

Matthew 2:3-6

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The magi's news of a newborn king disturbs Herod and all of Jerusalem. The child is a threat to Herod's power. He summons the scribes and priests, and asks them to let him know where the Messiah is supposed to be born. The scribes answer, "In Bethlehem." They support their answer with a declaration from the prophet Micah.

There is no apparent parallel account of this event in the Gospels.

The magi have arrived in Jerusalem, asking about the newborn king of the Jews so that they might locate and worship him. *Herod the king* became aware of their arrival to the city and their questions. Being ever mindful of any threat to his power, *Herod* is deeply *troubled* by the magi's questions. When Herod was *troubled*, everyone felt it. So *all Jerusalem* was *troubled with him*. Herod might have keenly felt the magi's claim that there was a king other than him, because he was in fact only "half-Jew." His father, Antipater, was an Edomite.

Even if the magi's claim was not true, if the expectant people under Herod's rule put stock in the magi's words and believed their claim that the King of the Jews was recently born, it could lead to an uprising, and the end of his reign and dynasty. The magi's unexpected arrival and astonishing announcement that a Jewish King had been born was the talk of *Jerusalem*. No doubt many were hopeful that this might mean the coming of the Messiah. It did not take much political calculus for Herod to recognize that if he wanted to remain in power, he could not afford to allow these rumors to spread.

So *when Herod the king* heard of this galling threat to his reign, he shrewdly summoned the *chief priests* (Sadducees) and *scribes of the people* (Pharisees) and *inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born*. It is likely that they were unaware of his malicious intent. But even if they were, Herod was not to be trifled with. Furthermore, the nature of the Pharisees and Sadducees was to seek political advantage; their inability to share power led to Rome's takeover of Judea in the first place.

Herod naturally associates the King of the Jews with the *Messiah*. He does not ask where the King of the Jews was to be born, which is what the magi sought. Rather, Herod *inquired of the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born*. Herod was aware of the Jews' sharply felt hope for their *Messiah* to appear and rescue them from the Roman yoke which kept him in power. Any outsider who could claim the political title, "King of the Jews" would in all likelihood have the zealous support of many Jews as "the *Messiah*." This aligns historically with the heightened expectation of the coming of *Messiah*, and Matthew's claim that Jesus was, indeed, the Jewish *Messiah*.

The priests and *scribes* tell Herod that the Messiah was to be born in *Bethlehem of Judea*. They say they knew this because of *what has been written by the prophet*, partially quoting Micah 5:2,

*‘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.’”*

This is the second prophetic fulfillment Matthew cites for Jesus being the *Messiah*. Matthew only quotes the portion of Micah’s Messianic prophecy that directly answers Herod’s question. This quote cites *Bethlehem* as the source of a *Ruler* who will *shepherd* all of *Israel*. Micah’s prophetic utterance about the Messiah continues from the rest of Micah 5:2 through at least 5:5.

“His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”
Therefore He will give them up until the time
When she who is in labor has borne a child.
Then the remainder of His brethren
Will return to the sons of Israel.
And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of the Lord,
In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.
This One will be our peace.”

Micah’s prophecy clearly states that *Bethlehem of Judea* will be the Messiah’s birthplace. This *Messiah* will be a *Ruler* and a *Shepherd* of God’s *people*. He will draw all Israel unto Himself and *shepherd* them in God’s power and majesty “to the ends of the earth.” This last phrase likely refers to both the entire earth and through the end of time. And this Messiah’s presence and rule will establish and be the source of all peace. This will correspond with Matthew’s report of what Jesus says after rising from the dead, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18).

Biblical Text

2:3-6 When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

**‘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.’”**