



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

God's Providence: An Illustration From Jesus' Infancy (Matthew 2:13-23)

BY PASTOR BRET CAPRANICA, SUMMIT WOODS BAPTIST CHURCH, LEE'S SUMMIT--MARCH 6, 2012

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

• **Tuesday, March 6, 7 AM in HHR #5**

-Breakfast Provided

Due to our special guest speaker this week, we will not hold our Tuesday Evening Study for March 6.

This week's study is being led by Pastor Bret Capranica of the Summit Woods Baptist Church of Lee's Summit. Bret is a graduate of The Master's Seminary. He has served in churches in Texas and California before moving to Missouri in 2010.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major events of 2011 was the death of one of the most influential figures of our technological times, Steve Jobs.

Jobs' life and work at Apple, Inc., have been chronicled and reported in great detail: from Apple's humble beginnings to its world renown influence and value; from Job's being removed from Apple, to his return and eventual dominance of the computer industry.

Included in the story is Steve Job's multi-year battle with cancer. One of the most celebrated of Steve Job's speeches is his 2005 commencement address at Stanford University. In rehearsing the fascinating events of his storied life, including his battle with cancer, Job's surmised:

"You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life."

Do all the dots of life connect? If so, how so? If so, who or what is doing all the connecting? If so, how can we see the connections and the one connecting the dots in a way that brings stability and focus to life?

In continuing to study aspects of God's character, this week we will consider Matthew 2:13-23; a poignant description of what we call the providence of God.

Let's look at some of the details of 4 descriptions about Jesus early days:

I. AN UNPLANNED LOCATION (2:13-15)

Matthew 2:12-15 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."

This event takes place just as the Magi of 2:1-12 have been warned in a dream not to return to Herod (2:12).

If you were Joseph, perhaps you could begin to connect the dots of a census moving you to Bethlehem, the city of David, so the prophesied Messiah could be born and fulfill prophecy. The child being raised just outside of Israel's capital and eternal city, Jerusalem, makes perfect sense, humanly speaking.

And yet, within weeks of Immanuel being born, the same angel who announced his coming, his purpose, and how he would fulfill divine promise is telling Joseph to run away.

For Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him...

Well before Herod knows of the Magi's new direction — the angel knows what Herod will do. It's as if someone omniscient is giving hints on the future here. Why Egypt? Why the place of Israel's historical slavery?

This was to fulfill . . . Matthew tells us that these activities fulfill what the prophet spoke of in Hosea 11:1, When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Is Matthew making this up? No, he is wanting us to think back to Israel's captivity in Egypt and also Israel's redemption from Egypt. And he is indicating that the fullest expression of Israel's liberation from slavery is found in her Messiah. And just as the nation, as a son to God, was brought from Egypt, the fullest expression of God's son, Jesus, would also be

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

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brought out of Egypt. Matthew is making a redemptive parallel and saying the redemption of Israel as a people is seen more fully through Jesus.

II. AN UNTHINKABLE EVIL (2:16-18)

Matthew 2:16-18 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 and in all that 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 and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Some skeptics say there is no historical confirmation of such a slaughter. Josephus never mentions it and virtually no other extra-biblical source mentions it. But it does fit Herod's character. Commentator France notes:

Herod's later years, as Josephus records them, were dominated by his obsessive defense of his throne, with the royal family of the Hasmoneans as the most immediate threat. Earlier in his reign his predecessors Antigonus and Hyrcanus were eliminated, together with large numbers of their supporters and eventually all remaining members of the Hasmonean family; even those Hasmoneans directly related to Herod by marriage, his brother-in-law, mother-in-law, and even his favorite wife Mariamne were killed. In his final years his three eldest sons were also killed on suspicion of plotting to seize their father's throne, Alexander and Aristobulus as Mariamne's sons and Antipater because he had married a Hasmonean princess. Outside the Hasmonean family we hear more generally of Herod's ruthless suppression of political suspects, relying on espionage. On one occasion earlier in his reign he faced an assassination attempt, and the ten conspirators were executed together with their families; such conspiracies and disloyalty, real or imagined, became a more frequent feature of his later years between 7 and 4 BC.²

Also, the population of Bethlehem in the first century was no more than 1000 people. More than likely there would have been no more than twenty male children in the city at the most. The city had little political influence making this murderous act one that was easily overlooked.

But it is an unthinkable evil. Herod slaughters every male that would be considered an infant. Why? Why would the birth of a savior mean the death of young children? Matthew gives us a little insight: he quotes Jeremiah 31:15 – another interesting quotation: *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."

This text is the only negative verse in one of the most hopeful chapters in the all of Jeremiah's prophecies. Matthew is again connecting Jesus' birth with a redemptive theme and suggesting that Jesus is the fullest expression of that theme.

This unexpected evil has with it a definite direction of redemption and hope. Jesus' birth came with bitter trial that highlighted Israel's time of spiritual death. But Jesus' birth is also associated with the covenant that will bring Israel and the world redemption.

Even an unthinkable evil can lead to a redeeming purpose.

III. AN UNANTICIPATED POLITICAL SHIFT (2:19-22)

Matthew 2:19-22 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. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

Herod's son Antipas was to receive the entire kingdom at Herod's death. But Herod made a last minute change in his will and the kingdom was divided between his sons, which led to Archelaus unexpectedly coming to power in Judea. And Judea was the obvious place Joseph would return to raise Jesus.

As one commentator noted of Archelaus: *His killing of about three thousand people at the Passover before he left for Rome, combined with the prolonged revolt at the feast of Pentecost that spread to the countryside of Judea, Galilee, and Perea, made a bad beginning of Archelaus's rule. His treatment of the Jews and Samaritans was one of brutality and tyranny.³*

Fear gripped Joseph. He no doubt thought that his identity and return to Judea would be made public and Archelaus was not likely to be supportive. Thus, an angel comes in a third dream and tells him to go to Galilee.

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IV. AN UNEXPECTED STATUS (2:23)

Matthew 2:23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

How is this a reference to an unexpected status? Again, commentator France notes about Nazareth: Archeological evidence suggests that its population was "a maximum of about 480 at the beginning of the 1st century A.D." It was an obscure Jewish village in the Galilean hills, rapidly being overshadowed by the growing Hellenistic city of Sepphoris only four miles away which Antipas rebuilt as the capital of Galilee.⁴

Jesus would not merely be called "one from Nazareth," but a Nazarene. The point being, Jesus' public persona would take on the status of the place where he was raised; a place of obscurity, smallness, and even rejection. It is as if Matthew is saying that Jesus will be called "the rejected." And that is exactly what the prophets indicated?

Psalms 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

It was Jesus' ultimate rejection that actually becomes the foundation for our redemption from sin.

What specifically is Matthew trying to teach us through these four elements of Jesus' infancy? Essentially one thing: providence points to Jesus' as the Messiah.

What is "Providence?" ***Providence is circumstances working under sovereignty.***

Notice how the four elements describing the early infancy of Jesus demonstrate circumstances working under God's direct sovereignty:

1. Location works under God's providence vv 13-15

What seemed like an unplanned move, motivated by a midnight angelic warning about a murderous plot was all along God moving Jesus to Egypt to parallel a redemptive theme that shows him to be the Messiah.

2. Evil works under God's providence vv 16-18

This unthinkable evil was maneuvering Israel, along with human history, through a period of spiritual devastation and alienation, into a period of spiritual revival and attraction to God through Jesus Christ.

3. Politics works under God's providence vv 19-22

The subtle shifts and last minute changes to Herod's will, the backroom deals, personal maneuvering, Herodian family intrigue and the entire Roman political landscape was being shaped so that Jesus would live in Nazareth and not Judea – because of a divine purpose.

4. Status works under God's providence v 23

And why Nazareth? Why would the King of kings be raised in obscurity; and not merely obscurity, but ridiculed obscurity? Why would Jesus, Israel's truest king, be raised outside the eternal city of Jerusalem? Why would the world's Messiah live in a city the world never knew anything about? Because the Messiah's suffering, ridicule, and rejection were all part and parcel of God's plan to bring redemption through His death on the cross.

What appears circumstantial is really providential guidance. It's all providential proof that Jesus is our Savior. It is God moving human history through willful sinful choices, supernatural events, normal human fears, and political events so that his grace, glory, mercy, kindness and salvation can be clearly seen.

CONCLUSION

All of this should push us to carefully consider how God is moving every event in unseen ways and in humanly unforeseeable directions.

Are we to act as if nothing matters, that God will do as He will despite our actions or intentions? Are we to fatalistically not care, living without any consideration of consequences, since God will work it all out as he pleases?

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Is that how Joseph acted? No. What is explicit in this passage is Joseph's obedience and Joseph's trust. He obeyed immediately he trusted God completely.

Every seemingly random, unexplainable, unexpected circumstance is a dot that God is connecting in order to paint a portrait of His redeeming Grace.

Obedient trust is our calling – purposeful direction is God's doing.

What events in our world, our cities, our churches, your family, your circumstances, your heart appear random, unplanned, unthinkable evil, unanticipated, or unexpected? Put it all in perspective of the cross. As everything moved toward the cross in human history, everything now moves in relation to it as we await Christ's future coming.

¹ Accessed at:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidewalt/2011/10/05/steve-jobs-2005-stanford-commencement-address/>

² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 84.

³ G. W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing), electronic copy.

⁴ Ibid., 91.