

The Gospel According to

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

CHAPTER 2, VERSES 16-18

NOTHING RECORDED

NOTHING RECORDED

NOTHING RECORDED

2:16 - ¶ Then Herod¹, when he saw that he was mocked² of the wise men³, was exceeding wrath⁴, and sent forth⁵, and slew⁶ all⁷ the children⁸ that were in Bethlehem⁹, and in all the coasts¹⁰ thereof, from two years old¹¹ and under¹², according to the time¹³ which he had diligently enquired¹⁴ of the wise men³.

2:17 - Then was fulfilled¹⁵ that which was spoken by Jeremy¹⁶ the prophet¹⁷, saying,

2:18 - In Rama¹⁸ was there a voice heard¹⁹, lamentation²⁰, and weeping²¹, and great mourning²², Rachel²³ weeping²¹ for her children⁸, and would not be comforted²⁴, because they are not²⁵.

CHRONOLOGY: Between May 11, 4BCE* and May 11, 3BCE*, It is suspected that Herod killed the young male children of Bethlehem shortly after Joseph, Mary and Jesus departed for Egypt. The date of their departure is debatable and unclear. We know it happened after Mary's purification, and likely not too long thereafter.

* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

Year theories:	1 BCE - Supported by the Apostle James E. Talmage & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
	2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger.
	2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
	3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
	4 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. Supported by this Author.
	5 BCE - Supported by the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.
	6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
	7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

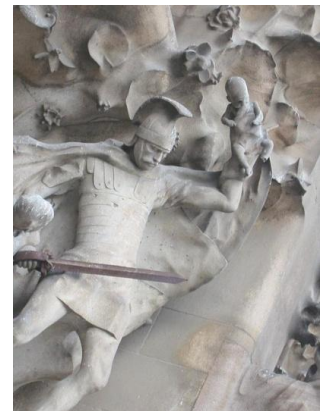
LOCATION: BETHLEHEM

COMMENTARY: The Lord allowed Herod his agency. He was free to choose, but he would not be allowed to stop the Lord's work. The Messiah was safe, but children would die so that Herod could stand accountable for his actions. A dozen or so male children 2 years of age and younger would be killed by Herod's "men" in a kill them all approach to eliminate a possible Messiah. Surely more than Rachel cried that day. Mothers and father, along with the host of heaven, cried as Herod executed the young ones. This story has come to be known as the "Massacre of the Innocents".

FOOTNOTES:

1 - Herod - The name "Herod" is translated from the Greek word "Ἡρώδης" or "Hērōdēs". It is unclear what the Greek name for Herod means. It probably means "song of the hero". The name Herod is best known for a menial king of Judah, Herod the Great. Thereafter, it became a title as well as a name. The name of the royal family, descending from Herod the Great, bore this title. Herod the Great was the son of Antipater of Idumaea. He was born an Edomite in 74BCE, with a claim that his mother was Jewish. Herod the Great was appointed king of Judaea in 40BCE by the Roman Senate with a nomination from Mark Antony and with the consent of Octavian. Herod was crowned "King of the Jews". He then overcame the great opposition which the country of Judah mounted in response to him taking possession of the kingdom in 37BCE. The Jews did not see Herod of the Davidic line, nor otherwise deserving of the Judean crown. Herod was given a Roman army to assist in the capture and taming of Judea and specifically Jerusalem. After the battle of Actium, he was confirmed by Octavian (better known as Caesar Augustus), whose favor he enjoyed throughout his life.

Herod was brave and skilled in war, learned and cunning; but also extremely suspicious and cruel. Hence, Herod's first order of business was to eliminate the entire royal family of Hasmonaeans. They were most likely to be seen as royalty and deserving successors to the throne by the Jews. Consequently, they were a threat to Herod's position as King. Mattathias Antigonus, a Hasmonaean, was executed with the help of Mark Antony and Herod killed 45 leading men of Antigonus' party in 37BCE (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 14, Chapter 16, verse 4 & Book 15, Chapter 1, verse 2). He had the elderly John Hyrcanus II, another Hasmonaean, strangled over an alleged plot to overthrow Herod in 30BCE (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 15, Chapter 6, verses 3-4). It didn't end there. Herod continued to purge the Hasmonaean family. He eliminated his brother-in-law,



Aristobulus, who was at the time an 18 year old High Priest. He was drowned in 35BCE by Herod's men in the swimming pool of the winter palace in Jericho because Herod thought the Romans would favor Aristobulus as ruler of Judea instead of him (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 15, Chapter 3, verse 3). He also had his Hasmonean mother-in-law, Alexandra (the mother of Mariamme) executed in 28BCE (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 15, Chapter 7, verses 6-8). He even killed his second wife Miriamme in 29BCE. She was his beloved Hasmonean bride whom he loved to death, literally, no pun intended. (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus Book 15, Chapter 7, verses 6-8). If you were Hasmonaean, you were on Herod's figurative list for extermination.

By these acts of bloodshed, and especially by his love and imitation of Roman customs and institutions and by the burdensome taxes imposed upon his subjects, he so alienated the Jews. So much that even his splendid restoration of the temple and other acts of kindness were unable to regain their favor. Around 20BCE, Herod remitted one third of the people's taxes in order to curry favor with them. Of course, Herod could not stop being Herod. At the same time that he was trying to gain their favor, he set up an internal spy network and eliminated people suspected of revolt, most being taken to Hyrcania, a fortress in the Judean Desert. When word got out that he was executing people who were secretly taken away, his good deeds seemed insignificant.

Herod's spying and paranoia seemed to get worse with time. Herod was so paranoid that he started to believe that even his closest allies were plotting against him. Herod even had three of his sons killed. The first two, Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of Mariamme, were strangled in Sebaste (Samaria) in 7BCE and buried at the Alexandrium. In the same year he had 300 military leaders executed. In the end, only five days before Herod's own death, Herod executed his son Antipater who was buried without ceremony at Hyrcania.

Probably the most noteworthy of his schemes, in relation to the Nativity, aside from the slaying of the children, occurred in 6BCE. Herod had a number of Pharisees executed after it was revealed that they predicted to Pheroras' wife [Pheroras was Herod's youngest brother and tetrarch of Perea] **"that by God's decree Herod's throne would be taken from him, both from himself and his descendants, and the royal power would fall to her and Pheroras and to any children they might have"** (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, 17:2:4). This is noteworthy since, the Pharisees and Scribes were troubled when the wise men came looking for the King of the Jews. They knew what happened the last time they spoke of a Messiah. They were afraid that Herod might execute them for such rumors. Shortly thereafter, Herod send for the Pharisees and scribes. Fortunate for them, Herod did not blame the rumor of a Messiah on them, but rather wanted to use them for information. They gave him the information, probably out of fear of the consequences if they didn't cooperate. Because of the significance of this event, the passage in Josephus is being included as follows;

"...But the king's sister [Salome] was their antagonist, who for a good while had looked about all their affairs, and was apprized that this their friendship was made in order to do Herod some mischief, and was disposed to inform the king of it. And since these people knew that their friendship was very disagreeable to Herod, as tending to do him a mischief, they contrived that their meetings should not be discovered; so they pretended to hate one another, and to abuse one another when time served, and especially when Herod was present, or when any one was there that would tell him: but still their intimacy was firmer than ever, when they were private. And this was the course they took. But they could not conceal from Salome neither their first contrivance, when they set about these their intentions, nor when they had made some progress in them; but she searched out every thing; and, aggravating the relations to her brother, declared to him, as well their secret assemblies and computations, as their counsels taken in a clandestine manner, which if they were not in order to destroy him, they might well enough have been open and public. But to appearance they are at variance, and speak about one another as if they intended one another a mischief, but agree so well together when they are out of the sight of the multitude; for when they are alone by themselves, they act in concert, and profess that they will never leave off their friendship, but will fight against those from whom they conceal their designs. And thus did she search out these things, and get a perfect knowledge of them, and then told her brother of them, who understood also of himself a great deal of what she said, but still durst not depend upon it, because of the suspicions he had of his sister's calumnies. For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good-will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them. In order to requite which kindness of hers, since they were believed to have the foreknowledge of things to come by Divine inspiration, they foretold how God had decreed that Herod's government should cease, and his posterity should be deprived of it; but that the kingdom should come to her and Pheroras, and to their children. These predictions were not concealed from Salome, but were told the king; as also how they had perverted some persons about the palace itself; so the king slew such of the Pharisees as were principally accused, and Bagoas the eunuch, and one Carus, who exceeded all men of that time in comeliness, and one that was his catamite. He slew also all those of his own family who had consented to what the Pharisees foretold; and for Bagoas, he had been puffed up by them, as though he should be named the father and the benefactor of him who, by the prediction, was foretold to be their appointed king; for that this king would have all things in his power, and would enable Bagoas to marry, and to have children of his own body begotten." (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 17, Chapter 2, verse 4)



FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

Herod died in the 70th year of his age, the 37th year of his reign, the 4th before the Dionysian era (if you consider Dionysius' calendar accurate). In Herod's closing years, John the Baptist and Jesus were born. Additionally, Matthew records that Herod commanded all the male children under two years old in Bethlehem to be slain.

Herod was evil. He falls into a class of history's most vial humans. The likes of Hitler, Nimrod, and Stalin, he embraced sin of every kind.

See also the commentary for Herod in Chapter 2, footnote #2, Chapter 14, footnote #8, and Chapter 15, footnote #5.

- 2 - **mocked** - The word "mocked" is derived from the Greek word "ἐμπαίζω" or "empaizō". The Greek word means to play or trifle with. It also means "to mock", "delude" or "deceive". Herod put on an act for the wise men. He pretended to have reverence for the new King and a desire to worship Him. He thought he worked out an agreement with the wise men. He directed them to Bethlehem, and they agreed to return and report after they found the Messiah. I imagine the wise men left with the same understanding. Herod thought he was controlling the situation. The wise men were directed by heaven not to return to Herod. They obeyed and went home without returning to Jerusalem. In this, Herod felt deceived. I am sure he felt like he had a deal. How dare the wise men defy Herod's request. He was, after all, King. This alone was a mockery to his throne. He felt he was deceived, when in fact, it was Herod that was being deceptive. Herod had no intention of worshipping Jesus, but rather murder was his goal. The spirit intervened and foiled his plans, and consequently, Herod felt mocked.

3- **wise men** - See the commentary for the "wise men" in Chapter 4, footnote #15, Chapter 14, footnote #3, and Chapter 15, footnote #1.

4- **exceeding wrath** - The word "wrath" is translated from the Greek word "θυμῶν" or "thymōō". It means "to cause one to become incensed", "to provoke to anger", or "to be wrath". Herod became very angry. If you look at Herod's life, anger seems to be a way of life for him. Farrar wrote, **"It must have been very shortly after the murder of the innocents that Herod died. Only five days before his death he had made a frantic attempt at suicide, and had ordered the execution of his eldest son Antipater. His death-bed, which once more reminds us of Henry VIII., was accompanied by circumstances of peculiar horror; and it has been asserted that he died of a loathsome disease, which is hardly mentioned in history, except in the case of men who have been rendered infamous by an atrocity of persecuting zeal. On his bed of intolerable anguish, in that splendid and luxurious palace which he had built for himself, under the palms of Jericho, swollen with disease and scorched by thirst, ulcerated externally and glowing inwardly with a 'soft slow fire,' surrounded by plotting sons and plundering slaves, detesting all and detested by all, longing for death as a release from his tortures yet dreading it as the beginning of worse terrors, stung by remorse yet still unslaked with murder, a horror to all around him yet in his guilty conscience a worse terror to himself, devoured by the premature corruption of an anticipated grave, eaten of worms as though visibly smitten by the finger of God's wrath after seventy years of successful villainy, the wretched old man, whom men had called the Great, lay in savage frenzy awaiting his last hour. As he knew that none would shed one tear for him, he determined that they should shed many for themselves, and issued an order that, under pain of death, the principal families of the kingdom and the chiefs of the tribes should come to Jericho. They came, and then, shutting them in the hippodrome, he secretly commanded his sister Salome that at the moment of his death they should all be massacred. And so, choking as it were with blood, devising massacres in its very delirium, the soul of Herod passed forth into the night."** (Life of Christ, Canon Farrar, pages 54-55).



When Herod didn't get his way, or even perceived that his will was being jeopardized, he became angry and death usually followed. It is hard to believe that someone could live their life in such a way. Macrobius, one of the last pagan Roman writers who lived around 400CE in Rome, wrote a book called Saturnalia. In it he wrote, **"When it was heard that, as part of the slaughter of boys up to two years old, Herod, king of the Jews, had ordered his own son to be killed, he [the Emperor Augustus] remarked, 'It is better to be Herod's pig [Gr. hys] than his son' [Gr. huiois]"** (Saturnalia 2.4.11). Macrobius may have gotten some of his historical facts garbled, but he could have given us a chronological key as well. If he was referring to the death of Antipater in 4BCE, the slaughter of the Innocents would have been one of the last, if not the last, brutal killings of Herod before he died. What is also interesting is the word-play in the quote attributed to Augustus- "pig" and "son" are similar sounding words in Greek. Herod would not kill a pig because it was not kosher, at least among the Jews; yet he had no qualms killing his own sons!

Anger is a trait of the adversary. It offends God and the Spirit. Jesus taught, **"For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another."** (3 Nephi 11:29). Anger is a tool used by the Devil to destroy agency. Decisions made in anger are usually not thought out, or reasonable. Anger is a selfish emotion. It has been said, **"Anger is a yielding to Satan's influence by surrendering our self-control. It is the thought-sin that leads to hostile feelings or behavior. It is the detonator of road rage on the freeway, flare-ups in the sports arena, and domestic violence in homes."** (General Conference, "Agency and Anger, Lynn G. Robbins, April 1998). Herod is a prime example of giving away one's ability to choose, and letting anger dictate the actions.

5- **sent forth** - The phrase "sent forth" is derived from the Greek word "ἀποστέλλω" or "apostellō". It means to order one to go to an appointed place. So Herod "sent forth". Who did he send forth? And to what appointed place? Herod did not command a Roman army, yet according to Matthew he commanded someone. While it is true that he was assisted by the Roman Army after he was made King of the Jews, this was short lived and only until Judea was subdued under Herod in 37BCE. That being said, Herod was not without soldiers. At its peak, Herod's army numbered 40,000 soldiers. Herod's army consisted of Jews and contingents of mercenaries. Herod obtained mercenary soldiers from Germania, Thracian, Gallia, and Parthia. It is said that they were divided into 3 cohorts. Undoubtedly, he dispatched a contingent of his army to Bethlehem. Herod had previously called for the Scribes to obtain information. The scribes used the scriptures to identify the birthplace of the Messiah, and they told Herod.

Herod sent forth soldiers. They were sent to Bethlehem as the Scribes had directed. How many soldiers? That we do not know. With upwards of 40,000 men at Herod's disposal, one could safely surmise that he sent an adequate force. Given the size of Bethlehem, a sizable army would not have been required. Herod would have sent enough to assure that there was no resistance, while at the same time refraining from sending such a force as to cause unrest in other areas of the kingdom.

6- **slew** - The word "slew" is translated from the Greek word "ἀναιρέω" or "anaireō". It means literally "to take up", or "to lift up". It is used to convey the idea of killing or slaying a man. Artists who have tried to convey the horrific scene of the slaying of the children often show soldiers with swords drawn. The fact is, we do not know how the act was accomplished. The soldiers might have drowned, or suffocated the little ones. They might yet have used other means. We can only speculate.

Many have argued that since the historical writers of the time have not collaborated the event, then it must not have happened. **"Josephus wrote for a Greco-Roman audience, which would have little concern for infant deaths. Greeks regularly practiced infanticide as a kind of birth control, particularly in Sparta, while the Roman father had the right not to lift his baby off the floor after birth, letting it die"** (Herod and the Infants of Bethlehem, Paul L. Maier, 1998, page 179). The entire concept of slaying children seems not only strange to our society, but barbaric. In order to wrap our minds around the concept of slaying children, we need to look at ancient customs. Oriental history is full of such deeds of cruelty, which are believed upon the authority of single writers. So why should the statement of Matthew be disbelieved, though confirmed by all that we know of the character of the chief actor, and of the history of the times. A like rule applied to general history would leave many of the pages of history empty. We believe the gospel account to be true. It lacks details and collaboration, but nevertheless, true.

It should be noted at this point that Moses foreshadowed the killing of the children. We know that Moses was created in the likeness and image of Jesus. God told Moses, **"And I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth; but there is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all."** (Moses 1:6). At the time of Moses' birth, a Pharaoh sat on Egypt's throne, and like Herod was concerned about his position. He looked upon the children of Israel and saw them growing in number and strength. He issued a command to the midwives, **"When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live."** (Exodus 1:16). The midwives followed the commands of Pharaoh and cast the new born sons into the Nile river. All of Israel mourned. Moses was born at this time. His mother took him and floated him into the Nile into the hands of the daughter of Pharaoh. He was then safely raised in the house of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Like Jesus, Moses escaped miraculously from an attempt on his life when he was a baby. Though Israel was in Egypt at the time of Moses' birth, he was protected from death by Egypt. (see Exodus 1:17-2:10).





- 7- **all** - The word "all" is translated from the Greek word "πᾶς" or "pas". It means each, every, any and all. It is used to convey the idea of everything or all things.

The word "all" the children gives an initial impression of a great number. We know it was to include all the male children, but how big was "all". The massacre might not have been as large as the church history of the dark ages records. The Martyrdom of Matthew states that 3,000 baby were slaughtered. The Byzantine liturgy places the number at 14,000 and the Syrian tradition says 64,000 innocent children were killed. Yet Professor William F. Albright, the dean of American archaeology in the Holy Land, estimates that the total population of Bethlehem, adult and children alike, at the time of Jesus' birth to be about 300 people (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.E. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 19). The number of male children, two years old or younger, would follow statistically to be about six or seven. This would hardly be a newsworthy event in light of what else was going on at the time.

Modern scholars have attempted to estimate the age and extent of the children involved in the slaying. Greswell limits it to the age of thirteen months. If so, the number of the children murdered is much diminished. But under any circumstances it could not have been large. Sepp, supposing the whole number of inhabitants of Bethlehem and its coasts to be 5,000, would make the male children of this age about ninety; but this is a large estimate. Townsend, making the inhabitants to be 2,000, makes 50 children to have been slain. Some would reduce the number to ten or fifteen. Voltaire, after an old Greek tradition, would make it 14,000. In peaceful times, such an act as this, even if executed as this probably was, in secrecy, would have excited general indignation when it became known; but now the Jewish people had so long "supped with horrors," and were so engrossed in the many perils that threatened their national existence, that this passed by comparatively unnoticed. Such a deed—from a man, of whom Josephus says, that " **he was brutish and a stranger to all humanity,**" who had murdered his wife and his own children, and who wished in his dying rage to destroy all the chief men of his kingdom, that there might be a general mourning at his funeral—could have awakened no surprise. It was wholly in keeping with his reckless and savage character; but one, and by no means the greatest of his crimes. It is therefore possible that it may never have come to the knowledge of the Jewish historian, writing so many years after the event.

Since Herod did not know exactly which child was the promised Messiah, he couldn't execute an isolated killing. He had to take a shot gun approach. If he killed ALL the children, surely the Messiah was one of them and his goal would be accomplished.

- 8- **the children** - The word "child" is translated from the Greek word "παῖς" or "pais". It is used for children, specifically infants. It can also be used in reference to servants or slaves. The greek word gives us no insight into the expected age of the Messiah at the time of the Massacre. The word could be used for both infant and child alike. Herod obviously thought he had a proper age range. He thought any child under two years of age was a candidate.

So children were killed. Why is there not more recorded. "The slaughter of infants two years old or less in a town of the size of Bethlehem (population ca. 300) at this time would not only have been a comparatively minor incident, and so probably unknown to Josephus, but also completely in line with Herod's known character." (Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible, W.E. Albright and C.S. Mann, page 19). See also the commentary for children in Chapter 2, footnote #36.

- 9- **Bethlehem** - The town of "Bethlehem" is a Hebrew name. It's Greek equivalent, used in this translation, is "Βηθλέεμ" or "Béthleem". The Hebrew word means "house of bread". "Bethlehem was not a large town, and the number of the children would not exceed from twenty to thirty babies. We must not think in terms of hundreds. It is true that this does not make Herod's crime any less terrible, but we must get the picture right." (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 28).



only 300 people in population, there would have been somewhere around 70 homes, plus other structures necessary to support a small town. See also the commentary for Bethlehem in Chapter 9, footnote # 23 and Chapter 14, footnote # 2.

- 10 - in all the coasts** - The word "coasts" is translated from the Greek word "ὄριον" or "horion" meaning "boundaries", "region", "district", "land" or "territory".

Where did the "coasts" of Bethlehem start and end? Speaking of Herod, Barclay says, **"He gave orders that every child under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding district should be slaughtered."** (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 28). Surely, the surrounding district would not include adjacent towns such as Etham or Zeleah. Most probably it included families living just outside of Bethlehem on small farms or in rural homes. It would include shepherds occupying the country side of Bethlehem.

- 11 - from two years old** - This phrase, two years old, has sparked plenty of discussion. Not only is there speculation as to what defines two years old, is that up to the second birthday, or until they turn three, but it also creates debate as to the age of Jesus. We will discuss each separately;

1. **"Children are counted as being two years of age until they attain their third birthdays. Apparently the decree of slaughter included all those who were two years of age and younger."** (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 237). I can't think of a more reliable source than Elder McConkie. If his view is correct, then we really had children up to three years of age included in Herod's order. This would increase the estimates for the number of children slain by 33%. One could also read the passage as any child up to two years of age. The age affects the total number of children and the possible age of the Savior.
2. **"Since Matthew expressly states, twice in the account, that the age of slaughter was determined by the time the wise men saw the star, which even coincided with the birth of the King, it appears the young Jesus could have been as old as two years and some months at this time. The usually accepted chronology makes him two or three months old. If his birth were placed a year or more back from December 5 B.C., it would mean that the Holy Family stayed in Nazareth for the added period before returning to Bethlehem, which of course is a distinct possibility."** (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 237).



The mainstream speculation is that the Wise Men spoke with Herod, and told him when the star first appeared in the heaven. It is assumed that the star appeared at the Savior's birth, and therefore could be used to calculate the Savior's age. The theory is that Herod gathered the facts to determine that the age of the Savior was 2 years old. Therefore, he ordered the death of all children 2 years of age and younger. Here is the problem with the theory. God could have set the new star in the heaven at conception, or early enough in time to allow for travel. Another problem is that Herod might have padded the number, just to make sure the Messiah didn't somehow survive based on a bad calculation.

So was Jesus an infant of a toddler? **"It is worthy of note that the wise men found Jesus in a house, not a stable, inn, or temporary abiding place; that he is called a 'young child', not a baby, a total of seven times in the course of fourteen consecutive verses; that Matthew makes two pointed references to the diligent nature of Herod's inquiry as to the actual time of the birth; and that a child is two years of age until the time of his third birthday. Now assuming that Herod would order the massacre of all young children in the general age bracket involved, still the presumption arises that a general number of months or even one or two years may have elapsed before the arrival of the eastern visitors."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 107). There are lots of great theories, and they may be correct, but we do not know if Jesus was an infant or a young child when he was visited by the wise men.

I do not think it wise to use the age of the children ordered to be executed as an Anchor point for Chronology.

- 12 - under** - The word "under" is translated from the Greek word "κάτω" or "katō". It means "down", "downwards", "beneath", and "below". This gives indication that the children were below or beneath 2 years of age.
- 13 - according to the time** - The word "time" is derived from the Greek word "χρόνος" or "chronos". It means time, either long or short. According to the time period that the wise men laid out before Herod is a reference point given by Matthew. Innocently, the wise men shared the time of the star, the length of their travel, and the desires of their hearts. **"When did the wise men come to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and how old was the child Jesus when they bowed down to him? Though this date cannot be known with certainty, there is strong reason to suppose that more than seven weeks and quite possibly several months or even nearly three years elapsed between this visit and the nativity. It could not have taken place during Mary's forty days of purification, because immediately following them the holy family went to Nazareth to live (Luke 2:21-24, 39), whereas following the visit of these eastern prophets, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, fled into Egypt."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Bruce R. McConkie, page 106-107). Elder McConkie clearly outlines the key issues to the time line in question;

1. The wise men probably didn't visit prior to Mary's purification, because after the gift of gold she would not have offered an offering of the poor.
2. The family left to Nazareth directly following Mary's purification, and the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem.
3. The family was visited by the wise men in Bethlehem and immediately afterwards left for Egypt to escape the slaying of the children
4. Herod purposefully selected children two years and under to be slain, based on some calculation of the Savior's age.

Matthew uses "according to the time" as if we could clue into the details of the time line. Unfortunately, that is easier said than done. In 200CE, Clement of Alexandria studied all the information available to him and recorded that the date of Jesus' birth would have been on May 14, 6BCE. Not bad, since modern revelation says that it was April 6th, and Elder McConkie would place the year in 5BCE. He concluded that the wise men from the east did not arrive in Jerusalem to visit Herod and then go on to Bethlehem until at least 50 days after the birth of the Lord Jesus, but more than likely a year to a year and a half later. Furthermore, Clement felt that when Mary performed the ritual of purification for her firstborn

in the Temple she offered two turtledoves, the offering of the poor (Luke 2:22-24 and Leviticus 12:8) and if the wise men had already arrived with their gold, frankincense and myrrh, Mary would have been obligated to offer a lamb and would have had the means to do so (Leviticus 12:6). Herod inquired of the wise men when the star first appeared and instructed them to go and find the "King of the Jews" and return and tell him so he could go and worship the young Child as well (Matthew 2:7-9). Herod realized he was tricked when the wise men returned home another way after they were warned in a dream of Herod's evil intentions (Matthew 2:12). Herod calculated the age of the young Child based on the testimony of the wise men as to when the star first appeared. He ordered the killing of all male children in Bethlehem and its immediate vicinity who were two years old and younger (Matthew 2:16). Herod dies in March of 4BCE, according to Clement, just under two years from the birth of Jesus. This line of reasoning by Clement made all the pieces fit nicely together.



CLEMENT OF
ALEXANDRIA

- 14 - diligently enquired** - The phrase "diligently enquired" is translated from a single Greek word, "ἀκριβῶς" or "akribōs". It means "to know accurately", "to do exactly", or "to investigate diligently". This is not a good thing for Herod's copability. He worked hard to make all this happen. He was careful and calculating. He set it up. **"We have read how he carefully enquired of the wise men when they had seen the star. Even then he was craftily working out the age of the child so that he might take steps towards murder, and now he put his plans into swift and savage action."** (The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 28). This would be clear and premeditated murder. I am sure that the pages of scripture will sound loud on the day of judgment. **"Baffled in the hope of attaining his object through the Magi, the reckless tyrant sought to secure it by an indiscriminate slaughter of all the children in Bethlehem and its immediate neighborhood, from two years and under. True, considering the population of Bethlehem, their number could only have been small, probably twenty at most. But the deed was none the less atrocious; and these infants may justly be regarded as the protomartyrs, the first witnesses, of Christ, the blossom of martyrdom' (flores martyrum, as Prudentius calls them). The slaughter was entirely in accordance with the character and former measures of Herod. Nor do we wonder, that it remained unrecorded by Josephus, since on other occasions also he has omitted events which to us seem important. The murder of a few infants in an insignificant village might appear scarcely worth notice in a reign stained by so much bloodshed. Besides, he had, perhaps, a special motive for this silence. Josephus always carefully suppresses, so far as possible, all that refers to the Christ - probably not only in accordance with his own religious views, but because mention of a Christ might have been dangerous, certainly would have been inconvenient, in a work written by an intense self-seeker, mainly for readers in Rome. Of two passages in his own Old Testament Scriptures the Evangelist sees a fulfilment in these events. The flight into Egypt is to him the fulfilment of this expression by Hosea, Out of Egypt have I called My Son.' In the murder of the Innocents,' he sees the fulfilment of Rachel's lament (who died and was buried in Ramah) over her children, the men of Benjamin, when the exiles to Babylon met in Ramah, and there was bitter wailing at the prospect of parting for hopeless captivity, and yet bitter lament, as they who might have encumbered the onward march were pitilessly slaughtered."** (Life of the Messiah, Alfred Edersheim, Chapter 8)
- 15 - fulfilled** - The word "fulfilled" is translated from the Greek word "πληρῶν" or "plērōō". It has many different definitions and usages, however the most appropriate is the bringing to realization sayings, promises, and prophecies. To cause God's promises to be fulfilled. The fulfilled prophecy is one uttered by the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. It is found in Jeremiah 31:15.
- 16 - Jeremy** - The name "Jeremy" is a poor translation. It is derived from the Greek word "Ἰερემίας" or "Jeremias". The Greek word is a form of the Hebrew name "Jeremiah". The Hebrew name literally means "whom Jehovah has appointed". Jeremiah was an Old Testament prophet and contemporary of Lehi. The son of Hilkiah of the priests that were in Anathoth. He was called very young to the prophetic office. It is believed that he was called in 622BCE, and prophesied for 42 years. He probably died in Egypt after the kingdom of Judah was taken exile into Babylon, leaving Jerusalem in heaps.
- 17 - prophet** - The word "prophet" is translated from the Greek word "προφήτης" or "prophētēs". A prophet is someone called of God to reveal God's will. They have the ability to predict the future, warn of things that are unforeseen, and reveal secrets as moved upon by Heaven. See also the commentary for prophet in Chapter 4, footnote #35, Chapter 14, footnote #14, and Chapter 15, footnote #10.
- 18 - Rama** - The word "Rama" is translated from the Greek word "Ραμά" or "Rhama". The word is Greek for the Hebrew word "Ramah", meaning a hill.

Most people think that Jeremiah is obviously speaking of the town "Ramah". Ramah in Benjamin was a city of ancient Israel. It was located near Gibeah to the South, with Mizpah to the West, and Geba to the East. It is identified with modern Er-Ram, about 5 miles north of Jerusalem.

The city is first mentioned in Joshua 18:25, near Gibeah of Benjamin. It is mentioned again as a Levite came traveling to Gibeah, with Ramah just ahead (Judges 19:11-15). It was fortified by Baasha, king of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 15:17-22; 2 Chronicles 16:1-6). Asa, king of the southern kingdom, employed Ben Hadad the Syrian king to attack Baasha at home and draw his forces away from Ramah (1 Kings 15:18, 20). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, those taken captive were assembled in Ramah before being moved to Babylon (Jeremiah 40:1).

It is the captivity into Babylon that Jeremiah references. Jeremiah said, **"Thus saith the Lord; 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."** (Jeremiah 31:15). It is thought that Rachel had so desired children that she considered herself dead without them (Genesis 30:1). Jeremiah said that Rachel was figuratively weeping because of the loss of the people killed or taken in captivity. At the time of the captivity, the exiles were collected in Ramah before removal to Babylon. And since she was the mother of Benjamin, it would fit because those in Ramah were Benjamites. The scriptures record, **"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon."** (Jeremiah 40:1).

ENTRANCE TO RACHEL'S TOMB,
NORTH OF BETHLEHEM



Rachel gave birth to her last son in Ramah, and died in child birth. However, the Ramah of the Babylonian exile and Rachel's death do not appear to be the same place. Rachel is said to have died in Ramat-Rachel on the road to Bethlehem. Remember that Ramah or Ramat means hill. Rachel died in child birth and Jacob buried her on a hill and placed stone markers to remember her death. **"And Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day."** (Genesis 35:19-20). Ramat-Rachel lies just a short walk north of Bethlehem. It is in the "coasts" of Bethlehem.

Jeremiah's prophecy was a dual prophecy. It absolutely references the loss of Israelites to Babylonian captivity and death. Rachel was figuratively mother to all of Israel, and would have wept at their loss. There is no comforting a mother who has lost her children. It also references the children lost in Bethlehem in an attempt to snuff out the Messiah. There is no doubt that Rachel has not watched from the spirit world, looking over her children. There is no doubt that she was sorrowed.





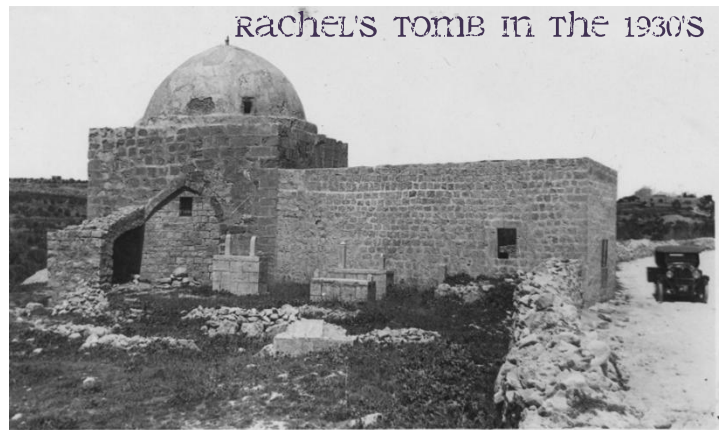
The covered vault that supposedly houses Rachel's body

It is located at Ramat-Rachel (the Hill of Rachel) just north of Bethlehem

- 19 - **heard** - The word "heard" is translated from the Greek word "ἀκούω" or "akouō". It means simply to hear. Though we have no record as to what happened in Bethlehem, it can be sure that the cries of loving mothers were heard. There could be no soldier that could silence the grief brought that day. See also the commentary for "heard" in Chapter 7, footnote #33.
- 20 - **lamentation** - The word "lamentation" is translated from the Greek word "θρήνος" or "thrēnos". It means "to cry aloud" or "to lament". A lamentation is not a silent sorrow. It is boisterous. It is the kind of crying that penetrates the heart.
- 21 - **weeping** - The word "weeping" is translated from the Greek word "κλαυθμός" or "klauthmos". It means "weeping" or "lamentation". Tears were shed. Emotions were wounded and the mothers and families cried tears of sadness.
- 22 - **great mourning** - The word "mourning" is translated from the Greek word "ὀδυρμός" or "odymos". It means "wailing", "lamentation", or "mourning". Soon after death, family members of the deceased would mourn and prepare the body for burial. Mourning consisted of ripping or renting ones cloths. It also called for placing ashes on one's forehead, and wearing sackcloth. The mourning was often done in public. It was loud and sad. The deceased body was washed and anointed with various oils and spices. The body was then wrapped in unique linen clothing that contained spices and placed on a stone shelf that was carved into the bedrock wall of a tomb. After the body was prepared, it was carried to the cemetery in a procession of lamentation and grief. The body was to be buried soon after death and the burial was required to take place outside of the village where the individual lived. The grieving period lasted from three to seven days.
- 23 - **Rachel** - The name "Rachel" is of Hebrew origin. It literally means "ewe" or "sheep". The Greek equivalent, which is used in this verse, is "Ραχήλ" or "Rhachēl". Rachel was the wife of the patriarch Jacob.

Rachel was the favorite of Biblical patriarch Jacob's three wives as well as the mother of Joseph and Benjamin who helped father the twelve tribes of Israel (along with their brothers). Rachel was the daughter of Laban and the younger sister of Leah, Jacob's first wife. Jacob was her first cousin and she was the youngest niece of Rebekah. Near Ephrath, Rachel went into a difficult labor with her second son, Benjamin. The midwife tells her in the middle of the birth that her child is a boy. Before she died, Rachel named her son Ben Oni, which means the "son of my mourning", but Jacob called him Ben Yamin or Benjamin, mean "son of the right". Benjamin was born in Jacob's old age.

Rachel was barren and watched her sister and Jacob's concubines give him children. What she really wanted was a child. She was greatly saddened by the absence of children. Perhaps this is why Jeremiah chose to use her in this prophecy. She was considered the mother of all of Israel and her grave is just outside of Bethlehem.



- 24 - **not be comforted** - The word "comforted" is translated from the Greek word "παράκαλέω" or "parakaleō". It means to "encourage", "strengthen", "comfort", or "consol". There could be not comfort, no consultation, or encouragement, or so it seems, as the soldiers take the lives of innocent infants at the order of Herod.
- 25 - **they are not** - This is a Hebrew idiom meaning that they are dead. They are no longer in mortality.

The follow are several Apocryphal works that coincide with this chapter;

Apocryphal Work: "(Chapter 22, verse 1) But when Herod perceived that he was mocked by the wise men, he was wroth, and sent murderers, saying unto them: Slay the children from two years old and under. (2) And when Mary heard that the children were being slain, she was afraid, and took the young child and wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid him in an ox-manger. (3) But Elizabeth when she heard that they sought for John, took him and went up into the hill-country and looked about her where she should hide him: and there was no hiding-place. And Elizabeth groaned and said with a loud voice: O mountain of God, receive thou a mother with a child. For Elizabeth was not able to go up. And immediately the mountain clave asunder and took her in. And there was a light shining alway for them: for an angel of the Lord was with them, keeping watch over them. (Chapter 23, verse 1) Now Herod sought for John, and sent officers to Zacharias, saying: Where hast thou hidden thy son? And he answered and said unto them: I am a minister of God and attend continually upon the temple of the Lord: I know not where my son is. (2) And the officers departed and told Herod all these things. And Herod was wroth and said: His son is to be king over Israel. And he sent unto him again, saying: Say the truth: where is thy son? for thou knowest that thy blood is under my hand. And the officers departed and told him all these things. (3) And Zacharias said: I am a martyr of God if thou sheddest my blood: for my spirit the Lord shah receive, because thou sheddest innocent blood in the fore-court of the temple of the Lord. And about the dawning of the day Zacharias was slain. And the children of Israel knew not that he was slain." (Protoevangelion of James or the Infancy Gospel of James, 22:1-3; 23:1-3)

Apocryphal Work: "(Chapter 17) And when Herod saw that he had been made sport of by the magi, his heart swelled with rage, and he sent through all the roads, wishing to seize them and put them to death. But when he could not find them at all; he sent anew to Bethlehem and all its borders, and slew all the male children whom he found of two years old and under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the magi. Now the day before this was done Joseph was warned in his sleep by the angel of the Lord, who said to him: Take Mary and the child, and go into Egypt by the way of the desert. And Joseph went according to the saying of the angel." (The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Chapter 17)

Apocryphal Work: "(Chapter 4, verse 1) Now Herod, perceiving that the wise men did delay, and not return to him, called together the priests and wise men and said, Tell me in what place the Christ should be born? (2) And when they replied, in Bethlehem, a city of Judea, he began to contrive in his own mind the death of the Lord Jesus Christ." (The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ, 4:1-2)

Apocryphal Work: "(Chapter 39) Then Longinus the sage wrote to Augustus Caesar and said to him, 'Magians, kings of Persia, have come and entered thy kingdom, and have offered offerings to a child who is born in Judah; but who he is, and whose son he is, is not known to us.' Augustus Caesar wrote to Longinus, saying, 'Thou hast acted wisely in that thou hast made known to us (these things) and hast not hidden (them) from us.' He wrote also to Herod, and asked him to let him know the story of the Child. When Herod had made enquiries about the Child, and saw that he had been mocked by the Magi, he was wroth, and sent and slew all the children in Bethlehem and its borders, from two years old and downwards, according to the time which he had enquired of the Magi. The number of the children whom he slew was two thousand, but some say one thousand eight hundred. When John¹ the son of Zechariah was sought for, his father took him and brought him before the altar; and he laid his hand upon him, and bestowed on him the priesthood, and then brought him out into the wilderness. When they could not find John, they slew Zechariah his father between the steps and the altar. They say that from the day when Zechariah was slain his blood bubbled up until Titus the son of Vespasian came and slew three hundred myriads of Jerusalem, and then the flow of blood ceased³. The father of the child Nathaniel also took him, and wrapped him round, and laid him under a fig-tree; and he was saved from slaughter. Hence our Lord said to Nathaniel, 'Before Philip called thee, I saw thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree.'" (The Book of the Bees, Chapter 39, page 86)

Apocryphal Work: "(Chapter 1, verse 9) And when Herod saw that the magi had left him, and not come back to him, he summoned the priests and the wise men, and said to them: Show me where Christ is to be born. And when they answered, In Bethlehem of Judaea, he began to think of putting the Lord Jesus Christ to death. Then appeared an angel of the Lord to Joseph in his sleep, and said: Rise, take the boy and His mother, and go away into Egypt. He rose, therefore, towards cockcrow, and set out." (Arabic Infancy Gospel 1:9)

