

Matthew 2:13-23 Escape to Egypt 28th Dec 2025

Pray: Father, as we continue to look at the Christmas story and the early days of Jesus life on earth, may we be encouraged in our faith and trust in you. Amen.

Just a few days ago we were celebrating Christmas, remembering the birth of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. We remembered his humble beginnings, born in a stable and lauded by Shepherds. Next week we will celebrate Epiphany and the wise men visiting Jesus. All taking place as part of God's plan for his son, the servant King. Today we read of the plot to kill Jesus as a baby and so begins the story of his life...there will be those who recognize him as Lord and will worship and follow him, and then there will be those who will feel threatened by his existence and try to get rid of him. This pattern continues even today...

So, let's take a closer look at this reading from Matthew. We began it in the middle of a story...verse 13 said "When they had gone..." Who are they? The wise men who had come from the east. They had come to Bethlehem via Herod's palace, expecting to find the baby there before finding out they had to go just down the road to Bethlehem. They had been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod after they worshipped Jesus, as Herod was not the nice guy he had pretended to be.

Herod was paranoid and jealous and wanted Jesus killed as he saw this newborn king as a threat to his own leadership. So, then, it was after the wise men left Jesus to go home, that Joseph also has a dream with an angel warning him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt as Herod was seeking to kill him.

On Christmas day we heard from Luke's gospel regarding the birth of Jesus and how the Angel went to the Shepherds and told them about his birth, the shepherds then hurried off to find and worship Jesus. Luke says nothing about the wise men and Herod, and Matthew says nothing about the shepherds. We usually just combine the stories from both gospels and consider that the wise men came sometime after the shepherds. And that Jesus went to Egypt for a while before returning to Nazareth.

Some commentators however suggest that Matthew's gospel at this point is more symbolic than factual as Matthew is keen to point out that Jesus is fulfilling prophecies from the Old Testament; and that Jesus didn't go to Egypt at all.

While there is plenty of Old Testament symbolism here, it does not necessarily mean that it is not historical also. The Jewish Talmud maintains that "*Yeshua was a magician who learned his skills in Egypt*". This is clear confirmation of the fact that Jesus performed miracles, which they suggest were due to magic, and it confirms that they thought he had been in Egypt. In fact, they had wrongly thought he had been educated there.

I think we can assume that it is highly probable that Jesus did in fact spend some of his very early life in Egypt. Quite possibly in Alexandria where there was a Jewish colony with more than a million Jews at that time. Egypt was known as a place of refuge for Jews.

And Matthew is keen to point out the symbolism of this fact as well.

Who do you think of when you think of Egypt? Joseph? Moses? Joseph was one of Jacobs sons who had been sold by his brothers as a slave and then used by God to save his family and it was there that the nation of Israel grew to great numbers. Interestingly Joseph was a receiver of dreams from God. And now another Joseph receives messages from God in dreams also.

But what about Moses...there are a few similarities with Jesus' story here. Moses was saved from being killed by a jealous ruler as a baby. And then he was used by God to rescue the nation of Israel from slavery under Pharaoh's cruel reign and to lead them to the promised land. Jesus was often referred to as the second Moses, but he was to rescue all people not just from political tyranny, but from the bondage of sin and death.

Matthew says that Jesus stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod... "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son". Matthew is quoting from the prophet Hosea chapter 11. This prophecy originally referred to the people of Israel whom Jesus now embodies. He is the recipient, bearer, and fulfillment of the promises made to Israel by God.

Matthew then moves on to point out the fulfillment of the prophecy from Jeremiah 31 where Rachel is weeping for her children, for they are no more. There would have been much weeping and mourning in Bethlehem after the baby boys under the age of 2 had been killed. No record has been found of this incident, but commentators and historians are quick to point out this was only one of Herod's minor massacres and probably didn't rate a mention compared to many of his other bloody endeavours. Bethlehem was a small town and so there may have been 20 to 30 young boys killed.

Herod was a jealous man who wanted no rivals, he was fanatical and neurotic and very cruel. He had executed half of the Sanhedrin, 300 court officials, his wife, his mother in law and even his 3 sons. So, the killing of 20 or so young children was probably barely noted.

But what was the connection with the prophecy from Jeremiah? *A voice in Ramah...Rachel weeping for her children.* You may remember that Rachel had died in childbirth when giving birth to Benjamin (Joseph's little brother). She had been buried in a tomb near Bethlehem. Jeremiah was prophesying about the Jewish exile to Babylon when they were taken captive. They would have been weeping as they walked past Rachel's tomb on their way from Jerusalem.

But if you read on in Jeremiah 31 he then speaks of hope, that they will return to their land, that God will bring them out of captivity because of his compassion and he will make a new covenant with his people Israel.

Who is the one to fulfill this new covenant? None other than his son Jesus. Many of the Old Testament prophets related to current or near future events while at the same time pointing to Jesus as their ultimate fulfillment. Matthew is keen to make this quite clear in his gospel.

The final fulfillment Matthew points out in this passage is that after Herod's death, Joseph was told in another dream that it was safe to return to Israel and they went and lived in Nazareth to fulfill what was said that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. Now of this prophecy there is no such direct scripture passage to be found in the Old Testament. Some suggest it may be a play on words – the Hebrew word 'neser' is branch and so could be referring to Isaiah 11 speaking of the Branch from Jesse that will bear fruit and the Spirit of the Lord will be upon.

In Luke's gospel we read that Joseph and Mary came from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Matthew has them already in Bethlehem. Later we hear that Jesus will be despised for coming from there, for "nothing good comes out of Nazareth", for some reason it was a place that was despised in Jesus' day.

Matthew has been keen to place Jesus in the big story of the bible as the fulfillment of God's promises to redeem his people once and for all. Jesus' story is in line with Abraham, Moses, David and the whole history of God's chosen people. But in Jesus he also brings something new. The fulfillment of his plan to rescue all people through his Son, once and for all.

What do we learn from this passage?

We learn that despite opposition God will fulfill his purposes. As Moses was rescued as a baby from being killed so that he could be God's agent to rescue the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, so too God protected Jesus from being killed by a jealous ruler so that he could walk the path God had prepared for him to rescue all who will believe in him.

Opposition to Jesus as King began when he was just a baby. And continued until he hung on the cross for claiming to be the King of the Jews. That opposition continues today. Some despise, reject, or simply don't believe in Jesus. But despite opposition his Kingdom continues to grow today.

We worship Jesus as the King of Kings, but others would rather 'kill' him off just like Herod. Millions (around 380 mill) of Christians are persecuted for their faith and

thousands still die for their faith every year around the world, especially in Asia and Africa. Distressingly we have recently witnessed here in Australia, those who are want to kill off our Jewish brothers and sisters, even a young child. We weep with them and all who are persecuted for their faith.

However, we need to continue to trust that God has all things in control and at a time only he knows Jesus will return and then every knee will bow before him.

In the meantime, we stand strong, we worship him and proclaim his name. When the early Church was severely persecuted it grew from strength to strength. The church in China grew exponentially when it was persecuted and sent underground. As Christianity in the West is increasingly maligned, we hear the stirrings of a quiet revival, especially among the younger generation.

I pray that we will not grow silent; do not fear persecution, the one who knows all about it has promised to be with us, so let's stand up for the one who was despised and rejected and pray that his Kingdom will continue to grow here on earth. As God used Moses, he chooses to use us for his purposes, to represent Christ in our communities. To be loving, forgiving, generous, holy, to act justly, to speak out for the downtrodden and live lives filled with grace.

We are to share the good news of Jesus, just like the Theos team are doing this week. But we can't just leave it to them, or missionaries, or to me...Jesus commands all his disciples to go and make other disciples. Jesus longs for all to turn to him, that's why he delays his coming says the Apostle Peter in his second letter, he wants everyone to know about him, to know they are loved, to receive his grace and forgiveness, and for all to love him and love one another.

God will continue to bring his purposes about just as he did some 2000 years ago when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, protected in Egypt, grew up in Nazareth and died on a cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem to be raised again so that we and others may be rescued forever.

Let's pray: Thank you, God, for your sovereignty over all things, thank you for our Saviour Jesus. May we look to you each day, may we listen for your voice, maybe even in a dream like Joseph; help us to share our faith and the hope that we have in you. In Jesus' name. Amen.