

Lesson 3

The Christ in Prophecy (2)

Four Fulfilled Prophecies in Matthew 2

Introduction

Matthew's gospel is a presentation of Jesus as King. In chapter 1, Matthew opens with a genealogy of Jesus, thus proving Jesus' human connection to the Jewish royal line thus establishing His legal right to the throne. The second half Matthew 1 details His birth disclosing *that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit*, 1.18. This shows us Jesus, while fully human, was also fully divine. Divinity came to live as a man for a very specific purpose: to *save his people from their sins*, 1.21. The King was given a very special name, Immanuel, *God With Us*, 1.23, thus expressing that He came to deliver us from the peril of sin and death.

As chapter 2 opens, Matthew continues with the kingly credentials. Sometime after Jesus' birth wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem. It is thought they were the Magi, members of the priestly tribe of the Medes. They were experts in astronomy. They had seen His star rising and came to worship the new King, 2.2. The Magi had become key people in the government of the eastern Roman empire and were seen as advisors of royalty. They were the ones that were consulted about things kings and rulers would want to know. They also played the role of kingmaker. They probably would have come into Jerusalem with a large escort of soldiers and servants. It would have been highly visible to all, so it would only be natural when we read how this caused great trouble to Herod, *and all Jerusalem with him*, 2.3.

Beginning in the next few verses is the first of four prophecies in Matthew 2 that we often pass over. All of them have to do with location: Bethlehem, Egypt, Rama, and Nazareth. The prophets Micah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and others all tie Jesus of Nazareth to these specific locations. It is far from a coincidence. It is all the work of God and is more than enough proof to connect Jesus as the Messiah.

Bethlehem

After the wise men of the east come to Jerusalem Herod assembles the chief priests and scribes and asks where the Messiah would be born. Herod himself was not a Jew, but he was very familiar with their religious beliefs and customs. He would have been very aware of the general Jewish expectation of a coming deliverer . . . although they were looking for someone who would fulfill their political desires rather than one providing salvation from sin.

As to the location of his birth, the Jewish wise men cite a passage from the ancient prophet Micah:

“In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel,” Matthew 2.5-6.

Revisiting Micah

Like most of the Minor Prophets, Micah's is a book of judgment. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, pronounces judgment on both Israel and Judah. Samaria would become *a heap of ruins in the countryside, a planting area for a vineyard*, 1.6-7. Jerusalem would become *ruins, and the temple's mountain will be a high thicket*, 3.12. Leaders of both nations were corrupt and abused the power of their office, 2.1-2; 3.1-3; 9-10. Religious leaders gave heed to false prophets, who denied any possibility of judgment from God, 2.6; 3.5-7, 11. All of this was written to provide Micah's readers with an accurate picture of how debased their leaders were. Their actions would lead to the destruction of both nations.

The Prophecy

It is in this light that we come to Micah 5.2:

Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.

The Messiah would come and conduct Himself with honor. He would be a legitimate ruler and do good. Instead of leading people to judgment and destruction, the coming One would be their Savior. Micah goes on to describe the nature of the Messiah's rule:

He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord his God. They will live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth, Micah 5.4.

This may be why Matthew adds the last part of his quote in Matthew 2.6: The Messiah will *shepherd my people Israel*. Rather than run over His people as a despot (like Herod, or the rulers of Micah's day), the Messiah would truly care for His people. This also directly ties with God's call to David in 2 Samuel 5.2. Just as David served as a shepherd for the people, so the Messiah would fulfill that in every way. Jesus was the ultimate in gentleness, tenderness, and pastoral leadership.

So again, as we think geography, Bethlehem is the specified place of birth, Matthew 2.1.

Egypt

After the departure of the wise men, who were directed by God not to go back to Herod, an angel appeared to Joseph and commanded him to flee to Egypt. He was to remain in Egypt until he received further instruction. Herod intended to search for the young child to kill him. Joseph rounded up his wife and child and escaped in the middle of the night, and remained there until Herod's death, 2.13-15a.

Then Matthew says all of this was done in fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son, Hosea 11.1.

Hosea's Prophecy

A simple reading of the Hosea passage in its context provides no obvious Messianic connection. Hosea is referring to Israel, who dwelt there for over 400 years. God brought them out of their captivity, through the wilderness, to the promised land, where He made them a nation. He led them gently and with the tenderness of a father:

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the hand, but they never knew that I healed them. I led them with human cords, with ropes of love. To them I was like one who eases the yoke from their jaws; I bent down to give them food, Hosea 11.3-4.

And yet, that nation became repeatedly unfaithful to Him. Hosea's message is one of heartbreak. God is sharing a very personal story with Hosea of how His heart was being ripped apart by Israel's continual rebellion and rejection of His caring, tender leadership over them.

Old Testament Type, New Testament Antitype

And so in this regard, the only way we see the connection between Hosea 11.1 and the Messiah is because Matthew, via inspiration of the Spirit, tells us so. There are two kinds of prophecies in the Old Testament. First there are *verbal* prophecies which are *predictive* in nature. There are also *typical* prophecies which use Old Testament stories as *models* that transfer to the New Testament.⁶ *Typical* prophecies are *nonverbal* in nature. Here in Hosea 11.1, the exodus led to the formation of a new people of God, which serves as a symbol of the greater work of deliverance God will accomplish through Jesus in the New Testament.

The only way Hosea 11.1 could be a type is if Jesus went to Egypt, which He did. In the Old Testament, Israel was called out of Egypt and in the New, so is Jesus. Israel's coming out of Egypt was a foreshadowing of Christ coming out of Egypt. So, Christ was born in Bethlehem. And he went to Egypt. Now, the next location.

Ramah

After Herod realized the magi had deceived him by not coming back to reveal the location of Jesus, he was filled with rage and sent soldiers to Bethlehem with instructions to kill every male child two years and under. Herod's actions here closely resemble the infanticide of Pharaoh in Exodus 1.15-22. The horrific scene is difficult to imagine. We can hear the wailing mothers as their sons are ripped from their arms and summarily executed before their eyes. Matthew tells us this was a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31.15:

This is what the Lord says: A voice was heard in Ramah, a lament with bitter weeping— Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children because they are no more.

This prophecy, like the previous one regarding Jesus' return from Egypt, is in the form of a type. Jeremiah, of course, was speaking of the great sorrow that would soon be experienced in Judah when most of the population would be carried captive to Babylon. Ramah was the place where Jewish captives were assembled for deportation, Jeremiah 40.1. It was located on the border between the northern and southern kingdoms. Rachel, the wife of Jacob and pictured symbolically as the mother of Israel, is weeping because her descendants were being carried off into a foreign land.

Here, Matthew applies what Israel experienced during Jeremiah's time to what the depth of grief people experienced in Bethlehem after Herod's cruel and merciless directive. Nothing could alter what

⁶ This is the Bible study method known as *typology*. It is a literary hermeneutical device in which a person, event, or institution in the Old Testament is understood to correspond with a person, event, or institution in the New Testament. See Cameron, Daniel J. "Typology." *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

happened with the deportations to Babylon and nothing could change what Herod did to those small children. Thus, the grief remained.

There is one more thing regarding the place. Just north of Bethlehem there is a hilltop that sits above Bethlehem that became known as Ramah, where Rachel's tomb is located. It is this Ramah that Matthew probably had in mind when he pens Matthew 2. Once again mothers wept because their children were slaughtered.

Nazareth

After Herod's death, an angel appears to Joseph instructing him to return to Israel. Upon his return, he was fearful of relocating in the area where Herod had reigned because he feared the new ruler, Archelaus might have some of the same inclinations. He is warned about this in another dream he received and decided to take his family to Galilee, 2.19-22. Matthew says Joseph settled in Nazareth. It appears they already had a connection there, Luke 1.26-27; 2.4.

By all accounts Nazareth was an obscure and unimportant town.

Now, verse 23:

Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

There is no specific Old Testament reference with these words, *He will be called a Nazarene*. Perhaps this statement was made by one of the prophets, but it has not survived. Better yet however is the idea that Matthew's statement should be interpreted that they moved there *so that* prophecy might be fulfilled.⁷ The prophets looked to the messiah coming as one who would be despised and rejected. Jesus' connection with Nazareth carried with it a tone of contempt.⁸ For Jesus to be known as a Nazarene (a derogatory label, John 1.46) was not compatible with the expected royal dignity of the Messiah and thus fulfilled passages like Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; and Zechariah 11.4-14.⁹ Isaiah 53.2 fits well here:

He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him.

What Do We Make of This?

In the four prophecies of Matthew 2 we find direct, specific verbal prophecy regarding Jesus' place of birth. We also find typological prophecy that had dual application ... to a time specifically nearer to the time of the prophets, and to the time of Jesus. When it comes to how these things were fulfilled by the all the people in Matthew 2, it cannot be mere happenstance. All of this began in the mind of God who brought everything to pass so that His Son could come to be with us.

⁷ Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992, p. 49.

⁸ The term Nazarene was a term of derision, used to describe any person who was rough and rude.

⁹ France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985, Vol. 1, p. 94.

Matthew 1 and 2 were written to prove the credentials of Jesus of Nazareth as King of the Jews.

- Matthew 1.1-17 – he was in the royal lineage.
- Matthew 1.18-25 – he was born of a virgin without a human father.
- Matthew 2.5-6 – he was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling Micah's specific prophecy.
- Matthew 2.13-15 – he went to Egypt.
- Matthew 2.18 – there was weeping in Ramah.
- Matthew 2.23 – he was raised in Nazareth.

All of this can lead to only one conclusion. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. The evidence is overwhelming.

How did they miss Him? Answer: the same way we would. We are simply asked to believe the evidence we have been given with the help of the Spirit. Will you choose to believe?