

2 Now after Yeshua was born in Beit-Lehem of Judah in the days of king Herod, behold, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to bow before him.

commentary

2:1 of Magi from the east - Magi is the plural of Magus, in Aramaic Magusha (מגוּשָׂא). Its root 'Mag' (מג) - meaning "to have power" - appears in most ancient languages, including Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian and Chaldee (i.e. Aramaic). It has a wide variety of connotations. Originally it may refer to an ancient tribe of Medes who were expert in occult science and interpretation of dreams (cf. *Herodotus* 1:107, 120; VII:19). It then referred the priests in the Zoroastrian religions. The Greeks considered Zarathustra the father of magic and science and in their traditions turned him into a sorcerer (cf. *Natural History* 30:2:3). This way, 'Magi' was also applied to wizards or sorcerers, as it appears in the Talmud: The Magus (מגוּשָׂא) mumbles [a charm] and does not know what he is mumbling (*Sotah* 22a). Interestingly, Zoroastrian priests were more interested in science than in magic (in the old times both disciplines were closely related), and were skilled in the interpretation of dreams. Philo, a first century Hellenic Jewish Philosopher, said that "Among the Persians there exists a group, the Magi, who investigating the works of nature for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the truth... initiate others in the divine virtues, by very clear explanations" (*Philo, Every good man is free* 74). The Zohar reveals that the people of the East received wisdom (meaning the wisdom of Kabbalah, which includes the knowledge of astrology) from Abraham. As it is written "To the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts and sent them away from his son Itzhaq, Eastward, to the land of the East" (*Gn* 25:6). The "gifts" (*matanot*) mentioned here are gifts of true wisdom, which his sons brought with them and became great sages, but those things were misused and turned into many idolatrous paths (cf. *Zohar Vayera* 1:99b). It is written that "Solomon's wisdom exceeded the wisdom of all the children of the East country" (*1Kng* 5:10 [4:30]), meaning they were known for their wisdom. During the exile Daniel was appointed the Rav-Mag (the leader of the Magi; cf. *Dn* 4:9, 5:11), so by this we know they were not completely ignorant of the God of Israel.

2:1 of Magi from the east - Zoroastrianism was well spread in the east, influencing all Babylon and even India. Although the personification of the forces of Nature and the constellations play an active role in this religion, in its essence it was a form of monotheism, worshipping ultimately to the only one, non-created, and non-physical Creator, called Ahura Mazda (literally: Supreme Wisdom), from where all other powers are emanated (cf. *Bundahishn* III). In Arabic sources the "Magi" are mentioned together with Christians and Jews as part of the monotheistic religions of that time (cf. *Quran* 22:17).

2:2 For we saw his star - Judaism gives a considerable credibility to astrology, within the parameters of the Torah (the difference between astrology and astronomy was quite blurry back then). As the Torah says, the luminaries serve as signs (*Gn* 1:14). The book of Yov contains several references to astronomical bodies (e.g. *Yov* 26:13, 38:32). The position of the constellations (called Mazal in Hebrew) play an important role, for every person is born under a star that influences his fate. Rabbi Hanina said that the stars give wisdom, give wealth, and [even] Israel stands under the influence of the stars (cf. *Shabbat* 156a). And the Midrash says "There is no blade of grass that does not have a constellation (Mazal) over it, telling it to grow" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 10:6; *Zohar* 1:34a). Astrology is considered a mystical science, pertaining to the secrets of Creation or Hilkhot Yetzirah. The books of Kabbalah are filled with astrology (cf. *Mishnat ha'Zohar* 2:171b), the most important being the Sefer Yetzirah, which the sages Hanina and Oshaia studied every Shabbat eve (cf. *Shanedrin* 65b). It was not a discipline for the masses, because they might give too much credit to it and end up in idolatry. For this reason sefer Hanokh (i.e. Enoch) enumerates astrology as one of the forbidden teachings spread by the Nefilim (*Hanokh* 8:3). Jeremiah tells not to be dismayed at the signs of heaven like the heathens do (*Jer* 10:2). Stars and constellations are mere servants of the one God, who has the power to change the 'Mazal' of those who believe in him, hence the Talmudic claim: "Ein mazal le'Israel"; i.e. 'Israel is not influenced by the constellations' (*Shabbat* 156a-b). God is superior to any star influence, and anyone entrusting his life's fate to the divination of an astrologer, let alone a heathen one, sins of idolatry. The Arizal explains that in the world of the Sefirot, the constellations have influence only in the lowest sefirah of Malkhut and only with God's help (cf. *Hayim Vital, Taamei haMitzvot*). It should not be a surprise that (contrary to popular belief) the Torah doesn't forbid astrology per se, what it forbids is inquiring from a 'meOnen'; i.e. one who determines auspicious times (cf. *Rashi on Deut* 18:9-10) or performs cloud divination (*Ibn Ezra on Deut* 18:10). In the same manner, there's not halakhic prohibition about astrology, but among the commentaries there are Hashkafot (personal opinions) ranging from its total rejection, being labelled as 'stupidity' - as it was the case of Rambam (*in his Letter about Astrology*) - to a complete acceptance and study of the discipline as it was the case of Ibn Ezra, who wrote 9 astrological treatises (cf. *Reshit Hokhma*). However, even someone as reluctant to astrology as it was Rambam seemed to acknowledge that at least to some degree it could be used to predict the future (cf. *Yesodei haTorah* 10:3).

³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

commentary

2:2 where is the one who has been born king of the Jews - Here we can see that the popular saying among the sages can gain some deeper understanding: 'The Magus mumbles and does not know what he is mumbling' (*Sotah 22a*). The science of the astrologer is not exact, and the interpretation of the signs can be inaccurate. Yeshua was not born king of the Jews (in the past tense as the verse has it), in fact he didn't reign in Israel in his entire life. The star had led them to look for the one who had the soul of Messiah in him, yet they were completely unaware of the details. Similarly it is written that the astrologers of Pharaoh saw that Moshe would be smitten by water, but completely erred in their interpretation, because they didn't know he would be mitted on account of the water of Meribah (*Sanhedrin 101b*).

2:2 for we saw his star - It is written in the Torah (*Nm 24:17*): 'A star has gone forth from Yaqov, and a staff will arise from Israel'. Rashi explains that the verb for "has gone forth" (יֵרֵד) is the same as in "bent his bow"; יֵרֵךְ קֶשֶׁתוֹ (*Lam 2:4*), for a star shoots out like an arrow. It then says (*Nm 24:19*): There shall come a governor out of Yaqov. The word for governor here is 'Yerd' (יֵרֵד), which is how the Arameans call to the East. For this reason, there's a Yemenite Midrash identifying the appearance of the king of Israel with that of a shooting star in the east. This Midrash says that the astrologers among the heathens are able to identify the star of the king of Israel. Another Midrash says that the wizards of Nimrod gazed at the signs of the stars and learnt that a special son had been born to Terah, and wanted to slay him (cf. *Beit haMidrash 2:118-196*; cited in *Sefer haAggadah*). Other Midrashim say the star would be visible in the east for fifteen days (cf. *Tefilat Shimon bar Yohai*; *Nistarot Shimon bar Yohai*).

2:3 He was troubled and all Jerusalem with him - The Magi had given for granted that everyone knew of the glorious birth of a new Jewish king, but everyone except the child's parents was unaware of such an event. Their mistake caused the wrath of Herod (positioned as the king of the Jews in that time) and the consternation of the entire city.

2:4 he inquired of them - From the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the priests and Scribes taught and interpreted the Torah to the citizens (cf. *Neh 8:3,7-8*). But in the first century the 'chief priests' referred to a sect of heretics and materialists that had been corrupted by the Roman bribes.^a The Boethusians (a similar, if not the same sect with that of the Sadducees) were all associated with the members of the high priests family (hence the title of chief priests) and are recorded as opposing to and bringing false witnesses against both the Pharisees and their Oral Torah (cf. *Pesakhim 57a*; *Rosh haShana 22b*, *Tosefta R"H 1:14*; *Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 5:2*). Although most Scribes (Sofrim) were Pharisees from the house of Hillel (cf. *Rosh haShana 19b*; *Yerushalmi Berakhot 1:7*), the Scribes being mentioned here were most likely Herodians (cf. *Mrk 3:6*, *Mt 22:16*; *Lk 13:31*). Herodians were Hellenistic Jews who favored the Herodian Dynasty.^b

relevant quotes

"And there shall be a ruler amidst Yaqov [*Nm 24:19*] At first a star arose in the east, at the head of which there was a sword. Israel saw it, and said to one another, What is that? The other nations asked their astrologers, What is the character of this star? They [the astrologers] said to them, This is the star of Israel. This is the king who shall yet arise for them. As soon as Israel heard that, they approached the prophet Shmuel and said to him, Give us a king to judge us, just like all the nations [*1Sam 8:5*] – just as the nations said. in this context it says, a star shall arise from Yaqov [*Nm 24:17*]. And so also at the end [of days], a star shall arise in the east, and it is the star of the Messiah; as it says, and there shall be a ruler (יֵרֵד) amidst Yaqov. Rabbi Yose said: In the language of the Arameans, the east is called yerd (יֵרֵד). And it spends fifteen days in the east. If it carries even longer, it is only for the good of Israel; and then you may expect the footsteps of the Messiah".

(*Midrash haGadol Bamidbar, Yemenite Midrash*)^c

"When our father Abraham was born, a star rose in the east and swallowed four stars in the four corners of heaven. Nimrod's wizards said to him: To Terah, at this hour, a son has been born, out of whom will issue a people destined to inherit this world and the world-to-come. With your permission, let his father be given a house full of silver and gold, on condition that his newly born son be slain."

(*Beit haMidrash 2:118-196 cited in Sefer HaAggadah*)

^a cf. *Josephus, Antiquities 13:10*; *Sanhedrin 90b*.

^b cf. *Adversus Omnes Aereses 1:1*.

^c *Midrash haGadol, Numbers, Yemenite Midrash, translated by Yitzchak Tzvi Langerman, HarperCollins, pg. 175-176*.

⁵So they said to him, In Beit-Lehem of Judah, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶But you, Beit-Lehem of Judah, are not the least among the chiefs of Judah; for out of you will come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

⁷Then Herod, when he had secretly called the Magi, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Beit-Lehem and said, Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring back word to me, that I may come and bow down to him as well. ⁹When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

commentary

2:5 In Beth-Lehem of Judah - The Scribes here are offering an interpretative rendering for Micah 5:1 [5:2], as this was the manner of the Scribes - a method well preserved in the Targumim^d - for it is written: "they read into the book, in the Torah, distinctly, and gave the sense, and explained to them the reading" (*Neh 8:8*). The word translated as "distinctly" (**מפורט**) also means "explained" and our sages expound here that this refers to the use of Aramaic Targumim^e (cf. *Megillah 3a*). The prophecy in Micah says: "And you, Beit-Lehem Efratah, although you might be the lowest of the clans of Judah, out of you he will come forth to me, to become a ruler over Israel, and his origins are from old, from days of yore". The scribes use "chiefs of Judah" instead of "clans of Judah", but it can be derived from the same word. 'Chiefs' (*alufei*, **אלפי**) in Hebrew consists of the same letters as 'clans' (*alfei*, **אלפי**). The allusion to the shepherd is probably taken from Ezekiel (34:23), which says: "I will set up one shepherd over them... my servant David". **Beit-Lehem** is called Efrat, as it is said, 'on the road to Efrat; that is Beit-Lehem' (*Gn 48:7*). Beit-Lehem refers to the place whence David emerged, as it is written: 'the son of your bondsman, Yisai of Beit-Lehem' (*1Sam 17:58*).

2:6 Out of you he will come forth - This refers to the Davidic Messiah, who emerges from the clan of Judah that suffered the stigma of Ruth the Moabitess (cf. *Rashi on Micah 5*). And so Scripture says: 'The stone the builders had rejected became a cornerstone' (*Psal 118:22*). The prophecy can be seen in two ways: for one part, Beit-Lehem refers to the Messianic dynasty's origin and not necessarily the Messiah's literal birthplace (cf. *David Altschuler, Metzudat David*). On the other hand, in an hyper literal interpretation the prophecy is being spoken to the town itself, which was indeed a very small town. This literal interpretation is followed in Aggadah: "Where are they [i.e. Messiah and his father] from? From the royal city of Beit-Lehem of Judah" (*Yerushalmi Berakhot 2:4 [17b]*; cf. *Eikah Rabbah 1:51*). In a similar manner, the Targum Yerushalmi (*on Gn 35:21*) identifies Migdal Eder - a tower at the borders of Beit-Lehem - as "the place from whence, it is to be, the King Messiah will be revealed at the end of days". This is based on Micah's words concerning Migdal Eder: "to you shall come the former kingdom [of David]" (*Micah 4:8*).

2:8 Go and search carefully... that I might come and bow down to him as well - Herod had no intention of giving his royal position to a completely unknown person. He had a spy network searching for people suspected of revolt (cf. *Josephus, Antiquities 15:365-372*), and he had murdered his own soldiers and even members of his own family in a paranoid fear of betrayal (cf. *Antiquities 16:392-394*). In the Roman world - which Herod knew very well - it was believed that the several successive appearances of a comet at night portends the death of a great ruler (cf. *Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, Book 6, Nero, pg. 188*). He wanted to use the Magi as a tool to detect and eradicate a possible threat.

relevant quotes

"And Rahel died, and was buried in the way to Efrat, which is Beit-Lehem. And Yaqov... proceed and spread his tent beyond Migdal Eder – the place from whence, it is to be, the King Messiah will be revealed at the end of days". (**Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Gn 35:21**)

^d **Targum** (in Hebrew: 'interpretation') is an interpretative translation of the Hebrew text. The Scribes gave for granted that every translation requires interpretation, so in order to shed light on the text, it was common to find paraphrased verses or homiletic interpretations. The Targum was read in the Synagogue service after the original Hebrew text, so the Torah scholars were familiar with the paraphrase of verses. It is written in the Gemara: "One should always complete the reading of one's weekly Torah portion with the congregation, twice from the miqra (i.e. the Hebrew text) and once from the Targum" (*Berakhot 8a*). Nowadays, this requisite - known as 'Shnayim Miqra ve-Ekhad Targum' - is fulfilled by reading a Torah portion twice together with a Targum (which in most communities is the Targum Onqelos). The Torah has its Targumim with official recognition, namely: Onqelos, Yerushalmi and Neofiti. The Biblical section of the Prophets is covered by the Targum Yonathan. There's no official Targum for the Hagiographa, although most of its books have their own Targum.

^e **The Septuagint** (or LXX) - in Hebrew 'Targum Shiviim' - was born as a Greek Targum (cf. *Josephus, Antiquities 12:2*). It was mostly used by Hellenic Jews. Christians use the term Septuagint to refer to the whole body of biblical and apocryphal literature that was translated into Greek, but when the sages in the Talmud use this term, they only mean the Greek version of the Pentateuch translated by them (cf. *Megillah 9a*); so we don't really know who translated the other books of the Bible.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹And they entered into the house, and they saw the young child with Miriam his mother, and prostrated themselves and bowed down to him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him: gold, myrrh and frankincense.

—commentary—

2:11 gold, myrrh and frankincense - The story appears to derive from the prophet's words: "Arise, shine, for your light has come... the wealth of the gentiles will come to you... a multitude of camels will cover you... gold and frankincense they will carry" (*Is 60:1, 5-6*). This foreshadows the midrashic idea that the gentile nations will come on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and bring gifts to the Messiah, thus contributing to the well being of his kingdom: "The nations of the earth will bring gifts to the King Messiah ben David, and to Messiah ben Ephraim" (*Midrash Tehilim 87:6*; see also the *Targum Tehilim 45:14*). So what do the three gifts mean? For the believers, the three gifts conceal spiritual and even mystical meanings, but not necessarily for these Magi. In occultism it is believed that myrrh and frankincense serve to clean one's house from evil energies, and this might have been their principal intention. The two spices are part of every ancient cult's ritual. 'Gold' (in Hebrew *Zahav זהב*) is of course the richness of a king; it has the value of 14, which equals "David" (*דוד*). "Myrrh and frankincense" (*מור ולבונה*) in Hebrew equal 345, the value of 'Shiloh' *שילה* (one of Messiah's names). The gifts allude to the Shekhina dwelling in Yeshua, telling us how righteous this person was. For it is written: "Let them make me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell within them" (*Ex 25:8*). The name of the 'Shekhina' is derived from the word 'Shakhanti' (I shall dwell). It doesn't say "I shall dwell in it" but "within them", i.e. within each and every one of them (*Liqutei Torah, parasha Naso; Reshit Khokhma, Shaar haAhava 6*). Just as the Temple with all of its components resembles the human being (cf. *Midrash haGadol*), the Jew is committed to become a Sanctuary for the Divine Presence, as it is written, "I will dwell within the children of Israel" (*1King 6:13*). The idea here of the verb 'Shakan' *שכן* is to lie down and rest, to reside somewhere, to become a neighbor, to have an habitation where he will be noticed and respected. This place is the body of the Tzaddiqim, of those who obey his commandments (cf. *Sforno on Ex 25:8*).

● **'Gold'** represents that which is holy or sacred, and is also a symbol of the Divine Immanence (the Shekhina) among us. Often the prophets use figures of speech based on the properties of the metals, of which gold is the most valuable (e.g. *Zech 13:9; Lam 4:2*). That's why gold is present in practically every item of the Temple service. The incense - which represents prayer (cf. *Psal 141:2*) - was offered in an altar covered with pure gold (*Ex 30:1-3*). The high priest had to wear bells of gold when entering the 'Sacred' place of the Sanctuary (*Ex 28:33-35*). The Talmud sees these golden bells as a symbol for revelation and divine inspiration, applying them to Samson and saying: "The Shekhina kept ringing in front of him like a bell" (*Sotah 9b*). Somewhere else: "When the holy spirit rested upon him, his hairs jingled like a bell" (*Vayiqra Rabbah 8:2*), for it is written about Samson: 'and the spirit of HaShem began to move/agitate him' (*Jdg 13:25*), and they say about Yeshua: 'the holy spirit will come upon him' (*Lk 1:35*).

● **'Myrrh'** is mentioned in the Song of Songs together with the **'frankincense'**. They are the perfume on the column of smoke which emerged from the Sanctuary (cf. *Rashi on Song 3:6*). The verse reads: "Who *מי* is this coming up from the desert like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense with all the powders of the merchant?" (*Song 3:6*). Here the word translated as "Who" (*מי*) is a name for the Shekhina (*Zohar 1:10b; 1:176b*), which as we have seen is also compared to gold, thus combining the three elements into one. Myrrh and frankincense were the incense's main ingredients, and their characteristic is described in the Zohar (*Shemot 3:20b*): "From the scent of the incense, some of the spices are red and some are white; namely, the frankincense is white, and the pure myrrh is red and the scent rises from both red and white". Here the Zohar is describing how God reigns from red (attribute of judgment) to white (attribute of compassion): "The sinner is called red, as it is written: though your sins be as scarlet...etc (*Is 1:18*); he then puts his offering to fire, which is red; then the blood - which is red - is sprinkled around the altar, so is the attribute of justice red. But the smoke of the offering rises all white, turning into the attribute of compassion". In this mystical exposition, the two spices represent the forgiveness and purification of all the nation. The **frankincense**, in Hebrew *Lebonah לבונה*, represents whiteness of heart in an honest prayer (white in Hebrew is 'Lavan' *לבן*, and heart is 'Lev' *לב*), thus the reason that this is the main ingredient of the incense. Myrrh is often related to the idea of atonement (see for instance Rashi's exposition on *Song 1:13*). Psalm 45 says: "Myrrh and aloes and cassia are all your garments" (*Psal 45:9 [45:8]*), the Targum Tehilim, which attributes this verse to Messiah, renders here: "Your garments are perfect". Rashi, who attributes the verse to the righteous Torah scholars, interprets that "all your betrayals and sins are expiated and smell of a fragrant scent" (*Rashi on Psal 45:9*). As a matter of fact Onqelos connects the Aramaic for Myrrh (*Murrah מורא*) with the mount of Moriah (*מוריה*). In the story of Itzhaq's binding, the verse says: 'Please, take your son... Itzhaq, and go away to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there for an ascending offering' (*Gn 22:2*). Onqelos renders the mount of Moriah as "the land of worship" in allusion to the service of the incense, which contained myrrh (cf. *Onqelos and Rashi on Gn 22:2*). So all of this foresees the atoning powers of this Tzaddiq, for: 'he will save his people from sin' (*Mt 1:21*).

¹²And they saw in a dream that they should not return to Herod, so they departed to their own country by another way. ¹³Now when they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Yosef in a dream, saying, Arise, take the young child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. ¹⁴When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt I called my son. [*Hos 11:1*]

commentary

2:12 And they saw in a dream that they should not return to Herod - This is because the Magi were trained in the interpretation of dreams.

2:13 the angel of the Lord - 'Malakha d'Maria' מלאכא דמריא, the expression is equivalent to the Scriptural verses: 'and an angel of HaShem appeared...' (*Jdg 13:3*), or "and an angel of HaShem said to her" (*Gn 16:9*), which the LXX renders as "O angelos Kyrio" (the angel of the Lord), and the Targum as 'Malakha d'HaShem' מלאכא דיי (The angel of HaShem). In reverence to the four letters Sacred Name (or Tetragrammaton), as it is written: 'Do not raise the Name of HaShem your God in vain' (*Ex 20:7*), and: "Do not desecrate my Holy Name" (*Lv 22:32*; cf. *Mishneh Torah, negative command 63*), and also: "He that blasphemes the Name of HaShem shall be put to death" (*Lv 24:16*; cf. *Yad, Avodat Kohavim 2:7*). This rule is called "Motzi Shem Shamayim Levatala" (Uttering the Heavenly Name uselessly; cf. *Nedarim 10b*). In the beginning of the Second Temple era people greeted each other making use of the Sacred Name, in a reverential and in a holy atmosphere. ^f Apparently the name began to be desecrated (i.e. made common) by some heretics (cf. *Mishna Berakhot 9:5*; cf. *Sanhedrin 10:1*; *Tosefta Yadayim 2:9*; cf. *Rash Mishnantz on Mishna Yadayim 4:8*). Then it was decreed that in order to not profane it, only the high priest was allowed to pronounce the Sacred Name and only inside the Temple walls. Then it would be taught to selected worthy students and keep it secret (cf. *Mishna Sotah 7:6, 38a*; *Yoma 6:2*; cf. *Qidushin 71a*; *Mishne Torah, Hilkhos Tefillah u'vrikat Kohanim 14:10*). The Mishna decreed that someone who pronounces [out of the Temple] the Sacred Name as it is spelled doesn't have a portion in the World to Come (cf. *Mishna Sanhedrin 10:1*; cf. *101a*). With the intention to avoid pronouncing the Sacred Name by mistake, they didn't even write it down in non-Biblical literature unless it was necessary. They used circumlocutions instead, such as: Abba (Father), Shamaya (Heaven), Eloqa (God), HaShem (the Name)... etc and also 'Adonai' ('The Lord'; whose Aramaic equivalent is 'Maria'). Certainly the Nazarenes followed this same Jewish principle, for in their literature the Sacred Name is not pronounced, not even once.

2:13 appeared to Yosef in a dream - A messenger of God's presence talked to Yosef through the intellect while he was asleep. Angels of dreams are Divine energies entering in contact with our intellect. Thus it is written (*Qohelet Rabbah 10:20*): "When a man sleeps, the body tells to the neshama (upper soul) what it has done during the day; the neshama then reports it to the nefesh (life-force soul), the nefesh to the angel, the angel to the cherub, and the cherub to the seraph, who then brings it before God". 'The angel' here is an allusion to the faculty of imagination and the Cherub is the intelligence; they connect to God, who may speak back through these same filters (cf. *Rambam, Moreh Nevukim 2:6*).

2:15 until the death of Herod - who died in the year 4 BCE (*Samuel Rocca, 'Herod's Judaea...etc' p. 159*).

2:15 Out of Egypt I called my son - "Israel is my firstborn son" (*Ex 4:22*). The original verse says: "For Israel was young (naar) and I loved him, and from Egypt I called my son. The more they [the prophets] called to them, the more they went away from them" (*Hoshea 11:1*). Next paragraph says: "But I sent to train Ephraim, he took them on his arms, but they did not know that I healed them" (*Hosh 11:3*). "I sent to train Ephraim"; that is, I sent a leader before them to train them in Torah, this refers to Yosef and Moshe who went to Egypt in order to bring them to the Holy Land. "He took them on his arms"; in reference to Moshe, of whom it is written (*Nm 11:12*), 'carry them in your bosom, as the nursing father carries the sucking child' (compare this with *Rashi's exposition on Hosh 11:3*). "As the nursing father"; this means, even if they stone or insult you (*Sifrei Beha'alotekha 1:42:10*). 'Carry them' (sa'ehu שאתו) is based on the verb 'Nasa' (נשא), to lift up; the same used in the verse: "Behold my servant... he shall be... lifted up (nisa נשא)" (*Is 52:13*); from where the Midrash deduces that Messiah will be more lifted up than Moshe (cf. *Tanhuma Toldot, siman 14*). So just as Israel were delivered from their Egyptian exile, Yeshua was brought back too. For Messiah is the other Son: "I have set my king... You are my son, etc." (*Psalms 2:7*). The Zohar explains that the righteous ones (the Tzaddiqim) are prepared above and given names before ever they come to exist in this world. In the example of the Zohar, they speak of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, who, because of being righteous, is called the son of the Blessed Holy One and of the Shekhina (cf. *Zohar Akharei Mot 3:61a-b*). This is how the author is able to connect through a peshet the verse with Yeshua's actual situation.

^f Rabbi David haLevi of Lvov (the TaZ) in his *Tureh Zahav (Siman 46, seif katan 7)* explains that this doesn't desecrate God's name.

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the Magi, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Beit-Lehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the Magi. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁸A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, bitter weeping, Rahel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are not. [*Jer 31:14*]

¹⁹Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Yosef in Egypt, ²⁰saying, Arise, take the young child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead.

²¹Then he arose, took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judah instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. ²³And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, that he shall be called a Nazarene.

commentary

2:16 put to death all the male children - While this may very well be a historical incident, we must be open to the possibility that it may be Aggadah (a legend passed down from mouth to mouth, based on some true incident), although it is certainly something that matches Herod's personality. Beit-Lehem was a very small town (with a population of 1,000), so there were no more than 20 or 30 children under the age of two.^g The Roman writer Macrobius recorded this event as part of the lore of his magnum opus - the 'Saturnalia' - claiming that it was at the time when Herod killed his own son (cf. *Saturnalia 2:4:11*).^h

2:18 A voice is heard in Ramah - The original verse speaks of Israel's exile, but Here is taken as a peshet. 'Ramah' רמה is the Hebrew for a high place, so: "a voice is heard on high". This is the Supernal world (in the sefirotic language, the Sefirah of Binah), for when is heard on Ramah, it is written: 'And on that day did God HaShem Tzebaot called for weeping and for mourning' (*Is 22:12*). The voice of Rahel was heard on high. What is Rahel? Rahel is the community of Israel as a whole (i.e. the Sefirah of Malkhut; which was heard in the Supernal world; cf. *Zohar 3:29*). The Targum on Jeremiah renders "Rahel" as "the house of Israel". Hence Devorah sitting between Ramah and Beit-El (*Jdg 4:5*); which is not literal, as these two cities are not together. Ramah is the Supernal World, and Beit-El is the lower world. In the Kabbalistic tree of Life, each one of the patriarchs is an archetypal representation of the spiritual forces. According to Tiqunei Zohar, Abraham represents the right column of loving-kindness (this is what his personality reflects in Scripture). Itzhaq reflects the left column of might. Yaqov is the middle balance of these two, and represents the Sefirah of Tiferet, whose perfect bride is the female sefirah of Malkhut. Hence, Rahel, Yaqov's beloved wife, who was buried in Efrat, which is Beit-Lehem (*Gn 35:19*), together with Leah built the entire house of Israel (*Ruth 4:11*). "Do not read Rahel רחל, but Ruakh El רוח אל (the spirit of God) weeping for her children" (cf. *Tana devei Eliyahu*). In Gematria Rahel = 238; that is two times the word for "tear" דמעה. So Rahel represents the two cosmic tears of the Shekhina over the community of Israel, which suffers under tyrannical powers until the day of the final redemption. This is how the author is able to connect this verse with the bitter crying of all those families who lost their babies that day.

2:22 in to the region of Galilee - The Galil is according to the Midrashim the place from where Messiah is to be manifested. "Messiah... shall reveal himself in the land of Galilee; for in this part of the Holy Land the desolation first began, and therefore he will manifest himself there first" (*Zohar 2:7b*).

2:23 that he shall be called a Nazarene - There's no Scriptural verse that says this. The author is giving a peshet based on an homiletic construction of Isaiah, "There shall come forth a rod out the stem of Yisai, and a Netzer will grow out of his roots" (*Is 11:1*). Netzer נצר may be translated as "branch", which is from the same root as Netzeret (i.e. Nazareth). An inhabitant of Nazareth would be called Natzri (נצרי) in Hebrew, or Natzaria (נצריא) in Aramaic. The community founded by Yeshua were known as Nazarenes (*Acts 24:5*). With the time all the Yeshua following religions were known as Notzrim (נוצרים), which literally means "watchers" or "keepers"; term that is mostly applied to gentile Christians nowadays.

^g Michael J. Wilkins, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Clinton Arnold, Ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, p. 19.

^h "When he [emperor Augustus] heard that among the boys in Syria under two years old whom Herod, king of the Jews, had ordered to kill, his own son was also killed, he said: 'It is better to be Herod's pig, than his son'" (*Macrobius, Saturnalia 2:4:11*).