

# Matthew 2:13-23: God Is at Work

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good afternoon to you. I'm going to ask you to stand. As Dave mentioned, our children are with us in our service this afternoon. Our scripture reading, Matthew chapter 2, verses 13 through 23. You'll find that in the Red Pew Bibles on page 784.

If you're using that on this afternoon, page 784, Matthew chapter 2, verses 13 through 23. Now, when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious.

And he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

[ 1 : 2 5 ] Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel reaping for her children.

She refused to be comforted because they are no more. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel.

For those who sought the child's life are dead. And he arose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth. That that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled.

He shall be called a Nazarene. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. For a moment there, I thought Pastor Jay had a change of mind and was going to preach for me as well.

[ 2 : 4 8 ] But thank you for doing that. Let us pray before we get started. Our Heavenly Father, we have come to gather around your word and to hear you speak to us through your word.

May you open our hearts and our minds through the power of your Holy Spirit that we may understand your word and live by your word so that you may be glorified. In Jesus Christ's name, amen.

God is at work. God is in control. God has been at work since before time began. God was at work in the Old Testament.

And God was at work in the New Testament. And God is still at work today. God is working towards the fulfillment of his promise of salvation of his people who will live under his rule in his forever kingdom.

In our text today, Matthew uses three vignettes to teach of how God works on a grand scale throughout history as he fulfills three different prophecies in the birth and early years of Jesus Christ.

- [ 3 : 51 ] However, Matthew also includes the narratives to reveal how God orchestrated the smallest details of Jesus' life as he provided for him financially, as he protected him from murder, and directed his travels from Nazareth to Bethlehem to Egypt and back up to Nazareth again, where he would live and grow to maturity.

God was at work both at a cosmic level and also at a very human, personal level in Jesus' life. God was at work both at a very human level and at a very human level. I'd like to walk through the vignettes from Joseph's perspective so we can feel how God acted at the very human level, even while he was exploring the grand work of history through the fulfillment of prophecies.

Imagine what Joseph must have been thinking the night he fled to Egypt. Let me read that vignette for you again. Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.

Joseph just woke his family up in the middle of the night. He made sure that they threw on their thick cloaks over their thin tunics to protect them from the bite of the night air.

- [ 5 : 19 ] The family passed through the village gates, walking the rocky roads, just a little bit of moonlight illuminating their path ahead of them. He was fully aware of the dangers of traveling alone at night.

The weight of the treasures from the wise men was a reminder to him that this was not the only things that could be taken from him if they were robbed by bandits that night.

On the other hand, the child's death was sure if they didn't flee that night because as we saw in verse 13, it says, For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. As Joseph settled into a stride after the initial midnight commotion, he and his family walked alone, isolated in the darkness of night.

Not much was spoken between Joseph and Mary. They were tired. They did not want to wake the child. Alone in his thoughts, feeling the sting as the wind was pelting his face with sand, keeping a watchful eye on every movement just beyond the shadows, Joseph looks up and says, God, I just don't get what you're doing.

I don't know what we're doing here. It just does not make sense. There was no answer. He kept moving forward. Joseph probably didn't fully understand that God was using him to move Jesus out of harm's way to keep him safe in Egypt.

- [ 6 : 44 ] Joseph's goal that night was to make it to the next city by morning so he could join a caravan to travel with them down the Via Maris, the major trade route to Egypt. It was much safer to travel in groups back then than to travel alone.

The only thing that kept him moving forward towards Egypt as they walked for the next two to three weeks and caring for his family was the fact that he believed that God was at work.

As we learned over the past few weeks, we learned a little bit about Joseph. We heard that he was a just man. He was born in the line of David. He was the son of David. This is why God was able to use him in his master plan.

Joseph tried living according to the law. He would make his annual visits to the temple. He was mastering his craft in carpentry. And he was looking forward to his impending marriage with a young lady named Mary.

He learned that she was with child and was considering how to address the issue. At that time, he was visited by an angel in his dream. God acted directly in Joseph's life to ensure that Joseph would remain with the woman and care for the Christ child in the early years.

[ 7 : 58 ] Initially, Joseph may have just tried to make peace with the situation. But as he walked the dark, dusty road with his family that night, he knew that the angel who spoke to him in a dream was speaking the truth.

When the angel said that the baby that Mary conceived was from the Holy Spirit. The amazing events that occurred surrounding the birth of the infant were indisputable.

The shepherds who appeared the night Jesus was born, telling stories about angelic choirs in the heavens. The mysterious prophecies that were spoken about the child during the dedication at the temple.

The visit from the exotic wise men from strange faraway lands bringing gifts fit for a king. This all certainly indicated that there was something extraordinary going on and that God was at work.

This is really the main point that Matthew is trying to convey as he writes down these stories. In reality, Matthew includes the narrative in his account, not just to tell you about Joseph's part in Jesus' early life, but because he wants you to know that God is at work in history to fulfill his promise of salvation to his people.

[ 9 : 12 ] Matthew points to five fulfillment statements in his narratives from the beginning of Jesus' birth through infancy. We encountered the first fulfillment statement a couple of weeks ago in chapter 1, verse 22, where we learned about Jesus' impending birth.

In chapter 2, verse 6, last week, we learned that Jesus was going to be born in Bethlehem, as the wise men pointed out. And our text today has three fulfillment statements, verses 15, 17, and 23.

And we do want to look at them today because this gets at the heart of what Matthew is trying to tell us in these three vignettes here. Our first fulfillment statement is in verse 15. So let's take a look.

I'll actually start at 14 and reread that again. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Out of Egypt I called my son. Now, before we dig in and start to work through the prophecy statements, I'd like to make a few comments about prophecy as the Old Testament prophecies are understood in the New Testament.

[ 10 : 24 ] One scholar calls the prophecies enigmatic riddles. They are puzzles to be solved many times. Some of them are more straightforward and clear, but ours are not as clear this week.

For example, the prophecies that are quoted in our text may appear to be completely unrelated or sometimes even incorrect, some of the statements that are made. We would not have been able to associate Matthew's Old Testament prophecy, quote, with the event of the flight to Egypt, for example.

Matthew was divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit as he wrote the gospel. And he was led to associate a particular prophecy with a particular event.

God is at work even during the writing of his word. So let's take a look at the first one. Out of Egypt I called my son. This is actually a quote from Hosea 11, verse 1.

I'll read that for you. You don't have to turn there. It's pretty short. When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son. So it helps to understand what's going on in Hosea.

[ 11 : 30 ] So I'll give you a little bit of background. Hosea was prophesying against the northern kingdom, Israel. And he foretold the capture of Israel by the Assyrians.

He talks about the resulting exile. But he also gives a promise of restoring his people in the end. Hosea moves back and forth between two key concepts in his prophecy.

He points out that Israel has been unfaithful towards God. And he shows how God has been faithful towards Israel. So in the quote that Matthew uses, the readers are reminded that God was faithful in bringing his people up out of Egypt when they were there in slavery.

Out of Egypt I called my son. In a sense, Matthew is using the prophecy to reach all the way back to the time when God saved Israel from bondage in Egypt. It was the salvation of his people.

He carries this through to Hosea's time where they were warned about the coming exile because Israel turned their back on God. Matthew then pulls this theme of salvation forward to the point of Christ.

[ 12 : 36 ] The ultimate fulfillment, the complete and final fulfillment of all salvation promises. He does all of this in one little quote. Out of Egypt I called my son.

Moving on to the second vignette, Joseph finds himself caring for his family in Egypt. He was in a holding pattern as he waited in Egypt.

He didn't know how long he would be there. Should he just sit and wait it out? How long would the gold and frankincense and myrrh last to pay their living and travel expenses? Should he look for a job?

Should he open a carpenter's shop? He didn't know how long he would be there. It was Joseph's obedience and his belief that God was somehow at work that sustained him as he waited in a strange country with strange food, strange language, and strange customs.

While he waited, God was at work. God used Joseph to move his son Jesus out of harm's way. While they sat in Egypt, King Herod unleashed his wrath and set in motion his abominable plan to kill all male children under the age of two in the region of Bethlehem.

[ 13 : 46 ] Let me read that narrative for you in verses 16 through 18. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem in all the region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping in loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.

She refused to be comforted because they are no more. This brings us to our second fulfillment statement in verse 18. This is actually a quote from Jeremiah 31, verse 15.

You can turn there if you'd like, but I'll reread it for you. It's a little bit different, maybe slightly more poetic, and it uses a different tense. So that's slightly different from the New Testament quote.

Thus says the Lord, A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children because they are no more.

[ 15 : 02 ] So again, we need to understand a quote from Jeremiah. We need to understand a little bit more about Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet to Judah at the southern kingdom.

He was there during the reign of the good king, Josiah, and he continued to prophesy all the way to the end, to the exile, to Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied that God rejected his people because they were faithless and unrepentant.

However, our quote in Jeremiah actually finds itself wedged in a text that is primary speaking of the coming hope that God promises. This part of Jeremiah talks about how God will restore Israel and Judah from exile.

He will make a new covenant with his people. He will bring his people back to the promised land. He will honor the Davidic covenant to establish a kingdom in the line of David.

Before he fulfills these promises, there will be the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, though. The Jews, including Jeremiah, were taken captive. They were bound in chains and gathered at Ramah, where they were then marched into exile.

[ 16 : 15 ] This is why Rachel cries for her children. This is the immediate fulfillment of the original prophecy. But if you look at it a little closer, if you remember I said our prophecies might appear to be incorrect at times.

Rachel is not really there witnessing the destruction. She's not really crying over Judah being marched off into exile. The tribe of Judah is not even her offspring directly. Rachel was buried at Ramah.

She was Jacob's wife and died giving birth to Benjamin more than a thousand years before this event. This is what some scholars call the personification to move the listeners.

It's a literary device or a theoretical embellishment. Jeremiah uses this idea of rousing the dead to weep over the loss of the sons of Israel. With this understanding, in the immediate context, Rachel was weeping because of the great loss of lives at the exile of God's people.

Jeremiah. And in Matthew's context, we see Rachel weeping over the loss of the children who were slaughtered at the hands of King Herod. And this time, it is followed by the fulfillment of the coming king in the line of David, Jesus Christ.

[ 17 : 29 ] Again, this quote sweeps through God's unfolding salvation plan through centuries, pulling the theme of loss from Rachel to the fall of Judah to the children being slaughtered by Herod, even as God protected the Christ child.

In a way, Jesus' personal history repeats the aspects of Israel's national history. It is an Old Testament foreshadowing of the New Testament events.

God was at work in all of these events, continually unfolding his plan of salvation for his people. Matthew's third vignette begins with Herod's death as God continued to orchestrate the movement of Jesus.

Joseph was visited by an angel again, and he led his family up out of Egypt, as we read in verses 19 and 20. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.

And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. As Joseph and his family made their way back to Israel and began to approach Judea, they were eager for news about what took place when they were gone.

[ 18 : 52 ] They quickly confirmed that King Herod was indeed dead, as Joseph was told in his dream. They listened with horror about how the king had slaughtered young children in and around Bethlehem, and were amazed as they began to comprehend how God protected their child.

When they learned that Archelaus took over the reins for Judea, they were concerned because his reputation was not much better than his father's, and Joseph was unsure where to move to next.

God again communicated to Joseph through an angel, in a dream, redirecting the family back to Nazareth. Our story ends in verse 22 and 23.

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father, Herod was afraid to go there. Sorry, his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And being warned in a dream, he withdrew from the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled.

[ 19 : 59 ] He shall be called a Nazarene. Here we find our last fulfillment statement. He shall be called a Nazarene. The strange thing is that this quote is nowhere to be found in all of scriptures.

Even if you expand your search beyond the canon, you won't find it anywhere. This is where we start to understand when some of the scholars call the prophecies enigmatic riddles.

God's inspired word makes us dig a little deeper and work a little harder to understand this statement. We will first note that Matthew changes from quoting the prophet in the past two quotes, in the prophet Jeremiah specifically in one of them, to the prophets in the plural.

This means that he is drawing from more than one prophet, which in turn would usually mean that our specific phrase, he shall be called a Nazarene, would have been spoken by more than one prophet.

But we already decided that this quote does not exist anywhere in scripture. So therefore, it's either a repeated theme that the prophets spoke of, or the prophets being quoted are lesser known and have not been written down.

[ 21 : 06 ] With this understanding, we see that God worked throughout history, often using the unknown, working in unexpected ways, and often using undesirable people and methods to carry out his plan.

It is no different as he introduces his son into history. The prophets that are being quoted are unknown. The path that brought Jesus to Nazareth was unexpected.

The city where the Messiah grew up was undesirable, as the disciple Nathaniel was happy to point out, can anything good come from Nazareth? For Jesus to be called a Nazarene meant that he came from a relatively unknown city, Nazareth.

It was certainly unexpected for the Messiah, who was in the line of David, to come from a city that was mixed with Jews and Gentiles. And the established religious elite would have certainly have declared anyone who came from Nazareth and claimed to be the son of God to be undesirable.

The theme does seem to fit, as many of the prophets foretold, that the Messiah would be despised and rejected. And it fits with how God works in mysterious and unexpected ways.

[ 22 : 16 ] This is our final vignette of Matthew's in his last fulfillment statement of the narrative story that he tells. Matthew included these narratives because he wanted you to know that God was at work to fulfill his salvation promise for his people through Jesus Christ.

God was at work at a cosmic level, shaping the events of history, manipulating genealogies and working through kings and authorities to introduce Jesus Christ, who was fully human and fully God.

Matthew included these narratives to show how God was intimately involved at a human level as well. Caring for the infant with a place of warmth in a manger, providing gold, frankincense, and myrrh to sustain the child and his family in their travels, providing parents who protected the child when Herod set out to kill him, and finally moving them to live in the city of Nazareth.

God remained intimately involved throughout Jesus' life. At Jesus' baptism, God announced that Jesus is his son. God was there when Jesus was judged and beaten for crimes that he did not commit.

God was there when they hung Jesus on the cross. God was even there when Jesus cried out, Why have you forsaken me? God completed his most powerful act of work by sacrificing his son, Jesus Christ, on the cross, where Jesus absorbed the full force of God's wrath against our sin on our behalf, so that through the blood of Jesus Christ we may be purified and justified, so that we may be considered his people and enter his presence and spend all eternity worshiping him as Christ rules his forever kingdom.

[ 24 : 02 ] God worked. God's work did not end at the cross. God continues to work today. How does he work today? At a cosmic level, Christ rules from the throne of heaven, and he is busy gathering his people into his kingdom, putting them under his authority.

At a personal level, he has made a new covenant with his people. He promised forgiveness of sins and promised that the Holy Spirit would dwell within each individual who believes in his son, Jesus Christ.

As he said in Jeremiah chapter 31, this is the same chapter that Matthew was quoting from as well. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And further on, he says, For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. God is carrying on his work by giving us salvation and giving us his Holy Spirit.

God is at work today gathering his people into his kingdom through the work of the Holy Spirit and his word. God is doing his work through us. If we are his people, then we are his disciples.

[ 25 : 12 ] If we are his disciples, then we are called to make disciples. God is at work today, and he is working through you and through me. He is using his people, his disciples, to gather his people into his kingdom, even as his word and his Holy Spirit are fully engaged in God's word on earth.

Looking back at Matthew's narrative, we see how God mobilized people, angels, shepherds, wise men, and kings and rulers for this great event. He orchestrated genealogies through history to secure the line of David for this moment.

He directed and redirected players to be in the right place at the right time. He used man's nature to lie, to deceive, and to murder to orchestrate the movement.

He did this all in preparation for the incarnation of his Son and the most awesome work that was ever done on earth, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that we may experience salvation through him and God may be glorified.

God was working to fulfill his promise of salvation by manipulating acts of history, while at the same time he protected Joseph and his family on the dark, dusty road to Egypt that night.

[ 26 : 26 ] Life is no accident. Your life is no accident. God is at work in us. If we belong to him, then he gives us the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and understanding and victory over the flesh.

God is at work through us. If we are his disciples, then he called us to make disciples. He is using us to gather his people into his kingdom. We are here because God wants us to be.

Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of that fact. Sometimes we get bogged down with the details of life. So often we just get too distracted by the busyness of our lives to notice God at work.

Sometimes we just can't figure out how God is at work in our particular situation or how God is at work in our lives. We just don't understand what God is up to. We might not understand what God is up to because we don't know God yet.

You are not yet his child and you have not repented of your sins and therefore have not yet received the gift of salvation in the Holy Spirit through the blood of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, those of us who do know God, we sometimes just simply find ourselves on a dusty dirt road surrounded by darkness, questioning why we must suffer from cancer, why we had to lose our job, why our marriage has hit a rough patch, why we lose our patience raising our adorable young children, why we struggle to keep our sexual purity, why we don't stand up for God's truth in the classroom or in the place of business.

[ 27 : 59 ] When you hit those rough patches, keep moving forward. Keep obeying God's word. You are not alone. God is with you. You are here because God wants you here. Find some peace in the fact that God is at work and he will fulfill all of his promises.

All our desires and frustrations and questions will fade away as we stand in God's presence and live under his rule. Joseph followed.

He obeyed God's commands given to him through the angel in a dream. He didn't know what God was up to, but he obeyed. There is no mention of Joseph in the Gospels during Jesus' ministry years.

He most likely passed away before he saw any of Jesus' miracles. He protected the child on the road to Egypt that night, never knowing that this was the true son of God who broke into human history to destroy the power of sin so that all God's people may enter the presence of God through the blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross so that we may live under God's rule in his presence forever.

Joseph knew that God was at work. Most of the time, he didn't have the details, didn't know the end game, and usually didn't know what was going on. But Joseph obeyed and followed God's commands as God led the way.

[ 29 : 22 ] Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gospel message from Matthew. We praise you and thank you that you are in control and that you are at work throughout history and even today.

May we submit to your rule. May we find peace and comfort in the knowledge that you are in control, that you are at work even in the smallest of details in our lives.

May we rise up and partake in your work as you have called us to make disciples. May you give us knowledge and understanding and wisdom and courage in the Holy Spirit so that you may use us to gather your people into your kingdom so that God may be glorified forever.

In Jesus Christ's name, amen. Amen. Amen.