

Session 4

THE EXILED KING

Matthew 2:13-23

Memory Verse

He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.

– MATTHEW 2:15, CSB



The Exiled King

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Even when we must unexpectedly pivot in our lives, God is in control—providing, guiding, and working things out for good.

CALL TO ACTION: If we call ourselves followers of Christ, we are to expect that we will experience opposition and persecution. Our HOPE is in Christ alone!

Have you ever heard the story of how Post-it® Notes were invented?

A 3M scientist, Dr. Spencer Silver, was researching to try and discover a new, bigger, stronger, tougher adhesive, when he stumbled across a formula that peeled apart from surfaces easily. It wasn't what he was looking for (remember, they wanted tougher, stronger adhesives), but he was determined to find a use for it.

Meanwhile, another 3M scientist, Art Fry, needed a solution to mark pages in his church hymnal. The little scraps of paper he used would always fall out by Sunday! He needed a bookmark that would stick to the pages of the hymnal without damaging them.

The two put their heads together and, viola! Post-it® Notes were born.¹

It wasn't what they, or even 3M, originally expected or intended, but it worked. Sometimes our lives work this way too. And we can always trust that God is at the helm with a plan, even when our story takes an unexpected turn.

This week, we'll look at the story of Jesus's family fleeing to Egypt. This was surely not part of the family's plans (if you have ever moved with a two-year-old, you can relate), but God was at work, guiding and protecting them.

 When was a time something in your life didn't work out like you expected? What happened?

 Think back ten years. Does your life today look like you thought it would? How has God worked in ways you didn't expect?

Session Summary

This week, we'll explore God's abundant provision, and how He used dreams to guide and protect Jesus's family, warning Joseph to flee to Egypt in response to Herod's threat. Just as He did then, the Lord still guides us today. Like Joseph before us, we can trust that God will take care of us no matter the circumstance.

When Jesus's family fled to Egypt, Herod issued a horrific decree: All boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding area were to be murdered. This horrific event reminds us of Pharaoh's command in Exodus 1 to kill the Hebrew baby boys, but in both cases, God's redemptive plans prevailed.

As Jesus's family returned from Egypt, God continued to guide and provide for them, leading them to settle safely in Galilee.

1. Into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)



What stands out to you about the warning Joseph received? How is this similar or different from other dreams we've seen in our study of Matthew so far?



How did Joseph display faith in God in this passage? Why might that have been challenging?

Last week, we read about the account of the Magi visiting the child Jesus. In those events, the paranoid Herod the Great was already seeking a way to identify and kill the child the Magi had identified as the king of the Jews. He directed the Magi to come and update him when they'd located Jesus, but they returned home by a different route, avoiding Herod. It was only a matter of time before Herod would have taken matters into his own hands.

We've seen dreams play a guiding role in Jesus's story multiple times so far. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him Mary's pregnancy was of divine origin:

But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." —Matthew 1:20-21

The Magi were warned in a dream to avoid Herod on their way home:

"And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route." —Matthew 2:12

In both cases, God used these dreams to guide and protect, and we see the same result in this passage. In danger from Herod the Great, Joseph was warned and instructed to take his family to Egypt. Note Joseph's quick, obedient response.

Joseph got up and fled with Jesus and Mary in the night. Remember the lavish gifts they received from the wise men? Many scholars believe that these gifts probably funded their flight to Egypt.

This isn't the first time God's people have taken refuge in Egypt. Back in Genesis, Jacob's family moved there during the famine in Joseph's time (Genesis 45:9-11). At this time, in Alexandria, Egypt, there was a Jewish colony numbering more than one million, so it's possible they settled with their own people!²

Jesus's family stayed in Egypt until Herod the Great died in 4 BC. Matthew identified this as fulfilling the prophecy "Out of Egypt I called my Son" (v. 15). This comes from Hosea:

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

This referenced the nation of Israel's exodus from Egypt but also foreshadowed this event from Jesus's life.³ Moses led the people out of slavery to the pharaoh of Egypt, and Jesus would lead His people out of slavery to sin.



Application: How do these events give encouragement for God's sovereign plan in our own lives?

2. Massacre of the Innocents (Matthew 2:16-18)



How did Herod seek to subvert what God was doing according to his human power?



How does the prophecy quoted here remind us that God is in control, even in the darkest moments?

When Herod realized that the Magi had eluded him, he “flew into a rage,” and “gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under” (v. 16)—Jesus’s apparent age at that time. “Massacre” is an apt word to describe the devastation of this order.

Remember, Herod was known for being tyrannical and vengeful. In his lifetime, he murdered family members to secure his power (his own wife and mother-in-law, and three of his sons), Jewish high priests, more than half of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish governing body), and hundreds of court officers. Before he died, he also arranged for the death of notable men in Jerusalem (to take place after his death was announced). He was cruel and unapologetic. It isn’t difficult to believe that this notoriously ruthless king would issue this devastating order.⁴

This event reminds us of a similar one in Exodus 1. Enslaved in the land of Egypt, the population of the Israelite people was so prosperous that the pharaoh of that day attempted to stifle them. The pharaoh issued this order:

“You must throw every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile, but let every daughter live.” —Exodus 1:22

Another connection pointing to Jesus as the new Moses is found in Deuteronomy:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!’ Then the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.’” —Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Jews in Jesus’s day viewed Moses as the deliverer of God’s people, but Jesus would deliver them in ways that Moses could not. In both horrific events, attempts to destroy God’s people failed. God’s plan cannot be derailed.

Matthew again connected this event to prophetic fulfillment, driving home the point that Jesus was the Messiah by sharing Scriptural evidence. Despite the horrendous

actions of Herod, God remained in control and would fulfill His promise of redemption.

? Application: When was a time something painful happened and you questioned why God allowed it? How did you see God work through that situation?

3. Return to Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23)

? God again spoke to Joseph in dreams. What are some ways you've learned to listen for and trust God's voice in your life?

? God may speak in miraculous ways, but He has spoken clearly through His Word. Why is it vital that we spend time in His Word so we can learn His voice and receive His guidance?

Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and was succeeded by his sons (Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip). Herod Antipas was in power at the time of Jesus's earthly ministry.⁵ Jesus, Mary, and Joseph probably stayed in Egypt for less than one year.⁶ When Jesus and His family returned to Israel, He was likely around the age of three.⁷

Once again, we see dreams play an important role in our story. Joseph was first warned in a dream to flee to Egypt, so it's fitting that he got the news he could return to Israel in a dream too. The Lord's warning in this dream is strikingly similar to the words spoken to Moses in Exodus 4: "Return to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead" (Exodus 4:19).

Archelaus (v. 22) was known to be similarly violent to Herod⁸, so Joseph was afraid to go to a region where he was ruling. Joseph's discernment and the Lord's warning led to the family settling in Galilee (the region ruled by Herod Antipas).

There is no specific Old Testament text that specifically says the Messiah would be called a Nazarene, so Matthew was probably referring to a prominent Old Testament theme rather than a specific passage. Matthew may also have been using word play here to allude to prophecy from Isaiah 11:1-2.⁹

And thus, the pieces were in place for Jesus's earthly ministry. Matthew recorded nothing else from Jesus's childhood, but picks up with the beginning of His earthly ministry in chapter 3.

? **Application: How has God guided decisions in your life? How have you found it better to trust Him than go your own way, even when the future is unclear?**

Conclusion

This week, we looked at divine guidance and protection in Jesus's early life. Once again, dreams played a key role, with the Lord's warning of the danger Herod posed coming in the form of a dream. Joseph quickly and obediently took action based on the Lord's warning, fleeing to Egypt.

The Lord still gives us warnings like this today. It could be in the form of a dream or a feeling, but the Holy Spirit often guides our actions and steps, protecting us in ways we may never know the full extent of. We should strive to be immediately obedient, like Joseph was, trusting that God knows what He's doing and will take care of us, even if what He's asking us to do seems extreme.

When Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were safely away in Egypt, Herod, in a rage, issued a murderous decree for Bethlehem and the areas around it: All boys aged two and younger were to be massacred. This heartbreaking event reminds us of Exodus 1, when Pharaoh ordered the death of newborn Hebrew baby boys to suppress the growing Israelite population. Both attempts to destroy God's people failed. Jesus, the new Moses, survived and would deliver His people out of slavery to sin. Even in the face of violence and sorrow, God's redemptive plan moved forward.

 What are some things we can do to better tune into God's direction in our own lives?

 How can we encourage one another toward obedience to God's guidance daily?

 How does living in obedience before God lead us to share Jesus with others?

Memorize

He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.

- Matthew 2:15, CSB

References

¹3M. "About Us." Post-it® Brand. Accessed October 8, 2025. https://www.post-it.com/3M/en_US/post-it/contact-us/about-us/

²Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70.

³Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1499.

⁴Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 71.

⁵NIV Application Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005, 1493.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1501.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.