

The Magi's visit and Leaving for Egypt

Lecture 8

Some thoughts on living in Israel in the 1st Century CE regarding diet and in particular bread.

5 Bread was made up from either wheat flour or barely meal; wheat for the rich and barley for the poor. If it was ever more than two to three days old it would go moldy because of the warm climate. The bread meal or flour could also be mixed with other cereal flour/meal or legume meal/flour in times of need. It was customary to keep some dough from the previous batch so that it would be
10 leaven for the next batch, very much like making sourdough bread today. The meal would be ground into flour by millstones or in a trough. It was baked in a clay oven in which a fire was built; or on a hot stone with a fire beside it or under it; or on stone with ashes/coal on top. Archeologists have found bread pans: how extensively they were used is unclear. The Loaves of the Presence are
15 thought to be made in loaf pans but the form they actually took is unclear. Most loaves were round, either raised or flat. Some of the loaves were pierced before or after baking. Bread would have been eaten in both meals during the day and was a staple of everyday diets. To break bread in the time of the Master and the disciples was to eat a meal. To imply that it meant communion is to fail to
20 understand the context of the setting¹.

Mat 2:11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

25 They entered a house not stable so this basically sweeps away all the nativity scenes that we have grown up. The reason they would have remained there was to protect the child's life. We must remember that 50% of children died before their first birthday. Again the order of precedence is the child first and then Miriam. The fact that Joseph is not even mention indicates that he had no
30 earthly father.

The Greek is very clear καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ that they fell down (πεσόντες[aorist part masc.pl.]= $\pi\iota\tau\omega$ to fall down), and then fell down and worshiped him (προσεκύνησαν [aorist 3per. pl.ind]= $\pi\rho\sigma\kappa\upsilon\nu\epsilon\omega$ to fall down and worship); this classic Semitism, verbs piled together to make emphasis. In
35 Hebrew προσεκύνησαν is represent by the word הִתְהַוָּה this is a hithpael form of the Hebrew הָוָה to fall; in form meaning to throw oneself upon the ground^{2 3}. This was used in worship for the most part and for royalty only rarely until the later Roman emperors. We can look at this statement and see that Matthew is stressing the idea of the worshipping the Messiah. Matthew is looking to the
40 future and fulfillment of prophecy of the Tanach when all nations will worship Hashem in particular Is 60;5+9 and PS 72;9-10.

¹ The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible Vol1 Editor George Arthur Buttrick publisher Abingdon press pg461ff from the article on *Bread*

² A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament editor William Holladay. Pub Eefdmans1971 pg 97

³ Gen 18:2, 19:1, 24:52, 37:10, 43:26

The phrase, “*they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh*” has been played upon by many commentators, that each of the gifts represent the states of his life gold for that of a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for one who is to die. It is a nice thought. I think though that it would be understood as this: they knew they were coming to worship the King of Jews and that it was incumbent upon them to bring gifts to the king.

What is Myrrh? It is a plant with many thorns and is called by some a mock rose. It produces fragrant resin that can be either a oil or solid form. You can find in most incense shops. In biblical times it was grown in Gilead and mostly in southern Arabia by the Ishmaelite. It is referred to in Ester 2:12⁴

What is frankincense? “It ss tapped from the very scraggly but hardy *Boswellia* tree through slashing the bark and allowing the exuded resins to bleed out and harden. These hardened resins are called tears. There are numerous species and varieties of frankincense trees, each producing a slightly different type of resin.”⁵

Mat 2:12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Here again Matthew is telling to things that even pagans who accept Yeshua as Messiah could receive a message for Hashem: to the Jewish mind this is incredible thought. Non Jewish people were in the Jewish mind unclean for two reasons, contact with the dead and worshipping and eating food given to pagan idols. That Hashem’s messenger could communicate with them in their unclean state was amazing. Yet Matthew is making a point that in spite of their wisdom they did not see Herod as a threat to the child and Hashem in intervened.

Mat 2:13-14 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." (14) And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt

Again Joseph is seeing angels and receiving messages. In Judaism the receiving of message from an angel is a sign of great blessing. We must also note that there was no hesitancy on the part of Joseph. So we are being told that the Husband of Mary is a man who is blessed. Also the idea of Joseph going to Egypt is teaching the idea of salvation, as it was salvation for Israel and his sons. It parallels David when left Israel and fled to the King of Gath in ISam 21:10f. Here we find the son of God being taken to a foreign country to save his life. The other thing is that Hashem was intervening to protect his Son. This story parallels the Exodus story as well.

⁴ [Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible Vol3 pg 478](#)

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankincense>

Exodus Story	Matthew Story
The Slaughter of the Male Children	The Slaughter of the Male Children
Flight of Moses out of Egypt	Flight of Yeshua, Mary and Joseph out of the land
Israel is delivered at night Ex 12:29	Yeshua, Mary and Joseph flee at night Matt 2:14
Moses returns after the Death of Pharaoh	Yeshua, Mary and Joseph return after the death of Herod
“for all those that have sought your life have died” (Ex 4:19)	“for those sought the Child’s life are Dead’ (Matt 2:20) ⁶

The question that come-s to mind is what was in Egypt and why go there? The answer is really simple there was large Jewish population in Egypt particularly in Alexandria.

5

Excursus Alexandria

The city was founded by Alexander the Great in 331BCE. From Alexandria the grain ships sailed to Rome. There was one of the greatest Libraries in the world between 400,000 to 700,000 volumes. It was trading center of the Mediterranean Sea. It has the Great Lighthouse which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It had five Harbors. It was larger then Rome by a quarter⁷. It was divided into 5 quarters. It contained the body of Alexander persevered in honey in a glass coffin⁸.

15

It is the city where the Hebrew text was translated into the LXX and stored. There was large population of observant Jews there and was considered the Jewish capital of the west⁹. Two of the five quarters were Jewish. The synagogues of the Jews were in all parts of the city. The central synagogue which shaped like a basilica; in it tradesmen sat together in their guilds. This allowed a stranger to find work easily within his trade¹⁰. The Jews of Alexandria were persuaded by Herod the great to support Julius Caesar while in Egypt. This lead to increased prosperity for the Jewish population, as well as the ability to keep the faith of their fathers.

25

There was a schism in the Jewish population there. During the Syrian/Seleucids persecution, Onias the son of the Murder High Priest built a temple there. It was an old pagan Temple that was used. It should not be thought that a large percentage of Jews accepted this temple as a valid alternative; many records of payment of half Shekel temple tax being transported to Jerusalem¹¹. This lead the Temple priests in Jerusalem declaring the family of the house of Chonyi as incapable of serving in the Jerusalem Temple¹².

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⁶ Hegg pg 60

⁷ The Life Times of Jesus The Messiah by Alfred Edersheim pub. Eerdmans 1971 single vol pg 59. 16,360 paces longer by 3,160 paces

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid pg 59

¹⁰ Ibid pg 60

¹¹ Ibid pg 62

¹² Ibid

5 The Jewish population in Alexandria had its own ruler and its own courts. The business of the Jews was Trade as well as Banking. The Jews were prosperous: the gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem were many, one particular stands out the gold and the silver that covered the nine gates in the Temple of Jerusalem was provided by a banker from Alexandria¹³. The political condition of Alexandria was much better than Judea and the Galilee after the death of Herod. After the Death of Herod there was civil war and the Roman governor in Syria intervened¹⁴.

10 *Mat 2:15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

15 This verse that Matthew quotes provides us with some difficulties. The first problem is why is the fleeing referred to as fulfillment of the prophecy and not the coming out? The Prophecy that Matthew is drawing from is clearly from Hosea 11:1

MT	LXX	Matthew
<p>וְאֶהְיֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל נְעִיר כִּי וּמִמִּצְרַיִם יִקְרָאתִי לְבְנִי</p> <p>When Israel was a youth, I loved him; and from Egypt I called My son.</p>	<p>διότι νήπιος Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐγὼ ἠγάπησα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ</p> <p>for Israel is a child, and I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called his children</p>	<p>ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου.</p> <p>out of Egypt I have called my son.</p>

20 Here it is evident that Matthew is quoting from the MT¹⁵. The text is clearly a reference to Israel's Salvation History and the Exodus. The question arises is this the correct usage? Church commentators have used this text to indicate that the new covenant with the church has begun. That is an extreme reach and what is said by the church makes the anti-missionaries becomes true if you take that interpretation as considered correct. If you take the position that Matthew did not see the Church as replacing Israel then what was his understanding and why did he use this text?

30 *Some have suggested that Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 is based upon gezera shava (literally, "an equal or identic category," see Jastrow, p. 232 second column last part¹⁶), a rabbinic hermeneutic whereby texts that contained similar verbal components were linked together as speaking of the same subject (e.g., b.Pesachim 66a). If this is the case, we must seek to find the verbal links that led Matthew to utilize Hosea's*

¹³ Ibid pg 64

¹⁴ Josephus Ant book 17 chapter 9-13

¹⁵ The Chart is Tim Hegg's pg 62

¹⁶ Also see most Siddur in the Shacharit prayer the Talmud section where it lists the 13 Laws of Rabbi Yishmael

5 prophecy as he did. We may first note Num 24:8, of the Balaam oracles, and the phrase “God brings him out of Egypt” (מִצְרַיִם אֱלֹהִים מֵצִיאָהוּ מִן־מִצְרַיִם). In the previous verse (24:7), where the MT has “water will flow from his buckets” (מִן־בְּרִיתֵי מַיִם יִלְלֵךְ), the Lxx translates “a man will come forth from his seed” (ἐξελευσεται ανθρωπος εκ σπερματος αυτου). The Peshitta (Syriac) has “a mighty man shall proceed from his sons” and Targum Onkelos interprets the phrase as “a king shall grow great, who shall be reared from his sons.” Thus, it is understandable how these verses would have been interpreted messianically by those (like Matthew) who were familiar with the Lxx and Targumim. Interestingly, in the margin of Codex Sinaiticus, at Matthew 2:15, a scribe has written in the margin that the quote is from Num 24:8, indicating the early connection between the two texts. The verbal linkage to Hosea 11:1 for Matthew, then, would have been the word “Egypt,” strengthened by the Targumic use of “sons.” Linking the two texts together allowed Matthew to also link the messianic interpretation of Num 24:7–8 to Hosea 11:1.¹⁷

20 Tim Hegg’s argument is that Matthew was playing on the understanding of the people of the Targums and the LXX.¹⁸ the translations that would have been in use by the local people as well as in the Diaspora in the east. Tim wants us to understand that people at the time would have memorized large documents simply so that were accessible. This was the way that Rabbis taught -- quote one small section and expected you to know the rest and the associated texts. Today everything has to be laid out simply because we do not have that vast amount of information stored in our brains¹⁹.

It is also very clear from;

30 *2Sa 7:12-16 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (13) He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. 35 When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, (15) but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. (16) And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”*

40 It is very clear that word son has Messianic implications and it is very clear that in using Hosea 11:1 that Matthew uses this understanding in his record of events. It should also be noted that Messiah can represent all of Israel is very much an idea that is found in scriptures in particular Isaiah²⁰. This is not some novel concept: David was seen representing all Israel in the battle with Goliath; High Priest represents Israel when entering into the Most Holy place on the Day

¹⁷ Hegg 63

¹⁸ It should be noted that some Dead Sea Scrolls followed the LXX reading and not the MT

¹⁹ Daniel Lancaster Hebrews lectures 1-5

²⁰ For the whole nation of Israel Is 41:8-9, 42:19, 43:10, 44:1-2, 21, 26, 45:4, 48:20, 49:3 and for Messiah Is 37:35, 42:1, 49:3,5-7 53:11

of Atonement. This concept was clearly understood and is understood by the Modern Judaism as seen with the rise of messianic movement.