

Joseph, Mary and Jesus went to Egypt until the death of Herod

Matthew 2:13-23

Matthew 2:13-23 - *"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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.' ¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵ and 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.'"*

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

¹⁹ Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, "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." ²¹ Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea 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. ²³ And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Background Notes

Joseph had four dreams from the Lord in the first two chapters of Matthew. In each dream he was given guidance, and that guidance was based on his circumstances at that particular time.

In the first dream Joseph was guided to take Mary as his wife because she was going to have a son conceived of the Holy Spirit (1:20-21). In the second dream Joseph was guided to take the family to Egypt to escape from Herod (2:13). We don't know how long they stayed in Egypt. Estimates range from several months to several years.

In the third dream Joseph was guided to come back to Israel from Egypt because King Herod had died (2:19-20). In the fourth dream Joseph was guided to reside in Galilee (2:22) – not in Judea, because Herod's son Archelaus was reigning over Judea. Archelaus was as cruel and despotic as his father. Early in his reign he murdered 3,000 Jews in the Temple area.

God used dreams to specifically guide Joseph in difficult times, and Joseph obeyed the Lord in every case. Joseph is an excellent role model for us in his obedience.

References were made to Jesus and his mother five times in this chapter. In every case the Lord was mentioned first. Scripture doesn't say "Mary with her child Jesus" but rather ***"the young child and His mother."*** *"And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him"* (v11). And, *"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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. So he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt...'"* (v13-14). And, *"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"* (v20). And, *"Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel"* (v21).

It's not by chance that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew gave Jesus the preeminence, not Mary. The wise men worshiped **Jesus alone**, not Jesus and Mary. *"When they had come into the house, they.... fell down and worshiped Him."*

Doctrinal Points

In the second half of Matthew 2 three prophecies are mentioned. And all three were fulfilled at this time.

1. Prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus returned from Egypt.

"When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and 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'" (v14-15). This prophecy is from Hosea 11:1 - *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son."*

This prophecy is especially interesting when you look at the context of Hosea 11. Hosea was clearly referring to the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. However, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew saw this Scripture as prophetic of the return of Jesus from Egypt as a child. This interpretation of Scripture is what's known as allowing for "the fuller meaning of Scripture."

In Hermeneutics (the study of the principles of interpretation of Scripture), we need to allow for the fuller meaning of Scripture. However, we must be extremely careful with this principle, because we aren't inspired writers or inspired interpreters of Old Testament prophecy, as Matthew was! If we're not careful with this principle, we could start reading our own ideas into Scripture, and designating our ideas as "the fuller meaning of Scripture"! So be careful when you practice this principle, and make sure the rest of Scripture is in agreement with your interpretation! Here the inspired writer, Matthew, saw the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 in the return of the Lord as a child from Egypt. Prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus returned from Egypt.

2. Prophecy was fulfilled when Herod killed the children.

“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more’” (v17-18).

This prophecy is from Jeremiah 31:15. In the context of the book of Jeremiah, the weeping and mourning was for the children who died when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s time. In Jeremiah 31, “Rachel” was used as a representative term for the nation of Israel. Jacob’s wife Rachel was buried in Ramah, just north of Bethlehem. Ramah was an assembling point for captives on their way to Babylon. The tragic circumstances of Jeremiah’s time were a “type” (or picture) of what happened in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus. Thus Matthew saw a fuller meaning of the Jeremiah text.

When Herod ordered the tragic murder of the children of Bethlehem, Rachel was seen as weeping from her tomb, along with the bereaved parents of Bethlehem. We don’t know how many infants Herod’s soldiers killed. Estimates range from as few as six to as many as fifty. At the time of Jesus’ birth, Bethlehem was not a large town, so most likely the number of murdered children was not more than thirty.

In secular history, King Herod is known as “Herod the Great.” His magnificent building projects can still be seen in Israel today. However, Herod is not known as “Herod the Great” in the Bible! In God’s Word and in God’s estimation, Herod is known as the king who murdered innocent children in his attempt to get rid of Christ.

The passage in Jeremiah pointed forward to this horrible event. Notice that for this prophecy Matthew didn’t give his normal phrase “that it might be fulfilled” but just, “it was fulfilled.” Prophecy was fulfilled when Herod killed the children.

3. Prophecy was fulfilled when Joseph moved to Nazareth.

“And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene” (v23). Notice that Matthew uses the plural, “by the prophets.” The problem is that when we search the Old Testament for “He shall be called a Nazarene,” we don’t find it any of the Old Testament prophetic passages. However, this isn’t a problem because the phrase, “He shall be called a Nazarene,” seems to refer to the idea that a “Nazarene” would be despised or looked down on. Remember what Nathaniel said when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth? Nathaniel said, *“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).* Nazareth was considered to be an unsophisticated and uncultured town, and people from Nazareth were scorned, looked down on and despised.

The prophets did indeed predict that the Lord would be despised and looked down on. Here is the Messianic prediction in Isaiah 53:3 - *“He [that is, the coming Messiah] is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”*

Also from the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 22:6, *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.”* So prophecy was fulfilled when Joseph moved to Nazareth, and Jesus was called a “Nazarene.”

Practical Application

Don't expect God's guidance to make your life easier.

I've heard Christians say, “If only God would guide me and let me know exactly what He wants me to do, it would make my life so much easier!” Have you ever heard anyone say that, or thought that yourself? Well, not necessarily true! Our lives may **not** be easier!

God guided Joseph specifically through dreams, but that didn't make his life any easier, did it? Do you think it was an easy task for Joseph to take a very young child and mother from Bethlehem to Egypt without modern transportation? (Even **with** modern transportation, it's not a piece of cake!) Notice, by the way, that Joseph used his common sense by leaving at night. *“When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt...”* (v14).

The Lord provided the means for their stay in Egypt, probably with money from the sale of the wise men's gifts. In addition, there were Jewish communities in Egypt at that time, where the family could settle within a Jewish sub-culture in a pagan land. But it was still a difficult journey. And the time they spent in Egypt was not a vacation, by any stretch of the imagination! Coming back into Israel with Archelaus in power was not easy procedure, either. God specifically guided them in these moves, but they were not easy moves.

Do you see the obvious application for us? God will guide us. He has promised to guide us if we look to Him and trust Him for direction. Think of Proverbs 3:5-6, for example: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”*

At the present time, Margie and I are looking to the Lord for guidance for our upcoming move. We know that He will specifically guide us, but this doesn't necessarily make life any easier. Being in God's will is what really counts. So don't expect God's guidance to make your life easier. More joyful? Yes! More productive? Yes! More meaningful and purposeful? Yes! But not necessarily easier! Don't expect God's guidance to make your life easier.