

10. Matthew 2:13-23 – Key Themes & Biblical Insights

The Flight into Egypt, The Massacre of the Innocents, and The Return to Nazareth

Matthew 2:13-23 recounts key events in Jesus' early life that demonstrate **God's divine plan, prophetic fulfillment, and the opposition that Christ would face.**

1. Divine Protection & Guidance

- Joseph is warned in a dream to **flee to Egypt** to protect Jesus from **Herod's wrath.**
- Later, an angel appears again to guide them **back to Israel**, showing God's active role in **protecting his plan.**
- The story highlights **God's providence** in guiding human events for his purposes.
- **Parallels with the Old Testament:** Just as **God led Israel through the desert** and provided for them (Exodus 13:21-22), he now leads and protects the Holy Family on their journey.

There is a strong connection between Moses' call at the burning bush. (Read Exodus 3:7-12)

Here's how both this passage and Joseph's dream parallel each other:

A. God's Direct Intervention to Preserve His People

- In **Exodus 3:7-10**, God tells Moses that he has **seen the suffering of His people in Egypt** and is sending Moses to **lead them out to safety.**
- In **Matthew 2:13**, God warns Joseph in a dream that **Herod is seeking to kill Jesus**, and tells him to **flee to Egypt** for protection.
- **Parallel:** In both cases, **God actively intervenes to guide a key figure (Moses & Joseph) to ensure the survival of his chosen people (Israel & Jesus, the new Israel).**

B. Egypt as a Place of Refuge

- In Exodus, Egypt was originally a **place of refuge** for **Jacob's family during the famine (Genesis 46:1-7)**, but it later became a **place of slavery** for the Israelites.
- In Matthew, **Egypt becomes a refuge for Jesus** as he is saved from Herod's massacre.
- **Parallel:** In both stories, **Egypt represents a temporary place of safety before God calls his chosen one out.**

C. God Calls His Son(s) Out of Egypt

- **Hosea 11:1** says: *"Out of Egypt I called my son."* This originally referred to **Israel's exodus**, but Matthew applies it to **Jesus returning from Egypt (Matthew 2:15).**
- Just as **Moses led Israel out of Egypt**, **Joseph is instructed to bring Jesus back to Israel.**
- **Parallel:** Both stories fulfill the prophecy of **God's chosen one coming out of Egypt to accomplish His mission.**

D. God Uses Dreams & Direct Encounters to Guide Leaders

- **Moses encounters God in the burning bush** and receives a **direct call to action (Exodus 3:7-10).**
- **Joseph receives divine instruction through dreams**, directing his actions (Matthew 2:13, 19-20).
- **Parallel:** Both men receive **divine revelation and respond in obedience** to God's plan.

E. The Ultimate Deliverance

- Moses leads **Israel out of physical slavery** in Egypt.
- Jesus, as the new Moses, will **lead his people out of spiritual slavery** to sin.
- **Parallel:** Both deliver **God's people**, but **Jesus' mission is greater—he saves the world, not just Israel.**

Final Connection: The New Exodus

The story of Jesus being **taken to and returning from Egypt** is part of a larger theme in **Matthew’s Gospel**:

- **Jesus is the New Moses** who will lead God’s people to salvation.
- **Herod’s massacre parallels Pharaoh’s decree**, showing that **the forces of evil always seek to destroy God’s chosen ones—but they fail**.
- **God’s presence and guidance remain constant**, whether through dreams (Joseph) or direct encounters (Moses).

Comparison Chart: Moses and Jesus’ Escape from Infanticide

Aspect	Moses’ Story (Exodus 1:22–2:10)	Jesus’ Story (Matthew 2:13-23)
Ruler Ordering the Killing	Pharaoh	Herod
Targeted Group	Hebrew male infants	Male infants in Bethlehem
Means of Survival	Placed in a basket and sent down the Nile	Joseph, warned in a dream, flees to Egypt with Jesus and Mary
Role of Parents	Mother (Jochebed) hides him, sister (Miriam) watches over him	Joseph obeys angelic guidance to protect Jesus
Divine Guidance	God works through Pharaoh’s daughter to save Moses	An angel appears in a dream to direct Joseph
Location of Escape	Raised in Pharaoh’s household	Escapes to Egypt
Return and Mission	Returns to Egypt as God’s chosen deliverer	Returns to Israel and is raised in Nazareth before beginning His ministry
Fulfillment of Prophecy	Foreshadows Israel’s redemption and the coming Messiah	Fulfills Old Testament prophecies (Hosea 11:1, Jeremiah 31:15)

Conclusion

Joseph’s dream to take Jesus to Egypt is **directly connected** to Moses’ calling to lead Israel out of Egypt. Both **show God’s divine guidance, protection, and ultimate plan of salvation**. Jesus’ journey mirrors Israel’s **but surpasses it**, as he is the true **deliverer, leading all humanity to freedom from sin**.

Biblical Reflection

Deuteronomy 18:15 – *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”*

This is Moses prophesying about Jesus, the ultimate deliverer who—like Moses—would lead God’s people to freedom, not from physical slavery but from slavery to all that keeps us from a deeper relationship with God & our neighbor.

3. Suffering & Opposition to Christ

- **The Massacre of the Innocents** (Herod killing the male children of Bethlehem) foreshadows the **rejection and suffering** Jesus will face later in his ministry.
- Evil rulers and **worldly power oppose God’s kingdom**, but their plans cannot stop God’s will.
- The suffering of the innocent children is part of a **larger pattern of worldly resistance** to God’s work.

Herod’s attempt to kill Jesus represents the darkness of the world opposing God’s light. But evil rulers cannot stop God’s plan, just as darkness cannot overcome light.

4. Fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew emphasizes that these events **fulfill Old Testament prophecies, reinforcing Jesus as the Messiah:**

- **Hosea 11:1** – *“Out of Egypt I called my son.”* (Originally applied to Israel, now fulfilled in Jesus.)
- **Jeremiah 31:15** – *“Rachel weeping for her children.”* (Originally a lament for Israel’s suffering, now fulfilled in the Bethlehem tragedy.)
- **Isaiah 11:1** (Possibly) – *Jesus being called a Nazarene* may be linked to the prophecy of a *“Branch” (Netzer) coming from the line of Jesse.*

5. Jesus’ Hidden, Humble Beginnings

- Jesus is raised in **Nazareth**, a small, **insignificant town**, rather than in Jerusalem or another prestigious place.
- This highlights **humility** and **God working in unexpected ways**—a key theme throughout Jesus’ life.
- Nazareth was not widely respected (**John 1:46** – **“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”**), yet this is where the Messiah was raised.
- Jesus’ **humble origins foreshadow his ministry**—he identifies with the lowly, the poor, and the marginalized.

About Nazareth

Jesus was not born in a palace but in poverty, which shows that God often works through the humble and unexpected.

Most scholars estimate that **Jesus was around 3 or 4 years old** when the Holy Family left Egypt. Upon returning to Israel, **Jesus grew up in Nazareth**, a small town in **Galilee**, which is in northern Israel.

Biblical References to Jesus' Childhood in Nazareth

1. **Matthew 2:23** – *“And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.”*
 - After returning from Egypt, Joseph settled in Nazareth with Mary and Jesus.
2. **Luke 2:39-40** – *“And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”*
 - This passage highlights Jesus' **development in wisdom and strength** as he grew up.
3. **Luke 4:16** – *“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”*
 - This confirms that Nazareth was Jesus' **hometown** and that he actively participated in synagogue life.

Why Was Nazareth Significant?

1. **A Humble, Small Town** –
 - Nazareth was an **insignificant** village, not mentioned in the Old Testament.
 - In **John 1:46**, Nathanael even asks, *“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”* showing its low status.
 - This aligns with Jesus’ **humble beginnings**—he didn’t grow up in a royal city like Jerusalem.
2. **Prophetic Connection** –
 - Matthew 2:23 mentions that Jesus **“would be called a Nazarene.”**
 - While no direct prophecy states this, scholars believe it may be linked to **Isaiah 11:1**, where the Messiah is described as a **“Branch” (Netzer) from Jesse’s line.**
3. **Cultural Influence** –
 - Nazareth was in **Galilee**, a region known for **cultural diversity** due to its mix of Jewish and Gentile populations.
 - Jesus’ Galilean background later caused skepticism among religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Why Is All of This Important?

Jesus' early years in both Egypt and Nazareth uniquely shaped his perspective, preparing him for a ministry that would transcend cultural, social, and national boundaries. As a child, he experienced life as a refugee, an outsider, and later, as a resident of a town deeply connected to global trade and diverse influences.

Fleeing to Egypt as an infant (Matthew 2:13-15) meant that Jesus began life as a displaced person, escaping political violence and seeking refuge in a foreign land. This experience foreshadowed his later mission to the marginalized and outcast—he understood firsthand what it meant to be unwanted and exiled. Egypt, a land with deep Jewish history, likely had Jewish communities where Joseph and Mary found shelter, but Jesus would still have grown up aware of being an outsider. This would later influence his deep compassion for the poor, the stranger, and the persecuted.

Growing up in Nazareth, near major trade routes, further exposed Jesus to a broader world beyond Galilee. He would have seen Roman soldiers, foreign merchants, and travelers from different backgrounds. This environment challenged the narrow, insular mindset of many in Judea and may have helped shape his later ministry, where he welcomed Samaritans, Gentiles, and outcasts into God's kingdom. Nazareth was small and overlooked, yet Jesus embraced its humility and ordinariness, which aligned with his mission to exalt the lowly and challenge the powerful.

Both Egypt and Nazareth prepared Jesus for a ministry that was inclusive, countercultural, and deeply compassionate. He was not a sheltered Messiah raised in privilege, but a Savior who knew what it meant to be displaced, misunderstood, and part of a larger, complex world. His early experiences made him the perfect Shepherd for a broken and divided humanity.

Questions for Consideration:

1) Growth Through Difficulties

God prepared Mary, Joseph, and Jesus for their mission through the struggles they faced. Nothing about their journey was easy—an unexpected pregnancy, a marriage that raised questions, a desperate escape to Egypt, and finally settling in a place that likely wasn't their first choice. Yet, each challenge shaped them for what was to come.

- How do you think God allows us to experience difficulties and discomfort as a means of growth and learning?
- Can you think of a time in your own life when an unexpected challenge ended up preparing you for something greater?

2) Isolation vs. Openness to the World

Our world today is becoming more and more polarized. Many societies are retreating from globalization and diversity, preferring familiarity over engagement with different cultures and perspectives. The Holy Family's experience, however, was one of movement, adaptation, and exposure to different ways of life—first as refugees in Egypt, then as part of a region influenced by trade and diverse cultures.

- Does this seem like the kind of experience God intends for us? Why or why not?
- How might their journey inform the way we engage with people who are different from us today?