

Matthew 2B

- In our teaching last week, Matthew showed us the contrast between Herod's reaction to Jesus and the magi's reaction
 - Herod called himself the King of the Jews, yet he refused to yield his throne to the true King
 - While the Gentiles from Babylon, Israel's enemy, traveled a long distance to worship the Jewish Messiah
 - The opposite reactions of Herod and the magi illustrate the Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants working together
 - Jesus is the King God promised to bring from David's family line
 - And He is the Savior for all nations God promised to bring from Abraham's family line
 - Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham
 - But notice that in this case, the fulfillment of these two promises leads to opposite reactions
 - Herod is rejecting Jesus while Gentiles are embracing Jesus
 - That trend will continue throughout Matthew's account, and we'll attend to it from time to time
- For now, let's return to Chapter 2, following the departure of the magi

Matt. 2:13 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."

Matt. 2:14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

Matt. 2:15 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."

- The magi depart, and an angel makes an appearance to Joseph in a dream again

- This is the second time Joseph has received instructions from an angel in a dream
- The first time was when Joseph learned that Mary's story about being pregnant by the Holy Spirit was true
- This time, the angel warns Joseph he must flee to Egypt to escape Herod
 - Because Herod is going to try to kill the baby Jesus
 - The threat is so imminent that the angel tells Joseph to get up
 - That is, to wake up and leave the house that night without waiting for the morning
 - Herod's rampage was set to begin the next day
- So Joseph obeys and wakes Mary, packs their things and heads out the door
 - We don't know where they stopped in Egypt, but it's only 60 miles to the Egyptian border
 - They could travel that far in about 3-4 days
 - If they went all the way to the capital of Egypt, Alexandria, it would mean a 500-mile journey
 - They probably stayed there several months or longer, until Herod died we're told in v.15
 - Now we understand why the Lord directed the magi to lavish the baby Jesus with such valuable gifts
 - The gifts that Mary and Joseph received were worth many thousands of dollars
 - And now as they flee in the middle of the night, they're going to need those gifts to fund their travel and time in Egypt
 - These items were more portable than cash and more easily spent
 - Small pouches of gold coins or spices were easily carried and could be traded anywhere
 - So the Lord in His sovereignty ensured that the family would be equipped for their flight
 - And He also ensured that Egypt would be willing to receive them

- Because at this time in history, Rome had conquered Egypt, so it was part of the Roman Empire
 - This allowed Joseph and Mary to travel there freely
 - But the Egyptian province was not under Herod's authority, so he could not enforce his orders in Egypt
 - This made Egypt a safe haven for anyone in Judea seeking to escape Herod's tyranny
 - But even before the Romans came along, Egypt had long been a place of refuge for those in the land of Judea
 - Back when Judea was called the land of Canaan, Abraham fled to Egypt to escape famine
 - As did Jacob's family when Joseph ruled in Egypt
 - As you probably remember, Jacob brought his family to Egypt because Joseph encouraged them to join him to escape a coming famine
 - The people of Israel ended up spending several hundred years in Egypt
 - And during that time, the people of Israel were enslaved by a new Pharaoh who despised Jews
 - Their bondage eventually resulted in the Lord sending Moses to free God's people during the Exodus
- The Exodus story holds a deeper connection to the events we're seeing here
 - Notice in v.25, Matthew tells us that Jesus' time spent sojourning with His parents in Egypt was a fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah
 - Matthew quotes from the prophet Hosea...here's what Hosea wrote in context:

Hos. 11:1 When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.

Hos. 11:2 The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.

Hos. 11:3 Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.

- The context of Hosea tells us that the “youth” and “son” in that passage is referring to the entire nation of Israel
 - God is calling the people of Israel, His son
 - Notice in Hosea 11:2, that God refers to this son as “they” meaning Israel
 - And remember earlier in Exodus, God said this to Moses:

Ex. 4:22 “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.

Ex. 4:23 “So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.””

- So it’s common for the Lord to refer to His people Israel as His “son”
 - And in Hosea, the Lord says Israel His son spent time in Egypt before God called them out, referring to the Exodus
 - But if the prophet was writing about Israel, why did Matthew interpret Hosea to be giving a prophecy about Jesus?
- Matthew is using a method of interpretation common among Jewish rabbis
 - In fact, rabbis recognized four methods of properly interpreting Scripture
 - All four methods are ways the Lord expected us to understand His word
 - Yet only one method is appropriate for any given passage
 - So the hard work is knowing which of the four methods is the appropriate way to understand a given Scripture
 - In this case, Matthew applies a method of interpretation the rabbis called *remez* in Hebrew, which means “suggestion” or “picture”
 - This method recognizes that some Scripture is given to us as a picture of later things to come

- In the case of Hosea 11:1, the prophet was describing Israel's Exodus in literal terms
- But he was also presenting Israel's departure from Egypt as a picture of the Messiah's life
- The Lord created an intentional connection between that earlier event and the events of Jesus' life
 - And in this way, the Lord can teach us something about Jesus from what we know about the Exodus
 - In this case, the Lord's picture is that of a son of God coming out of Egypt to enter into Israel
- The picture confirms that Jesus is the Son of God
 - Just as the Lord brought His first-born nation out of Egypt, so the Lord is telling Israel to expect His only begotten Son to come into the land out of Egypt
 - The effect of this picture is to give us confirmation that the Father called Jesus His Son
- Now obviously, before Matthew wrote His Gospel, we probably wouldn't have seen this connection
 - Only after Jesus' flight took place could someone put the two together
 - But that's how Scripture often works...only after later things are fulfilled do earlier prophecies make sense
 - That's how God prefers to reveal Himself...
 - It's like a game of Jeopardy...
 - The Lord first gives us the answer to a question we never thought to ask
 - And then later, He gives us the question and we suddenly see how the two will fit together
 - And in doing so, we come to recognize that the earlier writing was inspired, for how else could it have happened?
 - For example, Hosea gave us the answer to a question we didn't even know to ask, which is how does the Messiah enter the land?

- But later, after Jesus' life plays out, we can see that Jesus as the Son of God repeated Israel's footsteps, as Hosea wrote
 - God does this in His word so that as we make these connections, we witness the wisdom and sovereignty of God at work in the smallest of details
 - It's like God's calling card in His word, to show us we can trust what we read in these pages
- As we move through Matthew, I will continue to show you the various ways the text of scripture may be interpreted properly
 - But even now, I want to issue a warning about interpreting scripture in general
 - We don't have the right to just make up meanings on our own
 - That's not proper interpretation of the Bible
 - There's a lot of that going on today in and around the church
 - And it's created a lot of poor theology and bad ideas about God and His word
 - Honest and sincere efforts to uncover the meaning of God's word will always rely on certain and sensible rules of interpretation
 - So that we allow the text of Scripture to guide us to the truth
 - Because every passage of Scripture has only one meaning, the meaning assigned to it by God Himself when He inspired the author to write it
 - Our job in studying Scripture is to discover that assigned meaning, not to invent our own meaning
 - As Peter told us in His word

[2 Pet. 1:20](#) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

[2 Pet. 1:21](#) for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- Peter says that no view of scripture is a matter of our own interpretation

- If you've ever heard someone begin an interpretation of a verse in the Bible by saying "This verse means to me..." then you've watched someone violating Peter's rule
 - Because that's not how we uncover the truth of the Bible...or the truth of *anything*
 - Have you ever heard someone say "What the math equation 2+2 means to me is...?"
 - Of course not, because there is only one right answer to the question 2+2 and it doesn't matter what we think it means
 - It only matters what it actually means
 - That's the same approach we need to take to the study of Scripture
 - We want to honestly seek for what the text of Scripture actually means – what God meant when He wrote it
 - We don't want to rely on opinions or guesses, because the whole point of studying the Bible is to arrive at THE truth
 - In this case, Matthew tells us plainly how to understand these passages, so we can rest in that understanding
- Let's go back to the study, and specifically look at Herod's reaction to the birth of Jesus

Matt. 2:16 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.

Matt. 2:17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

Matt. 2:18 "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."

- Earlier, you remember Herod had questioned the magi as to when they saw the star appear so that he would know how old the Messiah was at that point. He also told the magi to report back on the location of the Messiah once they found him

- That was Herod's mistake
 - He should have followed the magi instead
 - Because the magi were warned by the Lord to go home another way so as to avoid Herod and keep Jesus' location a secret
 - By the time Herod discovered that the magi had departed, it was too late to find them or learn Jesus' whereabouts
- For a normal, rational, well-adjusted human being, that would be the end of it
 - But Herod was anything but normal or rational
 - By this point, Herod was already standing at death's door, so he should have nothing to fear from an infant king
 - Based on historical records, we assume he was suffering from kidney disease and gangrene, which takes a while to kill a person
- So Herod knew he would die soon
 - So it was unlikely that the new baby king would be old enough to take Herod's throne before Herod died naturally
 - And Herod couldn't have been worried about his sons inheriting the throne because Herod had three of them killed
 - So Herod could have left well-enough alone and never been threatened by this new king
- Nevertheless, his paranoia and ego led him to take drastic action to prevent this young king from even having the chance
 - Matthew says in around 4 BC, Herod ordered all male children two years old or younger in and around Bethlehem to be killed
 - So on Herod's order, Roman soldiers marched the few miles from the garrison in Jerusalem to Bethlehem
 - And they summarily executed every male baby they could find
- Herod's stipulation that children two years old and under should die gives us a hint as to what the magi told Herod in answer to his question about the appearing of the star

- Notice Matthew says Herod's orders were based on the magi's response
- The magi must have told Herod the star appeared a year or more earlier
- So to be sure he kills the Messiah, Herod orders that babies up to 24 months will die
- There must be a special place in Hell for this man, sitting right next to Hitler and whoever invented telemarketing
- Matthew tells us that the deaths of so many children sets all of Bethlehem to mourning
 - And once again, Matthew tells us this event is a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy
 - In this case, the prophecy comes from Jeremiah 31
 - Let's look at Jeremiah in its context

[Jer. 31:15](#) Thus says the Lord,

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
Lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
She refuses to be comforted for her children,
Because they are no more."

[Jer. 31:16](#) Thus says the Lord,

"Restrain your voice from weeping
And your eyes from tears;
For your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord,
"And they will return from the land of the enemy."

[Jer. 31:17](#) "There is hope for your future," declares the Lord,

"And your children will return to their own territory."

- This passage is similar to the one we studied in Hosea earlier
 - Like Hosea, Jeremiah's passage is not a prophecy about the Messiah, not specifically

- Jeremiah is giving Israel a prophecy concerning the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian army
- The prophet was warning the people of Israel that the Lord was preparing to send a great calamity upon the people in the city
- It would be judgment against Israel for their sins against God
- The Lord fulfilled this prophecy in 605 BC, when the army of Babylon invaded Judah
 - The army devastated Judah and killed many Jewish soldiers
 - The army took many sons of Israel captive as slaves, hauling them back to Babylon, many never to return
 - When that happened, the mothers of these sons were lamenting greatly, as you would expect
- When Jeremiah writes that “Rachel” was weeping, he uses the name of Jacob’s favorite wife as a symbol for all the mothers of Israel
 - The mothers of Israel would weep over their sons lost to captivity in Babylon
 - And they could not be comforted
- Yet in the midst of their misery, the Lord reassured the people of Israel that their suffering was not the end of the story
 - That event would actually give Israel cause for hope for the future
 - Babylon’s destruction of Judah was part of a larger plan of God’s to purge idolatry out of Israel
 - To bring His people back to Him in faith and humility
 - And this was a very good and very necessary thing in the long run
 - You see, in the years before the Babylonian captivity, the people of Israel had strayed very far from the Lord
 - So far, in fact, that at times the people had been led by evil kings to engage in demonic religious rituals

- At times, the people of Israel even engaged in human sacrifice, killing their infant children on altars praying to the satanic god Baal
 - So the Lord sent the Babylonian army into the land to conquer His own people and haul them off to Babylon in chains
 - In doing so, the Lord broke the people's will to follow after idols
 - Never again in history has Israel engaged in widespread idolatry, all because they suffered such great loss in Babylon
 - So while it was a great hardship for Jewish mothers to see their sons taken away into captivity, it was better than allowing the status quo to continue
 - In fact, it was a cruel irony that the mothers of Israel wept over these sons given that so many mothers willingly sacrificed their sons
- So once more, we find Matthew looking back on a moment in Israel's history and interpreting it according to a certain approach
 - In this case, Matthew is using one of the other four methods of Biblical interpretation
 - This method is call *drash* in Hebrew, which means "explanation"
 - This method recognizes that there are certain principles found over and over again in God's word
 - When you come across passages that conform to these principles, you can draw connections between them
 - These connections help us recognize these theological principles and make better sense of them
 - One of these important Biblical principles is at work here in Matthew Chapter 2
 - And it's also at work in Jeremiah 31, which is why Matthew connects them
 - Matthew wants us to learn something about the terrible circumstances in Bethlehem by considering what happened earlier in Jeremiah
- So what is that principle that connects these two moments?

- Well, it's best summarized by another well-known verse found in the book of Romans

Rom. 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- In Romans 8:28, Paul describes the same principle at work in Israel in Jeremiah's day and in Jesus' day
- The principle holds that our world is full of sin and evil and hatred, so as a result bad things will happen constantly
 - We see the proof of this on the news and in our neighborhood and in our family and in our own lives
 - Sin is everywhere and so its effects are everywhere
- The Bible doesn't promise believers that bad things will never happen to us or that we will escape life on earth unscathed
 - On the contrary, we will know pain and suffering
 - After all, trying to live in this sinful world without suffering its effects is like trying to swim in a pool without getting wet
 - It's not possible...if you get in that pool, then you will be saturated like anyone else
 - And if you live in a sinful fallen world, you're going to get hurt
- But the Bible also promises that even in the midst of these bad things, God is still on His throne
 - He is still in control of everything and He has great and wonderful things planned for His children
 - And He is at work ensuring that all of life's circumstances will come together to produce eternally good outcomes for His children
 - But sometimes, the only way to produce the very good things God has planned in eternity is by allowing bad things to happen to us here and now
- So the principle tells us we can always trust the Lord is working in the midst of our trials and turmoil and fear and troubles

- Throughout scripture, the Lord reminds us of this principle so we won't forget it
 - Even His design for childbirth reminds us of this principle
 - God instituted that a woman would endure pain in bringing forth life so He could create a picture of what Jesus would do for us
 - A difficult and painful event precedes the joy of new life
 - Just as the pain of Jesus' death was necessary to make possible the joy of our new spiritual birth
- And our lives on earth mirror this principle too
 - Our suffering now is a result of sin, and God is not the author of sin
 - But God uses the suffering we experience in life to produce spiritual benefit
- He's working to prepare us for the moment when we enter the Kingdom in our new eternal bodies at our resurrection
 - By that moment, everything necessary to ensure we are ready for eternity will have come to pass
 - Including the trials that God used to mold us into His image
 - We grow spiritually much better during trials than during the good times
 - Our prayer life, our study of God's word, our willingness to repent and reconcile with others are all more likely when we're facing difficulties
- In Jeremiah's time, God ultimately used the suffering of Israel's mothers over having lost their sons to Babylon to produce great repentance among all the hearts of Israel
 - And that repentance cured Israel from ever chasing after idols again
 - It restored the nation's desire for their true God
 - And it ensured that when Jesus came to bring them salvation, God's people were still there to hear Him

- So Matthew quotes Jeremiah to remind us that the terrible events in Bethlehem must be understood according to this same principle
 - We need to recognize these circumstances were part of the love of God at work for the sake of Israel and the world
 - But it will take spiritual maturity to understand it
- Which is why God's word reminds us of this principle over and over again, and why Matthew quotes Jeremiah here to explain it
 - The deaths of these children were a necessary evil to lead to the greatest good the world has ever known
 - After the children were killed in Bethlehem, Herod was satisfied with his atrocity and he lost interest in finding the Messiah
 - As a result, Jesus was able to survive his wrath
- Because Jesus lived, He could become our perfect sacrifice
 - Because Herod was satisfied, the salvation God promised for all mankind was possible
 - Because Jesus was protected while He was vulnerable to an evil one, you and I will receive Christ's protection from the Evil One
- Our God is a God of resurrection
 - He brings dead things back to life
 - He takes great loss and turns it into great gain
 - He wipes away tears, He takes away pain, He gives us relief from sin
 - He promises to do things in the eternal realm, but not necessarily here and now
 - And so Matthew quotes Jeremiah to remind us that the mourning in Bethlehem will one day give way to joy
 - Just as the Lord turned the weeping of Jewish mothers in Jeremiah's day into rejoicing over the nation's repentance
 - So too the Lord is prepared to turn the weeping of Israel and the world over evil and sin, into rejoicing for our salvation

- Their pain in losing a child is to be replaced with the eternal joy of knowing Jesus and His righteousness
- We've all suffered in one way or another, and it's easy to get absorbed in it, especially when it seems never ending
 - But never forget that you have overcome this world by your faith in Jesus Christ
 - The enemy can fire shots at you and sometimes, they're really strong
 - But he can't touch your eternal future and he can't rob you of your peace before God
 - And one day very soon, this world will pass away and at that point, all the suffering of this world will fade away with it
 - That's what Matthew wants us to remember, that God works all things together for good for those who love Him, to those called

[Matt. 2:19](#) But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said,

[Matt. 2:20](#) "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."

- Turning once more to the text, we're not told how long Jesus spends in Egypt, but it's probably not longer than a year
 - Because as Matthew tells us, they waited until hearing that Herod was gone
 - Since we know Herod died in 4 BC and Jesus was probably born near the end of 6 BC
 - And the magi arrived after Jesus was already about a year old
 - So they probably spent a year or less in Egypt
 - Whatever wealth they received from the magi was probably just enough to cover their expenses during that time
 - Wouldn't it have been an encouragement to this young family as they watched God provide in perfect proportion to their needs?

- They didn't know they were going to Egypt, so they couldn't have planned to pay for it, but God provided valuable gifts
- And once they were there, they had no idea how long they would stay, but the gifts God provided lasted just long enough
- So that once they returned home, they were no longer rich, but they never lacked
- Joseph learns the news of Herod's death through the angel vine
 - By now, Joseph is probably becoming accustomed to getting directions this way
 - It must have become obvious to these parents that raising the Savior of the world was not something that God was going to leave to chance
 - They were going to get lots of helpful parenting advice
- The angel says get up and go to the land of Israel with the Child and Mary
 - So Joseph leaves as instructed
 - We'll see what happens next when we return to the study next week
- But let's finish tonight taking one more look at the connection between this story and the account of Exodus
 - Because with the rest of the details of this story, we're now able to see that there is an even greater connection between the two stories
 - This picture goes much deeper than Hosea's connection to Egypt
 - It turns out many elements of the Exodus story match up to the story of Jesus' life and work
 - In fact, the key figure of the Exodus story, Moses, is a picture in the Bible of Jesus
 - For example, Moses originally fled Egypt because the Pharaoh sought to kill him
 - This is mirrored by Jesus fleeing the promised land when Herod seeks to kill him

- Secondly, in the Exodus account, the Pharaoh commanded that every male Hebrew child be killed by casting them into the Nile
 - And here we see another king, Herod, ordering every male Jewish child killed in Bethlehem
 - Furthermore, Moses was rescued from that death sentence by a mother taking him out of the Nile
 - While Jesus will be rescued by His mother taking Him across the Nile
- Both stories turn on a similar event
 - In Exodus, we're told the Pharaoh dies, and so it's time for Moses to return to free His people, Israel, from bondage
 - And in Matthew, Herod dies so Jesus' family is told it's time to return so Jesus can free His people, Israel, from bondage to sin
 - In both cases, an angel of the Lord said return because the one seeking your life has died
 - Moses returned with his family, just as Jesus returned with his family
- We see the point clearly, don't we? The Lord isn't just the author of Scripture... He's the author of History
 - God orchestrated both the events of Moses' life and of His own Son's life to bring about exactly what He wanted to achieve
 - And then He instructed men to write these things in ways that clearly show us these connections
 - And He did all these things because He loves us and doesn't want us to remain ignorant of what He was doing for our sake
 - Remember this as you live out the history of your life, including the dark moments that feel like your life is crashing down around you
 - Everything you're experiencing has already been designed by a God who loves you so much that He was willing to die for you
 - And even if He hasn't revealed every detail of our future, we can still be sure it has a good ending

- Because we know that one day, we will leave all this mess behind and we will receive our reward in eternity with Christ
- And from that vantage point – and only from that vantage point – we'll finally be able to appreciate why everything had to happen the way it did
 - And we'll be praising Him for it
 - So let's begin that praise even now...for God is good