

“Christ’s Troubling Narrative”

Matthew 2:13-23

April 7, 2024

INTRO: What’s **the most disturbing thing** you’ve seen or heard in a while?

Hold that thought...

Do you know what the difference is between the “LOVE vs. HATE” and the “like” vs. “dislike” sermons?

ANSWER: Like & dislike are usually, for better or for worse... matters of interest levels, style, &/or delivery. **BUT...** on the other hand, *“LOVE or HATE”* sermons are almost always **determined by & directly related to the sermon’s having hit the bullseye of the HEART...** *the defining center of one’s deepest passions & priorities.*

With that said... back to our opening question...

What’s the most troubling thing you’ve seen/heard/realized?

- Most abortion seeking women have given birth before...
- Legal euthanasia of a healthy 28 year old woman...
- Where did Jesus go between Friday & Sunday?
- Cordial, casual, & culturally accepted lies?
- Earthquakes? Eclipses? Bridges?
- Wars? Evil? Wickedness? Sin?
- **God with us? King Jesus!**

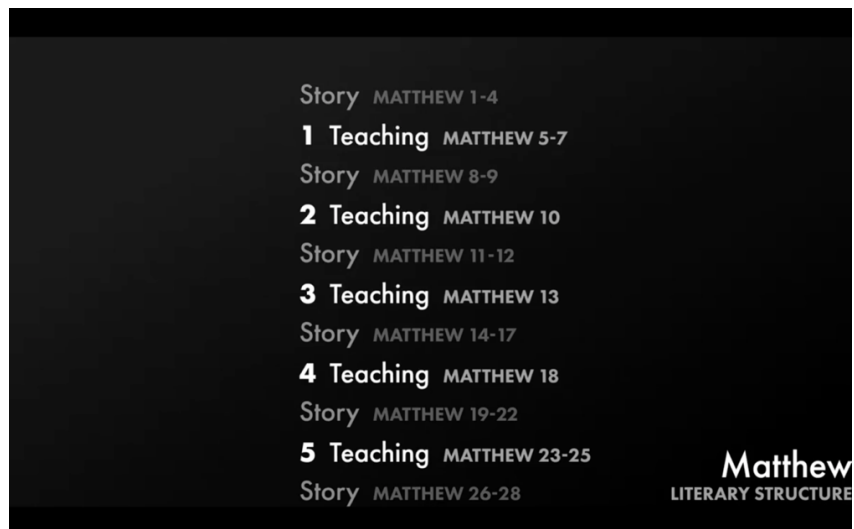
PRAYER

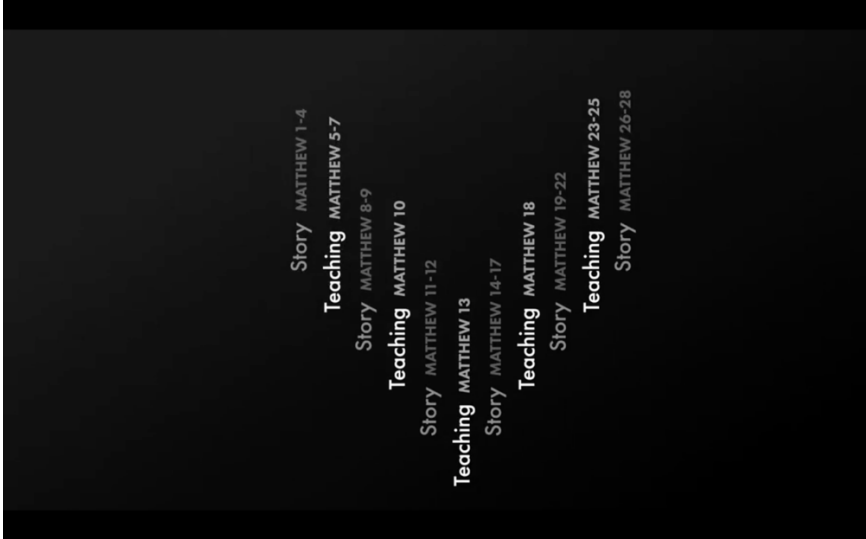
CONTEXT:

- Gospel of Matthew: **m M m** (miracle Messiah mission)
- Today we'll be zooming OUT & IN & OUT & IN...
- Let me begin by going back... & **zooming out...**
- We're going to take a closer look at Matthew's

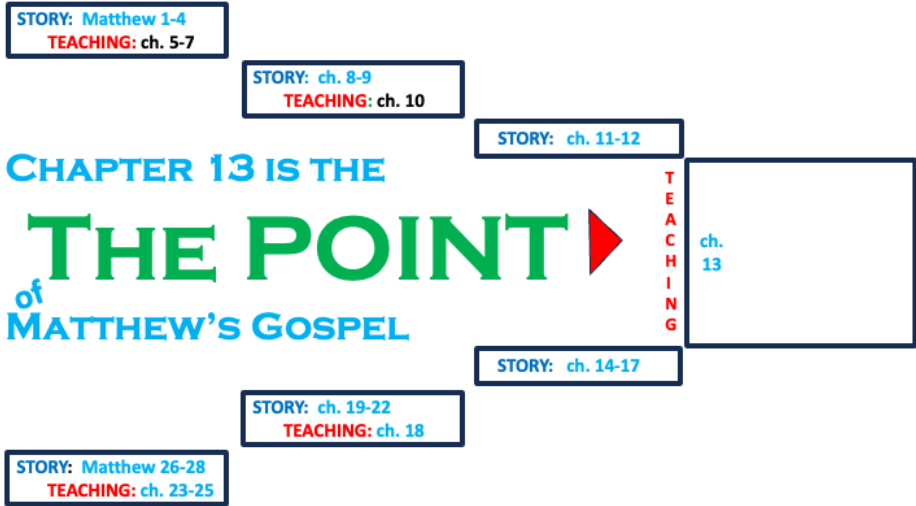
LITERARY STRUCTURE

(Today is old school... visuals but no videos.)





	Story MATTHEW 1-4
Mountain	Teaching MATTHEW 5-7
	Story MATTHEW 8-9
Land	Teaching MATTHEW 10
	Story MATTHEW 11-12
Water	Teaching MATTHEW 13
	Story MATTHEW 14-17
Land	Teaching MATTHEW 18
	Story MATTHEW 19-22
Mountain	Teaching MATTHEW 23-25
	Story MATTHEW 26-28



STORY: Matthew 1-4
TEACHING: ch. 5-7

STORY: ch. 8-9
TEACHING: ch. 10

STORY: ch. 11-12

CHAPTER 13 IS THE

THE POINT

of
MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

T
E
A
C
H
I
N
G

A	Parable of the Sower
B	Disciples ask question and Jesus answers
C	Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat
D	Parable of the Mustard Seed
E	Parable of the Leaven
F	Jesus speaks to crowds in parables
F'	Jesus speaks to His disciples alone
E'	Parable of the Hidden Treasure
D'	Parable of the Costly Pearl
C'	Parable of the Dragnet
B'	Jesus poses question and disciples answer
A'	Parable of New and Old Treasures

STORY: ch. 14-17

STORY: ch. 19-22
TEACHING: ch. 18

STORY: Matthew 26-28
TEACHING: ch. 23-25

Matthew

Ch. 13

The Kingdom of God

Chiastic

Arch

A	Parable of the Sower
B	Disciples ask question and Jesus answers
C	Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat
D	Parable of the Mustard Seed
E	Parable of the Leaven
F	Jesus speaks to crowds in parables
F'	Jesus speaks to His disciples alone
E'	Parable of the Hidden Treasure
D'	Parable of the Costly Pearl
C'	Parable of the Dragnet
B'	Jesus poses question and disciples answer
A'	Parable of New and Old Treasures

BIG IDEA: The trouble is...
Christ's entire NARRATIVE
...from start to finish!

T/S: Before we begin, we need to spend some time
*preparing for the text, today's AND the rest of Matthew's
Gospel... We need to understand the writing, reading,
interpreting, and applying of biblical NARRATIVE.*

(Narrative is more deduction than didactic do's and don'ts.)

- NARRATIVE = “story” or “story-telling”
- NARRATIVE can be multi-dimensional
 - Historical narrative
 - Parable narrative
 - PROPHETIC narrative
 - TYPOLOGICAL narrative
 - Historical-Typological narrative
 - **TYPOLOGICAL-PROPHETIC** narrative
- NARRATIVE is NOT primarily didactic
- NARRATIVE is intentionally “inductive”

******* Two typical ways of preaching narratives:

1. **SEQUENTIALLY** – unpack & apply as you go
2. **INDUCTIVELY** – tell the story & unload at the end

******* We're going to use a *both/and* approach. *******

PREVIEW:

1. Themes-Throughout
2. Truth-in-Typology
3. Troubling-Tension
4. Triumphant-Trusting

TEXT: ALL of Matthew & then Matthew 2:13-23

I. THEMES-THROUGHOUT

Now ZOOM IN AGAIN...

- Matthew ch.1...
 - ***“Biblos genesis”***
 - Theology in the genealogy
 - The descriptions of Christ’s arrival

- Matthew 2:1-12
 - Easter’s Troubling Truth
 - **We need more Friday in our Sunday...**
 - **And more Friday & Sunday in our Mondays**

Matthew 2:13-23

The Flight to Egypt

[13](#)Now when they had departed, 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.” [14](#)And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt [15](#)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.”

Herod Kills the Children

[16](#)Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. [17](#)Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

[18](#)“A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

The Return to Nazareth

[19](#)But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, [20](#)saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” [21](#)And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. [22](#)But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he

withdrew to the district of Galilee. [23](#)And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

See Matthew's SEQUENTIAL Themes/Scenes:

- The Absolute Almighty's **TRUTH** throughout
- **MIRACULOUS MESSIANIC MISSION**
- Instant danger/struggles/persecution/battles
- *To fulfill prophecy (6X)*
- Angel said... / Dream revealed = **GOD SPEAKS**
- *Contrasting THE King with worldly kings*
- Eternal-Spiritual **WARFARE**
- *His Holy humility...*
- Bethlehem & Nazareth vs. Rome & Hollywood!

II. TRUTH-in-TYPOLOGY

Matthew 1:1a
Biblos genesis...

*** Prophetic fulfillment:

- *Biblos Genesis* (= **Genesis 3:15**)

- *David's heir*
- *Abraham's heir*
- *Virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14)*
- *Bethlehem birthplace (Micah 5:2)*
- Now comes 3 more prophecies in vv.13-23
 - **Hosea 11:1** = *Israel & Christ Jesus*
 - **Jeremiah 31:15** = *grief for murder of boys*
 - "*the prophets*" = "**typological prophecy**"

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

John 14:6 & 17:17

John 5:39-40

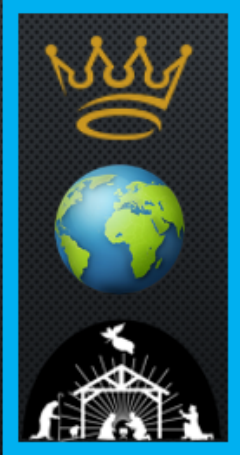
You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Looking back at Matthew 1:

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

PROLOGUE

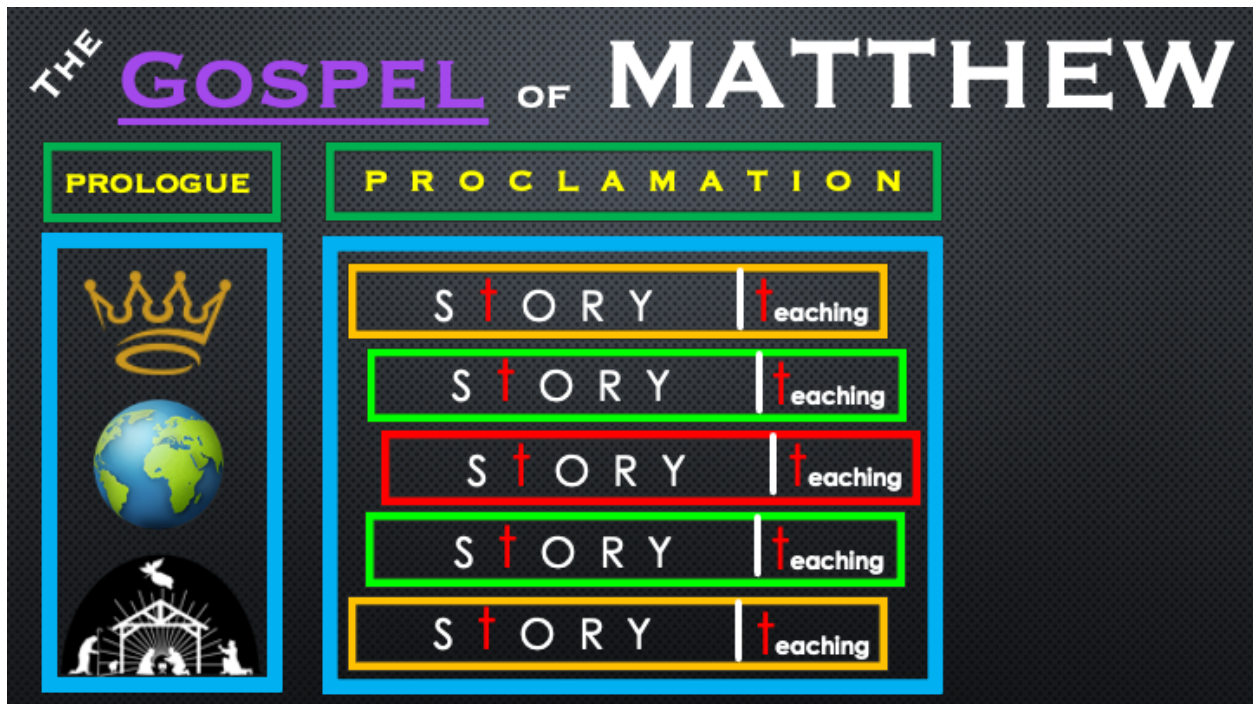


T/S:

*If you had to use one word to
DESCRIBE CHRISTIANITY
what would that one word be?*

III. TROUBLING-TENSION

*** Christians should NEVER feel troubled!
(Note: I did not say we wouldn't, I said we shouldn't. See Christ's promises in the Bible).



LIST of some of the TROUBLING Themes & TENSIONS:

- **Monster(s)**
- **Miracles**
- **MESSIAH**
- **Mission**
- **Methods**
- **Meaning**
- **Message(s)**
- **Monday's**

Universal... “troubling truths”

- Creation’s micro to macro ALL need the Messiah!
- Everyone is fighting spiritual warfare 24/7/365
 - *Internally*
 - *Relationally*
 - *Missionally*

TROUBLING portrait...

Christ's Kingship either unites or divides us. **Period!**
(You are either with Him or against Him... either helping Him to gather OR you are helping Satan to scatter.)

- JDP

***Cultural distain is growing against Christ & Christians...
the “troubled” are rising up against the Truth & truthful.***

- JDP

Christ's Kingship defines His kingdom and the Christian's citizenship, while simultaneously dethroning every counterfeit king.

- JDP

*When we choose to sin...
in that moment or season... we act as tho we can
dethrone King Jesus in the micro-kingdom of our lives...*

- JDP

We won't fall into sin if we're standing up for
and in awe of Him.

-JDP

***Every knee will bow and every tongue will
confess Jesus is LORD!***

IV. TRIUMPHANT-TRUSTING

***So... what are some of the intentionally INDUCTIVE
lessons embedded in our LORD's
troubling narrative?***

1. He & His Word ARE (...the only) absolute TRUTH.
2. Jesus THE Christ is CREATOR & Sustainer Christ!
3. His holiness & standards are absolutely PURE.
4. EVERYTHING that's wrong comes back to one bite/sin...
5. ANY & ALL unredeemed sin is eternally DAMNABLE.
6. Satan, demons, spiritual warfare, & hell are all REAL!
7. The world & your own flesh join Satan in his/the FIGHT.
8. By divine design, the serpent gets to wound the Savior...
9. The Savior's will & ways are counter-cultural/intuitive...
10. The Lord's loving mercy & grace are confounding...

11. The Lord's sanctifying discipline is awe-inspiring...
12. The Lord's righteous anger & wrath are frightening!
13. A reverent fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.
14. God is ALWAYS sovereign & in providential control.
15. God's ways & thoughts are NOT our ways/thoughts.
16. His Word is alive & active, sharp & never changing...
17. His Spirit actively CONVICTS, converts, & cleanses...
18. God often gives us enough rope to hang ourselves...
19. God's grace is sufficient AND exclusive in salvation.
20. God makes both absolute & conditional promises...
21. God's grace empowers humanity's responsibilities.
22. Humanity's responsibilities maximize God's graces.
23. Humanity continues to free-fall from bad to worse!
24. Globally... man is like a dog... returning to its vomit.
25. No enemy of God will ever win against Him.

NOW, let's take a closer look at some of the intentionally troubling, inductive lessons from

Matthew 1 & 2

- Notice how often the narrative keeps saying:
"this happened to fulfill what had been said:"
- We're going to continue to see God/Matthew driving home the point that Jesus IS the One promised to the Jews as:
 - *The Son of David* – King of the Jews
 - *The Son of Abraham* – The Global blessing
 - *Immanuel* – **"God WITH US"**

1. ***"Biblos genesis"***
2. Jesus arrived as 100% God AND 100% man – UNIQUE!
3. Christ's family was DYSFUNCTIONAL to say the least...
4. Jesus fulfilled ROYAL, GLOBAL, & SPIRITUAL prophecy!
5. The reality of God, Holy Spirit, & angels are declared...
6. Their personal interaction with humanity are declared.
7. The Bible records a diversity of divine communication...
8. God's miraculous & missional interactions perpetuate...
9. The humility of Christ's arrival is almost haunting...
10. Jesus Christ was **BORN** King of the Jews...
11. Some Magi who heard/learned of Messiah's prophecies would come from Babylon or Persia to see Him... but the Jew's religious leaders who knew and taught those same prophetic truths would not travel the 6 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to celebrate the Christ's arrival.
12. Like a new born gazelle on the plains of the Serengeti, to avoid the predators and preserve His life, baby Jesus had to be up and running (to Egypt) almost immediately.
13. Like David vs. Goliath (no pun intended), don't miss the apparent mis-match of strength and what appears to be unimaginable odds against the underdog in these fights... One would be prone to look away if it were not, by God's grace, for our foreknowledge of the outcome.
14. See the overwhelming wickedness and evil that is bound up in the deception and sweet packaging of king Herod's hypocrisy. (Read **Psalm 55:21**)
15. Note: sin's greatest foothold is in the human heart!

That which is unraveling before humanity is only a symptom from what is unraveling within humanity.

- JDP

16. Sin's collateral damage can be beyond destructive! Herod's evil, while nearly incalculable in his lifetime (killing all the baby boys around Bethlehem), went on to devastate certain families (and stain humanity) even after he died... His death marked the murder of others, for the sole purpose of creating an atmosphere of grief when he died – even tho no one was grieving his loss.
17. Moreover, one of Herod's 3 sons, in his 1/3 of the kingdom, continued, even advanced, his father's evil ways. After calling for the murder of thousands of Jews, Rome finally dethroned him, for fear of his creating an uprising, as a result of his heinously sinful reign. See here the power and potential (for evil) that comes with a bad and sin-filled example/witness.
18. It was Jesus (not Jeff) who put the “mess” and messiness in The Messiah's truth in love...
19. Again, it was Jesus who put the troubling “mess” in the message of His Gospel!
20. Don't miss the clear & comprehensive, early and perpetuating, troubling-trajectory of Christ's narrative...
 - Like it or not, this is God's absolute TRUTH...
 - Christ was “in trouble” from the second He arrived...
 - Our Model & Messiah exemplifies holiness & humility.
 - His promise & purpose both involve sacrifice & service.
 - To be friends with the world is to be His enemy.
 - This is just the beginning...

- Next, we'll meet a **troubling forerunner...**
- Then, we'll meet Satan literally tempting Christ...
- From there, *"you've heard... but I tell you..."*
- Think about the **Matthew's faith-filled finale...**

REVIEW:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. <i>Again & Again...</i> | Themes-Throughout |
| 2. <i>Absolute</i> | Truth-in-Typology |
| 3. <i>Affirmed</i> | Troubling-Tension |
| 4. <i>Assured</i> | Triumphant-Trusting |

CLOSE:

The trouble is...
 Christ's entire NARRATIVE
 ...from start to finish!

- Matthew 2:3... *"born King"* troubled Herod
 - *"Jesus of Nazareth - King of the Jews"* troubles us!
- Every village, town, city, state, country, continent – is run by sinners... trying to take care of or take advantage of other sinners. This thing can't possibly go well without divine intervention!

- We are seeing EXACTLY what God & His Word told us we would see as His return & Judgement Day draw near... Yet, just as we see throughout the Bible's Old AND New Testament, (again, just as Jesus said it would be), the world is asleep in its sin, and sadly, tragically, it is in large part, the professing Christian church (small "c" used intentionally) that is selling the spiritual fentanyl, distributing clean needles, and pushing Satan's poison sleeping pills. -JDP

The troubling truth of Matthew's narrative (and THE Gospel itself) is repeatedly patterned & laid out:

- A. Miracle needed
- B. MESSIAH exclusive
- C. Missionary's victory

*Here's the divine pattern we'll see...
all the way into eternity!*

1. TRUTH
2. TROUBLE
3. TRIUMPH

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

PROLOGUE



PROCLAMATION

S T O R Y | t e a c h i n g

S T O R Y | t e a c h i n g

S T O R Y | t e a c h i n g

S T O R Y | t e a c h i n g

S T O R Y | t e a c h i n g

PASSION



A. ***KING OF THE JEWS***

- Son of David
- Sign nailed to His cross
- Matthew 28:18

B. ***BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS***

- Son of David
- John 3:16
- Matthew 28:19

C. ***GOD WITH US***

- He will be called *Immanuel: God with us!*
- Acts 1:8
- Matthew 28:20

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *In Christ Alone & He Is Risen (w/ Bowman)*

STUDY NOTES:

The Flight to Egypt

13Now when they had departed, 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." **14**And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15**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."

Herod Kills the Children

16Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17**Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

18"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

The Return to Nazareth

19But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **20**saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." **21**And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22**But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. **23**And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Dutch woman, 28, to be euthanized over mental illness after psychiatrist said it will 'never' get any better

'There's nothing more we can do for you. It's never gonna get any better,' Zoraya ter Beek recalled her psychiatrist telling her...

A 28-year-old Dutch woman is slated to be euthanized next month because of her struggles with [mental illness](#) after her psychiatrist said her condition will never improve.

Zoraya ter Beek lives in a nice house in a small Dutch town near the German border with her boyfriend and two cats. Despite being physically healthy, she plans to end her life due to her depression, autism and borderline personality disorder, according to The Free Press.

She once had ambitions to become a psychiatrist, but she was never able to finish school or start a career due to her own mental illness. But now, she is tired of living and wishes to end her life.

A tattoo on her upper left arm shows a "tree of life" but "in reverse."

Zoraya ter Beek, 28, is slated to be euthanized next month because of her struggles with mental illness after her psychiatrist said her condition will never improve.

"Where the tree of life stands for growth and new beginnings, my tree is the opposite," ter Beek told The Free Press. "It is losing its leaves, it is dying. And once the tree died, the bird flew out of it. I don't see it as my soul leaving, but more as myself being freed from life."

Ter Beek's decision came after her psychiatrist told her that they had tried everything to [help her mental health](#).

"There's nothing more we can do for you. It's never gonna get any better," she recalled her psychiatrist saying.

After declaring her decision, ter Beek said, "I was always very clear that if it doesn't get better, I can't do this anymore."

As for how she plans to go out, ter Beek said she would be lying on the couch in the living room, with no music playing. But she has asked her boyfriend to be with her until the end.

Zoraya ter Beek plans to end her life due to her depression, autism and borderline personality disorder.

"The doctor really takes her time," she said. It is not that they walk in and say: 'lay down please!' Most of the time it is first a cup of coffee to settle the nerves and create a soft atmosphere. Then she asks if I am ready. I will take my place on the couch. She will once again ask if I am sure, and she will start up the procedure and wish me a good journey. Or, in my case, a nice nap, because I hate it if people say, 'Safe journey.' I'm not going anywhere."

Next, the doctor will administer a sedative and then a drug to stop ter Beek's heart.

Following her death, a euthanasia review committee will evaluate ter Beek's death to ensure the doctor followed "due care criteria" and the Dutch government will declare that her life was lawfully ended.

No funeral will be held following ter Beek's death. Instead, her boyfriend will scatter her ashes in an area in the woods they chose together, as she wishes to be cremated.

"I did not want to burden my partner with having to keep the grave tidy," ter Beek said. "We have not picked an urn yet, but that will be my new house!"

Ter Beek's decision to end her life came after her psychiatrist told her that they had tried everything to help her mental health.

Ter Beek admitted that she is somewhat afraid of dying because she is unsure of what, if anything, happens after death.

"I'm a little afraid of dying, because it's the ultimate unknown," she said. "We don't really know what's next — or is there nothing? That's the scary part."

The Netherlands in 2001 became the first country in the world to legalize euthanasia. Now, [at least eight countries](#) have legalized it. Assisted suicide is also legal in 10 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., and all six states in Australia. Protestant Theological University healthcare ethics professor Theo Boerin served on a euthanasia review board in the Netherlands from 2005 until 2014. During this time, he told The Free Press, he observed Dutch euthanasia "evolve from death being a last resort to death being a default option."

Albert Barnes Commentary on Matthew: 2:13-23

13. *The angel appeareth to Joseph in a dream.* See ch. 1:20.

Flee into Egypt. Egypt is situated to the south-west of Judea, and is distant from Bethlehem perhaps about 60 miles. It was at this time a Roman province. **There were many Jews there, who had a temple and synagogues (see Notes on Is. 19:18),** and Joseph, therefore, would be among his own countrymen, and yet beyond the reach of Herod. The jurisdiction of Herod extended only to the River Sihon, or “river of Egypt,” and, of course, beyond that Joseph was safe from his designs. For a description of Egypt, see Notes on Is. 19. It is remarkable that this is the only time in which our Saviour was out of Palestine, and that **this was in the land where the children of Israel had suffered so much and so long under the oppression of the Egyptian Kings.**

The very land which was the land of bondage and groaning for the Jews, became now the land of refuge and safety for the new-born King of Judea.

God can overturn nations and kingdoms, so that those whom he loves shall be safe anywhere.

14. *When he arose.* Having arisen; that is, he arose immediately after awaking from his dream, **and prepared at once to obey the command.**

By night. Thus, he showed his prompt obedience to the command, and at the same time so concealed his

departure as to render himself and Mary and the child safe from pursuit.

15. *The death of Herod.* Herod died in the thirty-seventh year of his reign. It is not certainly known in what year he began his reign, and hence it is impossible to determine the time that Joseph remained in Egypt. The best chronology's have supposed that he died somewhere between two and four years after the birth of Christ, but at what particular time cannot now be determined.

Nor can it be ascertained at what age Jesus was taken into Egypt. It seems probable that he was supposed to be a year old (see ver. 16), and of course the time that he remained in Egypt was not long. Herod died of a most painful and loathsome disease in Jericho. See Notes on ver. 16; also Josephus, *Ant.* xvii. 6. 5.

That it might be fulfilled, &c.

This language is recorded in **Ho. 11:1**. It there evidently speaks of God's calling his people out of Egypt, under Moses. See **Ex. 4:22, 23**. It might be said to be *fulfilled* in his calling Jesus from Egypt, because the words in Hosea aptly expressed this also. **The same love which led him to deliver his people Israel from the land of Egypt, now led him also to deliver his son from that place.**

The words used by Hosea would express both events.

See Notes on ch. 1:22. Perhaps, also, the place in Hosea became *a proverb*, to express any great deliverance from danger; and thus it could be said to be *fulfilled* in Christ, as other Proverbs are in cases to which they are applicable. **It cannot be supposed that the passage in Hosea was a prophecy of the Messiah. It is evidently used by Matthew only because the language is appropriate to express the event.**

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men. When he saw that he had been deceived by them; that is, that they did not return as he had expected. It does not mean that they did it *for the purpose* of mocking or deriding him, but that he was *disappointed* in their not returning, or that he had been trifled with.

Exceeding wrath. Very angry. He had been disappointed and deceived. He expected to send an executioner and kill Jesus alone. But, since he was disappointed in this, he thought he would accomplish the same thing, and be sure to destroy him, if he sent forth and **put all the children in the place to death.**—This is an illustration of **the power of anger. It stops at nothing.** If it cannot accomplish *just what* it wishes, it does not hesitate to go much farther, and accomplish much more evil than it at first designed.

He that has a wicked heart, and indulges in anger, knows not where it will end, and will commonly commit far more evil than he at first intended.

Slew all the children. That is, **all the male children.** This is implied in the original. The design of Herod was to cut off him that had been born *king* of the Jews. His purpose, therefore, did not require that he should slay the female children; and though he was cruel, yet we have no right to think that he attempted anything except what he thought to be for his own safety, and to secure himself from a rival.

In all the coasts thereof. The word *coast* is commonly applied now to the regions around the sea, as the *sea-coast*. Here it means the adjacent places, the settlements or hamlets around Bethlehem—all that were in that neighbourhood. We do not know how large a place Bethlehem was, nor, of course, how many were slain; but it was never a large town, and the number could not be very great. It is not probable that it contained more than one or two thousand inhabitants, and in this case the number of children slain was not over twenty or thirty.

From two years old and under. Some writers have said that this does not mean, in the original, that they had *completed* two years; but that they had *entered* on the second year, or had completed about one year, and entered on the second. But the meaning of the word is doubtful. It is quite probable that they would not be particular about the *exact* age, but slew all that were about that age.

According to the time, &c. He had endeavoured to ascertain of the wise men the exact time of his birth. He supposed he knew the age of Jesus. He slew, therefore, all that were of his age; that is, all that were born *about* the time when the star appeared—perhaps from six months old to two years. There is no reason to think that he would command those to be slain who had been born *after* the star appeared.

This destruction of the infants of Bethlehem is not mentioned by Josephus, but for this omission three reasons may be given. 1. Josephus, a Jewish historian and a *Jew*, would not be likely to record anything that would appear to confirm the truth of Christianity. 2. This act of Herod was really so small, compared with his other crimes, that the historian might not think it worthy of record. Bethlehem was a small and obscure village, and the other crimes of Herod were so great and so public, that it is not to be wondered at that the Jewish historian has passed over this. 3. The order was probably given in secret, and might not have been known to Josephus. It pertained to the Christian history; and if the evangelists had not recorded it, it might have been unknown or forgotten. Besides, no argument can be drawn from the silence of the Jewish historian. No reason can be given why Matthew should not be considered to be as fully entitled to credit as Josephus. Yet there is no improbability in the account given by Matthew. Herod was an odious and bloody tyrant, and the facts of his reign prove that he was abundantly capable of this wickedness. The following bloody deeds will show that the slaying of the infants was in perfect accordance with his character. The account is taken from Josephus, as arranged by Dr. Lardner. Aristobulus, brother of his wife Mariamne, was murdered by his direction at eighteen years of age, because the people of Jerusalem had shown some affection for his person.—In the seventh year of his reign, he put to death Hyrcanus, grandfather of Mariamne, then eighty years of age, and who had formerly saved Herod's life; a man who had, in every revolution of fortune, shown a mild and peaceable disposition.—His beloved and beautiful wife, Mariamne, had a public execution, and her mother Alexandra followed soon after.—Alexander and Aristobulus, his two sons by Mariamne, were strangled in prison by his orders upon groundless suspicions, as it seems, when they were at man's estate, were married, and had children.—In his last sickness, a little before he died, he sent orders throughout Judea requiring the presence of all the chief men of the nation at Jericho. His orders were obeyed, for they were enforced with no less penalty than that of death. When they were come to Jericho he had them all shut up in the circus, and calling for his sister Salome and her husband Alexis, he said to them, "My life is now short. I know the Jewish people, and nothing will please them better than my death. You have them now in your custody. As soon as the breath is out of my body, and before my death can be known, do you let in the soldiers upon them and kill them. All Judea, then, and every family, will, though unwillingly, mourn at my death." Nay, Josephus

says that with tears in his eyes he conjured them, by their love to him and their fidelity to God, not to fail of doing him this honour.—What objection, after this account, can there be to the account of his murdering the infants at Bethlehem? Surely there could be no cruelty, barbarity, or horrid crime which such a man was not capable of perpetrating.

17. *Then was fulfilled.* The word “fulfilled,” here, is used evidently in the sense that the words in Jeremiah *aptly express* the event which Matthew was recording. Compare Notes on ch. 1:22.

That which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet. Jeremiah.

This quotation is taken from **Je. 31:15**. The original design of the prophecy was to describe the sorrowful departure of the people of Israel into captivity after the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan. **The captives were assembled at Rama, Jeremiah himself being in chains, and there the fate of those who had escaped in the destruction of the city was decided at the will of the conqueror, Je. 40:1.** The nobles had been slain; the sons of the king had been murdered in his presence; the eyes of the king had been put out, and the people were then gathered at Rama in chains, whence they were to start on their mournful journey, slaves to a cruel monarch, leaving **behind them all that was dear in life.** The sadness of such a scene is well expressed in the language of the prophet, and it no less beautifully and fitly applies to the melancholy event which the evangelist records, and there could be no impropriety in his using it as a quotation.

18. In Rama was there a voice heard. Rama was a small town in the tribe of Benjamin. Rachel was the mother of Benjamin, and was buried near to Bethlehem, Ge. 35:16–19. **Rama was about 6 miles north-west of Jerusalem,** near Bethel, and was some **10 or 12 miles from Bethlehem.** The name *Rama* signifies *an eminence*, and was given to the town because it was situated on a hill. Rama is commonly supposed to be the same as the Arimathea of the New Testament—the place where Joseph lived who begged the body of Jesus. See Mat. 27:57. **This is also the same place in which Samuel was born, where he resided, died, and was buried, and where he anointed Saul as king,** 1 Sa. 1:1, 19; 2:11; 8:4; 19:18; 25:1.

Mr. King, an American missionary, was at Rama—now called *Romba*—in 1824; and Mr. Whiting, another American missionary, was there in 1835. Mr. Whiting says: “The situation is exceedingly beautiful. It is about two hours distant from Jerusalem to the north-west, on an eminence commanding a view of a wide extent of beautiful diversified country. Hills, plains, and valleys, highly cultivated fields of wheat and barley, vineyards and oliveyards, are spread out before you as on a map, and numerous villages are scattered here and there over the whole view. To the west and northwest, beyond the hill-country, appears the vast plain of Sharon, and farther still you look out upon the *great and wide sea*. It occurred to me as not improbable that in the days of David and Solomon this place may have been a favourite retreat during the heat of summer, and that here the former may have often struck his sacred lyre. Some of the Psalms, or at least one of them (see Ps. 104:25), seem to have been composed in some place which commanded a view of the Mediterranean; and this is the only place, I believe, in the vicinity of Jerusalem that affords such a view.”

Rama was once a strongly fortified city, but there is no city here at present. A half-ruined Mohammedan mosque, which was originally a Christian church, stands over the tomb of the prophet; besides which, a few miserable dwellings are the only buildings that remain on this once-celebrated spot.

Comp. Notes on Is. 10:29. The tomb of Rachel, which is supposed to mark the precise spot where Rachel was buried (comp. Ge. 35:18–20; 48:7), is near to Bethlehem, and she is represented as rising and weeping again over her children. “The tomb is a plain Saracenic mausoleum, having no claims to antiquity in its present form, but deeply interesting in sacred associations; for, by the singular consent of all authorities in such questions, it marks the actual site of her grave.”—*The Land and the Book*, vol. ii. 501.

By a beautiful figure of speech, the prophet introduces the mother weeping over the tribe, her children, and with them weeping over the fallen destiny of Israel, and over the calamities about to come upon the land. Few images could be more striking than thus to introduce a mother, long dead, whose sepulchre was near, weeping bitterly over the terrible calamities that befell her descendants. **The language and the image also aptly and beautifully expressed the sorrows of the mothers in Bethlehem when Herod slew their infant children. Under the cruelty of the tyrant almost every**

family was a family of tears, and well might there be lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning.

We may remark here that the sacred writers were cautious of speaking of the characters of wicked men. Here was one of the worst men in the world, committing one of the most awful crimes, and yet there is not a single mark of exclamation; there is not a single reference to any other part of his conduct; there is nothing that could lead to the knowledge that his character in other respects was not upright. There is no wanton and malignant *dragging him* into the narrative that they might gratify malice in making free with a very bad character. What was to their purpose, they recorded; what was not, they left to others. This is the nature of religion. It does not speak evil of others except when necessary, nor then does it take pleasure in it.

19. Herod was dead. See Notes on ver. 15. Herod left three sons, and the kingdom was at his death divided between them.

To Archelaus was given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria;

To Philip, Batanea and Trachonitis;

To Antipas, Galilee and Perea.

Each of these was also called Herod, and these are the individuals who are so frequently referred to in the New Testament during the ministry of the Saviour and the labours of the apostles.

The above table will show at a glance the chief connections of this family, as far as they are mentioned in the sacred history.

20. They are dead who sought, &c. This either refers to Herod alone, as is not uncommon, using the plural number for the singular; or **it may refer to Herod and his**

son *Antipater*. He was of the same cruel disposition as his father, and was put to death by his father about five days before his own death.

22. *He heard that Archelaus did reign.*

Archelaus possessed a cruel and tyrannical disposition similar to his father. At one of the Passovers he caused 3000 of the people to be put to death in the temple and city. For his crimes, after he had reigned nine years, he was banished by Augustus, the Roman emperor, to Gaul, where he died. Knowing his character, and fearing that he would not be safe, Joseph hesitated about going there, and was directed by God to go to Galilee, a place of safety.

The parts of Galilee, (The country of Galilee.)

At this time the land of Palestine was divided into three parts: GALILEE, on the north; SAMARIA, in the middle; and JUDEA, on the south. Galilee was under the government of Herod Antipas, who was comparatively a mild prince, and in his dominions Joseph might find safety.

23. *And he came and dwelt.*

That is, he made it his permanent residence.

The Lord Jesus, in fact, resided there until he entered on the work of his ministry—until he was about thirty years of age.

In a city called Nazareth.

This was a small town, situated in Galilee, west of Capernaum, and not far from Cana. It was built partly in a valley and partly on the declivity of a hill, Lu. 4:29. A hill is yet pointed out, to the south of Nazareth, as the one from which the people of the place attempted to precipitate the Saviour.

It was a place, at that time,
proverbial for wickedness,
(John 4:46).

It is now a large village, with a convent and two churches. One of the churches, called *the Church of the Annunciation*, is the finest in the Holy Land, except that of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

A modern traveller describes Nazareth as situated upon the declivity of a hill, the vale which spreads out before it resembling a circular basin encompassed by mountains. Fifteen mountains appear to meet to form an inclosure for this beautiful spot, around which they rise like the edge of a shell, to guard it against intrusion. It is a rich and beautiful field, in the midst of barren mountains.

Another traveller speaks of the streets as narrow and steep. The houses, which are flat-roofed, are about two hundred and fifty in number, and the inhabitants he estimates at 2000. The population of the place is variously stated, though the average estimate is 3000, of whom about 500 are Turks, and the residue nominal Christians.

As all testimony to the truth and fidelity of the sacred narrative is important, I will here introduce a passage from the journal of Mr. Jowett, an intelligent modern traveller, especially as it is so full an illustration of the passage of Luke already cited.

“Nazareth is situated on the side, and extends nearly to the foot, of a hill, which, though not very high, is rather steep and overhanging. The eye naturally wanders over its summit in quest of some point from which it might probably be that the men of this place endeavoured to cast our Saviour down (Lu. 4:29), but

in vain; no rock adapted to such an object appears here. At the foot of the hill is a modest, simple plain, surrounded by low hills, reaching in length nearly a mile; in breadth, near the city, 150 yards; but farther south, about 400 yards. On this plain there are a few olive and fig trees, sufficient, or rather scarcely sufficient, to make the spot picturesque. Then follows a ravine, which gradually grows deeper and narrower toward the south; till, after walking about another mile, you find yourself in an immense chasm, with steep rocks on either side, from whence you behold, as it were beneath your feet and before you, the noble plain of Esdraelon. Nothing can be finer than the apparently immeasurable prospect of this plain, bounded on the south by the mountains of Samaria. The elevation of the hills on which the spectator stands in this ravine is very great; and the whole scene, when we saw it, was clothed in the most rich mountain-blue colour that can be conceived. At this spot, on the right hand of the ravine, is shown the rock to which the men of Nazareth are supposed to have conducted our Lord for the purpose of throwing him down. With the Testament in our hands we endeavoured to examine the probabilities of the spot; and I confess there is nothing in it which excites a scruple of incredulity in my mind. The rock here is perpendicular for about fifty feet, down which space it would be easy to hurl a person who should be unawares brought to the summit, and his perishing would be a very certain consequence. That the spot might be at a considerable distance from the city is an idea not inconsistent with St. Luke's account; for the expression, *thrusting Jesus out of the city, and leading him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built*, gives fair scope for imagining that in their rage and debate the Nazarenes might, without originally intending his murder, press upon him for a considerable distance after they had quitted the synagogue. The distance, as already noticed, from modern Nazareth to the spot is scarcely two miles; a space which, in the fury of persecution, might soon be passed over. Or, should this appear too considerable, it is by no means certain but that Nazareth may at that time have extended through the principal part of the plain, which I have described as lying before the modern town. In this case, the distance passed over might not exceed a mile. I can see, therefore, no reason for thinking otherwise than that this may be the real scene where our divine prophet Jesus received so great a dishonour from the men of his own country and of his own kindred."

Mr. Fisk, an American missionary, was at Nazareth in the autumn of 1823. His description corresponds generally with that of Mr. Jowett. He estimates the population to be from 3000 to 5000, viz. Greeks, three hundred or four hundred families; Turks, two hundred; Catholics, one hundred; Greek Catholics, forty or fifty; Maronites, twenty or thirty; say in all seven hundred families.

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken, &c.

The words here are not found in any of the books of the Old Testament, and there has been much difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of this passage.

Some have supposed that Matthew meant to refer to Ju. 13:5, to Samson as a type of Christ;

others that he refers to Is. 11:1, where the descendant of Jesse is called “a Branch;” in the Hebrew *Netzer*.

Some have supposed that he refers to some prophecy which was not recorded, but handed down by tradition.

But these suppositions are not satisfactory.

It is much more probable that Matthew refers not to any particular place, but to the *leading characteristics* of the prophecies respecting him.

The following remarks may make this clear:

1st. He does not say “by the *prophet*,” as in ch. 1:22; 2:5, 15, but “by the *prophets*,” meaning no one particularly, but the general character of the prophecies.

2d. The leading and most prominent prophecies respecting him were, that he was to be of humble life; to be despised and rejected.

See Is. 53:2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12; Ps. 22.

3d. The phrase "*he shall be called*" means the same as *he shall be*.

4th. The character of the people of Nazareth was such that they were proverbially despised and contemned, Jn. 1:46; 7:52.

To come from Nazareth, therefore, or *to be a Nazarene*, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth; *to be a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness.*

This was what had been predicted by all the prophets.

When Matthew says, therefore, that the prophecies were "*fulfilled*," his meaning is, *that the predictions of the prophets that he would be of a low and despised condition, and*

*would be rejected, were fully accomplished in his being an inhabitant of Nazareth, and despised as such.*¹

NIV Application Commentary: Matthew 2:13–23

IN THE NARRATIVE in this chapter, **Jesus' personal history repeats certain aspects of the national history of Israel**, such as:

- A. going to Egypt and
- B. coming back under divine protection (Hos. 11:1),
- C. the sorrowing of mothers over slaughtered infants in Bethlehem and
- D. the sorrowing over exiled children at the time of the Babylonian captivity (Jer. 31:15), and
- E. the hoped-for redemptive Branch (Isa. 11:1).

The Family's Escape to Egypt (2:13–15)

ONCE THE MAGI escaped safely, **the angel of the Lord again appears in a dream to warn Joseph** about Herod's scheme to murder the child (**cf. 2:16**).

¹ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Matthew & Mark*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 15–21.

This is his third dream (cf. 1:20; 2:12) and the second communication from the angel of the Lord to Joseph.

Joseph again becomes the intermediary who provides for the safety and security of the child and mother. Although he is not the biological father, Joseph is a central figure in Matthew's narration (Luke focuses on Mary, the mother).

Matthew may be continuing the legal aspect of Joseph's fatherhood from the genealogy, but he is also chronicling the leadership role that the father played in the typical Jewish family.

The angel makes explicit what has been implicit in the narrative to this point—Herod's paranoiac grasp of the throne drives him to attempt to kill the infant king of the Jews. The angel instructs Joseph how he is to care for the child and mother, and Joseph is again immediately obedient, escaping to Egypt by night with the child and his mother.

The Egyptian border lay approximately 80 miles from Bethlehem. At the border began the most arduous journey, perhaps leading to the main Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, a city that lay on the Mediterranean Sea at the western edge of the Nile Delta. In this large metropolis lived about one million Jews. Almost anywhere in Egypt the family would have been immediately safe from Herod, since it was a Roman province outside of his jurisdiction.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stayed there until after Herod's death (March/April 4 B.C.), when the angel tells them to return to Israel (2:20).

As in the narrative of the conception and birth of Jesus, **Matthew points to the flight and later return from Egypt as a "fulfillment of Scripture."** It is difficult to see how Hosea's reference back to the Exodus can imply for Matthew that Jesus' life fulfills what the prophet had said.

This allows us to see that Matthew has a multifaceted perspective on the way that Jesus “fulfills” the Old Testament Scriptures.

(1) In some cases, “fulfill” indicates the way in which the events of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry bring to actualization predictive prophecy. Such fulfillment may be a specific prediction, as in 1:22–23 (the virgin birth), or it may be a collective predictive theme, as in 3:15, where Jesus’ life ministry brings to actualization the collective Old Testament prophecy of salvation-historical righteousness.

(2) In other cases, “fulfill” can indicate the way in which Jesus brings to its intended full meaning the entire Old Testament Scripture, such as his dramatic declaration in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (see comments on 5:17–20).

(3) In still other cases, Matthew’s use of “fulfill” can indicate the way in which Jesus’ earthly life and ministry corresponded analogically or typologically (some say recapitulated or repeated) to certain aspects of the national history of Israel. This is apparently what Matthew has in view when he cites the prophet Hosea to say, “Out of Egypt I called my son” (2:15; see also 2:17–18).

In the context of his prophecy, Hosea recounts how God had faithfully brought Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus.³ ***Matthew’s point of comparison is the corporate solidarity between the nation Israel as God’s son being rescued and delivered by God, and Jesus as the One who will be revealed to be God’s “Son” par excellence.***

Jesus Messiah is not only “son of David, son of Abraham” (1:1), but he is God’s Son, which points ahead to the unique manner in which the voice from heaven will specify Jesus as the beloved Son (3:17; 17:5), and the way in which Jesus will address God as his Father (26:39–42).

Further,

Old Testament authors consistently reminded the nation of Israel to look back to their redemption by God when he brought them out of Egypt. The annual Passover was a reminder, as well as a promise, that God had provided a sacrificial lamb for his people Israel.

As Matthew harks back to Hosea’s recounting of God’s faithfully bringing Israel out of Egypt under divine protection, he points out how Jesus’ infancy corresponds analogically to Israel’s history.

The life of Jesus is the historical completion of the process of redemption.

No threat from any public official can thwart the process. Jesus here recapitulates the promise to Israel that redemption is at hand.

As Craig Blomberg emphasizes,

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

he is about to inaugurate his new covenant.

Matthew is not trying to emphasize that Jesus is a new Moses but that he actualizes the promise to the nation Israel of redemption that was initiated with the Exodus and Passover.

The Massacre of Bethlehem's Boys (2:16–18)

MATTHEW RETURNS TO narrating the historical incidents surrounding the hideous murder of the infants at Bethlehem by Herod. When Herod realized that the Magi somehow had gotten wind of his true intentions and fled, he decided to take the situation into his own hands by putting to death any potential challenger to his throne.

His earlier query of the Magi about the time of the appearing of the star gave him a fairly good estimate of the birth of the child (2:7). So he ordered all the boys in the Bethlehem vicinity who were born within the two-year time period to be killed.

This would reckon to approximately ten to thirty boys of that age, given the size of the town.

Although this is not as large a number as is often graphically portrayed in reenactments in modern movies, it is still a heart-rending loss for the village.

No other historical records exist of this incident, which is not surprising, since Bethlehem was a somewhat small, rural town at this time. The number of infant boys massacred was a huge loss for Bethlehem, but it was not an incident to stand out significantly when seen in the light of other horrific events in Herod's infamous career.

Matthew speaks of Bethlehem's grief as a tragic reminder of the heartache experienced earlier in Israel's history, fulfilling what was said "*through the prophet Jeremiah*":

A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more. (**Matt. 2:18; cf. Jer. 31:15**)

Centuries earlier, Nebuchadnezzar's army had gathered the captives from Judah in the town of Ramah before they were taken into exile to Babylon (**Jer. 40:1–2**). Jeremiah depicts Rachel, who is the personification of the mothers of Israel, mourning for her children as they are being carried away. She has no comfort as they are removed from the land, because they are "no more"—that is, no longer a nation and considered as dead. But even as Jeremiah pictures this dreadful mourning for exiled Israel, he offers from God a word of comfort: There is hope for their future because God will restore

Rachel's children to their own land (31:16–17), and messianic joy will come in the future establishment of the new covenant with Israel (31:31–34).

Matthew's use of the Jeremiah narrative is similar to the way that he earlier cited the prophet Micah (cf. 2:15).

This is not fulfillment in the sense of prediction-accomplishment (see comments on 1:23; 2:6, 13–15); rather, it is a case of analogical correspondence.

As Herod attempts to eliminate the newborn king of the Jews, the events of Jesus' earthly life correspond analogically to an earlier attempt by a foreign power to wipe out God's chosen people.

But the advent of Jesus' life also marks the arrival of the comfort promised to the Jews sent into exile.

In Bethlehem, once again the nation of Israel experiences suffering and anguish, but the earlier promise will now be actualized. Rachel had died and was buried in Zelzah near Ramah, while traveling to Bethlehem. **Matthew links the site of the deportation and the site of the massacre, where in both cases foreign forces attempt to wipe out God's plan of salvation through the chosen people of Israel and through the Messiah.** But "God's power is greater than the power of sorrow-bringing forces," so with God's sovereign protection of the infant Messiah, he brings to completion the experience of the weeping at both the Exile and Bethlehem.

The promised messianic deliverer has arrived to inaugurate the new

covenant promised by Jeremiah
(Jer. 31:31–35).

Herod's Death (2:19)

NOT LONG AFTER ordering the grisly murder of the infant boys at Bethlehem, Herod became deathly ill with a painful terminal disease (see Bridging Contexts section). He died at the age of sixty-nine at his palace in Jericho in March, 4 B.C.

He had commanded that many influential Jews should be executed when he died so that people would mourn at the time of his death instead of rejoicing, but the order was countermanded by his sister Salome.¹³ An extensive burial procession of national dignitaries and military units marched with Herod's body on a golden bier studded with precious stones to where he was buried (near the Herodium).

After remaking his will at least seven times, Herod had finally settled on dividing the kingdom between three of his remaining sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip.

Archelaus, a nineteen-year-old son by Malthace, succeeded to his throne over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (cf. 2:22). He reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6 and quickly displayed the same kind of cruelty that had marked his father's reign.

He overreacted to an uprising in the temple at Passover after his father's death by sending in troops and cavalry, who killed about three thousand pilgrims. Because of his cruelty, Augustus Caesar feared a revolution from the people, so he deposed Archelaus and banished him to Gaul in A.D. 6.

The rule over Judea was thereafter passed to Roman rulers called prefects, one of whom was Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36; Luke 3:1; 23:1).

Herod Antipas, the seventeen-year-old younger brother of Archelaus by Malthace, became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; he reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 (cf. Matt. 14:1–12; Luke 23:6–12). He is the most prominent of Herod's sons in the New Testament because he ruled the region of Jesus' primary ministry. His chief infamy comes from his execution of John the Baptist for criticizing his scandalous marriage to his half-brother's wife (see comments on Matt. 14:1–12) and from his interview of Jesus prior to his crucifixion (cf. Luke 23:6–12).

The Family's Return to Nazareth **(2:19–23)**

WHEN HEROD THE GREAT dies, the angel appears once again to Joseph in a dream.

This is the fourth of five dreams in the narrative of the first two chapters & the third of four interchanges between Joseph & an angel.

The angel instructs Joseph to bring the child and mother back to Israel, because the threat from Herod is over.

The plural **“those”** who were trying to take the child’s life are dead”
is probably another reference to the culpability of
the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, whose power
base would be threatened along with Herod’s if a
new king was to rule the Jews (cf. 2:3).

The family probably stayed in Egypt no more than a year.

When they discover that Herod’s son Archelaus is ruling over the region of Judea in his father’s place, **Joseph is warned in another dream not to return to Bethlehem. Therefore, the family takes a detour to Nazareth in the region of Galilee**, a region governed by Herod Antipas.

In Nazareth the parents raise Jesus, away from the political machinations of Jerusalem.

Nazareth was located in the hills in lower Galilee at an elevation of 1,300 feet, midway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. It was not a strategic town politically, militarily, or religiously in Jesus’ day.

At this time, it probably had a small population of around five hundred people. A ten-minute walk up to the ridge north of Nazareth provided villagers with a magnificent view of the trade routes a thousand feet below on the valley floor as well as of Herod Antipas’s capital city, Sepphoris.

Being miraculously protected and guided, Jesus will grow up in Nazareth, and “he will be called a Nazarene.”

Several items invite our attention here:

(1) The most straightforward observation is that **Matthew identifies Jesus as the one who came from the town called Nazareth.** People did not have last names in ancient times, so they were identified in other ways. Since “Jesus” was a fairly common name, one person named “Jesus” was set off from others with the same name by expressions such as “Jesus, the carpenter’s son” or “Jesus from Nazareth.” The term “Nazarene” (*Nazoraioi*) derives from “Nazareth” (*Nazaret*) to indicate a person from that town. Matthew uses these expressions “Jesus of Nazareth” and “Jesus the Nazarene” interchangeably to specify Jesus’ hometown (see 21:11; 26:71).

(2) Matthew’s wordplay intends to suggest deeper significance, because **by calling Jesus a Nazarene, it “fulfilled what was said through the prophets.”** Since we cannot find any direct Old Testament prophecy with this wording, Matthew intends the expression to be a form of indirect discourse. His reference here alludes to several Old Testament prophecies that relate to the wordplay conjured up by “Nazareth/Nazarene.”

(a) One suggestion builds on the relationship between “Nazareth” and the Aramaic word for “vow” (*nezer*), suggesting that the founders of the village were members of a religious sect whose vows formed the focus of their practices, such as the Nazirite vows of ascetic separation found in Numbers 6:1–21: abstaining from strong drink, not cutting hair, and avoiding contact with the dead. This view suggests further that

since the expression “Nazirite of God” was used interchangeably with “holy one of God” in the LXX (cf. Judg. 13:7; 16:17), **“Nazarene” is linked with “Nazirite” (*nazir*) to indicate that Jesus was a Nazirite, a sort of second Samson (cf. Num. 6:1–21 with Judg. 13:5, 7; 16:17). In this case, Matthew may be emphasizing that Jesus took on certain vows as “the holy one of God” (cf. Mk 1:24). He was a man of purity and holiness.**

But the portrait of Jesus from the Gospels does not square with him as a Nazirite. Indeed, John the Baptist was more like this than Jesus. Jesus chided the people of Israel for rejecting John because he was an ascetic, and they rejected Jesus because he was “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners’ ” (11:16–19). Jesus would have violated the vow when he drank wine and when he touched the dead as he raised them (9:23–26).

(b) A more likely suggestion is that Nazareth was originally settled by people from the line of David, who gave the settlement a consciously messianic name, connecting the establishment of the town with the hope of the coming *nešer* (“Branch”) of Isaiah 11:1:

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch [nešer] will bear fruit.*

The prophecy of Isaiah 11:1–5 was one of the most popular texts of Davidic messianism in early Judaism, so it is not unlikely that a group returning from the Exile and establishing a new village would give their town a name that reflects that hope.²² The believing remnant of Israel also are called “the branch” (*nešer*; NIV “shoot”) in Isaiah 60:21, demonstrating the solidarity of the remnant with the promised Branch of Isaiah 11:1. The theme of a messianic “branch” or “shoot” surfaces strikingly in other Old Testament contexts as well, using synonyms for *nešer*, such as *šemaḥ* (“sprout, branch, horn”; e.g., Ps. 132:17; Isa. 4:2; 53:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ezek. 29:21; Zech. 3:8; 6:12), *ḥoṭṭer* (“shoot”; e.g., Isa. 11:1), and *yoneq* (“young plant”) and *šoreš* (“root”; Isa. 53:2).

Although *nešer* only occurs in Isaiah 11:1 and 60:21 in a messianic sense, the concept of the Branch became an important designation of the Messiah in the rabbinic literature and targums, and it was also interpreted messianically by the Qumran community, where “Branch of David”

became a favorite appellation for the expected Messiah.²⁴ This is important to note, because the term used to refer to the *nešer* of Isaiah 11:1 in the Qumran literature is *šemah*, demonstrating a direct equivalent usage of the terms. The expression is also used with reference to the messianic promise of 2 Samuel 7:12–14, the promise of a permanent sovereign from the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49:10, and other messianic contexts.²⁷

Together, these strands point to a significant, recognizable Old Testament theme of a messianic Branch of the line of David who would bring deliverance to Israel. The indirect discourse of Matthew's allusion to "the prophets" allows him to draw on both the Isaiah 11:1 *nešer* prophecy as well as the substance of several Old Testament prophecies that relate to the wordplay conjured up by the "Branch" motif. **The founders of Nazareth apparently were members of a movement who identified with this prophetic tradition. They were both waiting for the messianic "Branch" (Isa. 11:1) as well as living out the role of the faithful of Israel as the "branch of God's planting" (60:21). This messianic content should, in turn, be related to the announcement of Jesus' conception as the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14.**

(c) Matthew also uses "Nazarene" as a slang or idiomatic expression for an individual from a remote, despised area. He draws a connection between the divinely arranged association of Jesus with Nazareth and various Old Testament prophets who foretold that the Messiah would be despised (see, e.g., Ps. 22:6–8, 13; 69:8, 20–21; Isa. 11:1; 49:7; Dan. 9:26). The theme culminates in Isaiah 53:2, especially in the contrast of the powerful Branch that is ignominious:

**He grew up before him like a tender shoot [*yoneq*],
and like a root [*šoreš*] out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,**

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

The relative ignominy of Nazareth, in comparison with Jerusalem or even Bethlehem, becomes the hometown of the Messiah.

The infancy narrative has led up to this theme. This Messiah did not come with fanfare or glory but was born in relative obscurity in Bethlehem. He and his family fled with powerless humility in the night to Egypt, and his arrival in history was surrounded with grief and sorrow when the Bethlehem infant boys were slaughtered.

The child would not be raised even in Bethlehem with its Davidic overtones, but rather in the even more obscure town of Nazareth. ***Nathaniel displayed popular opinion when he asked, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:45-46).***

Matthew consistently returns to the theme of Jesus as an unpretentious figure (Matt. 8:20; 11:16-19; 15:7-8) and therefore is the One who fulfills the Old Testament prophecies that the

Messiah would be despised. The consistent reference to Jesus the Nazarene presumed some kind of negative overtone as an expression of sneering scorn. This scorn was also attached to Jesus' followers when they were ridiculed as "the sect of the Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5).

(3) Matthew's reflection on Jesus' early life thus intends for his readers to see a double meaning in the expression "Jesus the Nazarene."

On the one hand, Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope for a messianic *nešer*—the "Branch" out of the line of David. On the other hand, Jesus' association with lowly Nazareth gives notice that his coming is not in glory but in humble surroundings. As the Branch from the royal line, Jesus would be "hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn." Used by his followers, the

expression “Jesus the Nazarene”
denoted faith in him as the
messianic deliverer (Acts 2:22; 3:6;
10:38), but used by his enemies, it
was a title of scorn to deny his
messianic identity (Matt. 26:71; Mark
14:67).

Matthew says nothing about Jesus’ early years in Nazareth. Recent archaeological discoveries can fill in some of the blanks about what life may have been like **during those years. Education was valued highly in the people of Israel even among the poor, so most young children received the rudiments of schooling, including reading and writing. Jewish education was directed to learning the Old Testament Scriptures and perhaps learning local expressions of Judaism. Especially in the country, participation in the synagogue influenced the values, practices, and worldview of a young child.**

Jesus’ education would have also included learning the skills of his father—carpentry (see comments on 13:55) and other skills necessary to train a young boy for adult responsibilities, such as tending the family fields. Jesus may have had to take on adult responsibilities early, because it is likely that Joseph died sometime after the trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve (Luke 2:41–51) and before the beginning of his public ministry when he was thirty (Luke 3:23). The loss of a father was hard on a family, placing extra burden and expectations on the rest of the family (see comments on 12:46–50; 13:55–58).

Jesus grew up in a multicultural environment in which a number of languages were spoken by the common people. The Gospels all record Jesus’ life and teachings in Greek (common language for trade and commerce of the Roman Empire), but the common language of the Jews in Galilee was Aramaic. A few of Jesus’ statements in Aramaic have been brought over into the Gospels. Devout Jews also knew at least some form of vernacular and literary Hebrew, as is evidenced by Jesus’ reading the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–20). The common people also knew some Latin, which was spoken especially by Roman military personnel. For example, the sign

Pilate had nailed on Jesus' cross included a Latin title (John 19:20). Like other public people in the region of Galilee, Jesus was most likely multilingual.

In sum,
the picture of Jesus in Matthew 1–2 is an unfathomable equilibrium of human and divine elements.

Jesus has a human lineage and a supernatural conception and birth. He is born into very human circumstances, but those circumstances are guided supernaturally. While Jesus' human development was similar to other young boys of his day, Matthew has already underscored the uniqueness of his divine nature as Immanuel, "God with us." Yet none of the Gospel writers separates Jesus' human and divine natures. Both belong to the one man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, whose public ministry becomes the central focus in Matthew's ensuing chapters.

MATTHEW'S PORTRAIT OF JESUS. Matthew introduced a theme in chapter 1 that becomes one of the leading characteristics of chapter 2, namely, **the "fulfillment formula" (e.g., 2:14). As he records the historical details of the earthly life of Jesus, he looks beyond to the Old Testament Scriptures and**

declares to his readers that Jesus' life fulfills ancient prophetic pronouncements. This theme is a significant clue to understanding Matthew's purpose for writing his Gospel.

He varies the theme from direct predictive prophecy to analogical (or typological) correspondence to demonstrate the way that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies. Both ways give a more complete picture of Jesus as the anticipated Messiah of Israel.

(1) The first occurrence of the fulfillment formula points to Jesus' conception and birth, which fulfills the predictive prophecy that the messianic deliverer will be born of a virgin. The child will be known as Immanuel, which prepares Matthew's readers for the incarnational truth guaranteed in the birth of the child Jesus, that "God is with us" (1:22–23; cf. Isa. 7:14).

(2) Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea fulfills the predictive prophecy of the coming Messiah who will be born in David's own ancient birthplace and who will rule and shepherd the people of Israel (2:6; cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; Mic. 5:2).

(3) Jesus fulfills analogically/typologically the correspondence between Israel as God's son being rescued and delivered from Egypt by God and Jesus as God's Son being protected from harm as he goes down and comes back from Egypt under divine protection (2:15; Hos. 11:1). The covenant with Israel that was initiated with the Passover and Exodus is now fulfilled in the arrival of Jesus to initiate the new covenant.

(4) Jesus' life events fulfill analogically/typologically the correspondence between Israel's mothers sorrowing over their exiled children at the time of the Babylonian captivity and Bethlehem's grieving mothers at the slaughter of the innocent boys. Herod's attempts to eliminate the newborn king of the Jews correspond analogically to an earlier attempt by a foreign power to wipe out God's chosen people, but Jesus' advent also marks the arrival of the comfort to Israel promised to the Jews who had been sent into exile in Babylon (2:17–18; Jer. 31:15).

(5) Finally, Jesus' hometown roots in Nazareth point toward his identity as the One who fulfills both the direct prophecy of the messianic Branch, a king from David's line who will judge with righteousness and strike the earth with the rod (2:23; cf. Isa. 11:1–5; also Jer. 23:5), and the direct prophecy of the despised, messianic suffering Servant (Matt. 2:23; cf. Isa. 52–53).

Matthew paints a bold picture of Jesus by drawing together strands of prophecy from the Old Testament that challenge sectarian expectations within Israel. Jesus is as much as any of them could have hoped for, but he is far more. He is the incarnate God who has come to be their King.

History prophesied or prophecy historicized? Some critics today charge Matthew with composing an account of Jesus' life that is a fanciful manipulation of facts to try and fit what the prophets have said. They claim that Matthew either fabricated details or else manipulated the facts of Jesus' life to try to make it appear that he fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. For example, some suggest that Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, intentionally made up a life story about Jesus that fulfilled such prophecies as being born of a virgin in Bethlehem, or going to Egypt, or being raised in Nazareth. What about this? Did Matthew write an accurate account of what happened in history that fulfilled ancient prophecies, or did Matthew create stories about Jesus to make it appear that he fulfilled those prophecies?

Our claim is the former: Matthew recorded accurately what happened in the historical life and ministry of Jesus, and those events were the miraculous fulfillment of ancient prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. Evangelical scholars have satisfactorily answered charges of critics along four basic lines. (1) The creation of falsified historical accounts to substantiate a claim to prophetic fulfillment is not a staple of Jewish interpretive history. As a Jewish author, Matthew had no precedent for such a blatant disregard for Jewish interpretation of Old Testament prophecies. Moreover, he would have been subject to intense criticism from the Jewish interpretive community for falsifying predictive prophecy.

(2) The apostles, including Matthew, were so gripped by the reality of Jesus as the Messiah that they willingly suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews, and most of them later experienced martyrdom. They would not likely have been willing to suffer because of a lie about a person who really was not the Messiah.

(3) When the Gospels were written and circulated, there were still many people living who had seen the events of Jesus' life. They would have confronted Matthew with his fabrication. But no such record of this kind of accusation against Matthew surfaces from any ancient record.

(4) The Jewish people themselves would have used any so-called fabrications as a way of discrediting the claims that Jesus was the Messiah. If Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem, or if his claim to being Messiah were not in line with Old Testament prophecies, Jews familiar with the details would have readily denied their reality. However, we don't hear of any such accusations, not even from the Talmud, which at points speaks derogatorily about Jesus and his followers but never accuses them of falsification of Jesus' life to fit messianic prophecies.

The death of Herod the Great. Matthew's manner of recording the death of Herod is another poignant clue to the way he has designed to record the life and ministry of Jesus Messiah. Whereas Josephus gives a rather graphic picture of Herod's death, mainly to emphasize how God was inflicting punishment on Herod for his lawless deeds and impiety, Matthew merely states that Herod died, prompting the angel of the Lord to recall Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus from Egypt. His record of Herod's death, therefore, is another explanatory incident in the divine guidance of the infant Messiah's life.

Matthew may have had thoughts similar to those of Josephus about divine retribution on Herod because of the repugnancy of his murderous deeds, but he doesn't vent them. Instead, he concentrates exclusively on the events of the infant Jesus' life and how those events fulfilled

Old Testament messianic prophecies. His passing reference to Herod's death serves only to mark the sovereign work of God in protecting the infant Jesus Messiah so that he can return to his homeland to be raised in preparation for his future work of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God (cf. 4:23).

Modern calendars and the date of Jesus' birth. When Christians first learn that Jesus was most likely born anywhere from 6–4 B.C., they are confused. Doesn't the dating of Western calendars assume the birth of Jesus in A.D. 1? Could this mean that our New Testament records are in error? A little investigation helps us to see that the discrepancy does not arise from the biblical record but from the attempts in later centuries to establish a birth date for Jesus.

Modern calendars begin the present era, often called the "Christian era," with Jesus' birth. Dates after his birth are designated A.D. (Lat., *anno domini*, "in the year of our Lord") and dates before his birth are designated B.C. ("Before Christ").

The first person to develop this system was the Christian monk Dionysius Exiguus in A.D. 525. Prior to him the Romans had developed the dating system used throughout the Western world, using the designation "AUC" (*ab urbe condita*—"from the foundation of the city [of Rome]"—or *anno urbis conditae*—"in the year of the foundation of the city"). Dionysius believed that it would be more reverent for calendrical dating to begin with Jesus' birth rather than the foundation of Rome. So with the historical records available to him, Dionysius reckoned the birth of Jesus to have occurred on December 25, 753 AUC (i.e., approximately 754 years after the founding of Rome). That placed the commencement of the Christian era at January 1, 754 AUC (allowing for lunar adjustment), or under the new reckoning, January 1, A.D. 1.

However, Dionysius did not have all of the historical data now available to scholars to make a more precise dating.

We now know that King Herod died in March/April 750 AUC. Since Matthew states that Jesus was born while Herod was still alive, Jesus was actually born according to the Roman calendar between 748–750 AUC, four to six years earlier than Dionysius’s calculations. Thus, a more accurate dating of the birth of Jesus places it in 4–6 B.C. This has nothing to do with the accuracy of the biblical records, only the historical accuracy of the well-intentioned but misguided Dionysius Exiguus.

JESUS MESSIAH CAME into the world to save it, but from the beginning he received threats. Yet in the middle of the threatening forces of the world, God’s protective, guiding forces came to play in the life of the infant Jesus and family. Two points call for our attention here.

He will be called a Nazarene. The one named Jesus, who will save his people from their sins, Immanuel, “God with us,” who is hailed as “king of the Jews,” is also the one called a “Nazarene.” Such is the way that Matthew concludes his astonishing narrative of Jesus’ infancy. Matthew’s identification of Jesus with this epithet is a double entendre that focuses on him as the fulfillment of the contrasting Branch and Servant prophecies. **Jesus is both the powerful Branch of righteous redemption for Israel, but he is also the despised suffering Servant, who will take away our infirmities and will be pierced for our transgressions.**

The name “Nazarene” was for Jesus a title of honor as he became for Israel the long-awaited redemptive messianic Branch. But it also was a title of scorn as he became for Israel the despised suffering Servant.

We are called “Christians.” The earliest Christians were called “the sect of the Nazarenes” by the Jews (Acts 24:5), bringing over the contempt with which they held Jesus’ disciples. Soon, pagans began to call Jesus’ disciples “Christians,” which also had a double significance. The book of Acts indicates that in the large metropolis of Antioch, with its many competing cults and mystery religions, those who spoke so much about being disciples of the *Christos* were soon called *Christianoi*, “Christ’s people.” But wearing the name “Christian” was considered a badge of contempt (Acts 26:28). Peter tries to shore up the resolve of the persecuted church by saying that when pagans regard them with hostility, the name “Christian” is a badge of honor (1 Peter 4:16). Early in the second century, those accused of believing in Jesus Christ were asked by Roman officials whether or not they were “Christians.” If they admitted to the name, they were killed (or, if Roman citizens, were sent to Rome for trial). In the days of persecution of the early church, the use of the term was dangerous, because it clearly marked out to the Romans those who believed in a God who was not the emperor.⁴⁰

As the name “Nazarene” was for Jesus, so the name “Christian” is a badge of honor, but it is also a badge of scorn and a designation for persecution. For many in the world today, wearing the name “Christian” is

similar to what it was like for the early church.

In places like Indonesia, buildings are burned just because they are known to be “Christian” houses of worship. In communist China, people are placed in jail simply because they possess and distribute “Christian” literature. And in the face of worldwide radical Islamic terrorism, persecution for being a Christian has come even closer to home.

When Mark and Lara, two of our former students, graduated from college, they married and joined an international mission organization. They trained for several years to become Bible translators and finally fulfilled their dreams by participating in translation work in a primarily Muslim country. My wife and I recently woke up on a Sunday morning to hear the television news that an international church in the city where they live had been terrorized by two men who walked in during the services and tossed several hand grenades at the parishioners. The news was sketchy at first, but it was known that five people had been killed, two of them Americans. At least forty others had been wounded, perhaps as many as ten of them Americans. Later we cringed as we heard Mark’s name read over the news as having been wounded.

The country Mark and Lara live in is only about 2 percent Christian. They say that the people by and large are extremely kind and helpful to them. But there were these extremists who attacked the church only because it was a “Christian” house of worship.

The newspapers interviewed Mark a day or so after the incident. Lara and their two children were safe. When asked if they were going to leave, he said that they have contingency plans to leave if necessary, but they’d like to stay. In a gripping part of the interview, he

acknowledged that he had been attacked because he was a Christian, but then he said that he would like to stay, because he is a Christian: “I’m a Christian. I believe my safety lies in God’s hands, not in man’s.”

That is the example of Jesus the Nazarene at work in his life. Today many of us wear the name “Christian” with relative ease. But in our own way, the name indicates for us both honor and scorn or suffering. Discipleship to Jesus will come to mean in Matthew’s Gospel that we become like him (10:24–25). This is also the consistent theme of the other New Testament authors (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Peter 2:21). And if we become like him, we also will bear his name, with both positive and negative associations.

Torture and persecution for being a Christian seem far from a possibility in most of our everyday worlds. Yet persecution may become much more familiar to each of us than we expect. The increasing secularization of Western culture does not bode well for us. Christians are discouraged from denouncing practices condemned in Scripture, whether it is obscenity, pornography, or homosexuality. In the name of “freedom of religion” many of the normal practices of faith once enjoyed—such as public prayers or even displays of a manger scene at Christmas—have been stripped away. The agenda of much public policy seems more like freedom *from* religion.

It is not by accident that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was identified with it. It was a town whose name was given in recognition of the hope of the coming messianic “Branch” in Isaiah 11:1. But his relationship to Nazareth means additionally that Jesus came to be identified not with the center of the religious and political establishment in Jerusalem. Jesus was not part of the political, religious, or militaristic establishment. Rather, he fulfilled the prophecy of a messianic figure who came from the common people, **who was a man of sorrows, who was often despised**, but who was ultimately the messianic Servant to justify the many and carry their iniquities (e.g., Isa. 52:13–53:12).

Although his messianic sacrifice is unique, we are nonetheless provided in Jesus' incarnation an example of humility and servanthood that will challenge our own self-serving desires for comfort, fame, fortune, and glory.

Therefore, our walk with Jesus in this world will involve some kind of suffering for his name. Jesus suffered when doing the right and good thing.

Persecution marked the fate of the church from its earliest days, yet it did not dim their passion for following Jesus, no matter what the cost.

Paul tells young pastor Timothy,
**“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus
will be persecuted”**
(2 Tim. 3:12).

Joseph, the adoptive father.

A unique thrust of Matthew’s Gospel is the way that Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, stands out significantly.

In only his Gospel does Joseph have any prominence.

So along with our Christological focus on the portrait of Jesus that emerges from the infancy narrative, we also rightly look to see in Joseph’s role in the account the contemporary significance of the lessons that Matthew intended to pass on to his readers.

Having started out in Nazareth when the angel appeared to him with the announcement of the miraculous conception of the baby who would become king, Joseph appears for the last time in Matthew's Gospel as he leads the family back to Nazareth.

The amazing events that transpired in less than three years must have made this young father's head spin. He was a silent but strong figure as he steadfastly guided and protected his little family. What tremendous love for his wife and son must have sustained him!

In chapter 1 we see his love for his wife displayed as he first desires to protect her from disgrace and then as he obeys the direction of the angel and takes his betrothed to be his own wife, in spite of the overwhelming *human* evidence of unfaithfulness. And in chapter 2 we see his love for his wife and son displayed as he goes against all the forces of the political and religious establishment to obey God and protect his family. As a father, I am humbled to the point of obedience to God myself as I see his example.

Yet, we must remember that this is not Joseph's biological son. We might comprehend more readily the sacrifice that Joseph made if this child were of his own blood, but **it causes us to honor his obedience even more when we recognize that this is his adopted son. The bond between them did not derive from the deep emotional and spiritual tie of father and genetic son. It derived from the deep bond of obedience to the true Father of this Son.**

In this way, Joseph continues to be a powerful example to all of us as parents, because our

children also are truly not our own. They are a gift to us from God, their true Father.

That, I believe, is one of the most powerful lessons to be learned from infant dedication services, or whatever your church tradition may call them. **Young parents must start out their parental privilege by giving their own little baby back to the Father.**

We learned that dramatically with our first child, Michelle. The pastor of the church we were attending while I was going through seminary stressed in the dedication service that we were not only dedicating our little baby girl to God, but we were dedicating ourselves to raise her for God, because she is his child on loan to us. Just a month later she developed a severe influenza that steadily weakened and dehydrated her. One rainy, dark evening her vomiting and diarrhea had become so severe that on doctor's orders, we rushed her to the hospital. The examining doctor said that if we had waited until the morning, she would have died of dehydration. So we left our little four-month-old baby girl—"Squeaky," the nurses nicknamed her because she hadn't the strength to give a real moan—in their care and drove home. Lynne and I cried on the way home through the wetness of that eerie night, recognizing how close we had come to losing her. But in our tears we reaffirmed to God that Michelle was his. We had given her back to him and had dedicated ourselves to raise her for him. So, in our tears we loosened our grip on Michelle and said that we would follow his will for her life, for he is her true Father.

This is what Joseph teaches us as an obedient father of an adoptive son. **For all of us, whether biological or adoptive, parenting means to obey our child's true Father.**

Walter and Thanne Wangerin have raised children born to them as well as children adopted. They understand deeply the differences, especially the heart-wrenching that occurs when an adoptive child seeks to find her biological parents. But they learned deeply from Joseph the holy mystery of parenting another's child. And in that lesson, they also share with all parents the fact that **loving our children aright means to raise them for their heavenly Father, in whose image they were created.**

Wangerin writes expressively:

In all our children's faces is the image of their Creator. When any parents, by loving God, love their children right; and when, by following God, they lead their children out of the house, into adulthood and the purpose for which they were born, then in that fullness they, too, will find the face of God the Father, who had lent them the children in the first place.

This was the lesson that he learned from Joseph, who had raised his adoptive Son for his heavenly Father—a fitting lesson for us all.²

² Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 109–128.