

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 3, Magoi: Introduction to Exegesis

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I may not need that, but I've got it here anyway. Are you all set? I'm ready.

Good morning. We're continuing our course in Synoptic Gospels. We're going to look at our third unit, if you like, and we call this unit Introduction to Exegesis. Well, what is exegesis? It's a technical theological term that means basically interpretation, perhaps with a slightly different nuance.

Exegesis comes from a Greek construction meaning to lead out, and the idea is leading the meaning that's in the text out of it. It's sometimes contrasted with eisegesis, which is when people put meaning into the text that the author did not put there. We want to try and avoid doing that if we can.

Well, here we're going to provide kind of a quick sketch of things to think about when we're doing interpretation. A more thorough presentation of exegesis can be found in perhaps seminary courses on hermeneutics or advanced Greek or something of that sort. Two books I found helpful relating to the interpretation of the Bible are Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton's *Let the Reader Understand*, 1994 by Bridgepoint, and Robert Stein's *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, Baker, also 1997.

Well, we're going to discuss several things here under exegesis. We're going to look at some features. We need to continually build on getting our exegesis better.

And then, we're going to look at some of the genres that occur in the synoptic Gospels. Then, we're going to think about the narrative genre in this unit of our course. Then, we're going to discuss types of narrative within the Gospels and actually look at one, the story of the wise men in Matthew chapter 2. Well, there are some features we need to continually build on.

Exegesis is not simply a mechanical process. You learn a few rules and just apply them without thinking. It's not either totally scientific, at least as the average person understands science, as there may be a lot of surprises.

Of course, in real science, there are a lot of surprises, too. You may find yourself noticing things in the commentary that you didn't notice in the passage you're working on, or you may notice things in the passage you're working on that you didn't see discussed in the commentary. That can happen.

You will not be an expert in exegesis after you finish this course, or even after you graduate from seminary, but if you work on these following items, the features we need to build on, your exegesis will get better and better as the years go on. So, what are these features? Well, let's look first of all at number one, English. Or, if English is not your native language, your native language is Bible knowledge.

So, we'll call English Bible knowledge here. The more you know the rest of the Bible, the better you can understand the particular passage that you're working on. So, that's something we need to do.

We need to work on understanding the Bible. God really did design the Bible so that the Scriptures will help you to interpret Scripture. Since the advent of computer Bibles, we've had it a lot easier in trying to find all the occurrences of a particular word, or a particular English word, or in the New Testament, a particular Greek word, or in the Old Testament, a particular Hebrew or Aramaic word, elsewhere in Scripture.

Even that, however, doesn't guarantee that you'll find all the relevant passages to a particular matter because some of them may not use the same terminology but are still talking about something that's very relevant to what you're concerned about. Cross-reference Bibles were designed to solve some of this by getting you to other such passages that might not use the same words, and topical concordances do the same kind of thing, but that doesn't guarantee you'll get everything. Of course, we're not in general here trying to write doctoral dissertations, but we're trying to understand a passage, and I would say one significant goal is that when you finish studying a passage, you understand it better than you did before you started studying it.

And if you do that, then your sermons or your Bible teaching or Sunday school lessons, etc., should be reasonably interesting then or helpful to the people you're working with. Well, one important item to keep working on for the rest of your life is your knowledge of the Bible in your native or heart language. To help myself do this, I have tried to read through the Bible once a year and have done that for the last 40 or 50 years, I suppose.

If you count the chapters in the Bible, the Old Testament has 929 chapters, and the New Testament has 260 chapters, a total of 1189. So, to get through the Bible in one year, 365 days, let's say, you need to read several chapters a day. To be exact, to get through once in 365 days, you need to read 3.26 chapters per day.

Well, what's that going to work out? Well, that's roughly three chapters a day, with five on Sunday if you like to do it that way. Or, if you read four chapters a day, you can get through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. A lot of people use these one-year Bibles, which give you a passage out of the Old

Testament, a passage out of the New Testament, a passage out of the Psalms, a little Proverb, etc.

And they're certainly helpful for reading through the Bible. You may lose a little bit of continuity by jumping back and forth that way, but I've certainly done that many times. So, I think that's helpful.

So, I also try to use various versions of the Bible, and I have read a bunch of different versions. I once spent two years reading through the NIV Study Bible by reading all its notes as well as all the text. Those sorts of things can be helpful in strengthening your knowledge of your native language, the Bible.

There are some other things you can do. In a seminary program, we generally assume that you are learning Hebrew and Greek and such. So, you need to keep working on your biblical language competency.

After you've put in all the work, considerable work, to learn Greek and Hebrew and such, much of this knowledge will evaporate if you don't keep using it. My suggestion is that you put in some time each day or some time each week on this, and if you do that, I think your Hebrew and Greek will get in somewhat better form and stay in better form if you like. One of my former colleagues, Tom Taylor, who's a professor at Biblical, recommended a devotional book.

I don't know whether it's still out there or not. You might do a Google search on it. It's called Light for the Path, and it provides a short passage from the Greek New Testament for each day and a verse or so from the Hebrew Bible for each day with some help there on translation.

Another method, we're presuming you're in Christian service of some sort here, is to basically translate the passage you're going to preach from that week, or if you're teaching Sunday school or Bible class or Bible study or something, to translate that passage, trying to mix Old Testament and New Testament so as to keep both languages functional. A friend of mine, Al Jackson, who was a pastor in Virginia for many years, I don't know if he's still alive now, used to go through Metzger's lexical aids for students of New Testament Greek every year. That's pretty impressive.

So that's better than I did, I'll have to say. I tried to get down to 30 regularly in the frequency list, but there are a lot of lists beyond that that carry you down to words that occur 10 times or more. Well, I would recommend you try to review your grammar now and then, and that's, for most people, not terribly exciting.

But also work on sight-reading Greek, see how much Greek you can understand by doing it without looking in a dictionary or lexicon. One way that often New Seminary students will do that sort of thing is they take their Greek, New Testament, or

Hebrew Bible with them to church. When the Bible reading takes place in the service, they try to follow along.

And that can be helpful as well. You may get tired after a while of carrying an English Bible, a Greek Bible, or a Hebrew Bible with you to church. But, yep.

Okay, so some biblical language competency is the second thing to work on. The third thing to work on, I suggest, is a Bible background. Now, if you're serving the Lord in any capacity that involves the study of the Scriptures, preaching or teaching Bible study, or such, you'll need to spend time working through the particular passage for the next sermon or the next Bible study session or whatever.

This special study for specific passages should get you into the commentaries and perhaps occasionally into the Bible encyclopedia or such so that you'll get some exposure to the historical and cultural background of that particular passage. However, an important facet I think you need to work on in developing your Bible background is to try and work through materials that have a broader overview than just your specific passage. So, it's helpful to get an overview of ancient history, ancient culture, and some of the other religions in the New Testament time or Old Testament times that will help you to understand the impact of the Old Testament and New Testament in their own times.

And it will sometimes help you to notice things in the text that you might not have otherwise noticed because you actually have this background, and you say, say, that seems to resemble this or that sort of thing. Well, this sort of background is only going to come through fairly wide reading. For a number of years, I kept a list of all the books I'd read starting about 1968, I suppose.

That would be just after I started seminary. And this amounted to over 50 books a year, I think over 100 for about six of these years. I finally got sidetracked and gave up on it about 20 years ago, and I'm trying to get back into it now.

But my scheme was to try and read some of the primary sources. Obviously, I didn't try to read Josephus in Greek, which is pretty heavy going, but I felt that the English for Josephus in the Dead Sea Scrolls and that sort of thing was good enough. It gives you the background, and you're not, after all, doing a doctoral program in one of these areas.

So, I read Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Apocrypha, Nag Hammadi, Gnostic texts, and some of the rabbinic literature. It's massive to try to read all of that. And I was currently on Philo when I got hung up, so I've got a bookmark in my copy of Philo and haven't done anything with it for quite a few years now, I'm afraid.

I have also read works on ancient history or encyclopedias of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds or books on everyday life in Rome, ancient Greek warfare, archaeology, and such. So, I was a New Testament professor, so obviously, that controlled some of the kind of stuff I read. If you're a pastor or counselor, obviously, you're going to have to put in some time reading pastoral matters and counseling matters and things of that sort, which I really did not do any of.

But you should not neglect reading in these broader areas as well because they'll strengthen your understanding of the biblical world. After all, we do believe that the Bible is God's revelation to us, and we want to understand that as well as we can. So, those are three things you need to work on.

There's a fourth one, which in some ways is more important than all of them, and that's what I call spiritual insight. We need to work on building our spiritual insight. You remember that Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 said that the most spectacular gifts are worthless without love.

So even so, the most complete set of, what shall we say, mental and bibliographic tools for interpreting the Bible are going to be counterproductive without a real spiritual life and without real spiritual insight. So, if we don't know Jesus, all of our exegetical skills will only add to our condemnation in the end. If we do know Jesus, then we will grow in spiritual insight as we gain experience, and we gain experience through living, through our own problems facing those, through the help of other people with their problems.

And those things then will often cause us to see things in Scripture we hadn't seen before but are really there. So, it's absolutely crucial that we have close communion with God and love Him in order to do good exegesis. So, those are some things we need to build on to improve our interpretation of the Bible.

I want to move on and then talk a little bit about genres in the Synoptic Gospels. The word genre is a word that comes from French, and in French, as far as I know, the word just means kind. So, it's kind of a generic word.

But moved over into English, it's become a technical word, just like the word in Spanish, sombrero, just means a hat. But in English, it means a big floppy hat that Mexicans wear. Genre is a term in English literary studies for a kind of literature, a kind of writing, or a kind of speaking.

It might be as broad as the distinction between prose and poetry, or it may be as narrow as a particular kind of specialized poem, such as a limerick or a sonnet or something of that sort. Well, to be recognizable as a genre, we must be able to construct some kind of list of features of the genre that distinguish it from other genres. We're going to look at several genres common to the Synoptic Gospels here.

In the weeks of this course, we're going to look at four different passages, and each of those represents a different genre. The one here will be a kind of general narrative, and we'll look at a miracle account and a parable, as well as a controversial account, etc. At this point, I usually have a short class exercise and ask them what some of the features of poetry are. And the answer to that actually will depend upon what language you're talking about.

Most of us who are in Bible studies have thought a fair bit about Hebrew poetry, and Hebrew poetry, unlike English poetry, doesn't necessarily have rhyme, and we're not always sure about its meter, et cetera, but it does have a structure, what we call parallelism, in which succeeding lines are designed in such a way they relate to one another in certain ways, whether they repeat the same thing or they add to it a little bit or they do something that's the opposite of it, look at the other side of the coin, so to speak, would be features of Hebrew poetry that we might not see quite as commonly in English poetry. But English poetry and Hebrew poetry are also characterized by heavier use of figures of speech to kind of grab the imagination if you like. So, we could make a list of the things that we should find in Hebrew poetry.

Suppose you tried the genre of the sermon. What would be the characteristics of a sermon? Well, there are enough diverse kinds of sermons that it might be fairly hard. You could start with a definition of a sermon and say a sermon is a talk given to the congregation of a church or synagogue or something like that's intended to motivate them to right behavior or right attitudes or something of that sort would be kind of a generic way of saying it.

If you think about the classic sermon, which often starts out with some kind of, I'm thinking of fairly modern classic sermons, start out with some kind of a story and then kind of leave off in the middle of it and the conclusion pick up the end of the story if you like. That's what's called an *inclusio* in literary studies. And then in the middle, at least the classic sermon tended to make three points, and some people make two or four depending on the passage.

After all, if you're trying to interpret a passage, you should stick with the structure of the passage and not get too carried away with how many sermon points you've got. And then they might vary on whether after each point you make the application of that point or whether you save all the applications for a concluding section or something of that sort. In the old days, a sermon would often end with a poem or something of that sort.

But that's rather rare today, I would think. Another genre, how about a pun? What's a pun? Well, it's some kind of a joke, if you like. It's a joke that plays on two words that perhaps are alike in English or very similar in English.

I remember one of our physics professors at Duke told me once or maybe even twice about an elderly couple and how their sons had gotten a ranch. The elderly couple, the parents, called the ranch the Focus Ranch. Somebody asked why they called it the Focus Ranch. And they said, well, this is where the sons raise meat.

And you can see the triple pun in that. Sun for the object in the sky and for their sons. And the rays from the sun are raising animals and meat.

Well, I won't beat you to death on that, but that's an example. Well, we're going to look a little bit here at some of the genres we cover in class in this course and some that we don't. First of all, the genre of narrative is a generalized narrative.

We're going to look at the story of the wise men and the visit of the wise men in Matthew 2. Then, I used to assign a term paper, and they could choose out of six or eight-term paper topics; the walk to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection would be kind of a general narrative, if you like, in Luke 24. And then we're going to look at a miracle account. And one we look at in this course in class is the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5. Then, as a possible term paper topic, we will discuss the faith of the centurion in Luke 7. The parable example in the one we do in class is the royal wedding feast in Matthew 22.

For a term paper topic, the students could choose if they like the wicked tenants and wicked tenant farmers in Mark 12. Or, for a controversial account, we're going to look at casting out demons by Beelzebub in Luke 11. But for a term paper topic, picking grain on the Sabbath in Mark 2. There are a number of other genres that occur in the Gospels with greater or lesser frequency that we don't cover in class just because of limitations.

But a discourse, for instance. What's a discourse? Well, a person talking, but there's no talking back and forth like there is in a dialogue or something. For instance, Jesus' remarks in Matthew 6 are about not worrying.

So, don't worry about your life, your food or clothing, or that sort of thing. Another genre that occurs a number of times in the New Testament and in the Gospels particularly is symbolic action or acted parables. And there's a number of those in the Gospels.

I mention here three possibilities. There are probably eight or ten that you could suggest that there might be some argument over. But Jesus cleansing the temple is both a real action and symbolic in some way and found in Matthew 21 in parallels.

Or Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13. Or Jesus cursing the fig tree in Mark 11 in parallels. So, those would be examples of symbolic actions.

How do you tell they're symbolic actions? Well, that's trickier. Unlike parables, usually with a parable, the person tells you they're telling a parable. With a symbolic action, they don't necessarily tell you that.

So, you have to watch out for some unusual action and then something that it seems that the context gives you some idea of what the symbolism might be. So, certainly, Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple was unusual, if you like. But the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and who can abide the day of his coming in Malachi sounds to me like a pretty strong background for that.

Jesus' remarks about their misuse of the temple and such fall into that category. A genre that only occurs twice in the New Testament, I think, but does occur a fair bit in the Old Testament is genealogy. And we have one in Matthew and one in Luke, both for Jesus and not identical.

That's interesting as well. There's been a lot of discussion about that. My own guess is that Luke's genealogy is probably Mary's line, and Matthew's genealogy is Joseph's line.

Passages don't tell us that. We'll come back and say a word about that, I think when we briefly discuss the content of the Gospels. Another genre that is pretty common is what we would call dialogue.

That's where two people, usually just two, are talking back and forth. So, the temptation narrative in Matthew and Luke, Satan and Jesus speaking back and forth. Or Jesus' remarks in Matthew 8 of a couple of would-be followers of Jesus, and they say various things, and he speaks back to them.

The rich young ruler in Mark 10 would fall into that category, too. So, those are some samples of different genres that occur in the Gospels. We want to concentrate on the narrative genre for this session.

So, let's think a little bit about that before we go and actually look at a particular example of it. And the first thing we try to do is define the genre if you like. How do we define narrative? Well, a narrative, pretty briefly, is a story, an account, or a tale of events.

So, it's relating a series of events. A narrative may be either factual or fictional, though I understand all biblical narratives to be factual unless somehow marked. For instance, narratives in parables do not need to be factual.

And we've got some examples of that. The story that is told by Nathan to David about the rich man and the poor man with his ewe lamb, etc., is a fictional story.

Or the one where the prophet tells Ahab about the prisoner who got away and pretends he has been wounded. Well, he's actually been wounded, but that was a fake wound, etc. Those are examples of that sort of thing.

So, it's not necessarily for the inerrancy of scripture that the narratives that occur in parables be non-fictional if you like. But I would see all the other narratives in scripture as actually having occurred, though a number of those have been rejected by one or another interpreter. Narratives are a really broad genre, and that's something I should have said before.

Well, I did say it once, I think. I said a genre can be as broad as prose or poetry or as narrow as the other. So, a narrative is a very broad genre.

Usually a subclass under prose, but not always. There are poetic narratives. Song of Deborah and Barak, for instance, would be a narrative, yet it's in poetry.

That's in Judges 5. Homer's Iliad is a narrative, but it's in poetry, etc. Milton's Paradise Lost, I guess, is a narrative, but it's in poetry. However, at least in modern literature, it's usually in prose.

Lots of other things are in prose, however. So, how do we distinguish a narrative from prayer? That's fairly straightforward. Prayer is a declaration, speaking to God, if you like, something of that sort.

Exposition, you're explaining something. Dialogue is back and forth between two people, though, of course, dialogue can be part of a narrative. Discourse, one person speaking, etc.

So, all of these things, prayer, exposition, dialogue, and discourse, might be included in a narrative if, and occasionally, they might even include a narrative in them. That would have to be a long dialogue, but maybe a short discourse could still have a narrative of some sort in it. You could say, for instance, that Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin is a discourse if you like, but it's also a narrative, or it contains narratives within it, if you like, or interspersed with comments on how the Israelites behaved with regard to Joseph or Moses, or something of that sort.

Well, so the Gospels and Acts, in fact, are narratives, and yet they include these other genres as well. Okay, components of a narrative, because after all, when you're making kind of a definition of a genre, you need to give some features that characterize it, and one important component of a narrative is actors or characters, the persons who appear in the narrative, either causing the events or affected by events. They're one feature you're going to see in a narrative.

Then there are the events or the action itself, the occurrences described by the narrative, so actors, events, scenes, where the events occur, the time, the country, the region, town, indoors, outdoors, that sort of thing. A rather important feature of a narrative typically is a plot, particularly of a narrative that has been, what should we say, carefully put together. A person giving an anecdote might not have much of a plot for it except that some humorous incident occurred or something.

The plot is the interconnection or development of the events in the narrative. A complex narrative will have more than one plot, so a novel will typically have a bunch of different plots interweaving in various ways. The plot itself is often a conflict of some sort, and so can sometimes be divided into sections where the tension is building up, a climax is reached, then the conflict is somehow resolved, and the tension is released, and I might be able to say something about the consequences or something. So those features, at least, would be components of a narrative, actors, events, scenes, plots, plot or plots.

What kind of narratives do we have in the Gospels? A rather helpful work on the literary features of the New Testament is a book by Leland Ryken called *Words of Life, a Literary Introduction to the New Testament*. Ryken later expanded that to cover the whole Bible, and the title of the expanded version is *Words of Delight*. Well, he suggests the following types of narratives occur in the Gospels, and he gives names to them that are generic enough so that you can find these kinds of narrative genres elsewhere in other works.

So, the enunciation narrative, the enunciation nativity story, for instance, the enunciation or nativity story, is clearly important in the Gospels. The announcement that John was going to be born was given to Elizabeth, and the announcement that Jesus was going to be born was given to Mary. Those would be somewhat unusual because they involve prophecy of some sort. They involve the supernatural.

And then nativity stories, of course, need not involve the supernatural, but we have, what shall we say, unusual that John is born with his mother being as old as she is, and then we actually have a virgin birth for Jesus, so those are quite unusual. Yet you will still find, in many ancient stories, and even in modern stories, somebody telling something about the birth of their character. In the Gospel enunciation nativity stories, emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus, historical validity of various things, supernatural occurrences, fulfillment of prophecy, and perhaps the excitement, one sort or another, you remember the excitement that occurs when Zechariah comes out of the temple and he can't speak anymore because the angel has struck him dumb for not believing what the angel had told him.

Enunciation or nativity stories. A second example would be calling or vocation stories. These might be pretty characteristic in the Gospels.

They're narratives of Jesus calling people. So, we can think of Jesus coming along the seashore and calling the disciples who have been working in the boats, etc. Obviously, those sorts of things don't need to be limited to the Gospels, where you're talking about some teacher or some leader gaining followers or something and might be calling them in some way or another.

But features of the Gospel calling and vocation stories, you'd look for things like who's called, what the circumstances are, what kind of call they are being called to, and what kind of response they make. So, in some sense, you might say you've got a calling story when Jesus speaks to this fellow and says, follow me, but the person says, let me go back and say goodbye to my family or something like that, or bury my father, which probably means wait till he dies. Those are examples of a negative response.

A person doesn't follow Jesus, or at least doesn't at that point. A third kind would be recognition stories. Narratives of people discovering who Jesus is.

And these, again, don't need to be limited to the Gospels. So, in the Robin Hood stories for instance, there's a recognition story in which Robin and his men find out that this strange black knight turns out to be Richard the Lionhearted. So, it's a recognition story.

But obviously, a bigger deal in the Gospels because it's the Messiah, not just the King of England. So, there are narratives of people discovering who Jesus is. The kind of questions we'd think to ask of such a genre would be: what were the circumstances that led to the recognition? So, the woman, this man told me all whatever I ever did.

Can he be the Messiah? It would be a sample of that sort. What did the person come to recognize about Jesus? You remember Nathaniel and Jesus telling him that I saw you when you were under the fig tree. He realizes that what Philip had told him then is true.

Recognition stories. A fourth category would be witness stories. Jesus or another character testifies about who Jesus is or what he has done and what the evidence is for this.

So, the remark about the woman at Samaria at the well would be categorized as a witness story with respect to her telling the villagers who Jesus is or something. Or a healed person going out and telling who Jesus is. Jesus sends out we don't actually get the story, but Jesus sends out the healed demoniac in the gathering demoniac tale to go tell people in the Decapolis what Jesus is, what God has done for him, etc.

Witness stories. Encounter stories—representative stories of how Jesus seeks others.

They begin with his initiative or perhaps their initiative, continue with Jesus making some claim on their lives, and end with their response, either acceptance or rejection. People coming to Jesus think perhaps of Nicodemus encountering Jesus in John 3, or the woman at the well encountering Jesus in John 4, or we already mentioned Nathanael in John 1, etc. So, John has a number of these for individuals, perhaps less common in the synoptic gospels, but still, you know, Peter and the others following Jesus and gradually growing in their understanding of who he is, etc., would fall in that category.

Conflict or controversy stories. These are some of the most common stories in the gospels. Jesus is the protagonist against an opposing person or group who is viewed as the antagonist, and you think about what kind of situation you've got there.

Perhaps they're attacking Jesus, and you see how he defends himself and how he turns the thing to the offense, how Jesus gets the advantage, and what lessons we can learn, etc. There are some very striking ones there in regard to the perfect trap that the Pharisees have with the Herodians to get Jesus on the tax question and how he turns that around on them if you like.

The seventh category is pronouncement stories. Informed criticism. These are now called saying stories and used to be called apothems.

But some kind of event is connected with a very striking saying by Jesus. So, the one I just mentioned ends up with, well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give back to God what belongs to God, would be an example of a conflict story ending with a pronouncement, if you like. Miracle stories.

We're going to discuss these in some detail under the genre of miracle stories in one of our exegesis passages. Leland Ryken suggests a typical structure like this in that, first of all, a need is established. And so, the narrator will usually say something about, well, this fellow had been lame for these many years or since birth or something like that, or this person had been demonized for many years or something.

Jesus' help is sought and not always sought. Sometimes, he volunteers the fellow at the pool in Bethesda. He actually, if you like, volunteers in some way there.

And the demoniac comes running to Jesus, and we don't know whether the demoniac, having heard from the demons who it is, comes running for help or the demons come to attack and don't really know exactly who it is. A lot of stuff we don't know there. We'll talk about that more in that whole incident.

The person in need or a helper perhaps expresses faith or obedience in some way. So, the four carrying the lame guy break up the roof and bring it down. Obviously, I express some kind of faith to go through all of that sort of thing.

Jesus then performs the miracle, and then the characters respond to the miracle or respond to Jesus or something. Those are typically the need. Jesus helps the person express faith or something of the sort.

Jesus performs a miracle, and the characters respond to the miracle, etc. You don't always see all of those, but that's a characteristic of genre as well that there's usually a list of characteristics, and a particular incident needs to satisfy, let's say, the significant ones. A majority of them are something to be considered in that genre.

So, the ninth category is passion stories—narratives of events surrounding the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And again, in external literature, you can find stories of passion of some sort.

Think of the film. I think I've come up with a name now: Braveheart. It ends with a passionate story, if you like, the death of William Wallace, etc. So, obviously, the significance of Jesus' death puts all those others in the shade and, in fact, takes up then a much larger portion of the Gospels than would be characteristic in general of the death scene, taking up what portion it takes up in the biography of somebody else.

So, the passion stories can be viewed as a whole section for each gospel, or you can subdivide them into separate stories that make it up as well. And then Ryken mentions hybrid stories here as a tenth one. And we've already indicated as we walk through that a bunch of these things are, in fact, combinations of two or even three of the particular other things.

So, narratives that combine elements of the other miracle stories, which produce recognition, pronouncement stories, which are encounters, etc., would fall in that kind of category. Well, that's a very, very quick tour of the narrative genre and a little bit on how to get organized for exegesis.

Now we're going to actually do the exegesis of a narrative, do an exegesis of a narrative, and that's the incident of the visit of the wise men in Matthew 2. The whole chapter, actually, verses 1 through 23. In a classroom situation, I would have assigned them to translate all of this, and so we'd go around the class and point to various people and say, translate verse 1 for us. And then might have some comments from myself or various other people in the class on whether this or that thing should be translated slightly differently and maybe some comment on the grammar here and there, and that sort of thing.

Well, I'm not going to do all that right here, but this translation of the visit of the wise men is my own, and I'll here make a remark occasionally on this or that sort of thing. So, the text we're using here is the Greek New Testament by the United Bible Societies, with mine having a dictionary on the back of it, and I think this is probably the fourth edition. They've changed here and there over the years.

And it has little headings that are constructed to be as reasonably neutral as they can be, so they don't have a Baptist or Catholic or something of that sort of flavor to them. They describe basically what's coming. So, the first section here starts out with the heading, visit of the wise men, and my translation looks like this.

Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem. A number of things might arise from that question. One would be what are the Magi? And we're going to come back and say a little bit about that.

In the dictionary I have of Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, I think it's Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Donger has under Magos. The first definition it gives is a Magos, but then the parenthesis, a Babylonian or Persian wise man, and priest, an expert in astrology, dream interpretation, etc. So that's kind of the quick one you give there. You probably would like an unusual word like that and would want to investigate that a little bit further.

That's the word I think that's translated to King James, wise men, which is actually a good translation, but no single translation tells you everything you'd kind of like to know. I had a couple of words down here from the Greek that just wanted to have looked up, etc., but didn't particularly need, and so I don't know that we'd really need to go into them. The Magi are from the east and looked up the word Anatole.

It's the word we get Anatolia from in Greece, which is the eastern region of Anatolia. But it actually comes from the word meaning rising, so it's the direction the sun rises. So, generically, the east you're looking at.

So, it doesn't tell us anything specifically about just where they came from. Well, I might mention Magi, which is a Latin plural of the thing. It's Magus and Us and then Magi, Gi in Latin.

The Greek, of course, is Magus and Magoi, but we get the word magician from it, and it's used in the singular in the New Testament. Some Simon Magus is one of those kind of guys. Well, verse 2. So, they come from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to bow down to him or to come to worship him.

We've got a couple of things there of some interest in the passage. In the east, it could mean rising, not having time machines and not being there. That is a little uncertain.

When we were in the east, we saw it, but we did not say anything about which direction it was going. Or we saw it at its rising, which then does put it somewhat in the east because stars, because the way the earth rotates, the stars appear to rise in the east, go overhead, and set in the west, and even the ones that appear in the pole start over in the eastern direction and come around and go to the west and then go down and come back up again, etc. So, we're not sure that this is telling us exactly where the star was or whether it's merely just telling us where they were when they saw it.

And they bow down or worship him, which is ambiguous here and do not know enough of their own background. We don't know whether they felt they needed to worship him or whether they just needed to bow down, although you get a little bit of a hint, I think, in the fact that these guys are coming from some distance.

And why would somebody come from a great distance to bow down to somebody who, if he's just king of the Jews, they're not Jew? So there is perhaps a hint there that there's something more going on there. Well, verse 3, Now when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

That's got a lot of background to it, which we'll have to unpack a little bit. But it tells us that this is King Herod and probably suggests that there might be some other Herods around by the time the writer is writing. There are disagreements on when Matthew was written, and we'll deal with those in our next section of the course.

But at this point, there had only been one who was the king. By the time you get out to Josephus, late in Josephus' career, you have a second and a third King Herod. Verse 4, And he, that is Herod, gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and inquired of them as to where the Christ was to be born.

And Christ is just the Greek translation of the Hebrew Mashiach, which we still use the two words separately, Messiah and Christ, but they mean the same thing, and they're titles of some sort. You can see that already in this passage. And they, chief priests and scribes, said to him, Herod, in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written, by means of the prophet, and I'll jump on to 6, And you, Bethlehem land of Judah, are by no means least, by no means least are you among the rulers of Judah, for from you will come forth a ruler who is to be shepherd of my people Israel.

So, there's the quotation. It's a somewhat free quotation. The by no means, for instance, is rather interesting because the Hebrew says, though you are least, or something of that sort.

And so, I think we're getting what rabbinic scholars would call a midrash, an interpretive reading of the passage. I mean, although Micah says that Bethlehem is the least if you like, the reader interpreter is saying, well, if the Messiah is going to come from there, it's not least anymore. So, we've got something of that sort going on.

So that's the quotation. That comes out of Micah 5, too, and some commentators suggest that it's had some influence from another passage as well. I'm not sure I feel it's necessarily going that way, but leave it there.

Verse 7: Then Herod secretly called the Magi and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. Exact is not a separate word in the text, but the verb there, *akribo*, to ascertain, and it comes from *akribos*, which means something that's very specific. Actually, ascertain does too.

Certain and ascertain. So it gives the impression that he wanted to know if you could give me a date when this star first appeared or something of that sort. Well, he calls them secretly, which means he doesn't call them in while all the chief priests and the scribes are standing around.

That's a standard procedure among kings, actually. If you go back and look at the incidents surrounding just before the death of David, when it looks like Adonijah is going to run off with the kingdom, Bathsheba comes and gives a message to David of what's going on, and then apparently, she leaves, and Nathan comes in, and he gives a message. And then David calls Bathsheba back in, etc.

That's fairly characteristic, and when you look at the incident in the rebellion of Absalom, Absalom and his counselors call in Ahithophel, and say, what do you think we should do? And apparently, he goes, and Hushai is called in. They ask him what he thinks, and they tell him what the other guy recommended. Is that okay? What would you suggest? So you get that fairly standard royal procedure of getting all the information and maybe your advisors. Well, here, secretly, probably not even the advisors are there.

Herod and the Magi. And what's that all about? Well, we find that out in verse 8. Herod's sending them, the Magi, to Bethlehem. He said, Go inquire carefully about the child.

As soon as you find him, tell me so that I, too, can come and worship him. So, one knowing Herod and seeing the sequel here, that's obviously a lying remark, but he's going to kill the child if he can. That has some background about Herod, but even knowing kings in general, most of them are not enthusiastic about a successor having been born who's not their own kid.

Well, that's verse 8. Verse 9. So, they, and there's a nice example of a definite article used as a personal pronoun. So, they, when they heard the king went away, and behold, the star which they had seen in the east, or had seen in its rising, still got that ambiguity, brought them out, or went before them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. This is a rather important passage in understanding what might be going on here in connection with the star of Bethlehem.

We'll come back and think about that. But the natural reading of it here is that from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, they're actually guided by the star, and since they don't need the star to get them to Bethlehem, it presumably guides them to the place in Bethlehem, the house or whatever it is—verse 10.

Now, when they saw the star, they rejoiced greatly. It's hard to know how to translate that more than that. But they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Something like that is literally a very strong construction. This sounds to me like not only really joyous but perhaps fair to say that they are even perhaps surprised. I'm certainly excited anyway.

Verse 11. When they came into the house, they saw the child with Mary's mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. And opening their treasure chests, they presented gifts to him.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The word I translate, treasure chest there, is pretty generic. Treasure box, a storeroom, that which is stored, treasure, etc.

So, they opened their treasure. Whatever they carried the stuff in, they opened it. They obviously didn't open any storerooms since they aren't carrying storerooms around.

But something else. And then it's helpful to look up what frankincense and myrrh are because those are not really standard terms anymore. What we translate frankincense here is actually libanose, and the Bauer and Gingrich tell us it's a white resinous gum.

It's actually a fragrant-smelling thing. So, it's something rather valuable. The name, as we have it in English, French incense, probably indicating that the Crusaders, the Franks, brought it back from the Crusades or something of that sort.

even a white resinous gum is a little thin since it's an incense of some sort. It's so sweet-smelling incense, but it's not the little miniature charcoal cubes or something that we typically see incense in today. Myrrh is also a resinous gum, so both of them come from some kind of plant, the sap of some kind of plant.

And the Bauer and Gingrich add to it, sometimes used in embalming. Perhaps a hint there as well. Well, verse 12.

Since they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed by another route to their own country. So here we just get a quick statement rather than we don't get a narrative of this dream or anything. But apparently, God then intervened to tell them not to go back to Herod.

So, the result will be that Herod will not know which house to go to. And the wise men will not be tortured to find out. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus will have a little more time to get away.

The UBS Greek New Testament here gives another heading at this point, the flight to Egypt, for the next three verses. Verse 13. Now, after they had left, behold, an angel of the Lord or an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, saying, Arise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and be there, or stay there, until I tell you.

For Herod is about to seek the child to kill him. Verse 14. So, he rose and took the child and his mother by night and went away into Egypt.

For those of you who are into Greek, by night is this genitive of kind of time. Okay, so noctos by night, during the night. Verse 15.

And he was there until the death of Herod so that the things spoken of by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled out of Egypt. I have called my son. We're here seeing that they stay until the death of Herod.

Here, we get an example of euphemism used in Greek. The word is actually telute, end, of Herod. Till Herod met his end, we might say, in an English euphemism.

Euphemisms, you remember, are a way of saying something that sounds more pleasant than the actual thing is. Alright. We've got a quotation there from Hosea 11:1. Maybe I should say a word about it now because I don't think I do in my notes further on.

If you look at that passage in Hosea, it's about God bringing Israel out of Egypt, and you say, what's it got to do with Jesus? Well, a couple of things are going on there. One, Matthew was drawing some parallels between Jesus and Israel, and probably picking up an Old Testament idea that the servant of the Lord, and the whole servant section of Isaiah 40-54, or whatever, is about serving the Lord, and sometimes it's clearly Israel, and sometimes it's clearly not Israel. And so, the Messiah is the one

who's going to do what Israel, in principle, should have done in some sense, been the light to the nations and that sort of thing.

And so that's going on. But this isn't just Matthew's idea. Obviously, you can say it's Isaiah's idea or something of that sort, but it's Jesus' idea as well because in the temptation narratives, Jesus is quoting three times, responding to Satan with Israel in the wilderness narratives, Israel in the wilderness verses.

So, Jesus saw a parallel between his temptation in the wilderness and Israel's temptation in the wilderness. Israel is tempted into the wilderness and fails. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and succeeds.

Adam and Eve are tempted in the garden, not the wilderness, and they fail. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, not the garden, but he succeeds. There are some interesting interactions of various themes there, if you like, that are carried from the Old Testament into the New Testament.

We come then to another section of three verses that the UBS labels the slaying of the infants. Verse 16, then Herod, seeing that he had been deceived by the Magi, and the Magi weren't deceiving him, but that's his view of the matter and obviously sees plots where they aren't, but that's a very good characterization of Herod, became very angry, and he sent troops and killed all the children in Bethlehem and all its district from two years old and lower according to the time which he had determined from the Magi. A couple of things in there of interest became very angry, nice example of what we call the inceptive heiress, the heiress for the beginning of an action.

So instead of saying Herod was angry when he saw this, he became angry, if you like. We hear about Bethlehem and its district, which reminds us of something that I had not known early on, and that is the way that the territories were divided up in Israel, and probably a very common ancient division is villages and towns, etc. had territory around them, they administered in one way or another.

There's some discussion of that in a book on the Archaeology of Israel by a couple of Israeli archaeologists, but I don't remember details right now, and it's part of the library I gave away when I retired. Anyway, according to the time he had determined from the Magi, does that mean that the Magi told him the star appeared two years ago? Probably not. When we look a little at Herod's character, we'll see that he's one of these guys who doesn't take chances.

So, if a son looks slightly dangerous, get rid of him. So, it probably means it had been some significant fraction of a year or something like that, maybe a full year, just to make sure he got rid of the children that were anywhere near that age. Well, verse

17 was fulfilled, which had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, verse 18, a voice is heard in Ramah weeping in great mourning.

Rachel is crying for her children, and she won't be comforted, for they are no longer there. So here we have another fulfillment quotation of Matthew, and I don't think he's saying here that the incident described in Jeremiah 31 is explicitly about this, but that we've got some kind of a parallel situation going on here. Matthew uses fulfilled in several different ways, some of which would be for a literal fulfillment of a prediction, and others perhaps of carrying on a theme of some sort and showing how that's being carried out in the ministry of Jesus as well.

One last section, then, in verses 19 through 23, is the return from Egypt. After Herod had died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those seeking the life of the child have died. Those seeking life are a little interested.

Plural, it sounds like it's just Herod, but presumably, Herod and his henchmen, who one would not want to see some successor that would put their positions in danger if you like, is probably the idea there, but just a little insight that's not developed further. So, we've got this appearing of the angel, then, in a dream, to apparently the wise men, I don't think we're told exactly how that works, and then a couple of times here to Joseph, and tells him to go back to the land of Israel. So, he arose and took the child and his mother and entered the land of Israel.

So, the message, apparently, is just to go back to that territory. Verse 22, now, when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea and placed Herod his father, he feared going there. So, you get the impression that Joseph knew something about Archelaus, and it wasn't good.

And that fits with information we have from Josephus as well. Well, in fact, Augustus didn't give Archelaus kingship because of the complaints against him. He was allowed to be an ethnarch with a trial period, and he failed the trial period afterward, but it lasted about ten years, perhaps. Joseph apparently realizes that Archelaus has some of the, what, shall we say, bad traits of his father, Herod, and so it's not safe to go there.

And being warned in a dream, he departs in the district of Galilee. So, he realizes that Galilee is relatively safe, and indeed, Herod Antipas, another of the sons, who is apparently of a milder character, though he will eventually kill John the Baptist, you remember, even if you look at that incident, that that wasn't exactly his initiative. So, weakish as well as, so apparently, Joseph felt that was a safer move, and that's where he goes.

Verse 23: And he came and settled in a town called Nazareth, so that the word spoken through the prophets was fulfilled, that he should be called a Nazarene. So, that's an interesting remark; it doesn't give us an exact quote, and my guess is that this is an allusion to the branch passages. One of the Hebrew words for branch is netzer.

So, he goes to a city, a netzer city, and then he can be called a netzeri. So, but it is interesting that twice in Isaiah, Isaiah 11, 1 and 53, 2, and in Zechariah 6, 12, the Messiah is called the branch. It's not always netzer in all three of those passages, but at least one of them, it is.

So, that's a quick tour. We're going to come back and try to look at some of the questions about specific items in it. But let's first take a look at some of the narrative features of the passage.

So, narrative, okay, so that means it's got characters, events, scenes, and plots. Characters are pretty straightforward. Joseph, Mary, Jesus, but the only person who acts independently in the way it's narrated is Joseph.

Okay? Mary and Jesus kind of just tag along on that. Then there's the Magi, but the Magi all act as a group again. This is a choice of narrator, remember, okay? So, we don't find out whether they're named Balthazar and Melchor, etc., as the traditions say, but we just have, and we don't find out how many there are, for that matter.

Herod the King certainly acts, okay? And then there's the Jewish religious leaders, and again, for the narrator, they just act as a group. And then there's the Angel of the Lord, so that's basically what we've got in the way of characters here. Events, well, I can give a whole string of events without quite retelling the whole story.

First, the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, asking about a newborn king whose star they've seen. In the second event, Herod is disturbed, and so are those around him. Third, Herod gets information from the religious leaders.

Fourth, Herod has a private interview with the Magi, pretending he wants to worship the child. Next, the Magi see the star, rejoice, and are led to the child. Then, the Magi worship the child, give gifts, and then, warned in a dream, the Magi return to their own land rather than to Herod.

So, presumably, maybe going directly across the Jordan or even going some other out-of-the-way direction so that they don't get too close to where Herod is. Also warned in a dream, Joseph flees to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. Herod soon realizes the Magi are not coming back.

He apparently didn't send spies after him or anything, so because apparently he felt he had succeeded in deceiving them. He becomes furious and sends soldiers to kill the children. After Herod's death, Joseph is instructed to return to Israel with Mary and Jesus, settling in Galilee.

The scenes, well, we might say, you know, there's the east, but in fact, there's nothing, nothing is narrated going on there, so Jerusalem is the first scene, Bethlehem, the second scene, Egypt, the third scene, and then, really, not much is said about what's going on in Egypt, and then Galilee is sort of mentioned again at the end, but not really narrated. So I'd really say Jerusalem and Bethlehem are the main scenes, Egypt is mentioned a little bit, and then Galilee is mentioned in all the plots. It's often a little tricky to tell what all the plots are.

Here's what I get. A threat to kill Jesus is averted. Gentiles seek, find, and worship Jesus.

And the question, is the writer intentionally setting that in contrast to the Jewish leaders? I mean, after they had heard all that, well, what had they heard? Certainly, they had heard something about the magi in town. That must have gotten around in order to get the information to get to Herod and for them to come in. They probably aren't told a whole lot yet besides that, but still, perhaps there is some contrast there.

Herod, to protect his throne, tries to kill Jesus. That's a pretty clear plot. And then, God uses the events and actions of the opponents to accomplish his purpose.

Action to Herod gets Mary, Joseph, and Jesus into Egypt. Death brings them back, etc. So, we see some of that going on as well.

What type of narrative are we looking at here if we think about Leland Ryken's categories? Well, it's obviously a nativity story, okay? An encounter story between the magi and Jesus? Yeah, Jesus doesn't do anything, okay, but it does appear to be something like that. It's certainly a conflict story, but it's primarily a conflict between Herod and God, okay? You can certainly see from the angel that this is God at work, and it's not the cleverness of the magi or of Joseph or something of that sort. There are some items needing clarification in the passage in order to see clearly what's going on, and I put these out as kind of a little study sheet for the students to try and fill out while they were doing their translation and such, then they brought them back, and we discussed them.

But here are the questions I had on the study sheet. Who were the magi? How many magi visited Jesus? Okay, well then, so we go into a little discussion. The term magi is the plural of magus, Latin, or magus, Greek.

It's used commonly in Greco-Roman literature for magicians, okay? Elsewhere in the New Testament, it's used for Elymus the sorcerer in Acts 13:6 and 8. Do you remember the guy in Cyprus who tried to lead Sergius Paulus against Paul and Silas? And a cognate verb, *maguo*, is used of Simon in Acts 8-9. So although he's traditionally called Simon Magus, he's actually not called that in Acts, but the *maguo* there is a sufficient warrant for that, obviously.

Earlier usage, pre-Greco-Roman, okay, referred to Persian and Babylonian wise men or priests often with the ability to interpret dreams or the stars. We're going to mention a little later on in our course that a Hebrew text of Matthew has been discovered from medieval manuscripts, and there's warrant to believe that it's probably ancient and may even be a somewhat poorly transmitted copy of Matthew's original gospel in Hebrew. I'll say a bit about that when we get there.

So, I'm not going to say more about it here. I bring it up here because it translates *magi* the first time it occurs. Translating or not, okay, the term it gives is seers of the stars.

That's the term it gives. And then what we would call astrologers. The number of *magi* who visited Jesus is not given in the Bible.

It might perfectly well have been three, the traditional number, but some have suggested that maybe it's just based on the three gifts, okay, gold and frankincense. We don't know. We're not there, okay? The second question on this handout sheet: what was the star? What phenomena have been suggested? What data of the passage must each suggestion be tested against to see if it fits? Well, we're going to attempt to identify the star a little bit here.

My next section in the notes is the star Bethlehem. But numerous suggestions have been made over the ages, including a comet, at least a comet has been suggested, a supernova, a star that collapses and suddenly becomes as bright as its whole galaxy if you like, a conjunction of planets, when in the sky two planets appear to be very close together, an angel, something like the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites into wilderness, though perhaps not shaped that way, or merely the invention of Matthew or his source. That's even been suggested by a fairly evangelical author.

well, according to Matthew, it seems that the star appears to the Magi in the east but then apparently disappears because otherwise, why would they come to Jerusalem to inquire? If it's guiding them in some way, just follow it, and presumably would take them all away. So, it's more likely that the star tells them something, and that tells them to go to Jerusalem. It then appears after they leave Herod, and somehow, it guides them to the right spot.

So that's the information we've got there. Third question. Why do you suppose Herod was upset? What do we know about him from other ancient sources that fit this picture? How do you find that out? Well, the average person doesn't have all these ancient sources, so usually, you look in a commentary or a Bible encyclopedia or something of that sort to find out.

He was presumably upset by the threat a newborn king would pose to his own rule and especially to that of his descendants. He's old enough that a child just born is not going to be ruling while he's still alive, so he's more concerned with his descendants. I recall the reaction of Adaliah to finding out that Joash was still alive, that Adaliah was the queen mother who had put to death all these descendants of her son, and one of them had been snuck away with, and such, and when she finds out about it, treason! Although she killed all these people to get her throne pot, calling kettle black or something like that.

we find that's presumed. We do know from Josephus in Antiquity 1611 and 1717 that Herod killed three of his own sons, and that was when he thought they were in a hurry to succeed him. So, one of the sons had planted rumors about the other two sons that they were in a hurry to rule and got them killed, and then it backfired on him a few years later, and he got killed.

So well, Herod, we also know from Josephus, was fearful there would be a great celebration at his death. So, he knew he was not popular. And he said I know what I'm going to do so that there's going to be mourning at my death.

So, he had a number of the Jewish leaders collected into a stadium with the orders that when he died, the soldiers were to put them all to death. Well, the people who were just below Herod realized when he died that they would have to face the music if all these people were put to death. Herod was gone.

You'd face it with God, but they would have to face it here on earth. And so, they quietly dismissed the soldiers, and there was great celebration at the death of Herod the Great. Okay, the Star of Bethlehem.

What was the Star of Bethlehem? Well, something very interesting has happened in the last 20 years, and that is with the development of electronic computers late in the 20th century, a discovery was made that provides a very strong candidate for the Star of Jerusalem. I've got a narrated PowerPoint talk on this called The Star of Bethlehem: What Was It? on our IBRI website. So, if you go to www.ibri.org and you do, we've got a little Google engine up the top, and you do a Star of Bethlehem search on it, it'll turn it up for you.

There's also a video out called The Star of Bethlehem, produced by Stephen McEvity. I don't know who he is, but he was part of the advertisement, so I think he's pretty

well known. It was presented by Rick Larson, and you can find out about that at www.bethlehemstar.net. Yes, that's what it is.

And that's quite good. It doesn't do it quite the way I do, but it's the same event that they see there, and they use a rather sophisticated program, a computer planetarium program, which I eventually got to let you look at the events surrounding this particular thing. It's a close conjunction, so let me describe it here.

This candidate is a series of planetary conjunctions occurring in the years 3 and 2 B.C., which would have told the Magi that a king had been born to the Jews. The most striking of these conjunctions between Jupiter and Venus in the constellation Leo on June 17, 2 B.C., was so close that the two planets would have appeared as a single star of unusual brightness to the naked eye. When you run it on this planetarium program, it appears to be a single star, and then you can zoom in on the program, and you can get out there, and you can actually see the two, and they're right out there like that.

They're very, very close together. If you do the calculation, it is very rare. Such a close conjunction would have appeared as a single star and would have occurred only once in the whole history of human civilization.

So, a very rare event. It is spectacular enough to have brought the Magi hundreds of miles to see what was happening. It also left a very impressive record, if you like, on what we might call the astrophysics of the solar system.

That is, you can actually run the calculations backward. They're complex and long, etc., so you need computers, and that's why all this has finally been done with computers. So, an impressive record in the astrophysics of the solar system would be noticed once humans had developed sufficient computing power to do the necessary calculations.

But no one would have ever looked were it not for Matthew's record of it. So, back in the 1960s, a fellow cranked out computer calculations. This was for ancient historians, historians of the ancient world, that gave you the position of the sun, the moon, and the major planets from 600 B.C. to 600 A.D. Two volumes.

Then a fellow who was an amateur astronomer and who later became a writer for *Sky and Telescope* went through all of these, looking for close conjunctions around the time of the birth of Jesus when he found this thing. Since then, we have all these computers, and you can actually visualize them on your screen and everything. They were just looking through tables of position information to do that sort of thing. So, no one would have ever looked for this record had not Matthew left us his account.

I think it's strong evidence of the historical reliability of Matthew's gospel and rather interesting that it came just about the time that Robert Gundry was saying no. This is an invented story that was devised from the visit of the shepherds, etc. Okay, well, that's the Star of Bethlehem. I have a couple of other headings down here before we stop our discussion here.

Matthew's purpose in narrating this incident? Why do you suppose Matthew did that? Well, obviously, it's a nativity story. The reaction of the Gentile Magi, even though pagans to the birth of Jesus, is certainly in contrast with that of King Herod. It also appears to contrast the reaction of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, though they may well have felt it was way too dangerous to follow up something like this, given Herod's growing jealousy and irrationality near the end of his life, so there may be some mitigating circumstances for them.

Though Matthew's gospel is the most Jewish of the four gospels, it includes this incident and the Great Commission to take the message of Jesus to all nations. Perhaps under the inspiration of the Spirit, Matthew is hinting that the gospel received a better reception among the Gentiles than among the Jews, which wouldn't have been obvious at that time but is now very obvious at this time. The last question here, I suppose, is how you would preach or teach a Bible study on this passage. Well, like many passages of this length anyway, a whole chapter, there are a number of emphases that could be made here, depending on your audience, what strikes you at the moment, if you like.

I mean, there's certainly that element in all of our preaching and teaching. All of these particular elements that I suggest here are present in the passage. One, in spite of the fact that a number of commentators have doubted or dismissed the historicity of the visit of the Magi or the end of the star, it appears that God has provided striking proof by means of computer reconstructions of the event.

And that, I think, is exciting enough. I know one of my friends, John Studenroth, has a copy of this video, and he has been showing it around to a lot of people. I think that's a good move, frankly. Secondly, the incident pictures God reaching out to the Gentiles even though they are, what shall we say, ensnared in idolatry and false religion.

It seems to me that God has even humbled himself to speak to them in a language they understand. A number of Christians I've spoken to have trouble with this because it's astrology! Well, it's sort of astrology. But God is speaking to them in a language they understand.

He doesn't speak to everybody in Hebrew. He reaches out and has the New Testament written in this pagan language, Greek, and translated into a pagan language, Latin, and even more pagan languages up in northern Europe, etc. This

need not be seen as a recommendation of God for astrology any more than Jesus consorting with the tax collectors and sinners is a recommendation for their lifestyle.

You go where they are if you like, and say, we don't have to go where they are. Well, actually, we have to go where they are. Jesus and God didn't have to go where they were, but they chose to because of their mercy.

We also see here that this is a characteristic feature of the Gospels, a mixture of responses to Jesus. An important theme in all the Gospels. Jesus came to his own creation, came to his own people, and he was rejected by many, even most.

Yet some did receive him, and they, in turn, received eternal life. Well, that's our discussion of introduction to exegesis and looking at the exegesis of what we might call a generic narrative passage. So, we'll see you all for the next episode here in the Synoptic Gospels.

Okay. Man, you raised so many questions that I barely put up my hand.