

The Magi and the flight

Lecture 7

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Some thoughts on mistakes, agendas and slavery:

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In the study of the word of God, and listening to someone, we have to understand that all of us have an agenda when we talk -- whether it is to learn something or to teach something. We teach and shape facts as we want others to perceive them. In the church they have the need to be right and a need to argue from their position. A Rabbinic Jew, a Karaite Jew, and a Messianic Jew have their position and it is clear we are invested in to positions that are our own, as is the other person invested in their position. The question you must ask is this -- is their agenda shaping their facts or are the facts separate from their agenda? We must also understand that people are invested into positions which can not be touched without resulting in anger and/or fear. Why is that? To be wrong or to be deceived has great implications about our ability to recognize the truth or to determine the truth. For some pastors it is important to maintain their position because if they are wrong, then they as a pastor they would have failed; the other thing that affects a pastor's position is economics: his/her pension or wage would be at risk. So let us remember that truth is truth even if it is a minority of one or of none the truth remains truth regardless. The approach most of us have is that the more people that agree with us make it right or true. So one of the needs people have is to have more people agree with them so that they know that are right.

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It is important then for us to understand that one we must be able to look at what we believe rationally in spite of our emotional connection to what we believe. The other thing is to judge slowly about what is right and wrong. If you are faced with something that contradicts what you believe slow down and ask these questions:

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- 1) What is this teaching? What is its agenda? To change my mind; To change my beliefs; To change how I observe what I observe.
- 2) What is it that I lack to understand what is being said? Language skills, understanding on a particular subject, maybe not familiar with a subject or the book of the bible.
- 3) Do those terms that this individual is using mean the same thing to you as to him? If not then you better understand what is different about yourself and the teacher.
- 4) Am I being given knowledge or a show? If someone is giving you a show that is to be suspect because they are moving you emotionally. Are you being sold a vacuum cleaner or not?

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- 5) Spirit as opposed to letter or letter as opposed to spirit? If it lacks either spirit or letter in their teaching or emphasizes one over the other, it most likely empty of truth.
- 5 6) Is it something that is simple and clear, or is it convoluted?

These are just some of the question that you need to ask yourself in dealing with things.

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Mistakes -- everyone makes them. I make them, you make them, and even the most knowledgeable person can make them. The question is can I accept them, can you accept your mistake can the most knowledgeable person accept their mistakes. If any of the above can not accept that they may make mistakes, then their teaching must be suspect. I am always asking myself "is that right: did I get that right". The implication for you are the same; do you get that right are you going to accept what I said or the really knowledgeable person without checking it out. If a person has made a mistake, can they acknowledge it; if not then all that they say must be suspect. Why is that? They are not checking things out. A person who does not review their position and does not accept oversight from others is a person who has made themselves judge and jury over knowledge. If they know more then you, listen well but if you disagree with their position, then take notes and take your time reviewing it. Slow down -- there is no rush to make a decision; the rush is to equip yourself to make a decision.

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Now on to the issue of slavery in the land of Israel at the time of the master: were slaves present in Israel at this time? The answer is a resounding yes. Yet slavery was not as prevalent in Israel as in the rest of the Roman Empire. The earliest document that we have showing that the ratio of slaves to freemen is from 71CE, 385 people were found to own between them 44 slaves. Giving us a ratio 9(8.75) freemen to 1 slave which is fairly low¹. Outside of Israel slaves were considered human cattle and treated horribly without any rights at all. Varro's with in his *Rerum rusticarum* in 3 volumes states "a kind of tool that can speak". Though it should be noted that kindness toward slaves was not unknown, if freed a person would serve that family still². Urban slave faired better then rural slaves in the empire³. In Roman Empire slaves could also be public property⁴, in Israel that was rarely the case.

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Slaves witin the context of observant Israel was much better then that of Roman Empire generally. The book of *Ecclesiasticus* or *Wisdom of Sirach*.

¹ *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* , Henri Daniel-Rops published by Servant books, 1961. pg141

² *Roman Lives* by Brain Harvey pg 91

³ *ibid* pg 83

⁴ *ibid* pf 91

5 *Sir 33:24-31 Fodder, a wand, and burdens, are for the ass; and
bread, correction, and work, for a servant. . (25) If thou set thy
servant to labour, thou shalt find rest: but if thou let him go idle,
he shall seek liberty. (26) A yoke and a collar do bow the neck:
10 so are tortures and torments for an evil servant. (27) Send him
to labour, that he be not idle; for idleness teacheth much evil.
(28) Set him to work, as is fit for him: if he be not obedient, put
on more heavy fetters. (29) But be not excessive toward any;
and without discretion do nothing. (30) If thou have a servant,
15 let him be unto thee as thyself, because thou hast bought him
with a price. (31) If thou have a servant, entreat him as a
brother: for thou hast need of him, as of thine own soul: if thou
entreat him evil, and he run from thee, which way wilt thou go to
seek him?*

15 The instruction is to have work for your slave and the work must be
fit for him and to think about how you are treating him even to treat him
as a brother. This is representative the ethic from Leviticus. There are
records in the Mishnah of the Rabbi's of old feeding the slaves from
20 their own plate, in other words treating as their own children. There are
also reports of a Rabbi grieving over his slaves⁵. If a male slave was
purchased and not circumcised he could not be in your possession at
Passover; if he became circumcised he was Jew and your bother. This
changed the relationship and the obligations to the slave then. We are not
25 certain what the rules were at that time; the only information we have
about this really is from the scriptures themselves. The Mishnah and
Talmud are many centuries later but gives us clear indication that slaves
had clear rights and that obligations of their master were laid out.

30 *Mat 2:3-6 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and
all Jerusalem with him; (4) and assembling all the chief priests
and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ
was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for
35 so it is written by the prophet: (6) "'And you, O Bethlehem, in
the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of
Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my
people Israel."*

40 The religious leaders of the day are called by Herod to answer the
question where was he born. The answer is given by the greater group
"οι δε ειπο" *"But the ones said* "No one in the group itself would speak
as representative for the group; they were very careful not to involve
themselves individually -- that would have meant a greater risk. The
group was not the Sanhedrin but the Chief priests and scribes a group
45 that Herod controlled through the appointment of the High Priest.

The answer that Matthew records has prompted some debate. The
debate is whether or not Matthew is interpreting the prophecy in Micah
5:2 or recording what was said. We do not know which it is and in many

⁵ Daniel-Rops pg 143

ways it is unimportant. Let first look at Micah 5:2 and compare it to Matt 2:6

Table 1 Masoretic text, LXX, and B'rit HaChadashah

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MT	Lxx	Matthew
<p>וְאַתָּה בֵּית־לְחֶם אֶפְרַתָּה. זָעִיר לְהִיְוֹת בְּאֶלְפֵי יְהוּדָה מִמֶּנָּה לִי יֵצֵא לְהִיְוֹת מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִזֶּמֶר אֲתִיו מִקִּדְמָה מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם</p> <p>But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity</p>	<p>καὶ σὺ Βηθλεεμ οἶκος τοῦ Εφραθα ὀλιγοστός εἰ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰουδα ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος And you, Bethlehem, house of Ephrathah, are few in number to be reckoned among the thousands of Judah; yet out of you shall one come forth to me, to be a ruler of Israel; and his goings forth were from the beginning, even from eternity.</p>	<p>καὶ σὺ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἰ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ. And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.</p>

10 All of you can notice that the answer is different from the quotes from the MT and the LXX⁶. What we must understand is that Herod is old and that he easily threatened. An interesting point is that many believe that the Sadducees rejected the prophets and held only to the Torah is shown to be an error just by the answer given by the Chief Priests who were of the Sadducees. The answer shows a full knowledge of the prophets. What is interesting is that both MT and LXX make the point that Bethlehem is in the MT *“too little to be among the clans of Judah,”* and in the LXX *“are few in number to be reckoned among the thousands of Judah”* but Matthew says something very different *“are by no means least among the rulers of Judah”*. Here either Matthew is interpreting the text or he is reflecting the prophetic insight of the Chief Priests. We do not know but what is clear is that the answer speaks to the role of Bethlehem as the birth place of the Master.

25 The next important difference is this that ruler is called a shepherd. Is that answer meant to lessen the risk of the death of the Chief Priest and scribes or is it their prophetic voice or is it Matthew being interpretive. We do not know; what is clear regardless is that it represents recognition of the unique role of the Master. If it is Matthew being

⁶ Thanks to Tim Hegg for this chart and thoughts on this section. Matthew pg 55

interpretive is Matthew then drawing on the rest of this prophecy in particular Micah 5:4 in MT;

5 *4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.*

And in the LXX;

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4 And the Lord shall stand, and see, and feed his flock with power, and they shall dwell in the glory of the name of the Lord their God: for now shall they be magnified to the ends of the earth.

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In each of these translations representing the different history of the Text the idea of the shepherd is clear and is very possible that either Matthew was drawing on this or the Chief Priests and scribes understood this.

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Mat 2:7-8 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

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Here again we see the mind of Herod planning and preparing to protect his throne. Many pass this by with thinking about the other message that comes from this. The Magi were supposed to perceive that Herod's action were evil without difficulty. They did not perceive this until G-d revealed it to them it teaches us that we must rely on God to reveal the hearts of men. They did not know until G-d intervened and revealed it to them.

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Another question arises -- why did not Herod send someone to be his representative. Either G-d arranged it so that Herod was so paranoid about his reign he could trust no one fearing that this would be an excuse by his people or the Jewish people for an uprising⁷. The idea of the certainty of the time of the birth is clearly indicated in both verses Herod wants to know where this child is and when the child was born. Herod was always thorough in dealing with revolts and threats to his throne.

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Mat 2:9-10 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

⁷ Twice when he had been away to Roman the people had risen up against him. Josephus Ant books 14-18

(10) *When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

5 So they left at night and followed the star. The journey from
Jerusalem to Bethlehem would have been about 4-6 hours which is fairly
slow yet consistent pace. One of things that we need to worship Hashem
is sense of awe and sense amazement. The Magi had this amazement at
the start that caused them to wonder what it meant and where it lead.
10 Again even after following it many weeks they had still *rejoiced
exceedingly with great joy.*

15 Have we lost wonder at the miracles of creation: are they just
common places or do we maintain that child like awe about things. I used
to call them “Happy moments” when I did therapy. You would be
astounded at how many people do not see them. It is the smell of spring
or fall, the smell of the air just before snow falls; it is flowers -- seeing
them and rejoicing in them; it is seeing the stars or meteors; It is seeing
our spouse and family and rejoicing at their sight. Do we still marvel at
melting snow or falling snow? Does the sound of silence or of a storm
20 brings us to tears? Take time to see creation and rejoice exceedingly.