

4.

Jesus Was Taken to Egypt to Escape Herod

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how God caused the Jewish religious leaders, Herod and the entire city of Jerusalem to learn that the Messiah had been born. In our topic today, we are going to see how Satan worked through Herod to immediately try to destroy Jesus.

God warned the wise men not to return to Herod and so they began the return to their own country by a different route. Meanwhile, Matthew 2:13-15 says, “Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’” Here, we see that the Lord again used a dream to let Joseph know what to do.

Bethlehem was less than five miles from Jerusalem. God knew that as soon as Herod realized that the wise men were not returning to tell him where Jesus was that he would immediately make an effort to try and destroy Jesus. In the dream, Joseph was told to take the young Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. God told Joseph that he was to stay in Egypt until God told him to return. God said that Herod was going to try and destroy the young Child. The word translated “young Child” is used nine times in this chapter to describe Jesus. This is the word that was used for children up to the age of twelve years. It is also the word used in 1 John 2:13 to speak of Christians who are growing in their spiritual lives. That verse says, “I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father.” In this verse, it speaks of those who have gotten to know the Father.

Herod was a very evil and fearful man so God warned Joseph that Herod would try to destroy Jesus. God told Joseph to go to Egypt because Herod had no influence in Egypt. Joseph was obedient and left immediately by night so that no one would know where Mary, Joseph and Jesus had gone. By this action, no one could tell the soldiers of Herod where they might be able to find Jesus. By morning, Joseph, Mary and Jesus would have been several miles away from the town of Bethlehem and no one would know where they had gone. As a result, Jesus was protected from Herod.

However, God also had another purpose for sending Jesus to Egypt. Hosea 11:1 says, “‘When Israel *was* a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.’” The Jews understood that God had called Israel from the land of Egypt through Moses. Here, we see that God had a greater purpose for that statement that could only be fulfilled by Jesus. Throughout the Old Testament, God caused many things to happen that pictured Jesus. These things, later, were used in the New Testament to point to Jesus. An example is found in Exodus 17:5-7 where Moses struck the rock and water came from it. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, we read, “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

Matthew 2:16-18 goes on to say, “Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’” We see that Herod became extremely angry when the wise men did not return to tell him where to find Jesus. Then, we see the fear and evil in the heart of Herod.

In his fear, Herod ordered the death of all of the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding area from two years of age and under. The reason why he chose the age of two was due to the questions that Herod had asked the wise men. These verses show that Herod had asked the wise men several questions about the star. The wise men had made this trip based on the statement in Numbers 24:17 where we read, “‘I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.’” This verse said that a Star would come from the descendents of Jacob. A Scepter was what a king used as he ruled. As a result, that was why the wise men came to Jerusalem seeking Jesus. Apparently, Herod asked the wise men when they had first seen the star. It took the men time to get ready to travel. Then, it took them additional time for the trip. As a result, to make sure that he killed this potential threat to his rule, Herod ordered the death of all of the male children that were two years of age and under.

Matthew saw that this murder of the young children fulfilled the prophecy written several hundred years earlier by Jeremiah, the prophet. Jeremiah 31:15 says, “Thus says the LORD: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation *and* bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they *are* no more.’” Chapter 31 in Jeremiah talks about when the Lord will bring the scattered nation of Israel back from the places where they were scattered. That part of the chapter will be fulfilled by Christ with His second coming to rule on the earth. However, this verse was fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus because He came to die and rise again. This was necessary in order for Him to restore the nation of Israel when he comes to fulfill the thousand year rule of Christ promised in Revelation 20:4-6.

Matthew 2:19-23 goes on to say, “Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.’ Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’” Here, we see that an angel appeared to Joseph in another dream to let him know that Herod had died and Joseph, Mary and Jesus could return to the land of Israel.

We see that Joseph was obedient and took the family and made the return trip to the land of Israel. However, when Joseph, Mary and Jesus got close to the land of Israel, one of the people they met told them that Archelaus, the son of Herod, had replaced his father as the Roman ruler over the area of Judea. The area that Herod ruled had been divided between three of the sons of Herod so that they ruled various parts. That meant that Archelaus was ruling in Jerusalem over the entire region of Judea, which included the town of Bethlehem since that town was less than five miles south of Jerusalem. That caused Joseph to be afraid to go there because Archelaus was just as evil as his father.

However, God gave Joseph one more dream to guide Joseph. In this dream, God told Joseph not to return to Bethlehem. We see in the first two chapters of Matthew that God guided Joseph with four different dreams. God spoke to many different individuals in the Old Testament through dreams. That was necessary because

Old Testament believers had not received the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples the night before His crucifixion, in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” Later that evening, Jesus said, in John 16:13, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” God guided Joseph with dreams because the Holy Spirit had not yet been given.

We saw that God had allowed Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, to order everyone to return to the home of their ancestors to register for taxes so that was why Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. However, before that, Luke 1:26-27 says, “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name *was* Mary.” Here, we see that Mary and Joseph had actually been living in the town of Nazareth before Jesus was born. As a result, Joseph decided to return to Nazareth, which was located in the region of Galilee.

The word “Nazarene” is not mentioned in the Old Testament. However, Isaiah 53:3 says, “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Then, John 1:46 says, “And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’” Here, we see that the people of Nazareth were despised by Jews from other places. Jesus was born in a barn, and here, we see that He grew up in a town where the people were despised and rejected. God chose these places so that the despised and rejected would feel accepted by Jesus. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that Jesus came to provide salvation for every person, including those who are despised and rejected by many. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to reach out to those who have been rejected by society.