

MATTHEW 2:13-23: The Flight to Egypt and Herod Slaughtering Babies –
A study guide by Jamie Johnson

The Flight to Egypt

13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”

Matthew 2:13:

Observation:

This is the first geographical destination for Joseph, Mary and Jesus in this excerpt. Where to?

Why did Joseph take Jesus and Mary there? The command and the threat.

How long was he to remain there? Until I tell you.

Interpretation:

The Greek says that the angel of the Lord (angelos kyriou ἄγγελος κυρίου) appears (phainetai φαίνεται) from phainó (φαίνω meaning “to bring to light, to cause to appear”) to Joseph in a dream (onar ὄναρ).

Child usage (paidion παιδίον).

What is a pediatrician? It's a doctor for children. Why do we call it that? It comes from a Greek word for child we will study: paidion (Greek: παιδίον, pronounced pahee-dee'-on). It means "a young child" and is used for "a little child, an infant, little one" (Source: <https://biblehub.com/greek/3813.htm>), sounding a bit more endearing than the other words for child. And you will see this endearing quality come out in the context of the word's usage.

Luke 18:16 translates as follows:

- But Jesus, having called to [Him] them, said, Permit the little children to come to Me, and not do forbid them; of the for such is the kingdom - of God.

The word used is paidía (παιδιά) -- "little children" -- and it seems to convey the concept of little children belonging as to a father (just as those in Christ belong to the Father).

Matthew 18:3 uses the same word in its translation from the Greek:

and said, Truly I say to you, if not you turn and become as the little children, no not shall you enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

This really points to children belonging to the Heavenly Father. We are designed for dependency. Why do we eat? We are designed to rely on something outside ourselves. Ultimately, we are designed to be dependent on God, to have relationship with Him

through Jesus Christ. And think about Christ as an infant. He humbled Himself to be dependent on Mary and Joseph.

Destroy – the translations unanimously. Greek is apolesai (ἀπολέσαι) and it has its roots in apollumi (ἀπόλλυμι), which relates to Apollyon, the Greek word for Abaddon, both meaning Destroyer or Destruction. Apollyon appears in Revelation 9:11 (“[11](#)They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.”) and Abaddon appears in Job 26:6, 28:22, 31:12, Psalm 88:11 and Proverbs 15:11. Herod is an instrument of Satan.

Application:

Trusting God, waiting on God – His command, His timing.

Gratitude for what Jesus did for us (humbling Himself as a child).

Thankfulness for being God’s endeared children through Christ.

Matthew 2:14:

[14](#)So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

Observation:

What was Joseph’s response?

When was he to go? Immediately upon being commanded.

When did he go? Immediately.

Interpretation:

The phrase “while it was still night” is used for when Joseph took Jesus and Mary to Egypt. Why is that significant? It shows Joseph’s immediate obedience and keeping his family safe.

Application:

Immediate obedience.

Matthew 2:15:

[15](#)He remained there until the death of Herod. *This* was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

Observation:

Until when did Joseph remain in Egypt? Until the death of Herod.

How did the Angel of the Lord tell Joseph it was safe to return? Herod’s death.

When did Herod die? 4 B.C.

How does the date of Herod’s death challenge questionable thinking about how Jesus spent His time in Egypt (e.g., the idea of the Ark of the Covenant hidden in a church in Aksum, Ethiopia, where Jesus allegedly spent time as a child where God taught him from the Seat of the Ark [1.2.3.](#))? Consider the truth Jesus being fully man and fully God. Humanly, as an infant to 2 year old, would this make sense? Divinely, Jesus is God and wouldn’t need to be taught.)? Herod died in 4 B.C. Most agree that Jesus was born between 4 B.C. and 6 B.C. Most scholars say 4 B.C. So, Jesus was either an infant or a 2-year-old, most likely an infant, when leaving Egypt. Importance of Discernment.

Why did Joseph take Jesus and Mary to Egypt? Prophecy.

Where does the prophecy come from? Hosea 11:1.

What is the context of the prophecy? Read it Hosea 11:1-2. God calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt in the time of Moses. However, Israel went away from him.

RE: The prophecy in Hosea 11:1: "Matthew, under the inspiration of the Spirit, applies it to Jesus. He sees the history of Israel (God's children) recapitulated in the life of Jesus (God's unique Son). Just as Israel as an infant nation went down into Egypt, so the child Jesus went there. And as Israel was led by God out of Egypt, so also was Jesus." (1988 NIV footnote)

Interpretation:

What does Joseph's remaining in Egypt until the death of Herod show in regards to Joseph's obedience?

How can we discern ideas and teachings of others and test them and hold to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21)?

What is our ultimate authority?

How does the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 contrast Israel (God's children) and Jesus (God's unique Son) when considering the context of Hosea 11:1-2 and the context of this passage in Matthew 2?

Application:

Continual obedience, not just initial or a checklist.

Trusting God, waiting on God – His command, His timing, His Word (remember the prophecy, too).

Discernment. Go to Scripture for the ultimate answers.

Matthew 2:16:

Herod Slaughters Babies

[16](#) Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.

Observation:

How did Herod handle his anger?

Who was Herod's target?

Who were his victims?

In the Greek, the passage says that Herod "put to death" (aneilen ἀνεἶλεν) from anaireo which means to take away or make an end).

Interpretation:

What was the result of Herod targeting One in his anger (considerations: multiple children, not just Bethlehem but its vicinity, 2 years old and under)?

What is the result of sinful, uncontrolled anger?

What's the relationship between anger and murder? How can we understand this from Scripture (And we should use Scripture to interpret Scripture)?

Matthew 5:21-24 New American Standard Bible (NASB):

²¹“You have heard that ^[a]the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be ^[b]liable to the court.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be ^[c]guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘^[d]You good-for-nothing,’ shall be ^[e]guilty before ^[f]the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be ^[g]guilty *enough to go* into the ^[h]fiery hell. ²³Therefore if you are presenting your ^[i]offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your ^[j]offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your ^[k]offering.

Application:

When is anger sinful? When is it not?

How does sin impact others (it’s not about you)?

How should we handle anger?

Matthew 2:17-18:

¹⁷Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

¹⁸“A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”

Observation:

Where is the prophecy found in the Old Testament? Jeremiah 31:15

What is the context? Israel’s mourning turned to joy

Interpretation:

Study note for Jeremiah 31:15: “Quoted in Mt 2:18, 2h343 Herod’s orders to kill all the male infants “in Bethlehem and its vicinity” (Mt 2:16 are stated to be a fulfillment of this passage. *Ramah*. Located about five miles north of Jerusalem, it was one of the towns through which Jerusalem’s people passed on their way to exile in Babylonia (see 40:1; cf. Isa 10:29; Hos 5:8). *Rachel*. Jacob’s favorite wife (see Ge 29:30) and the grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh (see Ge 30:22-24; 48:1-2), the two most prominent and powerful tribes in the northern kingdom. The name is used here to personify that kingdom” (1988 NIV footnote).

How does the context of Israel’s mourning turning to joy relate to the Matthew 2 passage?

Application:

Suffering happens, but is part of the bigger picture. Trusting God – His timing and Word.

Joy comes out of grief. Why can we believe this as grief is guaranteed in life?

While this verse in Matthew uses a different Greek word for children (τέκνα tekna from τέκνον teknon meaning a child – figuratively anyone living in dependence on God), it is worth considering an application for our times from a similar passage using a different Greek word for children in Acts 7:19, which refers to a different killing of infants at the hand of Pharaoh:

Brephos (Greek: βρήφος, pronounced bref'-os). This means "an unborn or newborn child" and is often used to refer to an infant, babe or a child in arms (Source: <https://biblehub.com/greek/1025.htm>). While there are [plenty of sound arguments against abortion](#), this Greek word is a fundamental one. The unborn are children. Let's look further in context where this word for child is used.

[Acts 7:19](#) translates from the Greek to the following:

He having dealt treacherously with the race of us, he mistreated the fathers of us, - making [them] the infants abandon of them unto the not they would live.

And due to the "Yoda-speak" from the Greek translation, let's see [the NASB translation](#):

It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

Recall that "took shrewd advantage of" in the Greek is "dealt treacherously with" and it is in reference to the killing of the infants at the hands of Pharaoh (see the [prior verse](#) for context). However, there is more to say here. The word for infants used is bréphe (βρήφη), a form of the word brephos, the Greek word for child meaning newborn or unborn. It is treacherous to kill a newborn. Likewise, it is treacherous to kill the unborn.

Matthew 2:19-20:

[19](#)But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, [20](#)“Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.”

Observation:

Who was seeking the life of the Child? Those – plural

This is the second geographical destination for Joseph, Mary and Jesus in this excerpt. Where to?

Why did Joseph take Jesus and Mary there? The command. And Herod was dead.

Interpretation:

Again like verse 13: The Greek says that the angel of the Lord (angelos kyriou ἄγγελος κυρίου) appears (phainetai φαίνεται from φαίνω meaning “to bring to light, to cause to appear”) to Joseph in a dream (onar ὄναρ).

Child usage (paidion παιδίον).

Application:

Trusting God, waiting on God – His command, His timing.

Gratitude for what Jesus did for us (humbling Himself as a child).

Thankfulness for being God's endeared children through Christ.

Matthew 2:21:

[21](#) So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

Observation:

What was Joseph's response?

When did he go? When he got up (see interpretation for more).

Interpretation:

The Greek says "And having arisen" (egertheis ἐγερθεῖς from egeiró ἐγείρω meaning "to waken") Joseph took his family to Israel. So, Joseph left when he woke up (after the dream in verse 20). He had the dream, woke up and left.

Application:

Immediate obedience.

Are you obeying God when you awaken? Are you putting Him first?

Matthew 2:22:

[22](#) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned *by God* in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee,

Observation:

Why was Joseph afraid?

What did God do?

What did Joseph do?

Interpretation:

Who was Archelaus? "This son of Herod the Great ruled over Judea and Samaria for only ten years (4 B.C.-A.D. 6). He was unusually cruel and tyrannical and so was deposed. Judea then became a Roman province, administered by prefects appointed by the emperor.

God made a way.

Yet, Joseph had to obey and take it as we do.

Application:

In fear (and always), God is trustworthy.

God makes a way (even when we don't see it. Even in death, He has provided us Christ).

God shows a way, but we still must obey and it may be disruptive to our routine or comfort.

Matthew 2:23:

[23](#)and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”*

Observation:

This is the third geographical destination for Joseph, Mary and Jesus in this excerpt. Where to?

Why did Joseph take Jesus and Mary there? The command to go to Israel, the rule of Archelaus, the warning of God in a dream. And prophecy.

What was the prophecy?

Where is it found in the OT?

Interpretation:

What do we make of the prophecy “He shall be called a Nazarene”? *“Nazareth*. A rather obscure town, nowhere mentioned in the OT. It was Jesus’ hometown (13:54-57; see Lk 2:39, 4:16-24; Jn 1:45-46). *He will be called a Nazarene*. These exact words are not found in the OT and probably refer to several OT prefigurations and/or predictions (note the plural, “the prophets”) that the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Ps 22:6; Isa 53:3), for in Jesus’ day “Nazarene” was virtually a synonym for “despised” (see Jn 1:45-46). Some hold that in speaking of Jesus as a “Nazarene,” Matthew is referring primarily to the word “Branch” (Hebrew *neser*) in Isa 11:1” (1988 NIV footnote).

Application:

Obedience.

Trusting God’s Word.

Further thoughts:

Isn’t it interesting that after Herod looked into the prophecy and star in Matthew 2:1-7, he thought he could stop God’s plan?

SOURCES:

<https://biblehub.com/context/matthew/2-13.htm> and pages thereof.

<https://biblehub.com/text/matthew/2-13.htm> and pages thereof.

1988 NIV Study Bible footnotes

<http://beacondeacon.com/ichthus/personal/which-child-is-this.html>