

Matthew 2:19-23

Introduction

Let's start by looking back for a moment at how Matthew has been pursuing his theme of fulfillment (Christ is the "telos" of all things).

- ✓ In accordance with the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, Jesus was born of a virgin and so He is from the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God – with us (1:18-25).
- ✓ As the prophet Micah foretold, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah. He would be the ruler who would shepherd God's people Israel (2:1-12).
- ✓ In order to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Hosea, Jesus came out of Egypt as the one who would bring about a second exodus for His people and deliver them from slavery to sin and death (2:13-15).
- ✓ When Bethlehem wept and lamented under the cruel oppression of Herod, it was a fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. And so it ultimately pointed to the fact that Jesus would fulfill God's promises of deliverance from all oppression, and suffering, and weeping, and tears (2:16-18).

We see that God has been sovereignly working to bring about the fulfillment of prophecy in His Son Jesus Christ – Jesus, the Messiah.

- ✓ The virgin birth could only be the result of God's sovereign power.
- ✓ We know from Luke that Joseph and Mary were not from Bethlehem, and so it was only because of God's providence that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (cf. the census under Caesar Augustus; Luke 2:1-7).
- ✓ God specifically sent His angel to Joseph in a dream, and told him to take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt. God sovereignly orchestrated the events that would lead to the moment when He would call His Son out of Egypt.
- ✓ Last week, we saw that God is even sovereign in the weeping and lamentation of His people.
- ✓ And now this week we will see God continue to sovereignly direct the details of Jesus' life so that all of prophecy might be fulfilled in Him.

Verses 19-21

From what we have read in Matthew (leaving Luke out of the picture), we would expect that Joseph would return to *Bethlehem* in *Judah*. Joseph certainly must have considered the question of *where* he should raise this baby who had been born king of the Jews. Indeed, in a perfect world, the logical place would seem to be Jerusalem, the royal city of the Jews. And Matthew at least implies that Joseph initially planned on staying somewhere in Judea...

Verse 22

Once again, there is a dream. Once again, God is sovereignly directing Joseph's steps. But for what purpose? What is the goal? What is God doing?

(NOTE: The following historical background is largely adapted from R.T. France)

In the time of Jesus, the “Holy Land” was not one unified “country.” In many ways, the provinces of Judea and Galilee were very separate and distinct, if not completely at odds with each other. Remember that after King Solomon died, the nation of Israel split into North and South. When the Northern Kingdom went into exile in Assyria, their land was repopulated with Gentiles. So even in Jesus’ day, Galilee was a much more Gentile area than Judea (“Galilee of the Gentiles”; Matthew 4:15). There *were* the more Jewish areas like Capernaum, but they were in many cases overshadowed by pagan cities like Tiberias. This was all very different from the mostly Jewish population in the southern province of Judea.

Geographically, Galilee was separated from Judea by the province of Samaria, which was not a Jewish territory. So Jews traveling between Galilee and Judea would often go the long way around to avoid passing through Samaria. Galilee was even separated from the Jewish province of Perea by the Greek settlements in the province of Decapolis. So geographically, Galilee is extremely isolated from the “mainland” of the Jews. Politically, Galilee had been run separately from Judea for almost 1000 years.

In general, the Judeans despised and looked down upon their northern neighbors as provincial, backwoods, “country cousins” who weren’t as cultured and sophisticated and couldn’t even speak “proper” Aramaic (they had a sloppy accent).

- ✓ Matthew 26:73 – After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you [for you are a Galilean; Mark 14:70].
- ✓ Acts 2:5-7 – Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”
- ✓ John 7:50-52 – Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

So culturally and religiously, the Galileans were despised and looked down upon condescendingly by the Judeans. When a Jewish Galilean visited Jerusalem, he would have felt very much and in many ways like a lowly foreigner. And yet, being warned in a dream, Joseph withdrew with the one born king of the Jews to the district of Galilee. This is all wrong! Why should the *Messiah* grow up in *Galilee*? And growing up in Galilee, how will He ever find acceptance among the people of Judea and Jerusalem? Yes, the Messiah has come out of Egypt, but only to move to Galilee. What is going on? What is God doing now? And if we thought we could comfort ourselves with the thought that Joseph would at least settle in one of the relatively well-known and semi-respectable Jewish settlements in Galilee (like Capernaum), we couldn’t possibly have been more wrong.

Verse 23a

We know from Luke that Joseph is originally from Nazareth. But Matthew gives no hint of this for his Jewish readers. Matthew’s point is not that Joseph is returning to his home town.

Matthew's point is that Jesus is going to be raised in a city called Nazareth. Notice he doesn't say, "He went and lived in Nazareth." This would assume that everyone knew about Nazareth. Instead, Matthew says that Joseph "went and lived in *a city called* Nazareth." Is it possible that in Matthew's day, there were many Jews who still didn't know that Nazareth even existed? At the very least, Matthew is emphasizing the almost total obscurity of "a city called Nazareth." A city never once mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament or by any of the prophets. A city that didn't even exist in the time of the Old Testament. A city never referred to in any other non-Christian Jewish writing until about 300 years after Jesus. A city that probably "boasted" a maximum population of about 500 people in the time of Jesus. A city that *even in Galilee* would have been looked down upon and considered provincial, unsophisticated, and uncultured. Even Nathanael (a *Galilean* who lived only a few miles from Nazareth) once said to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) And yet it is here in *Nazareth, of Galilee*, that Israel's Messiah will grow up. And we have to assume by now that this is not by accident. This is not just because of the danger from Archelaus (verse 22). God Himself has sent Jesus to live and grow up in Nazareth...

Verse 23b

Nowhere in the Old Testament does the word "Nazareth" or "Nazarene" ever appear. How, then, could Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth be a fulfillment of the Old Testament? First of all, notice that Matthew says "what was spoken by the prophets" (plural). Everywhere else, Matthew quotes a specific prophet and a specific prophecy.

But here, since Matthew doesn't quote any one specific prophet, we can also assume that he is not trying to quote the actual *words* of any prophecy.

In fact, there really shouldn't be any quotation marks here in our English translations. Look how careful Matthew is as he applies his study of the Old Testament to Christ.

- ✓ Matthew 1:22 – All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by *the prophet, saying* [Greek], "Quotation."
- ✓ Matthew 2:5 – For so it is written by *the prophet*: "Quotation."
- ✓ Matthew 2:15 – This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by *the prophet, saying* [Greek], "Quotation."
- ✓ Matthew 2:17 – Then was fulfilled what was spoken by *the prophet* Jeremiah, saying [Greek], "Quotation."
- ✓ Matthew 2:23 – That it might be fulfilled what was spoken by *the prophets, that* [no quotation] He shall be called a Nazarene.

Matthew is not quoting the specific words of any one prophet or prophecy. He is trying to draw our attention to a general theme among the prophets. But what might that theme be? And how is it fulfilled in Jesus?

What would it mean to be called a Nazarene in the days of Jesus? It would mean ridicule at worst and condescension at best. To be *called* a Nazarene was to be mocked and made fun of and looked down upon. To be a Nazarene was to be a "nobody" in the eyes of your countrymen. And so for all of these reasons, to be a Nazarene was to be rejected – especially when it is a Nazarene

claims to be Israel's Messiah. Jesus – of *Nazareth*. All of this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets:

- ✓ Isaiah 49:7 – Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers...
- ✓ Isaiah 53:1-3 – Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 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.
- ✓ Cf. Zechariah 11:4-14; 12:10; 13:7; Daniel 9:26; Psalm 22 & 69

Conclusion

Jesus was a native not of Judea, but of Galilee – not of Jerusalem, but of Nazareth. And Jesus will be treated accordingly. He will be despised and rejected by men. He will be called a Nazarene. And it is only by this path and through this treatment that He will accomplish our salvation.

- ✓ In accordance with the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, Jesus was born of a virgin and so He is from the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God – with us (1:18-25).
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- ✓ When Bethlehem wept and lamented under the cruel oppression of Herod, it was a fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. And so it ultimately pointed to the fact that Jesus would fulfill God's promises of deliverance from all oppression, and suffering, and weeping, and tears (2:16-18).

All of this sounds wonderful. And it *is* wonderful! But it is all *preceded* by ridicule and rejection. It is all accomplished by the "Nazarene" who would be mocked and ridiculed even as he died. We saw last week that Jesus came to deliver us from all weeping and lamenting, and suffering, and oppression. And we see this week that in this very process, He Himself will weep, and suffer, and be oppressed.

He made Himself of no account for us (Phil. 2:7). Will we make ourselves of no account for Him? He was ridiculed and looked down upon for us. Will we gladly allow ourselves to be ridiculed and looked down upon for Him? In the Psalms, there is the recurring theme of the "righteous sufferer". We see this especially in Psalms 22 and 69. These Psalms are quoted repeatedly in the Gospels to show how they are fulfilled in Christ – the ultimate righteous sufferer.

- ✓ "Zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me." (69:9; John 2:17)

- ✓ “For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink” (69:21; John 19:28-29)
- ✓ “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1;)
- ✓ “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (22:8)
- ✓ “They have pierced my hands and feet... they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” (22:16, 18)

But these Psalms originally gave expression to the trials and sufferings of David. And so David wrote:

- ✓ Psalm 22:6-7 – But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.
- ✓ Psalm 69:7, 9, 12, 19 – It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face... the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me... I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me... you know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor.

In the days of the early church, the Christians were derisively called “Nazarenes.” (Acts 24:5 – For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.) Are we really alright with this? For our sake, He was called a Nazarene. Are we willing to be called “Nazarenes” for His sake?

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 – For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

According to worldly standards, we may be the foolish, the weak, the low and despised, and the things that are not. But so was Jesus. Should we think that we have any right to be thought of or treated any differently? Do we have any more of a right than our Savior did to be distinguished and honored and respected in this world? In many ways, we cling to these things. And yet He was despised and rejected by men. And in this, He set us an example that we should willingly accept the same – knowing that at the end of all ridicule and rejection and sufferings, at the end of our journey through the wilderness, there is the Promised Land. Are we willing to be scorned, despised, mocked, reproached, dishonored, talked about, sung about, and shamed? He made Himself of no account for us. Will we gladly make ourselves of no account for Him?

Teaching our Children

- Q. Since Jesus was born king of the Jews, where would we naturally expect him to live when he was growing up?
- A. We would expect that he should live in Jerusalem of Judea – where all the other kings had lived.
- Q. Instead of the “country” of Judea, where did God send Jesus to live while he was growing up (in what “country”)?
- A. God sent Jesus to live in Galilee.
- Q. What did the people in Judea think about the people in Galilee?
- A. The people of Judea despised and looked down on the people of Galilee. They thought of them as uneducated and somewhat “stupid” (see the Scriptures under II. A. 4.).
- Q. Instead of the city of Jerusalem, where did God send Jesus to live while he was growing up (in what city)?
- A. God sent Jesus to live in Nazareth.
- Q. What did the people in *Galilee* think about the people who lived in Nazareth?
- A. The people of Galilee despised and looked down on the people living in Nazareth. They thought of *them* as uneducated and somewhat “stupid” (cf. III. A. 2.).
- Q. So why did God send Jesus (Israel’s Messiah and the one born king of the Jews) to live in *Nazareth of Galilee*?
- A. Because the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be despised and looked down upon by the people (**read** Scriptures under IV. E.).
- Q. Jesus willingly chose to be despised and looked down upon by the world in order that we might be saved. He made Himself “nothing” for us. What should we be willing to do for Jesus?
- A. We should be willing to be despised and looked down upon. We should be willing to be made fun of and thought of as nothing – for *His* sake. (**Read** Scriptures under Conclusion A. 2. & C.)