

## The Preservation of the King

Matt. 2:13-23

**Intro.** Writing 20 years after Jesus ascended to heaven, Matthew's purpose was clear and his approach was systematic. Each section in **chs.1-4** presents Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah and King. The gospel opens with His genealogy which proves Jesus has the birthright to the throne. In the Christmas narrative Matthew declares that Jesus is **Immanuel** or God with us by means of the virgin birth. Then as the Christmas narrative continues, he reports how Jesus was worshipped by magi and hated by Herod. Each of these articles demonstrates that Jesus is the unique God-man with the necessary credentials to be our savior and king.

Despite the evidence presented thus far, some might still wonder if Jesus really became one of us. In the OT, the pre-incarnate Christ sometimes appeared in a vision or as the angel of the Lord. An early heresy and modern cults insist Christ came as a spirit and just appeared to be a man. How can we be sure God took on flesh? What proof do we have that Jesus experienced what we experience? How can we be confident He identifies with people of every stripe and background? Matthew anticipates these questions in this next section. He was the only Gospel writer to include Herod's plot to kill Jesus and the family's escape to Egypt. By the time we get to **v.23**, I think you'll understand why this dark part of the Christmas story is so vital in authenticating the humanity of Jesus.

Let me suggest an analogy to keep in mind as we approach these verses. I know it's painful...but think about a presidential campaign. To gain our votes, candidates for the highest office want to convince us they have at least two things. First, they hope to demonstrate their competence...they have the right credentials. (That's essentially what Matthew did concerning Jesus from **1:1-2:12**.) But a candidate also hopes to convince voters he's "a good old boy"...you know, one of us. He's no ivory tower blue blood who breathes different air and can't relate with the average person. He's from our side of the tracks. All sorts of photo ops are projected to persuade us...there he is with school kids... there he is at the scene of a disaster...there he is with factory workers and military personnel... there he is at Wal-Mart....and oh look, there he is eating a Big Mac. You see, he really is one of us..."he feels our pain." He knows this is important to us. Maybe you remember this infamous backfire.

I don't want to lower Matthew's presentation to a level that is sometimes disingenuous, contrived and on occasion, laughable. But on a higher level, I think the analogy helps explain the rationale behind **vs.13-23**. How could the Spirit of God convince Israel the Jesus they rejected is the nation's true representative and king? How could he demonstrate that Jesus really is the God-man who was **made like his brothers in every way...yet was without sin? (Heb.2:17 / Heb. 4:15).**

Before we examine the text, let me set the stage with one more thought. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, an inseparable connection exists between Israel and their Messiah. In fact, this linkage is so tight, we might say true Israel is Jesus and Jesus is true Israel...just as Christ and His Church are One. On the back of the sermon notes, I've listed several examples of this connection. Notice some common denominators that link ancient Israel and the Lord Jesus:

- In the OT, a young man named Joseph had dreams and went into Egypt to preserve his family (**Gen. 45:5**). In the NT God raised up another Joseph to be Mary's husband. Joseph of Nazareth, also had dreams and he too went to Egypt to preserve his family (**Matt. 2:13**).
- When the Hebrew people were led out of Egypt, God called the young nation "**my son**" (**Ex.4:22**). When the infant Jesus came out of Egypt, the Lord said, "**Out of Egypt have I called my son.**" (**Matt. 2:15**). So Israel and Jesus are both called the "**son of God.**"
- When Israel left Egypt, the people crossed through the Red Sea. The apostle Paul says they were "**baptized unto Moses ... in the sea.**" (**1 Cor. 10:2**). A spiritual connection occurred.

Jesus was also baptized **“to fulfill all righteousness.”** Immediately after His baptism. God the Father spoke from heaven and said, **“This is my Son whom I love...”(Matt. 3:15-17).**

- After the Israelites went through the Red Sea, they spent 40 years in the wilderness to test and refine their faith and obedience. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was **“led up of the Spirit into the wilderness”** for 40 days to test and prove His obedience. **(Matt. 4:1, 2).**
- At the end of their 40-year wilderness wandering, Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy (the letter of God’s law). At the end of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness, He resisted Satan’s temptations by quoting three Scriptures (all from Deuteronomy) and began His teaching ministry by declaring and clarifying the Spirit of God’s Law!
- In **Psalm 80:8** and again in **Isa. 5**, the Lord referred to Israel as a **“vine”** He brought “out of Egypt.” In **Jn. 15:1** Jesus declared, **“I am the true vine.”**
- Finally, though there are many other commonalities, God intended for His people to be a light to the Gentiles **(Isa. 42:6)** and Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world.” (Jn. 8:12)**

To this day, Jewish rabbis believe their nation is the suffering servant of **Isa. 53**. Yet God has opened our eyes to understand that Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Writing to a Jewish audience, Matthew’s purpose in the verses before us this AM was to demonstrate this linkage between Jesus and Israel. As the unique God-man from Heaven, Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses. He is the embodiment and personification of the life God intends for His people. Yet Matthew’s gospel isn’t for Jews only. Every person who reads this should be convinced that Jesus really is one of us. And here’s the thing...we discover true humanity and life as God intended it to be, as we become more like Him. Matthew understood how vital it is for Jew and Gentile to see our experiences and histories mirrored in Jesus Christ. So let’s turn to our text. It begins at **2:13**.

**1. The Escape to Egypt – vs. 13-15 - When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."**

Last Sunday, we considered the magi and the back story on King Herod. We won’t cover that ground again except to say, the magi went away saved, rejoicing and members of Christ’s kingdom because they believed God’s Word and embraced His Son. But King Herod showed his true colors as an instrument of the devil. He began his final descent. After **2:3**, he’s never called **King Herod** again... just Herod. Shortly after Jesus was born, Herod died, his little kingdom ended and he met his Maker.

For the second time, Matthew says an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. In the first dream, the angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife because she had not been unfaithful to him. Mary’s child was not conceived by a man, but by the Holy Spirit. The angel’s message lifted Joseph from depths of disappointment and grief to heights of joy and excitement. I imagine him racing to Mary’s father’s house to repeat the news she’s already heard. But in this second dream, the angel’s message was very alarming...**“take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”** Nobody crossed King Herod and lived to talk about it. He murdered everybody who threatened his little kingdom...even his wife and sons! Driven by jealousy and insecurity, he refused to tolerate a rival or allow someone to be greater than himself. Word on the streets was that it was **“better to be Herod’s pig than one of his sons.”** So the angel’s message was terrifying. Herod represented Rome’s ruthless imperial power. Using all his royal authority, Herod had authorized a search for their child so he could kill him. Can we even begin to imagine how it felt to learn the government wanted to destroy their child?

In Herod, the symbolism of **Rev. 12:4** came to pass. **The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. The dragon** represents Satan and the human being he controlled at that moment. The same satanic hatred has been the force behind all who hate and try to annihilate Israel...men like the pharaohs of Egypt / Adolf Hitler / Yassar Arafat / and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The evil that overtook these men will come to full bloom in the Antichrist. Paul wrote in **II Thess. 2:9, 10 - The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.** Then **Rev.13:7** says - **He** (the Beast or Antichrist) **was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.**

So by means of a dream the angel warned Joseph to escape to Egypt with Mary and the child. They probably left the same night. Under cover of darkness, they began their 100 mile journey south to Egypt. They may have rented a flat in Alexandria where a large population of Jews resided. Now you may be wondering...how did the family finance this relocation on the earnings of a young carpenter? Here's an idea...remember the gifts the magi brought? The **gold, frankincense and myrrh** were expensive items. After depleting their savings, the family probably survived on proceeds from the sale of these gifts. (Maybe you never thought of it this way before, but the first Christmas gifts may have been returned for a refund.) Have you ever been to a pawn shop? Have you ever cashed in an IRA or a bond to pay a bill? But the Lord knew their needs beforehand. He provided through the gifts given by the magi. At the time of the Exodus, the Lord provided for the Hebrews a similar way. As the Jews were preparing to move out, the Egyptians gladly gave them silver and gold and other expensive items. After the plagues, I think the Egyptians became very generous if the Hebrews would just go away! (**Ex. 12:35, 36**) But history is replete with examples of Jewish people who were persecuted and forced to flee to Egypt. Though persecution hasn't affected us, many Christians have had to flee their homelands. The experience of Jesus was no different. He really became one of us!

But notice **v.15** because it's the punch line to the narrative - **And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."** Here Matthew quoted **Hos.11:1**. He wanted his Jewish readers to see the connection between the experience of Jesus and an event in their own history. When Hosea prophesied, the Assyrians were coming to carry away the northern kingdom because of their disobedience. But just as Hosea had done with his unfaithful bride, God promised to be merciful. He promised He would bring His wayward people back to their land. To strengthen his message of hope Hosea reached back into Israel's history to remind his people of how God delivered them from Egypt. He had called His son **out of Egypt**. National Israel was literally born at the time of the exodus. You know the story. Hated by a godless Pharaoh who felt threatened by their growing numbers, the Lord heard the cry of His people and intervened to deliver them. As they made their journey across the Sinai, Pharaoh sent his army to destroy them all. But God triumphed over Israel's enemies. **Psa. 78:53** says, **the sea engulfed their enemies.**

Now Israel's history was repeated in Jesus. At the time of his birth, Jesus was also hated by a king who felt threatened and conspired to destroy Him. But our God is a champion who preserves His people from every adversary. This is why the apostle Paul wrote...**in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom. 8:37)** It isn't a question of having God on your side...the real question is this...are you on His side? Have you submitted to His majesty and holiness by embracing His Son? His name is **Immanuel** which means God with us. In all of life's difficulties and challenges, God is with us. He may allow us to suffer persecution, trouble and even martyrdom...but He has promised to provide, protect, sustain and carry us home.

The big point of **vs.13-15** is the way God preserved His Son when Jesus was hated and his life was threatened. Matthew eyes were opened to see a meaning in **Hos. 11:1...**

a meaning the prophet himself couldn't see. He saw this ancient prophecy fulfilled in Jesus. Satan's plans and purposes were thwarted. Time and time again Satan has attempted to derail God's redemption plan by destroying or corrupting the "seed of woman." But God rules and overrules. His purposes can't fail. Say listen, wasn't it fun to be a Spartan after the Rose Bowl? Even the die hard Wolverine fan, Randy Conat, was seen wearing green and white! Isn't it good to be on the winning side? When it comes to the cosmic contest for our souls...it beats second place by a long shot!

**2. The Slaughter at Ramah – vs. 16-18 - When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."**

To his rap sheet of murderous crimes, Herod added "baby killer." Not realizing the evil in Herod's heart, the magi supplied him with the information he lacked. Israel's religious leaders told him the place...the magi supplied the time frame. When Herod realized he'd been outwitted and the magi weren't coming back, he went ballistic. Now remember...God's hand was in all of this. **v.12** says, **And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they (the magi) returned to their country by another route.** It was the Lord who led the magi to Jesus and it was the Lord who warned the magi not to return to Herod. To make sure they weren't followed by Herod's men they took a different route back to Persia. (Instead of taking I-69 and the trans-Canadian route, they turned their horses south and picked up I-80 east near Toledo.)

Scholars estimate the number of children slaughtered to be about 20 or 30. For the parents of these little ones, the crime and their sense of loss were horrific. Herod again showed he was destroyer...a son of Satan who hates the sons of God. But here in **vs.17, 18** the Spirit again gave Matthew insight to see the connection between the slaughter of these children and a prophecy recorded 600 years earlier in **Jer.31:15**. Here's the back story on this prophecy. **Rachel** was the wife of Jacob and the mother of two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Her name appears more than 40 x's in the OT. She's called, "the mother of Israel." But Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried near Bethlehem (**Gen. 35:19**). A thousand years later, Jeremiah used Rachel to symbolically represent the mothers of his nation who wept bitterly when the northern tribes were either massacred or deported by the Assyrians in 722, 21 B.C. The final conquest of Judah came in 586 B.C. with the 3rd deportation of the Jews into the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah wrote, **"This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."** Ramah was a town in northern Israel not far from Bethlehem...a town where the Jews were assembled before they were deported to Assyria. (**Jer. 40:1**) It was a place of intense sorrow and weeping.

But now in Jesus' day the sound of inconsolable weeping was heard again. This time Herod was the cause of it. Israel's children had again been slaughtered and the nation's most important child had been taken to Egypt. In **Jer. 31:116-18**, the Lord comforted Rachel or Israel. He told her to refrain from weeping because she would be rewarded. "Her children" would repent and be brought back from the land of the enemy. **Chaps. 30-33** of Jeremiah are Messianic and were written at a time when the nation needed comfort and hope from God. Listen...the source of our hope is always Jesus!

But here's the point...at a time when Israel seemed all but dead, God was merciful. He was still faithful to His covenant and in control. At the time of the nation's birth, He delivered "His son," His people. Now at the time of their death, the Lord promised to deliver them again. By the Spirit of God, Matthew was shown the connection between the experience of Israel and the experience of Jesus...

a connection Jeremiah never could have imagined. The weeping at **Ramah** had now recurred in the slaughter at Bethlehem. Like Israel, Jesus was carried off to a foreign land. But just as God promised through Jeremiah, God would bring His son home again. And just as the Lord preserved a remnant of His people through the captivities, God intervened to preserve His Son. The experience of Jesus demonstrates His connection to Israel and reflects the experience of persecuted Christians in every century. It proves He really did become one of us.

**3. The Return to Nazareth – vs. 19-23 - After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."**

In the first 3 years of His life, decisions of a hostile government forced the family of Jesus to move 3 x's! Count them...before Jesus was born, he was taken from Nazareth to a manger at Bethlehem because of the census declared by Caesar. That's move #1. Then at about 2 years of age, Herod's conspiracy to kill Him prompted their escape to Egypt. That's move #2. Then sometime before his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, Jesus returned to Nazareth to avoid the madness of Archelaus, Herod's son. That's #3. Every time Joseph had a dream, Mary started packing! *"The man's had a dream...here we go again!"*

Are you ever perplexed by adversity? Do circumstances beyond your control make no sense at all? Do you feel as though life and those in authority are jerking you around? Take heart. Jesus has been there and done that. From the time of His birth, He experienced life's misadventures. This qualifies Him to be a sympathetic and faithful High Priest. Just as crisis and suffering was part of God's master plan for His Son, the same is true for God's children in every era. This world isn't our home. But God is faithful. He knows where His children are. He knows what we're going through and what we need. He has promised to protect us and to provide for us. Someday we'll understand, but for now we live by faith! Rachel's tears were wiped away by the hope of a coming Messiah. And just as God did for her, He has given us a blessed hope. Like Israel, Jesus escaped the blood thirsty reach of Herod and was protected. The same is true for every person who had become a child of Heaven's King. The devil can't lay a hand on us.

So Matthew reports the way Jesus fulfilled a prophecy of Hosea and a prophecy of Jeremiah. Even though the prophets couldn't know how their words would be fulfilled centuries later in Jesus, God's Spirit enabled Matthew to see the connection. But the 3<sup>rd</sup> prophecy is a bit more puzzling. **v. 23** says, **So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."** This is puzzling is because it isn't recorded anywhere else in the Bible. **Jude 14, 15** is like this because the nowhere does the Bible say Enoch ever said what Jude says he said. (did you get that?) But notice this detail...the fact that Jesus **will be called a Nazarene** wasn't prophesied by just one prophet. It's attributed to **the prophets**...plural. In other words, several prophets said or alluded to this. The best solution to this puzzle is that Matthew wasn't quoting a specific prophecy. Instead, he was reporting a consensus among the prophets...a distinction that was generally reported by them.

To be called a **Nazarene** was derogatory. It was bad-mouthing. Today, it would be labeled "hate speech." When Philip told Nathanael he found the Messiah and his name was Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael said, **"Can anything good come from there?" (Jn. 1:46)** If we compared Nazareth to some undesirable town in the US, we may offend somebody, so let's not do that. I made that mistake one time. I was describing a hick town up north, when a pastor's wife said, "I grew up in that town."

Just think of some up north berg with two stop signs and a small store that sells more firewood and deer feed than anything else. Don't say the town's name because somebody seated near you may have relatives there!

Located in the rolling hills of Galilee, Nazareth had been conquered by the Assyrians. After the invasion, Assyrians were sent in to repopulate these towns. They intermarried with Jews who remained. So in Jesus' time, much of the Nazarene population was half-breeds...half Jewish, half Assyrian. Galilee was so far removed from Judea, Galileans had their own speech pattern. Like my sweet daughter-in-law from TN, the Galileans had a twang. **(Matt. 26:73)**. The fact that Nazarenes were despised by other Jews and particularly those of Judea is well documented. **Jn. 7:40, 41** says, **On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?** The bias against Galileans is demonstrated again in **v.52** where the authorities questioned Nicodemus. **They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."** Everybody knew that nothing of value ever came from the ignorant Galileans.

Let me wrap this up. Israel, whom God called, **His Son**, fled to Egypt just as Jesus did. And of course, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Then by God's sovereign decree, the nation returned to their land. So did Jesus. He fulfilled the prophecy of **Hos.11:1**. And just as weeping was heard in Ramah as God's people were massacred or carried off to captivity, Herod's slaughter caused bitter weeping again. In this, was fulfilled the prophecy of **Jer. 31:15**. Yet just as God preserved a Jewish remnant and brought them home to their land, Jesus was protected and brought home. So there's unmistakable linkage between Israel and the Lord Jesus. Then too, the prophets said Jesus would be **called a Nazarene**...a nobody from a good-for-nothing town. Each of these prophecies prove that Jesus really became one of us. The adversity / the divine preservation / and the scorn heaped on Jesus, mirrors the experience of God's people through the ages.

But think about that last section. If Jesus came from Jerusalem, we might think He identifies only with the religious elite...the law abiding. If He came from Rome, we might think He identifies with the wealthy and powerful. If He came from Athens, we might think He identifies with the intelligent and educated. But He is Jesus of **Nazareth**. That means He identifies with half-breeds and common folk like us! Jesus wasn't a blue blood born to a socialite family in a high rent cultural district. From the earliest days of His life, the circumstances of His humanity were "messy" and seemed to lack reason or rhyme. But God in Christ had come into our world and He had really come as one of us! His story proves He isn't a **high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses... (Heb.4:15)** In Jesus Christ we have a savior and king who understands...a friend who comes alongside and really feels our pain. We know this because He experienced the worst of life in our world. A presidential candidate may hope to convince us of his competence and qualifications...he may try to appear average and in touch. Yet without any staging or air-brushed photos, the story of Jesus proves He's one of us.

Not too long ago a photo of another dignitary appeared on a tank. But there wasn't anything about this photo that was contrived, disingenuous or even politically motivated. Prince Harry didn't travel to Iraq to have his picture taken there, he chose a military career. He didn't claim special privilege when deployed to Iraq. He wasn't posing or play-acting. He voluntarily went into harm's way. And England loves Him for this. They love Harry because he's real...he's royal, but he's real! That's how it is with Jesus. **Phil. 2:6-8** describe Him this way...**Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!** I'd follow a king like Jesus anywhere, wouldn't you?