

Chapter 4: Problems with Matthew 1 and 2?

Seeing that non-virgin birth proponents remove the first two chapters of Matthew from the Scriptures, they go to great lengths to discredit what these chapters teach. In an attempt to make Yeshua NOT be born of a virgin, Matthew 1 and 2 is misunderstood and then manipulated. They then reason that we cannot trust this account as an authentic story of what really happened at the birth of Messiah. The problem with their reasoning is two-fold. (1) I have already shown that Matthew 1 and 2 is genuine and is thus Scripture. Therefore for anyone to reject it, they must reject Scripture. (2) Proponents of a non-virgin birth try to understand these chapters with their own limited and finite understanding instead of allowing the Scriptures to interpret each other (which is relying on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). However, in order to fully deal with the subject, I need to effectively show that each of these “problems” are not problems at all. If we allow the Bible to speak and interpret itself we have no reason to reject Matthew 1 and 2 as Scripture.

“Problem” #1

One non-virgin birth author wrote the following:

...the wise men from the east. These men (as Matt. Records) were magicians or sorcerers (Strong's #3097). Yahweh forbids sorcery. Would Yahweh reveal, by a star, the Messiah's birth to a heathen and not reveal it to one (or some) of his holy people? I think not! “Surely Lord Yahweh will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7)¹

First of all, this is what the inspired account in Matthew says. It does not matter what we think or fathom about the wise men. They saw the star and came, this is an absolute.

Secondly, most people believe that the study of the stars is a pagan practice. On the contrary, Yahweh mentions the stars several times in Scripture, as well as mentioning constellations. Job 9:9 says, “Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.” These names represent constellations or clusters of stars.²

Thirdly, this non-virgin birth author correctly points out that the Greek word for wise men can mean sorcerer. However, he incorrectly states that SEC defines this word as only a magician or sorcerer. Notice SEC's definition.

G3097 / mag'-os / Of foreign origin [H7248]; a Magian, that is, Oriental scientist; by implication a magician:—sorcerer, wise man.

As you can see, SEC gives as one of its definitions, a Magian. Magian is defined by Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language as follows:

One of the sect of the Persian Magi, who hold that there are two principles, one the cause of good, the other of evil. The knowledge of these philosophers was deemed by the vulgar to be supernatural...

¹ *What Think Ye of Messiah? Whose Son is He?* by Raymond Yackley, p4

² See my book titled *Look at the Stars* for a detailed study on the constellations and how they relate to the Biblical calendar.

We see that the Greek word *magos* does not always have negative connotations. As a matter of fact one Encyclopedia of the Bible stated the following under the heading *Magi*:

...a proper noun with no recognized intrinsic meaning. In *Hel.* and *Rom.* Times it was corrupted into a common noun meaning 'magician' or 'sorcerer'.³

There is no reason for us not to believe that the wise men in Matthew 2:1 were magi in the positive sense of the word. As the book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* notes:

The fact is that the Bible is quite unapologetic not only about these magi, but also about Daniel, who was more learned than all of the magi of Babylon (Dan 1:17, 20), having been trained as a Chaldean or astrologer-priest (Dan 1:4, compare Dan 2:2). Likewise, a Jewish contemporary of Matthew viewed Balaam as a magi who had received true revelation from God (Philo, *On the Life of Moses* I, 50 [I, 276-77]). However, neither Philo writing about Balaam nor the writer of Daniel believed that divine revelation came to their respective subjects through astrology, but that the fact that the person was an astrologer did not seem to hinder God from giving them his prophetic Spirit. In the case of Matthew it is different, for the revelation of the birth of Jesus comes to them through their astrological observations.⁴

Furthermore, let us consider a bit of evidence from the Cinquarbes text of the New Covenant Scriptures. Dr. James S. Trimm comments on this text of Matthew 2 in this fashion.

The account of the visit of the wise men in Matthew 2 has long presented a "problem". The Greek text of Matthew calls these visitors to Messiah "Magi" as does the Aramaic text of Matthew (both the Old Syriac and the Peshitta). The Aramaic uses the word M'GUSHAI which refers to a follower of the Magian religion or to sorcerers. Now the DuTillet and Munster Hebrew texts have the word M'KASH'FIM (from the same root as Strong's 3784-3786) meaning "magician" and the Shem Tob Text has "star gazers" in 2:1 and in 2:7 has KUSEMIM (from the same root as Strong's 7080-7081 meaning "sorcerer". These Hebrew texts of Matthew seem to have been influenced by the Greek and/or Aramaic which have an Aramaic word which can refer to a "sorcerer" or to a follower of the Magian religion in general. Now an endorsement of Yeshua as the Messiah by Magi, sorcerers or magicians is certainly a dubious distinction and one that anti-missionaries have not hesitated to lampoon. However the newly uncovered Cinquarbes text of Hebrew Matthew has an alternate reading of MAH'NIM "believers" in this account. Now this is very important because these visitors are said in Matthew 2:1 to have come "from the east". Now in the Tanak ("Old Testament") the term "Land of the East" is often a euphemism for Babylon (see Gen. 29:1; Judges 6:3). During this time period the worlds largest Jewish population was located in the land of Babylon where many of them had remained since the time of the Babylonian captivity. This was the region from which the "Babylonian Talmud" had originated and which Kefa later visited (1 Peter 5:13). Many Jewish sages hailed from this region at this time. Yeshua was not being visited and endorsed by pagans or sorcerers but by BELIEVERS FROM THE EAST... Jewish sages from the region of Babylon who had come to pay tribute to

³ *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, general editor Merrill C. Tenney, Vol. IV, p31

⁴ *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, ed. 2, One-volume edition 1996 by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred T. Brauch.

the newly born Messiah. And this wonderful truth has been preserved for us in the Cinquarbres text of Hebrew Matthew which preserves the original reading of Hebrew Matthew in this passage.⁵

Therefore, the original text *may* have read "*believers* from the east" instead of wise men. However, either way has a legitimate and logical explanation behind it.

Last, but not least, Yahweh did reveal this happening to His servants the prophets; most apparently in the great prophecies of Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2. However, non-virgin birth proponents reject Yahweh's revelation on these prophecies and their reference to the Messiah.

"Problem" #2

Another non-virgin birth author wrote the following:

There is no record in history of Herod's slaughter [Matthew 2:16] of the infant children.⁶

Is not the Scriptural account history? Of course it is, and it is inspired history at that. Therefore, the Scripture (history) does mention the edict of King Herod, and there is no reason for us to doubt the account recorded by Matthew, unless we feel we are more knowledgeable than Yahweh's own inspiration. Secondly, we should notice Mr. Albert Barnes in his notes on Matthew 2:16.

This destruction of the infants of Bethlehem is not mentioned by Josephus, but for this omission three reasons may be given:

1. Josephus, a Jewish historian and a Jew, would not be likely to record anything that would appear to confirm the truth of Christianity.
2. This act of Herod was really so small, compared with his other crimes, that the historian might not think it worthy of record. Bethlehem was a small and obscure village, and the other crimes of Herod were so great and so public, that it is not to be wondered at that the Jewish historian has passed over this.
3. The order was probably given in secret, and might not have been known to Josephus. It pertained to the Christian history; and if the evangelists had not recorded it, it might have been unknown or forgotten. Besides, no argument can be drawn from the silence of the Jewish historian. No reason can be given why Matthew should not be considered to be as fully entitled to credit as Josephus. Yet there is no improbability in the account given by Matthew.⁷

There are many others who have answered the objection concerning the lack of a historical account for Matthew 2:16. Take as one more support the New Commentary on the Whole Bible:

Why, ask skeptics and skeptical critics, is not this massacre, if it really occurred, recorded by Josephus, who was usually thorough in detailing the cruelties of Herod? To this the answer is not difficult. If we consider how small a town Bethlehem was, it is not likely there would be many male children in it of two

⁵ Taken from an e-mail to sanj-update@yahoogroups.com, on Thursday, March 25th, 2004, from Dr. James S. Trimm.

⁶ *What Think Ye of Messiah? Whose Son is He?* by Raymond Yakley, p4

⁷ *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, by Albert Barnes, Matthew 2:16.

years old and under; and when we think of the number of fouler atrocities that Josephus has recorded of Herod (e.g., he murdered some of his own children and some of his wives because he thought they were plotting against him), it is unreasonable to make anything of his silence on this.⁸

“Problem” #3

Another non-virgin birth author wrote the following:

Matt. 2:22-23 reads as if Joseph settled in Nazareth more or less by accident after returning from Egypt. Luke 2:4 & 39 records Nazareth as Joseph’s home town, to which they returned soon after Yahoshua’s birth.⁹

This argument is nothing more than someone making an attempt to find any little “discrepancy” possible. Consider both passages given by the above author.

But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene. [Matthew 2:22-23]

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David... And when they had performed all things according to the law of Yahweh, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. [Luke 2:4, 39]

Anyone not making an attempt to discredit Scripture should clearly see that this is two writers recording the same happening in different ways. We see different styles for each writer. Matthew wants to emphasize the fact of dwelling in Nazareth fulfilling prophecy, while Luke mentions that Nazareth was their hometown. Matthew’s narrative does not imply an accidental settling at all.

“Problem” #4

On the heels of “problem” #3, this statement is sometimes made by non-virgin birth proponents: "Matthew 2:23’s mention of prophecy fulfillment is in actuality nowhere mentioned in the prophets." They claim that the prophets never speak of Yeshua being called a *Nazarene*. This claim is quite easily solved when one looks to the reference of Isaiah 11:1. Isaiah being a prophet.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. [Isaiah 11:1]

One can examine the underlying Hebrew word translated *branch* in this passage, and find that it is the Hebrew word *netser*, defined by SEC as “...from 5341 in the sense of greenness as a striking color; a shoot; fig., a descendant...” This *netser* is the root word of

⁸ *New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, General Editor: J.D. Douglas, New Testament Editor Philip W. Comfort, comment on Matthew 2:16

⁹ *What Think Ye of Messiah? Whose Son is He?* By Raymond Yakley, pg. 4.

Nazarene. Rather than giving my comments, one pro-virgin birth article I have in my possession comments nicely on this Isaiah passage in this fashion:

The interesting thing about this word branch (nezer) is that it is #5342 in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance which is defined as a shoot or a descendant which is what YAHshua was. It comes from #5341 (natsar/nazar) which is defined as a prim. root; to guard, in a good sense (to protect, maintain, obey, etc.) or a bad one (to conceal, etc.) [Note: a study of Scripture reveals that there is the good Branch which is highly spoken of and a bad branch which is ill spoken of, fulfilling this definition] He (YAHshua) was a shoot or descendant (nezer) of David the rod (choter) of Jesse spoken of in Isa. 11:1... YAHshua proclaimed, "I am the Root and Offspring (branch/nezer) of David, the bright and morning star," Rev. 22:16.¹⁰

If we take the position that Matthew 2:23 was indeed inspired by Yahweh (which we have no reason not to believe) then we must agree with the interpretation that Matthew 2:23 was prophesied about in Isaiah 11:1

"Problem" #5

Another non-virgin birth author wrote the following:

Another problem for the writer of Matthew 1:23 is that Yahshua was NEVER called Emmanuel. It isn't recorded that His parents named Him that. They never referred to Him as Emmanuel. In fact, the writer of Matthew 1 contradicts himself in verse 21 where he specifically says that the Angel of Yahweh told Miriam to name Him "Yahshua". Luke 2:21 confirms the naming of the child as "Yahshua". Now, if an Angel of Yahweh came down and told the parents to name the baby "Emmanuel", why is it that Joseph and Miriam didn't follow that command? By which name only can we be saved? Yahshua, Emmanuel, Wonderful counselor... Which is it?¹¹

The contention here is this: since the text in Matthew says the child's name would be Emmanuel, and the child was never called Emmanuel, then Matthew 1:23 must be spurious. Is there, however, another option? Consider the first fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. (Isaiah 7:14 was at first fulfilled during the days of the prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Yeshua was ever born.) There was a child born at that time for the immediate fulfillment during the days of Ahaz. Was this child's name Emmanuel? Absolutely not, it was rather Mahershalalhashbaz.¹² Yet, in Isaiah 8:8, 10 we find that Emmanuel was to be understood in a prophetic sense as a *secondary name* for this child, not in a literal sense as a primary name. In the second or dual fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23-24) we see that the primary name for the child was Yeshua, while the prophetic, secondary name for the child was again, Emmanuel.

Non-virgin birth proponents always point out that they believe Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled during the days of Isaiah. This objection about the name Emmanuel backfires on them when they cannot show a child born in the days of Isaiah who was named

¹⁰ *Elder/Evangelist Jerry Healen COMMENTS in response to the following article which denies the virgin birth of YAHshua our Messiah, p10.*

¹¹ *The Virgin Birth – 21 Points, by Jon Francis, p6.*

¹² Isaiah 8:1-3

Emmanuel - unless - they recognize that Emmanuel was not a primary name but a prophetic, secondary name.

Conclusion

We have examined five supposed problems with the text of Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and have seen logical, alternate interpretations of the passages which lead one to accept Matthew's inspiration, rather than reject it. It seems in studying this issue that non-virgin birth proponents are seeking to critique the Scriptures rather than allow them to successfully harmonize. There are other "problems" people attempt to point out in the book of Matthew, particularly in regards to the prophetic fulfillments mentioned by Matthew himself. The problem is solved quite simply when one understands that a dual fulfillment of a singular prophecy is of a surety a Scriptural teaching. Matthew 2:15 and Matthew 2:17-18 are both fulfillments of Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15, that is, if we accept what Matthew was inspired to write. However, non-virgin birth proponents often mock at the notion of a dual fulfillment, they say that such a teaching is not found in the Bible, and that those proposing a dual fulfillment are simply making an attempt to bypass the clear teaching of Scripture. This is definitely a bold assertion on their part, but is it a contention which is based on the Scriptures or a contention based on their own biases and prejudices? Maybe they are right after all? Can we find such a thing as a dual fulfillment of a singular prophecy in Yahweh's inspired word?