

## § 016

### THE CHILD BROUGHT FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH

*19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." 21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene." 1*

*Matthew 2:19-23*

#### Introduction

1. Spurgeon said: Angels again! Yes, and they are busy still around "the beloved of the Lord."
  - Joseph still watches over his honored charge, even as *Joseph* of old watched over Israel *in Egypt*.
  - See the order in which the family is arranged, — "*the young child and his mother*."
    - The Lord is placed first: it is not here, as at Rome, "the Virgin and child."
2. The angel loathed to mention Herod's name, but said, "*They are dead*."
  - Such a wretch did not deserve to be named by a holy angel.
  - Herod had gone to his own place, and now the Lord brings back his banished ones to their own place.
  - Instead of making Jesus to die, the tyrant is dead himself.
    - Sword in hand, he missed the young child;
    - but without a sword, that child's Father struck home to his heart.
3. It is a relief to the world when some men die: it was certainly so in the case of Herod.
  - Those who keep our King out of his own are not likely to live long.
  - My soul, ponder the lessons of history concerning the King's adversaries!<sup>2</sup>

#### Commentary

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Mt 2:19-23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon, C.H. (2009). *The gospel of the kingdom: A commentary on the book of Matthew* (9). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

1. *But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.* Matthew now resumes the story of verses 13–15.
  - Angel and dream reappear for Joseph as before.
  - The wording of the Lord’s command begins exactly as in verse 13, but now Joseph and family are told to leave Egypt and return home to Israel.
  - The immediate danger has passed with Herod’s death.<sup>3</sup>
  
2. *Those who sought the child’s life are dead.* The plural *those* may include along with Herod some of his royal advisors.<sup>4</sup>
  
3. As Moses escaped from Egypt to Midian for a period when his life was in danger, so Joseph and his family have escaped *to* Egypt.
  - Now the danger is over, and just as Moses in Midian received a divine call to return to Egypt, so now does Joseph in Egypt, using the same words as God had used to Moses in Exodus 4:19.
  - The “new Moses” can now return to the place in which his work of deliverance will be launched.<sup>5</sup>
  
4. *And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.* Joseph obeyed without question.
  - “*He arose*”: that is to say, as soon as he was awake he set about doing as he was bidden.
  - At once he made the journey and came into the land of Israel; so should we hasten to obey.
  - He had his fears about Judea; yet he did not follow his fears, but only went as his guide from heaven directed him.
  - This Joseph was a dreamer like his namesake of old; and he was also a practical man, and turned his dreams to wise account.<sup>6</sup>
  
5. *He heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod.* Now another potential threat appears on the horizon.
  - After Herod the Great died, his kingdom was divided into four parts or tetrarchies.

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<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, C. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 22: Matthew* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (69). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Bratcher, R.G. *A Translator’s Guide to the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: UBS, 1981), 18.

<sup>5</sup> France, R.T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (89). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon, C.H. (2009). *The gospel of the kingdom: A commentary on the book of Matthew* (9). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

- His oldest son *Archelaus* ruled in Judea and was notorious for his cruelty.<sup>7</sup>
  - Not long after his father's death, he too ordered a massacre.<sup>8</sup>
  - The Jews soon protested his cruel leadership, sending an embassy to Caesar in Rome.
  - Augustus responded in AD 6 by removing Archelaus from power.
- Antipas, a second son of Herod, who ruled in Galilee to the north, was not perceived as such a threat.
- So Joseph, Mary, and Jesus go to Galilee rather than Judea to settle in the city in which they once lived.<sup>9</sup>

6. *Archelaus was reigning over Judea.* The present tense βασιλεύει [*was reigning*] is due to indirect discourse; after a past tense the Greek does not need to change the tense.

- It is like the English “was reigning.”
- The verb does not necessarily mean, “to be king”; it is used generally with reference to rulers, “to reign” or govern.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Until his murder five days before Herod's own death in the spring of A.U.C. 750, Antipater, Herod's eldest son, might naturally have been regarded as the successor, though in fact Antipas had been named as such in the will. But after Antipater's death Herod altered his will; and appointing Antipas Tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa, and Philip Tetrarch of Gaulonitis, Trachonitis, and Paneas, he granted the kingdom to Archelaus. Further, even after Herod's death, the succession was far from certain until the consent of Augustus had been obtained, and this, in fact, was jeopardized by Archelaus's massacre of three thousand of those who, on his accession, called for justice on the agents of the barbarities of the last reign. Eventually, however Herod's last arrangement was practically confirmed by Augustus, save that he expressly gave Archelaus, who had hastened to Rome, but half of his father's dominion, and appointed him only ethnarch, promising to make him king “if he governed that part virtuously” (Josephus, ‘Ant.’ xvii. 8. 1; 11. 4; cf. ‘Bell, Jud.’ i. 33. 8; ii. 7. 3). Joseph's fear of Archelaus quite corresponds to the character given of him by the Jewish ambassadors before Augustus. “He seemed to be afraid lest he should not be deemed Herod's own son; and so, without any delay, he immediately let the nation understand his meaning,” *i.e.* by the slaughter of the three thousand malcontents above referred to (Josephus, ‘Ant.’ xvii. 11. 2). He was in AD 6 deposed for his cruelty, and banished to Vienne, in Gaul [*The Pulpit Commentary: St. Matthew Vol. I.* 2004 (H.D.M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (36). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.]

<sup>8</sup> Josephus (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.9.3) records the details, among them the bloody act with which Archelaus began his reign. One of Herod's last acts was the slaying of Judas and Matthias for instigating the pulling down of the golden eagle Herod had placed above the Temple gate. At the time of the following Passover Archelaus, though not as yet confirmed as ruler by Caesar, found several people commiserating the martyrs. He ordered his cavalry to surround the Temple and slew 3,000. The rest fled to the mountains, and everybody abandoned the Passover, “lest something worse should ensue.” This was the news that greeted Joseph in “Israel's land” and filled him with dread. [Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (85). Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House.]

<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, C. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 22: Matthew* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (69). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (85). Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House.

7. *Being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.* The whole episode is a good example of how God leads His children.
- Joseph knew that he and his family were no safer under the rule of Archelaus than they had been under Herod the Great.
  - It is likely they were heading back to Bethlehem when they discovered that Archelaus was on the throne.
  - Certainly, Joseph and Mary prayed, waited, and sought God's will.
  - Common sense told them to be careful; faith told them to wait.
  - In due time, God spoke to Joseph in a dream, and he took his wife and her Son to Nazareth, which had been their home earlier (Matt. 2:19–20).<sup>11</sup>
8. *He went and lived in a city called Nazareth.* Nazareth is not to be thought of as a \_\_\_\_\_<sup>12</sup> community, but was on the trade routes of the world.
- Located in the north of Israel, it was a town which lay in the hills of the southern part of Galilee, on the major trade routes which carried the news of the world.
  - All one needed to do was to climb the hills of Nazareth to have a view of the world.
  - Off to the west one could view Mt. Carmel and beyond the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea.
  - Here ships came and went from Rome, and from Rome to the ends of the earth.
9. One could look to the foot of the hills and see one of the greatest roads in that part of the Roman world, leading from Damascus to Egypt and on into Africa.
- This was one of the great caravan routes, one which Abraham probably used in his business of operating a caravansary.
  - It had been followed three centuries earlier by Alexander the Great and his legions.
  - On this road, called "the way of the south," Jesus, as a boy, could have observed and met travelers of many nations.
10. The second road came through this community from Telmius on the sea to the west, traveling on to Tiberias and the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire.
- On this road the caravans from the east moved to the coast on the west, while the Roman legions moved from the coast into the eastern frontiers.
  - Thus Jesus was brought up in a town where the traffic from the ends of the earth moved through His sphere of life.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wiersbe, W.W. (1996, ©1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Mt 2:19). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

<sup>12</sup> [backwoods](#)

<sup>13</sup> Augsburg, M.S., & Ogilvie, L.J. (1982). *Vol. 24: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 24: Matthew*. Formerly The Communicator's Commentary. The Preacher's Commentary series (18). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.

11. From Luke we learn that at first Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth in Galilee and how it came about that they moved to Bethlehem.
- Matthew writes as though they intended to stay in Bethlehem indefinitely and were driven away only by Herod's plot.
  - And now that Herod was dead, all the implications of Matthew's narrative are to the effect that Joseph would like to have settled in Bethlehem.
12. The reason is not difficult to find. Galilee was despised by Jerusalem as "Galilee of the Gentiles," inhabited by a mixed population, Matt. 4:15; Isa. 9:1; 1 Macc. 5:15.
- Whatever was done in Galilee was done, as it were, "in secret," and only what was done in Jerusalem was considered as being done "to the world," on the real Jewish world stage, John 7:3, 4.
  - In Jerusalem the Temple stood, and here was the vital center of the theocracy.
  - According to Joseph's thought the proper place for the young Messiah to grow up was the neighborhood of the Holy City and certainly not the half-Gentile Galilee.
13. A comparison of Matthew and of Luke does \_\_\_\_\_<sup>14</sup> reveal a discrepancy or contradiction but only adds to our information.
- But Joseph found his fears too great to risk residence in Bethlehem or anywhere in Judea.<sup>15</sup>
14. *That what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."* The best explanation of the origin of this name appears to be that which traces it to the word *netzer* in Isaiah 11:1—the small *twig, sprout, or sucker*, which the prophet there says, "shall come forth from the stem (or rather, 'stump') of Jesse, the branch which should fructify from his roots."<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

### JESUS THE NAZARENE

The politics of Jesus' day forced Joseph to move his family around. From Bethlehem they fled to Egypt. Their return to Israel found them skirting Judea and finally resettling in the relatively peaceful region of Galilee, in the town of Nazareth. Matthew sees God's

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<sup>15</sup> Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (85). Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House.

<sup>16</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A.R., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Mt 2:23). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

providence in these moves. Micah 5:2 had predicted that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem (Matt. 2:6), and Matthew cites another prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene," as being fulfilled when Joseph moved to Nazareth (2:23). An exhaustive search of Scripture reveals that the specific words of this prophecy are not found in any OT prophet.

There have been two major explanations of this biblical mystery. Some have traced the origin of the word *Nazarene* to the Hebrew word for "branch" or "shoot." The word *Branch* is used by the prophets to speak of the coming Messiah. For example, Is. 11:1 states that the Messiah would come out of Jesse's "roots," as a "Branch" (Is. 53:2). Like a tree that had been cut down, the royal line of David had almost been destroyed in the Babylonian captivity; yet a twig would grow out of the stump. This is Jesus, a descendant of David and the King of kings. Others have pointed to the plural "prophets" in Matt. 2:23 as an indication that Matthew was not referring to a specific prophecy but to a concept that appears in a number of prophecies concerning the Messiah.

The town Nazareth housed the Roman garrison in northern Galilee. Jewish hatred of the Romans was so extreme that most Jews avoided any association with Nazareth. In fact, Jewish people who lived in Nazareth were thought to be "consorting with the enemy." At that time, calling someone "a Nazarene" indicated utter contempt for the person.

Having come from Nazareth, Jesus was despised in the eyes of many Jews. Even Jesus' disciples initially harbored bad feelings about people from Nazareth. When Nathanael heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he scoffed, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). That Jesus was despised because of His Nazarene background aptly fits several OT prophecies about the humble character of the Messiah (Ps. 22:6–8; Is. 42:1–4; Mic. 5:2).

Whether the word *Nazarene* is associated with the prophecies of the Messiah as the "Branch" or with the general prophecies of the Messiah's humble character, apparently Matthew's largely Jewish audience would have seen the association clearly. Otherwise Matthew would have provided further explanation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Radmacher, E.D., Allen, R.B., & House, H.W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Mt 2:22). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.