

Chapter 6

The Wise Men from the East

Matthew 2 vv 1-12

Through the great desert which lies between the Land of Canaan and the former Babylon and Persia some travellers steadily make their way. It is the same desert through which once Abraham and Lot journeyed when the Lord called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. Through this same desert the Jews also returned from the Babylonian captivity under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel. The travellers ride on their camels over the wide open sandy surface, during the day the sun burns down upon them and the heat is almost unbearable. At night time it gets very cold. Yes, sometimes it freezes.

They are on their way to Jerusalem, the chief city of the Land of the Jews. They are some wise men who live in the East and now make the distant journey to Palestine. Why are they doing this?

Well, they have seen in their land a star, so fine, so beautiful, so brilliant as never before has been seen. In the greatest amazement they had stared at this extraordinarily brilliant star. Then they had cried with great joy "That is the sign that the King of the Jews is born". But how do the wise men know that? Why should that star be to them a sign? Who has informed them of that? – Listen!

In the East there had always been wise men. They were really stargazers or astronomers. People who at night, whenever it was clear,

studied the stars. From that land also came Balaam who was called by Balak, the King of the Moabites to curse Israel. The Lord had prevented that and Balaam had been obliged, against his will, to bless that people. Do you still remember that? I am sure you do.

In one of those blessings, the last, Balaam spoke about a star which would come forth from Jacob. Balaam himself returned no more to his own country. He was killed by the Israelites when they fought against the Midianites. Centuries later Daniel came into that same land. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon appointed Daniel to be the chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Doubtless Daniel told them what Balaam had intended by his blessing. He spoke about the coming Redeemer, the King of kings.

Daniel is dead, but after his death the wise men still looked out for the coming of that star. They told it to their children and they also waited for the appearance of that shining star. After that they have had to wait nearly five centuries from generation to generation. And then suddenly there gleamed in the heavens a star of extraordinary brightness. The wise men immediately believed that that was the long promised star – the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews. It was impossible to doubt that gleaming star – it was far too clear a token. Unanimously they decide to pay homage to that

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

Prince. Yes, more than that they will go and worship Him.

The next day they have made everything ready for the great journey and now they are on the way to the land of the Jews. They decide to go to the capital city, for Jerusalem will, of course, be in festive array. After a long, difficult and dangerous journey they at last reach the Jordan.

They cross the river and a few hours later they enter the city through one of its many gates. What a disappointment for those wise men! Jerusalem



And lo, the star went before them.

is not in festive array. Life there is carrying on its normal course. There is nothing out of the ordinary to be seen. Certainly they, themselves, are stared at by inquisitive passers-by.

"Where is He that is born King of the Jews" they ask, "for we have seen His star in the east and are come to worship Him". But the inhabitants of Jerusalem shrug their shoulders and look at these strangers in amazement. "A King of the Jews born?" they ask in disbelief. "We don't know anything about it. No King has been born here." The wise men are overcome by the greatest disappointment. They look at each other. Could they have deceived themselves? Could they perhaps have made that long journey in vain? Such questions may well have come into their minds.

The news travels through the city like fire

that strangers have arrived to worship the King of the Jews. In the Bible it says that "Jerusalem was troubled". It is not long before Herod the King hears it. He too was troubled. What, a king born? A King of the Jews? That is dangerous. That King could well push him from his throne, for he has heard much about the promised Messiah. The Jews have told him that that King will drive out the Romans. Then he, too, will be driven out, but Herod doesn't want that. That must never happen. He must remain King. He has had his wife and sons murdered in order to remain King. Then doubtless he was agitated.

Immediately, in his nervousness, he calls for the Chief Priests and the scribes and demands of them where Christ should be born. Oh yes. The scribes know that alright. They have their answer ready at once. "The King of the Jews? He will be born in Bethlehem for that has been foretold by Micah the prophet ages ago." Herod listens with deep interest. Not one word escapes him. When the scribes have left, Herod remains behind. He is restless, agitated. A fearful doubt fills his heart and gives rise to alarm. Oh, if it is true what those strangers relate, then his reign is over. But he does not plan to sit back and wait, for then perhaps he could be too late. He will prepare counter-measures and quickly too. His lips crease into a vicious smile. Wait! He already has a plan that is bound to succeed. It is a wonderful, splendid, cunning plan.

While the wise men still remain undecided in Jerusalem and ask themselves what they shall now do, they receive a message from the King bidding them to come to him for he has something to ask them. At once they make their way to the Royal Palace and are immediately

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

admitted, but Herod does this in such a way that no-one takes any particular notice. He calls for them secretly, for the Jews must not know what he plans to do. "You have come to worship that little Child, haven't you?" he asks kindly, "Well now, go to Bethlehem, for that village will be the birth-place of the King, and try to find that Child, but will you do me a great favour? When you have found him bring me word again before you return to your own land that I may come and worship Him also". The wise men promise this and depart. Herod sits back and grins treacherously. So – he's managed that quite well. Those strangers believed him. At least they promised him faithfully that they will inform him. They actually think that he will worship that Child. Worship? His lips curl in a cruel smile. Ah! He will take a dagger with him and when he comes near that Child he will thrust that sharp deadly weapon into that tender little body. He will murder that Child, then his troubles will all be over. He will be one ahead of that King.

This is the devilish plan of Herod. That brute, that murderer of his own wife and children. He laughs and Satan laughs too for that villainous plan is also the work of the devil. That Child must not come. The devil is using Herod to do away with that Child. Will he succeed?

Look! There that little group of strangers again leaves the city, probably stared at by many with a sympathetic smile. They are going to Bethlehem. "There shall the King be born: Herod had told them. Well then, off to Bethlehem. They do not give up hope so quickly, you may be sure. After all, they had seen His star. New hope has risen in their hearts. They shouldn't be in

Jerusalem at all. They have gone wrong. In Bethlehem His cradle will be found.

They travel alone. Not one of the High Priests or the scribes goes with them. Do you know what these High Priests and scribes are like?... They are just like signposts. Signposts are very useful - yes indispensable. They give their silent information to thousands of people. To thousands they show the way excellently, but they themselves remain standing. And when they get old and broken down, then they are hacked in pieces and thrown upon the fire. That is a very true, but fearful example. These scribes also show the way to these strange heathens. They tell very carefully where the Saviour will be found, but they themselves remain in Jerusalem. They themselves do not think it worthwhile to go with them. Oh children, which of you will also become such a signpost? To have shown the way to others and to be rejected oneself or, in other words, to have given advice to others and to be eternally lost oneself. How terrible that would be! May the Lord grant that you may not only be signposts, but also that you may through grace also walk the path of God's commandments. Ask if God will renew your heart. That is necessary; that is indispensable.

The distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem is not so great. What will have been going on in the hearts of those wise men? We do not know, but God, who knows all things, looks into the hearts of those strangers and He will not put their silent hope to shame. Suddenly a happy cry resounds and the wise men look up with joyful faces, for there from the heavens shines out suddenly a bright star. They recognise it. It is the same star which they saw in the East. Oh, their

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

faces beam with joy. Their journey then is not for nothing.

And now read what is in God's word. Let us read it together.

"And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." That means, that star showed them the way. They only had to follow and when they arrive at last in Bethlehem the star stands over a certain house. Quickly, trembling with joyful expectation they step inside and there they find a little Child with Mary His Mother. The Bible says "the house", so Mary and Joseph are no longer in the cattle shed. Which house that was we do not know. The wise men do not in fact find a cradle embroidered with gold and pearls, no sky-blue drapery, no child clothed in royal clothes. No, they find a quite ordinary little child wrapped in swaddling bands. And yet for them it is no ordinary little child. Through faith, they see in that simple baby the King of kings. Oh, in holy reverence they fall on their knees and worship that Child. A heavenly joy fills their souls. They find the Saviour. Then they open their treasures and give gold, frankincense and myrrh. These were very expensive gifts – royal gifts.

The next day the wise men should go back to Jerusalem. They should tell King Herod that they have found the King. They should indicate to him the exact place where he will find the Child. They have, after all, promised this. But in the night the Lord comes to them in a dream and informs them that they must not go to Jerusalem, but that they must go back to their fatherland by another way. The wise men obey. Why they have been commanded to do that they do not know, but they do go back by a different

route. We may well believe that they made this long journey with joy in their hearts. Here is already fulfilled what Simeon said "A light to lighten the Gentiles". These wise men were the first fruits. Oh boys and girls, will these heathen wise men be before us? Will they be inside, and shall we, who know it all so well, be outside? Oh that this might move you, that it might sound an alarm.

Matthew 2 vv 13-15

It is night time. The inhabitants of Bethlehem are asleep. The streets are quiet and forsaken. But no, there are some people leaving the village under cover of night. No one sees them, no one knows it. It is a man and a woman who carries a little child. Can you name them? Joseph, Mary and the Lord Jesus. Whether Mary rode upon an ass at this time, we do not know, but it could well be, since they now had money. But the Bible remains silent on this point. But why are they leaving Bethlehem so suddenly? Well, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him of the evil plans of Herod. He must flee to Egypt for there Herod will not seek the Child. The Lord is ahead of Herod or rather of the devil. The cunning plan of Herod shall fail.

Joseph rises hurriedly. He wakes Mary. Quickly everything is prepared. Mary takes her Child and they leave the village as quietly as possible. They flee. The suffering of the Lord Jesus begins even at his birth. What a humiliation for the King of kings. No room! No room in His land, no room among His people. He must flee for His life.

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

When the morning breaks Joseph and Mary are already far out of sight and on the road to Egypt.

Matthew 2 vv 16-18

The next morning Herod sits in his dazzling palace. He is waiting. The wise men will soon return, at least they have faithfully promised to do so. Hours creep slowly by, but those strangers are still nowhere to be seen. We may well believe that Herod looked many times through the window and up the road to see if he could see them. The face of Herod becomes more and more overcast, what a long time they are! They could have been here long ago. He can't understand it. Gradually his heart grows more anxious. Surely they will come, surely they will keep their promise. If not, his cunning plan will fail and that must never happen.

At last Herod realises that he is waiting in vain. Wild hatred blazes up within him, his eyes glare. He clenches his fists. He paces angrily up and down the apartment. "I am deceived" he rages in the height of passion "I am deceived - they are not coming. That is a mean trick when they have promised." And boys and girls, is that not in fact true? The wise men had promised, and what is promised must surely be fulfilled? What do you think about it? Yes that is difficult isn't it? But if you just think about it, then it is by no means difficult. The wise men have not deceived Herod, but he deceived the wise men. He said that he would worship that little Child, but his heart was planning murder. He wanted to thrust a dagger into that Child's heart. He, not the wise men, is to blame, for their strange actions. If he

had spoken the truth then they would quite certainly have returned. But Herod does not look at it like that. No, he feels he has been deceived, yet he still intends to have his way. That Child must and shall be killed. If that Child remains alive, then he is lost, then all is over with his own might and glory.

Quickly Herod takes action. He sends a Roman chieftain with his soldiers to Bethlehem. "Go" sounds his grim command, "go and slay all children from two years old and under" Now, why two years old and under? – Well, he had carefully enquired from the wise men when that star had appeared, how long ago that was. Be sure that he would not be particular about the age group. No he wants to be quite certain that the King of the Jews is included.

The Roman soldiers hurry towards Bethlehem in order to carry out the fearful command of their king. As soon as they get to that little town then, oh children it is almost too terrible to relate, – then all the children, not only from Bethlehem but even from the region around Bethlehem, are cruelly murdered. They are



Herod gives orders to slay the children of Bethlehem.

dragged from their beds and slain without pity. Hear the despairing screams of the poor mothers as they sit beside the dead bodies of their young dear ones. The Roman soldiers force their way into every house and carry out their fearful task. When at last they stop, their swords drip with

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

blood. Then the murderers go back to Jerusalem and tell their brutal king that his order has been carried out. Herod grins, but in Bethlehem there is mourning and deep sadness. Loud sounds of weeping come from all directions.

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." That prophecy is now fulfilled, for there in the proximity of Bethlehem, Jacob had buried his wife Rachel, centuries before.

"So", thinks Herod, "now the King born to the Jews is certainly dead." Wrong Herod, you are mistaken. On the borders of the land of Canaan two simple, poor people flee with that King towards Egypt. But Herod does not know that.

Matthew 2 vv 19-21

Not long afterwards Herod dies of a terrible disease. Some writers say that he was eaten of worms. The spilling of the innocent blood of all those children was avenged. He died a painful death and then he had to give account before a holy, righteous God.

Herod, you shall know. That blood will for ever follow you. It will fill you with everlasting remorse.

In the mean time Joseph dwelt safely in Egypt. The gifts, which the wise men had offered, were now very useful. He sold that gold, frankincense and myrrh for a lot of money and with that money Joseph could buy everything they needed. How wonderfully the Lord had cared for them. They lacked nothing.

After the death of Herod, the angel appears again to Joseph in a dream and commands him to return to the land of Canaan. Joseph need no longer fear, for Herod is dead and can do no more evil.

Joseph obeys at once, but when he hears that a son of Herod has become king in the place of his father, he dares not live in Bethlehem. In this matter also the Lord shows him how he must act. At God's command Joseph must go and live in Nazareth. So he goes straight through to Nazareth, that despised township in the North, and there he settles down. The prophets had foretold that the Lord Jesus would be a Nazarite, and in this way that came to pass.

The flight into Egypt had also been foretold, for Hosea had said "Out of Egypt have I called my son".

Can you see now, boys and girls, that everything which the prophets had prophesied concerning the Lord Jesus was fulfilled to the letter? This was a proof for the Jews that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messiah. But ... they still did not believe it. They rejected Him. They hated Him. They shouted themselves hoarse screaming "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

But it is also for us, a proof that the Lord Jesus is indeed the Messiah. And what do we do? Do we also reject Him? There is no other way of salvation but through Him.

Implore God to make room in your hearts through grace for the King of kings, for the only Saviour. Oh may you be prevented from rejecting that King.