

Dec 24, 2006 AM

**BATTLE FOR THE BIRTHRIGHT
MATTHEW 2.13-23**

Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy to show that Jesus has the “legal” right to the throne of Israel.

Matthew follows up the genealogy of Jesus in 1:1-17 with a series of five fulfillments: (1) he will be born of the virgin (1:22-23); (2) Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (2:5-6). We are going to cover the next three fulfillments.

One predominant theme: exile. And we will see how that plays out throughout the story. It is only through exile that the Messiah accomplishes his mission.

1. EXILE, PRESERVATION, AND DELIVERANCE IN EGYPT (13-15)

Joseph: Matthew is telling the story from the perspective of Joseph primarily.

In the predominant theme of this entire passage concerning exile to and deliverance from Egypt, Joseph plays the part of his name’s sake: the Joseph we meet in Genesis as one of the sons of Jacob.

- Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, is a “dreamer.”
- Joseph is called to do is to go down into Egypt and take God’s son so that his life may be preserved. This is precisely what the original Joseph did with God’s son, Israel (cf. Gen 45.5-7)

Herod: ‘the king of the Jews’; a friend of and subservient to Rome (and anyone in power there); a brutal killer of anyone who was a threat to him; a “half-breed” Jew.

Herod was of Idumean descent. This means that he was from the line of Esau, the brother of Jacob. This is the continuing war between the “seeds.” This is the classic battle for the birthright; i.e., to have the “blessing of Abraham,” the true king. The new Esau isn’t happy and seeks to take the life of the new Jacob upon whom the father has bestowed the blessing (cf. Ge 27.41-42).

The fleeing of the heir: Just as Jacob had to do in response to the threats of Esau, Jesus has to leave the land in order for his life to be preserved. The child has to go into exile in order to be the one who will bring deliverance to his people and become their king.

This story of the warring seeds, is told over and over again concerning God’s people. And thus, to tell the story of the exile of Jacob is also to tell the story of the descent of the children of Israel to Egypt.

Interesting contrasts: For instance, he says that Joseph responded to the word of the angel by arising, taking the child and his mother *by night*, and fleeing to the land of Egypt. This is a new Passover, but this time it is fleeing *to* Egypt. The “Promised Land” has become the new house of bondage, the new Egypt.

The land of Egypt is the place of exile. But even though it is that, it is also the place to which God’s son will flee for protection and from which God will call him out. This is the meaning of the quote given by Matthew from Hosea 11.1.

The story of God’s people is the story of God’s son. This is clear from the Exodus story in which God proclaims Israel to be his son, his firstborn (Ex 4.22, 23). The son of God becomes embodied in Israel’s king, the son of David, as God promised David in 2 Sam 7.14. So, the story of the king becomes the story of Israel.

Now, the passage in Hosea is most definitely dealing with the past history of God delivering his people from Egypt. But that history has a trajectory that is to be fulfilled in God’s true king. Matthew understands this and can, therefore, understand Hosea 11.1 as being “fulfilled” and not merely a bland recounting of history or a “forced” prophetic passage. The son must be exiled. This is what God told Abraham in Genesis 15. This is what must happen in order for God to bring about what he has promised. In the birth and exile into Egypt we see the story of God’s people being embodied in God’s new Israel, God’s son, the true king of the Jews.

2. EXILE, SUFFERING AND WEeping OF RACHEL (16-18)

Herod as the new Pharaoh: Herod decides to kill all the children in Bethlehem and its districts who are two and under.

There is a recapitulation of Exodus 1. Pharaoh saw how great the people were becoming in his land, he order the slaughter of all newborn male children.

Pharaoh, like Herod, was “tricked” and made a fool of also. He was deceived by the mid-wives who feared God, much like the Magi feared God and refused to obey the king’s order.

But right in line with the fact that Jerusalem has become the place of bondage and the throne of the seed of the serpent, Herod becomes the new Pharaoh and executes the children seeking to kill the promised seed. But as God did with his son of old, the promised seed was delivered so that he might bring deliverance to God’s people and lead them out of Egypt.

Rachel weeping: Jeremiah 31.15. Rachel is the wife of Jacob, a mother of Israel. She is the mother of the tribes of Israel. Jacob is the rightful heir to Abraham’s blessing. So Rachel, along with her husband inherits the blessing. They are the new Adam and Eve.

Rachel’s children must suffer. Jeremiah is prophesying of the Babylonian exile. Rachel, who is buried in Ramah, weeps for her children who are going into exile. Ramah is the place from which the exiles were gathered to march to Babylon in 586 BC (Jer 40.1). Now the mother of Israel weeps again as her children are “slaughtered.” This mother of Israel is embodied in all the mothers of Israel at that time as they weep for their children.

This passage comes in the midst of God’s promise to stop the weeping of Israel and restore the joy. This will happen because God will bring in his new covenant. This new covenant will not be like the old one which he made when he led his people out of the land of Egypt (again that theme arises). But God will bring in a new covenant which will be his final word.

Matthew has not arbitrarily picked a passage. He is telling his Jewish readers that through this suffering God is ushering in his new covenant. At the present there must be suffering and weeping. But in the end God will vindicate his people and deliver them, restoring joy to the land. This is fulfilled in Jesus.

3. EXILE, HUMILIATION AND PROMISE CONCERNING THE NAZARENE (19-23)

Joseph again: Once Herod is dead, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream in Egypt. The angel tells him to take the young child and his mother and go back to the land of Israel, “for,” says the angel, “they are dead which sought the young child’s life.” Almost a direct quote of Exodus 4.19 (which concerns Moses going back to Egypt to deliver God’s people.)

Joseph is now the new Moses who delivers God’s son out of Egypt.

A new exile: Archelaus, the son of Herod; Archelaus was as wicked as his father. He was so bad that the Roman government deposed him in AD 6, only ten years into his rule after his father’s death.

Being warned of God in a dream again, Joseph protects his bride and God’s son and takes them to Nazareth of Galilee. Matthew will make it clear later on that Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Galilee is being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus (cf. Mt 4.14-16; Isa 9.1-2). But there he designates it what his readers would know all too well: this is Galilee of the Gentiles.

Jesus essentially lives in exile from God’s holy mountain in Jerusalem. But this also looks forward to the bringing in of the nations that will occur when Messiah is crowned king.

That what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” There is no specific quote from the OT like this. But Matthew says “prophets.” He does not name a particular prophet. He is picking up on a biblical theme.

“Nazarene” - What does he mean?

- (1) Hebrew play on words with *nazir* in Isa 11.1 (“the branch” from the stump of Jesse).
- (2) Nazarite (like Samson and Samuel)
- (3) Derogatory name to reveal his rejection.

Probably a mixture of two and three. He was set apart for holy war. Took his vow in earnest when he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the war was complete at the cross. But he was also despised and rejected of men.

But in order to do this, the Messiah, God’s son, must himself live out the story. He must go through the exile, humiliation and suffering in order to be crowned the king of the world.

- (1) The war continues.
- (2) There are political ramifications with regards to the birth of Christ.
- (3) The King has been born and we live in the light of the hope of His full reign over all the earth.