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Bread of Life Baptist Church
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Matthew 2:1-23

New King, New People, New Exodus, and the Promises of Old

Intro

It's a new year: 2020 has gone, and 2021 has come; and I'm sure we're all especially glad to see 2020 go! There is always something exciting about the dawn of a "New Year," isn't there? It feels like something of a "clean slate" - an end to the last chapter, and the beginning of the new. A chance to reflect and celebrate the good of the last year, and a chance to think about the possibilities of the next; a chance to recognize and put away the bad, and opportunities for growth, change, and improvement to come; my guess is, we're all especially feeling that last category this year, hoping to put away "*The Year of the Virus*" and welcome in a new, fresh year.

As we've recently begun our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, we've seen that this book signals a "*new start*," a "*new beginning*" for the people of God, and all nations of the world, in this *New Era* of the story of Redemption. The *Old Testament* has ended and the *New Testament* has begun! But this is not like getting a *new car* or a *new phone*, where we replace and are done with the old, and where the *new thing* is something completely different and separate. No, this is much more like a *new chapter* or a *new book in a series*; it's a new start that *continues and builds upon what has already come*. It's like a *sequel*, a new book or movie that is *Part 2*; it's not something completely different, but it builds upon *Part 1*, continuing the story, making clear all that was left undone at the end of book one, and bringing the story to its *climactic and satisfactory end*. And the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, makes very clear that this *new era* centers completely around *the person, life, and work of Jesus Christ*.

In these first two chapters of this *new beginning* Matthew begins by introducing us to *who Jesus is, why he has come, and what he has come to do*. As we move into chapter 2, we see more of the story of Jesus's early unfold; and all throughout, we also see, over and over again, further evidence of how Jesus truly is the *promised one* of the Old Testament. Matthew is still showing us *who Jesus is, why he has come, and what he has come to do*.

A major theme of this passage is the **fulfillment of scripture** in the life of Jesus. This passage tells us the story of the beginning of Jesus's life and his early years; and yet, it also does *much more than this*. Matthew is showing us how everything that is happening here *is fulfilling the Word of God given to His people in the Old Testament*. In chapter 2, we see *four instances* where Matthew tells us that these things that happened *were part of God's plan along; they were fulfilling the scriptures*. So this chapter can be broken into *four subsections*: in each one, we see more of the story unfold, and then we are told something like, *“for so it is written by the prophet,”* or *“This what to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet”* or *“prophets.”* This means that in order for us to understand the *main meaning and purposes of this passage*, we have to understand *why these particular bible passages and verses are being quoted and referenced here by Matthew*; we have understand *how exactly* these passages from the Old Testament point to and are fulfilled by the life of Christ. However, this can be a bit challenging for us to unpack and understand.

As we will see, the *first quotation* is fairly simple and straightforward: the prophecy says where the promised savior would be born, and we see that this is exactly what happened! But the *next three* “scripture fulfilment” sections are not so simple. When we go back and look at the scriptures being quoted or referenced, it doesn't appear, at first, to be about the promised Messiah, much less the details of his life as an infant. We have to work a bit harder, then, to understand just what is going on here. We have to ask the question: **Why is Matthew referencing these passages as pointing to and being fulfilled in the life of Jesus?** Is he playing loose with the text? Is he imposing his own thoughts onto the Old Testament, making it say whatever he wants it to mean? *No, of course not; that's not at all what's going on.* Instead, *Matthew is teaching us how to read our Old Testaments.* He is showing us that there is more than one way that the Old Testament points to, *or prophesies about*, Jesus Christ. So as we walk through this passage, we will see how the *life of Jesus* here is *fulfilling the Old Testament scriptures*; and as we unpack what is said here, **we will learn how to better understand and read our Bibles in a way that places Christ at the center of the whole story - no matter what book of the Bible we're in.** Matthew is teaching us *how to read our Old Testament* better so that we can *better understand Jesus and the gospel*, not only in the N.T., but in *all of Scripture*.

I. Jesus is God's Promised Savior-King for All the Nations (2:1-12)

Some time after the birth of Jesus, a group of “*wise men from the East*” show up in Jerusalem. We don’t know a ton about them, where exactly they were from, or even how many of them were present. They were, however, men of very prominent, wealthy, and noble standing back in their home country. Coming from the East, they were most likely from a nation such as Babylon, somewhere in Arabia, or another similar place. The word for “wise men” here refers to those who were scholarly, often bearing religious connotations, and acted as advisers to kings and officials. So these were not **Jewish religious leaders of scholars**; they were “Gentile pagans” - foreigners, outside of Israel, who did not worship the One True God, but followed pagan religious beliefs, most likely related to their study of the stars and astrology. And yet, God uses their pagan superstitions and study of the stars to *lead them to Jerusalem*; he reveals to them that the *true King of Israel has been born* by the appearance of some kind of star.

So, naturally, they go to the capital of Israel, Jerusalem, to speak to the current king of Israel, *King Herod*. Not knowing the Old Testament of G^Od’s promises in it, they do not know where to look for this newborn King, so they ask Herod and the religious leaders; after all, they of all people should know! The religious leaders - the *chief priests* and scribes, those who studied the scriptures - told them that the promised “messiah,” the promised King, was prophesied to be born in **Bethlehem**, the *city of David*. Matthew confirms this for us, quoting Micah 5:2. This is a straight-forward **promise and fulfillment**: we see prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures that the promised messiah, the “savior King” would be born in Bethlehem; and Matthew confirms, this is exactly what happened in the birth of Christ! *Jesus is truly the promised Son of David*, God’s **promised King** come to save His people.

That is the wonderful news that the “wise men” are alerting the people of Israel to: *this promised savior and King has been born! The one they have been waiting for has finally come!* And yet, King Herod and the religious leaders in Jerusalem, *the very people that should be looking for, recognizing, and rejoicing in the arrival of G^Od’s promised messiah*, completely miss it! When they hear this news, *they are shocked and disturbed*. God is fulfilling the wonderful promise He gave to His people, *and yet the leaders of G^Od’s people reject the news*. Herod, being a paranoid, power-hungry tyrant, is greatly troubled by the news of a “promised King” being born. He doesn’t want there to be any threat to his throne or rule, so he immediately devises a plan to kill the child; he deceives the Wise Men, sending them on their way and asking to be notified when they find the child.

And so, the Wise Men find the infant Jesus, with his family, as God miraculously leads them there. Whereas the King and religious leaders of *God's people* scoff and reject the news of the Messiah's birth, we see a very ironic *plot twist*: these **pagan, non-Jewish** Wise Men bow down and worship Jesus! They bear gifts to his family: gold, frankincense and myrrh, recognizing that he truly is **born King of the Jews**. Even though the priests and scribes did not, they recognize that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the promised King for God's people!

What this story vividly pictures for us is this: **Jesus truly is born to be the King of the Jews**. And yet, not in the way that King Herod feared, nor in the way that many Jewish people and religious leaders hoped; he did not come to lead a Jewish rebellion or re-establish an earthly Kingdom of Israel. Jesus is the **true King of God's people**. And this goes far beyond the borders of Israel; *Jesus is the True King over all people and nations of the world!* Even though Israel rejected him, *Jesus is truly King; and wise men and women bow down and worship Jesus as the True King, God's King over all!* For whoever trusts in Jesus, believing He is God's promised Savior and King - whoever has faith and worships Jesus *is part of God's true people!*

So as we are reminded of *who Jesus is*, we are also reminded of *who we are* and *what we are supposed to do!* As we trust in the *gospel of Jesus*, the **good news that He came to live, die, and rise again in our place to save us from our sins and usher in the Kingdom of God**, then *we too are part of His Kingdom!*. And so we bow down and worship Him as God and bow the knee to Him and **King and Lord over all!** And just as we see the nations coming to bow down before him here, we are reminded of our *mission as God's people*; just as the book of Matthew begins with the nations coming and bowing down before Christ, so the book will end with Christ *sending us out to the ends of the earth*, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus *to all people in every nation*, that **every knee should bow before him in faith!** This is our mission! So let us *worship and serve* the King by *proclaiming this good news, the gospel, to all people, everywhere*, so that *all might bow down to Jesus in faith.*

II. Jesus, as a “New Moses” and the True Israel, Brings About a “New Exodus” (2:13-23)

The storyline continues simply enough: Herod, in his paranoid fury, attempts to stamp out this perceived threat to his rule by having the infant boys of Bethlehem massacred. This even is truly heart-breaking and tragic. And yet, he does not succeed in his goal; God sends another

angel to warn Joseph, who then takes his family down to Egypt where they wait until God tells them that it is safe to return, after Herod's death.

Yet the theological truths we're meant to see here are a little more difficult to understand; we have to wrestle with the Old Testament references and fulfillments here, even though they are difficult, in order to understand what all is going on and why it is significant. The difficult begins with the next "fulfillment of scripture", in **v. 15**: "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" But when we look back at Hosea 11, it doesn't appear, at first, to be about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, much less about his family fleeing to Egypt.

So what is going on here? Well, as I said earlier, *Matthew is showing us how to put our Bibles together* and become better readers of the Old Testament. We've just seen an example of straight-forward prophecy about the Messiah from Micah; that is exactly what we saw last week, too, in the prophecy of Isaiah 7, then again in chapter 9. These bible verses are originally written to *directly talk about the coming savior, Jesus Christ*. But God so inspired the Bible that *the whole Old Testament* points us to Jesus, whether *directly or indirectly*; so another way this happens is through particular *themes, promises, and symbols* that are developed over the course of scripture, until it is eventually made explicitly clear that they are pointing towards Christ! This is called **typology**, because the writer of Hebrews refers to these as "*types and shadows*," so that themes like the *Passover Lamb* and the *Sacrificial System*, for example, point to our need for *the True* atonement for our sins, Jesus Christ.

So what we see *here* is Matthew picking up *another of these biblical themes: that of Exodus and Exile*.

The quote here is from Hosea 11:1. In that chapter, Hosea links the **Exodus** of Israel from Egypt to the **Exile**, which is a punishment for their sin and idolatry; the prophet proclaims, in Hosea 11, that God would save and deliver his people out of their **captivity and Exile** back into the promised land, just as he delivered His people in the book of Exodus.

Matthew is showing us that Jesus is fulfilling this promise, fulfilling this **biblical theme** of *deliverance and salvation from captivity*. In this chapter, *Jesus is being identified with Israel, God's Old Covenant people, by reliving important events in the early "life story" of Israel's history*:

In **Gen. 46**, a man named Joseph brings his family (the family that would turn into the nation of Israel) down into Egypt to save them from the terrible famine in their land; and we are

told this is God's providence in their lives, as he guides and protects them. **Here**, another man named Joseph is guided by the Lord to take his family, Mary and Jesus, down to Egypt, to protect them from being killed by King Herod in their homeland.

As the **book of Exodus begins**, Joseph's family, the family of Abraham, has multiplied into the nation Israel. Yet they are *enslaved and held captive* by the wicked Pharaoh. He even has the baby sons "thrown into the Nile" River in an attempt to murderously stamp out any threat of rebellion. **Back in our present passage:** while Jesus's family is in Egypt, another wicked leader, King Herod, is paranoid once again of a threat to his rule, so he ruthlessly massacres the baby sons of Bethlehem.

Flash back to the Exodus story: God hears Israel's cries for deliverance and raises up **Moses** to be a leader over His people, to bring them out of their captivity in Egypt, to form them into a unified **people of GOD, a "holy nation,"** and to lead them into **the promised land,** GOD's promised place for His people. And hear what GOD says to Pharaoh through Moses, in **Ex. 4:22:** ***"Thus says the LORD, "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me."*** Did you catch that? God calls Israel not only His people, but **His Son**. This is what Hosea is referencing in **Hos. 11:1** - *"Out of Egypt I called my son."*

And now, flash back once again to the end of **Matt. 2:** once the coast is clear, God tells Joseph to bring **Jesus, God's true, eternal Son,** to come back out of Egypt, thus delivering him from the hand of his enemies. Jesus is being identified here with *Israel, God's people* - just as they were called out to be a **"son"** to God, so Christ, **the true son of God,** has come to identify as Israel, replaying their story in his life.

But the thread doesn't stop there: Matthew doesn't quote **Exodus**, but **Hosea**; and Hosea 11 references the Exodus, but is talking about God's deliverance **from Israel's later Exile**. In verse 18, this is referenced again in the next Old Testament quotation, from **Jer. 31:15:** *"A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."* Jeremiah is speaking about the terrible pain and grief experienced throughout Israel as they were defeated, slaughtered, and taken into captivity and exile by their enemies, Assyria and Babylon. But, like in Hosea 11, Jeremiah 31 turns into a chapter about **the sure hope of God's future salvation from Exile**. And in that chapter, Jeremiah makes clear that the real problem *is a problem of the heart*; Israel is led into Exile *because of their sin, because they have broken GOD's laws and covenant, because they*

have gone after false gods, and because they have evil hearts. So what is the solution? *God promises He will make a **new covenant**, forming them into a **new covenant people** with **new hearts*** (see Jer. 31:31-34).

And that is exactly what is being fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Here, Matthew applies this verse from Jeremiah to the *horror and lamentable tragedy* of Herod's massacre in Bethlehem, showing a vivid picture of how God's people are still languishing in captivity and suffering oppression, still crying out for deliverance. No, they are not slaves in the foreign lands of Egypt, Babylon, or Persia. Yes, they are back in the physical land of Israel. Yes, they have homes, cities, even a temple once more. And yet they are still captives. *Rome rules over them.* They still suffer the oppression of *wicked rulers*, such as King Herod, as this passage makes clear.

But even more profoundly, they are still **spiritually captive; they are slaves to sin, oppressed by the tyranny of Satan and all the evil injustices of the world, and will all answer to the slave-master of death - indeed, a reminder of the second death, the eternal judgment of God that we all deserve because of our sin.**

[Illustration] The musician Andrew Peterson captures this biblical theme very well in his song "Deliver Us" with these words:

Our enemy, our captor is no pharaoh on the Nile
Our toil is neither mud nor brick nor sand
Our ankles bear no calluses from chains, yet Lord, we're bound
Imprisoned here, we dwell in our own land...
Our sins they are more numerous than all the lambs we slay
Our shackles they were made with our own hands¹

And yet, God promised *deliverance - salvation for His people!* Just like he raised up Moses to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, so God raises up a **New Moses** - a prophet *far greater than Moses*, for He is God Himself - to form a *New Covenant people of God* and to *deliver them out of their slavery and bondage to sin, Satan, and death!*

Each of us is born into this world **as slaves to our own sin**; each one of us knows the dark desires of our hearts, our wicked and selfish thoughts, schemes, and actions. Each of us feel the shame and regret of not doing that which we know we should, or for doing what we hate. *And*

¹ Andrew Peterson, "Deliver Us," *Behold the Lamb of God* (2004).

not a single one of us can free ourselves! Like slaves in Egypt or exiles in Babylon, we need someone to save us from our sins and the wrath of God we deserve! We need someone to free us from our shackles, so that we are free to repent and obey God, loving and worshipping him as His people! This is why Christ came! He is the New Moses, leading and forming the True People of God; for He is the True Israel, God's Son, and all who are united to Christ by grace through faith become part of GOD's true people in Him! If we simply believe in these promises and trust in who Christ is and what He has done to save - not trusting in our works, not still chasing after sin or worshipping false gods - but if we truly *trust and believe in Him*, then He *delivers and saves us from our sin, freeing us to live as His people, with Him, both now and forever!*

III. Jesus is Rejected, Despised, and Persecuted - Yet it is Part of God's Sovereign Plan of Redemption (2:1-23)

The final reference to the “fulfillment of scripture” in this passage is the most difficult to understand. In **2:23**, Jesus's family returns from Egypt after Herod's death, “*so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*” On the face of it, this explains why they move back to the town of Nazareth instead of their last home, in Bethlehem. But here's the problem that arises for us: *there is not a single Old Testament verse that ever says this.*

So what do we do? Does this mean that the Bible is wrong, that Matthew made a mistake, or was making things up? *No, of course not.* We know that the Bible is *perfectly true and without error, for it is God's Word.* We just have to work hard to understand what it means here. Again, we're being forced to be better readers of our Bibles.

There are a couple of valid ways to try and resolve this quotation; here is the interpretation I find most convincing: the phrase “*will be called a Nazarene*” is not just talking about the geographical hometown of Jesus, but is also being used *as an idiom.* To be from Nazareth and to be called a “*Nazarene*” meant to be *a Nobody* from *Nowheresville.* Think of what Nathaniel, one of the twelve disciples, said in **John 1:46** told him that they had found the Messiah, and he was Jesus of Nazareth; and Nathaniel replied: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” *Everyone* knew of a place like Bethlehem or Jerusalem! They are mentioned all over the place in the scriptures, especially in reference to the coming Messiah! But who had ever heard of podunk, small-town, “middle-of-nowhere” Nazareth? It's never mentioned at all in the

Old Testament, let alone in the prophecies of the coming Savior! *But that is exactly the point Matthew is making!* The prophets never spoke of Nazareth; but they *did* talk about how the *Messiah*, this *promised Savior-King from God*, would not only be accompanied by signs and fulfillments of prophecy, *but would also unrecognized, even despised and rejected* by Israel, the very people he came to save. (Zech. 9-14; Isa. 52-53)

And this is exactly what we see going on in this passage, isn't it? Those who *should be looking for and recognizing* the birth of Christ, the promised Messiah, are instead *dismissive and indifferent at best*, such as the religious leaders and the majority people of Israel are. Even worse, King Herod and other officials are not only *rejecting and despising him*, but are trying to *kill him!*

Friend, have you ignored the good news of Christ? Have you rejected the call to repent and believe in Him? Do you despise the Bible's claims that you are a sinner in need of saving grace? That your life is not your own, for you will answer to God?

God sovereignly guides and protects the infant Jesus and his family, not letting them be overtaken by the evil schemes of these earthly rulers and powers; we've seen how God himself sent angels and dreams to protect them throughout. And yet, this is not some chess match, where God is having to react to what the enemy is doing, in order to make sure his plans aren't messed up. No, on the contrary, *all of it fits into his divine plan of redemption*. Even the wicked plots of evil men - indeed, even the wicked schemes of the Great Enemy, Satan - that we see here were already prophesied about, already part of God's sovereign plan; for he uses them to bring about his glorious purposes of grace.

Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, GOD's promised Savior and King, the God-Man Himself - he was **rejected and despised by his own people**; this would only continue throughout his life. Yes, the political and even religious leaders hated him so much that they tried to kill him; one day, they would succeed; they would hang him on a cross. And yet, *this was always part of God's plan to save the world!* It is precisely *through being rejected, despised, and persecuted that the promised King brings about the Kingdom of God; it is through being unjustly murdered on a cross that he saves wicked sinners from their sins!*

The *glorious, divine King* over all nations came to *save and form God's people, delivering us from our slavery to sin, satan and death*, by becoming *despised, hated, rejected, even killed, for our sakes*. This is what he came to do! He entered into death to bring us out of it

and into the true promised land, **the eternal Kingdom of God and eternal life with Him!** So then, just like the wise men pictured for us, *let us bow down and worship Him*, believing He is God's promised Savior and King! Let us trust in Christ alone, being forgiven and redeemed from our sins, and freed from our bondage so that we might *truly live as God's people!*