

Matthew 2:13-23 – Worship or Kill?

Joseph was descended from king David. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born of the virgin Mary. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. He is Immanuel, God with us. The angel told Joseph that Jesus would save his people from their sins. He was sought by wise men who brought gifts and honored Jesus as the king of the Jews. He was a threat to Herod.

Read Matthew 2:13-18.

In verse 13, we find the second of three times when an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. It occurred after the wise men left to return to their homes. How did the angel appear to Joseph? The phrase “an angel of the Lord” occurs three times in the first two chapters of Matthew. It does not occur again until chapter 28 when an angel of the Lord rolled the stone away from Jesus’ tomb. What did the angel tell Joseph to do? The angel gave a reason for the command. Either Herod did not understand what “worship” meant or he was a big liar. What did Herod tell the wise men he wanted to do when they found Jesus? The angel revealed Herod’s true motive. What was it? (2:13)

In verse 14, what did Joseph do in response to what the angel told him? Joseph went to Egypt. That sounds familiar. How long did Jesus stay in Egypt? Most scholars say that Herod died in 4 BC. Many believe that Jesus was not in Egypt for very long. What word of the Lord was fulfilled by Jesus going to Egypt? See Hosea 11:1. Matthew’s quote aligns better with the Hebrew text than that of the Greek translation of the OT (LXX). Matthew is the only NT writer who quoted Hosea 11:1. This one is for nerds only. D. A. Carson says “Robert Gundry has shown that the OT quotations and allusions Matthew and Mark have in common are consistently from the LXX, whereas those found in Matthew alone are drawn from a variety of versions and textual traditions”. (2:14-15)

In verse 16, what happened when Herod realized that the wise men weren’t coming back to see him? Why did Herod make the cutoff 2 years old? Does this mean that Jesus was 2 years old when this happen or does it mean that he was definitely no older than two years old? William Hendriksen makes an interesting point about the earliest time the wise men could have visited Jesus. Forty days after Jesus birth, Joseph and Mary were required to bring a sacrifice for purification. See Luke 2:22-24 and Leviticus 12:2-8. They offered “the poor people’s” sacrifice. If the wise men had come before the forty days, Joseph and Mary would not have been poor. It doesn’t take much gold to get someone out of the poor house. Is it reasonable to assume that Herod gave himself a wide margin for error? Herod’s act speaks for itself about what kind of person he was. Are there other examples in scripture where a ruler commanded that Jewish babies should be killed? See Exodus 1:22. (2:16)

In verses 17-18, how was Herod’s despicable order a fulfillment of prophecy? See Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah 31 begins a section on the new covenant. Ramah was about 5 miles north of Jerusalem. Bethlehem was about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. Rachel died from giving birth to Benjamin. She died on the way to Bethlehem. See Gen 35:19, 48:7. (2:17-18)

Read Matthew 2:19-23.

In verse 19, what happened when Herod died? The general consensus is that Herod died in late March or early April in 4 BC. This is based on information from Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian. Josephus wrote that Herod died after a lunar eclipse and before the Passover. 4 BC fits this criteria. Some argue that 1 BC also fits the criteria. That would allow for Jesus' birth to be in 1 BC. (2:19)

In verses 19-20, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream for the third time. What did the angel tell Joseph to do? What reason did the angel give to Joseph? This verse implies that Herod was not the only one who wanted to kill Jesus. Notice "those who sought the child's life". Who do you think this referred to besides Herod? (2:19-20)

In verse 21, what did Joseph do in response to the angel's command? Did the angel mention a specific city? Unlike Joseph, son of Jacob, this Joseph got to return to Israel alive. Jesus (OT Joshua) entered Israel after being in Egypt. That sounds familiar. (2:21)

In verse 22, what did Joseph hear that frightened him? Joseph again had a dream that directed him where to go or not go. This time there was no mention of an angel. Herod's son was ruling in Jerusalem, so it was best to keep some distance from Jerusalem. Bethlehem was too close to Jerusalem. Where did Joseph take Jesus and Mary? (2:22)

In verse 23, in what city did Jesus, Joseph and Mary settle? Matthew did not mention anything about Joseph and Mary previously living in Nazareth. How do we know that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth? See Luke 1:26-27 and Luke 2:4. What do we know about Nazareth? Matthew only mentioned Nazareth by name three other times. See 4:13, 21:11, and 26:71. In John 1:46, Nathaniel said "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" This is what he said when Philip told him that they found the Messiah (whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote) and he was from Nazareth. (2:23)

In verse 23, Jesus' settling in Nazareth fulfilled "what was spoken by the prophets". Literally it is "the word by/through the prophets". This wording is unique in Matthew. The wording that comes closest to it is in 26:56 which has "the Scriptures of the prophets". This leads some people to believe that what Matthew was talking about is not a single OT quote but a concept of the Messiah spoken of by multiple prophets. Where does it say in the OT, "He shall be called a Nazarene"? That is a trick question. This does not appear to be a quote found in the OT or in any other literature outside of Matthew. What does the quote, "he shall be called a Nazarene" refer to from the OT prophets? Some believe it refers to his humble condition. To answer Nathaniel's question, "yes, someone good did come out of Nazareth." (2:23)