

The Geography of Christmas Prophecy

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 81-7

The following sermon transcript does not match the *video* version of the sermon—it matches only the audio version. Here's a brief explanation why.

John MacArthur routinely preaches a sermon more than once on the same date, during different worship services at Grace Community Church. Normally, for a given sermon title, our website features the audio and video that were recorded during the same worship service. Very occasionally, though, we will post the audio from one service and the video from another. Such was the case for the sermon titled "I and the Father Are One, Part 2," the transcript of which follows below. The transcript is of the audio version.

I have a lot that I want to help you to understand from Matthew, chapter 2, so open your Bible to this chapter. I suppose there would be some who would think this would be a day for a devotional message, something maybe on a topical format, and that's fine. But nothing has the power and the glory of the Scripture itself. And even in its detail, it manifests its divine authorship, and we will see that again this morning as we look at verses 13, in particular, to the end of the chapter, with a little bit of a return to a portion of the earlier part of chapter 2.

In the Old Testament, God promised to send a King into the world who would bring salvation to individual souls, eternal life for them in heaven, and who also would establish on earth a kingdom of righteousness, justice, and holiness. That is what the Old Testament promises: God will send a King. The Old Testament gives us details about that King. The King will be born of a virgin that is conceived in her womb by God without an earthly father. That's Isaiah 7.

The King will be the Eternal God. The King will be, humanly speaking, from the royal line of David, 2 Samuel, chapter 7. And the King will be the King over all kings, Psalm 2. He will be sovereign over all rulers. Created in the womb of a woman by God, virgin born, in the line of David, the Eternal God takes on human flesh and is the sovereign over all other kings, and He comes to save His people from their sins, and to establish His kingdom on earth and then throughout eternity to reign forever over a new heaven and a new earth with His people. That is the message of the Old Testament.

The New Testament begins by introducing the arrival of that King, and the arrival is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and so the New Testament begins with Matthew's account of the birth of the great promised King. His mother is a virgin. His name is God with us. He will bear the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. He is a holy Child who will rule over an everlasting kingdom. That is the testimony of the birth accounts by the gospel writers Matthew and Luke. We're looking at Matthew, and Matthew at the very outset wants us to know that this Child who is born is God's promised King: the King of salvation, the King of the earth, and the King of eternity.

Matthew begins by giving us His genealogy. His family history at the beginning of the very first

chapter, and he traces that genealogy through David. He is in the royal line of David by His father – His earthly father: not His natural father, but His earthly father. He is also in the line of David, Luke says, by His mother Mary who is a descendant of David. So He fits that qualification.

So the king will be the sovereign over all kings, He will come from the royal line of David. He will be conceived in the womb of a virgin by divine power. And He will be God in human form. His rule, His sovereignty, His kingliness is also declared in verses 19 through 25 of chapter 1 by angels. Heavenly angels declare that this Child and no other is the promised King: God with us.

Matthew further demonstrates His sovereign rule by the magi. They are the official oriental king makers who have been instructed by generations coming down to them from the Jews in exile, including the great prophet Daniel who was the chief of the magi in the ancient past. By the time of Jesus, they are looking for the Messiah, and they see a star, and they come, and the star points them to Him, and He's lying in a manger, and that's the sign they have found Him. The testimony of the magi affirms that this is, in fact, the promised King. They're following what they were told by the Jews and by Daniel himself.

Luke adds the testimony of angels to Zacharias. He adds the testimony of Zacharias himself of Elizabeth, of Simeon, of Anna. Luke also adds the testimony of the angels to the shepherds in the fields in Bethlehem. You have all of this in Matthew and Luke affirming that this Child Jesus is the promised King.

Now Matthew has one other course of instruction that is very, very fascinating to me, and it will be to you, I think. As we look in this 2nd chapter, there is a collection of geographical locations laid out, and they come together to connect Jesus to the Old Testament, to demonstrate that He is the one promised in the Old Testament. And, by the way, they exclude every other person. There is no coincidental way that Jesus could be deemed the Messiah, because certain things just sort of coincidentally happen. No, the features that are connected to these geographical places are so specific that the probability of coincidence is zero.

The King, when He comes, Matthew tells us, has connections to four places: Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth. All of them have a role in the identity of the great King, the Messiah. Let's begin with Bethlehem, we've already considered it. Bethlehem is the first place.

Go back to chapter 2, verse 1. "He was born in Bethlehem of Judea." Judea, the title for the southern part of the land of Israel in which Jerusalem existed as the capital. But Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In fact, when Herod wanted to find out where the Messiah was to be born, "He called together" – in verse 4 – "the chief priests and the scribes. He inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this has what has been written by the prophet:' – and then they went on to quote the prophet Micah, chapter 5, verse 2 – "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders or rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel."""

That is a prophecy that the Messiah, the King would be born in Bethlehem. The Jews knew it, the leaders of Israel, the theologians knew it, and they gave an immediate answer to Herod. Jesus, in order to be identified as God's promised King, must be born in Bethlehem. And, of course, He was, He was.

Now how are we to understand Micah's prophecy in regard to Jesus? To do that, let's go back to Micah, back to that minor prophet – minor only in size, certainly not in message – and a little bit of information for you about Micah.

Micah was a prophet of doom. Micah thundered judgment against the false rulers of his day, false leaders. He literally blistered the leadership of the people of Israel for their defection from God, for their apostasy, for their corruption. Just to get a flavor of it, all you need to do is look down at chapter 2 where woes or curses or damnation is pronounced upon them: "Woe to those who scheme iniquity, who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, for it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am planning against this family a calamity from which you cannot remove your necks; and you will not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time.'"

These are people with power in the nation of Israel who with that power abuse people consistently continually. This is a denunciation of those false rulers so corrupt they abuse their people. It extends also to chapter 3, the opening of chapter 3. There's more in-between, but just some samples. "Hear now, heads of Jacob, rulers of the house of Israel."

Again, we're talking about false rulers. "Is it not for you to know justice?" In other words, if you're a ruler, shouldn't you be marked by being just? But contrary to that, "You hate good and love evil. You tear off their skin" – meaning the people – "from them and their flesh from their bones, who eat the flesh of my people, strip off their skin from them, break their bones and chop them up as for the pot as meat in a kettle. Then they will cry out to the Lord, but He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have practiced evil deeds." They literally consume the people, like stripping down an animal for consumption, tearing the skin off, smashing the bones, peeling off the flesh. This is the kind of leadership that was going on in the day of Micah.

Down in verse 9 of chapter 3, again, addressed to the heads of the house of Jacob, those who were supposed to mediate God's rule in that nation, he says, "You rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet you lean on the Lord saying, 'Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.' Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest." The smashing and crushing and desolation of Jerusalem and the temple is going to be the judgment against this leadership and the people.

Then when you come to chapter 4 there's a dramatic change. Now we are taken into the future. From that very dire situation in the past, we are moved to the last days, the last days of God's redemptive history. "It'll come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and be raised above the hills. And the people will stream into it." This is the millennial reign of the Messiah on earth.

"Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways, that we may walk in His paths.' For from Zion

will go forth the law, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many people and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” No more war. “Nation will not lift up sword against nation. Never again will they train for war. Each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. Though all the peoples walk each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk” – in that future time – “in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

“In that day,” declares the Lord, “I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts, and even those whom I have afflicted. I’ll make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever. As for you, tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come – even the former dominion will come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.” That is magnificent language speaking of the reign of the King when He comes, the Messiah.

How will they know when the King has arrived? Chapter 5, verse 2: “As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” Not only is this Messiah, this King, this Ruler to come from Bethlehem, but He will be one who is eternal. He will be an eternal person.

Verse 3: “Therefore He will give them up until a time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel.” That looks at the interval. Before the King comes to set up His kingdom, there will be an interval in which He gives up His people and they live in a kind of labor. That is to say they will remain under enemy domination. It’s an interval in which time they refuse to acknowledge their King. This is the picture of Messiah’s first coming, second coming, and the interval of rejection in-between.

But eventually, verse 4, “He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace.” Magnificent powerful statements about the messianic kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice He is a shepherd in contrast to the character of Herod, who is a wolf. So we learn then from the prophecy of Micah – and you can return now to Matthew, chapter 2 – that there is coming a great King who will establish a kingdom of justice, righteousness, and holiness. Until that time, the people of Israel will reject Him between His first and second coming. Born in Bethlehem, then a period of rejection, then the kingdom. Bethlehem, verse 2; the interval, verse 3; the kingdom, verse 4; and all the elements of the kingdom that we saw back in chapter 4 will come to pass.

Messiah the King will come out of Bethlehem, and He will be rejected until a future time when that rejection ends and He comes to be the shepherd of His people Israel. Messiah has this essential connection to Bethlehem. Jesus the Son of God was born in Bethlehem.

The second location that is important to Matthew and to us is Egypt, Egypt. This is the story after the Christmas story. This is the story you never hear. But chapter 2, verse 13, tells it, and it is a powerful story. Verse 13: “When they had gone” – that is when the magi had left to go back to the Middle East

and gone another way, not going back to tell Herod where the Child was, because they had been warned in a dream that Herod was going to kill the Child. So they went another way.

“After they had left, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream,” – and they would be still living in a house in Bethlehem by this time – “and the angel says, ‘Get up! Take the Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.’ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.” They did it in a clandestine way in the dark so no one would know that they had departed, and no one would follow them.

Now you notice that this is more angelic revelation. The angels keep talking to Joseph through this whole account on a number of different occasions. It is also true that even the magi were warned by God. So there is an awful lot of revelation from God, angelic revelation in the story. And up to this point, it's all been positive, it's all been blessed revelation: a wonderful revelation to Zacharias and Elizabeth about the birth of the forerunner to the Messiah, John the Baptist; and subsequently, the Messiah. A wonderful revelation to Mary from an angel. Another revelation to Joseph from the angel. Another revelation to the shepherds from the angels that were there in the fields. A revelation to the magi by a star that appeared, the shekinah glory, in the east, and signals the birth of the Christ child, and then reappears in Bethlehem right over the place where the Child was placed in a manger. All of this is so positive and so blessed.

But now we have revelation from heaven that has an element of danger in it. The first comes in verse 12. The magi are warned by God. This is a warning revelation. And then in verse 13, Joseph is warned by God in a dream through an angel of the Lord to get out and get to Egypt. Now that's about a seventy five mile walk: Joseph, Mary, and the Child. The Child is some months old by now living in a house, not still in a stall or a stable – seventy five miles to the Egyptian border. Then from the Egyptian border to a settlement where they might find some people who would welcome them would be another hundred miles. So this takes some time to go that amount of distance.

Now why Egypt? Well, Egypt was close, and Egypt, believe it or not, at this time was safe. Over the years, Egypt became a kind of a popular place for Jews running away from the land of Israel for one reason or another to go. There was a large Jewish settlement in the land of Egypt, and it had been accumulating there literally for centuries. You can go back in history and find times when the Jews migrated into Egypt and found a certain measure of safety there. It was a natural asylum for the Jews that there was something they needed to get away from.

For example, during the time of the Maccabean Revolt, which was between the Old Testament and the New Testament in that 400-year period in there, during that revolt there were many Jews, historians tell us, who fled the revolt into Egypt and established themselves there. There's a community that you probably have heard of, the Qumran community – caves of Qumran on the edge of the desert just east of Jerusalem where they found the Dead Sea Scrolls – that was a community of Essenes, which was kind of monastic-like sect of the Jews, like scribes and Pharisees and zealots. But these were called the Essenes. In 31 B.C. they basically had been run out of their land, run out of their territory, and they ran to Egypt. So they had established a kind of Qumran community of Essenes in Egypt since 31 B.C. Many Jews then lived in Egypt.

Alexander the Great had arranged for a special area, a special place in the city of Alexandria where the Jews would have their own quarters, and they were friendly to the Jews in those ancient days. In

150 B.C. they built a temple, a Jewish temple in Egypt for the Jews specifically.

40 A.D. – now we're moving past the time of Christ – 40 A.D., Philo says, the historian, there was many as a million Jews in Egypt. So it was a very, very familiar place for Jews to go where they would find people that were friendly to them. No doubt the gifts of the magi – the gold, the frankincense, the myrrh – whatever the elements of that were, were a massive amount of wealth that would secure the family and meet all its needs as they bartered or exchanged those things while they were in Egypt.

But the reason they went to Egypt was not because Egypt was friendly to Jews, or even because there was a Jewish community there where they would find people who spoke their language and find opportunity for fellowship and maybe even some employment, that wasn't the reason. The initial reason they went was because they were escaping slaughter. They went because Herod was going to kill all the baby boys. They were told that, and so they left to escape for their lives.

Now they were a few months in Egypt. We don't know exactly how many, but it was a few months. It's only within a year after Jesus is born that Herod is basically dead. It's a short amount of time. He seems to have died in March-April of the following year that Jesus was born, around Passover time. So it's a few months in Bethlehem, and then it's a migration to Egypt, and it's a few more months in Egypt.

Now some bizarre things – and I just warn you about this – have come out about our Lord's stay in Egypt, and you might run into them if you're tampering with any gnostic gospels or any bizarre superstitions about our Lord's time in Egypt, you may come across these. There is a crazy bizarre book that is called *The Gospel of the Infancy of Our Lord*. You say, "Who wrote it?" I don't know who the human instrument was, but it's demonic, because it introduces bizarre things about the Lord. It says things like, "While He was in Egypt He did many miracles," – as basically an infant – "and everywhere He went idols were smashed and people were healed." It also says that He carried around His swaddling cloth and used it to cast out demons and heal children.

Worse than that, the Jews have said through history that Jesus was a black magician, that He was a representative of the darkness, He was a representative of Satan. You remember, that's what they said, "He does what He does by the powers of Satan." They have said historically that He learned His magical arts in Egypt, because Egypt was supposed to be the center of magical art. So when He went there as a child, He became schooled in magical arts, and He came back and used His magic to try to convince people He was their Messiah.

One of the most familiar names in church history is the name of Celsus. He was an early heretic who said that Jesus learned His magic in Egypt. All of that, of course, is ridiculous. He was there as a small child, just within the first year and a few months of His life.

But beyond going there to escape, notice verse 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.'" There was something else going on here than just an escape, there was a connection being made to the Old Testament, and that scripture comes out of the book of Hosea.

Hosea is a prophet. Hosea said, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." But did Hosea say that with the

Messiah in mind? Certainly not. So let me help you to understand how that connects with Jesus. Some background on Hosea quickly.

Hosea was another judgment prophet. Hosea was called by God to declare the failure, unbelief, corruption, decadence, disobedience, unfaithfulness of Israel. That was his message, he preached judgment. He accused Israel of spiritual prostitution, spiritual adultery, spiritual harlotry. They had abandoned their covenant with God. God was the husband, they were the unfaithful wife in that picture. That was his message: "You have violated your covenant with God. You're like an unfaithful wife." But he did more than just say that; he demonstrated that by using an illustration from his own marriage. His own marriage becomes his object lesson.

Now he married this woman named Gomer. I don't know what the parents were thinking when they named the girl, but they did. He married a girl named Gomer. She was the love of his life. Like any bright-eyed bridegroom, this was the highest moment in life, and he had the highest hopes. She became unfaithful, unfaithful at a massive level. She became a prostitute. She actually bore children to her clients. She was like a sex slave bought and sold on the slave market. She was as wretched as a woman could possibly be.

This shattered the heart of Hosea, and he had to make a decision about what he was going to do. His love for her was so profound, so deep that he couldn't reject her, even after all of that; so he pursued her. And the story that he tells is the story of him pursuing her, and trying to find her, and looking for her. And finally he finds her for sale on another sex slave market platform, and he buys her, and she costs him fifteen pieces of silver and a bunch of barley. And he takes her back and he makes her his wife, and he forgives her, and he loves her.

In all of this is Hosea's personal illustration of God and Israel. God is a loving husband. Israel covenanted to be God's faithful wife. Israel became enamored with idols, prostituted itself to false gods, became guilty of spiritual adultery.

What's God going to do? Well, the history of God dealing with Israel is the history of God redeeming Israel, going to find Israel, and paying the price and bringing her back. God, in tender love, brought Israel back. And the first time God did it was when He went into Egypt and brought them back in the great exodus. They had been influenced by the gods of Egypt. The fact that they were unfaithful to Him became immediately demonstrated in the wilderness where they so easily began to create their own idol. God, in tender love, brought Israel back the way Hosea, in tender love, brought his wife back. So when Hosea's heart was shattered, when the ideal of his life was ruined, when he suffered the deepest agony of unfaithfulness, God said, "Now you know how I feel."

To show Israel and to show all the rest of us the greatness of God's love for them, God reminds them through Hosea that, "I brought you back out of Egypt." "Out of Egypt I called My Son." That's what Hosea 11:1 is talking about. It's talking about God saying, "I went down there and I brought you back." And what an expensive price, the death of the firstborn, all kinds of plagues, parting the Red Sea, drowning the Egyptian Army, wandering in the wilderness: God brought His people back.

Hosea 11:1 says, "When Israel was a child," – in the infancy of that nation – "I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt." Changes the metaphor from a husband and a wife to a father and a son. And all those metaphors work.

But you say, “Well, that’s Israel, and that’s God calling Israel and delivering them from Egypt. How does that relate to Jesus? How is the experience of Jesus in Egypt connected to that?”

The New Testament writer is telling us that that is a type of, a picture of, an analogy of, a symbol of, a likeness of what is happening to Christ. Why would those two be connected? Anybody who reads the Old Testament prophets knows that there are connections made between the nation and Christ. I give you a for example.

The servant of the Lord, as you’re reading in Isaiah, the servant of the Lord is Israel. The servant of the Lord is Israel. The servant of the Lord is Israel. And then all of a sudden, the servant of the Lord is Christ. The servant of the Lord who is unfaithful in Isaiah is Israel; the servant of the Lord who is faithful is Christ, so that Christ is the embodiment of the faithful servant; Israel is the embodiment of the unfaithful servant.

You also see in the prophets that Israel is God’s child whom He loves, and Christ is God’s Child whom He loves. Israel is unfaithful as a wife, Israel is unfaithful as a son, yet Israel is called out of Egypt. Christ faithful as a son is called out of Egypt. He is the embodiment of the true Israel, the true servant of God.

Just as God protected Israel His son from the king of Egypt who wanted to kill them, so He protected Jesus Christ His Son from the king of Israel who wanted to kill Him. Messiah is the true Israel in a perfect person. His arrival in the land from Egypt is a kind of recapitulation of the story of Israel. Again, the New Testament writer is using by the Holy Spirit the Old Testament text as a picture or a type of Christ.

And the bond is even closer than that. Think of it this way. If God had not brought Israel out of Egypt, if He had left them there and they had mingled and intermarried and continued down the path of idolatry, there never would have been a Messiah, because the Messiah was in the loins of Israel. And when God delivered Israel, He delivered Messiah, because He kept His people in tact so that His Son could be born. Had Israel been destroyed in Egypt, there would not have been a Messiah, and there never would be the fulfillment of any messianic prophecy. So when Israel was called out of Egypt, so was Christ called out of Egypt in Israel.

Now the Child is born in Bethlehem. He must be born in Bethlehem, Micah said. He must also come out of Egypt, says Hosea, and the Child born in Bethlehem is now driven into Egypt all in God’s plan. As of old, God loved Israel when a child and brought Israel out of Egypt. His love still centers on His Son, the King; and He will bring Him out of Egypt.

And just another thought. The exodus is the prototype of salvation. The mighty act of God in delivering His people Israel from Egypt through the miracles under the leadership of Moses is the picture of what Christ did in delivering His people from the bondage of sin by His death on the cross. And you remember, there had to be a sacrifice of a lamb, and the blood spread on the door and the posts for the angel of death to pass by. Now you see in Christ, the Son who is faithful being delivered from Egypt that He might by His own sacrifice deliver His people forever from sin.

It’s just an interesting note that in the prophet Isaiah, chapter 19 and in Zephaniah, chapter 3, and

also Psalm 68, there is a statement made in each of those places that in the future millennial kingdom there will be some blessing sent to Egypt, blessing to Egypt. Why? Maybe, maybe God provides some divine gratitude for sanctuary given to His Son. So the birth at Bethlehem, the exodus from Egypt.

The third location is Ramah, Ramah. We come to verses 16 to 18. It certainly wouldn't take long for Herod to realize that he had been ignored by the magi. When they left town everybody would know it. They were a massive entourage. The report came to him that they had all left and they didn't tell him where the Child was. Because he's such a violent enraged human being he doesn't have normal powers of reason. He should have assumed that, "If they left without telling me, they probably told the family to leave too."

But he doesn't think rationally that they might as well have been warned. So what happens is in verse 16, "Herod saw that he had been tricked" – literally mocked – "by the magi, he became very enraged," – that's a passive verb. It took him over. It's not something he willed, it's something that literally came on him that he was unable to control.

"He became very enraged," – the only place that word is ever used in the New Testament, and it's used in the passive form – "he was taken over by violent rage and sent" – sent soldiers with swords – "and slew all the male children in Bethlehem and all its vicinity from two years old and under." They counted years the way we do.

Your baby might be thirteen months; but when you ask, "How old is your child?" you say he's two, right? We don't count at the end of the year, we count at the front of the year. They did the same thing. So this would mean essentially anytime around a year old and younger.

Since he wasn't exactly sure who the Messiah would be, and months had passed, months since the star appeared, he wanted to know exactly the time the star appeared, back in verse 7, and he began to calculate from there. He knew that if he went a little higher he'd be sure to catch that Child. So any of the children who were beyond twelve months would have been massacred. They would have been ripped out of their mother's arms and basically stabbed in the heart. That's what would have happened. They would pierce their hearts with a sword, bringing instant death.

This is the beginning of sorrows for Israel, this wicked deed, the beginning of sorrows for Israel. Just imagine all the baby boys in Bethlehem and all the area around all being massacred everywhere. They are the most cared for, beloved, precious, helpless of all the children in the families, in the homes. The slaughter would have created massive heartbreak, sobbing, weeping. This is the beginning of what our Lord said to Israel in Matthew 23 when He said, "Your house is left to you desolate. Because you've rejected Me," – which shows up even at His birth all the way through His life, even to His very ascension, the nation rejected Him.

So here you see the beginning of the travail, and the heartbreak, and the weeping, and the sorrow of Israel, which still goes on today. "Your house is left to you desolate." How long is the nation Israel desolate? "Until you say, 'Behold, the one who comes in the name of the Lord,'" "Until you look at Me whom you pierced and mourn for Me as an only son, until you confess Me as Lord and Messiah, your nation is desolate, desolate." Desolation means sorrow. Desolation means weeping. And mothers bear the brunt of all that.

The rejection by Herod of the Messiah and the slaughter of the little boys produced massive weeping. And that's connected with an Old Testament text, verse 17: "Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.'" This is somehow connected to Rachel and Ramah.

How is that to be understood? Well, this is another prophecy from the Old Testament, Jeremiah 31:15. It's quoted in verse 18. That's right out of Jeremiah 31:15. "A voice heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning." And then it mentions, "Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more."

A little background. Historically, Jeremiah was called the what prophet? The weeping prophet. His message was so sad. His message was so sad. He was telling the people of Israel that they were going to be destroyed, they were going to be taken captive. They were going to be murdered, slaughtered. Children died in the Babylonian invasion: young people died, adults died. It was a massacre; it was a slaughter.

We think of it as the destruction of the city and the temple. But it was primarily the destruction of the people. The people that were left were hauled off captive to Babylon. Jeremiah says that that's going to be a time of weeping and mourning when it comes. And Jeremiah was already weeping just thinking about it was going to happen. And when it did happen, when they were taken captive – 604, 597, 586, those three different captivities into Babylon – there was weeping, weeping, weeping.

But why is this weeping connected with Ramah? Why with the village of Ramah? Well, Ramah was a border town north of Jerusalem, right on the border between the southern kingdom Judah and the northern kingdom Israel. It's identified in 1 Kings 15:17. It's a border town. It had an interesting history. Its history was that it became the locus for the gathering of the captives to be hauled into captivity.

When Assyria came and took captives, basically emptied the northern kingdom of Israel, when the Assyrians came, they gathered their captives near Ramah and they hauled them from there. When Babylon came, they gathered their captives near Ramah and hauled them off from there. History tells us Ramah was that border town that foreign conquerors used to collect and assemble the people they were taking captive. So there was a lot of weeping going on in Ramah historically.

What about Rachel? Rachel, when the Assyrians came and hauled off the northern kingdom Rachel was long in the past; she wasn't around. And when the Babylonians came and hauled off the southern kingdom, this is long after Rachel. Rachel's way back in Genesis. Rachel's the wife of Jacob who is named Israel. So she's back at the beginning of the very identity of Israel, long before the kingdom was split during the time after Solomon.

What's Rachel have to do with it? Well, let me tell you. Sometimes you're reading the Old Testament, and Israel as a nation is referred to as Jacob. Israel is referred to as Jacob. That's a designation that's like a synonym for the identification of Israel, because Jacob was given the name Israel. Jacob's favorite wife was Rachel. So as Jacob sort of stands for the nation as such, Rachel stands for the women of that nation, the Jewish women.

Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob, had two sons: Benjamin, who's connected to the southern kingdom; Joseph, connected to the northern kingdom. His two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh both had territory in the northern kingdom. So when the northern kingdom was hauled away by the Assyrians, metaphorically speaking Rachel wept for the loss of her children, the ones who came from Joseph. When the Babylonians hauled off the southern kingdom, Rachel metaphorically weeps for the southern kingdom. She has children there as well.

So Rachel is the figure used to look at what happens to all the descendants of Jacob, all those that come out of the line that God established with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. She is the one who weeps at all that happens historically. She is the official Jewish weeper. She is the one who laments. She is the representative for all Jewish mothers who weep over the killing of their children in Jeremiah's day.

You could even say it; there must have been the weeping of Rachel in the second World War at the slaughter of millions and millions of Jews by Hitler and by Stalin. Rachel would be weeping again. She is the symbol of all the mothers who weep over the judgment and the destruction that comes to their children, and it all begins with regard to Jesus in Bethlehem.

You remember as Simeon said to Mary, "A sword's going to be thrust into your heart." The sword was unsheathed in Bethlehem, and it began by slaughtering the children. Jewish mothers have been weeping through the centuries. You see them weeping sometimes even today when somebody blows up their children in Israel. Rachel still weeps. Rachel still weeps. So Rachel is the representative of the mothers of Bethlehem. She's weeping again, weeping again.

If you remember what Rachel wanted, she had one real prayer, Genesis 30, verse 1, pretty strong: "Give me children, or I" – what? – "I die." She got her children. But Assyria took away her children. Babylon took away her children.

In a sense, Rachel, the symbol of all Jewish mothers, still weeps and weeps and weeps. And where is her comfort? Where is her comfort? Where is her comfort? Because of the slaughter of Bethlehem's baby boys, Matthew sees Rachel weeping for her children.

But what about Ramah? Ramah, that's north of Jerusalem, maybe an equal distance that Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem. Is this a different Ramah? Ramah means height. That word means height. It was a common term for any part of land that was elevated, such as the Bethlehem area.

And there are some commentators who identify an area one mile north of Bethlehem called the Ramah, the height. And, oh, by the way; Rachel's tomb is there, it's there. It was there when the slaughter happened. Rachel was again in a Ramah weeping for her children.

The sorrow of the bereaved mothers of Bethlehem can be turned to joy, because the child who escapes Herod is finally killed, but as the Savior of His people. So the King has to come to Bethlehem, as Micah said; must come from Egypt, as Hosea foretold; and there must be weeping in Ramah, as Jeremiah declared.

On final location is Nazareth, Nazareth. This is just a simple straightforward text, verse 19, "When

Herod died,” – by the way, Josephus says, “He died of ulcerated entrails, putrefied maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions, foul breath, and neither physicians nor warm baths led to recovery.” Another way to say it, apparently natural causes. But that sounds a lot worse, because they despised Him, they said things like that.

“He died. Behold, an angel of the Lord” – again, a third time – “appears in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ‘Get up, take the Child and His mother, go into the land of Israel, you can go back; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.’” There were others who bought into Herod’s desire to murder the Messiah, the King, and they had all died, whoever they were.

“So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.” This would have been most likely just after Passover – with that Passover, apparently Herod died. They went back into the land with just that very, very young Child in His second year.

“However, when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.” Why would he be afraid to go there? What does this mean? The Bible’s so interesting in giving us details.

Now when Herod was about to die he murdered one of his sons. Five days before he died, he murdered his son Antipater. But he didn’t murder all of his sons, he had a few left. Archelaus was one of them, and Archelaus was in charge of his funeral. He was in charge of Herod’s funeral, and he wrapped the corpse in purple, and put on the head of the corpse a crown, and put in his hand a scepter, put it on a solid gold platform lined with precious stones and five hundred slaves carrying perfume to overpower any stench. And, by the way, Herod was buried somewhere outside of Bethlehem, between Bethlehem and Jericho.

Once he’s dead, they get the word, in verse 20, that they can go back. They can go back to the land of Israel. They do in verse 20. Where did they go? Maybe they came to the people they knew in Jerusalem. I told you that was their sort of family heritage area.

They must have known the people they came to stay with originally before the child was born, maybe went back to some relatives; or they may have gone to Jerusalem. We don’t know; it doesn’t say. But they didn’t stay very long, because Joseph hears, in verse 22, that Archelaus is going to reign over Judea in place of his father Herod, so he’s afraid to go there.

The power is going to be spread around now. One of Herod’s sons is Herod Antipas. He takes over Galilee the north. He’s a more benign guy – not totally, but more than Archelaus. Archelaus is given control of Jerusalem and Judea. Archelaus is a frightening character, he’s a very frightening character. I don’t want to bother you with a lot of history, but this is kind of interesting.

Just quickly; while Herod was still alive, he really was pro-Roman. So he wanted to have a huge golden eagle erected in honor of Rome on the gate going into the temple. Well, the Jews saw this as an abomination; they were furious. Two very prominent Jewish teachers, one named Judas and one named Matthias, said that eagle’s got to come down. So they got some young guys to buy into that, and they told them to climb to the top of the gate and take some axes and hack that eagle down.

Well, they didn’t get it fully down before they were arrested and brought before Herod. Herod was

afraid that this could lead to a rebellion if he did anything to those young men, because they were seen as heroes. So he sent them off to Jericho for some kind of a trial down in Jericho. They received a mild punishment. But behind the scenes, he got the two teachers that egged them on and he killed them.

Well, that was a kind of last straw right at the Passover time, so there was a rebellion. There was a rebellion. That rebellion ended when Archelaus amassed a force and slaughtered 3,000 Jews around the Passover. He was a vicious, vicious man. And, by the way, by his ninth year ruling that Judea area, he was so bad the Romans removed him and replaced him with a man named Pontius Pilate. Joseph didn't want to get caught in Archelaus' territory. This was confirmed from heaven.

In verse 22, "After being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee. Came and lived in a city called Nazareth." Never mentioned in the Old Testament: nondescript, insignificant. Never mentioned in the Old Testament. But this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Now if you go back to the Old Testament to find that you won't find it. It's not a prophecy that's recorded in the Old Testament. But it is what the prophets said. It's a prophecy of prophets from the Old Testament recorded in the New Testament. That's not unusual.

In the book of Acts, chapter 10, it says, "Our Lord said it is more blessed to give than receive." You won't find that in the gospels. It's something our Lord said, not recorded in the gospels, but recorded later in the book of Acts.

You also have in Jude 14 a comment about the prophecy of Enoch. There were times when God spoke in the Old Testament as there were times when God spoke in the New Testament through the apostles and the prophets; not everything was recorded. Do you remember how John's gospel ends? "If everything Jesus said and did were recorded, the books of the world wouldn't contain it."

So the prophets – and apparently he doesn't have to defend it, everybody must have known it, that the Messiah will be a Nazarene, which is bizarre. You would think if He's coming from Bethlehem, He'd be a Bethlehemite. Nazareth is 55 miles north of Jerusalem in Galilee, and the people there were rude and crude and violent, had a bad reputation: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That's what Nathaniel said.

And, by the way, Nazarene means despised one, from the Hebrew *Nazare*. The town was named the town of the despised. What a place for the Messiah to live. But Isaiah said He will be despised and rejected. The Jewish Talmud calls Jesus Yeshu Ha-Notzri, Jesus the Nazarene. It never calls Him the Bethlehemite. To delegitimize Him, it calls Him the Nazarene. But that's exactly what the prophet said: "He would be the Nazarene." Had to be Nazareth, it had to be Nazareth. The prophets had said that; and Nazareth was fitting, because He was despised.

Micah says the King comes from Bethlehem, Hosea says He comes out of Egypt, Jeremiah says He brings weeping like Ramah, and the prophets say He's going to be a Nazarene. Who meets all those qualifications? Only one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, thank You for Your rich Word to us. How blessed we are to have all the revelation concerning

our blessed Redeemer, our great Savior. Thank You for opening up the truth to us again, the inescapable reality that all others are disqualified. Only Christ is qualified to be the great King: Your Son, our Savior. Call Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. And it is because He has saved us that we gather on this day, especially this Christmas day, to worship Him, to bring Him glory. Open every heart to Him this day we pray in His name. Amen.

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