

Intro: The last decade or so has seen its share of massacres. Where angry, malevolent people decide to cock a gun go into a public place and kill as many people as possible. There is no predicting, who or when some one will strike. In most cases the perpetrator of the violence also has a death wish and pulls the trigger on themselves as well.

Why such violence? Often after such senseless and random acts of violence occur, people are bewildered and ask the question- Why? The answers are usually convoluted and are circular. Simple said- the heart of man is desperately wicked.

And for that matter there is nothing new under the sun. 2000 years ago when Jesus Christ was born, the announcement of his birth by the Magi to Herod the Great signaled a potential rival to the puppet ruler of Judea. Terrified of the prospect of being deposed by the true King- Herod goes on a murderous tirade hoping to eliminate any competition. The result was a bloody massacre.

This has commonly become known as the *"slaughter of the innocents"*. It is a violent picture of the rabid, senseless and wanton violence of a man drunk with power, and who in a fit of rage will kill any one who he thinks will get in his way. **Why?**

Maybe the answer is no difference. Power. Herod's main desire is power, and the birth of Jesus **signals a threat to his power.** He will not recognize the power of God.

And even for the rabid human beings who carry out violent massacres today- the motive is no different. Power. Perhaps marginalized, quiet and unnoticed in life- these men fantasize over the great power they will enjoy temporality over the lives of their victims- and their subsequent moment of fame on TV- when they make national headlines.

But there is one thing that such people do not recognize- their lust for power, is no match for the Power of God. And even in their delirium where they believe they have power- they are really impotent and pathetic creatures.

And that's where our sermon takes us today. As we examine the massacre of the innocents that surrounds the early childhood of Jesus- we are reminded

- That evil is alive and well. And the host of Satan is on high alert to destroy the baby Jesus. (He is flesh and blood and vulnerable)
- But, we see the powerful intervention of God, in delivering the baby Jesus from all harm-and his sovereign plan overriding the plots of the wicked.

Also we see how Matt teaches us under divine inspiration **all of this was to fulfill OT prophecy** and prove Jesus is the messiah- the Son of David.

In fact our text today is broken up into **three parts based on formula quotations.** Consisting of a concise narrative- and a prophetic formula- "This was to fulfill"

We have already seen earlier with the reference to Is. 7:14. (Immanuel prophecy), and the reference to the Micah 5:2 prophecy-

So let's unpack our text.

I. **The New Exodus from Egypt (13-15)** In this first formula quotation- we see the immediate aftermath of the magi's visit. Last we left off the magi were warned in a dream by God- not to return to Herod and they went home a different way.

Once again God visits Joseph in a dream, to warn Joseph of Herod's murderous scheme. This is clearly an act God's preserving grace and through the means of direct revelation protects his son from Herod. God specifically told Joseph to flee to Egypt until Herod died.

Joseph being a man of faith wastes no time and takes flight by night. (Demonstrating the urgency of his escape.) and goes to Egypt.

→ *There was actually a large settlement of Jews in Egypt for centuries. Alexandria had one of the largest and Jews there enjoyed the benefits of a good economy. So Mary and Joseph would have easily found a synagogue and Jewish community to be involved in.*

Apart from this divine revelation- Joseph and Mary are completely unaware of the danger that Jesus is in. And Jesus is in real danger. Yes he is the Son of God incarnate, but he is human, flesh and blood and a child- vulnerable to injury and death

So they Settle In Egypt until Herod died then they return: Ma→ But there is meaning to this. Matthew teaches us that the meaning is bound up in the fulfillment of scripture. He quotes Hos 11:1 *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."*

What is interesting is that Hosea's text is clearly not a predicative messianic prophecy. In fact it is a recollection of the origins of the nation of Israel and God's love for them.

This echoes the time when Jacob was told by God to go to Egypt during the famine and to fear not, and the promise of bringing his people back. After that Jacob and all of Israel moved to Egypt and would remain there until the Exodus.

Gen. 46: *And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."*

Therefore rather than seeing Jesus' flight to Egypt as a the fulfillment of a predicative prophecy it is rather a fulfillment of a typological prophecy. In Hosea's text, Israel is personified as God's son, as a type pointing to the greater Son- Jesus.

Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of Israel. He is the one in whom the true character, hopes and destiny is fulfilled. (This is seen more explicitly in Jesus temptation)

RT France comments, *"Matthew sees striking parallels in the patterns of God's activities in history in a way he cannot attribute to coincidence. Just as God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt to inaugurate his original covenant with them, so God again is bringing he Messiah who fulfills the hopes of Israel, out of Egypt as he is about to inaugurate his new covenant."*

Jesus is the new Israel. In his body- all are made one in him. He is the one in whom all the OT finds its meaning.

II. **Rachel Weeping for Her Children (16-21)** We learn that once Herod discovered he was misled by the magi- he becomes infuriated/ enraged.

Based on what the Magi reported to him, he deduced that the child born must have been anywhere under the age of two. Based on his information- he orders his soldiers on a **search and destroy mission.** Find all male children under 2 and kill them. A broad stroke approach.

→ Some have questioned the veracity of this account, because there is no historical record of it. However there are a few things to keep in mind.

- 1- Bethlehem was a small rural community. Based on expert hypothesis Bethlehem had a population of no more than 200 people. Estimates suggest there were no more than 20 children who were murdered by Herod.
- 2- In a time when violent atrocities were all too common, and given Herod's violent record, something like this would have been a minor offense in comparison with other of Herod's murderous acts.

However- In keeping with his paranoid and maniacal personality it is no surprise that he responds the way he did.--> Recall: He had ten wives 20 whom he murdered. He was so cold blooded he and killed 3 of his own sons because he was suspicious they were plotting against him.

Clearly- the Slaughter of the innocents would be consistent with his character.

Fulfillment: But once again Matthew explains to us that as horrific as this event was- it also fulfilled prophecy. Let's check the context of Jeremiah's prophecy to get a better idea of what Matthew is thinking, Jer. 31:16-17

- The context of the prophecy reveals to us that Rachel represents the mothers of all the sons who would be taken off into captivity into Babylon during the Babylonian exile.
- These were tears shed for their sons whom they thought they would never see again. Whereas the tears shed in Matt 2 are those mothers grieving the death of their sons.

But what connection does Jer 31 have to this event? Jer 31 is a chapter about hope. It's a prophecy that reminds Israel- although they are enduring the discipline of the Lord- God has a plan for them, and their future. He has a plan for their restoration and salvation. **Read vv. 1-6**

→ *Just as there was hope for the exiles in Babylon that they would eventually return to their own land- there is hope for Israel because the Messiah escaped from Herod's rage and would return to his own land from Egypt to save his people.*

Furthermore- Matthew's intent is made obvious by his emphasis in Jesus genealogy. The central point of his genealogy is the Babylonian captivity. At that point the Davidic Dynasty came to an end. No more Kings in Judah. Jesus completes the next set of 14 generations- indicating he is the fulfillment of the post exile hopes. → What Matthew is saying is **that the exile is truly over.** Messiah has arrived the true King of Israel.

DA Carson- *The tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers in Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, The exile is over, the true son of God has appeared and will introduce the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah.*

→ **Notice that Carson points to the New Covenant.** In Jeremiah 31 in the context of today's prophecy Jeremiah speaks of the New Covenant- (31:31-34 cf with Hebrews 8:8-12)

This ties in with the "out of Egypt" prophecy. It is the inauguration of the New Covenant.

III. Third Prophecy: Return to Nazareth: (19-23)

In this third narrative we learn how Joseph knew when it was time to return to Israel. Just as the angel of the Lord spoke to him in a dream warning him to flee to Egypt, the Angel of the Lord alerted him when it was safe to return...when Herod died.

It should be noted. That although Herod experienced relative success in his life in carrying out his evil, he met a terrible end. God is still just, and his death was a slow, painful death. "Herod's Evil"

Roman Historian Josephus describes the diseased state of his body, *"But now Herod's distemper, greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon his for his sins: for fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to touch outwardly as it augmented his pain inwardly. For it brought upon him a vehement appetite which he could not satisfy with one food or another. His entrails were also ulcerated and his chief violence of pain lay in his colon.; an aqueous and transparent fluid also settled about his feet. And a like manner afflicted him below his belly. Nay, farther, his privy member, was putrefied and produced worms and when he sat upright he had difficulty breathing which was very loathsome because of the stench of his breath, he also had convulsions in all parts of his body which increased in strength."*

→. After suffering greatly for 2 years- Herod the Great died in 4bc. There's a lesson- Like all despots and tyrants- they DIE. They are no more. And like he died a gruesome death- that even the 1st century Jews recognized- as God's judgment. (He may have lasted for 37 years- but he finally suffered. (Make no mistake about it- no one gets away from God.)

In the end his kingdom was divided amongst his 4 sons. Archeleus became the tetrarch of Judea and followed in his father's footsteps in being a cruel and violent leader.

The Jews after dealing with his father for 37 years protested and sent an emissary to Rome to requesting he be removed. Rome found Archelaus incompetent- removed him from power replacing him with a Roman governor.

→ This would explain why the angel appeared a second time to warn Joseph not to return to Judea due to Archelaus' violent rule. So instead Joseph settled his family in Nazareth- where Herod's more passive son Antipas ruled.

Joseph then takes Jesus and Mary and settles in his home town of Nazareth. And it was here Jesus would grow up and reside until his public ministry.

Fulfillment: Matthew tells us that this was to fulfill what the prophets said- he shall be called a Nazarene. – Here is the problem: No where in the OT is there a prophecy that says the messiah will be called a Nazarene. So what is Matthew Saying?

The answer can be discovered after a closer examination: This is the first formula quotation in which he uses a **plural reference** to the "*prophets*" This suggests that Matthew is **summarizing a broader prophetic theme** without actually citing any one prophet.

There are two possible solutions to this.

- 1) Jesus being from Nazareth and being called a Nazarene can be a play on words from the Hebrew word Neezer- which means "*branch*" There are two obvious messianic prophecies that refer to the coming messiah as a "branch" (nezer) Is. 11:1, and Jer. 23:5
- 2) The second possibility is that the Nazarene is actually a *pejorative term used in the 1st century referring to people of lesser nobility.* (Compare the attitude towards Nazareth in John 1:146) A modern day equivalent would be like saying- Hick, Hillbilly, or Ghetto.

This would fulfill such Messianic prophecies such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 11:4-14- where the theme presents Messiah as rejected, lightly esteemed, and

3) Finally one can make a case for a combination of the two. As Isaiah 11:1 would convey a similar message as the shoot from the cut down stump is a symbol of lowly origin.

One thing is certain, Jesus birth and childhood were not that you expect of a noble birth for the anticipated messiah. And this is what Matthew is establishing.

Jesus came to this world in a way that no one expected. He was born in a stable, to poor parents, had to flee for his life as a baby, and grew up in a town that had a horrible reputation → *All this to say- God's ways are far different than our own.*

App: Often we have grand ideas the way things should be. (us example of my desire for a church building) but maybe God has different ideas- and we need to embrace that.

Conclusion: What do we make of this? Clearly Matthew is giving us a theological treatise on how Jesus geographical movements and historical development in his childhood all demonstrate a fulfillment of OT prophecy. – the theme begun from Chapter 1. Jesus is the Son of David- the Messiah

But there are some important lessons to learn from this:

1) The Forces of Evil are on high alert: Herod represents Satan. He is a tool of Satan and as such he does everything in his power to stop Jesus Christ from surviving.

Revelation 12 which was written at the end of the 1st century paints a graphic picture of Satan's hatred of Christ and his people and parallels Herod's rage.

→ *What we see is ancient battle prophesied in Genesis 3:15 how there would be enmity between the serpents seed and the seed of the woman. In the slaughter of the innocents we see this enmity on graphical display.*

Jesus life and ministry is not only surrounded by angelic visitation, but also demonic attacks. Satan and his host concentrate all their efforts on destroying the messiah- but the strong man will be bound.

Daniel Dorianai- *"Cast from heaven eons ago, Satan fought to keep his realm when Jesus invaded it in the incarnation. He used malice, the mania, and the lawlessness of Herod to destroy Christ, and if he could by ordering the death of all baby boys in Bethlehem. In this way, Satan kept fighting even though his defeat was and is sure. Our adversary is potent and evil, but our ALLY is GREATER!"*

→ This is why men like Pastor Saeed Abedini is being tortured in Iran. Its also the reason why our government is not doing anything about it. But we must remember this is a spiritual battle.

Eph 6:12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

This is theme that will continue in Matthew as the Jews like Herod are threatened by Jesus and are in love with power. Like Herod- they would do everything in their power to destroy Jesus,

But the point is- nothing will happen to Jesus a day sooner than God had ordained. God is sovereign and will protect his Son. The Messiah is victorious and Satan is impotent.

2) The fact that Jesus is victorious signals that the Kingdom of God has arrived. Which side are you on?

Whenever we declare the gospel we are actually declaring the authority and power of Jesus Christ as King. And depending on how you present the gospel this will either draw men to Christ or enrage them.

Psalm 2 shows this reality in how the people of the world respond to the Messiah's rule, and what the outcome for those who despise it look like.

Vv. 1-3 Demonstrate the Herod's. Those who are enraged and threaten by the authority of Christ. They refuse to acknowledge Jesus has a right to rule their lives.

Vv. 4-5 Is interesting- The text says God laughs at such people. Ps. 37:13 The Lord laughs at the wicked, and in Prov. 1:26- I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,

This tells us something. All those who laugh now, and think the gospel is a joke. Will cry one day. And the tables will be reversed- God will laugh at all those who mocked him, blasphemed him and rejected him. Its is a fearful thing.

10-11- Be Wise- Be warned: This text indicates that given the power of the messiah's rule- the people of this world who think they have power- be warned and be wise. God will judge all mankind., You reject Jesus, God will reject you. The wise person will worship and submit to the King- like the Magi did.

The call is clear- the only refuge from the wrath of God- is God's mercy unfolded at the cross of Christ.
GOSPEL CALL>