

Synopsis 011b The Early Life of Jesus: Called out of Egypt

A little boy was overheard praying, "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am." How many people (Christians) have this attitude today? They just want fire insurance and don't want to convert or change their lives? Don't have this attitude in life.

The magi had just left, and [Matthew 2:13-23]

“When they were departed”; immediately; as soon as they were gone, “behold, an (not the) angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream”. It might be the same angel who appeared to him in [Matthew 1:20].

This time, when an angel appeared to him in a dream said, “Arise”; awake out of sleep, and rise from your bed right now; don't hesitate. How often do we hesitate to follow instructions from the Lord? But, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother”.

Look at the way this is worded; it's also worded similarly in the next verse: “The young child and his mother.” This is an indirect hint that Joseph was simply the child's guardian. He may be reckoned as the father for human purposes, but he's not the child's father. If you think about it, Joseph has little place at all in the Gospel history, other than the guardian of the child. But, as inglorious as this seems, as far as we know, he was faithful to the end.

The angel does not say, “Take thy wife and son”. Although Mary was his wife, Jesus was not properly his son. Also, the child is mentioned before the mother. I think that it's a reflection upon the divine nature of the child, but more than that, the preservation of the child was of the utmost importance at this juncture.

Joseph is ordered to take the child and his mother, “and flee into Egypt”. Egypt, was near to Judea, and it was a Roman province that was independent of Herod. There were many Jews there, with a temple and synagogues, and Joseph would be among his own countrymen, and beyond the reach of Herod. (This all happened back in Isaiah 19.) How often do we as Christians have to seek refuge outside the Church? There is much persecution going on in the world today, **within the Church**. There are many in the church who won't endure sound doctrine. They want to conform to the world, and anyone who holds to sound, Biblical doctrine is forced to flee for refuge.

But, Egypt was an easy and convenient refuge to which Joseph could take the child and his mother. A long and tedious journey would not have been suitable for the mother and child. Being outside of Herod's jurisdiction, he could not come after them, nor have any power over them. (Besides, a prophecy was fulfilled; not simply fulfilled for the sake of fulfillment, but fulfilled out of necessity and reality.)

This story shows us that it can be lawful to flee from danger from tyrants and those who persecute us. Especially when God opens a way of escape. (There are times, however, when we are not to flee.)

But, escape to “the house of bondage?” Well, it once was that. But Egypt was a house of refuge before it was a house of bondage, and now it has returned to its first use. Many things that begin as something good can easily be turned into bondage. The law is a perfect example of this; the law is good, but the Jews turned it into bondage.

But, Joseph is told by an angel to take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt, beyond the jurisdiction of Herod and seek temporary refuge. This is the only time of which we are aware in which Jesus was outside of Palestine, and the time he spends out of Palestine is spent in a place where the children of Israel had suffered so much for so long under the oppression of the Egyptian kings. The land that was a land of refuge for the children of Israel became a land of bondage; the land of bondage for the children of Israel, once again became a land of refuge and safety for the King of the Jews. God can overturn nations and kingdoms, and those he loves can be safe anywhere.

But, this angel said, “take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt and be there until I bring thee word”. Stay put. Don’t go anywhere. Don’t even return back, until I tell you otherwise. How often we ignore the counsel of God and how terrible the consequences.

Then, the angel tells Joseph why he’s appearing to him and why he is to take them to Egypt and stay there: “for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.” Herod the Great, a bloody man, desperate, and resolute, “will seek”; diligently search; “will seek”, not Joseph and Mary, who might have been safe, but “the young child”; the King of the Jews. He had a great deal of unease about this young child.

Herod wasn’t going to seek the young child to worship him, as he had told the magi, but “Herod will seek the young child” for what? He will seek him to destroy him. Apollumi. It means to perish; Herod would cause him to perish. He would take away his life.

This word “perish” is interesting. We’re going to look into it more deeply at a later date, Lord willing, but I want you to remember and meditate upon one thought concerning this word and idea: You have to have a life to lose it. You cannot perish without having a life. Those who are already dead **cannot perish.**

But, that’s why the angel was sent to Joseph; to prevent Herod from causing Jesus to perish; from being destroyed. That is what Joseph was charged with. Although Jesus was born to die for the sins of the people, his time was not yet come. He was to grow up into maturity, he was to preach the Gospel, he was to do many miracles, and last, but not least, he was to lay down his life of himself, voluntarily. His life would not be taken away from him without his knowledge and will. This was all a part of God’s plan.

Verse 14: “**When he arose**, he took the young child and his mother **by night**...” Having arisen; by night. He arose immediately after waking from his dream, and prepared to

obey the command he had been given. He showed his prompt obedience to the command. He didn't say, "I'll do your will Lord, but I'll do it at a more convenient time". He arose, and he took them immediately, while it was still night.

By leaving at night, not only did he show prompt obedience to the commandment, but he also concealed his departure. This would help make them safe from pursuit. We can apply this to our lives: We need to be obedient promptly, because God has a plan and a reason for the things that we are to do. If Joseph had put off leaving, the soldiers could have come, or neighbors could report, "well, I saw them going that way, so if you hurry, you just might catch them". Obey God swiftly, sweetly, and completely. (Sound familiar?)

One thing that I want you to think about when meditating about the provisions of God is about the timing of this story. It seems a bit opportune that the wise men had presented their gifts; the gold they brought served to pay for the expenses of the journey. God provided for all their needs. (Not their wants; I'm sure that running and hiding was uncomfortable, to say the least. Could he have done so? Of course. But, that was not part of God's plan.)

So, Joseph takes this child who is about two years old and his mother, and he departs by night, which not only conceals the departure, but it's cooler to travel, and he took the gold that God has provided, and he "departs into Egypt".

What part of Egypt? [Overhead] We don't know for certain, but the Jews say that they went to Alexandria, and that is very likely. Alexandria had a lot of Jews living there at the time. If you think about it, what is the Promised Land? Genesis 15 tells us that it's the land from the Nile to the Euphrates. You can look at the promised land as representing the Kingdom, and the land flowing with milk and honey as representing the better part of that inheritance. But, they were truly outside of Israel. Although the Jews deny who Jesus is, they do know that he lived, and the fact that they have this event recorded at all is an acknowledgment of the truth at least in this respect.

Of course, they also claim that he brought enchantments or magic out of Egypt in an incision in his body, denying his divinity while admitting his existence. That's one way they explain away his miracles. They say reproachful things such as he was a magician, and he performed all these things by secret arts, and he stole strange sciences, and he stole the names of mighty angels out of the temples of the Egyptians.

How often do we hear things such as this today? "Well, sure a great philosopher named Jesus existed, but he messed up and got himself nailed to a tree; he's not God or anything." Or, "He faked his death, and his disciples snuck him to India where he lived out a normal human life; the world's greatest practical joke". There are many blasphemous things along this line that people spew forth today. It's sickening to hear.

"And was there until the death of Herod." The Magi had been warned in a dream not to report to Herod and now Joseph was warned in a dream to take Mary and the child away.

In Egypt, Joseph was to keep Mary and Jesus until the death of Herod the monster. Herod's death came not too long after this. Shortly after he had the children of Bethlehem slaughtered, he was afflicted with diseases that quickly brought him to his end. According to most experts, Jesus was probably only three or four months in Egypt. Herod died in the 37th year of his reign, and it is not known for certain when he began his reign, but he died in either 4 BC, based on our current calendars, or possibly as late as April of 3 BC. Since we know that Jesus was born in either 7 BC or **6 BC** according to our current calendars, and Herod died in 4 BC, they weren't in Egypt for a terribly long time, and Jesus was still a very young child when they came up out of Egypt.

Joseph took them there until the death of Herod. Herod really was a monster. One reason that there is no secular historical support for his murder of the children in Bethlehem is because that is one of the less notorious abominations that he committed. As king, he was unbelievably cruel and evil.

Herod was an Idumaean, from the Land of Edom, a desert region of nomads to the south of Judaea. His father was Antipater, who became a trusted procurator of Judaea, and his mother was Kupros, a woman of Arab descent. At that time the King of Judaea was Hyrcanus II. He was from the family of Hasmoneans, a popular nationalist, Jewish family who had been priests and Kings of the area from about the second century BC. Antipater was, in his new position and friendship with King Hyrcanus II able to secure good jobs for his sons. One of them, Phasael was made prefect of Jerusalem and the other son, Herod, was given the job of military prefect of Galilee. Herod, now moving in the royal circles, caught the eye of Mariamne, the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II and, after divorcing his wife Doris, they became engaged to be married. However, in 40 BC things took a turn for the worse as the Parthians invaded the area and set up Antigonos, another Hasmonaean, as King. As Jerusalem fell, Herod escaped with his family but Hyrcanus and Phasael were captured. After making sure that his family was safe he set off for Rome where he persuaded the Roman senate to give him the title, "King of the Jews", and he pledged himself to return and take Judaea back under Roman allegiance. He returned to the Palestine region, and starting from Galilee he slowly took control of his kingdom. In just three years he succeeded in capturing Antigonos, and with his new bride Mariamne, he began to rule his kingdom.

King Herod began to rebuild the temple. He established new towns and harbors and brought neighboring regions into his own kingdom and in alliance to Rome. However, this seemingly successful story of how a member of an Idumaean nomadic family became the ruler of a kingdom was unfortunately marred by Herod's chronic insecurity. This was partly because the Jews did not like him because he was an Idumaean. Although he practiced Judaism, it was not thought that he gave it much priority. In modern terms he was a multi-faith enthusiast, giving credence to other religious ideas, which in Jewish eyes diluted his conviction to the faith. Also against him was his overthrowing of Antigonos from the popular Hasmonean family. He tried to overcome this by marrying Mariamne, King Hyrcanus II's granddaughter, and therefore a Hasmonean princess. He also curried favor with the people by placing Hasmoneans in important positions in his court. This had the affect of making people tolerate his

kingship but it also made him feel under even more threat from the very people he had promoted, and led to increasing insecurity. Having reached the heights of Kingship, he never felt totally secure and he saw conspiracy and plotting from every quarter. He had usurped authority; what happens when we do that today?

First to be killed on his orders was his brother-in-law and high priest, Aristobulus. While answering the charge of his murder in Egypt, he gave the order to his uncle Joseph that if he should die, then his wife and her mother were to be executed. Herod managed to talk his way out of the murder charge, but on his return to Jerusalem found that his wife had learned of his arrangement with Joseph. Needless to say Mariamne was not too pleased to hear of this arrangement! Herod began to wonder why Joseph had told Mariamne, and came to the wrong conclusion they were having an affair. In fact Joseph had told her of the plan in order to demonstrate Herod's love for her. However, despite the total lack of evidence, Joseph was executed. Herod was very much in love with Mariamne, but with jealous accusations from other wives and Mariamne's increasing coldness towards him, he eventually persuaded himself to have her executed too. He regretted it straight away and became filled with guilt, which made him both mentally and physically ill. Thinking that Herod was about to die, Alexandra, Mariamne's mother made arrangements to put Herod's children by Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus, on the throne. She too was then executed for her presumption! Herod had 10 wives altogether and towards the end of his life, Antipater, the eldest son by his first wife began to realize that he was not favored to take over from his father. He was deeply jealous of the sons of Mariamne, and in order to discredit them he accused his two stepbrothers of treachery, and believing him, Herod had them both executed too. Antipater must have thought he had got away with it, but just before Herod died, Antipater was executed as well. He was accused of trying to accelerate Herod's death. While signing Antipater's death warrant, Augustus Caesar remarked that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son!

Just before his death, Herod, realizing that when he died there would be no great mourning, sent letters to the principle heads of every family in Judaism demanding their presence on pain of death. Having got them to Jerusalem, Herod ordered them to be locked up in the horseracing ground. He then gave the orders to his sister that upon his death they were all to be executed, thus making sure that the whole nation would mourn when he died, albeit not for him. But, when Herod died, his sister released the imprisoned Jews and allowed them to return home. Herod died 37 years after being declared 'King of the Jews', leaving four sons, to whom was given one quarter of his kingdom each.

This brief history just barely scratches the surface of Herod's cruelty and insanity. Herod was a tool of evil, and back in verse 13, there are three verbs that give a vivid picture of the purpose of Herod in relation to this child. Will seek to destroy! Literally, is about to be seeking to destroy. Apollumi; perishing, or in this case, to cause to perish.

Joseph took the child and his mother and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod, which was not too long. Then, in verse 15, Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1,

which says, “When Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” This showed that this was a fulfillment of God’s purpose to call his Son out of Egypt.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a Jewish tradition in the Talmud that Jesus “brought with him magic arts out of Egypt in an incision in his body”. (Shabb. 104b) Matthew doesn’t directly confront this attempt to ascribe the Lord’s miracles to satanic agency, but it does seem as if this account about the flight into Egypt may be made in order to combat it.

Now, “all this was brought about that it might be fulfilled”. This was not merely an accommodation of the phrase by creating a similar event to the one described in prophecy, merely creating the antitype to a type that was established in the OT. It was not merely in a proverbial sense, which might be adapted to any remarkable deliverance out of hardship, misery, and destruction. This was brought about literally, properly, and in the obvious sense thereof. “Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

[Matthew 2:16] Herod did not know exactly how old the child would be, so he took no chances and included all the little boys in Bethlehem two years old and under. There were probably about 15 or 20 at the time. As we pointed out, it is no real surprise that Jewish historians make no note of this event, because compared to Herod’s other horrors, this was simply a footnote.

This event was another fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15, which says, “Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not.” The quotation in [Matthew 2:18] seems to be from the Septuagint. This passage was originally written of the Babylonian captivity, but it is a striking prophecy that applies here as well.

It is better to be Herod’s pig (or sow) than his son. The sow has a better chance of living. This is striking when looked at in relation to the way people in that region thought of pigs. Very low esteem of pigs.

[But when Herod was dead...] As we looked at a few minutes ago, Herod’s death took place only a few months after this atrocity that he committed. He died no later than April of 3 BC, but according to the Jewish writers, he died on the 7th day of the month Cisleu, which would be the same as the 25th of November by our reckoning. Afterwards, this date was observed as a day of rejoicing by the Jews.

The account of Herod’s death given by Josephus is absolutely miserable: “A burning fever seized him, with an intolerable itching all over his body, and continual pains of the colic; his feet swelled with a dropsy; he had an inflammation in the lower part of his belly: a putrefaction in his privy parts, which bred worms; a frequency and difficulty of breathing, and convulsions in all his members; he had a voracious appetite, a stinking breath, and his intestines abounded with ulcers; when he found that all means made use of were ineffectual, and that he must die, he attempted to lay violent hands upon himself,

but was prevented, and soon after expired in a very miserable manner.” A miserable end for someone who caused so much misery.

[Matthew 2:19] It may be the same angel who appeared in the same manner, and ordered him to go into Egypt with the young child and his mother who now brings him the news of the death of Herod and tells him to return to Israel. I tend to think it is the same angel, because, back up in verse 13, the angel is speaking and he says, “and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word.” Of course, since the angel was speaking with the authority of God, he could have been speaking from the viewpoint of, “until I [God] bring thee word”. That’s a small point, though. No matter what this shows that God is provident in being watchful over the infant Jesus, and that he uses angels in ministering.

[Matthew 2:20] “For they are dead...” Only Herod had sought to kill the young child, but there were others who were following his orders. It’s an idiom that is a general statement of a particular fact. It’s common for people to say, “They say”. However, I think it’s probably that Antipater would be seeking the death of the child as well, and Herod had executed him, so the “they” could be specific also.

This bears a striking resemblance to the story of Moses. God had instructed Moses to go to Egypt to get his brethren, and in Exodus 4:19, we read, “And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.”

But, the angel came to him, “Saying, arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel”. He wasn’t told to go to the land of Judea, and in fact, a little later, he’s expressly warned not to settle there. To human logic, it might make sense to take the King of the Jews to the seat of power, but human logic is tragically flawed. Neither is he specifically told to go to Galilee, although he went there when he found that it was unsafe to settle in Judea. But, he’s told to go to the land of Israel, in the most general sense of the word. He’s told to go to the Holy Land at large, the particular province not yet being indicated. [Hebrews 11:8: Joseph wasn’t the first to go one faith.] So, Joseph took the child and his mother, and like Abraham, had to “go out, not knowing whither they went,” until they received further instructions.

[Matthew 2:21] Obviously, he intended to return to Bethlehem, probably to rear the infant King in the royal city, until the time when he would occupy Jerusalem. How many people are prepared to do exactly what God wants, but they try to project their human ideas of what makes the most sense, including the grandeur that goes along with it, and then find out that God wants them to do something that is seemingly insignificant? People often think that God should want what they want; don’t make that mistake.

In youth groups Wednesday night, we read a story about a girl who prayed, “God, I’m ready to serve you”. Her idea was that she could witness to a movie star, or become a Christian rock musician and reach millions of people, or would meet an agent so she could witness to powerful and important people; God’s idea was that she would witness to that lonely, ignored girl in the back of the room. Joseph had no grandeur; we don’t even know when he disappeared from the scene. Sometimes God wants you to do

something great and visible and powerful; sometimes he wants you to talk to that lonely little girl in the back of the room.

Joseph's idea was that he would take the king to the palace. God's plan showed that Joseph had the wrong idea, as so many do today as well. But, Joseph was obedient (swiftly, sweetly, and completely); He arose from the dream and "took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel".

[Matthew 2:22] Joseph was already afraid to go to Judea because Archelaus was reigning; more properly, he was ruling. Just before his death, Herod had changed his will again and put Archelaus, the worst of his living sons, in the place of Antipas. So, Archelaus succeeded to Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, but Augustus refused him the title of king, only gave him the title of ethnarch, until he saw how Archelaus conducted himself. He never rose above this title. The people recognized him as his father's successor, so it is said here in verse 22 that he "reigned in the room of his father Herod". But, after ten years in cruel tyranny and defiance of the Jewish law, the people lodged complaints against him, and the emperor banished him to Gaul, which reduced Judea to the status of a Roman province. At this point, the "scepter" was completely "departed from Judah". Remember, the scepter departing was one of the signs of the Messiah.

But, Archelaus was reigning in the place of Antipas, so Joseph went to Galilee. Matthew says nothing about the previous dwelling of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth. We learn about that from Luke, who writes nothing of the flight into Egypt. The two supplement each other, and in no way contradict each other. Together, they paint a clear picture, and that's why we're conducting this study of the Gospels in a chronological and systematic order; we want to see the complete and total picture that's painted.

[Matthew 2:23] "The prophets"; it's plural. It's not indicating any one prediction in particular, but a summary of several prophetic statements, such as Psalm 22:6 & 8, Psalms 69:11 & 19, and Isaiah 53:2-4.

What was it that was spoken by the prophets? "He shall be called a Nazarene." This was a term of contempt. John 1:46 says, "And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." It was contemptible; it suggested insignificance. John 7:52 says, "They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." (Of course, this statement was false; Jonah, Nahum, and Hosea were from there, and possibly Elijah, Elisha, and Amos.)

In Hebrew it means sprout or shoot. The name is prophetically given to the Messiah in Isaiah 11:1. In Isaiah 10, the fate of Assyria is described under the figure of the felling of a cedar forest, and then the figure of the tree is continued at the beginning of chapter 11, concerning the Jewish state. The cedar throws out no fresh suckers from its roots, but the oak is a tree, "in which, after the felling, a stock remaineth", according to Isaiah 6:13.

There is a future for Israel, represented by the oak. “There shall come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse, and a twig from his roots shall bear fruit.” David came from the humble family of Jesse, so the Messiah, shall arise from humble beginnings.

The fact that Jesus grew up at Nazareth was sufficient reason for his being despised in the eyes of man. He was not a lofty branch on the summit of a stately tree. He was not a recognized and honored son of the royal house of David. He was an insignificant sprout from the roots of Jesse. He was a Nazarene; he was of an upstart, insignificant town. But, as despised as Nazareth was at that time, Jesus has exalted its fame. If we truly follow Jesus and seek to be obedient so that we may be found faithful, and if we seek to run the race with diligence so that we may one day rule and reign in the coming Kingdom of our Lord, we will be contemptible in the eyes of man. But, just as Jesus exalted the fame of Nazareth, he will one day exalt us, if we are faithful.

Jesus sought refuge in Egypt; Egypt represents the world. Egypt is outside the land of promise. Sometimes, as Christians, we might have to seek refuge in the world, especially due to persecution from within the Church, as they seek after false teachings and strange doctrines and doctrines of men. But, just like Jesus, we are not a part of the world; we don't need to remain in bondage to the world; we need to be like Jesus and follow Truth and earnestly seek the Kingdom in everything we do.

The lowly Nazarene is what Jesus was at first. But, if we are followers of the Nazarene; if we are faithful in our daily walk, then one day we can hope to be exalted, and to rule and reign with him. That's my prayer for you today.