epoch of history just as David and Jechoniah terminate one history and begin another.³⁸ Waetjen's

³⁷Brown, *Birth*, 75, 80 f.n. 38.

³⁸Waetjen, “Genealogy,” 210–2.

theory is plausible only if he holds to an early dating of 2 *Baruch* and a late dating of the Gospel of Matthew. Furthermore, there is no other reference to 2 *Baruch* in Matthew. Carson rightly critiques Waetjen's analysis by indicating that it is not clear that one can jump from schematized time periods in apocalyptic literature to names in a genealogy and he indicates that Waetjen's "correction" of the omission in the third set by listing Jesus twice is wrong because the second reference to Jesus in his scheme belongs to the inaugurated kingdom and not to the third set. The three by fourteen structure is most likely due to the numerical value of David's name.³⁹

Matthew did go to lengths to make his genealogy fit within that structure as some names are left out while others would need to be counted twice (the discussion of the historicity of the genealogy will be saved for a later chapter). Matthew wanted to emphasize dramatic shifts in salvation history for the three divisions (Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel; David, the king of Israel whose lineage would bring about the Messiah, the deportation to Babylon due to disobedience, and the coming of the Messiah who would bring true freedom to the Jews and Gentiles alike). The question still remains why the number fourteen is significant and the theory of the numeric value of David's Hebrew name is the best explanation posited thus far.

Foreshadowing: Four Women of the Genealogy

One of the unusual features of the genealogy is the inclusion of four women in addition to Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba). Brown summarizes the three primary explanations for their inclusion: 1) Jerome indicated that

³⁹D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8; *Matthew, Mark, Luke*; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 69.

they were all regarded as sinners, foreshadowing Jesus as the Savior of sinful humanity; 2) Luther proposed that they were all foreigners, demonstrating that the Jewish Messiah was related by ancestry to the Gentiles; 3) the proposal held by many scholars today is that the women had unusual unions with their partners and played a large part in God's plan.⁴⁰

It is rather unusual to name women in Jewish genealogies but there are rare instances where a woman is named to distinguish one set of sons bore by her from another set of sons bore by another woman (Abraham: Gen 25:1–4, 12–18; 1 Chr 1:28–34; Esau: Gen 25:36–43 but not in 1 Chr 1:35–42; Judah: 1 Chr 2:3–12; Caleb: 1 Chr 2:18–20, 42–55; David: 1 Chr 3:1–24). Certainly this could be the reason why Matthew includes Tamar as the wife of Judah who bore Perez and Zerah (Matt 1:3). As shown above, her name is mentioned specifically in 1 Chr 2:3–12 perhaps to distinguish her from Bath-shua. Looking at the same text in 1 Chronicles, neither Rahab nor Ruth is mentioned in the genealogy although they are mentioned in Matthew's list (1:5). Ruth, like other women are mentioned in narratives in the OT, is not included in the brief genealogy at the end of the book by the same title (Ruth 4:18–22). The final woman mentioned in Matthew's list is the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) (1:6). She is actually included in the genealogical list from 1 Chr 3:1–9 but called "Bath-shua" (not to be confused with "Bath-shua the Canaanitess" of 1 Chr 2:3) in order to distinguish David's offspring through her from his many wives and concubines.

⁴⁰Brown, *Birth*, 71–73; For a more detailed survey of the various positions, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 170–3; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 73–77.

Out of the four women mentioned, only two of them are mentioned in previous genealogies of the OT so Matthew's inclusion of them cannot be merely to distinguish the specific line of a patriarch's offspring from another. There must be another reason or Matthew would have needed to specify other mothers in his list. Why these four? As Brown and others have pointed out, there must be a theological reason for their inclusion, which will be one of the focuses of Chapter 3 of the present work.

Genealogical Source(s)

What is the source of Matthew's genealogical information? Africanus says that up until Herod's appointment as king of Judea, the genealogies of the Hebrews had been registered in the public archives. Because Herod knew that the lineage of the Israelites had nothing to do with him and was burdened with insults concerning this, he burned the records. Thus, he could clear himself since the lineage of the Hebrews could not be traced. However, a number of people kept private records, including family members of Jesus from Nazara and Cochaba, Judean villages, as well as other parts of the country. These genealogies came from "the Book of Days."⁴¹

As Goulder points out, Matthew follows the example set by 1 Chronicles 1–3 and appears to complete the third section of the Chronicler (Genesis to David, David to Shealtiel and Zerubbabel). Goulder believes that the beginning of the genealogy from Genesis 25 and the detailed use of Chronicles and of the Chronicler's methods indicate that Matthew has composed the genealogy except for the name Joseph, which appears to

⁴¹*The Epistle to Aristides*, 4–5 (ANF 6:126–7).

be traditional.⁴² Brown posits that two genealogical lists were already in existence in Greek, one resembling those found in 1 Chronicles 2 and Ruth 4 and the other a popular genealogy of the Davidic line (kings of Judah and some generations of Zerubbabel). Matthew saw that both lists included fourteen names (between Abraham and David and in the monarchical section). He decided to stay consistent with the third grouping in his own list and included Joseph and Jesus to keep the 3 x 14 pattern, being aware of the numerical value of David's name.⁴³ Davies and Allison critique Brown by indicating that a redactional use of 1 Chronicles 1–2 accounts for Matt 1:2–6a but that Brown's theory of the use of a monarchical and post-monarchical Jewish list of the descendants of David is plausible, providing a source for Matt 1:6b–16. Against Brown, they believe that Matthew also used 1 Chronicles 1–3 and was aware of traditional reckoning of fourteen generations from Abraham to David. Through the combination of the gematria and the attraction to symmetry, Matthew imposed the number fourteen for his list in 1:6b–16.⁴⁴

It would appear that Matthew could have used the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1–3 as a source of information for his own. The names given from Abraham to David follow the list in 1 Chronicles 1–3 except where Matthew leaves names out to make the pattern fit the 3 x 14 structure he has established. Most of the text follows the LXX in the spelling of the names, however, there are places⁴⁵ where Matthew appears to have used the MT

⁴²M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, The Speaker's Lectures in Biblical Studies 1969-71 (London: SPCK, 1974), 233.

⁴³Brown, *Birth*, 69–70.

⁴⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 165–6.

⁴⁵1 Chr 2:5, 9 $\text{קָרַן לְאַרְבָּעִים}$ LXX Ἀρσων or Εσερων compared with Matt 1:3 Ἐσρώμ; 1 Chr 2:9 רָמַח LXX ὁ Ραμ καὶ ὁ Χαλεβ καὶ Αραμ compared with Matt 1:3 Ἀράμ; 1 Chr 2:11 בְּעֵינָי LXX

and given a Greek translation of the proper name.⁴⁶ It is obvious that Matthew has imposed an artificial structure on the genealogical lists to match his 3 x 14 pattern as he has eliminated certain names and must count other names twice. Additionally, he must have a source outside of 1 Chronicles for the third section of the genealogy. Africanus' explanation of the source coming from a family genealogy is a distinct possibility.⁴⁷ Allen also believes that the author of the Gospel gained knowledge of the names in vv. 13–16 from an unknown source that may be Christ's family. He rightly points out that there is no reason to think that the genealogy ever existed apart from Matthew's Gospel.⁴⁸ There is no evidence of the Gospel without the genealogy. Taylor gives good reasons for holding that the genealogy belongs with the rest of the Gospel: 1) there is strong interest in the Davidic Sonship throughout; 2) the artificial structure is characteristic of the way

Booc compared with Matt 1:5 Βόες; 1 Chr 2:11–12 בְּרִיָּה LXX Ωβηδ compared with Matt 1:5 Ἰωβήδ; 1 Chr 3:5 הַלְוִי LXX Σαλωμων compared with Matt 1:6–7 Σολομῶνα / Σολομῶν; 1 Chr 3:10 אֲסָא LXX Ασα compared with Matt 1:8 Ἀσάφ; 1 Chr 3:11–12 אֲחִיָּזָא LXX Οχοζια compared with Matt 1:9 Ὀζίας (MT and LXX depart from Matthew here: LXX has Οχοζια υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Ιωας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Αμασιας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Αζαρια υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Ιωαθαν υἱὸς αὐτοῦ as compared to Matt 1:9 Ὀζίας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωαθάμ); 1 Chr 3:14–16 אָמֹן LXX Αμων compared to Matt 1:10 Ἀμώς; 1 Chr 3:14–16 יִשׁוּיָא LXX Ιωσια compared to Matt 1:10–11 Ἰωσιάν/Ἰωσίας (MT and LXX depart from Matthew here: LXX has Ιωσια, πρωτότοκος Ιωαναν, ὁ δεύτερος Ιωακιμ, ὁ τρίτος Σεδεκια, ὁ τέταρτος Σαλουμ. καὶ υἱὸς Ιωακιμ, Ιεχονιας as compared to Matt 1:11 Ἰωσίας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰεχονίαν); 1 Chr 3:19 MT and LXX depart from Matthew with LXX Ζοροβαβελ, Μοσολλαμος καὶ Ανανια, καὶ Σαλωμιθ ἀδελφὴ αὐτῶν, καὶ Ασουβε καὶ Οολ καὶ Βαραχια καὶ Ασαδια καὶ Ασοβαεσδ, πέντε as compared with Matt 1:13 Ζοροβάβελ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀβιούδ, Ἀβιούδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἐλιακίμ.

⁴⁶For a more detailed look at the various possibilities of spelling and sources, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 167–85.

⁴⁷Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 1.

⁴⁸Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 2, 5.

Matthew arranges material in groups of threes throughout; 3) the legal use of γεννάω to combine Virgin Birth with the Messiahship of Jesus; 4) the apologetic motive in the genealogy is characteristic of the entire Gospel as is the case in the baptism, the guard at the tomb, and the resurrection narratives; and 5) the nature of the genealogy leaves little room for a linguistic test although the use of λεγόμενος in 1:16 and the objective use of “the Christ” in v. 17 is similar to 11:2.⁴⁹

Purpose of the Genealogy

Was Matthew merely copying a list of the genealogical records of Jesus from a source to give a historical record or did he have a deeper purpose? There have already been many clues throughout our literary analysis that would suggest an ulterior motive. First, he has begun by pointing out that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, the Son of Abraham. Second, he uses a chiasm between 1:1 and 1:17 to emphasize not only the structure of 1:1–17 but also the important link between Abraham, David, and the Messiah. Third, there have been names left out of the genealogy and the inclusion of four specific women in addition to Mary. Fourth, the structure appears to be artificial with three divisions of fourteen names. Fifth, the list is different from that given in Luke 3. Sixth, there is a foreshadowing of the unusual birth of Jesus by the emphasis of Joseph as the husband of Mary but the use of the passive (ἧς ἐγέννηθη) rather than the active verb which is repeated throughout the genealogy (ἐγέννησεν). The genealogy apparently serves a theological purpose for Matthew, which will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

⁴⁹Taylor, *Virgin Birth*, 95–97.

Literary Analysis of the Birth Narrative (Matt 1:18–2:23)

Setting

After Matthew presents the genealogy of Jesus in 1:1–17, the birth narrative begins. Matthew 1:18–25 contains the story of the annunciation to Joseph and the naming of Jesus. Matthew 2:1–23 takes place after the birth of Jesus and includes the journey of the magi who follow a star to Jesus, Herod's jealousy and act of terror upon the children of Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, and the return to Israel before settling in Nazareth. While the genealogy is a record of names, carefully structured to present Jesus as the Messiah, there is no action until Matt 1:18. At that point, the birth narrative takes the form of a drama where the scene changes numerous times throughout.

Stendahl's work has been invaluable in the examination of the setting. He believes that Matthew 2 is dominated by geographical names, describing Bethlehem of Judea, moving on to Egypt, describing the massacre at Bethlehem, and taking the reader out of Egypt back to Israel. The story bypasses Judea and into Galilee before settling in Nazareth. The geographical names are important to Matthew as can be seen in them being the common denominator in the four formula quotations (2:5–6; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23).⁵⁰

There is no indication of the location for the events of Matt 1:18–25 because the first place named is not until 2:1, however, one might infer that the events of 1:18–25 took place in Bethlehem of Judea because of 2:1. This is different from the setting of the beginning of Luke's birth narrative. There, the angel announces the birth of Jesus to Mary at Nazareth (Luke 1:26) and the reader discovers that Joseph must depart from Nazareth

⁵⁰Stendahl, "Quis et Unde?," 97–98.

in order to fulfill Caesar's decree for the census, which would compel him to travel to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1). Meier recognizes this apparent difference: "[W]hile Matthew's basic geographical plot in his Infancy Narrative moves from original home in Bethlehem to adopted home in Nazareth (necessary for political reasons), Luke's plot moves in the opposite direction: from original home in Nazareth to temporary stay—hardly a home—in Bethlehem (necessary for political reasons), and then back to "their own home in Nazareth."⁵¹ On the other hand, there is no reason to dismiss the possibility that the annunciation to Joseph took place in Nazareth but the birth took place in Bethlehem as a harmonization of the two Gospel accounts.

Brown structures Matthew 2 as a two-act play that provides a synopsis of the geographical movement:⁵²

Act I (2:1–12): Magi from the East pay homage to the Messiah

Scene 1 (2:1–6): The magi from the East travel to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem.

Scene 2 (2:7–12): The magi arrive in Bethlehem to give gifts to the child king.

Act II (2:13–23): Herod seeks to kill the newborn king and the family escapes to Egypt before returning to Nazareth.

Scene 3 (2:13–15): The flight to Egypt

Scene 4 (2:16–18): The massacre of the children at Bethlehem

Scene 5 (2:19–23): The return of Joseph and family to Nazareth

The setting changes from the quiet birth at Bethlehem, in which the story only reveals mother, father, and child on the scene, to Jerusalem in 2:1 where magi arrive from the east, inquiring about the birth of the Messiah. The city was considered most holy by the Jews and was often very busy because of the Temple located there where thousands

⁵¹John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 213.

⁵²Brown, *Birth*, 178–9.

came to make sacrifices to Yahweh. The arrival of the magi and the jealousy of Herod make the setting at Bethlehem appear quite tense. The city seems to be in turmoil: “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (2:3). The bustling scene at Herod’s court soon thins out as Herod takes the magi aside to inquire further about the timing of the star, signally the birth of the Messiah. The text gives some clue as to the clandestine and foreboding nature of Herod’s inquiry, signally the reader that Herod’s motives are more than meets the eye (2:7–8).

The story returns from the scene in Jerusalem back to Bethlehem as the magi are sent on their way to find the child (2:9). Again, the scene is much more subdued than chaotic Jerusalem as the magi pay homage to Jesus before returning to their home country. They are described as entering τὴν οἰκίαν (2:11). Meier indicates, “Presumably this is the house Joseph and Mary dwell in permanently in Bethlehem.”⁵³ Notably absent from mention in the scene is Joseph. “The phrase, ‘the child with Mary his mother’ recurs (with ‘and’ for ‘with’ and without ‘Mary’) in 2.13, 14, 20, 21.” One of the reasons Davies and Allison gives is that “It puts Joseph out of the picture, thereby reinforcing the impact of 1.16–25: Jesus has no human father.”⁵⁴

At 2:13, Joseph is warned that he must take his family to Egypt to avoid the massacre by Herod. He quickly obeys and leaves during the night. The family travels to Egypt and remains there until the death of Herod. The time spent in Egypt is not

⁵³Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 211.

⁵⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 248.

described in Matthew's account but many apocryphal accounts have tried to fill in the gaps by providing stories of Jesus and family in Egypt.⁵⁵

As if in a movie, the camera quick-cuts back to Judea where Herod learns that the magi have tricked him. His jealous rage results in his decree that all male children two years old and under be killed in Bethlehem and the surrounding region (2:16–18). While the family is safe in Egypt, there is bedlam in Bethlehem.

The scene is, once again, Egypt where an angel announces the death of Herod and instructs Joseph to take his family back to Israel. They enter the land of Israel but decide not to resettle in Judea due to the reign of Archelaus. The angel instructs Joseph, once again, to settle instead in Nazareth of Galilee. This settlement in Nazareth concludes the birth narrative where Matthew's Gospel fast-forwards some thirty years to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and his baptism in the Jordan River in the region of Judea (3:1–17).

The various scene changes throughout Matt 1:18–2:23 provide a dramatic effect for the story as the mood appears to alternate between *panicked turmoil* and peaceful reassurance:

- Scene 1: Bethlehem (1:18–25): Birth of Jesus
 - a) Betrothal of Joseph and Mary mentioned (1:18a)
 - b) *Joseph's decision to divorce Mary privately because of perceived conception outside of marriage (1:19)*
 - c) Reassurance by angel to Joseph and birth of Jesus (1:20–25)
- Scene 2: Jerusalem (2:1–8): Jerusalem Response to Messiah's Birth
 - a) Journey of the Magi to find Messiah (2:1–2)
 - b) *Jerusalem troubled and Herod's hidden agenda (2:3–8)*
- Scene 3: Bethlehem (2:9–12): Magi's Arrival at Bethlehem
 - a) Magi pay homage to Messiah (2:9–11)
 - b) *Magi warned to return home another way (2:12)*
- Scene 4: Egypt (2:13–15): Flight to Egypt

⁵⁵See apocryphal works: *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour*.

- a) *Angelic warning and quick escape to Egypt (2:13–14)*
- b) Temporary settlement in Egypt and prophecy fulfilled (2:15)
- Scene 5: *Bethlehem (2:16–18): Slaughter of the Innocents*
- Scene 6: Egypt (2:19–20): *Angelic Reassurance of Safe Return to Israel*
- Scene 7: Israel (2:21–23): *Return from Egypt and Settlement at Nazareth*
 - a) *Warning of Archelaus' reign in Judea (2:21–22a)*
 - b) *Settlement in Nazareth of Galilee and prophecy fulfilled (2:22b–23)*

Transition and Repetition: Dream Appearances and Fulfillment Quotations

The narrative is written from the point of view of the narrator as the details are given in the third person, there are simultaneous events portrayed (Flight and Settlement in Egypt in 2:13–15 and Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem in 2:16–18), and there is the interjection of fulfillment quotations. Although the narrative is written in the third person, much of the action focuses on Joseph as he is the one to whom the angel appears and instructs throughout. These appearances as well as the fulfillment quotations serve as transitional devices to move the narrative along from scene to scene.

Dreams, as Davies and Allison point out, are often the conduit for divine revelation in the OT (Genesis 28, 37, 41, Judges 7, Job 33, Daniel 2) and in the intertestamental literature (*1 En.* 10; 93:2; 4 Ezra 4:1–4).⁵⁶ Calvin points out that God speaks to his servants through dreams as indicated in Num 12:6–8.⁵⁷ These dreams as a revelation of the divine are widespread from the classical period to the Byzantine era. They often warn of a coming crisis, encourage a leader to advance, reveal a criminal, inspire the founding of a city, or cause healing to take place. In the NT, they appear not

⁵⁶Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 207; M. J. Davidson, “Angels,” *DJG* 9.

⁵⁷John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke I* (CC 16; trans. William Pringle; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1943; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 96.

only in Matthew's birth narrative but also at the end of his Gospel where Pilate's wife has a troubling dream regarding Jesus (Matt 27:19). Additionally, the book of Acts includes a number of visions or dreams (Acts 16:9–10; 23:11; 27:23–24).⁵⁸

Brown suggests that the dream appearances could be the structure around which a pre-Matthean narrative patterned after the infancy of Moses is built.⁵⁹ Three of the four dream sequences in the narrative repeat identical elements:

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων (1:20)

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων (2:13)

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων (2:19–20a)

These three appearances include the following elements: 1) introduction by the particle (ἰδοὺ); 2) inclusion of the messenger in the dream (ἄγγελος κυρίου); 3) mention of the means of instruction (κατ' ὄναρ); 4) the act of appearance itself (ἐφάνη or φαίνεται); 5) the recipient of the instruction (αὐτῷ or τῷ Ἰωσήφ); 6) the introduction of the content of the message (λέγων); 7) the message itself. The fourth dream appearance is abbreviated with no mention of the particle, the angel, the appearance, or the exact words of the angel: χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ (2:22b). In three of the four dream appearances (not 1:20), the angelic instructions actually transition the narrative from one scene to another. In 2:13, the dream appearance moves Joseph and family from Bethlehem to Egypt. In 2:19, it moves them from Egypt to Israel. In 2:22b, it causes them to bypass the region of Judea and settle in Nazareth of Galilee.⁶⁰

⁵⁸N. C. Croy, "Religion, Personal," *DNTB* 927.

⁵⁹Brown, *Birth*, 108–111.

⁶⁰For additional similarities in the Matthean dream appearances, see Table 6 in Brown, *Birth*, 108.

In the OT, the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Jacob is similar to that found in Matthew:

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ’ ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων (Matt 1:20; 2:13; 2:19)
καὶ εἶπέν μοι ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ καθ’ ὕπνον Ἰακωβ (Gen 31:11 LXX)
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי מְלָאכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחִלּוֹם יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּבִיאִי (Gen 31:11 MT)

In this passage, the LXX does not reflect the particle as does the MT. Genesis 31:11 reflects the use of אֱלֹהֵי (θεοῦ) rather than אֱלֹהֵי (κυρίου). The act of appearance (ἐφάνη) is not included in Gen 31:11. The LXX uses καθ’ ὕπνον (“sleep”) rather than κατ’ ὄναρ (“dream”) but the MT reflects “dream” (בְּחִלּוֹם), which Matthew uses (κατ’ ὄναρ) in 1:20; 2:12, 13, 22; 27:19. The commonalities between Matthew’s dream appearances and Gen 31:11, according to the seven elements discussed above include (1) in the MT, (2) as an angel “of the Lord” or “of God,” (3) as a dream in the MT and “in sleep” in the LXX, (5) as Jacob, (6) as a past tense form (εἶπέν) in the LXX and (וַיֹּאמֶר) in the MT, (7) in Gen 31:12–13. In other words, other than minor differences, Gen 31:11 includes all of the elements of Matthew’s use of dream appearances except for the verb, indicating the act of appearance itself. Although Gen 20:3 is similar, there is no particle. It is God himself who comes to Abimelech, and God “comes” to him rather than “appears.” The other elements (3, 5, 6, 7) are alike. Judges 6:12 is similar in that it includes 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 but there is no particle and the angel appears to Gideon apart from a dream or sleep. These examples demonstrate that there are some similarities in the way an angelic appearance is described in the OT and in Matthew, however, Matthew’s account tends to move the narrative along while this is not always the case in the OT examples.

The first dream appearance mentioned is in 1:20 where the angel appears to Joseph in a dream to indicate that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The angel goes on to inform Joseph that the conception is of the Holy Spirit and that Joseph should name the baby “Jesus.” Gundry sees a pattern: “The famous dreams of the patriarch Joseph (Gen 37:5–11) influenced Matthew to conform the traditional vision of Zechariah and visitation to Mary in the daytime (Luke 1:11, 22, 26–28, 38) to the OT pattern of Joseph’s dreams in the nighttime.”⁶¹ As shown above, there seems to be closer OT parallels than Joseph’s dreams and there is much debate over whether Matthew was aware of the account of Zechariah’s vision and the appearance of the angel to Mary so Gundry’s alleged pattern appears to be a stretch. In the Lukan account, although there are appearances of angels to announce a birth to Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds, the angel is specifically named Gabriel in the annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26) while it is described as the “angel of the Lord” who appears to Zechariah (Luke 1:11–12) and the shepherds (Luke 2:9). None of the accounts in Luke give any reason to believe that the angel appeared in a dream as in the Matthean accounts. Brown does point out some similarities among annunciations of birth, using Genesis 16, Genesis 17, Judges 13, Luke 1, and Matthew 1. He indicates that there are five steps included in each (although Matthew 1 does not include elements 4 and 5: 1) appearance of an angel of the Lord (or the Lord); 2) fear shown by the recipient; 3) divine message with similar elements; 4)

⁶¹Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 22.

objection by the visionary as to the possibility or a request for a sign; 5) giving of a sign.⁶²

What is apparent is that this is the only one of the four dream appearances involving Joseph that does not transition scenes or move the narrative from one geographical location to another. The dream does, however, give a solution to the conflict in Matt 1:18–25 as Joseph now obeys the angel by taking Mary as his wife and naming the baby, claiming him as his own, instead of divorcing Mary and walking away from what would appear to be an illegitimate child.

The second dream appearance involving Joseph appears in 2:13. The scene is Bethlehem and the angel appears to Joseph in another dream, warning him to take his family and flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's massacre. This is followed immediately by Joseph carrying out the instructions of the angel and moving his family to Egypt during the night. The third dream appearance for Joseph appears in 2:19. The family has already moved to Egypt as a result of the angelic instructions (2:13) when an angel comes to Joseph yet a third time in a dream to instruct him that it is safe to return to the land of Israel since Herod has died. This is followed again by Joseph's immediate obedience in returning to the land of Israel. Upon their return, however, Joseph hesitates going into Judea because Archelaus is reigning in Herod's place. Joseph receives a message a fourth time in a dream in 2:22b but this time, the text is not explicit that it is an angel or that he tells them to specifically go to Galilee or that the reason for the warning is because of Archelaus reigning in Judea but all of this can be perceived by the context and picking up

⁶²Brown, *Birth*, 155–9. See also Edgar W. Conrad, "The Annunciation of Birth and the Birth of the Messiah," *CBQ* 47.4 (Oct 1985): 656–63.

on the previous patterns of angelic appearances in dreams. As a result of the warning in the dream, Joseph takes his family and settles in Nazareth of Galilee.

Not only do the dream appearances serve as transitional devices and examples of repetition throughout Matthew's birth narrative but there are also OT formula quotations which are repeated and used for transition as well. Many of these follow closely upon the dream appearances. There are five OT quotations or references throughout the birth narrative (1:23; 2:6; 2:15; 2:18; 2:23). Brown points out that these represent five out of the entire Gospel's fourteen formula citations, covering just two chapters out of twenty-eight.⁶³ The quotation from 2:6 is different from the others in that it is spoken by characters in the narrative (the Jewish chief priests and scribes) rather than inserted by the narrator. The quotation in 2:23 is slightly different from the others in that it does not specify a particular prophet and the source is unknown. Here are the introductory formulas:

ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (1:22)
οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται διὰ τοῦ προφήτου (2:5)
ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (2:15)
τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (2:17)
ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι (2:23)

Upon examination of the five OT citations, there does appear to be common elements: 1) a purpose conjunction (1:22; 2:15; 2:23), adverb (2:17), or both (2:5); 2) some passive form of πληρώω (except for 2:15 which has γέγραπται); 3) τὸ ῥηθὲν (except for 2:5); 4) either ὑπὸ or διὰ to indicate instrumentality or agency of the fulfillment; 5) οὗ προφήτου (except for 2:23 which has the plural form); 6) λέγοντος in 1:22; 2:15; 2:17 only.

⁶³Brown, *Birth*, 98. See Table 5 for a full listing of formula citations in Matthew.

Matt 1:23 Quoting Isa 7:14

The quotation from 1:23 is explained by 1:22 in that Mary was to give birth to a son to be named “Jesus.” Matthew saw the birth and naming of Jesus as a fulfillment of the prophecy made in Isa 7:14. The theological ramifications and explanations of this passage will be saved for the following chapter but here it is important to see how

Matthew adapted the text from the OT source:

MT: הַיְהִי הָעֲלֵמָה הַרְהֵךְ יְלִדָת בֶּן וְקָרָאתָ שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל

LXX: ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένοϛ ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει, καὶ τέξεται υἷόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ

Matt: ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένοϛ ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει καὶ τέξεται υἷόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουηλ

All three have the introductory particle. The most controversial word in the passage is the Greek translation, παρθένοϛ, for the Hebrew, עֲלֵמָה. Much has been written on this comparison, discussing the usual Hebrew word, בְּתוּלָה (Deut 22:23), for “virgin” as opposed to עֲלֵמָה.⁶⁴ Some say that this use of παρθένοϛ for עֲלֵמָה in meaning a virgin could not be correct since the usual word is בְּתוּלָה.⁶⁵ Sweet gives a good defense of Matthew’s interpretation by critiquing the arguments of Keim⁶⁶ who indicates that the LXX translation of the Hebrew is incorrect. The primary idea of the Hebrew word is not

⁶⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 214–6; Brown, *Birth*, 145–9; Maarten J.J. Menken, “The Textual Form of the Quotation from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23,” *NovT*. 43.2 (2001): 144–60; Louis Matthews Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ According to the Gospel Narratives* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1907), 30–32.

⁶⁵Elwood Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord* (New York: Scribner’s, 1932), 44–46; Paul Lobstein, *The Virgin Birth of Christ: An Historical and Critical Essay*, trans. Victor Leuliette (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 75.

⁶⁶Theodor Keim, *The History of Jesus of Nazara I*, 2d ed., trans. Arthur Ransom (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876), passim.

unspotted virginity nor an unmarried state but the marriageable age or age of puberty. Sweet says that he fails to account for the various uses of the word. “The only passage which Gesenius alleges as evidence that the word is used to designate any other than a virgin is Isaiah vii, 14, the very passage in dispute. As a matter of fact there is no conclusive evidence to show that the word was ever used in the OT, except with reference to a virgin.”⁶⁷ According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, “[t]here is no instance where it can be proved that *almâ* designates a young woman who is not a virgin. The fact of virginity is obvious in Gen 24:43 where *almâ* is used of one who was being sought as a bride for Isaac. Also obvious is Exod 3:8. Song 6:8 refers to three types of women, two of whom are called queens and concubines. It could be only reasonable to understand the name of the third group, for which the plural of *almâ* is used, as meaning ‘virgins.’ In Ugaritic the word is used in poetic parallel with the cognate of *bētûlâ*.”⁶⁸

Brown points out that some LXX MSS have ἐν γαστρὶ λέπσεσται rather than ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει as the translation of the LXX given above or as Matthew has. Nolland points out that this use, along with the LXX use of παρθένος for the Hebrew עַלְמָה are used to focus on the state of pregnancy rather than the process of becoming pregnant, serving to make the natural reading of the text as speaking of a virgin who will be pregnant as a virgin rather than a virgin who will one day become pregnant in the normal way. Brown indicates that the alternate reading matching with Matthew was a Christian scribe’s adaptation from the Gospel account. Either way, the meaning does not have a drastic

⁶⁷Sweet, *Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, 68–69.

⁶⁸Alan A. Macrae, “עַלְמָה,” *TWOT*, electronic ed., 672.

change (“receive in the womb” versus “have in the womb”). The real point of interest is in Matthew’s adaptation of תאמר . The LXX has καλέσεις , a possible correct translation of the second person singular verb “you shall call” although most translators believe that the MT is using an older form of a third person feminine form “she will call.” Brown points out that 1QIsa has תאמר , which may be translated “his name will be called,” thus possibly giving rise to Matthew’s third person plural “they will call.”⁶⁹ More likely, however, is Matthew’s adaptation of Isa 7:14 to the context of his own Gospel account, indicating that Jesus will be known by all as the presence of God, since he adapts other OT quotations in the birth narrative (ex: Mic 5:2). Although Matthew’s text follows the LXX throughout (except for “they will call”), it is more likely that the interpretation Matthew gives is a rather common understanding of the Greek from the Hebrew as has been explained with המלך and παρθένο and Matthew adapted his own translation for his context in “they will call.”

Matt 2:6 Quoting Mic 5:2 (Mic 5:1 MT, LXX)

As has already been pointed out, this quotation is unique in that it is not inserted by the narrator but is quoted by characters (the chief priests and scribes or the magi) in the narrative itself. The usual word used by Matthew for inserting quotations is πληρωθῆναι but here it is γέγραπται . Herod “and all Jerusalem” are troubled at the news of the Messiah’s birth and the journey of the magi to worship him. Herod gathers the Jewish leaders together and inquires where the Messiah is to be born. The question here is whether Herod is asking the Jewish leaders or the magi this question. The Greek simply

⁶⁹Brown, *Birth*, 145, 151; See also Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel. Supplement to Novum Testamentum*, vol. 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 89–90; Nolland, *Matthew*, 101.

gives ἐπονθάνετο παρ’ αὐτῶν (2:4) so context will need to decide. Perhaps the magi are the recipients of Herod’s question and they quote from Micah, which would show the understanding of the “pagan” Gentiles contrasted with the ignorance of the Jewish leaders who made their living studying the Scriptures. On the other hand, however, why would the magi need to stop in Jerusalem to ask for the location of Bethlehem (Matt 2:2) if they already knew the answer (Matt 2:5)? Could it be that because of Bethlehem’s small size, they needed directions or could it be that they knew Jerusalem was the epicenter of Jewish knowledge and they felt more comfortable confirming the prophecy there? Since the Jewish leaders are in closest proximity to the question within the context and because of the evidence from Matt 2:2 discussed above, it is best to understand the chief priests and scribes as the ones who quote from the OT. Cyril of Alexandria holds this belief and says that although they knew the prophecy, they did not comprehend its truth (Fragment 10.3; MKGK 156).⁷⁰ In other words, the quotation provides the town where Jesus was to be born, indicating that the Jewish leaders understood the birthplace of the Messiah as Bethlehem. Note that when the magi ask about the “King of the Jews” (Matt 2:2), Herod and the Jewish leaders assume they are referring to the magi (Matt 2:4).

MT: וְאַתָּה בֵּית־לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה צִעִיר לְהָיוֹת בְּאֶלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמָּדָר לִי יֵצֵא לְהָיוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
 LXX: Καὶ σύ, Βηθλεεμ οἶκος τοῦ Εφραθα, ὀλιγοστός εἶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰουδα, ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ
 Matt: καὶ σὺ βηθλέεμ γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαὸν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ

The first point of interest in comparing the translations is the description of Bethlehem. The MT and LXX of Mic 5:1 describes it as “Bethlehem Ephrathah” while

⁷⁰Manilio Simonetti, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1–13*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 23.

Matthew describes it as “Bethlehem, land of Judah” although the Micah passage goes on to describe it as part of Judah. The qualifier, “Ephrathah,” is an indication of the specific Bethlehem in question (Gen 35:16, 19; Gen 48:7; Ruth 4:11), which happens to be in the land of Judah. As Davies and Allison point out, “Ephrathah” probably would mean very little to Matthew’s audience but Judah would.⁷¹

The next point of interest is the MT and LXX description of Bethlehem as “small to be among the clans of Judah” contrasted with Matthew’s description of it as “by no means least among the rulers of Judah.” It is clear here that the Matthew passage is taking what was considered an insignificant town in the OT and emphasizing its importance by the emphatic οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη. It also changes “clans” to “rulers” to not only reflect the description of a ruler going forth later in Mic 5:1 but also the emphasis on the Messiah as ruler. The MT and LXX go on to explain that “from you for me he will go forth to be a ruler in Israel” but Matt 2:6 indicates “from you will go forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” As many scholars have pointed out, it appears that either Matthew or the Jewish leaders conflate Mic 5:1 with 2 Sam 5:2b (σὺ ποιμανεῖς τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ), a reference to David being chosen as king.⁷²

Would the Jewish leaders make these significant changes to the OT quotations or is this a result of Matthew’s editorial creativity? On the surface, it appears that the Jewish leaders would have been well-versed in the Scriptures and would not have confused the

⁷¹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 242; For the opposite view that Matthew intentionally had Ephrathah in mind all along, see A. J. Petrotta, “An Even Closer Look at Matt 2:6 and its Old Testament Sources,” *JETS* 33.3 (Sept 1990): 311–5.

⁷²Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 243; Brown, *Birth*, 184–7; George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1–2* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 261–93.

Micah 5 and 2 Sam 5 passages nor would they have placed special emphasis on Bethlehem by the use of οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη. Besides, they indicate that it was written by “the prophet,” singular rather than plural. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders may have purposely conflated the two in order to demonstrate further the Davidic Messiah’s role. The chief priests and scribes allude to the Davidic line in conjunction with Bethlehem as describing the Messiah in John 7:42. Could it be that they were referencing the Micah 5 and 2 Sam 5 passages there, too? One final point that needs to be mentioned in reference to the question of whether Matthew edited the quotation by the Jewish leaders or not regards the rest of the quotation in Mic 5:1(2). The rest of the verse speaks of the eternal nature of the ruler (וּמִוֹצֵאֲתָיו מִקֶּדֶם מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם). If Matthew were editing the words of the Jewish leaders, why would he pass up on a chance to further describe Jesus the Messiah as having an eternal rule? Matthew was either passing on the rulers’ quotation of the passage or was clarifying the context from which they drew their conclusion that Bethlehem was the birthplace of the future ruler since it would fit well with Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as Son of David.⁷³ Either way, the quotation here is not directly from the MT or the LXX and is a free translation from possibly two or more OT passages.

Matt 2:15 Quotation from Hos 11:1

This quotation, like the one from Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23, comes quickly on the heels of a dream appearance to Joseph by an angel. He warns Joseph to take his family and escape to Egypt to avoid Herod’s plot to kill Jesus. Joseph obeys and the family

⁷³See Homer Heater, Jr., “Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources,” *JETS* 26, no. 4 (Dec 1983): 395–7 for an explanation of cumulative exegesis rather than abuse of Scripture.

remains in Egypt until Herod dies. The angel appears to Joseph again in a dream in 2:19–20 and instructs him to return to Israel. The quotation from Hos 11:1 regarding an exodus from Egypt strangely appears in 2:15 when it seems more appropriate to appear in v. 21 or 22.⁷⁴

MT: וַיִּמְצָאֵם אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית לְבִנְיָמִן

LXX: ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ

Matt: ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου

The quotation in Matthew appears to follow the MT rather than the LXX which has a different form of καλέω (from μετακαλέω) than the Matthean text, both of which are accurate translations of וַיִּמְצָאֵם. The LXX also has τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ instead of Matthew's closer translation of the MT: τὸν υἱόν μου. It appears that Matthew is closer to the MT and offers either a translation from another Hebrew original or, more likely, he offers a free translation himself of the Hebrew original.

Matt 2:18 Quoting Jer 31:15

Herod discovers that the magi have tricked him and he resorts to murder of the male children in Bethlehem two years old and under in order to stamp out the would-be Messiah. Matthew inserts an OT quotation from Jer 31:15 here to say that the slaughter in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of this prophecy where weeping was heard in Ramah, Rachel crying for her children.

MT: קוֹל בְּרָחֵל נֹשֵׂעַ נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוֹרִים רַחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מְאֹד לְהִנָּחֵם עַל-בְּנֵיהָ פִּי אֵינָנִי

LXX (Jer 38:15): φωνὴ ἐν Ραμᾶ ἠκούσθη θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ ὄδυρμοῦ· Ραχήλ ἀποκλαιομένη οὐκ ἤθελε παύσασθαι ἐπὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτῆς, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν

Matt: φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμᾶ ἠκούσθη, κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμὸς πολὺς· Ῥαχήλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι ὅτι οὐκ εἰσιν

⁷⁴Brown, *Birth*, 219–220.

Matthew's interpretation of נָהָי בְּכִי תַמְרוֹרֵי יָם with κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμὸς πολὺς is closer to the MT than the LXX with θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ ὄδυρμοῦ which uses conjunctions to provide three descriptions rather than two (with an adjective that intensifies the mourning). In word order, Matthew is closer to the MT than the LXX regarding Rachel's crying over her children but the LXX follows more closely with the masculine understanding of "sons" than Matthew who uses the generic "children." In the MT and Matthew, Rachel "refused to be comforted" or "would not be comforted" but in the LXX, she would not "cease." It appears that Matthew once again is closer to the MT and offers either a translation from another Hebrew original or, more likely, he offers a free translation himself of the Hebrew original.⁷⁵

Matt 2:23 Reference

The final OT quotation, or for this case, reference, is found at the end of the birth narrative and comes on the heels of yet another visit by an angel in a dream who warns Joseph of Archelaus' reign in Judea. In response to this warning, Joseph takes his family and settles in Nazareth of Galilee. The reference appears here to indicate that the settling in Nazareth was a fulfillment of a prophecy. The difficulty with this particular reference is the uncertainty as to which Scripture Matthew is referring.

Jerome defends the quotation of being called a Nazarene (Matt 2:23) by pointing out that Matthew says it was spoken by "the prophets" rather than "a prophet," indicating that it is not found in Scripture but is a sense gathered from the Scriptures. "Nazarene" is understood as "holy." He also mentions Isa 11:1 as a possible interpretation

⁷⁵Ibid., 221–3.

(*Commentary on Matthew* 1.2.23). Aquinas follows Jerome in that Matthew is not following a particular prophecy since he uses the plural (“prophets”) but a general sense of Scripture pointing out that He is holy (Nazarene) or possibly from the idea of the branch (נֹצֵר) in Isa 11:1.⁷⁶ Since the early church fathers, there has been debate over this and most point to a wordplay on Nazarene⁷⁷ or נֹצֵר⁷⁸ or both.⁷⁹ Menken’s article is most valuable in helping to determine Matthew’s thinking on this. He points out that the Gospel is in Greek to Greek-speakers and the jump from Ναζοραῖος to Ναζωραῖος in reference to Nazirite and Nazorean (Judg 13:5, 7) is much more easily made than the Hebrew difference between נֹזֵר and נֹצֵר (Isa 11:1). He also points out that the similarity in Matthew’s treatment of Isa 7:14 in regards to Jesus being known as “Emmanuel” and that of Samson in Judges 13–16. “Matthew apparently considers Emmanuel not the actual name of the boy (that is Jesus) but an indication of his significance. Likewise, ‘Nazarite’ in the Judges passages is not the name of the boy (that is Samson) but an indication of his dignity.” The same could be said of Jesus as a

⁷⁶Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 37; Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers I, St. Matthew* (ed. and trans. John Henry Newman; Southhampton: Saint Austin, 1997), 90.

⁷⁷Goulder believes it is more likely that it is closer to Judg 13:5, 7. The alteration of the i of Nazir to the o of Nazoraïos is understood in light of similar adjustments in the rabbis. See Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, 240–1; Brown, *Birth*, 223–5; Prabhu, *Formula Quotations*, 193–216.

⁷⁸Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 1:221–3; Hagner, *Matthew*, 41; For a combination of Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12 and the Targums, see Box, *Virgin Birth*, 19–23 and Gundry, *Use of Old Testament*, 40; For a similar view but inclusion of Isa 4:3, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 280.

⁷⁹John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica Matthew—I Corinthians II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:23.44.

Nazorean. Furthermore, Menken addresses the fact that Matthew refers to the “prophets”:
“Matthew regularly uses the plural ‘the prophets’ in combination with ‘the law,’ to indicate the second division of the Hebrew Scriptures (5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40)...[i]t seems that in Matthew’s time, no individual authors were distinguished for the books known as the former prophets.”⁸⁰

As has been demonstrated, Matthew tends to move his narrative along through the use of the dream appearances and the insertion of formula quotations. The formula quotations appear to be Matthew’s adaptation of the Hebrew text for his own purposes within the narrative (except for possibly Matt 2:6, which is a citation by the Jewish leaders within the narrative).

Foreshadowing

In addition to the dream appearances and the use of formula quotations, the Matthean birth narrative also includes the use of foreshadowing. First, there is foreshadowing from the genealogy (Matt 1:1–17) to the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18–25). The genealogy presents Joseph as the husband of Mary but does not indicate that he is the father. Instead, it simply indicates that Jesus was born through Mary (Matt 1:16). This leads the reader to question the identity of the father. The question is addressed in 1:18–25 where Joseph acquires the role of earthly father of Jesus through naming him, claiming him as his own (1:21–25). The virginal conception, however, is through the

⁸⁰Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Sources of the Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23,” *JBL* 120.3 (2001): 462–7.

Holy Spirit (1:18, 20, 25).⁸¹ Matthew's birth account is intimately connected with the genealogy in answering this question and addressing the divine origin of Jesus.

Second, there is foreshadowing with the naming of Jesus. Matthew 1:21 indicates that the angel prophesies that Jesus will "save his people from their sins," thus commanding Joseph to name him "Jesus." Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus indicates that his blood will be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). One may even find a partial fulfillment of this foreshadowing in Jesus' forgiveness of the lame man's sins in Matt 9:5–6. The other part of the naming of Jesus comes from the prophecy in Isa 7:14 quoted in Matt 1:23. The prophecy of Emmanuel is applied to Jesus, pointing out the divine presence in him. This description of "God with us" serves as bookends to Matthew's Gospel as it reappears in Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matt 28:18–20. Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them always. Menken has noted that the theme of God being with his people "is often connected with forgiveness and absence of sins or with Jesus' saving activity, topics addressed in the interpretation of the name 'Jesus' in 1:21."⁸²

Third, the hostility of Herod and the Jewish leaders, along with the adoration by the Gentile magi toward Jesus, foreshadows the reactions to Jesus' ministry. Luther indicates that the magi are the first fruit of the Gentiles converted to the Gospel

⁸¹Waetjen, "Genealogy," 216–8; W. Barnes Tatum, "Origin of Jesus Messiah," 530–1; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "Rewriting the Messianic Script: Matthew's Account of the Birth of Jesus," *Int* 54.4 (Oct 2000): 377–8.

⁸²Menken, "Isaiah 7:14," 156–8.

(III.130.374).⁸³ Throughout the Gospel, there is indication of Gentiles coming to faith and Jewish rejection (Matt 8:5–13; 15:21–28; 21:33–46; 22:1–14). Brown points out that the reactions in the birth narrative foreshadow the events of the passion. Just as the chief priests and scribes along with the king were against Jesus at his birth, so are they at his trial and crucifixion (Matt 27:1). Just as the people of Jerusalem join with Herod and the Jewish leaders in their troubling at the birth of Jesus, so are “all the people” shown as accepting responsibility for Jesus’ death (Matt 27:25). The reference to Jesus as “king of the Jews” made by the magi appears as part of the charge placed over Jesus’ head at his execution (Matt 27:37).⁸⁴

Matthew has obviously employed the use of foreshadowing within the birth narrative. This type of literary device helps to solidify the Gospel’s unity and interconnectedness. Theologically, Matthew is presenting Jesus as not only the Son of David but also as the Son of God. He is not only the Jewish Messiah, but the Savior of the world.

Typology

Throughout the birth narrative, one can see many similarities between the events surrounding the birth of Jesus and the life of Moses. Whether these were intentional or not, there is certainly a Jesus-Moses typology. Additionally, it is widely recognized that

⁸³*Sermons of Martin Luther I*, 2d ed. (ed. and trans. John Nicholas Lenker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:374.

⁸⁴Brown, *Birth*, 183; For a more detailed look at the foreshadowing of Gentile acceptance and Jewish rejection of Jesus, see Donald Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Birth of a New World: Matthew’s Theology of History in the Passion Narrative,” *CurTM* 19.6 (Dec 1992): 416–23.

Matthew presents Jesus as the second Moses throughout his Gospel, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). While the parallels include Joseph’s actions with Moses’ actions, Israel’s actions with Jesus’ actions, and Jesus’ actions with Moses’ actions, the similarities between the Matthean story and the accounts from Exodus as a whole are remarkable.

Davies and Allison present nine parallels between the events surrounding Moses and Jesus: 1) Like Joseph, Amram (Moses’ father) was in despair concerning his wife’s pregnancy (according to Josephus, *Ant.* 2.210–16); 2) like Joseph, Amram received the prophecy that Moses would deliver the Hebrew nation (according to Josephus, *Ant.* 2.210–16); 3) like the attempt to slaughter the innocents in Bethlehem, there was an order to slaughter every male Hebrew by Pharaoh; 4) like in the case of Herod, according to Jewish tradition, Pharaoh’s order to murder was because he wanted to stamp out the future liberator of Israel; 5) like Herod learned of the future deliverer from chief priests and scribes, Pharaoh learned of the future deliverer from sacred scribes; 6) like Jesus was rescued from Herod and taken away from the land of his birth, Moses was spared as a baby through divine circumstances and was forced to leave his homeland when Pharaoh sought his life; 7) like Joseph was commanded by an angel of the Lord to take his family back to Israel following Herod’s death, Moses was commanded by God to return to Egypt (his homeland); 8) like Joseph obeyed and took his family back to Israel, Moses obeyed and took his family back to Egypt; 9) like the debate over whether Herod or Jesus was rightful king of the Jews, according to Jewish tradition, Moses was made a king over Israel after delivering the Israelites from Pharaoh’s rule.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 192–3; Cf. Brown, *Birth*, 112–5.

Allison gives an example of an explicit statement from the birth narrative regarding Jesus as a Moses typology. He points to Matt 2:15 as it quotes Hos 11:1. There is nothing messianic about Hos 11:1. However, as Hos 11:1 refers to Israel as the son who was called out of Egypt, Jewish sources often point to redemption from Egypt as a messianic redemption. There will be another exodus and another return. By Matt 2:15 quoting Hos 11:1, he is pointing out a parallelism of the story of Jesus with the story of Moses. Allison points out that Jesus is made both like Israel and Moses. He says that in Matthew 4, one could take the opposite reasoning that he has turned an Israel typology of Q into a Moses typology. He uses Matt 2:19–21 recounting Jesus’ return from Egypt as an implicit citation of Moses typology. Comparing the text from Matthew with the LXX of Exodus 4:19–20, he points out the similarities. While Matt 2:20 refers to a plural “those seeking”, it could be a rhetorical plural or the language of Exod 4:19 was retained without perfect grammatical adjustment. Allison points out that Jesus “is the object of ‘those seeking the life of the child’ (Matt 2:20)” while Moses is the object in Exod 4:19, here lying the parallelism.⁸⁶

Brown also sees typology between Joseph, Jesus’ father, and the patriarch Joseph. The patriarch had the ability to interpret dreams and also went down to Egypt where he was involved with Pharaoh. Jesus’ father “consistently receives revelation in dreams and he goes down to Egypt, the only man in the NT to do so. And the NT Joseph is involved with a king (wicked) even as the OT Joseph was involved with the Pharaoh.” It is pointed out that the Pharaoh with whom Joseph had dealings was more benevolent but Exod 1:8

⁸⁶Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 140–4.

describes a new Pharaoh “who knew not Joseph.” The parallel between the patriarch and Jesus’ father is based on “OT Joseph/wicked Pharaoh/infant Moses” and “NT Joseph/wicked King Herod/infant Jesus.”⁸⁷

While there are certainly parallels between Jesus’ life and that of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph the patriarch, Moses, and the nation of Israel, many of the parallels depend upon late Jewish tradition and legends.⁸⁸ Within the Matthean birth narrative, the Jesus-Moses typology appears to be the most prevalent within the biblical accounts, which are verifiably early enough sources to provide a parallel. The question still remains as to whether these OT accounts of Moses provide a basis to create a legendary birth story about Jesus or whether Matthew simply highlights some of the parallels which already existed in a pre-Matthean narrative on the birth of Jesus.

Source(s) of Matt 1:18–2:23

As Davies and Allison summarize well, there are three primary solutions to the problem of sources for Matt 1:18–2:23. First, there are those who claim that there is very little traditional information (names of Jesus’ parents, the residence in Bethlehem, and the virginal conception) but much creativity on the part of Matthew. Second, there are those who claim that most of the information is pre-Matthean and Matthew contributed only minimally. Third, there are those who see the sources as being somewhere in the middle.

⁸⁷Brown, *Birth*, 112. Other parallels mentioned are between the story of Jesus and that of Abraham and that of Jacob/Israel, based primarily on Jewish legend (see pp. 543–5). Cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 33–34; Myles M. Bourke, “The Literary Genus of Matthew 1–2,” *CBQ* 22.2 (Apr 1960): 160–75.

⁸⁸For a good critique of several of these parallels, see R. T. France, “Herod and the Children of Bethlehem,” *NovT* 21.2 (Apr 1979): 98–120.

In other words, Matthew might have joined together and edited what were originally two or three different sources and stories.⁸⁹

In the first category of those who believe that most of the birth narrative is fictional, Goulder not only believes that the genealogy was composed completely by Matthew except for the name “Joseph,” but also believes that the annunciation story to Joseph was based on the annunciation of the birth of Isaac in Genesis 17 and that Matthew believed *a priori* in the virginal conception of Jesus since he was known as the son of God. The journey of the magi draws from Isa 60:3, 6; Ps 72:10, 15; and the gifts from Song 3:6; cf. 4:6. Jesus is not only the new Jacob/Israel in regards to other nations bowing down to him (Gen 25:19–28:8) but also the new Joseph including the dreams of others who bow down to him and present gifts (Gen 37:8; 41:6). The star that led the magi also corresponds with the star of Num 24:17 as well as the cloud and pillar of fire at the Exodus. The flight to Egypt is a midrash of Exodus 1–4 and the quotation of Jer 31:15 is “clearly artificial” and uses Exodus to gloss the story of Rachel.⁹⁰

Gundry says Matthew links 1:18–25 with the genealogy by pointing out how Jesus came to have the legal link with David since Joseph named him but was not his physical father. Gundry appears to correlate various parts of Matthew’s nativity with Luke’s, stating at several points that Matthew changed parts of the Lukan tradition to fit his story (angels to star, sword that pierced Mary’s heart to the sorrow of the infants’ mothers, the sacrificial slaying of the turtledoves to the slaughter of the infants, the great joy of the shepherds to the great joy of the magi). In describing Joseph as “righteous,”

⁸⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 190.

⁹⁰Goulder, *Midrash*, 228–42.

Matthew draws on the description of Zechariah and Elizabeth as “righteous.” “The famous dreams of the patriarch Joseph (Gen 37:5–11) influenced Matthew to conform the traditional vision of Zechariah and visitation to Mary in the daytime (Luke 1:11, 22, 26–28, 38) to the OT pattern of Joseph’s dreams in the nighttime.” Gundry indicates that the location of Bethlehem and the traditional route of escape to Egypt “made it easy for Matthew to bend the dominical material in this direction.” The harmonization of Luke and Matthew “supports creativity on Matthew’s part.”⁹¹

Worcester believes that the earliest sources were Paul’s preaching of the cross and resurrection, followed by the accounts of the life of Jesus by the Gospel writers. To meet the Messianic claim of Jesus, the original Apostles and others who represented the old Jewish tradition appended the genealogies to the Gospels. Because the connection to “an ancient Hebrew ancestor lost all significance and importance,” the “Christian consciousness felt itself impelled to go back to the very source and beginning of Jesus’ life to represent him as called into being by the direct act of God and as filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.” Finally, the idea of preexistence came through Paul but was elaborated in the Gospel of John, being completely “outside the sphere of history.” The idea in the Father’s words to Jesus at the baptism regarding “begetting” spurred the narratives of the birth and childhood of Jesus to be written. “Our belief is that Matthew received the first impetus for his story from St. Luke, or, since he departs so widely from Luke’s narrative, from the faith to which Luke bears witness” and elaborated

⁹¹Gundry, *Matthew*, 19–40.

it with methods similar to Jewish Midrash or Haggada.⁹²

The second category represents those who believe that Matthew only made minor edits to an already existing source. Bultmann believes that Matt 1:18–25 seems to come from a source but the quotation in vv. 22f came from him and he could have formulated the introduction. One needs to translate “Jesus” in order for “he shall save his people from their sins” to make sense. This gives the possibility of a Semitic source although the idea of a virgin birth is foreign to that background. Instead, its origin is Hellenistic with stories of other kings or heroes from virgin births. The original story probably only indicated that Joseph would have a son (like the Syriac translation “she will bear thee a son”) and a Semitic origin would also explain the naming of the son prior to birth along with the prophecy.⁹³

Taylor believes that there are not so much two independent narratives of the Virgin Birth but two independent witnesses to what was originally one tradition. Luke’s narrative may go back to Mary but Matthew’s is doubtful in going back to Joseph. The two very different narratives arise out of the same belief, being independent witnesses to the existence of the virgin birth belief in the early Christian community. It appears that the two Gospels were probably written within months of each other. “The farthest point therefore to which we can trace the existence of the Virgin Birth as a public tradition is some little time previous to the composition of the Third Gospel” (since Luke appears ignorant to a tradition of Virgin Birth). The idea of a private authoritative tradition

⁹²Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord*, 270–89.

⁹³Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 291–2.

requires answers to the question of the date of the two Gospels, the possibility of error in the Gospels, the alternative theories on the origin of belief in the Virgin Birth, and the theological aspect of the tradition. “All that we can reach is a primitive belief, generally accepted within NT times, which presumably implies an earlier private tradition.”⁹⁴

Brown uses three criteria to establish sources: 1) amount of Matthean vocabulary, style, and organization; 2) the presence of internal tensions within a passage that may lead one to believe there have been two sources joined together; 3) the presence of parallels to other material. Although there are pre-Matthean elements in the narrative, there is much vocabulary throughout that is consistent with Matthew, thus leading to the conclusion that he also played a major role in organizing the narrative into its present form. An example of internal tension is in the two dream appearances, which give different geographical instructions, one to go to the land of Israel and the other to go to the region of Galilee. “If this story were a unity, why would there be two different dreams? Why did not the angel tell Joseph in the first dream to ‘go to the land of Galilee’?” In reference to parallels, Brown lists eleven points shared by both Luke and Matthew.⁹⁵ He also sees parallels with OT accounts of Moses and Joseph the patriarch. Brown comes to the conclusion that the main pre-Matthean narrative included a dream appearance to Joseph concerning the birth of a son, the birth of Jesus during Herod’s

⁹⁴Taylor, *Historical Evidence*, 116–29.

⁹⁵Brown, *Birth*, 34–35. 1) Mary and Joseph are legally engaged but have had no sexual relations; 2) Joseph is of Davidic descent; 3) an angel announces the birth of the child; 4) the conception is not through Joseph; 5) the conception is of the Holy Spirit; 6) the angel indicates that the child is to be named “Jesus”; 7) an angel describes Jesus as Savior; 8) the birth takes place after the parents have come to live together; 9) the birth is in Bethlehem; 10) the birth is related chronologically to the reign of Herod the Great; 11) the child is raised in Nazareth.

reign, the troubling of Herod and Jerusalem along with him sending spies to find the child, the dream appearance to Joseph to escape to Egypt along with his obedience, the massacre at Bethlehem, and the dream appearance of the angel to instruct Joseph to return to Israel along with their obedience in returning to Israel. In addition to the main pre-Matthean narrative Brown includes other pre-Matthean elements which were added to the narrative before they reached Matthew's hand: the annunciation of birth (influenced by accounts in the OT) and the narrative of the magi from the East who followed a star to Bethlehem (influenced by the story of Balaam from Numbers 22–24 and combined with the story of Herod and Joseph). The Matthean editing included the addition of the five formula citations, changes in context due to the addition of the formula citations, and the joining of the narrative to a genealogy, whose final editing belonged to Matthew.⁹⁶

Davies and Allison claim that Haggadic legendary material concerning Moses determined the content of Matthew's narrative. On the other hand, there were a few historical elements such as the names of Jesus and his parents, his birth in Palestine near the end of Herod the Great's reign, and the family residence in Nazareth. The redactional elements of the story come from the five OT fulfillment quotations throughout the narrative. Removing these elements, the story remains as the virginal conception by the Holy Spirit, the birth in Bethlehem, and the visit by the Magi who followed a star. Davies and Allison believe that these elements went through three stages of development. The first stage gave the elements of the story with features from the Mosaic legends. The second stage expanded the Mosaic narrative toward a Davidic Christology. The third

⁹⁶Ibid., 105–19.

stage, representing the redactional stage, included the formula quotations, 2:22–3, and Matthean style and vocabulary.⁹⁷

Representing the third category, those who believe that Matthew drew from multiple sources and synthesized them, Dibelius indicates that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels are “principally collectors, vehicles of tradition, editors.” He believes that the birth (1:18–25) is an apologetic work of the evangelist since the defense of the virgin birth rather than the miracle itself is at its center and because Isa 7:14 is not given in the speech of the angel but by a quotation from the evangelist in his own style. The introduction to Matthew 2 seems to be independent of Chapter 1. Joseph appears to be absent or possibly already dead in Matthew 2:1–11 but resumes as the focus in 2:12–23. Dibelius assumes that the magi story existed earlier as a legend. It makes no sense for the magi to need Herod’s theologians to find the birthplace. Rather, it was to “historize a mythical conception of the appearance of a new star among the old ones whose radiance it excels.”⁹⁸

Examining the various formulas in Matthew, Prabhu insists that the introductory formulas of the formula quotations are “thoroughly redactional,” thus rendering it evident that they are expressions of Matthew’s theology. He gives reasons why the formula quotations of the Infancy Narrative are not so different than the rest of the Gospel: 1) although more numerous than elsewhere in the Gospel, showing the importance of them for correct interpretation, it does not mean that the narrative has been derived from or

⁹⁷Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 192–5.

⁹⁸Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, rev. 2d ed., trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Scribner’s, 1935), 3, 128–31.

built around the quotations; 2) they are not better integrated into their contexts in the Infancy Narrative than when they appear elsewhere in the Gospel; 2a) except for MT 2:5f, they can be removed without leaving a gap in the narrative; 2b) the formulas are not always appropriate to the contexts; 3) the Infancy Narrative shows a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar expressions common to a redactionally worked source. Prabhu believes that Matt 1:20 parallels the dream narratives of Matthew 2 while the annunciation story with birth oracle (1:21) resembles the formula quotation of 1:23. Thus, the birth oracle, from an annunciation story expanded from a dream narrative, was adapted to the formula quotation. This, coupled with the fact that the introductory “Joseph son of David” linked the story with the genealogy makes a theological statement of Jesus’ divine and Davidic origins. He also believes that the story of the Magi and that of Herod are two independent accounts joined together since the star appears and disappears and the Magi suddenly appear in Jerusalem. The introduction to the Herod Magi story is redactional but incorporates pre-redactional elements of the Magi story and Herod story as well. The Magi story is largely pre-redactional but is joined with the Herod story to show their contrast with unbelieving Jews. The Herod story has been edited heavily by Matthew in an attempt to integrate it into the Magi story,⁹⁹ telling the story of the second Moses, but the formula quotation was probably pre-redactional rather than inserted by Matthew.

⁹⁹See John Nolland, “The Sources for Matthew 2:1–12,” *CBQ* 60.2 (Apr 1998): 283–300. He posits a merging of two sources in Matt 2:1–12 with the double focus on the Magi and on Herod. He proposes that Matthew inserted “in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king” in Matt 2:1. He says that by combining the two sources, it allows Herod to learn of the birth from these “experts in esoteric celestial arts” rather than from heresay. Matthew also has the Magi take on the role of the “anonymous spies” of Herod in Matt 2:7–9 since the spies originally sent by Herod failed to find the child because he had already been taken off to Egypt. The role of the star becomes identifying the place where Christ was to be found rather than its original role of providing the necessary guidance when Jerusalem failed.

Thus, Prabhu finds three sources in Matthew's birth narrative: 1) three dream narratives; 2) Magi story; 3) Herod haggadah.¹⁰⁰

Davis indicates that the birth narrative includes a "carefully organized Matthean redactional structure," integrating the quotations into the narrative as well as creating narrative sections at Matt 2:1–2 (in part), 3–9a, 10, 12, 16–18, and 22–23 in order to link the first two chapters with the rest of the Gospel. The tradition behind the birth narrative is composed of four units: 1) 1:18–21, 24–25; 2) 2:1–2 (in part), 9b, 11; 3) 2:13–15a; and 4) 2:19–21.¹⁰¹

Knox indicates that there are five stories included in Matthew 1–2 with a "marked unity of structure." Each of these is woven around a quotation from the OT. The original substratum of the source is the three Joseph stories (1:18–25; 2:13–15, 19–23) with the first of these having undergone revision. He suggests that the first story began with an opening genitive absolute (ταραχθέντος δέ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ), included a phrase indicating that the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, Joseph awoke and obeyed the angel, and ended with "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord to the prophet" before including the quotation from the OT. In the original, Knox says, 2:13 began with "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the King." Verses 19–23 include expansion of the original story to provide reasons for going to Nazareth in order to fulfill the prophecy. Knox indicates that the group of prophecies was expanded by the Herod incidents, providing Matthew with five prophecies (his favorite number). The lack of unity of time and place indicate that it is a conflation of two stories: visit of the wise men

¹⁰⁰Prabhu, *Formula Quotations*, 48–63; 162–70; 229–94.

¹⁰¹C.T. Davis, "Tradition and Redaction in Matthew 1,18-2,23" *JBL* 90 (1971): 420–1.

and appearance of the star in Jerusalem. The inclusion of the Herod story also helps to supply a parallel with Moses' birth story. The original birth narrative must have been old enough for Luke to develop along different lines. Matthew may have been responsible for the introduction of the wise men since they fulfill no prophecy but the Herod prophecies added to the Joseph group are probably older.¹⁰²

Looking at the first solution to the problem of sources, there are many reasons why one would have difficulty upholding this view. First, there are many details beyond the names of Jesus' parents, the residence in Bethlehem, and the virginal conception that can be found in both Matthew and Luke.¹⁰³ Second, there are much easier ways to create a narrative that fits OT prophecy. Third, it is unlikely that Matthew would have borrowed everything from Luke and his story become so different in its approach and content. As Sweet explains, the infancy narrative has been part of the tradition from the beginning as it appears in the Gospels in every unmutated manuscript in existence. Sweet gives four reasons why the account in Matthew is primitive: 1) The impersonal use of "Holy Spirit" belongs to the earliest age of Christianity when the OT use of the creative power of God and the NT use of the Spirit as a Person are just beginning to mesh; 2) The phrase "Herod the King" indicates that the later signification "Herod the Great" was not in use yet, pointing to an earlier writer; 3) the conception of salvation is Messianic rather than Christian; 4) the expression and idea of ἄγγελος κυρίου is Hebraic. "These four items of evidence are certainly adequate proof that we have no late document—if not late, it cannot well be mythical." "[T]he two narratives of Matthew and Luke are fragments of

¹⁰²Knox, *Sources of the Synoptic Gospels*, 121–8.

¹⁰³Again, see Brown, *Birth*, 34–35.

one common narrative,” based on “unity of thought, viewpoint, feeling, and atmosphere.”¹⁰⁴

Skipping over the second option momentarily, the third option of combining several sources together to create a new narrative is also difficult since 1) the narrative flows smoothly between the accounts of Herod and those of the magi; 2) none of the explanations given for separate Herod and magi sources are satisfactory so that the onus is on those who point to two sources since there is no real evidence of it in the account; 3) there is no real explanation other than a vague “heresay” to indicate how else Herod would have learned of the birth of Jesus.

It would appear that the second option, that Matthew made minimal edits to an already existing narrative which would include the basic elements of the story, is the best. While this is the position that some of the most thorough scholars of recent years have taken, such as Davies and Allison as well as Brown (although Brown might fit more easily into the third category since he mentions separate Herod and magi accounts), the three stages of development presented by Davies and Allison as well as the changes made to the narrative to fit the formula quotations presented by Brown are not necessary (some of these aspects will be presented in more detail in the historical analysis). If Matthew drew from a source for the narrative in 1:18–2:23, what is that source?

Although Matthew was not on the scene at the time of Jesus’ birth, Bauckham’s work on eyewitness testimony strengthens the possibility that Matthew received his account of Jesus’ birth from an eyewitness since this seems to be the pattern displayed by

¹⁰⁴Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, 55, 326–9.

those of the first century.¹⁰⁵ Second, while Mary is the only one who would be able to recall her inmost thoughts from the Lukan narrative, Joseph is the focus in Matthew.¹⁰⁶ The objection to Joseph being the source for Matthew's narrative is that he does not appear in the public ministry of Jesus, must have died prior, and could not have passed his account on to Matthew or any of the other disciples of Jesus (assuming the Gospel writer is also the disciple).¹⁰⁷ Machen provides a good defense of this in pointing to the possibility that Joseph told his account to Mary. On the other hand, the independent testimonies of Mary and Joseph as preserved in the Lukan and Matthean accounts respectively are evidence that Joseph could have either committed his story to writing before he died or could have entrusted it to someone else who would reveal it at the proper time (since many of the details, including the virgin birth, would have given rise to misunderstanding and slander). Mary could have known about Joseph's side of the story but chose to tell his story to those most interested in his perspective and told her story to those interested in hers. As Machen states, "The difference of our two narratives from each other is therefore probably to be explained, not exclusively by separateness in the ultimate sources of information, and not exclusively by a selective process either in the course of transmission or at the time of the final literary fixation, but by both causes combined."¹⁰⁸ Schleiermacher argues that if John was closest to Mary, and if the disciples

¹⁰⁵Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 9, 18, 20, 222–8.

¹⁰⁶Plummer, *Matthew*, 3.

¹⁰⁷Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 209.

¹⁰⁸J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1930, 1958), 201–2.

discovered the details of the birth narrative from Mary, certainly he would have presented the birth narratives in his own Gospel.¹⁰⁹ This can be explained, as has already been mentioned above, by the fact that his purpose was radically different in presenting Jesus and thus, the birth narratives may not have served that purpose.

Many scholars have referred to the Matthean birth narratives as midrash, but this has been shown to be inaccurate. Hagner describes it as “midrashic haggadah.” He explains it as “*midrashic* in the sense that the OT quotation is of key importance and phrases of it are utilized in the surrounding narrative; *haggadah* in the sense that the story is not told for the sake of the facts alone, but in order to illustrate their deeper meaning, that is, the theological significance of Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises.”¹¹⁰

France points out that the events in the birth narrative do not easily correspond with the five formula-quotations nor did these quotations have any previous connection with one another. “Thus it was the incidents which brought the texts into Matthew’s scheme, not vice versa.” As France mentions, it appears that some of the quotations were adapted to fit the narrative context.¹¹¹ Quarles sums it up best: “...Matthew might easily have remained faithful to one text and adapted the details of his story to fit the informing text. Yet Matthew was moved to either adapt existing translations or provide his own in order to allow the reader to see more clearly how the texts found its fulfillment in Christ.

¹⁰⁹Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series, Leander E. Keck, ed., Trans. by S. Maclean Gilmour (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1832 (*Das Leben Jesu*), 1975), 46–49.

¹¹⁰Hagner, *Matthew*, 16.

¹¹¹R. T. France, “Scripture, Tradition and History in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew” in David Wenham and R.T. France, *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels Volume II* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981), 244–55.

This suggests that his starting point was the narrative tradition rather than the fulfillment texts. Matthew did not create narrative to fit the text but carefully chose and adapted the translation of texts to fit the narrative.”¹¹²

The Purpose of Matt 1:18–2:23

As the previous discussion has shown, it does appear that Matthew adapted some of the formula quotations to fit the context of the narrative itself as well as used the standard formula introduction in 1:22; 2:15; 2:17; 2:23 (the citation in 2:5–6 appears to be part of the narrative itself). If Matthew used a previously existing source to write his birth narrative but then organized his narrative according to dream appearances and formula quotations, what was his purpose? The various elements previously examined in the literary analysis all contribute to the overall purpose. Matthew has used foreshadowing to not only connect the genealogy with the birth account by explaining the identity of Jesus’ father (1:16; 18–25), but also by showing the rejection of Jesus by the Jews (2:3, 13, 16–18) and the adoration of Jesus by the Gentiles (2:1–2, 9–12). He has also used typology by emphasizing the events that show a correlation between Jesus and the Moses as well as Jesus and Israel. Through the use of dream appearances, he has shown that the events surrounding the birth of Jesus have been orchestrated and overseen by divine guidance. Perhaps, the best clue to the purpose among Matthew’s literary techniques is in his use of the formula quotations. Each of these presents Jesus as the presence of God (1:23), the Messiah (2:6), and representative of Israel (2:15). The final

¹¹²Charles L. Quarles, “An Analysis of Midrash Criticism as Applied to the Synoptic Birth Narratives” (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 121–2.

two quotations indicate that the geographical events have already been prophesied (2:18, 23).

It would appear that Matthew's overall purpose of his Gospel, which is probably to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies of the Jewish Messiah, is also the overall purpose of the birth narratives, although a secondary element involved in both is that while the Jews reject their own Messiah, the Gentiles are often the ones who seek after him. A more thorough analysis of Matthew's theological purpose is necessary.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MATTHEAN BIRTH NARRATIVE

The literary analysis indicated that the purpose of Matthew's birth narrative is primarily theological. Even though it touched upon this purpose, due to the various literary devices used by Matthew, this chapter is devoted to the theological implications of Matthew 1–2. It has been shown that Matthew did not “invent” the birth narratives but passed on what he received from a previous source and added some formula quotations to highlight the theological meaning behind them. This chapter will not only delve into the theological aspect of the formula quotations but also the birth narrative and genealogy as a whole as found in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel.

Theological Purpose of Matthew's Gospel

Perhaps the first step to understanding the theological purpose of the birth narratives is to look at the theological purpose of his Gospel as a whole since it has been shown that the birth narratives have always been a part of the Gospel. In other words, the birth narratives surely contribute to the overall purpose of the Gospel.

As has been previously discussed, Matthew's Gospel begins with the statement: Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβρααμ. It has been shown that this opening statement is primarily referring to the genealogy of Jesus in 1:2–17 but that Matthew may have been using wordplay to suggest Jesus as a new beginning (Matt 5:17), which would also point to many aspects of his ministry throughout the Gospel. This new

beginning manifests itself in Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), much of which is unique to Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus demonstrates the true intent of the Mosaic laws. There are examples of Jewish rejection of Jesus (12:38–42; 15:1–9; 21:33–46; 22:1–14; 27:1–50) and Gentile acceptance (Matt 8:5–13; 15:21–28; 27:54) throughout the Gospel. The Jewish rejection often shows up in some of the parables of the kingdom which are unique to Matthew's Gospel (The Tares among Wheat in 13:24–30, 36–43 and The Net in 13:47–50). The kingdom of heaven is spoken of numerous times throughout the Gospel (as is in the Markan and Lukan accounts), which Jesus inaugurates and its value is emphasized in unique Matthean parables (The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl in Matt 13:44–46 and the New and Old Treasures in 13:51–52). Jesus' multiple acts of healing are presented as proofs of his identity as the Messiah (Matt 11:1–6). Jesus' continued presence is promised in his fulfillment of being Emmanuel (Matt 1:23), in times of prayer to the Father (Matt 18:19–20), and in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), all of which are unique to Matthew's Gospel. In addition to the Messiah or Son of David (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 16:16; 19:30–31; 21:9, 15; 26:64), Jesus is presented as the Son of God throughout the Gospel (Matt 3:17; 8:29; 10:32–33; 11:25–27; 14:33; 15:13; 16:16; 17:5; 18:19, 35; 20:23; 26:29, 39, 42, 53, 64; 27:46, 54).

Perhaps the best clue to Matthew's overall purpose in his Gospel is his use of fulfillment quotations throughout. These appear in Matt 1:22–23; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10 (2:5–6; 3:3; 4:4–7, 10; 13:14–15 are presented as spoken within the narrative itself while 26:56 does the same but gives no particular citation). These fulfillment quotations refer to the events surrounding Jesus'

birth, John the Baptist as the messenger of the Lord (Jesus), Jesus' healings, Jesus as the hope for the Gentiles, Jesus speaking in parables to a group of unbelieving hearers, and the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and execution. Matthew is obviously concerned with presenting the events surrounding the birth, life, and death of Jesus as fulfillment of OT prophecy.

Looking at each of the emphases above, it becomes apparent that Matthew is very interested in presenting Jesus as the Messiah as well as the Son of God. Although the Gospel account is probably written to primarily Jews (hence the numerous fulfillment quotations), there is emphasis on Gentiles as well (numerous displays of acceptance by Gentiles and explanations of specific Jewish terms and sects). Therefore, the primary purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to present Jesus as the Messiah, first for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, who would personify a new beginning in salvation-history. He is not only the Son of David but also the Son of God and the fulfillment of OT prophecy.¹

Theology of the Genealogy (Matt 1:1–17)

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβρααμ (Matt 1:1)

Much has already been discussed regarding the meaning behind this phrase, that Matthew was using it primarily as an introduction to the genealogy as shown by the chiasm with 1:17 but that he might have been using Βίβλος γενέσεως as a wordplay for introducing his Gospel as a “book of beginnings” since Jesus does inaugurate a new era in salvation-history. Although there are many scholars who indicate that Matthew was

¹See also W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, 3d ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1947), 66–79. For an overview of various proposals on purpose, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 32–38.

adapting his Gospel to the book of Genesis,² there is simply not enough evidence to indicate so. The beginning of the Gospel of John is much closer in wording, giving away the intention to echo the beginning of Genesis, however, one should not look for a connection with Genesis from every Gospel writer.

Since the previous chapter dealt with Βίβλος γενέσεως in more detail, this chapter will focus on the latter part of the phrase in identifying Jesus. He is described as Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The first identification Matthew gives to Jesus is that he is the “Christ” or the “Messiah.” Brown emphasizes that the term “Jesus Christ” is used only here and in 1:18 in Matthew’s Gospel and that what was originally a title has become so attached to Jesus that it has become part of his name. Although Brown believes that here, the reference is to Jesus Christ as his name, the word, Χριστός, appears five times within the infancy narrative.³ Although it is true that Christ became so closely attached to Jesus that he began to be referred to as such, Davies and Allison rightly indicate that “1.17 (where Χριστός appears by itself) and the ‘Son of David’ in 1.1 warn us that, as in Rom 9.5, Χριστός has messianic content—and this is confirmed by 2.4; 16.16, 20; 22.42; 24.5, 23; 26.63, 68.”⁴ Indeed, Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah throughout the Gospel as indicated in the previous section. While Mark does begin his Gospel with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, the remainder of his Gospel does not put the emphasis upon Jesus as Messiah as

²W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew I* (ICC 1; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 150–3.

³Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 59.

⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 155.

Matthew's Gospel does. To say that Mark's title influenced Matthew's use⁵ is not necessary since the name or title "Jesus Christ" was certainly popular by the time of the writing since it is used throughout the book of Acts and several of Paul's letters. Matthew 1:16, which rounds out the list in the genealogy, refers to him as Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός. Matthew's use of "Jesus Christ" is primarily theological, pointing to him as the Messiah.

This is confirmed by the fact that the rest of the statement refers to him as υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβρααμ. There is a link between the "Messiah" or "Christ" ("anointed one") and the "son of David" since the expected Jewish Messiah would come through the line of David (2 Sam 7:8–16). As Davies and Allison point out, "the dominant, although not exclusive, Jewish expectation—no doubt reinforced by the shortcomings of the non-Davidic Hasmoneans—was that the messianic king would be a son of David." The phrase, "son of David," is used nine times in Matthew (1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15) while it is only used three times in Mark and none in the supposed Q source.⁶ In addition to including David in the lineage of Jesus, it is interesting to note that Joseph is addressed as "Son of David" in 1:20, further emphasizing the link in Jesus' lineage.

Not only is Jesus the son of David but also the son of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. While Luke's genealogy begins with Jesus and traces the lineage to Adam, presenting Jesus' connection with the entire human race (Luke 3:23–38), Matthew's genealogy begins with Abraham and traces the lineage down to Jesus (Matt 1:2–16),

⁵Ibid., 156.

⁶Ibid., 156–7.

emphasizing Jesus' connection with Israel. Brown, as well as Davies and Allison, acknowledge that Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as being "son of Abraham" probably goes beyond recognizing him as the Jewish Messiah but is also thinking of Abraham as one through whom all nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).⁷

Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as "Christ," "the son of David," "the son of Abraham," is theologically loaded. In a way, it does present some of his most affluent themes throughout the entire Gospel. As Hood points out, the genealogy describes how Jesus qualifies for these titles. As is often the case with genealogies, the one presented in Matthew serves the purpose of identification, showing Jesus' kinship to the Jewish people, and also serves the purpose of magnification, giving prominent names throughout the genealogy which would catch the attention of Jewish readers.⁸ There is a chiasmic structure between 1:1 and 1:17 with Christ...David...Abraham and Abraham...David...Christ, further emphasizing Jesus connection with these titles in the genealogy. Matthew reveals that much of his theological purpose is tied into these connections.

Genealogical Structure: Three Divisions of Fourteen

The genealogy of Jesus includes important names from Jewish history such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. Additionally, he emphasizes "Judah and his brothers," hinting at the twelve tribes of Israel and Judah as the tribe from which Jesus came. For Matthew, the purpose of the genealogy was to present Jesus as the goal of Israel's remembered history. While the genealogies in Genesis usually listed a person's

⁷Brown, *Birth*, 67–68; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 158.

⁸Rodney T. Hood, "The Genealogies of Jesus," in *Early Christian Origins: Studies in Honor of Harold R. Willoughby*, ed. Allen Wikgren (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), 9.

descendants, Matthew lists Jesus' ancestors, pointing to the fact that his ancestors depend on him.⁹

The genealogical structure turns corners at David's reign as well as the deportation to Babylon. In other words, the 3 x 14 structure mentioned in v. 17 has already been discussed as artificial in the literary analysis due largely to Matthew's desire for uniformity and possibly to pattern it after the numeric value of David's name. The first set of fourteen ends with David, the second set of fourteen ends with the deportation to Babylon, and the third set of fourteen ends with Jesus. In order to reach a uniform fourteen in each set, some names have been omitted while others must be double-counted. Gundry points out that Matthew omits Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah because of the iniquity of Ahab on the third and fourth generations of his children and to keep the number fourteen. Although Matthew appears to be following a genealogy similar to Luke, his substitution of reigning kings indicates that he is not following a purely physical descent. In order to get fourteen in the final grouping, Matthew needed to count Mary as well as Joseph (physical as well as legal).¹⁰ This is unlikely since women were rarely counted in genealogies and although Matthew has pointed out specific women, he never counts them up to Mary. In Matthew's list, David can only be counted in the first set if Jeconiah is counted in the second, however, Jeconiah must also be counted in the third to reach Jesus as number fourteen. In other words, it appears that Jeconiah is counted twice.

⁹Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 76–80.

¹⁰Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 16–19.

In explaining why this is done, Augustine indicates that Jeconiah was appointed king in place of his deceased father. The kingdom was taken away from him and given to another but the exile took place during his lifetime even though no fault was mentioned concerning Jeconiah. “The carrying away into Babylon took place of old by Jeconiah, who was not permitted to reign in the nation of the Jews, as a type of Christ, whom the Jews would not have reign over them. Israel passed over unto the Gentiles, that is, the preachers of the Gospel passed over unto the people of the Gentiles.” Because Jeconiah was a type of Christ, he is a type of cornerstone in which one sees two walls at the corner. “Hesitate not then to reckon the head of the corner twice, and you have at once the number written.”¹¹ Aquinas follows similarly in saying that the three groups of fourteen are: Abraham to David (including David); David to the carrying away (not including David but the carrying away to captivity included); carrying away to Christ (if Jeconiah is included, then the carrying away is included). This threefold division shows that the first division included those before the law, the second as those under the law, and the third as those under grace.¹² Allen puts it this way, “In David the family rose to royal power. At the Captivity it lost it again. In the Christ it regained it.”¹³

Outside of indicting Matthew of miscounting (which is unlikely since it has been shown that he is attempting to fit everything into three divisions of fourteen), the two best

¹¹*Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 1.12–15 (NPNF 6: 249–51).

¹²Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers I, St. Matthew*, ed. and trans. John Henry Newman (Southampton: Saint Austin, 1997), 38–39.

¹³Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd ed. (ICC 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 2, 7; Cf. Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC 1; London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 2.

explanations for the divisions are the counting of Jeconiah twice or the explanation given by Schweizer, indicating that the ancient way of reckoning includes the first and last elements in a series (Abraham to David = 14; David to Josiah, the last free king = 14; Jehoiakim, the first king of captivity to Jesus = 14).¹⁴

It is clear that the birth of Jesus is a crucial moment in Jewish history. God promised Abraham that through him, he would make a great nation (Gen 12:1–3). Abraham became the father of the nation of Israel, thus Matthew began his genealogy with him. David was the king of Israel to whom it was promised that the scepter would never depart (2 Sam 7:8–16). His name ends the first division and begins the second in the genealogy. The Babylonian Captivity was a low point in Israel's history, marking their disobedience to God and the punishment which resulted. This marked the end of the second period and the beginning of the third in the genealogy. Jesus marks the end of the third period but also the beginning of a new era as the Messiah who came for the salvation not only of Israel but of all nations.

Four Women of the Genealogy

Chapter 2 of the present work introduced the unique inclusion of the four women in the genealogy but this section will attempt to examine more closely the theological implications. As mentioned previously, Brown summarizes the three primary explanations for their inclusion: 1) Jerome indicated that they were all regarded as sinners, foreshadowing Jesus as the Savior of sinful humanity; 2) Luther proposed that they were all foreigners, demonstrating that the Jewish Messiah was related by ancestry

¹⁴Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 7–8.

to the Gentiles; 3) the proposal held by many scholars today is that the women had unusual unions with their partners and played a large part in God's plan.¹⁵

Gundry dismisses the various attempts to explain the inclusion of the four women in the genealogy. Mary could not be prefigured by them because there are other OT women who would have been chosen. They could not have been chosen for their ill-repute alone because of the inclusion of Ruth, the likelihood of arousing more suspicion over Jesus' own birth, the fault lying with Judah and David rather than Tamar and Bathsheba, and the Jewish high regard for Rahab.¹⁶ Gundry is correct in giving reasons why Jerome's explanation of the women as "sinners" cannot completely explain their inclusion, however, there does seem to be some type of prefiguring of Mary with the inclusion of these four specific women.

Schaberg's feminist interpretation comes to four primary conclusions: 1) each of the women are outside the patriarchal family structure (Tamar and Ruth are "childless young widows"; Rahab is a prostitute; Bathsheba is an adulteress and then widow pregnant with her lover's child); 2) the women are wronged by the male world in some way; 3) because of their sexual activity, the women risk damage to the social order and they give cause for others to condemn them; 4) the situations of all four women are righted by actions of men who take responsibility upon themselves to legitimate them and their children. Matthew uses these four women to introduce a fifth who undergoes the same four situations listed above. Additionally, Schaberg emphasizes the fact that God does not miraculously intervene in the stories of each of these four women. Matthew

¹⁵Brown, *Birth*, 71–73.

¹⁶Gundry, *Matthew*, 15.

prepares the reader for a fifth story where, instead of miraculous intervention, God works with human freedom.¹⁷ It is obvious that Schaberg is attempting to fit the inclusion of these four women into her feminist worldview. While some of the conditions she listed can be observed, there is no reason for Matthew to emphasize (2). While Joseph is presented as a righteous man, (4) is not a primary purpose for Matthew since 1:16 is a foreshadowing of the explanation of the virgin birth in 1:18–25, thus indicating that Matthew’s emphasis was demonstrating that Joseph was not the physical begetter of Jesus. Furthermore, to indicate that Mary’s situation as with the other four women did not involve divine intervention would go against Matthew’s purpose of presenting Jesus as the son of David as well as the son of God.

Weren emphasizes what the four women have in common with Mary rather than how they differ. “Men, it seems, are the principal protagonists of Israel’s history, and women function only as a means by which their male counterparts secure their futures. Yet it is precisely this idea that is undermined by the text.” The five women mentioned in the text (including Mary) are linked to one another by the preposition ἐκ. The Holy Spirit is also added to the company of the five women and also introduced by the preposition, implying that “the five women do not act of their own accord, but are activated by the spirit of God.” Weren sees five common elements among the five women: 1) all stories include statements concerning specific provisions of the law referring to sexual intercourse or the conditions required to share rights and privileges of belonging to a family, clan, or nation; 2) all stories begin with the “women’s protected position within

¹⁷Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 32–34.

their family, clan, or nation” according to the law; 3) all stories include an event that jeopardizes this lawful position; 4) all stories include situations which the women face that allow them the unique ability to “contribute to the development of the house of Israel”; 5) all stories have happy endings.¹⁸ Weren’s explanations have some validity, however, his explanation of Rahab fitting into (2) is unsatisfactory and it is a bit of a stretch to say that Bathsheba’s story has a happy ending (5) since the child that was a result of the act of adultery died (2 Sam 12:15–23). Only later, did she give birth to Solomon (2 Sam 12:24–25) and see to it that he be made king (1 Kings 1).

Brown, along with most scholars today, holds that each of these women had unusual unions with their husbands but there was also divine intervention in each situation. “In the eyes of men her pregnancy was a scandal since she had not lived with her husband (1:18); yet the child was actually begotten through God’s Holy Spirit, so that God had intervened to bring to fulfillment the messianic heritage. And this intervention through a woman was even more dramatic than the OT instances; there God had overcome the moral or biological irregularity of the human parents, while here He overcomes the total absence of the father’s begetting.”¹⁹ Keener critiques this position by asking why Matthew would not focus on Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, whose wombs God opened, since they would provide better examples of miraculous “irregular” births.²⁰

Hutchison’s 2001 article gives a unique slant on the four women in the genealogy.

¹⁸William J. C. Weren, “The Five Women in Matthew’s Genealogy,” *CBQ* 59.2 (Apr 1997): 289, 301–4.

¹⁹Brown, *Birth*, 74.

²⁰Keener, *Matthew*, 79.

He explains that Matthew does not intend to bring attention to the four women as much as he intends to bring attention to the four OT stories that illustrate a point. The four stories cover four OT periods: the patriarchs (Tamar), the Conquest (Rahab), the judges (Ruth), and David's kingdom (Bathsheba). In each case, a Gentile shows extraordinary faith in contrast to the Jew's lack of faith. "The faith of Tamar versus that of Judah, of Rahab versus that of the Israelites in the wilderness, and of Ruth versus that of the judges' generation illustrates that at crucial times in Israel's history Gentiles demonstrated more faith than Jews in response to God. Bathsheba is probably cited by Matthew as 'the wife of Uriah' in order to focus attention on Uriah's faith in contrast to that of David."²¹ Hutchinson's emphasis is a twist on the traditional view that the women's Gentile status is highlighted. This fits for all of the women, including Bathsheba since she is referred to as "the wife of Uriah," placing emphasis on her connection with Uriah the Hittite. While this appears to be the best explanation for the inclusion of the four women, the debate will continue without all loose ends tied up since Mary is obviously not of Gentile descent.

τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας ἐξ ἧς ἐγέννηθη Ἰησοῦς (Matt 1:16)

The textual variants of Matt 1:16 have already been discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work. The given text of the UBS 4th edition describes Joseph as "the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." Both external and internal

²¹John C. Hutchison, "Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy," *BSac* 158 (April–June 2001): 152–3.

evidence points to this reading as the original.²² It has also been shown that 1:18–25 develops and explains why Joseph is not described as begetting Jesus.

If this is the proper reading of the text, what is its theological purpose? It is interesting, first, to note that this is the first and only time in the entire genealogy that someone is qualified as being τὸν ἄνδρα of a woman. This points to the significance of the woman rather than the man. Furthermore, in each of the cases where a woman is included in the genealogy (1:2, 5, 6), the formula has been (father) ἐγέννησεν τὸν (son) ἐκ τῆς (mother).²³ Here in v. 16, however, the formula has changed not only by naming Joseph as the husband of Mary but also with the phrase ἐξ ἧς ἐγέννηθη Ἰησοῦς. The formula here is (father) the husband of (mother) ἐξ ἧς ἐγέννηθη (son). It is clear that Joseph is not described as “begetting” Jesus. Instead, there is a passive rather than active form of γεννάω. Matthew’s intent here is to use ἐγέννηθη as a divine passive, illustrating God’s hand in the situation through the activity of the Holy Spirit.²⁴ As noted earlier, the question is left open as to whom the father of Jesus really is. The answer is given in the birth story in 1:18–25, where the Holy Spirit is described as the agent of conception.

The Birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18–25)

The Virgin Birth

Foreshadowed by the genealogical reference to Mary as the mother of Jesus but

²²For more details on the textual criticism behind this verse, see J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 2d ed. (London: James Clarke & Co., 1958), 176–87.

²³Although, Bathsheba is never specifically named but is instead referred to as τῆς τοῦ Οὐπίου.

²⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 184; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 437.

Joseph as described only as the husband of Mary rather than the father in 1:16, Matthew presents the birth of Jesus as an explanation of this strange wording in the genealogy. Matthew begins his narrative by emphasizing the fact that Mary and Joseph were not married but betrothed and that before they had sexual relations, Mary became pregnant. She is described as ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου (1:18). As Davies and Allison point out, this is information the reader discovers before Joseph does and it anticipates 1:20 when Joseph learns of this from the angel. The description here also anticipates the quotation of Isa 7:14 in 1:23 (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει).²⁵

The appearance of the angel to Joseph indicates that this is an important event in salvation history as the appearances of angels throughout the Scriptures are. The angel's words in 1:20 confirm what was already given by the narrator in 1:18 that the child inside Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Obviously, Jesus' birth signifies for Matthew something that is supernatural in origin. This is further highlighted by Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14.

A closer examination of the context of Isa 7:14 will aid in understanding Matthew's theological point in using the quotation. In the Isaiah text, Rezin (king of Aram) and Pekah (king of Israel) advance on Jerusalem to lay siege to it. The Lord speaks to the prophet Isaiah to assure him that Jerusalem will not fall to them. The Lord speaks through Isaiah to Ahaz (king of Judah) and instructs him to ask for a sign in order to assure him of safety and victory against Rezin and Pekah. Ahaz responds by refusing to ask for a sign, probably an allusion to Deut 6:16, which indicates that one is not to test God as a result of rebellion and/or doubt. Here, however, it is God who is telling Ahaz to

²⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 200.

ask for a sign and he still refuses. The Lord becomes angry and tells Ahaz that he will get a sign anyway. The sign is: הַיְהִי הָעֵלְמָה הָרָה וְיִלְדֶת בֶּן וְקִרְאֶת שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל (Isa 7:14). The Lord continues the description of the sign by indicating that this boy will eat curds and honey when he knows how to choose good over evil. In verse 16, he indicates that the two kings who are attempting to lay siege to Jerusalem will be forsaken before the boy knows how to choose good over evil. The text goes on to describe tragedy for Judah as foreign nations will come into the land and wreak havoc (Isa 7:17–25). Isaiah 8 describes the birth of the son and that he is to be named “Maher-shalal-hash-baz.” This text also alludes to the prophecy of the spoils taken from the two kings, giving the impression that at least part of the prophecy is fulfilled in this birth.²⁶ “Emmanuel” is noted, once again, in 8:8. The Lord addresses him as associated with the land of Judah and warns of an enemy that will sweep into it as well.

Carson gives a brief survey of the various interpretations of Isa 7:14, siding with J. A. Motyer in viewing Emmanuel’s birth as too late to be a “present persuader” but is rather a “future confirmation.” The sign is one of foreboding because Ahaz has rejected the Lord’s offer. The birth follows the coming events and will take place after the Davidic dynasty has lost its throne. Isaiah 7:1–9:7 must be read as a unit where Emmanuel (7:14) will possess the land (8:8), defeat opponents (8:10), appear in Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1) as a light to others (9:2) and will be the child described in 9:6–7.²⁷

²⁶John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 213.

²⁷D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8; *Matthew, Mark, Luke*; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 79; J. A. Motyer, “Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,” *TynBul* 21 (1970): 118–25.

Contra Carson, however, the partial fulfillment of the promise for Ahaz must have taken place in his lifetime as noted above yet there was also a future fulfillment.

While the controversy over the LXX and Matthew's use of παρθένοϛ for the Hebrew עַלְמָּוּלָה has already been discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work, one should note that the idea of a "young woman" giving birth versus a "virgin" giving birth as a sign of God is significant. Irenaeus argues that the interpretation of Isa 7:14 should be understood as a true virgin as the Greek indicates and points out that the LXX was written by Jews years before the advent. He indicates that the sign given in Isa 7:14 would not be a great thing if it was conceived by ordinary means: "For what great thing or what sign should have been in this, that a young woman conceiving by a man should bring forth, a thing which happens to all women that produce offspring?"²⁸ Some might argue that the LXX is simply indicating that a woman who is currently a virgin will give birth to a son in the future and that the future pregnancy is enough of a sign.²⁹ On the other hand, Origen asks which would be better considered Emmanuel: a virgin born son or a son born of the union between a man and a young woman?³⁰ Although the propheticess of Isaiah 8 appears to be the mother of the immediate fulfillment in "Maher-shalal-hash-baz," Matthew interprets Mary as the virgin mother of Jesus, the future fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy.

²⁸*Against Heresies* 3.21.1–6 (ANF 1.451–3); Cf. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke I* (CC 16; trans. William Pringle; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1943; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 104.

²⁹Brown, *Birth*, 149.

³⁰*Against Celsus* 34–35 (ANF 3.411).

The uniqueness of the LXX translation is underscored by Machen's arguments that there is no direct evidence that pre-Christian Judaism had any expectation of a virgin birth of the Messiah in order to influence this passage in Isa 7:14.³¹ As Oswalt notes, "Unless *'almâ* had overtones of virginity about it, the LXX translation is inexplicable." He says that while Isaiah did not want to emphasize virginity, he did not want to "leave it aside (as he could have done by using *'išša* or some other term for 'woman')." Although God's promise to be with Ahaz can certainly be seen with the ridding of Aram and Israel, Assyria was soon to turn on them. Was God's presence temporary or could there be a twofold understanding where God's presence is promised beyond the days of Isaiah and Ahaz?³²

It is apparent that the LXX as well as Matthew understood the Isa 7:14 prophecy to be referring to a virgin through their use of *παρθένο*. There is also evidence to show that the prophecy could have had a double-meaning: one during the time of Ahaz and another for a future time. Matthew understood this futuristic prophecy to be fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Although the Lord promised Ahaz that he would be with him during the siege by Aram and Israel, Matthew understands a deeper meaning to the prophecy as the Lord's far-reaching presence in the person of Jesus. While v. 22 includes the introductory fulfillment formula, how does v. 21 and v. 23 relate to one another? In other words, how do "Jesus" and "Emmanuel" correspond?

³¹Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 297; Cf. Louis Matthews Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ According to the Gospel Narratives* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1907), 30; Adolf Harnack, *The Date of the Acts and of the Synoptic Gospels* (NTS 4; trans. J. R. Wilkinson; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), 147; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 217–20.

³²Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 209–11.

Jesus...Emmanuel

1:21 τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν· αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.

1:23 ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουὴλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.

The verb, τέξεται, is used in v. 21 and v. 23. Just as the virgin of the Isaiah prophecy will give birth to a son, so will Mary. It is noteworthy that in v. 21, the second person singular is used (καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν) while in v. 23, the third person is used (καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ). It has already been shown that Matthew’s change from a second person (Isa 7:14 MT and LXX) to a third person here in his quotation (1:23) is most likely an adaptation to the context of his own account. The question now arises how Mary’s child can be known as “Jesus” and “Emmanuel.” The most obvious clue appears to be the perspectives. Joseph is to name his child “Jesus” because he is to carry out the meaning of his name in that “he will save his people from their sins.” At the same time, however, “they” will call his name “Emmanuel,” which is “God with us.” Jesus will be known as the presence of God. It is interesting to note that if “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” in Isaiah 8 is connected with the Emmanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7, the Lord commands his name to be “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” but the virgin will call him “Emmanuel.” Matthew’s account here in 1:21–23 indicates that the angel of the Lord commands Joseph to name the child “Jesus” but that he is the fulfillment of the Isa 7:14 prophecy and “they will call him ‘Emmanuel’.”

The Lord commands Isaiah and Joseph to name the children names by which their lives would reflect. “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” means “swift is the booty, speedy is the prey” and is a reflection of the oncoming carrying away of the wealth of Damascus and

Samaria (Isa 8:3–4). “Jesus” is very close to the Hebrew word for “salvation” (*Yeshua* = “Yahweh saves” Neh 7:7) and in Matthew’s account, his name is given because “he will save his people from their sins.”³³ Carson points out that this is a reference to Ps 130:8: “He [Yahweh] himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.”³⁴ Throughout the Gospel, Jesus claims to have the power to forgive sin and substantiates that claim with his resurrection from the dead. The child of Isaiah 8 may have been named “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (Isa 8:3) but is addressed as “Emmanuel” in Isa 8:8. In the same way, the child of Matt 1:21 may have been named “Jesus” but will be called “Emmanuel” (Matt 1:23). As Stendahl indicates, Emmanuel is meant as a title by Matthew as is clear from the plural καλέσουσιν (“they will call him...”) against all known OT texts. “The Emmanuel prophecy substantiates the significance of the name Jesus as expressed in v. 21...”³⁵ Brown rightly points out that “his people” in v. 21 are the ones who constitute “they” in v. 23. “If ‘his people’ includes the Gentiles..., then their recognition of Jesus as Emmanuel or God’s presence with them would be an aspect of Jesus’ being ‘son of Abraham’ (1:1). Herein would be fulfilled the prophecy that in Abraham’s seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed...” Matthew is able to present Jesus as having Davidic sonship by Joseph naming him as well as divine sonship by the title “Emmanuel.”³⁶ Wilkins succinctly distinguishes the two names: “The name *Jesus*

³³Calvin, *Matthew*, 98.

³⁴Carson, *Matthew*, 76.

³⁵Krister Stendahl, “Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt 1–2,” in *Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* (ed. Walther Eltester; Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), 103.

³⁶Brown, *Birth*, 152–3.

specifies *what he does* ('God saves'), while the name *Emmanuel* specifies *who he is* ('God with us')."³⁷

Magi, Herod, and Moving Star (Matt 2:1–12)

The Birth at Bethlehem

The first theological implication which strikes the reader in Matthew 2 is the statement that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea (2:1). Matthew 1 makes no mention of a location of the birth, but the statement in 2:1 suggests that at least some of the events of 1:18–25 took place in Bethlehem. Luke's account has a census bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1). Many scholars believe that this was a theological manipulation for Matthew and Luke to get the family to Bethlehem in order for Jesus to be born there. The historical likelihood of a Bethlehem birth will be examined in the next chapter but the current issue is Matthew's theological purpose in highlighting Bethlehem as the birth place. Brown has expounded upon Stendahl's description of the Matthean birth narrative as the "Who?" (Matthew 1) and the "Whence?" (Matthew 2). He sees the first chapter as describing the "Who?" (1:1–17) and the "How?" (1:18–25) while the second chapter describes the "Where?" (2:1–12) and the "Whence?" (2:13–23).³⁸ It is clear that the location of Bethlehem is crucial to Matthew's theological emphasis in 2:1–12.

The theological implications are explained within the passage itself. The magi come to Jerusalem, seeking the "King of the Jews." Herod assembles the chief priests and

³⁷Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, (ZIBBC 1; ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 13.

³⁸Stendahl, *Quis et Unde?*, 100–105; Brown, *Birth*, 53–54.

scribes and they inform him that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (2:5) and quote from Mic 5:2 (5:1 LXX). As with any of Matthew's formula quotations, they have deep theological significance and reveal much of Matthew's theological purpose in a given narrative. It is important to note that the quote in the narrative is made not by Matthew but by the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Additionally, it does not appear with Matthew's usual aside in the sense that "this was to fulfill what had been spoken by..." Matthew does not normally place a quotation of an OT passage in the mouth of a character.

As has already been explained, the quotation does not follow Mic 5:1 exactly. The name "Bethlehem Ephrathah" (Mic 5:1) has changed to "Bethlehem of Judah" (Matt 2:6) in order for Matthew's readers to understand the location as they might not be as familiar with "Ephrathah," which was a specific place in Judah.³⁹ Gundry insists that references to Bethlehem of Judea in 2:1–2 and 5–6 are to accentuate the area of the kings of Judah and heighten the kingship of Jesus rather than clarify to which Bethlehem he is referring.⁴⁰ It would be best to see this as a "both/and" rather than an "either/or." For historical purposes, Matthew wanted the readers to be familiar with the location but for theological purposes, he also wanted to highlight the Messianic ties to Judah.

Additionally, the passage in Micah emphasizes the insignificance of Bethlehem because of its size among the "clans of Judah" while Matthew's quotation emphasizes its greatness among the "rulers of Judah."⁴¹ The Matthean quotation goes beyond describing

³⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 242.

⁴⁰Gundry, *Matthew*, 26, 29.

⁴¹See Calvin, *Matthew*, 134.

a ruler that will go forth from Bethlehem but also describes this person as one who will shepherd them. This change has led many to believe that there is a conflation of Mic 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2. Heater demonstrates the possibility of a third text recognized by many early church fathers, Gen 49:10, with which the 2 Sam 5:2 passage is linked in the Targums as a reference to the Messiah: “A coming ruler was promised in Gen 49:10. David was such a ruler (*hegoumenos*), and now David’s town has been singled out as the birthplace of the greater David.” This same person is the understanding of the *archon* in Mic 5:1. According to their understanding which was a result of cumulative exegesis and not an abuse of Scripture, the scribes give the content of the three passages to Herod.⁴² Another possibility is that the Jewish leaders were giving not only Mic 5:1 but also part of Mic 5:3 where it describes this ruler as one who will ποιμανεῖ τὸ ποίμνιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἰσχύϊ Κύριος (LXX). The MT has הַיְהוָה יִצְרָח הַיְהוָה. This is a very similar phrase as that in Matt 2:6: ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ. The idea of shepherding for the Lord is in both passages.

Whether or not the rulers quoted the prophet or simply identified the fact that Bethlehem is named by the prophet, the integrity of the passage remains. Additionally, there is good evidence that the passage from Micah or the combination of it with 2 Sam 5:2 is in mind here since John’s account of the people challenging Jesus’ origin includes a reference to Bethlehem, David, and the Christ in John 7:42. This shows that the identification of a future ruler of Israel with Bethlehem was widespread knowledge. This

⁴²Homer Heater, Jr., “Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources,” *JETS* 26:4 (Dec 1983):396–7.

emphasis on the Davidic birth of Jesus in the city of Bethlehem fits well with Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as Messiah, the son of David.

There are those scholars who reject the expectation of the Messiah from Bethlehem prior to a Christian interpretation. Freed says, "The tradition of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem arose in Christian tradition; and after that happened, it continued to survive on the presumed authority of OT scripture. No Jewish sources speak of Bethlehem as the place of the Messiah's birth before the fourth century A.D." Once the disciples believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, they naturally began to believe he was born in Bethlehem because of 1 Sam 16:18; 17:12; 17:15). "The passage in Micah means no more than that the expected messianic king would come from the family of David whose home had been in Bethlehem. It does not mean that Bethlehem was known to be the place of the Messiah's birth."⁴³

The passage in Micah speaks of this ruler as being from Bethlehem: ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ (5:1 LXX). While it could be said that this is referring to the source of the family (David) from which the Messianic ruler would come, on the surface, it is most literally understood as the exact location from which the ruler would come. Additionally, the passage from John 7:40–52 indicates that the Jews believed the birthplace to be Bethlehem. Some scholars argue that this was a later Christian understanding, which John included in his Gospel account but it would seem that John would want to make Jesus' birth at Bethlehem more explicit if this discussion of Bethlehem was a creation by the Gospel writer. Köstenberger indicates that there was

⁴³Edwin D. Freed, *The Stories of Jesus' Birth: A Critical Introduction* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 79–80; cf Brown, *Birth*, 513–6.

ample Scriptural support for the belief that “the Messiah would come from David’s family and from Bethlehem.” The passage from Mic 5:2 in Matt 2:5–6 “confirms that at least by the beginning of the first century A.D., Jewish scholars generally expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem.”⁴⁴ It is obvious that this is how Matthew understood it since he emphasizes Bethlehem and if one holds that the Jewish authorities were the true source of the quotation, they understood it this way as well.

Within the context of Micah, the passage is certainly speaking of a future ruler who will be a hope for Israel. It is easy to see Messianic implications from this passage as he is described as who will be “great to the ends of the earth” (5:3), “peace” (5:4), “He will deliver from the Assyrian” (5:6). On the other hand, there are some mysterious descriptions in 5:1b which make this ruler appear to be more than an earthly ruler: “his goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity.” It is interesting that with this type of divine description of the ruler in Micah 5 that Matthew does not quote this part of the passage. It would seem that since it has been shown that he wanted to present Jesus as not only Son of David but also Son of God, if he was the creator of the quotation in Matt 2:5–6, that he would include these divine descriptions in Mic 5:1b as part of the quotation. Since he does not, it gives more credence to the Jewish leaders as the source of the quotation, thus providing further evidence for an understanding of the Messiah from Bethlehem in Jewish thought during the first century rather than a later Christian

⁴⁴Andreas E. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 241–2.

creation.⁴⁵

Journey of the Magi

The first seekers of the birth of the Jewish Messiah, according to Matthew's account, are Gentile magi from the east. They arrive in Jerusalem, asking for the location of the one born "King of the Jews" so that they could "worship him" (Matt 2:2). The irony of Gentile astrologers seeking after a Jewish Messiah cannot be overstated. The magi are found in the OT primarily in Dan 2:27 and 5:15 where they interpret dreams and the handwriting on the wall to no avail. The NT describes Simon in Acts 8:9 as one who practiced magic (μαγεύων). Acts 13:6, 8 describe Bar-Jesus and Elymas as μάγος. In each of these cases, the magi are not presented in a positive light. So, why does Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus have them as the first worshippers of the Jewish Messiah? What role does the star play in Matthew's theology?

Many scholars have pointed to the Balaam prophecy in Num 24:17 as the source for Matthew's account of the magi and star, whether the basis for creating the account or the basis of a historical journey of magi who followed a star which they discovered in the OT prophecy.⁴⁶ Matthew's account shows that the magi came to Jerusalem because they followed a star. The earliest connection with Num 24:17 is from Irenaeus in the second century (*Against Heresies* 3.9.2) and Origen in the late second or early third century

⁴⁵Cf. Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*, 21–29.

⁴⁶*Collected Works of Erasmus 45, Paraphrase on Matthew*, ed. Robert D. Sider, trans. and ann. Dean Simpson (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974), 49; David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 2d ed. (Lives of Jesus Series; ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. George Eliot; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 174–7; Elwood Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), 48–49; Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew*, 236–8; Gundry, *Matthew, 27*; Brown, *Birth*, 193–6; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 234–5.

(*Against Celsus* 58–60). Luther denies that the magi understood the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:17) as the star since the star himself was Christ in the prophecy.⁴⁷ Edersheim indicates that rabbinic tradition looked for a different event surrounding the birth of the Messiah than a few magi paying homage. Similarly, the Balaam prediction is not likely to have been understood as an appearance to a few magi.⁴⁸ Along with other scholars, Plummer says that the OT is not the source of the star since the Evangelist, despite his fondness of quotation fulfillments, does not quote Num 24:17. “We may believe that the Evangelist knew that the Star of Balaam’s prophecy indicated the Messiah Himself, as even the Targums interpreted it. It was Christians who, under the influence of this narrative, misinterpreted Balaam’s Star as meaning the star which guided the Magi...”⁴⁹ There are some parallels between the prophecy of Balaam and the magi’s star, including the magus Balaam and Matthean magi, the star representing the Messiah in Numbers and the magi’s star leading them to the Messiah, the departure of Balaam to his home (Num 24:25) and the magi’s return to their home (Matt 2:12).⁵⁰ On the other hand, however, the points made by Edersheim and others that Matthew never quotes from Num 24:17 even though this would have been an ideal place to do so if this passage was in mind, are well taken. Brown’s attempt to defend against this in saying that the star could represent the

⁴⁷*Sermons of Martin Luther I*, 2d ed. (ed. and trans. John Nicholas Lenker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 335.

⁴⁸Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 1:208–9.

⁴⁹Plummer, *Matthew*, 12–13; G. H. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus: A Critical Examination of the Gospel Narratives of the Nativity, and Other New Testament and Early Christian Evidence, and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1916), 19–23; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993), 25.

⁵⁰Brown, *Birth*, 195–6.

Messiah after the king is born falls short. Although the Num 24:17 passage appears to point to a Messianic fulfillment, it does not appear that Matthew had this in mind as the star in his Gospel account. There would have been a much clearer way to tie his account into the prophecy had he been basing it upon in the Balaam account.

The magi bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the child Jesus. These gifts have been interpreted in a number of ways since the early church fathers. The gold could be for a king (Ireneaus and Origen) or could represent wisdom (Gregory the Great). The frankincense could represent God's manifestation to man (Irenaeus and Origen) or as a prayer to God (Gregory the Great). The myrrh could represent Jesus' sacrificial death (Irenaeus and Origen) or as a self-sacrifice of the body before God (Gregory the Great).⁵¹ Erasmus, as well as many others, point to the gold as representing a gift for a king, the incense for a priest, and the myrrh for mortality, but also sees the three gifts as representative of the three persons of the Trinity.⁵²

Most scholars have abandoned such allegorical interpretations but have looked to specific passages in the OT to be the source behind the story, specifically Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72.⁵³ The passage in Isaiah does make mention of kings being drawn to the light (Isa 60:3) and bringing the wealth of the nations (Isa 60:5), gold and frankincense (Isa 60:6). On the other hand, however, it appears that the context of Isaiah 60 is directed at

⁵¹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.9.2 (ANF 1:422–3); Irenaeus, *Against Celsus* 58–60 (ANF 3:422–3); Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.6 in Manilio Simonetti, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1–13*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 28–29.

⁵²Erasmus, *Matthew*, 52.

⁵³Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 176–7; Box, *Virgin Birth*, 19–23; Gundry, *Matthew*, 32; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 249–51.

the city of Zion rather than a person: “Foreigners will build up your walls” (v. 10a), God’s wrath struck it and his favor had compassion on it (v. 10b), “your gates will be open continually” (v. 11), the trees of Lebanon will be brought “to beautify the place of my sanctuary” (v. 13), “and they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (v. 14). There are many other clues throughout the chapter that indicate that Isaiah is speaking of a city rather than a person.⁵⁴ While one could take this as referring to Bethlehem and in that way, the magi would be a partial fulfillment of the prophecy but the descriptions of the city in Isaiah 60 point to a larger city with walls and more population than Bethlehem ever had, thus describing Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem.

Psalm 72 appears to be even more difficult to relate directly to the gifts of the magi. The connection here is associated with the kings of Tarshish and of the isles who are to pay tribute and the kings of Sheba and Seba who are to bring gifts (72:10). The kings are to fall down (προσκυνέω – same word describing the act of worship by the magi in Matt 2:11) before him and all nations to serve him (72:11). The psalm is largely associated with Solomon so that some point to a Jesus-Solomon typology: 1) gold and myrrh were gifts brought to Solomon by foreigners while gold and frankincense were associated with Solomon’s temple; 2) Psalm 72, as pointed out previously, was attributed to Solomon; 3) frankincense and myrrh appear together only three times in the OT and each time in association with Solomon; 4) the eschatological events, which could be foreshadowed by the magi’s pilgrimage to worship the Jewish Messiah, were often

⁵⁴Cf. Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 208–9.

compared to the days of Solomon and said to surpass those days; 5) just as the magi rendered gifts to king Jesus, foreign royalty brought gifts to king Solomon.⁵⁵ Plummer rightly points out that Matthew never quotes Psalm 72 or Isaiah 60. The gifts mentioned are intrinsically probable, independently of any prophecy or previous narrative. He goes on to say that “it was Christians who, under the influence of Psalm 72, turned the Magi into kings.”⁵⁶

The gifts of the magi are gifts associated with a king, thus indicating their reverence for the one “who has been born king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2). One should not look at the actions of the magi apart from the response of the Jewish leaders to the birth of the Jewish Messiah. The immediate response of Herod and “all Jerusalem” was that they were “troubled” (τράσσω).⁵⁷ Although the Gentile magi were aware of the birth of the Jewish Messiah, having followed a star, Herod had to inquire where the Messiah was to be born. He was ignorant of the Scriptures, pointing to either his disbelief or his lack of respect for the OT prophecy. Furthermore, Herod attempts to destroy the child (Matt 2:12–13, 16–18) because of his fierce jealousy and paranoia concerning his own power. This rejection and violent reaction by the Jewish leaders contrasted with the acceptance and humble adoration by the Gentile magi is a foreshadowing of things to come

⁵⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 250–1; Cf. Mark Allan Powell, “The Magi as Kings: An Adventure in Reader-Response Criticism,” *CBQ* 62.3 (July 2000): 459–80.

⁵⁶Plummer, *Matthew*, 12–13.

⁵⁷“τράσσω” in *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, eds. T. Friberg, B. Friberg, and N. F. Miller (electronic ed.) (Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 375. This word is used “(1) literally *shake* or *stir up* (JN 5.4, 7); (2) figuratively, of a crowd *cause an uproar* (AC 17.8); of acute mental or spiritual agitation *disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion* (AC 15.24); passive *be troubled, be upset, be agitated* (MT 2.3); with an added component of fear *be frightened, be terrified* (MT 14.26); with an added component of threat *be intimidated* (1P 3.14).”

throughout the Gospel of Matthew (4:15–16; 8:5–13; 9:1–2; 15:24; 21:43; 27:54; 28:18–20).⁵⁸ Martin Luther made this discovery in his time and applied it to a list of three classes of disciples.⁵⁹

The search for the Jewish Messiah by the magi, their worship of him and gifts presented to him, as well as their faithful obedience to the angelic warning, present them as a sign of the salvation that would be available to the Gentiles (Isa 49:6) and as an indictment against the people of Israel who reject their own deliverer. Matthew has highlighted the contrast between the two responses to the birth of Jesus, reminding the reader that Jesus is not only the Jewish Messiah but also the entire world's redeemer.

Flight to Egypt and Settlement in Nazareth (Matt 2:13–23)

After the magi return home, defying the instructions of Herod to report back to him about the location of the child, the account focuses on Joseph once again. The angel of the Lord, having appeared to Joseph before to assure him of taking Mary as his wife (1:20–21), reappears to warn Joseph to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt to avoid assassination by Herod (2:13). Joseph is obedient and remains there until Herod's death. Matthew here (2:15) includes a fulfillment quotation from Hos 11:1. The account shifts to

⁵⁸Donald Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Birth of a New World: Matthew's Theology of History in the Passion Narrative," *CurTM* 19.6 (Dec 1992): 421–3; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 238–9.

⁵⁹Luther, *Sermons*, 2.63–67.350–1; 2.93.361.

Herod's reaction of rage at the magi's deceit and he determines to kill every male child two years old and under, according to the time he determined from the magi. Matthew includes another fulfillment quotation here (2:18) from Jer 31:15.

There are several theological implications in this account as evidenced by two different fulfillment quotations. Many scholars have pointed out a Jesus–Moses typology in the details of this part of the story. These parallels have already been presented in Chapter 2 of the present work.⁶⁰ Bourke sees some similarities with Moses: 1) announcement of birth; 2) terror of the Egyptians when the prediction is revealed; 3) consultation of Pharaoh with his sages and order for the Hebrew boys to be killed; 4) escape of Moses from the slaughter. He also sees differences, many taken from Jewish tradition: 1) the dream of Pharaoh has no parallel in Matthew while the dream which announces Jesus as savior of his people rather than his birth comes to Joseph rather than Herod; 2) Pharaoh's consults predict the child's birth and give advice on how its consequences can be avoided while the scribes of the Gospel inform Herod of the birth location; 3) Pharaoh's order for general slaughter is necessary because he knows very little about the child while Herod's more specific slaughter is a result of more knowledge of the location of the child's birth. Bourke, along with other scholars, sees that Jesus relives the Exodus experience of Israel. Jeremiah 31:15 is a context of the restoration of Israel. Isaiah's interpretation of Judah's return from Babylon as the new Exodus further sheds light on this connection. "One may say, then, that the *Reflexionszitate* of 2,13–18

⁶⁰Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 192–3; Cf. Brown, *Birth*, 112–5; Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 140–6; R. T. France, "Herod and the Children of Bethlehem," *NovT* 21.2 (Apr 1979): 98–120.

by themselves show that in that section at least, the OT parallel to Jesus which was of primary importance to the author was not Moses but Israel.”⁶¹

Box indicates that the details of Matthew 2 were regarded as fact but assimilated to earlier models and display Midrashic elements showing the parallel between Israel and Jesus. “The Evangelist intends to suggest a likeness between the divinely guided career of Moses, the instrument of Israel’s redemption from Egypt, and the Messianic Redeemer who saves His people from their sins...”⁶² Boslooper says that “the flight into Egypt is intended to associate Christ with ancient Jewish tradition of deliverance and redemption from bondage. The Herod incident is an attempt to show that Christ too was subject to the vicissitudes that Israel had had to tolerate for years at the hands of dictatorial antagonists and that the new child was immune to these aggressors. This incident had another implication, however. To the Gentile mind this incident was analogous to the motif in antiquity of the Evil One who sought the destruction of the newborn babe.”⁶³

Although the literary details comparing the quotation by Matthew in 2:15 and the MT and LXX of Hos 11:1 have already been discussed in Chapter Two of the present work, a closer examination of the original context of the Hosea passage helps to shed some light on its theological implications for Matthew. Hosea’s prophecy concerned the faithlessness of the Israelites toward God. Throughout the book, he emphasizes their sin and rebellion along with the impending doom as punishment. The end of Hosea 10

⁶¹Myles M. Bourke, “The Literary Genus of Matthew 1–2,” *CBQ* 22.2 (Apr 1960): 162–3, 171–2.

⁶²Box, *Virgin Birth*, 19–23.

⁶³Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 231.

speaks of the king of Israel as being cut off. Hosea 11 opens with כִּי נַעַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶהְיֶה וּ
וּמִמִּצְרַיִם קָרָאתִי לְבָנִי (“When Israel was a youth, I loved him and out of Egypt, I called
my son”). Hosea continues to speak for God, indicating that although they kept
sacrificing to the Baals, it was God who taught Ephraim to walk and healed them (Hos
11:3). The context is clear that Hos 11:1 is referring to Israel as “my son” whom God
called out of Egypt. Therefore, Matthew’s use of the MT of Hos 11:1 is to show the
experience of Jesus as coming forth from Egypt as a parallel to the exodus of Israel. Here,
Jesus represents corporate Israel, reliving “in his own life the history of that people.”⁶⁴
Carson points out that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy because 1) he is the antitype of Israel;
2) the verb “to fulfill” has broader implications than one-to-one fulfillment; 3) Hosea’s
prophecy looked forward to a saving visitation by the Lord, a pattern often appearing in
OT prophecy, thus a “fuller meaning” of the text; 4) Jesus is the locus of true Israel.⁶⁵

Strauss says that the supposed fulfillment of Hos 11:1 shows a comparison of the
collective Israel with Jesus the Messiah but “the only parallel consists in the bare fact in
both instances of a sojourn in Egypt” while the details of those sojourns are very
diverse.⁶⁶ While this is true, the theological point being made by Matthew is to show that
the exodus of Israel was a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do one day. He is not
worried about showing every detail as similar. Allison notes that there is nothing
messianic about Hos 11:1. However, since Hos 11:1 refers to Israel as the son who was

⁶⁴Brown, *Birth*, 215; Gundry, *Matthew*, 34.

⁶⁵Carson, *Matthew*, 91–93.

⁶⁶Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 167.

called out of Egypt, Jewish sources often point to redemption from Egypt as a messianic redemption. There will be another exodus and another return. By Matt 2:15 quoting Hos 11:1, he is pointing out a parallelism of the story of Jesus with the story of Moses. Answering to the objection that this is an Israel typology rather than a Moses typology, Allison rightly points out that Jesus is made both like Israel and Moses.⁶⁷

Oddly enough, however, as mentioned earlier, Matthew gives the fulfillment quotation of Hos 11:1 here at 2:15 immediately following the description of the family fleeing to Egypt and remaining there until Herod's death. It would seem to fit better at 2:20 or 2:21 where the family exits Egypt and heads for the land of Israel.⁶⁸ Brown's observations may help here: "The three formula citations...in chapter 2, by mentioning *Bethlehem*, the city of David, *Egypt*, the land of the Exodus, and *Ramah*, the mourning-place of the Exile, offer a theological history of Israel in geographical miniature. Just as Jesus sums up the history of the people named in his genealogy, so his early career sums up the history of these prophetically significant places."⁶⁹ Taking Brown's analysis of the importance of Matthew retelling the story of Israel, it may be that he wanted to mention the Exodus event before making a reference to the Exile event in his quotation of Jer 31:15. Looking more closely at the context of Jer 31:15, which Matthew quotes in Matt 2:18, one finds that a majority of the chapter is positive, describing how Israel will one

⁶⁷Allison, *New Moses*, 140–2.

⁶⁸One apparent intention of Matthew is to highlight the irony of Egypt as a place of refuge for the collective Israel. Cf. Calvin, *Matthew*, 155.

⁶⁹Brown, *Birth*, 217; Carson indicates that Matthew probably wants to use the return journey to set up the reference to the destination of Nazareth rather than the starting point of Egypt. See Carson, *Matthew*, 91.

day be restored although she is now in exile. Verse fifteen is the depressing dissonance within the chapter of hope. Jeremiah refers to Rachel, Jacob's (Israel's) favorite wife, as weeping because her children are no more. The weeping is heard in Ramah.⁷⁰ The tie-in to Bethlehem here is the fact that Rachel's tomb is mentioned as being on the road to Bethlehem in Gen 35:19. Rachel's weeping over her children who are "no more" is metaphorical for the absence of the Israelites in Israel since they are in captivity in Jeremiah's time. On the other hand, however, God offers comfort through Jeremiah's words, indicating that the tears and weeping should be restrained (Jer 31:16) because "the children will return to their own territory" (Jer 31:17), thus pointing to the return from exile. Matthew's use of Jer 31:15 follows immediately upon the massacre of the children of Bethlehem. If Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem and the Jeremiah prophecy indicated that her weeping was heard in nearby Ramah, it appears that Matthew is connecting the weeping in Bethlehem over the slaughtered children. Carson believes that Matthew was showing that, despite the tears, the exiles will return and despite the tears of Bethlehem mothers, hope remains because the Messiah escaped Herod and will ultimately reign. The

⁷⁰Nancy L. Lapp, "Ramah," *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. P. J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row, and Society of Biblical Literature (electronic ed.) (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985). "Ramah of Benjamin, which is identified with modern er-Ram, about five miles north of Jerusalem and west of Geba and Michmash on the border of Israel and Judah. It is unexcavated but surface exploration indicates occupation begins about the twelfth century B.C., and it can be associated with a number of OT passages. Deborah judged between Ramah and Bethel (Judg. 4:5). Baasha, King of Israel (ca. 902-886 B.C.), fortified Ramah, but, by an alliance with Benhadad of Damascus, Asa of Judah (ca. 908-872) tore it down (1 Kings 15:17-22). According to Isa. 10:29 the Assyrians advanced toward Jerusalem through Ramah. Ramah is mentioned in Hosea's cry against Israel (Hos. 5:8), and Jeremiah was set free there (Jer. 40:1). Ramah is among those towns listed with inhabitants following the Exile (Ezra 2:26; Neh. 7:30). Rachel was associated with this town (Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:18)."

Exile is over now that the true heir to David's throne has come and will introduce the new covenant (26:28) promised by Jeremiah.⁷¹

Plummer says that the change in formula for introducing Matt 2:17 from "in order that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" to "then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet" is unique: 1) nothing is said about Divine purpose; 2) nothing is said about divine utterance; 3) the name of the prophet is given. Perhaps Matthew was unwilling to draw a direct connection with God's will for the massacre at Bethlehem.⁷²

Although Jesus does escape the slaughter, he has experienced an exodus (Hos 11:1) as well as an exile (Jer 31:15). For Matthew, the two prophecies, which he has quoted, have double fulfillments. One fulfillment of the Hosea prophecy was actually the exodus event of the past but the future fulfillment takes place in the return of Jesus from Egypt. One fulfillment of the Jeremiah prophecy took place during the exile where the children of Israel were missing from the land but the future fulfillment takes place in the wailing mothers of Bethlehem over their children whom Herod had slaughtered. As Graves suggests, "By citing the land of the exodus and the place for mourning the exile, Matthew's birth narrative offers in miniature a geographical survey of Israel's tragic past."⁷³

⁷¹Carson, *Matthew*, 95.

⁷²Plummer, *Matthew*, 18; Cf. Allison, *New Moses*, 35–36 and Brown, *Birth*, 205 (Brown points out that Matthew treats Judas' thirty pieces of silver the same way in Matt 27:9).

⁷³Thomas H. Graves, "A Story Ignored: An Exegesis of Matthew 2:13–23," *Faith & Mission* 5 (Fall 1987): 71.

After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph and instructs him that it is safe to bring his family back to the land of Israel but when he discovers that Archelaus is reigning in Judea, he is afraid. Joseph is warned, again, in a dream, which results in him taking his family into Galilee to the city of Nazareth. Matt 2:23 indicates that the settlement in Nazareth is to fulfill the words of the prophets that “He shall be called a Nazarene.”⁷⁴

Extensive footnoted sources have already been provided in Chapter 2 of the present work regarding the various views on the possible source and meaning of the quotation. Menken’s article has proved most useful in examining Matthew’s intended wordplay in Greek. Encapsulating what has already been discussed, Menken rightly points out the similarities between Jesus and Samson as being set apart and being given a specific name at birth (Jesus...Samson) but also a title of significance (Emmanuel...Nazarite). The use of “prophets” by Matthew instead of a specific prophet from which the quotation is derived could be another example of Matthew’s use of “prophets” to distinguish the second division of the Hebrew Scriptures (5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40), which could account for the former prophets.⁷⁵ Carson indicates that the plural form of “prophets” demonstrates that there is no specific OT source in mind. He dismisses the attempts to connect it with wordplay and says that it is simply implying that it has been

⁷⁴Brown indicates that along with the mention of “the land of Israel” (Matt 2:20), Galilee here relates to the quotation of Isa 9:1–2 in Matt 4:14–16: “...Matthew has Jesus divinely directed to the two groups that make up the Matthean community: Jew and Gentile.” Brown, *Birth*, 218.

⁷⁵Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Sources of the Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:23,” *JBL* 120.3 (2001): 463–7; Cf. Goulder, *Midrash*, 240–1; Gundry, *Matthew*, 40; George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1–2* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 19761), 93–216.

prophesied that Jesus would be despised just as Christians were insulted by others in Acts 24:5 as the “Nazarene sect” although there is possibly a discreet allusion to the *neser* (“branch”) of Isa 11:1.⁷⁶

The quotation in Matt 2:23 is rather mysterious as indicated by the number of disagreements among scholars as to its source and meaning. Even Menken’s view has a weakness in the fact that Jesus does not follow the Nazarite vow of Num 6:2–21 because Jesus touches the unclean (Matt 8:1–4; 9:20–22), approaches the dead (Matt 9:23–26), and drinks wine (Matt 26:27–29; 27:48). Would Matthew need to refer to Jesus as a Nazarite on the basis of his following the specific instructions given in Num 6:2–21? As Brown considers, “[P]erhaps he was considered a Nazarite in the sense that he was consecrated to God’s service from the womb.”⁷⁷ Calvin points out that Jesus is the redeemer or deliverer of his people just as Samson was considered (Judg 13:5). The favorable prophecies about Samson can be applied to Jesus. While Jesus is the original model, Samson is the inferior anti-type.⁷⁸ In other words, in the Matt 2:23 quotation, Matthew points to the settlement at Nazareth as not merely a geographical conclusion to the birth narrative and a name (Nazarene) by which Jesus will be known, but he also points out its significance through the use of wordplay that Jesus is set apart (Num 6:2, 8) for carrying out God’s will.

⁷⁶Carson, *Matthew*, 97.

⁷⁷Brown, *Birth*, 210–1.

⁷⁸Calvin, *Matthew*, 164.

Theological Purpose of the Matthean Birth Narrative

After examining each of the major theological components of Matthew 1–2, it is time to take a step back and look at the big picture of Matthew’s theological portrait of Jesus. It has already been shown that Matthew began with a narrative that he received from a previous tradition or source and then adapted the translation of the fulfillment quotations to fit the narrative. Discussion of the historicity of the account will be the topic of the next chapter but suffice it to say here that Matthew believed that the account he was writing was historic and that the events which he recorded affected him deeply regarding the person of Jesus. How did the events surrounding Jesus’ birth impact Matthew’s theology?

The literary analysis resulted in a primary purpose for Matthew’s birth narrative as presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies of the Jewish Messiah and a secondary purpose as demonstrating the Jewish rejection of Jesus as contrasted with the Gentile acceptance and adoration of him. The theological analysis has only served to reiterate these two purposes. Looking at the theological emphases throughout the entire Gospel of Matthew, it becomes apparent that Matthew wants to present Jesus as not only the son of David but also the son of God as fulfillment of OT prophecy. Contrary to much modern scholarship, this does not mean that Matthew wrote the birth narratives as a result of his understanding of who Jesus was, creating the beginning of a hero and a series of fictitious events that would make the events surrounding his birth point to his Messiahship. Instead, however, Matthew’s understanding of Jesus’ identity was further developed by the account of his birth. Through the use of fulfillment quotations, Matthew

attempted to demonstrate that the events surrounding his birth were fulfillments of what had already been prophesied in the OT.

It is obvious that Matthew has made editorial comments in his account, reflecting the impact the events had on him. For example, it has been demonstrated that Matthew's Gospel begins with an introductory statement defining Jesus as the Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυίδ υἱοῦ Ἀβρααμ. This statement, although introducing the genealogy of 1:2–17, also serves to present Jesus as a new beginning. Altogether, Matthew begins his gospel with a statement that alludes to Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and the beginning of something new.

The genealogy serves only to confirm this as it is divided into three sets of fourteen names, pointing to major events in the history of Israel, culminating in the birth of Jesus the Messiah. The use of the four women in the genealogy shows how God continues to intervene through women throughout his dealings with the children of Israel. Here, he has intervened by conceiving through the Holy Spirit apart from the human father. The names included throughout the genealogy, while solidifying for Matthew that Jesus came through the messianic line, also points to the fact that Jesus' lineage is made up of some of the most evil kings and scandalous people in the OT. This highlights God's intervention even in the face of unseemly heritage. This divine intervention is hinted at in 1:16 but illustrated in 1:18–25 where Jesus is virgin-born. The name by which the angel of the Lord instructs Joseph to give his child reflects his role as savior. This triggered Matthew to see Jesus as the Emmanuel of Isa 7:14, thus, demonstrating that Jesus is not only son of David but also son of God.

The account of the magi, the star, and their encounter with Herod convinces Matthew that even in his beginnings, Jesus is known as the one “born king of the Jews” (2:2), the object of Gentile worship, and the object of Jewish rejection. The birth at Bethlehem demonstrates that indeed Jesus fulfills the messianic prophecy concerning the location of the Messiah’s birth (2:5–6) as shown by the Jewish leaders’ words. The flight to Egypt as well as the slaughter of the innocents persuades Matthew that Jesus relives the exodus (2:15) as well as exile (2:17–18) of collective Israel. Jesus’ settlement in Nazareth and identification as a Nazarene appears to spark Matthew’s memory of the birth of Samson. Jesus, like Samson, is set apart from birth for special service to God.

Taken altogether, this brief summary reveals that the genealogical records of Jesus as well as the events surrounding his birth have led Matthew to believe that these beginnings only further point to Jesus as the son of David (Messianic representative and deliverer of Israel), the son of God, and one who will also include Gentiles as part of “his people” (1:21). As Carson puts it, “Jesus is the promised Messiah of the line of David, and he is ‘Emmanuel,’ ‘God with us,’ because his birth was the result of God’s supernatural intervention, making Jesus God’s very Son; and his early months were stamped with strange occurrences which, in the light of subsequent events, weave a coherent pattern of theological truths and historical attestation to divine providence in the matter.”⁷⁹ Although Matthew viewed Jesus’ birth accounts which he included in his Gospel as historical, it is now time to examine whether they can indeed be considered historical or not.

⁷⁹Carson, *Matthew*, 72.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MATTHEAN BIRTH NARRATIVE

After examining the literary techniques employed by Matthew in his birth narrative, determining the sources for the narrative, and deciphering the theological purpose and implications of his narrative, the conclusion thus far is that he wrote a narrative account of the genealogy and birth of Jesus based on what he received from a pre-existing source but arranged the narrative in such a way as to highlight its meaning. By use of OT quotations, Matthew pointed out how certain events surrounding the birth of Jesus were prophesied in the OT and that the reader should understand him as the Jewish Messiah who has come to usher in the Kingdom of God and provide salvation not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. It appears that Matthew saw his narrative as a history driving theology but the question which this chapter will attempt to answer is whether these events can truly be considered historical or whether Matthew stands alone in his perspective.

Genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1–17)

Comparison with OT Genealogies

There is much debate over the genealogy of Jesus although the descent from David is attested elsewhere in the NT (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:42–45; Mark 10:47; 12:35–37; Luke 3:31; 18:38–39; 20:41–44; Acts 2:24–36; 13:22–37; Rom 1:3–4; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16) as is his descent from the tribe of Judah (Heb

7:14).¹ Matthew’s genealogical list is derived from various sources as Chapter 2 has already demonstrated. Are these sources trustworthy? The most significant source for a large portion of Matthew’s genealogy is from 1 Chronicles 1–3.² It has already been shown that Matthew’s list follows the LXX most of the time but with a few exceptions where he may have used the MT and given his own Greek translation of certain names. Since much of this has already been discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work, the focus here will be on the names which Matthew left out and which he derived from an unknown source. The first point of interest is in comparing 1 Chr 3:11–12 with Matthew 1:9:

יִרְם בְּנוֹ אֶחָזִיָּהוּ בְּנוֹ יוֹאָשׁ בְּנוֹ
 יִרְם בְּנוֹ אֶחָזִיָּהוּ בְּנוֹ עֲזַרְיָה בְּנוֹ יוֹתָם בְּנוֹ (MT)

Ἰωρὰμ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Ὀχοζίας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Ἰωᾶς υἱὸς αὐτοῦ (LXX)

Ἰωρὰμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ὀζίαν, Ὀζίας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωαθάμ (Matt 1:8b–9)

This comparison highlights the fact that Matthew has Ὀζίας as the son of Joram while the MT has אֶחָזִיָּהוּ and the LXX has Ὀχοζίας. Davies and Allison demonstrate the possible spellings used by various manuscripts.³ One Lucian manuscript has the same spelling as Matthew’s spelling, which Nolland uses as the explanation, indicating that

¹John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 216–9.

²Num 26:19–21 and Ruth 4:18–22 follow the same names.

³W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 176. “[I]n 1 Chr 3:11 most LXX mss. have Ὀχοζίας but B has Οζεία, A V Luc Ὀζίας. (Elsewhere the LXX generally has Οχοζείας).

Matthew may have been using a Greek text that had the Lucian reading.⁴ The most glaring difference between Matthew's list and the list from 1 Chronicles is the omission by Matthew of Ἰωὰς, Ἀμασίας, and Ἀζαρίας. Many have pointed to this omission as the solution to the difference in the spelling of Ὀχοζίας. Brown believes that a copyist error took place with the omissions due to the similarity between the Greek forms of Uzziah (Azariah) and Ahaziah. In other words, instead of Joram as the father of Ahaziah, the copyist made a mistake by having Joram as the father of Uzziah.⁵

On the other hand, Davies and Allison rightly point out that this is not likely since Matthew has already demonstrated a concern for the 3 x 14 pattern in his genealogy. Instead, they propose that the more likely explanation is that the omission was intentional, due to the desire to rid the genealogy of the wicked kings and to fit the 3 x 14 pattern of the numerical value of David's name. The three omitted kings met violent deaths as willed by God (2 Chr 22:1–9; 24:1–25, 28) but it is a better explanation to point to a curse upon the house of Ahab (1 Kgs 21:21; 2 Kgs 10:30; 2 Chr 22:7).⁶ 2 Chronicles 21:7 indicates that although Jehoram did what was evil in the Lord's sight (not only did

⁴John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 80.

⁵Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1977, 1993), 82; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (ABC 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 3–6.

⁶Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 176; Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 16; Although Brown does not hold this view, he explains it best in a footnote: "A curse on the House of Ahab, king of Israel, levied in 1 Kgs 21:21, may have been brought over to the royal house in Judah through Ahab's daughter Athaliah, wife of King Joram. According to biblical rules this curse would have affected Joram's offspring even to the third and fourth generation (Exod 20:5), thus his son Ahaziah, his grandson Jehoash, and his great-grandson Amaziah—the three kings omitted in the Matthean list" (Brown, *Birth*, 82 n. 45).

he walk in the way of Ahab but he was married to Ahab's daughter – v. 6), the Lord was unwilling to destroy the line of the house of David because of the covenant he had made with him and promised to give a lamp to him and his sons forever. Perhaps this statement, indicating that God would have wiped out the lineage because of Jehoram were it not for his promise to the house of David, caused Matthew to eliminate Jehoram and his descendants to the third generation from the genealogy. Matthew wanted to keep uniformity in his genealogical structure and this might have been the best point in the lineage for omission.⁷ Thus, Matthew's "Uzziah" is the "Azariah" of 1 Chronicles 3.

Calvin indicates that Matthew was not concerned with every name in the genealogy but wanted to keep each of the three sets to fourteen kings so he had enough of the genealogy to place before his readers without needing to include the three omitted kings.⁸ As Davies and Allison point out, omission of names in a genealogy was common practice as seen in Gen 46:21 (cf. 1 Chr 8:1–4); Josh 7:1, 24; 1 Chr 4:1 (cf. 2:50); 6:7–9 (cf. Ezra 7:3); Ezra 5:1 (cf. Zech 1:1).⁹ While there is a possibility that Matthew was using a source that already omitted the three kings, it is more likely that the omission was intentional in order to preserve the 3 x 14 structure. The omissions do not compromise the lineage of the Davidic Messiah, which is Matthew's primary purpose in presenting the genealogy nor do they threaten the historicity of the genealogy itself.

⁷The threat was there for Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:13, 36 but Solomon was too large of a figure in Israel's redemptive history for Matthew to eliminate him from the genealogy.

⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke I*, trans. by William Pringle (CC 16; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 91.

⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 176–7.

The next point of interest is found in the omission of Jehoiakim. He is clearly presented in 1 Chr 3:15–16 as the second son of Josiah but is omitted in Matthew’s genealogy:

וּבְנֵי יִשָּׁיָהוּ הַבְּכוֹר יוֹחָנָן הַשֵּׁנִי יְהוֹיָקִים הַשְּׁלִישִׁי צְדָקְיָהוּ הָרְבִיעִי שְׁלֹמֹה:
וּבְנֵי יְהוֹיָקִים יְכֹנְיָה בְּנוֹ צְדָקְיָה בְּנוֹ (MT)

καὶ υἱοὶ Ἰωσῖά· πρωτότοκος Ἰωανάν, ὁ δεύτερος Ἰωακίμ, ὁ τρίτος Σεδεκίας, ὁ τέταρτος Σαλούμ. καὶ υἱοὶ Ἰωακίμ· Ἰεχονίας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, Σεδεκίας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ (LXX)

Ἰωσῖάς δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰεχονίαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς μετοικεσίας βαβυλῶνος (Matt 1:11)

Jehoiakim is presented as the son of Josiah and the father of Jechoniah in both the MT and the LXX of 1 Chr 3:15–16. Why would Matthew skip over Jehoiakim? Keeping in mind that Matthew wants to retain his 3 x 14 structure of the genealogy, if one counts Solomon as the first name of the second group, then Jechoniah would be the fourteenth name, thus giving reason to skip yet another name (in addition to the three names omitted in the above discussion). This would lead to a double-counting of Jechoniah in the third set in order for Jesus to be the fourteenth name. Brown, as well as Davies and Allison, point to a possible confusion by pre-Matthean sources over the names, Jechoniah, Jehoiachin, and Jehoiachim.¹⁰

On the other hand, as scholars have identified through the years, Jechoniah’s kingly name was Jehoiachin, which is spelled Jehoiakim in the LXX. Nolland says that the LXX usage of the grandson of Josiah is either “Jechoniah” or “Jehoiakim,” with the latter being used as the same name for the father. “Jechoniah” is first himself but also “a

¹⁰Brown, *Birth*, 61, 83; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 178–9.

cipher for the father with whom he shares a name.” If one accepts Jehoiakim as the last name of the second group, then the Jechoniah of the third group is not a repeated name but a new one, which makes thirteen and Jesus makes fourteen. Nolland indicates that to reach the three sets of fourteen, the genealogist counted Abraham to David, then Solomon to Jechoniah. This set is upheld by omitting three kings and deliberately conflating Jehoiakim and Jechoniah. The third set counts from Jechoniah to Jesus where Jechoniah is counted in the second fourteen (when actually Jehoiakim was in mind) and also counted in the third set.¹¹

Because Matthew describes Jechoniah as having “brothers” (plural), it would appear that he is referring to Jehoiakim who had three brothers: Johanan, Zedekiah, and Shallum (1 Chr 3:15–16) since Jechoniah (Jehoiachin) only had one brother, Zedekiah, according to 1 Chr 3:16.¹² On the other hand, Matthew describes Jechoniah (Jehoiachin) as fathering Salathiel (Matt 1:12) which matches up with 1 Chr 3:17. While Nolland’s explanation of Matthew referring to Jehoiakim in the second set of fourteen (Matt 1:11) but referring to Jechoniah (Jehoiachin) in the third set (Matt 1:12) aids in preserving historical accuracy and in justifying the appropriate numbers in each of the sets, it does not follow the pattern established throughout the genealogy where Matthew always repeats the previous son’s name as the father of the next generation (i.e. Jesse begat

¹¹Nolland, *Matthew*, 83–86; Calvin, *Harmony*, 91; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993), 6–7.

¹²While the Hebrew word אָח used in 2 Chr 36:10 could be used for kinsmen other than specifically brother, the Greek word ἀδελφὸς used here in Matt 1:11 is only used in the NT as specifically a physical brother unless talking about a spiritual brother.

David; David begat Solomon). Matthew could have made Nolland's explanation easier if he would have used the kingly name for both (Ἰωακίμ).¹³

It does appear that either Matthew was using a source which already had the two names confused or that he deliberately conflated the names to preserve the 3 x 14 structure, which would have been tainted had both Jehoiakim and Jechoniah been included. If Matthew's primary source for his genealogy up to this point has been 1 Chronicles 3, it is unlikely that Matthew was confused over the names since both the MT and the LXX clearly distinguish between Jehoiakim and Jechoniah. He has already deliberately omitted names in the genealogy to preserve his structure and it would seem that he has deliberately conflated Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin as Jechoniah here to retain the structure.

Another point of interest is the contrast between Matthew's presentation of Zerubbabel and the Chronicler's presentation in the MT as opposed to the LXX (1 Chr 3:19):

וּבְנֵי פְדַיָּה הַרְבֵּבֶל וְשִׁמְעִי וְיֹרְבָבֶל מְשֻׁלֵּם וְחַנְנִיָּה וְשִׁלְמִית אֶחָדָה (MT)

καὶ υἱοὶ Σαλαθιήλ· Ζοροβάβελ καὶ Σεμεΐ. καὶ υἱοὶ Ζοροβάβελ· Μοσολλὰμ καὶ Ἀνανία καὶ Σαλωμεθὶ ἀδελφὴ αὐτῶν (LXX)

Μετὰ δὲ τὴν μετοικεσίαν βαβυλῶνος Ἰεχονίας ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σαλαθιήλ Σαλαθιήλ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ζοροβάβελ (Matt 1:12)

In 1 Chronicles 3:19, the MT presents Zerubbabel as the son of Pedaiah whereas the LXX and Matthew present Zerubbabel as the son of Salathiel. The genealogical line presented by the LXX and Matthew is confirmed by Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh 12:1; Hag 1:1,

¹³See Chapter 2 of the present work for a discussion of the textual variant on Matt 1:11.

12, 14; 2:2, 23¹⁴ as well as in Josephus.¹⁵ Therefore, what appears on the surface as a historical blunder by Matthew proves to be false since Matthew is still faithful to his most likely source: the LXX of 1 Chronicles.

Matthew 1:13–16 departs from the 1 Chronicles source as none of the remaining names match. For Matthew, the son of Zerubbabel is Abiud whereas in 1 Chronicles 3:19–21, the genealogical line passes from Zerubbabel to Hananiah. While it is tempting for modern scholars to dismiss the remainder of Matthew’s genealogical list as fictional, why would Matthew not continue at least until the end of the Chronicler’s list in 1 Chronicles 3 instead of changing at this point if he wanted to create a genealogy?¹⁶ Rather, it would seem that Matthew begins to follow another source here but the question still remains as to why the source Matthew begins to use at this point does not at least follow the Chronicler until the end of his list. As Carson notes, Josephus’ *Life* 6.1 indicates that there were public registers from which genealogies such as the one Matthew compiled could have derived.¹⁷

Comparison with Luke’s Genealogy of Jesus

While Matthew’s list of names compares closely with those of 1 Chronicles 3 until Zerubbabel, a comparison with Luke’s genealogical list is important in order to

¹⁴Brown, *Birth*, 61.

¹⁵Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.3.10.

¹⁶Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 181, n. 65.

¹⁷D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8: *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelain; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 61–63.

determine whether there are any commonalities or discrepancies. As noted in Chapter 2 of the present work, Luke's genealogical list begins with Jesus and works backward to Adam while Matthew's list begins with Abraham and works forward to Jesus. From Abraham to Hezron, the names appear exactly the same in spelling. The son of Hezron is Ἀράμ in Matthew but Ἀρνὶ in Luke. Luke also adds Ἄδμιν as the son of Ἀρνὶ before Matthew and Luke again unite in Ἀμιναδάβ.

Brown points out that Hezron is connected in Gen 46:12 with the period of Joseph going down to Egypt while Aram's son, Amminadab, is connected in Num 1:7 with Moses and the wilderness wanderings following the Exodus. Thus, Matthew appoints one name, Aram, and two generations to cover what was traditionally thought to have lasted 400 years.¹⁸ On the other hand, Luke's inclusion of Ἄδμιν and Ἀρνὶ is mysterious as these names are otherwise unknown and there is uncertainty among the various manuscripts as to the appropriate names at this juncture.¹⁹ Although the names here diverge, Matthew is still faithfully following his source in the LXX of 1 Chronicles while Luke's source remains a mystery.

The next point of interest is Matthew's spelling of the son of Nahshon (Σαλμών) compared to Luke's spelling (Σαλᾶ). Again, Matthew is following the spelling of the LXX of 1 Chronicles. Luke's spelling contains variations among the manuscripts as seen in the UBS⁴, including many reliable manuscripts which offer the same spelling as that of

¹⁸Brown, *Birth*, 60.

¹⁹See the numerous possibilities in the text-critical apparatus of the UBS 4th ed. of the Greek New Testament for Luke 3:33.

Matthew. Granted, some of this could have been a result of an attempt to harmonize the two accounts. Variation of the spelling of this name is evident in the brief genealogical list in Ruth 4:20 which has it as Σαλμάν and it does not appear that the difference between Matthew's presentation and Luke's presentation causes any concern. Nor does the variation on Matthew's Βόεξ compared with Luke's Βόος.

Other than variation on spelling, Matthew's unique inclusion of the women in his genealogical list, and the names given between Hezron and Amminadab, the two genealogical lists appear to be following the same line from Abraham through David. At the point of David's offspring, the two lists depart drastically, only to briefly reunite at Salathiel and Zerubbabel, before parting ways again until they reach Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.²⁰

One of the earliest attempts to reconcile the two genealogical lists of Matthew and Luke is from Julius Africanus (ca. A.D. 200). Africanus believed that Matthew traced Jesus' ancestry through the pedigree of Jacob the father of Joseph from David through Solomon whereas Luke traced that of Heli from Nathan the son of David. He argues that the priestly tribe of Levi allied with the kingly tribe of Judah because of Aaron marrying Elizabeth and Eleazar marrying the daughter of Phatiel (Exod 6:23–25). Africanus indicates that one Gospel writer traced Jesus' ancestry through his natural father

²⁰Jeremias observes that Matthew lists twelve names from Zerubbabel to Jesus, giving an average of fifty years for each generation while Luke lists eighteen names for the same period, giving an average of thirty-three years for each generation, a number comparable to the number Josephus gives of the high priests during the first and second temple periods (*Ant.* 20.222). Matthew makes obvious omissions probably to maintain the 3 x 14 structure. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. by F. H. and C. H. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 294 n. 86.

(Matthew) while the other through his legal father (Luke). He explains that Matthan, father of Jacob, and Melchi,²¹ father of Heli, were married to the same woman (Estha). Apparently, Matthan died after begetting Jacob and Melchi took the widow as his wife and begat Heli. Matthan is a descendant of Solomon while Melchi is a descendant of Nathan, “Thus, then, we shall find Jacob and Heli uterine brothers, though of different families” (*Epistle to Aristides* III).²² Aquinas also follows Africanus and attributes the name, Jesca, to the common wife of Matthan and Melchi.²³

Augustine follows the same line of reasoning as Africanus, indicating that Matthew traced the natural father of Joseph (Jacob) while Luke traced the adoptive father of Joseph (Heli) since Matthew repeats “...begat...” all the way down to Joseph. Even if Luke had used the same term, it would not necessarily mean a natural begetting since the same is used of spiritual begetting but Luke only mentions “Joseph, the son of Heli,” making it a clear distinction.²⁴

Erasmus explains that the genealogical list given by Matthew is Joseph’s, however, it would also be Mary’s since they would have been of the same tribe and

²¹It should be noted that here Africanus (and later Aquinas) appear to have either followed a manuscript which has some names missing (such as the Latin witness to Irenaeus or the Latin *c* manuscript) or they overlooked and omitted Matthan and Levi (Luke 3:24) as Melchi is the third name away from Heli.

²²Africanus, *The Epistle to Aristides* 1–3 (ANF 6:125–6).

²³Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers I, St. Matthew*, ed. and trans. by John Henry Newman (Southampton: Saint Austin, 1997), 33.

²⁴Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 2.3.5–7 (NPNF 6:103–6). Cf. *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 1.27–29 (NPNF 6:255–6).

family (David) in accordance with the law (Gen 24:2–4; 28:1–2).²⁵ On the other hand, this would not explain the radical differences between the list in Matthew and the list in Luke.

Calvin posits that Matthew traces the legal succession of Jesus' kingship through Solomon while Luke traces the natural lineage of Jesus from Nathan. He indicates that the legal kingship came from Solomon because of the promise in 2 Sam 7:13 to establish the throne of his kingdom forever: "Though he was not naturally descended from Solomon, yet he was reckoned his son by legal succession, because he was descended from kings." He explains that at the death of Ahaziah, the lineal descent from Solomon was closed. Ahaziah's mother, Athaliah (2 Kings 11), reigned in his place after his death. Joash, who would be crowned king by Jehoiada the priest, is called the son of Ahaziah in 2 Chr 22:11 because he was the nearest relative. Calvin does not believe that Joash was actually the grandson of Athaliah (and the son of Ahaziah), thus proving to be from a different line.²⁶

In one of the first concerted efforts to destroy the credibility of the Gospels, Strauss insists that the discrepancies include the fact that forty-one names appear between David and Jesus in Luke while only twenty-six appear in Matthew. He denies the Augustinian explanation of Joseph being the natural son of Jacob (Matthew) but the adopted son of Heli (Luke) since the purpose of the Levirate marriage was to maintain the name and race of a deceased brother and inscribe the firstborn son of the marriage on

²⁵*Collected Works of Erasmus 45, Paraphrase on Matthew*, ed. by Robert D. Sider, trans. and ann. by Dean Simpson (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974), 39.

²⁶Calvin, *Matthew*, 85–87.

that of his legal father rather than natural father. Even the idea of Heli as the natural father and Jacob as the legal father is untenable because of the differing names in their lineage before them.

Strauss also finds difficulty in believing that Luke's genealogy shows Mary's lineage since only by exception does a man take the name of his maternal ancestors (Ezra 2:61; Num 32:41 compared with 1 Chr 2:21f). Furthermore, the previous thirty-four members, well known from the OT, give the genitive a precise relationship of a son rather than son-in-law. Salathiel and Zerubbabel are often explained as different people in the two genealogies but they appear in the twenty-first and twenty-second generations from David in Luke while Matthew gives them in the nineteenth and twentieth so it is highly unlikely that they are different people. Additionally, no other part of the NT claims Davidic descent of Mary (Luke 1:27; 2:4). Strauss's conclusion regarding the two genealogies is that they are not historical: "a conviction...that Jesus, either in his own person or through his disciples, acting upon minds strongly imbued with Jewish notions and expectations, left among his followers so firm a conviction of his Messiahship, that they did not hesitate to attribute to him the prophetic characteristic of Davidical descent, and more than one pen was put in action, in order, by means of a genealogy which should authenticate that descent, to justify his recognition as the Messiah."²⁷

Plummer also does not believe that the genealogy in Luke is of Mary since "[n]either Jew nor Gentile would derive the birthright of Jesus from His mother." There

²⁷David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 2d ed., ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by George Eliot, Lives of Jesus Series, ed. by Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 113–8.

seems to be no question, however, that Jesus descended from David and it is quite possible that Mary did also (Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Trypho* 43, 45, 100; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.5; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 9; *Ascension of Isaiah* 10.2; *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* 1.1).²⁸

Machen appears to give a clearer explanation of Calvin's idea of separate lines of legal succession and physical succession as his own view. He indicates that "when a kingly line becomes extinct, the living member of a collateral line inherits the throne. So it may well have been in the present case." This could have happened several times throughout the lineage, thus indicating why the two lists converge at Salathiel and Zerubbabel but then depart again. This view is based on the assumption that Matthan of Matt. 1:15 is not the same person as Matthat of Luke 3:24. Machen explains the difficulties of relying upon Levirate marriage too heavily to explain Matthat and Matthan as the same person since it may "explain the divergence as to the father of Joseph (Heli in one genealogy, Jacob in the other), but not to explain the divergence as to the father of Matthat (Matthan)."²⁹ Carson follows Machen's solution of the two lines of Jesus provided by Matthew and Luke in respect to Matthan and Matthat and Jacob and Heli. The explanation of Matthew's genealogical list differing from Luke's is most likely that Matthew's was a legal descent while the other traces biological descent. "These genealogies, like much of the content of the Gospels, are to be taken as interpreted

²⁸Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 1–2.

²⁹J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1930, 1958), 203–9.

history—i.e., factual and not fictional data, conceived and set forth with theological goals, these in turn informed by the eschatological fullness now inescapably present to these writers.”³⁰

Freed concludes that despite many different attempts to explain why there are different names for Jesus’ grandfather (Matt=Jacob; Luke=Heli), the names “were hardly meant to be taken historically in the time of Matthew and Luke and even less so in our own.” Instead, they were manipulated for specific purposes unknown to us.³¹

There are many difficulties in reconciling the lists given by the two Gospel writers, but there is no reason to resort to either Strauss’s insistence upon a fabrication of history by the Gospel writers in order to present Jesus as the Davidic Messiah or to Freed’s conclusion that the names were not meant to be taken historically at all.

Matthan and Matthat were probably two different people since the genealogical lists differ so greatly from David to that point. Jacob and Heli would need to be half-brothers, having the same mother but different fathers (Matthan—Jacob; Matthat—Heli) in order to explain the different fathers presented in the Gospel genealogies. Joseph is probably the natural son of Heli but when Heli died, Jacob married his wife (the mother of Joseph) and adopted Joseph as his own (Deut 25:5–10). Thus, Africanus’ basic premise is possible (apart from his mistaking Melchi for Matthat) with the added wrinkle of Joseph being the natural son of Heli but the adopted son of Jacob. On the other hand, however, where does the explanation of levirate marriage end? In other words, would we

³⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 8–9, 65.

³¹Edwin D. Freed, *The Stories of Jesus’ Birth: A Critical Introduction* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 22.

also assume that Matthan and Matthat were brothers, and if so, why do they not have the same father? Brown summarizes some of the basic arguments against this solution in his first appendix titled, “Levirate Marriage.”³²

Is it possible that any of these levirate marriages involving Jacob and Heli or Matthan and Matthat could be explained by a remarriage to someone other than a direct brother or half-brother? This could explain the great divergence of names throughout the genealogical lists. This was surely the case in Num 27:1–11 where the daughters of Zelophehad pleaded with Moses to be able to be given an inheritance among their father’s brothers. Furthermore, the account of Ruth marrying Boaz illustrates that the marriage could involve someone other than a brother of the deceased since Boaz speaks of a relative closer than he (Ruth 3:12; 4:8–13).

More likely is the explanation that Matthew follows the genealogy of Joseph while Luke follows the genealogy of Mary. This explains the vast differences in the genealogical lists throughout, both converging only at Salathiel and Zerubbabel³³ between David and Joseph. Matthew’s birth narrative tends to focus on Joseph while Luke’s narrative focuses on Mary, thus giving more credence to this possibility. Brown does

³²Brown, *Birth*, 503–4.

³³There is difficulty in establishing the true line from Zerubbabel since Matthew lists Abiud as the son, 1 Chronicles lists Hananiah (1 Chr 3:19), and Luke lists Rhesa. Matthew obviously follows a different source at this point in the genealogy as expressed above while many attempts have been made to explain Luke’s list here. One such explanation is given by Jeremias who indicates that Rhesa is actually the Aramaic word for chief or prince and is an attribute of Zerubbabel while Joanan (Luke 3:27) is the same person as Hananiah (1 Chr 3:19), “the son of Zerubbabel the prince.” See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. by F. H. and C. H. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 296.

pose a difficult problem, however: “a genealogy traced through the mother is not normal in Judaism, and Luke makes it clear that he is tracing Jesus’ descent *through Joseph*.”³⁴

Nolland, following the lead of Holzmeister³⁵ and Nolle,³⁶ provides a solution in that Mary was an only child, whose father adopted Joseph as his own upon the marriage of his daughter to him. Furthermore, the passage of Num 27:1–11 already mentioned also gives credence to this solution since it clearly states that if a man dies and has no son, his inheritance is to pass to his daughter. Nolland lists several other instances (Num 32:41; 1 Chr 2:21–22; Ezra 2:61; Neh 7:63), most notably 1 Chr 2:34–35.³⁷ The Chronicler lists the genealogy of Jerahmeel where Sheshan is listed in vv. 34 and 35 as having no sons. He gave his daughter to an Egyptian servant named Jarha who bore him a son named Attai. The genealogy continues with Attai’s son.

Thus, this proves that a genealogy could follow through a mother because of having no male siblings from which to trace the lineage. It would have settled the issue had Luke, like the example set in 1 Chronicles 2, included a comment about Heli having no sons but only Mary as a daughter. If the lineage of Jesus follows Joseph as his earthly father by birth (Matthew) and follows the lineage of Mary by way of Heli adopting Joseph as his own son (Luke), then Jesus’ genealogy can be traced back to David through

³⁴Ibid., 89; Cf. Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 113–8.

³⁵U. Holzmeister, “Ein Erklärungsversuch der Lk-Genealogie,” *ZKT* 47 (1923): 184–218.

³⁶L. Nolle, “Old Testament Laws of Inheritance and St. Luke’s Genealogy of Christ,” *Scr* 2 (1947): 38–42.

³⁷John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20* (WBC 35a; Dallas: Word, 1989), 169–70.

Solomon (Matthew) and through Nathan (Luke).³⁸ While there is not enough historical evidence to prove the validity of both genealogies, there are sufficient explanations to account for the differences so that there is no reason to reject the genealogical list in Matthew as fictional or irreconcilable.

The Virgin Birth (Matt 1:18–25)

The actual birth story of Jesus begins in Matt 1:18. While the magnitude of the prophecy fulfillment quotations and the theological ramifications of the naming of Jesus have already been discussed in the literary and theological analyses, it is important to examine the historical plausibility of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Featuring most prominently in this segment of the account is the miraculous virgin birth.

The Matthean account in v. 18 begins after Mary and Joseph have been betrothed (μνηστευθείσης). The normal Jewish marriage began with courtship, followed by the drawing up of the marriage contract, then betrothal, and finally the marriage itself which usually took place one year after betrothal. The betrothal stage was considered the time when the woman is called “wife” and can become a widow, divorced, or could be punished with death for an act of adultery (note that Joseph is referred to as ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς in v. 19). The marriage itself is when the woman passed from the support of her father to that of her husband’s (Mishna *Kethuboth* 4:5).³⁹ From Matthew’s account, it is clear that

³⁸Also worth pointing out is the argument by Irenaeus that if Jesus had been the natural son of Joseph, he could not be king or heir, according to Jeremiah (Jer 22:24–28; 36:30–31), since Jeconiah and all of his offspring were disinherited from the kingdom. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.9–10 (ANF 1:453–4). On the other hand, argument can be made that the line was restored in Zerubbabel (Hag 2:20–23) whom appears in both Gospel genealogical lists.

³⁹Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 367–8

Mary and Joseph were in the betrothal stage, which also meant that this was before Joseph took Mary to live with him. The marriage ceremony itself would be where this would take place (Matt 25:1–13). Furthermore, the text describes the conception as taking place *πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοῦς*. While this could mean either living together or coming together in sexual intercourse,⁴⁰ it probably describes both in this case since they are in the betrothal stage where they would live apart and because the account describes Mary as being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18, 20), the virgin prophecy of Isa 7:14 is applied to her in vv. 22–23, and Joseph’s initial reaction to her pregnancy is to divorce her quietly (v. 19).

This initial reaction by Joseph is understandable, believing that his betrothed had been unfaithful to him and following Jewish law that infidelity should result in divorce. He is described as being a *δίκαιος* man but at the same time not desiring to make a public spectacle of Mary (*δειγματίσαι*) (cf. Col 2:15). These two descriptions of Joseph are used as present participles, most likely indicating cause (“because...”).⁴¹ Thus, because Joseph was a righteous man and because he did not desire to make Mary a public spectacle, he decided to divorce her quietly. The law indicates that infidelity within betrothal or marriage can result in the death of the woman by public stoning (Deut 22:20–25). Therefore, Joseph was righteous in that he was to put her away but he was also merciful by not wanting to make a public scene which would most likely lead to Mary’s death.

⁴⁰Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 199.

⁴¹Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 631.

While Joseph was considering his options, an angel appears to him, indicating that he should not be afraid to take Mary's hand in marriage because the conception is of the Holy Spirit and that he should name the child "Jesus." Matthew makes it clear that this is a fulfillment of the Isa 7:14 prophecy. The account of Jesus' birth ends with Joseph's obedience to the angel and v. 25 describes Joseph as οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτήν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν. Louw and Nida explain γινώσκω as a figurative expression of "to know" which can mean "to have sexual intercourse with" (Luke 1:34). This also is the case with συνέρχομαι ("to come together") as in Matt 1:18. Admittedly, the two expressions can simply point to marriage⁴² but the context of both the Lukan and Matthean passages clearly points to the idea of sexual relations. As has already been established in previous chapters of the present work, the text is understood as meaning that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born, clearly pointing to the supernatural.

Comparison with Luke's Account

The virgin birth is one of the most controversial aspects of the birth narrative because of this miraculous nature. Yet, both Gospel birth narratives affirm the virgin birth of Jesus. While many aspects of Matthew's account in 1:18–25 have already been discussed in previous chapters, it is helpful to compare it with Luke's account before going into more discussion of its supernatural element.

Luke's account begins with the story of the angel appearing to Zecharias, promising that his wife, Elizabeth, will bear a son even in their old age. While there is no virgin birth in this segment, the miraculous is already in place because of the age of

⁴²J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, "γινώσκω," L&N 23.61.

Zecharias and Elizabeth along with the appearance of the angel. This story, included in Luke 1:5–25 but not appearing in Matthew’s Gospel, sets the stage for Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus.

The birth announcement of Luke 1:26–38 compares with that of Matt 1:18–25. Several elements in this passage agree with that of Matthew’s account: 1) angel as messenger; 2) reaction of fear; 3) Mary as virgin; 4) Mary and Joseph betrothed; 5) the names of Jesus’ parents; 6) conception by Holy Spirit; 7) the name “Jesus.” On the other hand, there are several differences: 1) to whom the announcement is made; 2) named angel; 3) place of announcement; 4) nature of angelic appearance 5) lack of prophecy fulfillment quotation; 6) link to Elizabeth’s pregnancy; 7) Joseph’s dilemma over infidelity.

First, the angel is sent as a messenger in both accounts. This is in line with the rest of Scripture (Gen 16:11; 31:11–13; Judg 13:3–5; Zech 2:3–5; Dan 8:16, 17; 9:21–23; 10:10–11; Acts 8:26; 10:3–6; 27:23–24; Rev 1:1–2). It also fulfills the literal meaning of “angel” which is ἄγγελος in Greek and מַלְאָכִים in Hebrew, meaning “messenger.” The angel also serves the same function later in Luke’s birth narrative (Luke 2:9–14).

While the angel serves the same function in both birth narratives, the announcement is made to Mary in Luke’s account while it is made to Joseph in Matthew’s account. This also reflects the differing foci of the two accounts as Luke’s account appears to focus on Mary while Matthew’s account appears to focus on Joseph, giving details that only she and he would know respectively. Thus, the two accounts are focusing on two different characters and are not in contradiction to one another. The angel could have appeared to both Mary and Joseph. The reactions to the angelic

appearances are very similar. Luke's account describes Mary as "troubled" (διεταράχθη) in 1:29, the same reaction Zecharias has in 1:12. While Matthew's account does not describe Joseph's emotions, the angel's first words clue the reader that he must have also been deeply troubled. The words of comfort from the angel appear in the message to Mary and Joseph: "Do not fear." While the message to Joseph concerned his fear of taking Mary as his wife, it should also be understood as an attitude of fear in general (although it should also be noted that Joseph encountered the angel in a dream throughout Matthew's narrative) since this is the same reaction by those who encounter angels throughout Scripture (i.e. Dan 8:17; 10:10–13). The same reaction is displayed by the shepherds in Luke 2.

The angel is named "Gabriel" in Luke's account while it is simply referred to as "an angel of the Lord" in Matthew's account. Gabriel appears as the messenger in Daniel 8 and 9 while the "angel of the Lord" appears throughout the OT and NT. While not essential to the purpose of this paper, the identity of the "angel of the Lord" has been debated for centuries, often being explained as a theophany or Christophany.⁴³ It is important to note that the "angel of the Lord" is described as the one who announces the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in Luke 2:9–14. Whether or not Gabriel is the same as the angel of the Lord is uncertain and not essential.

In Luke's account, the angel appears to Mary in Nazareth of Galilee (1:26) while the location is not named in Matthew's account where the angel appears to Joseph (1:18–

⁴³For more information, see "ἄγγελος" in *TWNT 1 on CD-ROM*, ed. by G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich (Logos Library System Version 2.0c. 1995, 1996; Print ed.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, c. 1976), n.p.

25). Some scholars indicate that the events of the birth narrative in Matthew take place in Bethlehem since that is where the birth is mentioned in 2:1, however, it is unclear. See “The Birth at Bethlehem” below for more discussion on this.

The nature of the angelic announcement differs between the accounts in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, it is clear that the angel appears to Joseph in a dream as he does throughout Matthew 1–2 to Joseph and to the magi. In Luke 1–2, the angel is simply described as appearing to Zechariah, Mary, and to the angels but there is no mention of a dream. The message to Mary is to let her know that she will conceive through the Holy Spirit and give birth to Jesus while the message to Joseph is that he is not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, despite the unusual circumstances. The angelic instruction to Mary (Luke) and to Joseph (Matthew) includes the directive to name the child “Jesus.” Note also that both accounts agree on the names of Jesus’ earthly parents: *Μαριάμ* and *Ἰωσήφ*.

The Lukan account includes the link to the pregnancy of Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, introducing John the Baptist early in his account as the one who will pave the way for Jesus the Messiah (1:5–25, 39–45, 57–80). Matthew does not mention any other birth in his first two chapters and does not mention John the Baptist until Chapter 3. The Matthean account only gives fulfillment quotations from the OT, pointing to the Messianic prophecies. It is also the only one that points out Joseph’s dilemma over the perceived infidelity of Mary. These differences, however, can be justified again by the differing foci in each Gospel account. Luke’s account focuses on Mary (including Mary’s song in 1:46–56) while Matthew’s account focuses on Joseph. It is also Matthew’s purpose to present Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (Matt 1:1) while Luke’s Gospel points to

an “orderly account” of Jesus’ words and deeds for a Gentile audience (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–3).⁴⁴

Finally, the insistence of a virgin birth is attested in both Gospel accounts. They agree that the couple is in the betrothal stage. Matthew’s account has *μνηστευθείσης τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας τῷ Ἰωσήφ* (1:18) while Luke’s account has *παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ* (1:27). As explained above, the man and woman were referred to as husband and wife. Similarly, both accounts testify to Mary as a virgin and the conception by the Holy Spirit:

πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτούς εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου (Matt 1:18)

τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου (Matt 1:20)

Ἴδου ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν (Matt 1:23; Isa 7:14)

καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτήν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν (Matt 1:25)

παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ ἐξ οἴκου Δαυὶδ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαρίας (Luke 1:27)

Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; (Luke 1:34)

Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ (Luke 1:25)

The seven similarities and seven differences between the two Gospel accounts of the virgin birth shown above indicate that there are many details which are accounted for in both narratives. They also point to differences which should not be considered contradictions but the result of differing foci of the two Gospel writers. Matthew’s account clearly focuses on Joseph as the main character, giving many more details about

⁴⁴See Chapter 2 of the present work for more details on the comparison and contrast of the purposes of the two Gospels.

him, his encounters, and his fears. Luke's account focuses on Mary as the main character, giving many more details about her, her encounters, fears, and song of exultation. From this comparison, the historicity of the Matthean birth narrative cannot be ruled out as contradictory. The miraculous and supernatural elements of the narrative are what make many scholars skeptical.

Natural vs. Supernatural Presuppositions

No one approaches the text without some sort of presupposition. One's worldview impacts their ability to look at it with pure objectivity. Some approach the birth narratives with the presupposition that they are divinely inspired and inerrant (as the present work admittedly does) while others approach them with intense skepticism, quickly dismissing the possibility of historicity in them. One of the most prominent dividing lines of presupposition in approaching the birth narratives is that of natural vs. supernatural presuppositions. If one believes that there is nothing outside the natural world, one will be closed off to the birth narratives almost entirely. There are numerous supernatural elements throughout Matthew 1–2 such as angelic appearances, virgin birth, conception by the Holy Spirit, a moving star, and divine warnings in dreams. While one's presupposition should not determine meaning, it should be acknowledged and used to make sense of the text.⁴⁵

Machen recognized the supernatural as the dividing line when he attempted to approach the birth narratives from a scientific-historical understanding in the early

⁴⁵For an excellent discussion of presuppositions and their impact in hermeneutics, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 29, 466, 516–21.

twentieth century where the historical-critical method was blossoming: “It has seemed quite clear to most of those who deny the entrance of the supernatural in connection with the birth and infancy of our Lord that the supernatural elements are quite central in the narratives as we now have them, and that it is useless to seek for non-miraculous events as forming the basis upon which a false supernaturalistic construction was built up.”⁴⁶

Meier reminds us that when dealing with miracles, historical-critical analysis is not enough: “One’s acceptance or rejection of the doctrine [of the virgin birth] will be largely influenced by one’s own philosophical and theological presuppositions, as well as the weight one gives Church teaching.”⁴⁷

Given this understanding, the historical plausibility of the angelic appearances in Matt 1:18–25 is impossible to prove or disprove. What is known is that both Gospel accounts include angelic messengers and that this is not the first time in Scripture nor the last time in Scripture that angels make such appearances (see earlier discussion on angels as messengers). Angelic appearances are also attested in extra-biblical accounts such as the OT and NT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. A complete discussion of angels is beyond the scope of this paper so the focus in this section will be on the virgin birth.

Multiple Attestation?

With the distance of over two thousand years, it is difficult to establish firm historical or scientific evidence for a miracle such as the virgin birth, however, the criterion of multiple attestation can be used to measure its plausibility. As has already

⁴⁶Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 213.

⁴⁷Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 222.

been discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work, Matthew’s narrative must have come ultimately from Joseph since many of the details would only be known to Joseph (his dreams, thoughts, etc.). Luke’s narrative, in the same way, must have ultimately come from Mary.⁴⁸ Most likely, these narratives came to Matthew and Luke through oral traditions passed from their original sources. Therefore, the two Gospel accounts are multiple attestations to a single event although the focus is obviously on two very different aspects of the story. The similarities and differences between the two accounts of the virgin birth is described above, indicating that there are many similar details while the differing elements can be explained apart from contradiction.⁴⁹

One of these common elements is the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary. Is there attestation of a virgin birth anywhere else in the New Testament? Brown critiques the various attempts to use other NT passages in support of virgin birth (Mark 6:3; John 1:13; 8:41; Rom 1:1; Gal 4:4), pointing out the weaknesses in these attempts.⁵⁰ The Mark 6:3 and John 8:41 accounts are more difficult to dismiss than the others. Brown and Meier⁵¹ point out that the parallel passages to Mark 6:3 in the other Gospels acknowledge Jesus as the son “son of the carpenter” (Matt 13:55) and “the son of Joseph” (Luke 4:22; John

⁴⁸See G. H. Box, *The Virgin Birth of Jesus: A Critical Examination of the Gospel Narratives of the Nativity, and Other New Testament and Early Christian Evidence, and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1916), 178–9; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; London: Robert Scott Roxburghe House, 1909), 3–4.

⁴⁹Plummer, *Matthew*, 3–4.

⁵⁰Brown, *Birth*, 519–21.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 537–42; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 222–9.

6:42). More likely is the explanation by Brown that Jesus' opponents were chastising Jesus as someone they knew, using "son of Mary" because Joseph was probably already dead at this time. He does not make appearances in the Gospel accounts after the start of Jesus' ministry (Mark 3:30–35). The passage in John 8:41 is more difficult to dismiss. While Meier sees it as a theological retrojection to view this as a question of Jesus' physical illegitimacy, Brown insists that it is impossible to know for sure. Meier does make a good point that Jesus' opponents attack him with an accusation that he is a Samaritan (v. 48), obviously not a real belief in the literal, physical sense. On the other hand, however, it is unclear as to whether they were suggesting a spiritual sense in their words in v. 41: "we were not born of sexual immorality." There is suggestion here that the Jews were referring to Jesus as having been born of sexual immorality.⁵²

Whether these opponents of Jesus were actually referring to their uncertainty of Jesus' father or whether they were simply using an *ad hominem* argument to insult Jesus is unclear. What is clear is that the legitimacy of Jesus' birth was brought into question very early in Christian history. The earliest reference to the virgin birth outside the NT is from Ignatius (*To the Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2; *To the Ephesians* 18.2), writing very early in the Second Century. Shortly thereafter, numerous church fathers point to a virgin birth: Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.16.2 and 3.19), Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1.33; *Dialogue with Trypho* 43), Tertullian (*On the Flesh of Christ* 20; *On Prescription Against Heretics* 13;

⁵²See also Vincent Taylor, *The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), 3–20; Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 158–62; James P. Sweeney, "Modern and Ancient Controversies Over the Virgin Birth of Jesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (Apr–Jun 2003): 142–153.

Against Marcion 3–4), and Origen (*Against Celsus* 28–35).⁵³ These examples, dating to what could be as early as A.D. 107,⁵⁴ indicate that not only was there orthodoxy established for the virgin birth but there were also sources for heterodoxy this early.⁵⁵

The accounts in Matthew and Luke of the virgin birth differ radically from the embellished accounts in the *Protevangelium of James*, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*. Quarles explains the difference in terms of historicity: "If they were unbound by the historical facts surrounding Jesus' birth, then one would expect the Evangelists to include more convincing evidences of the virginal conception...The limited apologetic element in the canonical birth narratives is best explained as being confined by historical restraints."⁵⁶

Sweet responds keenly to those who believe that the disciples and other Jews created the birth accounts, including the concept of the virgin birth. He indicates that Jewish Messianists would have been more likely to invent something of a miraculous birth rather than complicating it with a virgin birth. The events surrounding the birth are also difficult to see as necessary if it were an invention. The weakness, poverty, and

⁵³For a detailed description of these arguments, see Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 28–63; Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 184–8; Sweeny, "Modern and Ancient Controversies," 153–8.

⁵⁴Box points out that the Roman Creed has Christ as "born of the Holy Ghost from the Virgin Mary." Some place this creed as early as A.D. 100 and Ignatius wrote about the Virgin Birth before his death somewhere around A.D. 107–116 in *To the Ephesians* 18.19. See Box, *Virgin Birth*, 151; Cf. *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study*, ed. by Darell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 27–29, 40–56.

⁵⁵See Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 172–6 for possible early Jewish accusations of illegitimacy.

⁵⁶Charles L. Quarles, "An Analysis of Midrash Criticism as Applied to the Synoptic Birth Narratives" (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 164.

obscurity of Mary and Joseph also do not point to fiction. In response to questioning why the later New Testament writers do not comment on Jesus' birth, Sweet points out that the events of His birth were not in as much doctrinal controversy as the significance and historicity of the resurrection. He points out that until after the resurrection, the disciples could never have reached the point of "absolute conviction" from which the Infancy could have come. Was there time by Pentecost for the disciples to not only deal with the resurrection (though not the theological implications of this as Paul and John did) but also the birth of Jesus and understand its implications?⁵⁷

While there is no solid historical or scientific evidence for the virgin birth of Jesus, there is double attestation with the independent sources of Matthew and Luke. Concerning the lack of other NT attestations, Sweet explains that the details of Jesus' birth are left out of Mark's Gospel because he was focused on the career of Jesus based on the sermons of Peter. John's concern was that the eternal Christ was embodied in the historic Jesus. The controversy John was interested in was the Incarnation itself rather than the virgin birth. There is nothing in Paul's statements concerning Jesus being of the seed of David that goes against a virgin birth. Paul's emphasis was more on the eternal Christ "but he has by no means forgotten the historical Jesus."⁵⁸

There is, however, possible charges of illegitimacy within the Gospel accounts (Mark 6:3; John 8:41). Finally, there is historical evidence of early charges of illegitimacy in the patristic records of the early Second Century. These pieces of

⁵⁷Louis Matthews Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ According to the Gospel Narratives* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1907), 110–6.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 227–36.

evidence, though small, do point to a mystery surrounding Jesus' fatherhood. Whether or not one chooses to answer this question with the virgin birth is up to the reader and his or her presuppositions.

“In Bethlehem of Judea in the Days of Herod the King”

Birth at Bethlehem

“Was Jesus born in Bethlehem, the city of David? The answer is a very simple no. There is almost no possibility that this claim is a fact of history.” Such is the view of former bishop James Shelby Spong. “If history is our prime agenda, we ought to sing at Christmas ‘O Little Town of Nazareth,’ for that is overwhelmingly the probable place in which the one known as Jesus of Nazareth was born.”⁵⁹ Meier indicates that the birth narratives “may indicate that Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem is to be taken not as a historical fact but as a *theologoumenon*, i.e., as a theological affirmation (e.g., Jesus is the true Son of David, the prophesied royal Messiah) put into the form of an apparently historical narrative.”⁶⁰

Is there need for such intense skepticism? Jesus is referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth” throughout the Gospels. Outside of the birth narratives, there is no emphasis on Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus. Mark 6:1 and its parallel in Matt 13:54, 57 refer to Jesus returning to his hometown, which is obviously in Galilee. The parallel in Luke

⁵⁹John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the NonReligious* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 15, 21.

⁶⁰Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 216; Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series, ed. by Leander E. Keck, trans. by S. Maclean Gilmour (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 50; David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, 2d ed., ed. by Peter C.

4:16 more narrowly defines this location as Nazareth, the town in which Jesus ἦν τεθραμμένος.⁶¹ The only passage that may have some indication of Bethlehem is John 7:41–42.

The crowd is divided over what they believe about Jesus. Some believed him to be the Messiah but others retorted that the Christ would not be from Galilee but from Bethlehem. The question is whether John’s Gospel indicates that he really was born in Galilee rather than Bethlehem or whether he was raised in Nazareth but was born in Bethlehem. The latter choice would involve irony on the part of the story as the crowd knows that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem but does not realize that this is where Jesus was born, thus posing another proof that he is who he says he is...the Messiah. John’s Gospel has already pointed to “Jesus of Nazareth” from the lips of Philip and Nathaniel, discussing whether anything good could come from Nazareth (John 1:45–46). Earlier in John 7, some in the crowd wonder at Jesus being the Christ, claiming to know where he is from but arguing that no one will know where the Christ will be from (John 7:26–27). Later in John 7:52, the Pharisees claim that no prophet has ever arisen from Galilee. While each of these passages make it seem that Jesus was known as being from Galilee, in John 9:29, it appears that the Pharisees do not know where he is from. As with

Hodgson, trans. by George Eliot, *Lives of Jesus Series*, ed. by Leander E. Keck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 184–90.

⁶¹Different forms of this word, τρέφω, appear throughout the Gospels and Acts, always referring to feeding (Matt 6:26; 25:37; Luke 12:24; Acts 12:20), nourishment (James 5:5; Rev 12:6, 14), or nursing (Luke 23:29). Louw and Nida indicate that the word is predominantly understood as “raising a child to maturity.” They present passages such as Eph 6:4; Acts 7:21; 1 Tim 5:10 as firm evidence of this understanding. See Louw and Nida, “τρέφω; ἐκτρέφω; ἀνατρέφω; τεκνοτροφέω” L&N 35.51. In the context in Luke 4:16, it could either point to the birthplace of Jesus or the place where he was nourished (or brought up). If Luke wanted to speak of his birthplace, he could have used some form of τίκτω (Matt 1:25; Luke 1:57; 2:6, 7) or γένεσις (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:14).

Matt 2:5–6, John 7:42 gives the strong impression that there were strong beliefs that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.⁶² The fact also remains that there is no other explicit mention of the birthplace of Jesus other than Bethlehem (Matthew 2; Luke 2).

Outside the NT, the birthplace of Bethlehem appears as early as the Second Century with the church fathers agreeing throughout early church history. Justin Martyr points to Bethlehem as a village “thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem” where Jesus was born.⁶³ Tertullian affirms that Jesus was “from the native soil of Bethlehem, and from the house of David.”⁶⁴ Origen indicates that there is a cave and manger at Bethlehem where Christ was born that is talked about by many in the surrounding areas, even by enemies of the faith. The belief that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem was already circulating among Jews as is evidenced by the chief priests and scribes informing Herod. Origen also uses John 7:42 to indicate that the Christ was to be born at Bethlehem. He says that in the same way lies were spread regarding the disciples stealing Jesus’ body, the birth at Bethlehem was also discounted (*Against Celsus* 51). Although later apocryphal works, both the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour* agree with Origen on the cave location near Bethlehem. Secular history supports Bethlehem by the fact that the traditional site of Bethlehem’s cave, already recognized in the early Second Century, was made into a temple to Adonis by

⁶²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 317–8, 329–30. Carson explains that there were enough pieces of evidence for the crowds in John 7:27 to know the origins of the Messiah but would not reveal himself “until he appeared to effect Israel’s redemption” (Matt 24:26–27; Mark 13:21–22; Luke 17:23–24).

⁶³Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.34 (ANF 1.174).

⁶⁴Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 10 (ANF 3.164).

Hadrian (A.D. 135) to eliminate veneration given by Jewish Christians.⁶⁵ Luke's description of a manger points to a cave as a probable location since this is where animals were usually kept.⁶⁶

There appears to be enough evidence to sustain the belief that Jesus was born at Bethlehem of Judea. Matthew and Luke are independent attestations of this fact. Although Jesus is referred to as "of Nazareth" throughout the Gospels, there is no direct statement that this is referring to his birthplace but only his hometown where he ἦν τεθραμμένος (Luke 4:16). The account in John 7 has also been demonstrated as a possible support for Bethlehem because of the Johannine irony. Perhaps the strongest evidence is that Matthew and Luke are the only places in the NT to explicitly state a birthplace of Jesus and they agree on Bethlehem of Judea. Early church history as well as secular history also point to Bethlehem.⁶⁷

In the Days of Herod: Chronological Comparison with Luke 2

Just as clearly as Matthew posits that the birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem, he also states that it was during the reign of Herod (Matt 2:1). Most likely, Herod the Great died around 4 B.C. as attested by Josephus (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.6.4; 17.8.1; *J.W.*

⁶⁵R. Riesner, "Archeology and Geography," *DJG*, 34.

⁶⁶James M. Efrid, "Manger," *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. by P. J. Achtemeier, Harper, P. Row, and Society of Biblical Literature (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 600.

⁶⁷Chilton argues that the birth was at Bethlehem of Galilee and that Matthew pointed to Bethlehem of Judea only because of its prophecy fulfillments. This position appears very weak in light of the fact that nowhere, including the NT, church history, and secular history, is Bethlehem of Galilee mentioned as the birthplace. The only other option is Nazareth. Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 7–9.

2.1.8).⁶⁸ While recent scholars such as W. E. Filmer and E. L. Martin have challenged the date of 4 B.C. given by Emil Schürer, Timothy Barnes, Harold Hoehner, and Paul Maier have given adequate defense of the 4 B.C. date. Hoehner summarizes some of the best defenses for this position. Herod the Great was proclaimed king in 40 B.C. and became king *de facto* in 37 B.C. with the capturing of Jerusalem. The 4 B.C. date is upheld as he is described as dying in the thirty-seventh year of his reign and died thirty-four years after he captured Jerusalem (Jos. *Ant.* 17:191), counting inclusively and using a nonaccession-year system. Furthermore, Herod's successors appear to begin their reign in 4 B.C. as found on many ancient coins from the time period. The idea of co-regencies is not likely due to lack of historical evidence and due to Herod's narcissistic and paranoid behavior as ruler.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Martin goes into thorough detail of why the death of Herod is 1 B.C. rather than 4 B.C. in Ernest L. Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World* (Portland: ASK, 1996). Some of his strongest arguments come from the study done at the British Museum of all major MSS of Josephus, finding that before A.D. 1700, twenty-seven out of thirty MSS, indicate that Herod died in the twenty-second year of Tiberius rather than the twentieth as is presented in modern versions of Josephus. All of the MSS before A.D. 1544 (around twenty-five) have the number "twenty-two" as the year (p. 112). See also David W. Beyer, "Josephus Reexamined: Unveiling the Twenty-second Year of Tiberius," 85–96 in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II: Chronological, Nativity, and Religious Studies in Memory of Ray Summers* (ed. by E. Jerry Vardaman; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998). Beyer expounds on the discoveries in the British Museum mentioned by Martin as well as his own discoveries in the Library of Congress which support Martin's findings. Additionally, Beyer summarizes many of the early church fathers' views on the date of the nativity as 2 B.C. This does pose some problems for the 4 B.C. death year for Herod but it appears that the other evidence above may be enough to overcome it until more discoveries are found. Either way, the historicity of the birth of Jesus during the reign of Herod the Great is not in jeopardy.

⁶⁹See Hoehner, "Date of the Death of Herod the Great," 101–11 in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (ed. by Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989). See also Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (rev. and ed. by Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar; Edinburgh: Clark, 1973), 1:326–28 n. 165; Timothy D. Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," *JTS* 19.1 (Apr 1968): 204–9; W. E. Filmer, "The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great,"

Maier points out that since Josephus indicated that Herod died shortly following an eclipse of the moon (there was one capable of being seen from Jerusalem/Jericho on 23 Mar. 5 B.C., 15 Sept. 5 B.C., 13 March 4 B.C.) and not long before a Passover, there must be enough time for the events described by Josephus to take place between Herod's death and the Passover but not too much time. By using inclusive reckoning on the Julian calendar (Josephus often does this) for Herod's reign, 5 B.C. would only mark the thirty-third year since the capture of Jerusalem and the thirty-sixth year following his kingship as given by the Romans. Maier also demonstrates how Archelaus was eager to claim his part in Herod's will and his own succession as king, thus the December 5 B.C. death proposed by Barnes and Bernegger is too much time before the Passover of 11 April 4 B.C. Finally, the eclipse of 15 Sept. 5 B.C. is at a time when the palace in the Jordan valley would have been excessively hot due to its location being over a thousand feet below sea level. Josephus indicates that the eclipse takes place on the night Herod executed those responsible for an assault on Herod's golden eagle which he mounted over the gate of the temple. Herod would not have been there during this hot time in September but would have been there in his winter palace during the eclipse of March 4 B.C. Therefore, his death probably took place in March or April of 4 B.C.⁷⁰

While a complete analysis of Luke's birth narrative is beyond the scope of this

JTS 17.2 (Oct 1966): 283–98; Maier, "The Date of the Nativity," 113–30 in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (ed. by Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989); Ernest. L. Martin, "The Nativity and Herod's Death" 85–92 in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, (ed. by Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

⁷⁰Maier, "The Date of the Nativity," 115–8.

paper, it is important to look at the historicity of Matthew's claim of the birth of Jesus during the reign of Herod in light of Luke's account of a census. Brown indicates that there is no evidence that the Romans collected taxes based on a census in Herod the Great's realm. The census of A.D. 6–7 was conducted after Judea had come under direct Roman rule.⁷¹ Hoehner indicates that there have been examples of Rome superseding power in an autonomous city-state and client kingdom, including Apamea in Syria, Archelaus' kingdom of Cappadocia, the Nabatean kings of Petra, and Herod's domain in Samaria following his death. The latter example was put into effect before it became a Roman province. "Hence, it is seen that the Roman emperor became involved in taking censuses in the vassal kingdoms."⁷²

Furthermore, as Luke has hinted, the census was taken according to Jewish practice, with the requirement for registrants to return to the native city of their fathers. This would cohere more with a practice under a client-king of the Jews such as Herod the Great. Ramsay points out that the historian, Strabo, certainly viewed the kingdom of Judea as part of the Roman Empire with dependent kings. Additionally, he notes that Appian describes client kings as paying tribute under Antony. One would certainly expect the same to be done under Caesar Augustus, who ruled between 42 B.C. and A.D. 14.⁷³

⁷¹Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 551.

⁷²Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ," *BSac* 130.520 (Oct/Dec 1973): 342–3.

⁷³W. M. Ramsay, *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem? A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898), 119–22.

Perhaps one of the strongest pieces of evidence for a census under Herod the Great's reign is the fact that Caesar was able to depend on accurate tax revenue records from Herod the Great following his death to divide his kingdom among his sons (Josephus, *A. J.* 17.11.4). Such records must have been dependent upon some type of Judean census taken.⁷⁴ Additionally, if Caesar knew Herod's health was failing, he might want a census taken to get the information before his death.⁷⁵ While this latter suggestion is clearly speculation, combined with the other evidence presented above, there is no reason that an argument from silence would weigh more heavily on one side (the silence of Roman censuses under Herod the Great) than the other.

The census of A.D. 6/7 was while Quirinius (Luke 2:2) was ruling over Syria. Therefore, if Luke was referring to the census of A.D. 6/7 as the time when Jesus was born, it would not coincide with the dating from Luke 3:1 where John the Baptist is preaching during the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius while Pilate was governor/ruler of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch over Galilee. In Luke 3:23, Jesus is said to be about thirty years of age when he began his ministry. If his ministry began with his baptism by John, his birth could not have been in A.D. 6/7 since that would make him between twenty-one and twenty-three years old (Tiberius reigned from A.D. 14–37, making the fifteenth year around A.D. 28 or 29). While approximation in the first century would allow for such an age qualifying as “about thirty years of age,” there would be a great discrepancy with Matthew's birth narrative since he clearly states that Jesus was

⁷⁴Brook W. R. Pearson, “The Lucan Censuses, Revisited,” *CBQ* 61.2 (Apr 1999): 266.

⁷⁵Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, 5th ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1922), 49.

born during the reign of Herod the Great (Matt 2:1).⁷⁶ Furthermore, Luke refers to Herod, king of Judea, during the time of the conception and annunciation (1:5).

On the other hand, Quirinius is not mentioned during this time period. Josephus mentions Quirinius as being sent to take account of property in Syria and to sell the house of Archelaus (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.13.5). Tacitus also mentions Quirinius but primarily in his relation to Tiberius's request for a public funeral in honor of his work as a soldier in the war against the Homonadenses on the Cilician borders of Syria. However, he does mention that during the time of Augustus, he was given consulship, sometime around 12 B.C. (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.48). This position, as well as his involvement in the wars, make it likely that he held some official post in Syria. Brown's dismissal of this possibility due to a better base of operations from Galatia for the Cilician border war is no less speculative. Furthermore, Brown points out that between 12 and 6 B.C., Quirinius was involved in the war against the Homonadenses and was in Syria as an advisor to Gaius Caesar "for several years before A.D. 4."⁷⁷

Is there an alternate explanation for Luke's mention of Quirinius and the census during the time of Herod the Great? Actually, there are many. Ramsay's argument from the "Lapis Tiburtinus" inscription is problematic since the inscription does not mention a

⁷⁶This piece of information exposes the weakness in Smith's belief that Jesus was born in A.D. 6 and that the Herod referred to in Luke 1:5 is not Herod the Great but Herod Archelaus. There is no reason for Luke to be mistaken here, especially given his exactitude of so many dates throughout his Gospel. Cf. Mark D. Smith, "Of Jesus and Quirinius," *CBQ* 62.2 (Apr 2000): 285.

⁷⁷Brown, *Birth*, 551.

specific name.⁷⁸ Sherwin-White's theory of Quirinius being the successor of Quintilius Varus soon after 4 B.C. appears to be reaching and still does not justify the birth during the reign of Herod the Great since he died in 4 B.C.⁷⁹

Wallace explains why the αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη (Luke 2:2) is better translated as "this is the first census"⁸⁰ rather than "this census is the first" (F. F. Bruce, Nigel Turner, Wayne Brindle)⁸¹ or "this census was before" (A. B. J. Higgins, Harold W. Hoehner, Brook W. R. Pearson).⁸²

Tertullian appealed to Sentius Saturninus as a census-taker in Judea (*Against Marcion* 4.19.10). However, the question remains whether he was referring to the census of Luke 2. Based on several pieces of evidence including the context of an argument against Marcion in which the discussion of Luke 8:19–21 appears, C. F. Evans has demonstrated that the reference is not concerned with Luke 2.⁸³

⁷⁸Ramsay, *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*, 227–8, 274. He argues that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice (11/10 B.C. to 8/7 B.C. as well as the time period of A.D. 6/7). He further argues that there was a delay of the census made in 8/7 B.C. by Quirinius until around 6 B.C.

⁷⁹A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Law and Roman Society in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 166, 170–1. He argues that Quirinius was legate of Syria between 4 B.C. and 1 B.C. Using primarily Josephus and Tacitus, he indicates that Quintilius Varus held the legateship of Syria from 6 B.C. until at least 4 B.C. His successor until the arrival of Gaius Caesar is unknown but is likely Quirinius. Bock suggests an additional possibility that the census began under Varus but the results and taxation came about under the legateship of Quirinius during the time Sherwin-White suggested. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1, 1:1–9:50* (BECNT 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 908.

⁸⁰Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 304–5.

⁸¹Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2," *JETS* 27.1 (March 1984): 49.

⁸²Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects," 347; Pearson, "The Lucan Censuses, Revisited," 282.

⁸³C. F. Evans, "Tertullian's References to Sentius Saturninus and the Lukan Census," *JETS* 24.1 (April 1973): 27, 39.

Stauffer argues that ἀπογράφεσθαι refers to the preparation of tax records while ἀποτίμεσις refers to actual taxation as found in the records of A.D. 6. In other words, the census process took ten years from the initial record-taking phase in Luke 2 to its completion in A.D. 6.⁸⁴ Bock points out the weaknesses in this position by showing that Luke uses the same term in Acts 5:37 as he does in Luke 2 and Josephus uses the terms interchangeably (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.1).⁸⁵

As one can see, there are numerous options, most of which have not been completely convincing. Perhaps the best approach, other than an alternative translation of πρώτη (“before” or “earlier”) as discussed above, is to look at Luke’s use of ἡγεμονεύοντος. Does it necessarily need to be translated as “legate” or “governor”?

Although Ramsay depended on two Latin inscriptions for his argument that Quirinius served two governorships of Syria, he admits that Luke does not specify what type of position he had. Luke uses the same word for Pontius Pilate in 3:1 and the related ἡγεμονίας for Tiberius in 3:1 as well as ἡγεμόν for Pilate in Luke 20:20; 21:12, Felix in Acts 23:24, 26, 33; 24:1, 10 and for Festus in Acts 26:30. “Hence the word, as employed by Luke, might be applied to any Roman official holding a leading and authoritative position in the province of Syria.” Ramsay goes on to argue that Quirinius may have stood in the same relation to Varus in Syria as Vespasian in regard to Mucianus. The latter relationship shows Vespasian as leading wars in Palestine while Mucianus

⁸⁴E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, trans. by D. M. Barton (New York: Knopf/London: SCM, 1960), 30–31 referenced in Bock, *Luke*, 908.

⁸⁵Bock, *Luke*, 908.

governed Syria. Tacitus referred to Vespasian as *dux*, the Latin equivalent to ἡγεμών.⁸⁶ Additionally, Plummer points to Justin Martyr who refers to Quirinius as procurator at the time of the census (Luke uses the same word in 3:1 for procurator). “This gives weight to the suggestion that, although Varus was *legatus* of Syria at the time of the enrollment, yet Quirinius may have held some office in virtue of which he undertook this census.”⁸⁷

So when was Jesus most likely born? Clearly, one cannot glibly dismiss the possibility that Quirinius could have been involved in a ruling position in Syria during the time of the Lukan census in the reign of Herod the Great. Taking into consideration that Luke’s historical intent has been demonstrated through his prologue (Luke 1:1–4) and his obvious knowledge of secular events (Luke 2–3), his statement that Jesus was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23) when he began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius must be seriously considered. Therefore, the year of Jesus’ birth must fall within the 6 B.C. to 4 B.C. range in order to account for Herod’s death in 4 B.C. during the sojourn of the family in Egypt, the approximation of age thirty for Jesus’ baptism, and Quirinius’ presence in Syria during the time between the end of the war with the Homonadenses (6 B.C.) and A.D. 4.

Since Herod commanded that the male children age two and under be destroyed, Jesus must have been under the age of two. Herod determined the age from the time the star appeared to the magi (Matt 2:7, 16). There must also be time for the magi to travel.

⁸⁶Ramsay, *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?*, 229, 239.

⁸⁷Plummer, *St. Luke*, 51.

Herod would want to estimate an older age of the child to make sure he did not miss him.

A date of 4 B.C. or 5 B.C. would accord well with Luke's description of Jesus as "about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) when he began his ministry during the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1). This would put the date around A.D. 28 or 29 as the start of his ministry, thus resulting in an age of about thirty-two for Jesus, an age well within the approximation of "about thirty years of age." Furthermore, Maier points out that the comments in John 2:19–20 concerning the temple during the ministry of Jesus indicate that the temple has stood for forty-six years. Calculating from Josephus *Ant.* 15:420–21 that the construction began in 19 B.C., a date of A.D. 27/28 is a possibility but only if it is referring to the start of construction. If, as it seems in the text from John's Gospel, the reference is from the completion of the temple, it would result in a date of A.D. 29/30 since Josephus indicates that it was built in one year and five months. Thus, Jesus was probably around the age of thirty-two at the time. While Maier uses other reasoning for a birth month of December 5 B.C., there is too much speculation to be that precise but it is probable that Jesus was born in the latter part of 5 B.C. in order to be close to the "about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) and to account for the events of Matthew 2 which took place before Herod's death in March of 4 B.C.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Maier, "Date of the Nativity," 120–3. While there have been arguments against an autumn or winter birth of Jesus due to the idea that shepherds and sheep would not be in the fields during the cold winter months, Maier points out that the sheep in Bethlehem were probably in the fields year-round due to their use for temple sacrifice in Jerusalem. See n. 30 on p. 128. Furthermore, would all shepherds have a place to keep their sheep during the winter months, especially in a poor, rural town like Bethlehem?

Journey of the Magi (Matt 2:1–12)

Identity and Origin of Magi

Why would foreign magi seek out a king from the Jews? Many in ancient times believed that the birth of a great king was heralded by the appearance of a star or other heavenly phenomenon. There are also many stories of foreigners making pilgrimages to pay respects to a king.⁸⁹ Many of the outlying countries had either Jews living in them or records of Jewish history and religious practices that could have led to a common understanding of the expectation of a Messiah.⁹⁰ Edersheim points out that *Targum Jonathan* demonstrates that the prediction in Mic 5:2 was widely understood as pointing to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah.⁹¹

Who were the magi? The magi were considered astronomers or astrologers (the two were intertwined at the time of the first century) who were often considered priests or even magicians. Pliny (*Annals* 2.27; 12:22, 59) and Tacitus (*Natural History* 30.2) associated magi with magic and sorcery while Simon of Samaria was known for his magic (Acts 8:11) and Elymas is considered the μάγος of Paphos (Acts 13:6, 8).⁹²

There have been three primary considerations for the origin of the magi: 1)

⁸⁹For more detailed analysis on such stories from the ancient world, see Brown, *Birth*, 174; Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3d ed. (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 11–12.

⁹⁰See Suetonius, *Vespasian*. 4; Tacitus, *Annals* 5.13 for examples of expectations of a world-ruler from Judea during the turn of the era.

⁹¹Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah I*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 203–6.

⁹²Tony T. Maalouf, “Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?” *BSac* 156 (Oct-Dec 1999): 424–5.

Parthia or Persia, because of the term being originally associated with the Medes and Persians; 2) Babylon, because of the great interest and development of astronomy and astrology by the Babylonians and their probable introduction to Jewish messianic expectations during the time of the captivity of the Jews; and 3) Arabia or the Syrian desert, because of the localization of the gifts employed by the magi. The earliest attested views come from Justin (*Dialogue* 78) and Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 3), who both describe the magi as being from Arabia. Supporting this theory is the usual Old Testament reference to desert Arabs as “people of the East.” On the other hand, the dominant view among the Church Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1.15) and Origen (*Against Celsus* 1.58–60), has been that they came from Persia. Along with this interpretation is the support from the connection with Zoroastrianism, which originated among the Medes and Persians. Still, there is also support by Celsus (Origen, *Against Celsus* 58–60), Jerome (*Commentary on Matthew* 1.2), and Augustine (*Harmony of the Gospels* 5) for a Babylonian origin as the magi appear in the Greek form of the book of Daniel as flourishing under the Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar.⁹³

The Matthean narrative does not make it clear as to the origin. Matt 2:1 simply describes them as μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν. As Maalouf points out, the term, μάγοι, has been used to describe those from Arabia, Persia, and Babylonia, as well as Jews so the decision is not simple. He insists that the magi were from Arabia since 1) the earliest attestation of church fathers (Justin, Tertullian) indicated so; 2) “sons of the East” in the OT were the Arab nomadic tribes (Gen 25:1–6, 12–18; Judg 6:3; 7:12; 8:10; Jer 49:28; Ezek 25:4, 10), 3) Babylon and Persia were often described as from “the north” in OT passages (Isa

⁹³Brown, *Birth*, 168–9; Maalouf, “Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?,” 425.

14:31; 41:25; Jer 1:13–15; 3:18; 4:6; 6:22; 16:15; 31:8; 46:10; Zeph 2:13; Zech 2:6; 6:6); 4) several Arab-Jewish contacts appear throughout history; 5) the gifts of the magi are from the region of Arabia; 6) God frequently uses Arabia and Egypt for the survival of a chosen individual before his redemptive work (Joseph, Moses, nation of Israel).

Tertullian identified “the East” as Arabia (*Against Marcion* 1.18) as did Clement of Rome. Maalouf insists that Justin, Tertullian, and Epiphanius all depended upon earlier apostolic tradition to indicate that the magi were from Arabia.⁹⁴ The question is why the church fathers began to change their perspectives from an Arabian origin to that of Persia or Babylon. While there is no clear evidence, it could possibly be the association of the magi with the Babylonian and Persian Empires during the time of Daniel where the term, “magi,” appears in Greek form of the book of Daniel. Furthermore, Clement of Alexandria began a legend among the church fathers that Zoroaster was a prophet who predicted the coming of the Messiah (*Stromata* 1.15; 6:5). Later, the (*Arab.*) *Gos. Inf.* would point to the same legend (7:1). Would there be any reason for the earliest church fathers to associate the magi with Arabia if that was not their origin? One possible reason could be the association of the gifts of the magi with that region.⁹⁵

Maalouf’s citations of the OT passages describing the region of Arabia as the “sons of the East” are valid. He also rightly points out that Babylon and Persia were identified as “from the north” in a majority of OT texts. He does mention three passages that speak of Persia as “the East” (Isa 41:2, 25; 46:11) but dismisses them on the basis

⁹⁴Maalouf, “Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?,” 428–42.

⁹⁵Brown, *Birth*, 168–70.

that the Hebrew word used in these three passages is קָם while the term used in the other passages is מִזְרָח . Maalouf insists that the former is an astronomical term (“the rising of the sun”) while the latter is geographical (“the East”).⁹⁶ The former derives from קָם which means “to rise” and many of the passages in which it appears can be interpreted as an astronomical understanding but could also be understood as a geographical term (Josh 11:8; Amos 8:12; Zech 14:4).⁹⁷ Of the passages Maalouf points out (Isa 41:2, 25; 46:11), Isa 41:25 can be dismissed since it could be understood temporally (cf. 2 Sam 23:4) and refers to one “from the north” in the same verse. The other two passages could have a geographical or astronomical understanding.

Various forms of the Greek term, ἀνατολή, appear in Matt 2:1, 2, 9; 8:11; 24:27; Luke 1:78; 13:29; Rev 7:2; 16:12; 21:13).⁹⁸ The passages from Matthew 2 all refer to the magi and the star. The origin of the magi as well as the appearing of the star could be “in the east” rather than the magi described as from the east but the star appearing “at its rising.” In this scenario, the star does not appear in the eastern sky but appears to the magi first in their geographical point of origin (i.e., while they were in the East).⁹⁹ Matthew 8:11 and 24:27 as well as Luke 13:29 most likely refer to a geographical understanding but are making more of an all-inclusive point (i.e., east to west) rather than a specific geographical point. The Luke 1:78 reference is part of the Magnificat and

⁹⁶Maalouf, “Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?,” 431–2.

⁹⁷Gerard Van Gronigen, “ קָם ,” *TWOT* 580c.

⁹⁸Heinrich Schlier, “ἀνατολή,” *TDNT* 1:351–3.

⁹⁹Maalouf, “Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?,” 432.

appears to be astronomical in the context given the “shining” understanding in 1:79. The passage in Rev 7:12 could be understood in either way because it is the origin of the angel while Rev 21:13 describes the gates of the new temple geographically. The passage that gives the most problems to Maalouf’s understanding and which he ignores is Rev 16:12 where it describes the drying up of the Euphrates River in order to allow passage of the kings from the east. The drying of this river would not affect passage to Jerusalem from Arabia but would affect passage from Babylon and Persia.

Maalouf’s arguments from the gifts of the magi, the Arab-Jewish contacts, and God’s use of Arabia and Egypt as places of survival do not trump other considerations. Gold (1 Kgs 9:11, 28; 10:10; 15:19; 2 Chr 9:9), frankincense (Isa 60:6; Rev 18:13), and myrrh (Gen 37:25; 43:11; Song 3:6) are historically probable as gifts presented to a king. While it is true that gifts of frankincense and myrrh originated in Arabia (Clement of Rome, *1 Corinthians* 25:1–2; *Herodotus* 3.107; Pliny, *Natural History* 12.30),¹⁰⁰ these would make their way around Babylon and Persia because of trade and could be brought as gifts from those two countries. There are even more Babylonian-Jewish and Persian-Jewish contacts leading up to the time of the NT than Arab-Jewish contacts. It is also a stretch to say that Arabia and Egypt were places of protection since Egypt particularly was considered a place of bondage (Exod 1:1–14) and not a country to rely upon (Jer 44:7–48; Ezek 17:11–18).

Still, it appears that because of earliest attestation as well as the majority of passages pointing to those “from the east” as the region of Arabia and passages

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 437.

describing Babylon and Persia as those “from the north,” the origin of the magi appears most likely to be Arabia.¹⁰¹ The primary point of the passage, however, is that these magi were from the world of Gentiles. While the people of Israel were obstinate in their understanding of Messiah, Gentiles were the ones seeking the newborn king of the Jews. It is historically plausible for these Gentile kings to travel to Judea to present gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to a Jewish king.

The Moving Star

The star which the magi followed is a great mystery and source of much speculation. The star first appears to the magi in their homeland (Matt 2:2).¹⁰² The star somehow signals the birth of the “king of the Jews” since this is part of the inquiry by the magi when they arrive in Jerusalem. It also must have appeared at the time of the birth since this is the timing which Herod is interested in knowing so that he can determine the age of the child he is seeking to destroy (2:7, 16). Why would they arrive in Jerusalem rather than the star lead them straight to Bethlehem? Apparently, the star appeared to the magi while in the east but must have disappeared because it reappears and leads them to the specific location of the child in Bethlehem (2:9). If the magi recognized the star as foretelling the birth of the king of the Jews, the most obvious place to journey would be

¹⁰¹The Nabateans were from the area of Egypt and Arabia and appear to have had some of the best relations with Herod the King and the commerce was most developed during the time period of 9 B.C. to A.D. 40 because of the marriage of the daughter of King Aretas IV to Herod the Great’s son, Herod Antipater. See Mary K. Milne, “Nabatea, Nabateans” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. by P. J. Achtemeier, Harper, P. Row, and Society of Biblical Literature (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 678.

¹⁰²The star appears “in the east,” most likely indicating that it appeared to them while they were in the east. This has already been discussed in a previous section as most likely Arabia.

Jerusalem.¹⁰³ There, they inquired of King Herod and the Jewish leaders where the child would be born. It is only there that they learn of Bethlehem (2:5–6) as the location and Herod sends them there (2:8). Thus, the star appears, disappears, moves, and stands still.

Dunn doubts the historicity of this event: “Matthew’s moving star does not evoke a strong impression of historical credibility. If, instead, we attribute such detail to the symbolical imagination of the story-teller, how much of the story remains as a viable historical account?”¹⁰⁴ Brown summarizes the primary explanations of the star as a supernova, a comet (such as Halley’s comet, which would have appeared in 12–11 B.C.), or a planetary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn (others would also include Mars).¹⁰⁵

Although the theory of a supernova is interesting, there is no knowledge of such an astronomical event during the time of Jesus’ birth and it does not explain why only the magi saw the star while Herod and the Jewish leaders appear ignorant. Likewise, the comet theory is doubtful because generally, this was a negative sign. The idea of Halley’s comet appearing in 12–11 B.C. does not coincide with the chronology of Jesus’ birth described above. A conjunction of planets would be less conspicuous to the naked eye, thus only those looking for a sign in the heavens would be likely to detect anything extraordinary about it. The problem with this theory, however, is that there have been

¹⁰³Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 204.

¹⁰⁴Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 343–4.

¹⁰⁵Brown, *Birth*, 171–3. For a more detailed analysis of the various theories, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Episode of the Magi,” 15–40, Konradin Ferrari-D’Occhieppo, “The Star of the Magi and Babylonian Astronomy,” 41–54, and Paul L. Maier, “The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus’ Life,” 113–32 in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (ed. by Jerry Vardaman & Edwin M. Yamauchi; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989); William E. Phipps, “Theological Table-Talk: The Magi and Halley’s Comet,” *ThTo* 43:1 (Apr 1986): 88–92.

many conjunctions which did not lead to a search for a king.¹⁰⁶ Much of what one believes about the importance of a natural explanation will determine the dating of the event since astronomers and historians have calculated certain dates in which these phenomena were possible.

On the other hand, Dunn has a point in referring to the incredulity of a moving star whose explanation is difficult to uphold through naturalistic attempts. The star is said to go before the magi and stand still over the place where Jesus was born (προῆγεν αὐτούς, ἕως ἐλθῶν ἐστάθη ἐπάνω οὗ ἦν τὸ παιδίον). Ignatius furthers the supernatural tendencies of the event in the earliest description of the star outside of Matthew's Gospel: "A star in the sky shone brighter than all the stars. Its light was indescribable and its novelty created astonishment. All the other stars, along with the sun and the moon, formed a chorus to that star, and its light surpassed all the others. And there was a disturbance over whence it had come, this novel thing, so different from the others" (Ign. *Eph.* 19.2 [Ehrman, LCL]).¹⁰⁷ While a supernova would shine brighter than all other stars, Ignatius' description is more poetic than scientific because of the description of the stars,

¹⁰⁶Kenneth Boa and William Proctor, *The Return of the Star of Bethlehem* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 64–68. On the other hand, Martin has given the scholarly world much to think about in Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World*, 46–66; 82–91. The conjunction of the king planet (Jupiter), the king star (Regulus), and the mother planet (Venus) in the king constellation (Leo), along with the Sun crowning Virgo (the virgin) while the moon rests at her feet (Revelation 12), along with the many other conjunctions of the time, is very convincing in regards to striking the magi as significant and pointing to a birth of a king in Judea. In the end, however, this all rests on a 1 or 2 B.C. death of Herod.

¹⁰⁷Cf. *Prot. Jas.* 21. Worcester believes that these descriptions of the star by Origen and *Prot. Jas.* make for independent attestations. See Elwood Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), 211.

sun, and moon forming a chorus to that star. Chrysostom explains that the star is certainly not ordinary since it stops, moves, and guides (*The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 7.3–4*).

The fact that the star does so many incredible feats not explainable by comets, meteors, planetary conjunctions, or supernovas, it might be best to understand this as a purely supernatural event. While Maier tends to view Johannes Kepler’s triple conjunction of planets as the most plausible, he does remark that “the star (alas!) must always shine only as secondary or tertiary evidence for purposes of Nativity chronology, since enough celestial events seem to have filled the skies over Judea between 12 and 1 B.C. to preclude any sure conclusion.”¹⁰⁸ Using modern astronomical technology, one can find no natural explanation that satisfies all characteristics of the star of Bethlehem during the time period of Jesus’ probable birth in 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C.¹⁰⁹ When the star is said to stop over where the child was, some may take this as Bethlehem (the star would be over the southern horizon looking from Jerusalem as the magi would be traveling).¹¹⁰ On the other hand, however, if the chief priests and scribes indicated to the magi in Jerusalem that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Messiah (Matt 2:5–6) and if

¹⁰⁸Maier, “The Date of the Nativity,” 119.

¹⁰⁹ *Starry Night Enthusiast v. 6.0.6 CD-ROM* (Toronto: Imaginova, 2006), n.p. While there are planetary conjunctions that take place in other years that would draw attention to the night skies over Arabia and Bethlehem, there is nothing significant during the time period of Jesus’ birth unless one uses extreme conjecture in order to force enough symbolism to make it significant. For example, on 11 March 5 B.C., Jupiter (the king planet), Venus (named after goddess for fertility), Pleiades (the seven sisters), and a first-quarter moon (new birth) came very close together as seen with the naked eye from Arabia looking due west (toward Jerusalem/Bethlehem) just above the horizon soon after sunset. Given these descriptions, one could create a reason for seeing a sign in the sky of a new, royal birth and having the number “seven” as symbolic of Israel’s fascination with it as the perfect number. On the other hand, the star is described as singular in the Matthean text.

¹¹⁰ Martin, *The Star that Astonished the World*, 59–61.

Herod sent the magi to Bethlehem to search for the child (Matt 2:7–8), then it is obvious that Bethlehem was the anticipated destination of the magi at this point anyway. Even if the star appears and disappears because of cloud cover, would it need to point them to Bethlehem, which was some five miles south of Jerusalem? Although Bethlehem was a small village, the magi would need to know which home to enter in order to find the child. If the star (a planetary conjunction) shown on the horizon over Bethlehem, would it have illuminated a particular house?¹¹¹ These details are still difficult to explain with a naturalistic theory of the star.

Allison purports a new theory on the magi's star as something that should be understood as an angel since there are many instances throughout Scripture where angels are referred to as stars. This would also explain much of the supernatural tendencies of the star.¹¹² While the supernatural explanation by Allison is plausible, it appears that if Matthew saw angels, he would have described them as such. Besides, an angel has already played a vital role as messenger in Matthew's birth narrative so it is unlikely that he would refer to another angel as a star.

An argument that is often posited is that the idea of a star can be derived from a possible evocation of the story of Balaam's prophecy in Num 24:17. While some believe the star did appear as a fulfillment of the prophecy (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.9.2; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 58–60), others believe it is only a fictional derivation from the

¹¹¹While Jesus was probably born in a cave since this is where many animals were kept as a stable, by the time the magi arrived, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had moved into a house (οἰκία–Matt 2:10).

¹¹²Dale C. Allison, Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 17–41.

prophecy.¹¹³ As Dunn describes in a footnote, this passage “was a popular source of speculation and hope in Jewish thought of the time, not least at Qumran.”¹¹⁴ Brown explains that there are enough similarities between the Matthean passage and the Numbers passage (magus Balaam, as described by Philo, and the Matthean magi; star symbolizing the Messiah in both passages; the rising of the star in the LXX translation of Num 24:17 and the rising of the star in Matthew) that this is the background for Matthew’s story. However, as Donald Hagner points out, “since Matthew makes no deliberate attempt to draw wording from the episode in Numbers, nor does he cite or allude to the OT passages, it may be that the similarities are coincidental. We cannot know with certainty that Matthew had the Balaak/Balaam material in his mind when he wrote this narrative.”¹¹⁵ While Matthew does tend to use typology (such as Moses) in showing Jesus’ connection with the OT, there is every reason to expect Matthew to have quoted from Num 24:17 at this point to clarify the messianic prophecy as he does with other OT prophecies throughout the Gospel (1:22–23; 2:15b; 2:17–18; 2:23b; 3:3; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 21:4–5; 26:56; 27:9–10).

The magi, while fulfilling a central purpose for Matthew in describing the more finely tuned eyes and ears of Gentiles as compared with the obstinacy of the Jews, cannot be dismissed as “symbolical imagination of the storyteller” (Dunn).¹¹⁶ The criterion of

¹¹³Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 174–7; Freed, *Stories of Jesus’ Birth*, 92–94.

¹¹⁴Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 340.

¹¹⁵Hagner, *Matthew*, 25.

¹¹⁶Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 340.

embarrassment would certainly hold much weight in this case. If Matthew wanted Gentiles from afar to come to find the Messiah, it would be more likely for him to avoid the difficulty of astrological projections as a guide. Although stars and constellations are described as God's work (Job 9:7; 38:32; Ps 8:3; 136:9; 147:4; Isa 40:26; Jer 31:35), magicians and astrologers were considered blasphemous and the practice was condemned in Israel (Deut 18:9–14; 2 Kgs 23:5; Isa 47:13). Something extraordinary must have taken place, involving a remarkable exception to the general outlook of Jews regarding astrologers and magi.¹¹⁷

While there is no need to justify the appearance and actions of the star through naturalistic explanations, neither is it justified to discount the supernatural because of a post-Enlightenment presupposition of the impossibility of miracles. There are many other miraculous events throughout the Gospel which would also have to be dismissed if using a purely naturalistic criterion. On the other hand, as Quarles notes, “the comparatively modest miracle material in the canonical birth narratives compared to the excesses of other early birth narratives suggests that Matthew and Luke were bound by historical restraints. They wrote only what had been passed to them by early tradition or by interviews with eyewitnesses.”¹¹⁸

The Slaughter of the Innocents (Matt 2:16–18)

“Then Herod, seeing that he was tricked by the magi, became very enraged, and

¹¹⁷See also Yamauchi, “The Episode of the Magi,” 20, 28.

¹¹⁸Quarles, “Midrash Criticism,” 164. He also successfully defends the Synoptic birth narratives against accusations of creative midrash by scholars such as Robert Gundry.

sending forth, he slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi” (Matt 2:16). Dunn implies, once again, Matthean creativity in the account of the Bethlehem slaughter: “The ‘slaughter of the innocents’ is hardly out of character for Herod, but it is also unlikely to have escaped the notice of Josephus.”¹¹⁹ He suggests that Josephus’ comments on a Roman attack on villages surrounding Sepphoris, following the death of Herod the Great, could have been the traumatic event that strengthened the tradition behind Matt 2:16. Certainly much of the knowledge of the events leading up to and including the first century owes a great debt of gratitude to the works of Josephus, the Jewish historian. Brown references S. Perowne in saying that it was in Josephus’ best interest to include as many horrific acts by Herod as possible since he “was writing for the Emperor Titus whose Jewish mistress, Berenice, was descended from the Hasmonians, Herod’s priestly enemies.”¹²⁰

A slaughter of innocents is not outside of Herod’s character. In fact, Allison and Davies reference several instances in Josephus (*Ant.* 15.5–7, 50–87, 173–8, 232–6, 247–52, 260–6, 289–90; 16.361–94; 17.42–4, 167, 182–7) of Herod’s violence.¹²¹ While these references indeed show the brutality of Herod’s reign, they are primarily records of either high-level political figures being executed such as high priests or they are family

¹¹⁹Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 344; Cf. Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 168.

¹²⁰S. Perowne, *The Life and Times of Herod the Great* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 152 quoted in Brown, *Birth*, 226 n. 34.

¹²¹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 264–5; Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 16.5; Sweet, *Birth and Infancy*, 121–5.

members of Herod. Would the slaughter in Bethlehem be viewed as significant as these events? Hagner mentions Zahn's informative comments on the numbers in the slaughter of Bethlehem and its surrounding districts: "Even within these expanded boundaries, the number of infants under two in a population of 1,000, given the birth and infant mortality rates of the time, has been reckoned at less than twenty."¹²²

Paul Maier demonstrates that Matthew's use of ὁρίοις ("boundaries" or "borders") would have included regions within one or two miles of Bethlehem since anything beyond that would have referred to Jerusalem's ὁρίοις. The term itself is very elastic, as seen throughout the rest of Matthew's Gospel, much like the English term, "boundaries." Maier concludes, "A figure larger than a dozen or two victims cannot be supported *even if* (italics his) a larger region were allowed for Matthew's *horiois*." He mentions that Josephus may not have even known about this slaughter since it was so small compared with the number of other atrocities Herod committed. "Moreover, Josephus wrote for a Greco-Roman audience, which had little concern with infant deaths." He refers to the fact that Roman fathers could allow their infant to die by not lifting it from the floor after birth while Greeks practiced infanticide as a means of birth control.¹²³

Thus, there is enough evidence that leaves open the possibility of Josephus' omission of these events. The dismissal on the basis of the lack of mention in Josephus is,

¹²²T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 2d ed. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1903), 109 referenced in Hagner, *Matthew*, 37; Cf. Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 17–19.

¹²³Paul L. Maier, "The Infant Massacre—History or Myth?" *Christianity Today*, 19 December 1975, 8–9.

again, premature. France says, “If the crucifixion of Jesus achieved no non-Christian record at the time, and only began to be noticed in the light of the movement which arose from it, can we assume that the visit of the magi and the killing of a few children in Bethlehem, if they actually happened, would have been known to, say, Josephus nearly a century later, or, if he had known of them, that he would have thought them worth including in his record?”¹²⁴

This is an argument from silence that does not hold much water when examined more closely. Additionally, although Jesus escapes from the slaughter, a dozen or two other children do not escape and God provides no means for these Jewish children to be saved. The criterion of embarrassment could be applied in this situation where it is left unexplainable why God would allow this to happen. The only other slaughter of children recorded in Scripture refers to the children of the enemies of God, primarily the story of the Egyptians which is most often used in connection with Matthew’s story. Here in Matthew, however, it is not the children of enemies who are slaughtered but Jewish children slaughtered by an enemy. There is no warning by God for the others. Evidently, the historical value of this episode should be reexamined in light of other criteria and other possibilities rather than a total dependence upon whether Josephus mentions it or not.

¹²⁴David Wenham, and R.T. France, *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels Volume II* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981), 240; Cf. Carson, *Matthew*, 94.

Flight to Egypt and Settlement in Nazareth (Matt 2:13–15, 19–23)

Immediately following the visit of the magi, Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt. While historically, the dream warning cannot be proven, just as the other dream appearances of the angel throughout the narrative, the flight to Egypt can be discussed as to its historical plausibility. “So having arisen, he took the child and his mother at night, and departed to Egypt and he was there until the death of Herod” (Matt 2:14–15a).

Dunn’s view on this journey is much the same as his view on the connected themes: “And the whole Egyptian episode, including Joseph and Mary’s return to settle in Nazareth, does seem somewhat contrived.”¹²⁵ Much of Dunn’s reasoning stems from the apparent parallels between the narrative and that of the Exodus account of the birth of Moses. He and Brown see this entire episode, as theologically-motivated in order to present Jesus as the new Moses or the new Israel.

There is evidence outside of the canonical Gospels that Jesus did spend some time in Egypt before returning to Nazareth. Quarles references evidence from *The Mishna* that Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (A.D. 80–120) believed Jesus brought the art of magic out of Egypt (*Šabb.* 104b). Additionally, “Origen argued against the notion that Jesus worked in Egypt, learning magical arts while a laborer and returned to Palestine, claiming to be a god (*Against Celsus* 1.38). These reflect historical tradition of Jesus’ stay in Egypt independently of Matthew.”¹²⁶ Additionally, apocryphal Gospels such as *Gos. Thom.* and (*Arab.*) *Gos. Inf.* elaborate on stories of Jesus’ childhood in Egypt.

¹²⁵Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 344.

¹²⁶Quarles, “Midrash Criticism,” 32; Cf. Box, *Virgin Birth*, 19–23.

While some scholars agree that there must have been some sojourn in Egypt, they see problems with Matthew's historical and political facts. Davies and Allison highlight what they perceive to be an error in Matthew's text: "According to our text, Archelaus 'reigned' (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.93) in place of his father. This is strictly incorrect and reminds one of the similar problem in 14.9=Mk 6.26, where Herod the tetrarch is called 'king'. Archelaus was an ethnarch (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.317; *Bell.* 2.93; extant coins)."¹²⁷ Additionally, John Meier points out that Luke's account leaves no time for Matthew's detour through Egypt to get to Nazareth from Bethlehem.¹²⁸

First, in reference to the accusation by Davies and Allison that Matthew was mistaken about the reign of Archelaus, the Greek rendering of the phrase is Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει τῆς Ἰουδαίας. The term, βασιλεύει, is a present-tense verb, which could mean either "to reign" or "to be made king."¹²⁹ The genitival phrase, τῆς Ἰουδαίας, is a genitive of subordination, indicating that the region over which Archelaus reigned was Judea. While Davies and Allison reference Josephus's mention of Archelaus as being made king after Herod (*Ant.* 18.93), they tend to emphasize that he was made ethnarch rather than king of the entire country (*Ant.* 17.317). It appears that, according to the same standard of Josephus, Matthew is not making a mistake here. He is simply stating that Archelaus was reigning over Judea much in the same way that Josephus mentions him as king in *Ant.* 18.93. Hence, while Davies and Allison present this as a historical error on the part of

¹²⁷Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 273.

¹²⁸Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 210, 213.

¹²⁹Louw and Nida, "βασιλεύω; βασιλεία, ας." L&N 37.64.

Matthew, they also provide the solution in their reference to the other Josephus passage. Furthermore, Josephus (*Ant.* 17.11.1–4) also provides evidence of the general distrust of Archelaus, making it very likely that Joseph and his family would want to avoid Judea and settle in Galilee.

As to Meier's charge of discrepancies between the Matthean and Lukan accounts of travel between Bethlehem and Nazareth, Machen has already provided some important points. While there is certainly no time for a presentation of the child in the Temple after the visit of the magi because of the wrath of King Herod, this most likely occurred before the magi came. Thus, the child was born in Bethlehem, presented in the Temple, returned to Bethlehem until the visit of the magi and was whisked away to Egypt before returning to Nazareth. The only problem with this suggestion is the indication in Luke 2:39 that the family returned to Nazareth following the presentation in the Temple. As Machen indicates, Luke is interested in describing Jesus as fulfilling the requirements of the law and returning to Nazareth where he would spend a majority of his childhood up until the beginning of his ministry. The fact that he does not mention a return to Bethlehem or a sojourn in Egypt does not necessarily mean that these events did not occur. Either he was unaware of these further incidents or they did not fit his purpose: "But here again the silence of one narrative regarding events recorded in another is quite a different thing from actual contradiction."¹³⁰

The family settling in Nazareth of Galilee certainly agrees with the frequent reference to Jesus as being from Nazareth (Matt 13:54; 21:11; Mark 1:24; 10:47; Luke

¹³⁰Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 196–7.

4:16–34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:46). Luke’s birth narrative agrees with Matthew that the family settled in Nazareth following the birth (Luke 2:39, 51). There is multiple independent attestation apart from the various views on the synoptic problem since there is reference across all four Gospels and in two very different birth narratives.

Conclusion: Historical Plausibility

The previous two chapters have demonstrated that Matthew’s primary purpose in writing his account of the birth of Jesus was to present Jesus as the virgin-born Son of God but also the Messianic Son of David. Although known as the Jewish Messiah, he was received by Gentile magi and rejected by Jewish leaders. Matthew’s chief source for his birth narrative was probably Joseph. The previous two chapters have demonstrated that Matthew received what he considered historical information to write his narrative and highlighted the theological impact of the beginnings of Jesus the Christ. The current chapter explored whether or not the events of Matthew 1–2 could be considered historically plausible from a modern perspective.

Because of the supernatural elements of the Matthean birth narrative, it has been pointed out that much depends on one’s openness to the possibility of the supernatural when determining historicity. On the other hand, there are a number of points in the narrative that can be examined in light of history and science. The genealogy of Jesus, while different between the two Gospel accounts, is still plausible if Matthew traces Joseph’s genealogy and Luke traces the genealogy of Mary (because her father had no male offspring). This explanation best accounts for the dramatic differences between the two lists. The common elements between the two Gospel accounts also points toward a virgin birth at Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great, most likely in the latter

half of 5 B.C. based on various elements within the Gospels (Matthew 2; Luke 3; John 7:42).

The magi are most likely from the region of Arabia because of early attestation as such and the tendency to refer to this region as those “from the east.” The star they followed to Judea was probably of a supernatural kind since no natural explanation can account for its various actions, particularly the way it points out a specific house in Bethlehem. The actions of Herod the Great in slaughtering the children of Bethlehem is historically plausible despite the omission of the event by Josephus since it would have involved such a small number of children but is still very much in character with a maniacal and paranoid king as he is described in Josephus. There have been extra-biblical accounts that could also support a sojourn in Egypt and this would have been a safe haven from King Herod. The settlement in Nazareth of Galilee agrees with the rest of the Gospel accounts who describe Jesus as being “of Nazareth.”

While there are many scholars who quickly dismiss the possibility of historicity in the birth narratives, this chapter has presented an alternate view. Matthew, while focusing on the theological implications of the birth, can still be trusted as writing not only what he saw as historical, but also what could actually have been historical within a worldview open to the supernatural. In other words, there is no reason to dismiss the historical plausibility of the Matthean birth narrative other than an aversion to the supernatural.

CONCLUSION

Matthew wrote what he believed to be historical information passed down to him and arranged this information in such a way as to bring out the theological implications surrounding the birth of the Messiah who is the son of David and the son of God. While Matthew understood the account to be historical, there is no reason to dismiss the account today as ahistorical simply because of the supernatural elements therein. There is enough explanation within a worldview open to the supernatural to make this account historically plausible.

The first chapter of the present work explored the various treatments of the Matthean birth narrative from the first century to the present. This survey has shown that the early Church Fathers believed these accounts to be historically accurate and that Matthew's purpose was to highlight Jesus as the Christ. The first challenge to the veracity of the account came from those who claimed that Jesus was an illegitimate child. The early church wrote vigorously in defense of the virgin birth. During the middle ages and the Reformation, the theological implications of the virgin birth and the account of the magi were the focus but soon the Age of Enlightenment would bring a new emphasis on the historically and scientifically provable. This led to a number of attacks on the believability of the Matthean birth narrative.

The Gospel writer was no longer viewed as honest in terms of presenting the historical but his account was viewed as tainted by theological presuppositions,

embellishments, and a creative imagination. Even those who believed there to be a historical core also believed that midrashic and haggadic interpretations were the best explanations for the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Not only were commentaries and brief accounts in festschriften pointing to this but many also produced massive works on the virgin birth, indicating such creative storytelling based on the heroes of the faith in the OT. While there have been a few modern scholars who have defended the historical plausibility of the Matthean birth narrative, the trend toward skepticism has not subsided even in a post-modern world that is increasingly becoming open to the supernatural.

The second chapter of the present work began what is known as the hermeneutical triad (literary, theological, historical analyses). The literary analysis focuses primarily on Matthew's use of sources, literary devices, and other elements within the text to determine not only how Matthew views the information he uses for his narrative but also his overall purpose in writing. A comparison with the other Gospels reveals Matthew's unique contribution to the overall story of Jesus. His inclusion of a birth narrative from primarily Joseph's perspective also points to Matthew's purpose. A detailed look at Matthew's treatment of the genealogical records in 1 Chronicles indicates that he conformed the list to a 3 x 14 pattern, most likely signifying the numerical value of David's name. While Matthew does not dismiss historicity, it is clear that his purpose in presenting the genealogical record of Jesus is more theological. Still, the sources for his genealogical records include 1 Chronicles to an extent but there must have been an additional source. This source is most likely a family member of Jesus or public records that are no longer available today. The genealogy has always been a part of the Gospel

account, thus any theory of its late addition is strictly conjecture which stands against the textual evidence.

Matthew uses various literary devices to move the narrative portion of the account along and to reveal his purpose. Geographically, the story changes scenes between Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, and Nazareth. The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream throughout the narrative, moving the action along between these geographical locations. One of the most significant elements in the narrative is the use of OT fulfillment quotations which he adds to the account. Matthew uses five of these in the birth account (1:23 quoting Isa 7:14; 2:6 quoting Mic 5:2(1); 2:15 quoting Hos 11:1; 2:18 quoting Jer 31:15; 2:23 quoting an unknown source) to indicate that the events surrounding the birth of Jesus have been prophesied long ago by the OT prophets. Through a comparison of the quotations by Matthew and their sources, it is clear that Matthew uses a free translation of the Hebrew original. Additionally, Matthew uses foreshadowing in various places in the birth narrative that appear later in the Gospel, thus showing the unity of the Gospel and the inclusion of the birth narrative. Matthew uses typology to present Jesus as the new Moses or the new Israel but this is not the same as indicating that Matthew created a birth account of Jesus to match those of the OT.

The question of sources for Matthew's birth narrative proper is one that often results in resorting to fabrication, creativity, or heavy adaptation. On the other hand, there are many elements common to the birth narratives in both Matthew and Luke. Additionally, if Matthew wanted to create a narrative based upon OT quotations, he could have found easier ways to do this. The narrative flows smoothly apart from the OT quotations, pointing to the likelihood that the quotations were added by Matthew to bring

out theological implications of what he believed to be historical facts. The most likely source for the narrative is ultimately Joseph, since many of the events could only be witnessed by him (his dreams, his fears, etc.). While many scholars have indicated that this is an attempt to salvage Matthew's account from creativity, this cannot be dismissed as implausible.

Chapter 3 examined the theological implications of the Matthean birth narrative. While the literary analysis focused on the various literary methods employed to accomplish Matthew's purpose, the theological analysis actually examined the purpose itself. The first verse in his Gospel reveals part of his purpose as presenting Jesus as the son of David, the son of Abraham, thus pointing to him as the Jewish Messiah. This is further emphasized by the genealogical structure of 3 x 14, the numerical value of David's name. The genealogy also traces Jesus from Abraham and through David, following the Davidic kings down to Jesus. The four women uniquely mentioned in the genealogy show the contrast between the faithfulness of a Gentile and the unfaithfulness of a Jew, pointing to the second purpose of Matthew's Gospel and birth narrative: Jesus is not only the Jewish Messiah but is ultimately Christ for the entire world. Isaiah 7:14 prophesied a virgin birth that was not completely fulfilled during the time of King Ahaz but, according to Matthew, was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. He is the salvation for his people (Matt 1:21) and he is ultimately God's presence (Matt 1:23). Thus, Matthew presents Jesus as the son of David and the son of God.

Matthew further presents Jesus as the Messiah through his quotation of Mic 5:2(1) where it was prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The uniqueness of this quotation is that it came from the chief priests and rulers in Herod's court rather than

an aside by the Gospel writer, thus revealing that there was a significant amount of Jews who believed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. This reference came in response to the question by the magi of where the Christ would be born. Matthew emphasizes the journey of the magi and contrasts their seeking for the Jewish Messiah with the rejection by the Jewish leaders. This theme is repeated throughout the Gospel where Gentiles reach for the truth of the gospel but Jews tend to reject their own Messiah.

Just as Moses was spared from the slaughter of the children in Egypt by Pharaoh, Jesus was spared from the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem by Herod. Just as God led Moses and the children of Israel out of Egypt, so God led Jesus and his family out of Egypt to the city of Nazareth (Hos 11:1). Jesus not only experienced the exodus but also the exile. One fulfillment of Jer 31:15 took place during the exile where the children of Israel were missing from the land but the future fulfillment takes place in the wailing mothers of Bethlehem over their children whom Herod had slaughtered. Matthew uses Rachel, whose tomb is located near Bethlehem (Gen 35:19), as a tie-in here. Finally, the settlement in Nazareth enabled Jesus to be known as a Nazarene. This strange quotation in 2:23 most likely employs wordplay as a reference to the setting apart of Samson as a Nazarite (Num 6:2, 8; Judg 13:5). In the same way, Jesus is set apart for God's will. Thus, the birth of Jesus has been prophesied long ago and he is not only the Jewish Messiah, but also the Son of God who will ultimately be the savior of both Jews and Gentiles.

The final chapter included the historical analysis of the Matthean birth narrative. In other words, now that it has been determined that Matthew wrote what he believed to be historical and simply brought out the theological implications of these historical events

to present Jesus as the son of David and son of God, the question remains whether the events described therein can be considered historically plausible today.

Matthew clearly omits names and adapts the genealogy of Jesus to fit his purposes but his use of sources appears to be historical. He has used 1 Chronicles to build the foundation of his genealogical list but then uses another unknown source for the remainder of the list. Through a comparison with Luke's genealogical list, it is completely plausible that Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph while Luke traces it through Mary as a result of Mary's father adopting Joseph as his own since he had no son to pass on his inheritance (Num 27:1–11; 1 Chr 2:34–35). The virgin birth of Jesus is accounted for by both Gospel birth narratives while indications of a unique situation surrounding his birth come from other Gospel accounts (i.e., Mark 6:3; John 8:41) as well as much discussion among early church fathers.

Similarly, Jesus was born at Bethlehem as described by both Matthew and Luke as well as hinted at by discussions in John 7:42, church fathers indicating a more precise location of a cave near Bethlehem, and embellishments by apocryphal Gospels. Although not clearly spelled out by other writers in the NT, they do not present any other location of Jesus' birth than Bethlehem. Even the title "Jesus of Nazareth" points more clearly to the place where he was raised rather than the place of his birth.

The most discussed portion of the birth narrative in regards to historicity involves the birth of Jesus during the reign of Herod the Great and how this corresponds to Luke's account of a census taken by Quirinius as well as magi's search for the child by following a strange star. Using various biblical (Luke 3:1; 3:23; John 2:19–20) and extrabiblical accounts, the birth of Jesus most likely took place sometime in the latter half of the year 5

B.C., shortly before the death of Herod in March of 4 B.C. A census taken in vassal kingdoms during Caesar Augustus' reign is also possible, given the historical situation surrounding the failing health of Herod and the need to tax these kingdoms. The obstacle of the census of Quirinius in A.D. 6 is not as difficult to overcome as once thought since the word used by Luke indicates that he was a ruler and does not specifically mean that he had the official office of governor in Syria during the census (Luke 2:1). It has been shown that Quirinius probably held some sort of official position in Syria during the time of Jesus birth during the reign of Herod the Great even if he was not officially the governor.

The earliest attestation of the magi and the majority of passages in the OT which point to Arabia as "the east" make it most likely that the magi were from the region of Arabia. There is sufficient evidence that such magi would travel many miles to seek out the birth of a king. The question which haunts historians and scientists alike is what type of star this was which they followed. Although a number of astronomical phenomena have been presented as possibilities (with a planetary conjunction being the most plausible of the naturalistic theories), given the time of the birth of Jesus as well as the various actions of the star itself (primarily its ability to stop over a specific house in Bethlehem), the naturalistic explanations fall short. Instead, this must have been a supernatural event which the magi saw and followed. Given the fact that Jews were averse to any type of astrology (Deut 18:9–14; 2 Kgs 23:5; Isa 47:13), the criterion of embarrassment applies here as to why Matthew would present pagan magi to find the Jewish Messiah by way of an astrological sign. If Matthew wanted to create a story, he would most likely want to avoid the appearance of accepting astrology as a practice.

Herod's slaughter of the children of Bethlehem, although not mentioned in Josephus, accords well with the character of Herod, particularly the mental state of paranoia he was in during the last years of his life. Additionally, the number of children under the age of two in the village of Bethlehem would have been so small (perhaps a dozen) that it would have been easy for Josephus to overlook. Again, the criterion of embarrassment is applied here because of the question left open as to why God would allow Jewish children to be so viciously slaughtered. The flight to Egypt has been attested by Origen, some of the apocryphal Gospels which have embellished stories of Jesus' life there, and Jewish texts, thus giving multiple attestation of its historicity. The return to Nazareth is also well established since this is the town in the Gospels from which Jesus is known to have been raised ("Jesus of Nazareth"). Additionally, accusations of historical inaccuracies due to a comparison with Luke's account are easily explainable.

Through a literary, theological, and historical analysis of the Matthean birth narratives, it is clear that history was driving theology in Matthew's account. In other words, Matthew began with what he believed to be historical events passed on to him and wrote an account which would bring out the theological ramifications of these events. While Matthew began his Gospel after the resurrection event, which undoubtedly convinced him of Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the savior of the world, the events in the birth narrative were not fabricated but simply highlighted with prophetic fulfillment quotations. The events surrounding Jesus' birth only added to Matthew's understanding of who Jesus was. He is the son of David and the son of God. There has always been a pattern of Jewish rejection and Gentile acceptance so that he is not simply the Jewish

Messiah but also the savior of the world. At the same time, however, the story is not only historical in the mind of Matthew but can also be considered historically plausible to the modern mind which is open to a worldview that includes the possibility of the supernatural.

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