

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Lesson 10 Matthew 2:13-23

Christmas in Egypt

Years ago, when I was pastoring in Virginia, my wife proposed a children's Christmas play entitled *Christmas in Egypt*. This sounded like a bizarre title to market a novel program at Christmas season for churches bored with the same old story. My first response was to "judge a book by its cover." She explained that Jesus would have spent one or more birthdays in Egypt according to Matthew 2:13. The concept definitely made you think. It showed how Egyptian children of pagan god worshipers possibly could have heard the gospel account of how the one true God who destroyed Egypt with 10 plagues had sent His Son to earth to die for man's sins. It would be unlikely that Joseph and Mary had a western style "birthday party" for Jesus. However, we cannot rule out that Mary and Joseph were asked why they as Jews had moved from Israel back to Egypt. Why wouldn't they explain the story of His birth fulfilling prophecy? Truly they were a light to the truth in a dark place. They may have left out the "King" thing for fear of Herod's spies.

The Magi found the "young child" in a house (Matthew 2:9). Herod's subsequent slaughter of infants means Jesus was no older than two. The angel referred to Him as a "young child." "Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (2:13). Immediately the couple fled Bethlehem and "departed into Egypt." Verse 15 tells us they remained in exile until the death of Herod. Historians debate the dates for Herod's death between 4 BC – 1 BC.ⁱ

Israel and Messiah are called God's son.

Hosea's prophecy is referenced in Matthew 2:15 where God refers to Israel as a child, "my son" that He called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Matthew 2:15 is a "typical fulfillment," in other words a type fulfilled later in Christ. Israel was a type that prefigured Jesus coming out of Egypt. Hosea undoubtedly had Exodus 4:22 in mind where God calls "Israel my firstborn son." Matthew quotes from the Hebrew rather than the Greek Septuagint which translates him as a "child." While Hosea could only look backward with Israel and the Exodus in mind, Matthew wrote the inspired intent of God who was looking to the future with Messiah in mind.

The second text that Matthew is referencing is Numbers 28:8 which speaks of a special One coming out of Egypt whose people were the descendants of Jacob. Balaam prophesied in the same chapter that a star would arise out of Jacob, and a scepter would come out of Israel. Matthew's reference to both of these texts indicates that God's Son who would be from God's "child/son" Israel, and would come out of Egypt and royally rule over Israel and her enemies. Matthew confirms these Egypt prophecies as being a direct reason for the holy family's flight into Egypt. Were it not for these ancient prophecies, they could have fled from Herod's wrath to anywhere. Divine providence always incorporates the dynamic cause of the evil human free will as a means to triumph over the worst evil of man with the goodness of God. In Numbers 22:23 the Hebrew text changes from describing Israel as a singular unit, one nation, to literally "God will bring **them** out of Egypt." In 24:8-9 there is a deliberate change from "them" to "him," the future scepter bearer – the King. The parallel of the types between Israel and Messiah are illustrated in the following chart from [The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy](#).ⁱⁱ From the "them" comes "Him" and from Israel called "Ariel" (Isaiah 29:1,2,7) meaning the Lion of God comes the Lion like King Messiah.

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE BALAAM ORACLES

Israel's past experience prefigures the King's future experience.

ISRAEL

Numbers 23:18

God brings **them** out of Egypt

God is for **them** like the
horns of an ox

Israel is like a lion

KING

Numbers 24:7-9

God brings **him** out of Egypt

God is for **Him** like the
horns of an ox

The **King** is like a lion

Matthew was the inspired lens through which the Jewish audience were "Reading Moses Seeing Jesus".ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew's comparison of Jesus in Egypt to Moses in Egypt is basic to build the case to the Jewish leaders that Jesus as Stephen later said; "is that Moses" (Acts 3:37). Hebrews 3:1-6 further establishes the superiority of Christ over Moses. Jesus had to fulfill the prophecy of the one whom God would raise "like Moses" to become the deliverer of Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15). In quoting Numbers 24:8 and Hosea 11:1, Matthew was making the connection that just as Israel left Canaan and went into Egypt then came forth out of Egypt so Jesus departed from Bethlehem and temporarily went into Egypt then came back to the promised land. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 clearly gives the likeness of Moses to identify Messiah. On the road to Emmaus Jesus rebuked the unbelieving disciples as slow of heart to believe all that Moses had said about Messiah. The two disheartened disciples had only viewed Him as a prophet "mighty in word and deed" (Luke 24:19). Like Moses, Jesus was rejected at first by His people, yet later delivered them. Peter affirmed that Jesus was that prophet foretold to be like Moses and warned that, "And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22,23).

What was the year of Jesus' birth?

Luke chapter three gives two clues. He indicates that the preaching of John the Baptist began "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius" which is established as A.D. 28-29. Jesus was six months younger than John, and He "began to be about 30 years of age," when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). Another key time marker for the latest possible date for the birth of Jesus was before the slaughter of the innocents preceding Herod's death. Emil Schürer calculates^{iv} his death around 4 BC, but some hold that it was as late as 1 BC. That later date coincides with Jesus beginning His ministry in 28-29 AD. If Jesus was born in 1 BC, He would be 29-30 years old in 28-29 AD. A third clue is the number of Passovers in the Gospel accounts indicating that Jesus' ministry lasted for three and one half years. What we do not know is, how long John ministered before Jesus was baptized by him. Beyond these textual clues one must go to extra-biblical evidence about the year and day of Jesus' crucifixion and work backward to narrow down the possible years of His birth.

Randy Nettles, a biblical student who has extensively researched these dates draws the following conclusion: Nettles relied on the work of Fred Espenak "a former NASA astronomer and calendar specialist who is highly respected in his field, who also worked on NASA's website on 5000 years of solar and lunar eclipses. These new and full moon tables (going back thousands of years) are mathematically determined and deemed accurate." Based on those tables Nettles concludes; "The only years with a Wednesday or Thursday crucifixion on Nisan 14 are AD 30 (Wednesday) and AD 33 (Thursday)." Nettles research concluded that there was no Friday crucifixion (on Nisan 14) within these years.^v Working backward from 33 AD would place Jesus' birth just before Herod's death in 1 BC. However, if Herod died in 4-3 BC then the 33.5 year lifespan of Jesus would have to end in 30 AD in which year Nisan 14 fell on a Wednesday according to the Espenak calculations. Basing either of these two options of the birth year on the year of Jesus' death based on which death day fits a Wednesday or Thursday still leaves the unresolved debate among historians as to the date of Herod's death. The only biblical reference of historical evidence we have to go on is that Jesus birth had to happen: 1) before Herod's death and that the year that John the Baptist began his ministry was "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," 2) and that Jesus was about 30 years of age" when He was baptized by John and 3) that the gospels record at least three Passovers during His ministry. The uncertainty surrounding the year of either His birth or death is not cause

for uncertainty as to the historicity of Jesus' birth and of His death by crucifixion. Even unbelieving historians accept Jesus' birth and His death. The debate then is about who He was and is. Unbelievers are left with the burden of disproving His virgin birth and His bodily resurrection. Whether the year of Herod's death or His birth is 1 or 4 BC, of the two, only Jesus' tomb is empty.

The slaughter of the innocents Matthew 2:16-18

In Matthew 2:16 we see the heinous act of Herod who responded in paranoia to the report of the Magi charting a royal star. Why is there no written or archaeological evidence of this slaughter? I propose that it happened in such proximity to Herod's death and the ensuing political drama that it paled in significance in the historical records. Also sadly, this slaughter would not have stood out as unusual given Herod's maniacal pathology. Our faith in the infallible inspired text is not daunted in the absence of any extra-biblical evidence of this atrocious act of Herod.

Matthew uses this tragedy to point to Jeremiah 31:15. When we come to the third Old Testament citation in this passage we see his use of "applicational fulfillment" as opposed to "typical fulfillment" (Matthew 2:16-18). Here he quotes Jeremiah 31:15, which "speaks of Ramah as the place of weeping because it was where the Babylonians gathered the captive young men of Judah before sending them into exile (Jeremiah 40:1-2)...Jeremiah was referring to the deep pain of Jewish mothers at the loss of their young men to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians."^{vi} I had often wondered if Bethlehem lay in the region of Ramah. Bethlehem is in Judah. Ramah is in the tribe of Benjamin, which borders Judah to the north. It was the home of Samuel and Deborah.

So, the question is, since Jeremiah 31:15 refers to the Babylonian exile, how could Matthew cite the slaughter of the innocents as fulfilling this text?"^{ibid} Some scholars argue that Matthew was using a rabbinic method of making a homiletic figurative application "*midrash*" instead of a literal hermeneutic interpretation. Those scholars espouse "creative exegesis." The Greek prefix of the word "exegete" (Ex = out of; eis = into) limits the exercise to discovery from what is in the text not the insertion of meaning into the text. They wrongly assign to Matthew the kind of allegorical interpretation method that they themselves use instead of the literal interpretation. There is much evidence that the rabbinic Jewish hermeneutic of the first century was concerned with the meaning of the prophetic text and only later began to stray from that literal hermeneutical method in the face of the messianic apologetic interpretations that were used to prove prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. The application or *midrash* of a scriptural text that abandons the literal interpretation loses its effectiveness if the literal interpretation is not established first. However the uses of application is not foreign in scripture. "So, in Matthew 2:16-18 Matthew was citing an Old Testament text, and deriving a principle found in that text, and showing its relevance to his own day and time. Matthew was applying scripture, not twisting it."^{vi} When we read Moses we see Jesus and when we read Jesus we can see Moses. Mary, like Jochebed, both saw their sons miraculously escape the slaughter of deranged royalty and go on to become a deliverer of their enslaved people. Moses and Jesus fasted 40 days while meeting with God. Moses came from the mount with God's Law. Jesus taught on the mount with grace and truth. Matthew recognized that Jeremiah wrote of the suffering of Rachael, who was buried in Bethlehem, as the personification of Jewish mothers, at the exile. He, in turn, applied the principle that the Jewish mothers of Bethlehem still wept because of the suffering of their children at the hands of wicked Herod."^{vii} Michael Rydelnik classifies this as an "applicational fulfillment," contrasted to a "direct fulfillment" of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. Just like Rachael representing the mothers of Israel wept over their children at Ramah, they later wept over their children at Bethlehem. Anti-Semitic history was repeating itself. Murder of the unborn or young by Pharaoh, Herod or governmental heads today always originates from Satan.

Jesus the Nazarene 2:19-23

The long-recognized difficulty in this section is that no Old Testament actually text says, that Messiah "shall be called a Nazarene." "The most popular explanation to many is that Matthew is making a citation of Isaiah 11:1 emphasizing the

Hebrew word *netzer* used of a branch and a root that shall arise out of Jesse. The modern word play jumps from Hebrew to English without interpreting from the Greek New Testament by linking *netzer* to one raised in Nazareth and therefore being called a Nazarene. Michael Rydelnik points out the difficulty with this. “The wordplay is entirely absent in Greek, the language of Matthew’s Gospel, and makes no sense of the fulfillment.”^{viii} Rather, Rydelnik calls this prophecy a “summary fulfillment” in contrast to the previous “typical fulfillment” in (2:15) and the other “application fulfillment in (2:16-18).” The clear use of the plural “prophets” instead of one specific prophet broadens the interpretation potential to include a summary of the general teaching of many of the prophets about the Messiah. Nazarene was a common term of derision in the first century, as the disciple Nathaniel so bluntly used it. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 7:46). In summary the prophets consistently show that the coming Messiah would be despised and rejected by Israel (Isaiah 49:7; 50:6; 53:2,3). Jesus being a Nazarene fulfilled the general summary of the prophets, ie: despised. Interpreting in the literal sense as in the direct fulfillment seen in 2:5,6 of His birth in Bethlehem does not exclude interpreting in the literary sense of either typical fulfillment (2:15), application fulfillment (2:16-18) nor of summary fulfillment (2:23). In chapter 2 we see Jesus directly fulfilling Micah 5:2. Then we see Jesus fulfilling the type of Israel in the Exodus. (2:15) We see Jesus’ birth being the cause of fulfillment by application of Jewish mothers weeping for their children like the Jewish mothers of the Babylonian exile. Last we see Jesus fulfilling the general summary of the despised, rejected Messiah of which multiple prophets spoke.

Four geographical references are made in this chapter; Bethlehem, Ramah, Egypt and Nazareth. In Bethlehem, Jesus the second Adam was born that men might be born again and delivered from the curse of the first Adam. In Bethlehem, where Isaac wept at Rachael’s burial place, Mary gave birth to the One who would conquer the grave. She was warned by Simeon that “a sword would pierce through her own soul”(Luke 2:35). From Egypt, Jesus the second Moses came to bring eternal deliverance from Satan’s slavery just as Moses delivered Israel from Pharaoh’s slavery. Lastly, in Nazareth Jesus stooped not only to be found in fashion as a man, but he humbled Himself in the form of a servant i.e a manual laborer, a low-income working class “carpenter” and became one in ignominy with His Jewish brethren, despised and hated by the religious hierarchy as well as by the common Jew. To top that off, Jesus was rejected in that little despised good for nothing town of Nazareth(Luke 4:13-16). “He came unto His own and His own received Him not” (John 1:1). On His cross the title could not be more insulting - **Jesus of Nazareth** nor more mocking **King of the Jews**. The people ask in derision where does scripture say that Messiah will come out of Galilee ie: Nazareth? (John 7:40-42) The epithet, your King from Nazareth could not have been more insulting to their Messianic expectations. Isaiah said “we esteemed him not.”

Four kinds of fulfilments used in Matthew chapter 2		
Direct Fulfillment	Born in Bethlehem	Matthew 2:1
Typical Fulfillment	Out of Egypt...my son	2:15
Application Fulfillment	Rachael Weeping	2:16-18
Summary Fulfillment	Called a Nazarene	2:23

ⁱ Lesson 2 Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

ⁱⁱ The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy, Michael Rydelnik, Edwin Blum, Mood press, Chicago, Ill. 2019, p 108

ⁱⁱⁱ Reading Moses Seeing Jesus, Dr. Eitan Bar, One For Israel Ministry, Lexham Press, Belingham, WA, 2017

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emil_Sch%C3%BCrer

^v <https://www.raptureforums.com/bible-study/three-days-and-three-nights/>

^{vi} Ibid, p 111

^{vii} Ibid, p 112

^{viii} Ibid p 113