

Matthew 2:13-15

Introduction

We're quickly coming to the beginning of another year and a time when we're appropriately reminded of how we ought to be *always* numbering our days—as the psalmist says—so that we might present to the Lord hearts of wisdom (cf. Ps. 90:12). Presenting to the Lord a heart of wisdom encompasses a whole lot, but certainly one key to this is being people who read and meditate on the Scriptures – the word of God. That's why it's also appropriate that one common “new year's resolution” for Christians is that they will seek to faithfully read the Scriptures, with the prayer that their lives will be more and more shaped and molded by those Scriptures for God's glory and their own true joy. I would encourage you to have a plan for this coming year for being in the Scriptures daily (whether a specific Bible-reading plan or simply a time set aside each day). I also want to encourage you to be very strict in holding to your plan (almost “legalistically” strict, but not really). In order to encourage us to this end, I want to preach this morning on Matthew chapter 2 verses 13-15.

- Matthew 2:13-15 — Now when [the magi] had departed [from Joseph and Mary], behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Notice how simple and how short this is. It leaves out almost all the details we'd probably be most interested in knowing about. There's no description of the 150-mile trip into Egypt. There's no mention of anything that happened during the entire time that they were in Egypt. There's no mention of anything that a normal biography or historical account would have included! In fact, this account is so simple and so short and so apparently random that it could almost seem there was no good reason for Matthew to include it in the first place! In the end, what we're probably really wanting to know is this, “What does it have to do with me?”

How often might we feel this way about the Scriptures? But now is a good time to remind ourselves that *all* Scripture has been breathed out by God always with a very specific agenda and goal. Matthew writes his gospel for a specific audience and always with a clear agenda and goal in his mind. Moses does the same, and Paul, and Peter, and John. But it can be tempting for us to want to bypass the original author's agenda (which can sometimes seem irrelevant to us) and jump straight to our own circumstances and our own needs. In other words, we can so easily want the Word of God to meet us directly, and immediately, where we are – almost as though it were a “magic” book, rather than an “inspired” book. But when we do this, two things are bound to happen. First, we can often end up disappointed and even disillusioned. And so Bible reading ends up being a “chore” and our plan for being every day in the word ends up failing. And second, even as we're wanting to be changed and transformed, we're actually robbing ourselves of the *true*, transforming power of God's Word. This year, as we read and meditate on the Scriptures, let's purpose to approach them on their own terms, in their own world, according to their own agenda, praying always that God will give to us a true joy and delight in what *HIS*

agenda really is. In this way, we'll never be disappointed or disillusioned with any part of God's Word – not even the genealogies.

Coming back now to our passage this morning, how are we to understand these verses on their own terms, in their own world, and according to their own agenda? One of Matthew's main agendas is the theme of "*fulfillment*." ("This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet..."; Mat. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9; Mark and Luke have no parallels to this phrase and John has only three [Jn. 12:38; 19:24, 36]). Matthew wrote his gospel for Jewish Christians in order to assure them that their faith in Jesus as the Messiah was in perfect harmony with the faith of their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). The Jewish Christians were being accused of being traitors to their Jewish heritage because of their membership in the church. But "No!" Matthew says. "It's only through faith in Jesus as the Messiah and therefore as a member of the Messiah's church that you will ever truly know the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament Scriptures."

So *why* does Matthew include this account of the flight to Egypt? Because he sees in this account another wonderful *assurance* for his Jewish Christian readers (and ultimately for us; cf. 2:1-12) that the fulfillment of God's many promises to Israel will only be experienced by those Jews who place their trust in *Jesus* as Savior and Lord.

I. Matthew 2:13 — Now when [the magi] had departed [from Joseph and Mary], behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

We know from verse fourteen that Matthew sees in this the fulfillment of the Scripture that says: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." But the only thing Matthew actually tells us about is not Jesus coming *out* of Egypt, but Jesus going *into* Egypt. How can Matthew do this? What's the connection between what he actually tells us about (going into Egypt) and the "fulfillment" (coming out of Egypt)?

Matthew assumes that the *primary* "*reason*" Jesus was taken to Egypt was *so that* He might come out of Egypt in fulfillment of the Scriptures! Yes, Jesus went down to Egypt to escape Herod, but according to Matthew, Jesus *had* to go down to Egypt because at an even more fundamental level it was God's will (it *had* to be; it was *necessary*). The flight to Egypt was not *ultimately* caused by Herod's wicked plot, but by God. Here is a wonderful support to our faith and something that should teach us true a humility before the Lord. The Apostle Peter writes:

➤ 1 Peter 5:6-7 — Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty [sovereign and often times mysterious] hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you [and because the hand of the one who cares for you is mighty!].

The angel's message is urgent, but the angel of the Lord isn't worried. He's commanding what was already **God's will** and a part of God's plan before the world began. It can be so easy for us to feel that God is somehow subject to the "chance" happenings of this world and to the

“chance” decisions that people make – even if that’s not what we believe on paper. But the Bible says the opposite of this from beginning to end. All that happens in the world, and especially all that happens in the lives of God’s children is in some wonderful and mysterious way, ultimately according to God’s eternal plan. Do we believe this? Or do we give lip service to this awesome truth while we go on living our lives to some extent in worry or fear? When we do this, not only will we lack peace and joy, but also the strength and the fortitude to serve God faithfully. So may we truly *believe* in God and be *strong* in faith in order that our lives will bring glory and honor to Him.

Now, while this is certainly a very legitimate teaching to be drawn from this particular passage, it’s not Matthew’s main point or agenda – and it’s Matthew’s main point and agenda that we mainly want to understand. So, we go on to read in verses 14-15:

II. Matthew 2:14–15 — And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

The prophet that Matthew quotes, here, is the prophet Hosea.

➤ Hosea 11:1 – When Israel was a child, I loved him, and **out of Egypt I called my son.**

But here we have a problem. Hosea isn’t talking about Jesus, or the Messiah, or for that matter about anything or anyone in the future. What he’s talking about is the nation of Israel and their *past* exodus and deliverance from Egypt. We all know the story of how Israel with his twelve sons went down into Egypt, and how they were eventually enslaved by the Egyptians, and how God brought them out of Egypt by His great power and led them through the wilderness into the Promised Land. So if this passage isn’t a “prophecy” of the future, and if it’s actually talking about the *nation* of “Israel” as God’s son, then how can Matthew say that it’s *fulfilled* in Jesus when He came out of Egypt as a child 700 years later?

The Jewish scribes and religious leaders were notorious for interpreting their OT Scriptures in a way that might at first look very similar to what Matthew is doing. It was called Midrash. Midrash didn’t always interpret the Scriptures carefully, according to their original, God-intended meaning. Sometimes the interpretations of Midrash were very fanciful. So is Matthew just doing a Christianized version of Midrash? Many good Christians think he is and suggest that he’s allowed to do this only because he’s an inspired Apostle. But, in fact, Matthew is giving us a *model* of how to rightly read and interpret the Scriptures. Therefore, this should be a wonderful help to us as we look forward to our time in the Word in the coming year. How are we to read and understand Hosea 11:1 like Matthew read and understood Hosea 11:1 – as that which is fulfilled in Jesus when He comes out of Egypt?

Matthew knows, first of all, that the Old Testament Scriptures described the coming Messiah as the ideal or the true Israel. That’s a really important thing to remember if you want to have a fuller and truer understanding of the Old and New Testaments. The Servant of the Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah:

- Isaiah 49:1-5 – Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. And **he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”** But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.” And now the LORD says, **he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him...** [See how Israel gathers Israel.]

The Messiah, when He came, would be the “true” and ideal Israel, because He would do perfectly what Israel had so completely and totally failed to do. He would be a light for the nations; He would cause the name of God to be glorified in all the earth; He would be the “substance” that Israel could at best only typify and shadow forth. And in the end, somehow, He would even enable Israel to *be* what Israel had so dismally failed to be. When Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, he knows full well the context of this verse:

- Hosea 11:1-7 – When Israel was a child, I loved him, and **out of Egypt I called my son.** The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king [a second Egypt], because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.

Israel had failed. And exactly where the nation of Israel had failed, it was there that the Messiah as the “true” Israel would succeed! When Matthew takes an OT Scripture that originally referred to a past event in the nation of Israel and sees it “fulfilled” in a future event in the life of Jesus, he’s first of all assuming the wonderful Old Testament teaching that the Messiah would Himself *be* “Israel.” But is it really alright for us to take every detail of Israel’s history and see it all “fulfilled” in Jesus?

Matthew not only knew that in the OT, the Messiah was pictured as the “true Israel,” he also knew that the salvation the Messiah would bring to Israel was pictured as a second exodus from Egypt. The first exodus was designed by God as a type of a future and greater exodus through which He would accomplish once and for all the redemption and salvation of His people (Is. 11:11; Mic. 7:15; cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

- Hosea 2:14-15 – Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

- Isaiah 43:16-21 – Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.
- Isaiah 51:9-11 – Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

And once again, Matthew certainly knew full well the context of Hosea 11:1.

- Hosea 11:1, 8-11 – When Israel was a child, I loved him, and **out of Egypt I called my son [PAST]**...How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; **they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt [FUTURE]**, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.

It was the Messiah, as the “true Israel” who would accomplish this second exodus from Egypt and bring about an even greater salvation and redemption of His people. So, when *Jesus* is taken down to Egypt (even as Israel moved to Egypt with his twelve sons) and then comes out from Egypt (even as Israel came out from Egypt in the days of Moses), it’s a clear sign to anyone with faith that *as the promised Messiah, Jesus is the embodiment of true Israel and that it is He who accomplishes a second and greater exodus from “Egypt.”* Mark and Luke don’t point to this event. Only Matthew does. But if Matthew had not, we would still be wholly justified in making this connection ourselves (assuming we knew of the historical event). God sent Jesus into Egypt and then brought Him out of Egypt not just to escape Herod, but so that through this “reenactment” of Israel’s history, we could see *in this* that He is the “true and faithful fulfillment of Israel.” God sent Jesus into Egypt and then brought Him out of Egypt not just to escape Herod, but so that we might see *in this* that Israel’s history—the story of Israel’s redemption—is *fulfilled in Jesus*.

This isn’t fanciful interpretation. This is a very careful (and exciting) reading of the Old Testament. It’s a model of how we ought to be always reading the Old Testament in the *light* of the New and always reading the New *as the fulfillment* of the Old. We even see that the history of Israel is itself a “prophecy” that’s fulfilled in Jesus. And so in this way, the whole Bible is opened to us as a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. This should be a wonderful help for us

as we looking forward to our time in the Word in the coming year. We must learn to read the Bible always in light of the big, overarching picture of promise and fulfillment, and of how in both the promise and the fulfillment it is Jesus Christ who is all in all – the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end (cf. Rev. 22:13).

Conclusion

Do you see *how* Matthew is working to strengthen the faith and increase the joy of the Jewish Christians? They *already* believe (much like we do this morning), but as their faith becomes more and more grounded, as their understanding of the Scriptures is enriched and deepened, they're enabled to stand firm in the midst of opposition and to follow more steadfastly after Jesus. This is also true of us. One of the keys to standing firm—whether in the face of comforts and ease or in the face of suffering and persecution—is to be a people who are deeply rooted and saturated in the Scriptures' revelation of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul writes to Timothy:

- 2 Timothy 3:12–17 — All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for [eschatological] salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Since Christ is the “true and faithful Israel”, and since these Jewish Christians are now “in Christ”, they also are the “*true Israel*” – the “true” and faithful people of God. Through their union with Christ, they are enabled to be what the “old” Israel had so dismally failed to be. And what about *us*?

Since Jesus is the “true Israel”, and since we Gentile Christians are now also “in Christ”, by God's grace we also have been grafted in and become part of the *true Israel* – the people of God (cf. Romans 2:25-29; Ephesians 2:11-22; Revelation 2:9; 3:9). The prophets foretold that when the second exodus from Egypt happened, the gathering into the promised land would include not only Jews, but Gentiles also!

- Isaiah 49:5-6 – And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant [true Israel], to **bring Jacob back** to him; and that **Israel might be gathered** to him... He says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to **bring back the preserved of Israel**; I will make you as a light for the nations, **that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**”

The Apostle Paul quotes this passage when he turns to the Gentiles with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Acts 13:47-48 – For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” And when the Gentiles heard

this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

Do we see the sure foundation of our faith? Are we rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord? Are we being strengthened to persevere in true faith and obedience to Christ? Jesus is the true and faithful Israel so that in Him and through Him, we *can* fulfill our calling to God's glory. In Him and through Him God has called *us* out of Egypt. He has ransomed us, and redeemed *us* from our slavery to sin and death.

- Romans 6:20-23, 12-13 – When [we] were slaves of sin, [we] were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were [we] getting at that time from the things of which [we] are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that [we] have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit [we] get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord... Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Having been brought out of Egypt, we are free to live for His glory as we anticipate the day when our journey is completed and we enter at last into the Promised Land.

- Isaiah 51:11 – The ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

May these realities truly help us this year to present to the Lord hearts of wisdom.