

**The Messiah Has Come
(A Study in Matthew - Week 3)
Matthew 2:13-23
“The Sovereign God”**

Introduction

I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with My eye on you, I will give counsel. **Psalms 32:8**

As Matthew continues his narrative of Christ's infancy and young childhood, he demonstrates, just how God protected His Son. While The Messiah most assuredly came to die for the sins of mankind, the manner of His death would be of a time and place of God's own choosing. No earthly king would ever be granted power over *Emmanuel*, God with us. This world would not take The Son's life, but rather, He would give it. Herod wanted to eliminate this new King of The Jews for he saw Him as a threat to his rule. And truth be told, the coming of Christ will one day be to the demise of all who would stand in opposition to Him, for Christ will ultimately trample over His foes.

Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He abolishes all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26

Herod was every bit as evil a ruler as Christ is good. The illegitimate *Idumean* (descendant from Esau) despot was as paranoid as he was wicked, viewing anything and everyone as a potential threat to his rule. Perhaps it is because that deep down, even he knew that he had no real claim to the throne of Israel. Herod had murdered his own sons, and even his favorite wife, for the fear that they might be plotting against him. So it should come as no surprise that he completely lost all self-control when he heard of a “*new king*” being born in Bethlehem! He would naturally respond with jealousy and brutality. But unbeknownst to Herod, he was merely a pawn in the hands of Satan himself. And the prince of darkness would go to great lengths to stop God's Anointed One from completing his mission of redemption.

In any ordinary circumstance, with such power arrayed against a small child born to a poor carpenter's household, the weak would be destroyed and the strong and mighty prevail. But while Herod may well have had an army at his disposal, Joseph had The LORD of Hosts! Therefore, Herod's wicked schemes were defeated even before they had begun, for as the preacher John Knox once said, “*One man with God is always in the majority.*”

What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare His Own Son but gave Him up for us all. How will He not also with Him grant us everything? **Romans 8:31-32**

As I have been wont to do this Christmas season, I have been reflecting upon the words of some of my favorite Christmas carols. Some of those old songs beautifully express the wondrous truths of our faith. One such song kept coming to my mind as I studied to prepare this week's lesson. The song is entitled, “*I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*”. There is a powerful lyric in that song that describes how prevalent evil is in our world, so prevalent and powerful that to the casual observer, it would seem impossible to overcome.

*“Then silently I bowed my head. There is no peace on earth I said,
For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth good will to men.”*

Most of us know exactly how the poet feels in this line, but the following response is one to remember:

*“Then pealed the bells more loud and deep, God is not dead, nor doth He sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth good will to men!”*

This is just a beautiful way of saying, “*One man with God is always in the majority!*” Herod the king thought he could wipe out The LORD with all his vast power and resources, but not only did he fail miserably, but God actually used him as a pawn to fulfill Scripture. Matthew gives us three separate *Old Testament* prophecies that Herod unwittingly helped to fulfill. For when you go against God, you lose every time! Please allow me to explain the prophecies that Herod’s rampage helped come to pass, *The Getaway, The Grieving, and The Galilean.*

Prophecy 1: The Getaway (vs. 13-15)

After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the Child to kill Him.” So he got up, took the Child and His mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son. Matthew 2:13-15

I wonder just how long it took ol’ Herod to realize that he’d been duped by the Magi? A month? Six months? Nevertheless, he finally realized that those guys weren’t coming back, so he decided to take matters in his own hands. If the wise men wouldn’t point out the child to him, he’d send his troops to find Him. After all, he had all the men and firepower needed to rid Judea of a single infant. Unfortunately for him, even after the priests had explained to Herod exactly Who this child was, he actually believed that he had the power to eliminate him.

This wasn’t the first time that Satan had inspired a king to get rid of a deliverer sent from God. Pharaoh had tried it with Moses (*Exodus 1:22*). But he failed miserably. For no matter whom Satan chooses to do his bidding, our God and His purposes will ultimately prevail. The Greek despot Antiochus Epiphanes learned the same valuable lesson, as did Herod, Hitler, and one day, the anti-christ himself. *The wrong will fail, the right prevail with peace on earth good will to men!*

Joseph would have not had the slightest idea of the danger that was coming toward Bethlehem, but The Spirit of The Living God knew, and He came to Joseph in a dream warning him to flee the country. Not to just anywhere, mind you, but to Egypt, some seventy miles to the south. Herod would have no jurisdiction there. The child would be safe. Many Jews had fled to Egypt to escape the living conditions of Herod’s Jerusalem. Joseph’s family would fit right in. And thanks to God’s provision through the Magi, the trip and subsequent settling in had already been adequately financed!

Now, of course, God could have simply protected His Son from Herod’s onslaught right there in Bethlehem. It wasn’t like He wasn’t able to stop Herod in his tracks. But there was a greater purpose here. For you see, over and again in Scripture, the Christ is presented in parallel with the nation of Israel. Many of the things that Israel endured, The Son was also called upon to endure. It was God’s way of identifying His Messiah with His chosen people. If they had but heeded Matthew’s powerful testimony, they would have seen the truth.

Israel was in Egyptian bondage for four hundred years, and then God called them out of Egypt. Just as He would ultimately call His One and Only Son from this same Egypt. He, like Joseph before Him, was a fugitive from the wrath of his own brethren. And God would bring Him out the same way that He had brought out His chosen people.

The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their unfaithfulness. Christ was tempted in the wilderness for forty days and proved Himself faithful! Israel was often referred

to as “a vine” in Scripture, for God had Himself planted them in His own vineyard, but instead of producing good fruit, they produced sour grapes instead (***Isaiah 5:1-7***). In *John Chapter 15*, Jesus declared Himself to be the “*True Vine*”; where Israel had failed in their mission from God, Jesus would succeed in doing His Father’s will, and all who would abide in Him would be forever fruitful!

So you see, Christ was sent to Egypt for a purpose. To ultimately fulfill the prophecy of Hosea:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I have called My Son.
Hosea 11:1

As it was with the nation of Israel, so it would be with Israel’s Messiah, The Son of God! Herod’s persecution only served to bring to pass the very thing that God had intended all along! Herod was simply a pawn in the hands of The Almighty God. There was never really any danger, for our God is over all.

Prophecy 2: The Grieving (vs. 16-18)

Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more. (Jr 31:15)
Matthew 2:16-18

Herod’s slaughter of Bethlehem’s children two years and younger was done in order to correspond with the time when the star first appeared to the wise men, with more than likely a little wiggle room to spare. By the time the wise men had found the young child, He was most likely a toddler, so Herod would take no chances. He ordered his vile henchmen to execute all the young boys in Bethlehem and surrounding communities. Again, he was simply fulfilling yet another *Old Testament* prophecy, this time from the Prophet Jeremiah.

The short term fulfillment (as prophecy often has a long term and short term implication) of Jeremiah’s prophecy was in regard to the weeping at *Ramah*, a small suburb community on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Ramah was the staging point for the children of Israel’s deportation to Babylon during their seventy years of exile. Thus it is mentioned by name in Jeremiah’s prophecy. Israel had rejected the commands of The LORD, and therefore, He allowed them to be led away in bondage by Nebuchadnezzar’s armies.

Rachel, Jacob’s beloved wife, who bore him both Joseph and Benjamin, had died during Benjamin’s childbirth. She is often used as a symbolic mother of Israel (as was Abraham’s wife Sarah). Just as Rachel wept over her son as she lay dying, the mothers of Israel, would weep for the children carried away in bondage by the Babylonians.

The long term fulfillment of this selfsame prophecy would be the weeping of the mothers of Ramah once more, as their children were slaughtered at the behest of Satan’s puppet ruler, King Herod. But once more, Herod’s actions served to only fulfill God’s Word! Once again, our God is *over all*.

How awful it must have been for those who, for no other reason but simply due to their proximity to The Messiah King, would lose their very lives because of it. So it has been through the ages for the persecuted church as she aligns herself with Christ Jesus. But make no mistake, a day is coming when God will mete our retribution for those who would harm His own.

...Vengeance belongs to Me. I will repay, says The LORD.
Romans 12:19b

Prophecy 3: The Galilean (vs. 19-23)

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the Child are dead." So he got up, took the Child and His mother, and entered the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee. 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. **Matthew 2:19-23**

I love the colorless way that Herod's demise is described in Matthew's account. He simply says, "after Herod died.." Seems rather ignoble for the passing of a king does it not? And so it is with those who are at enmity with God. They are simply forgotten, just another footnote in the historical record. Herod may have considered himself a grand performer upon life's stage, but in the eyes of The LORD, he was just another nobody who lived a while, and then he *died*.

The Scriptures do not tell you *how* he died, but historians do. Herod contracted an STD which basically caused his organs to rot from the inside out. He cried out in agony and madness from the pain. The guards who stood watch at his bedchamber door had to be changed frequently for they could not abide the horrific stench that emanated from his putrid flesh. And even in death, Herod remained defiant, even appealing to Rome for the execution of yet another of his own sons, who he didn't want to succeed him.

Herod knew that there would be no mourning in Israel for his passing, so from his deathbed, he ordered the most popular leaders of Israel to be taken captive and executed upon his death. That way, he exclaimed in his visceral hatred, "They may not mourn for me, but by the gods they will mourn!" When Herod died, those who had been ordered to execute the leaders of Israel, set them free instead, so rather than mourning, Herod's death actually brought about a celebration among the people! As we said before, to God, he was a nobody.

Upon Herod's death, his son Herod Archelaus was installed by Caesar to rule only a portion of Herod's domain, namely Judah and Samaria and Idumea. The rule of Galilee was given to Herod's younger son Herod Antipas, who was not nearly as brutal as Herod Archelaus. Archelaus was as they say, "a chip off the old block", as it were. So it isn't any wonder, Joseph feared to return to Bethlehem. So what did this godly man do, he prayed about it, and The LORD gave him guidance and counsel.

The Spirit of God led Joseph to the region of Galilee, more specifically to Nazareth. A small hamlet with a reputation for the outcast. In fact, a well known saying in Jesus' time was, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (**John 1:46**). But as usual, God had a specific reason in mind for allowing His Son to grow up there. For from that day on, He would become known as Jesus, the Nazarene.

Now let me be clear, there is no specific prophecy in *The Old Testament* that says, "He will be called a Nazarene." However, there are several prophecies that refer to The Messiah as "The Branch." The word "branch" in Hebrew is *Netzer*, and it specifically refers to an offshoot that comes up from a stump of a tree that has been cut down. The Christ was such an offshoot from the line of King David. Although that line had been "cut down" as it were, the offshoot would come from it to once more establish David's throne. This was the calling of "The Messiah King."

So, how does Nazareth fit into this prophecy? The word *Nazareth* is derived from that same Hebrew word *Netzer* for it was an offshoot of a little town that sprang up from basically nothing. In his commentary on Matthew's Gospel, John Phillips describes it thusly:

"Netzer was a term of contempt. When a tree is hewn down, a small green shoot springs up out of the stump. A Hebrew seeing such a shoot would have used the word netzer. 'It is just a sprout,' he would have said. 'The tree is gone. Of what use is this shoot?' Similarly Nazareth was just a small town on a hillside hemmed in by fifteen higher hills. It was a town of Galilee, an area that had a mixed population and was often contemptuously called by the Jews 'Galilee of the Gentiles.'"

So as Jesus became known as Jesus of Nazareth, He was actually being called The LORD'S Salvation, The Branch. He was despised and rejected, but His is the only Name under heaven by which men can be saved (**Acts 4:12**). Once more, the puppets of Satan simply were pawns to fulfill all of God's promises! For our God is *over all!*

Why does all this matter? Because the very same God Who saw to it that His will was accomplished perfectly, the same God who has insured that every outcome of every situation will work out for His glory. That very same God has promised also that all things will work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (**Romans 8:28**). No matter what is going on around you, He will *never* leave you nor forsake you (**Hebrews 13:5**). And finally:

...He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:6b**

So, my prayer this morning is that this message will be one of "*peace on earth, and good will to men*" (and women) during this ***Christmas*** season. Be not dismayed and fear not, for our God is over all!

TRUTH!!!