

## Fulfilling the Word

Matthew 2:13-23

11 Oct 09

We're turning today to our study of the gospel of Matthew so I ask you to open to Matthew chapter two. Make sure your lights are on now as we study God's word. And I want to read verses 13 to 23 in Matthew chapter two. Matthew chapter two verses 13 through 23. "Now, when they [referring to the magi] 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.' So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 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.' Then when Herod saw that he had been ticked 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. 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.' But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, '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.' So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"

Now as you read through that text there's something that really jumps right out at you. And it isn't the fact that Joseph must have slept a lot. So the only way the Lord could talk to him was in a dream. Now that's not what jumps out at you. What jumps out is that three times you see a reference to the Word being fulfilled. You see that in verse 15, verse 17, and verse 23. You might want to highlight those words, fulfill, or fulfilled. It's similar to what we saw in chapter one verses 22 and 23 where it said, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with Child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" And then you remember when the magi came to Jerusalem and they wanted to know where the Messiah was going to be born, the Bible scholars had the right answer. Verse five of chapter two says, "they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Matthew's making a really powerful point here. Jesus is the Messiah and in Him the Word is fulfilled. In Him God's word is fulfilled. We saw in chapter one that Matthew showed that Jesus is the Messiah by means of the genealogy, showing that he was a descendent of David, a descendent of Abraham, the rightful heir to David's throne, the promised Messiah. And we saw the explanation of the virgin birth because it's true that Jesus is from the line of

David but by means of a miraculous conception, He avoids the stain of sin and even a curse that had been placed on David's line at the time of the Babylonian exile.

So he's showing that Jesus is the Messiah, He's from the right line. He came through a miraculous birth. Jesus is the only possible descendent of David who can legitimately be called the Messiah. In chapter two verses one through 12 we saw Jesus worshiped as the Messiah, but not by Jews, but by magi who had come from the east. And that reminds us that Matthew wrote this gospel primarily to Jews in order to warn them not to repeat the mistakes of their countrymen who for the most part had either ignored or rejected Jesus as their Messiah. And if Matthew is going to convince some really tough minded resisters, then he must prove his point from scripture. And that's what he does in the passage we're looking at today.

You need to take note of Matthew's view of scripture. You'll notice in verse 15 that he says that the word there was so that, well the word was to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet. Spoken by the Lord, through the prophet. You'll notice also in verses 17 and 23 it says that the message came through the prophet. That's highlighting the fact that the prophet didn't create his own message. The message had its source in the Lord and it was delivered through a human instrument, the prophet. And that's what we mean when we say scripture was given by inspiration of God. The message was breathed out by God Himself and it was accurately and inerrantly delivered through the means of a human prophet. That's why, by the way, at Believer's Fellowship we give so much attention to the scripture, because we believe it is God's word. Inerrantly, infallibly delivered to us. So what else would we give our attention to? This is a word from God. It originated in God, it was communicated through the means that He chose and we have it before us. That's why we give so much attention to it.

Now, many commentators have looked at the verses that Matthew quotes here in this passage and they've concluded that he played pretty fast and loose with those particular verses. But again, you have to keep in mind that Matthew is writing to Jews who were familiar with these scriptures and if he abuses them, well then he's ruining his whole argument. So, if it doesn't seem like these verses quite fit to us, that's our problem. We need to carefully look at these verses and understand the way in which they were fulfilled as Matthew used them here. And it's important that we do that because Matthew's wanting us to see some very important truths about Jesus as the Messiah.

So as we look at these three sections which each conclude with the statement of fulfillment of scripture we're going to see three aspects of Jesus the Messiah. We're going to see His life fulfilling the word. We're going to learn three characteristics, the Messiah, His life, and His ministry that are really vitally important for you and me today. So let's look at those three aspects that are brought out regarding Jesus the Messiah as we look at these particular passages.

First thing that we want to note is that Jesus the Messiah was divinely protected. He was divinely protected. Verses 13 through 15. "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.' So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 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.'" Now, let me show you why this is so important. The magi had been warned by God not to return to Herod. You remember Herod had talked to them, had got information from them, asked them to go find this Messiah that they were looking for and then come back and report to him. They had been warned not to go back to Herod. And now you see that the Lord has also warned Joseph. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream with an urgent message from God. God knew what Herod's plans were so just as He had warned the magi, he warns Joseph as well. And the command here is urgent and explicit. It's explicit in that He specifically says flee to Egypt. Not just flee any old place. It's specifically, explicitly, flee to Egypt. And it's urgent that he do this because Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him. He's going to mean he's about to, he's on the verge of doing this. He's going to come and he's going to search for the Child and he's going to destroy Him, so get up and go to Egypt.

Now, Egypt was close by. It was at that time a well governed Roman province. It was beyond the jurisdiction of Herod. It's a logical place for them to go. Also many Jews lived there, which made it even more a sensible place to go. In fact a few decades later, Philo the Jewish philosopher said there were a million Jews living in Egypt. And so this command is to go. Go for your safety, go to Egypt. The focus here is on God's protection of the Child. His protection of the Messiah is unmistakable here in these verses. God is working providentially according to His predetermined plan regarding this particular Child. And He's providentially protecting Him against the plans of the Devil to destroy Him.

There's some significant things to note in what the angel says to Joseph. He refers to Jesus as the Child. He doesn't say to Joseph, take your son, because physically he's not the son of Joseph. He refers to Him as the Child. And, he refers to the Child and His mother. The Child first which would have been very uncommon to mention the Child before the mother. He's emphasizing the uniqueness of this particular Child because He is the Messiah.

Now, while this shows us God's protection of this Child, it doesn't mean that it was something easy for Joseph to do. He receives supernatural revelation, but he still had to get up and go to Egypt, and he had to do that the old fashioned way. He wasn't supernaturally transported to Egypt. From Bethlehem down to the border of Israel and Egypt is about 75 miles. They probably went another 75 miles into Egypt to a place where they could stay, so we're talking about a 150 mile journey, most likely by foot. So it would take about a week and they have a little child with them. No minivan. No DVD player. Just them walking down into Egypt. And also, they're not told how long they're going to have to stay there. They're just told to get up and go there.

So what was Joseph's response? Well verse 14 tells us he obeyed God's command and he obeyed immediately. He obeyed God's command and he obeyed immediately. There was no delay. There was no hesitation. There was no reluctance expressed by Joseph. He just did exactly what God told him to do. And it's interesting to think about the time line of these events. According to verses nine and ten we can assume the magi arrived at night because they were following a star that was leading them. And it's perhaps that very same night, or at the latest, the next night that Joseph is told to leave. So one moment the Child is being honored as the Messiah King, and the next moment they have to flee for their lives. That's just signs of God's providential care. And Joseph obeys.

And, not only did God provide protection by this revelation to Joseph, but no doubt the gifts that were given to them by the magi, that's what they used to finance that trip and their stay in Egypt.

Now verse 15 tells us that they remain there until the death of Herod which probably was only a few months later. But as they're leaving they don't know that. What's interesting is at the end of verse 15 Matthew's quote of Hosea. It's an interesting quote that we'll talk about but also that he quotes it at this time as he gives the record here. He quotes it at the time that they're going into Egypt, not the time when they're coming out of Egypt, which is what you might expect. Well, why did he insert this quote at this point? Well, he puts it there for emphasis. He's highlighting that God is going to preserve the Child in Egypt and bring Him back safely. They're going down into Egypt but that's not the end of the story. God's going to safely bring them back, just like He did with Israel when they went down into Egypt. And that brings us to that quote from Hosea. It's Hosea 11:1. And if you were to look that verse up it says just what it says here. And it's a clear reference to God's calling the nation out of Egypt. And you're all familiar with that story. You're familiar with the 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, Moses leading the people out of Egypt. That's what this is a reference to. It's a look back by Hosea to that significant event. So the question then is in what way was it fulfilled by Christ going into Egypt and coming back out? Well, you need to rightly understand how Matthew used the Old Testament. And you need to realize that when he quotes a particular verse he's pointing to a whole context. Remember they didn't have chapters and verses in their scriptures of those days. And so a particular verse belongs to a particular section and when he refers to that verse he refers to a whole section. The Jews thought of scripture in large sections, not little verses like we tend to do. In fact I heard a speaker this week talk about how in his home he grew up and they had a very common practice. They would come down for breakfast in the morning and they had a container on the table, it was shaped like a loaf of bread. It had a slot in the top and you had all the cards in it and everybody pulled out a card and read a verse. It didn't matter what the verse meant. There was not discussion of the context of that verse. It was just a reading of that verse. And on the side of the little container that looked like a loaf of bread it read 'our daily bread. Anybody seen one of those? You know what I'm talking about. He said it shouldn't have been called 'our daily bread.' It should have been called 'our daily crouton.' And that's an unfortunate way for us to think of scripture because verses have a context. And they mean something in a context. And that's how the Jews thought about scripture. They thought in large sections.

And so when he quotes a particular verse he's pointing to a larger context. And Hosea is a book about judgment. Judgment from God against an unfaithful Israel. But in the midst of the judgment there's hope that's given. That they are going to be judged now, but this isn't the end of the story. There's going to be a future restoration. And the point here is that just like God delivered Israel out of captivity in Egypt, so He will deliver them again in the future. In fact, if you read the whole of Hosea chapter 11 you would see that. They were unfaithful and they were experiencing the results of their unfaithfulness. But God will always be faithful. He made promises and we talked about those in chapter one. Promises to Abraham. Promises to David. He's going to keep those promises and so even though Israel may experience judgment in a particular time, there is a future restoration because of promises God has made.

And as an indication of God's faithfulness, Hosea refers back to God bringing them out of Egypt just like He said He would. So the point Matthew makes here is that just as God preserved Israel, He will preserve the Messiah. In fact, you can say Jesus is the ultimate Israelite. In the Old Testament you can see Israel called God's Son. You can see Israel called God's First Born. You can see Israel called God's Servant. And in all of those ways, Jesus is the ultimate. He's the ultimate Son, He's the ultimate First Born, He's the ultimate Servant. And just as Israel had to come out of Egypt or the Messianic prophecies couldn't be fulfilled, so Jesus must come out of Egypt for the Messianic prophecies to be fulfilled as well. God Brought Israel out of Egypt in His faithfulness. So He'll bring Jesus out of Egypt in His faithfulness. There's some striking parallels there and Matthew is saying, hey this isn't any coincidence that this is happening. Israel came out of Egypt and the Old Covenant was inaugurated. Jesus will come out of Egypt and the New Covenant will be inaugurated. So we say that Israel here serves as a type or a picture of Jesus, the ultimate Israelite.

Events which occurred with Israel provide pictures of the Messiah. And the messiah is connected to Israel. In fact you can say when Israel came out of Egypt, so did the Messiah because He identifies with them. So the picture is fulfilled or completed in Jesus the Messiah. Here's the way to understand it. It's like, through the scriptures God is painting a picture. In the Old Testament you get the border and the background details. But the picture is complete when Jesus comes. He completes the picture. A lot of things in the Old Testament were pictures pointing to Him coming. We can talk about the sacrifices. We can talk about the work of the priests. They were all pictures. But the picture is finally completed with Jesus. So, the picture is fulfilled with Jesus the Messiah. The protection of Him is tied to His work of deliverance. Israel was delivered from Egypt. Hosea uses that to point to God's faithfulness regarding even future deliverance according to His promises. And Jesus is that ultimate deliverer. And God once again demonstrates His faithfulness.

Jesus the Messiah was protected, divinely protected. And you can see that protection going all throughout His life. A few weeks ago we looked in the gospel of John and we saw how there were numerous times that people wanted to take Jesus, seize Jesus, kill Jesus, but the text said His time has not yet come. He was divinely protected until the time God had determined. And that protection began right at the beginning. Satan will attempt to thwart God's plans, but he'll always be unsuccessful. And that's significant for you and me because of God's protection of the Messiah, your salvation was accomplished. And God is faithful. And He can protect you in Christ. Jesus the Messiah was divinely protected.

Second thing that we can note here is that Jesus the Messiah brings comforting hope. Jesus the Messiah brings comforting hope, verses 16 through 18. "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. 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.'" Herod had sent the magi from Jerusalem down to Bethlehem, five miles away to find the one that they were looking for. And he wanted them to report back. We saw that in verse eight. When he realizes that they weren't coming back, he feels like he's been tricked. And the

text tells us he was very enraged which means he was totally controlled by his anger. And what he does is perfectly in keeping with Herod's character. Remember we talked about Herod last time and I told you that he had had his wife and at least two of his sons murdered. He eliminated anybody that he saw as a threat. And that's what you see him doing here. And what you see here in the actions of Herod is just how foolish sin can make a person. You know, he could have just sent some men and investigated, well what family did these magi visit with? He didn't do that. If the magi had left a different way, they didn't come back to Herod, well then maybe the family with this child, maybe they went away too. Herod didn't think about that. Herod just acts out of his blind rage. You'll notice that it says he has all the male children two years old and under put to death. Two years old and under. That's based on the information he received from the magi regarding how old this child might be. It is possible that the text is saying, it could mean under two. So it's not including two year olds. And it doesn't mean that the child was two years old when this happened. It could simply mean that Herod was giving himself a wide margin. He wasn't taking any chances, any potential threats to his rule. He's going to eliminate them all. And also, the number of children killed in this incident has been, well according to legends, greatly exaggerated. I mean, I read accounts of 1400 children being slaughtered by Herod at this time. That's not right. The whole city of Bethlehem had less than 1000 people at that time. So there aren't 1400 two year olds running around. We're probably talking about 15 to 20 children that were killed. Now that's small time for Herod. That's no big deal for him. Probably why this particular incident isn't recorded in other histories of Herod. That's why some critics question this, because why wouldn't this have been recorded in other histories about Herod? Well, because this was small time stuff for him. He did stuff like this all the time. That's not to say that the killing of 15 to 20 little children is a small matter. Not at all. And no doubt, that incident provoked many tears. Just like it says in the text.

And that's why Matthew quotes from Jeremiah the prophet in verses 17 and 18. He's actually quoting Jeremiah 31 verse 15. And that's a very interesting text. The context there is the Babylonian captivity. In fact, Jeremiah 40 verses one and two say that the captives were taken through the city of Ramah. In fact that was kind of a gathering point before they were hauled off to Babylon. Ramah was a city close to where Rachel's tomb is. And there's a mention of Rachel here. Rachel is pictured as a mother in Israel. She was one of Jacob's wives. In fact, she was the wife that Jacob loved. Rachel. She was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. And the picture here that's presented in Jeremiah and quoted in Matthew, is Rachel weeping for her children, the children of Israel, as they are being led off in to captivity. The captivity that threatens the future of the nation. This is the exile that ended the rule of David's sons. And you remember from chapter one that this exile, this Babylonians exile, was highlighted in the genealogy. Remember the genealogy was broken down into three sections of fourteen? Fourteen from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. The exile was huge. The exile was highlighted. That's the incident that's being talked about here in Jeremiah and quoted by Matthew. But again remember that a reference to a verse is a pointer to a larger context.

And the context of Jeremiah 31 really is one of hope. Hope that is meant to bring comfort to those who are sorrowing. In fact verse 16, the very next verse after the one that Matthew quotes, says, "Stop your weeping." And verse 17 says, "There is hope for your future." And why is that? Well, because later in Jeremiah 31, the thing that this chapter is most well known for, is the giving of a new covenant. Verse 31

of Jeremiah 31 says, “Behold, days are coming.’ Declares the Lord, ‘when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,’ declares the Lord. ‘In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eat the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. ‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declare the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,”

So to those who are sorrowing because of the captivity, He says there’s a hope for your future. I’m going to make a new covenant. This captivity is bad but this captivity isn’t the end of the story. There’s going to be a new covenant and the key features in that new covenant are the forgiveness of all of your sins. The forgiveness of all your sins. The exile doesn’t ultimately end until the Messiah comes, the one who makes that new covenant. And then it’ll end and Matthew is telling about that Messiah. The One who has come to inaugurate the new covenant. Despite the tears, the tears caused at the exile, the tears caused by the killing of children in Bethlehem and all the other times the Jewish people have been caused to cry and sorrow, there is hope because of a Messiah. There is comfort for those who sorrow. So, Jeremiah presents a generic, timeless picture, of Rachel, pictured as a mother of Israel weeping for her children. The killings in Bethlehem is just another incident, but those tears will be swallowed up in joy because of the hope of a Messiah. The tears of sin will be swallowed up in the joy of salvation. By pointing to this verse in Jeremiah 31, Matthew is saying the Messiah has come. The One who gives hope has arrived. Matthew’s message of Messianic joy and fulfillment, it’s marred by the shadow of death, the killing of children in Bethlehem. Just like Jeremiah’s message of hope was marred by tears. But the message is the same. The Messiah brings hope, and Jesus, He’s that Messiah.

Sin and unfaithfulness brings death. It brings sadness, brings sorrow. But there’s hope for sinners. Because they can find comfort and consolation in a Messiah, a Savior. The One who came to save them. That might be a time to say Hallelujah. Do you ever get saddened and sorrowful by the effects of sin? You can find comfort in the Messiah. He’s the One pictured in the Old Testament scripture. Remember that idea that a picture’s being painted. The Old Testament presents the background, the border, Jesus completes the picture. He’s the One who fulfills, or the word you could use there is completes. He completes the picture. These Old Testament references show part of the picture. Jesus completes the picture. So in that sense He fulfills it. He completes it. Jesus is the Messiah and He was protected according to God’s plan and He brings hope according to God’s plan. Anybody here today like a little hope? In the midst of a sinful and sorrowful world, it’s Jesus that gives hope. Not your 401k, not the politicians, it’s Jesus.

But there's another part of God's plan that's brought out here. A part that you might not have anticipated. Certainly one the Jews didn't anticipate as they thought about their coming Messiah. And the third thing that is brought out here is that Jesus the Messiah was ruthlessly rejected. Verses 19 through 23. "But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, "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.' So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"

Like I told you, Herod probably died a few months after Jesus and Joseph and Mary went into Egypt. I won't go into all the details because you are probably all looking forward to a nice big lunch after church. But Herod died an extremely painful and gross death. And I'll just leave it at that. At that time though an angel appears to Joseph just like he said he would, back in verse 13, he says stay there till I tell you and now here is coming to tell him. And again you have to notice God's initiative both in preserving and guiding the life of this Child. And the angel tells Joseph that now it's safe to take the Child back into the land of Israel. And he doesn't mention anywhere specific. He says it's just safe to go back into Israel. So what does Joseph do? Well, again he obeys immediately without any hesitation or reluctance. Now you and I might have said, hey, we just got here. We just kind of got settled in. I found a joy, found a place to live. We're just kind of getting comfortable here and how we got to get up and go back? There's none of that. And you know, if Jesus had been entrusted to my care, I don't think I'd have slept too much. But Joseph is sleeping all the time. This is a man who trusted the Lord, and obeyed the Lord. He believed God. And he acted on the revelation he received from God. He was a faithful man.

So he gets up and goes, but he's not going to return to Judea which is where Bethlehem is because of this man Archelaus. When Herod died his rule was divided among three of his sons. Archelaus was given the rule over Judea and some other areas, and he was just as bad as his father. Just as murderous as his father. In fact, shortly after assuming his reign, he had 3000 Jews killed because they protested the fact that they had put a Roman eagle over the gate into the temple. So he said, you don't like that? Okay. And he killed 3000 of them. But he was such a bad leader he only ruled for about 10 years and then Rome had him removed. Anyway, he's bad news, and God acts in care of the Child, warning Joseph, and they go to Galilee and settle in a little city, really nothing more than a little village, called Nazareth. Now, we know about Nazareth. We know that that's where Joseph and Mary had lived before Jesus was born. In fact in Luke chapter one verses 26 and 27, when the angel appears to Mary to tell her what's going to happen, at that time she's engaged to Joseph and they are living in Nazareth. They went to Bethlehem, you remember Luke two tells us, because of the census. So they had to go to their home cities. Since they were in the line of David they went to Bethlehem. But they had been living prior to that in Nazareth. So, they went back home in essence. Back to Nazareth. Nazareth was located southwest of the Sea of Galilee, about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. So, this is a long journey from Egypt up to Nazareth. Remember, no minivan, no DVD player. No convenient stores to stop at along the way. Just walking.

But they returned to Nazareth under God's direction so Jesus could fulfill what had been spoken by the prophets. Now, you'll notice Matthew states this one a little differently. He doesn't quote a specific prophet. He mentions the prophets in general. Verse 23 says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets." He just speaks in a general way there, and he doesn't quote a specific Old Testament verse. What he gives there is a summary of what the prophets had said. And the summary of what they had said is He'll be called a Nazarene. What does that mean? He'll be called a Nazarene. What's the significance of that? Why did they indicate that He'd be called something like that? Well, let me tell you a little bit about Nazareth. Nazareth was even smaller than Bethlehem. And it was so insignificant, you won't find it mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament. The thing to take note of, most significantly, is that Nazareth was a despised place. You know the famous quote of Nathanael, when Philip came to him and said, hey we've found the Messiah. It's Jesus from Nazareth. And you remember what Nathanael said? What? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And you know, Nathanael wasn't a cynical kind of a guy. In fact, when he met Jesus, Jesus referred to him as an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. So what he said about Nazareth, what he indicated about Nazareth, that's what was true. Nothing good ever came out of Nazareth. It was, had a bad reputation. So to be called a Nazarene was to be despised, to be ridiculed, to be scorned. It was to be rejected. To be called a Nazarene, that's calling you a dirty name. And Jesus was known as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus the Nazarene. He wasn't known as Jesus of Bethlehem, which would have really been a title of honor, from the city of David. No, He wasn't known by that title. He was known as Jesus the Nazarene, which was a title of scorn and rejection. In fact in Acts 24:5, Christians are referred to as the sect of the Nazarene. That was meant to be hurtful. That wasn't a compliment. So when Matthew says that He would be called a Nazarene, he's referring to the fact that the prophets predicted one who was coming, this Messiah who was coming, would be lowly, scorned, ridiculed, and ruthlessly rejected. And perhaps Matthew even had some particular scriptures in mind.

For example Isaiah 53 verses two through four describing the Messiah says, "He grew up before Him [before God] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground, He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." He was one who was rejected. He was called a Nazarene. Perhaps Matthew was thinking of some verses from Psalm 22 which is picture of the coming Savior. In verse six and seven of Psalm 22 it says, "But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip; they wag the head." He was scorned, He was sneered, He was rejected, He was ridiculed. Verse 15, Psalm 22 says, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaved to my jaws; and you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." That's a prediction of crucifixion, the ultimate sign of the rejection of the Messiah. He was a Nazarene, ridiculed, despised, looked down upon, and rejected. So you see that what Matthew is doing here is not a direct quotation,

but a summary and a theme about a despised and rejected Messiah summarized by the fact that He'd be called a Nazarene.

And just to note to follow Him is to join in His rejection by the world, to be a part of the sect of the Nazarenes. Don't expect to be popular for following Christ. This is the one, this is the Messiah, he's the one divinely protected. He's the one who bring comforting hope, but he was ruthlessly rejected by men. Matthew's point to his original readers and to us is that we must receive Him, not reject Him. He's the Messiah spoken of in scripture. He's the one who fulfills scripture. Herod and for the most part the Jews rejected Him. Matthew is warning his readers, don't do the same thing. You must receive Him, not reject Him. You need to be like Joseph. The main characters in this section are obviously Jesus, but also Herod, as the one who rejected Him, and Joseph, the one who received Him. And you'll notice that Joseph received the Savior and the word of God. And he responded to the word of God even though it wasn't easy for him to do that. None of this, for him to take Mary for his wife wasn't an easy thing. None of this was easy for him, but you never see any hesitation on Joseph's part. Are you so quick to do the hard thing scripture tells you to do? So are you receiving Him or rejecting Him? Joseph received Him and it's seen by the fact that he heard what God said and he did it no matter how hard it was. And it wasn't easy for him, and it wasn't anything that Joseph asked for. He wasn't lining up, he didn't buy a lottery ticket. Hey, I'd like to be the dad of the Messiah. He wouldn't ask for this. He didn't sign up for any of this. None of it was convenient for him. None of it was comfortable for him. How different he is from the typical Christian today who is totally driven by convenience and comfort. Never wants to do that hard thing. In fact, the saying today is, God doesn't want me unhappy so I'm not going to do any of those hard things. That's a complete perversion of what the scripture says. The ultimate issue in your life and my life is who rules. Who rules in your life? You, or the Messiah king? Who rules?

Herod wanted to rule his own life. His own kingdom. And he tried to protect his throne. And he responded in anger when he perceived a threat to his throne. Do you have a problem with anger? That might be a really good indication of who's really ruling your life. When you respond in anger to anything that disagrees with you, or anything that threatens your kingdom. You got a problem with anger? Who's ruling your life? How futile it is for any of us to think that we can thwart the plan of God, the purpose of God. How futile to think that you could survive without submission to Christ. How futile it is to have a high view of scripture without obedience to scripture. A lot of people in Bible teaching churches who claim a high view of scripture, and they could quote scripture. They could be just as quick as those guys who knew that Bethlehem would be the birthplace. But just like those guys, they don't obey. How futile it is to say, well I have a high view of scripture, and yet you don't obey it, because it's uncomfortable, it's hard. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be called a Nazarene. How futile to think you could live that way and nothing is going to happen. How futile for you to think that there is any other way to salvation apart from humbly uniting with Christ through faith and facing the rejection of the world. It's absolutely futile for you to think that you could love the world and love Christ at the same time.

Sin brings death. Sin brings sorrow. Christ brings hope. Christ brings comfort, protection, forgiveness, salvation. Are you fearful today? You can find protection in Christ. Are you sorrowful today? You can find comfort in Christ. Are you angry today? You can find forgiveness in Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. He fulfills

the scripture. You can have confidence in Him. Make sure your confidence is in Him and in His word alone. Let's pray.

Father, we're so thankful that there's a Savior, a Messiah, a Christ that you sent into the world. Just the right time, just the right line, just to the right people, through a miraculous means, fulfilling all of the scripture, completing the picture that You had been painting. We're so thankful that He came into this world. We're thankful that we have this record from Matthew given through Matthew from You that tells us about this Savior, this Messiah that's come. Lord, we see it's obvious You're bringing Him into the world and You're guiding Him and protecting Him and fulfilling Your plans through Him. And those are plans for good. They are plans that provide hope and comfort. They are plans that take away our fears and provide forgiveness of our sin. Lord, help us to understand that this isn't just kind of interesting information. This is Matthew presenting a truth to people who had been resisting it with the desire that they would respond to it, that they would heed the warnings, that they would see how futile and empty it is to fight against the Messiah like Herod did. Even though Herod feigned care and worship, yet he still fought against Him. Even those who were the Bible students ignored Him, rejected Him, confident in their knowledge. Lord, help us to heed the warning. Help us to see that what's presented here is so different from what's common today. The response of Joseph to Your word, so uncommon, yet only natural if we understand he's receiving revelation from you and it has to do with the Messiah, Lord, help us to respond. And Lord, I pray for any here today who might be fearful that they would know that they can find protection in Christ, eternal protection so that no matter what happens they have eternal life in Him. Those who are sorrowing because of the effects of sin in this world, and there are many, many reasons for us to cry tears today, yet we can have hope in a Messiah. A hope for the future where we'll be free from sin. Lord, help us to recognize that Jesus was rejected by this world and if we want to follow Him then we should expect the same and we should be willing to follow Him because who else is there? Help us to see how futile it is to try to live our own lives, establish our own kingdom, live any way we want to live. Help us to realize that we need to acknowledge Christ as king and follow Him. Lord, I pray You would speak to each one of us here today confirming Your word in our hearts that we might follow after Christ. For I pray this in His name. Amen.