

Section 4

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND RETURN

TEXT: 2:13-23

13. Now when they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell thee: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
14. And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt;
15. and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my son.
16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the Wise-men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had exactly learned of the Wise-men.
17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying,
18. A voice heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she would not be comforted, because they are not.
19. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,
20. Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the young child's life.
21. And he arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.
22. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; and being warned *of God* in a dream, he withdrew into the parts of Galilee,
23. and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What characteristics do you see in Joseph that reveal some of the reasons why God chose him to be Mary's husband and Jesus' protector?
- b. What does this incident reveal about Herod's nature?
- c. Why do you think God allowed His only Son to grow up in such a despicable little town as Nazareth? Had not the by-word said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth"?
- d. Why would God have Joseph take the family out of the country when Herod never did see the Baby and could not have identified it anyway?
- e. What does the age "two years old and under" indicate about:
 - (1) the appearing of the star to the magi in the East?
 - (2) the age of Jesus when Herod sought to slay Him?
- f. Why would God send Joseph to Egypt and not to Edom or Arabia or perhaps to Mesopotamia?
- g. Why should Joseph be afraid to return to Bethlehem, even though Herod the Great was dead as well as "those that sought the child's life"?
- h. Why should not Joseph be equally afraid of the ruler of Galilee, who was also another son of Herod the Great?
- i. Would the Bethlehemites have known the location of the house where dwelt the Babe "born to be King"?

PARAPHRASE

Now when the magi had departed, it was then that the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Get up now: you must take the little Child and His mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I direct you further. For Herod is about to search for the Child to do away with Him."

So Joseph awoke and, taking the Child and His mother by night, they made *their* escape to Egypt where they remained until Herod's death. This resulted in the fulfillment of what the Lord had declared through His prophet Hosea (11:1): "I called my Son out of Egypt."

When Herod realized that he had been trifled with by the magi, he flew into a furious rage. He issued orders for the massacre of all baby boys in Bethlehem and its whole neighboring vicinity, of the age of two years or less, corresponding to the time he had ascertained from the wise-men.

Then Jeremiah's prophecy (31:15) was fulfilled which reads:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel is weeping for her children,
Refusing all consolation,
Because they are gone."

After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared by dream to Joseph in Egypt, commanding, "Rise and take the little Child and His mother with you and make the trip back into the land of Israel. For they who sought to slay Jesus are now themselves dead!" So Joseph got up and took the little Child and His mother and journeyed toward the land of Israel. Hearing, however, that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judaea, Joseph was afraid to go there. So, having been instructed by God in a dream, he withdrew to that part of the country called Galilee where he settled down in the old hometown of former years called Nazareth. This action resulted in the fulfillment of the message of several prophets who said, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

SUMMARY

God, indicating Egypt as the place of secure refuge, warned Joseph of Herod's murderous intent. Joseph instantly obeyed by taking Jesus and Mary into Egypt. Herod carried out the massacre of the innocents and later died. Then God informed Joseph that it was safe to return to Palestine. They settled in Nazareth. The incident results in the fulfillment of two prophecies.

NOTES

2:13 The magi having left the house of Joseph, each settled down for the night. But this night was to be troubled by dreams: one which warned the wise-men not to return to Herod; another warning Joseph to save Jesus' life by flight into Egypt. It would seem that it was Joseph's plan to remain indefinitely in Bethlehem, but this was to be their last night there. To the little family this was a night of conflicting emotions: happily surprised by the adoration and offerings of the magi, they had gone to sleep only to be shaken by the angel's warning to flee. The high honors of being parents of God's Son are also accompanied by sorrow, pain and great self-sacrifice. Whatever plans Joseph had laid for the support of his family there in Bethlehem

must immediately be scrapped due to the urgent necessity of immediate flight to Egypt. Egypt's near border lay approximately 100 miles to the southwest of Bethlehem, beyond the reach of Herod. They could not travel rapidly, so all attention must have been given to immediate departure **while it was yet night**. They must escape detection at all costs, so that they could not later be followed by Herod's men.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream: see on 1:20. Joseph is the legal father of Jesus, so the care of the Child is in his hands. The one word of hope in the angel's message is the promise of a future appearance. This flight into Egypt though sudden is not unforeseen to the mind and will of God, because the magi had just delivered God's provision for the little family's sustenance in Egypt, i.e. the gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Escape to Egypt is quite reasonable, since it was the closest Roman province outside Herod's jurisdiction and was large enough to hide a peasant carpenter, his wife and Baby. Thousands of Jews had settled there. In Alexandria, the chief city of Egypt, the Jews "occupied a more influential position than anywhere else in the ancient world." (ISBE, 94a). It would not be at all difficult for Joseph to labor at his craft until the day of their return to Israel.

The full treachery of Herod is exposed: **Herod will seek the young child to destroy him**. Perhaps the wise-men had narrated to Joseph the drama of the star, their visit with Herod, and his directing them to Bethlehem. Herod knew about Bethlehem: Joseph must leave instantly.

2:14 The dream having come to Joseph while he was sleeping, upon awaking, he arouses Mary into instant action, explaining to her the urgent reason for his unexpected actions. Prompt obedience to the divine message when it becomes clearly understood, as always, is the key to physical and spiritual safety! Much as we might desire to know of that flight—its means, its duration, its exact destination, its dangers—Matthew leaves us only those details necessary to the accomplishment of a greater design than the satisfaction of curiosity: the tracing in the life of Jesus the great outlines of the Messiah clearly promised in the OT.

2:15 **The death of Herod** occurred in the spring of 4 B.C. at Jericho. From this date we have a clue to the approximate fixing of the true date of the birth of Christ. An eclipse of the moon, men-

tioned by Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, vi, 4), occurred on March 13 of that year just prior to Herod's death. The events which preceded March, 4 B.C., then, are:

1. The enrolment under Quirinius (Luke 2:1, 2)
2. The birth of Jesus (Mt. 1, 2; Lk. 2)
3. The purification of Mary, before the presentation of Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem, required 40 days (Lev. 12; Lk. 2:22-39a).
4. Return to Bethlehem and visit of the magi (Mt. 2:1-12)
5. Flight into Egypt (Mt. 2:13ff)
6. Death of Herod (Mt. 2:15-19), after 40 days illness at Jericho.

Therefore, the birth of Jesus occurred sometime from 80 days to three months prior to March, 4 B.C., or perhaps even earlier. The common dating for the commencement of the Christian era is four years too late.

That it might be fulfilled. See the general study connected with this chapter. The words of Hosea 11:1, when first spoken by the prophet, had only one "son of God" in view, Israel: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." But God, looking upon the people of Israel and prophesying through the lips of Hosea, saw in Israel not merely a potentially great, sacerdotal people who could be His own possession. Rather, He could see in Israel, even as He led them by the hand out of the house of bondage, that yet-unformed Israelite Who would be the Messiah. God could see in Israel what even Hosea could not have seen nor could have intended in his prophetic utterance. It was not until the return of God's true Son from Egypt that God's foreknowledge and planning could be seen. Now the thrilling news could be heralded: God brought Israel out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses not for Israel's sake, but for Jesus' sake! The obscure passage of Hosea shouts: "God knew ahead of time and carried out His plan for Israel by means of Jesus!" It is not merely coincidental that the angel sent Joseph to Egypt, and not to Babylon or elsewhere.

2:16 Herod, mocked of the wise-men. Not a word of this slaughter is found in the available secular history. Some have seized upon this fact to discredit Matthew's inclusion of such a story. No doubt, from the Christian point of view, the massacre of these little boys would be a particularly atrocious and newsworthy event. One

would think that at least Josephus would have included the story in his life of Herod. But several factors combine to explain Josephus' silence:

1. The all-too-common exposure of infants, being an almost ordinary feature of the period, might render the murder of these infants worthy of no special horror. (Unger, *Archeology and the NT*, 57)
2. Bethlehem's position was that of an obscure little village of no particular interest to the leaders of the period and the number of male children in it under two years of age would not be many;
3. Herod's closing years were painted in the blood of nobles and those of position. A few babies might not even merit attention outside the limits of Bethlehem!
4. Even if Josephus knew of the incident, he might have ignored it, since a full explanation of it would have necessitated mention of Jewish messianic hopes, which, in preparing his work for Roman readers, he might have chosen to omit.

There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that if the massacre of the Bethlehem babes had really occurred, Josephus would necessarily have included it in his history. Yet, though the tragedy is not attested by other history, it is in perfect harmony with what is known of Herod in his latter years. Matthew in no wise exaggerates the character of Herod by saying, "When Herod found that he had been trifled with by the magi was in a furious rage . . ." Although he had been an able monarch, yet in the last years of his reign his cruelty reached the verge of madness: his murdering his own children and the one wife he loved, and his plan to slaughter all the leading citizens of Jerusalem in the hippodrome, contain exactly that quality of wild and useless bloodshed which appears in Matthew's record. (See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 238, 239) When frustrated in his diabolical cunning by the divine warning to the wise-men, Herod's uncontrollable rage, so characteristic of this outwitted man, now shows itself in murder. It is no less murder because done by the State in the name of the king. The fatal order concerned those baby boys whose parents lived in Bethlehem or worked the farms that spread out fan-like from and depended upon Bethlehem. Since it appeared that the wise-men had tricked him at least once, Herod took no further chances, giving the

order to kill all who had not yet reached their third birthday. *Two years* probably refers to the time of the rising of the "star" as seen by the magi at its first appearance. Herod connects this with the birth date of the supposed Messiah and gives his order accordingly.

2:17 See general study of prophetic fulfillment at the end of this section.

2:18 **Ramah** was a city in the tribal territory of Benjamin, located about 6 miles north of Jerusalem. (I Sam. 10:2; Gen. 35:16ff; 48:7; Josh. 18:25) The prophecy of Jeremiah (31:15) focuses our attention upon this city as the separation point where the victorious armies of Babylon took Israelitish captives into Babylon (Jer. 40:1), leaving only the poor of the land who wept. In a poignant, poetic figure, Jeremiah pictures the ancient mother rising from her tomb to weep also at the deportation of her children, as if they were being wrested from her arms forever. Matthew appropriates this inimitably beautiful image, using it to portray the suffering of the mothers in Bethlehem. Thus, the *fulfillment* is not one based upon the facts predicted, but upon the words which so aptly describe this otherwise unrelated event. Matthew might have said, "If these sadly beautiful words adequately described the sorrow of those who beheld the captives depart for Babylon, never to be seen again, how much more adequate are they to picture the first of a series of tragic martyrdoms for the sake of Him who would be Israel's Redeemer? If Rachel wept when the great promises of God seemed to be annulled by the deportation of her children into captivity, how much more could she do so due to this heart-rending disaster where the Messiah is taken to Egypt upon threat of His life and these innocents must suffer?"

2:19 Observe how simply Matthew tells his story: he mentions enough of the historic circumstance to leave his narration open to historical verification while omitting what would merely detract from the mainline emphasis of the life of Jesus. Josephus describes with considerable gruesome detail the facts surrounding the horrible death of Herod (*Antiquities*, XVII, vi, 5). With the death of the tyrant, the immediate danger to the Child ceased. Faster than a Roman courier, an angel of God relays the news of Herod's death to the Jewish carpenter down in Egypt.

2:20 **The land of Israel** is a phrase used to indicate all four of the small provinces which comprised it: Galilee, Samaria, Judea and

Perea. The first area into which Joseph would enter, returning from Egypt, is Judea. **They are dead** obviously refers primarily to Herod the Great who sought Jesus' life, although there may have been others who concurred with him or were employed by him.

2:22 The angel had only announced the death of Herod and commanded Joseph to take the family back to Palestine. He had not indicated a specific place to which Joseph was to bring them, nor had he stated who was to be Herod's successor. Upon crossing the Egyptian frontier into Judea or perhaps in conversation with some traveller recently returned from the Jerusalem area, Joseph learned the bad news: **Archelaus is reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod**. Archelaus, according to Josephus, was barbarously cruel to those Jews and Samaritans who had opposed his accession to power and had taken their quarrel with him clear to Rome, complaining of his ruthlessness to the Augustus. The news would travel rapidly of Archelaus' severe measures taken to repress a passover riot in which he killed 3000 shortly after his accession (*Ant.*, XVII, 9, 3). Thus, **Joseph was afraid to go there**, for it seemed still unsafe to return to Judea with the savage and reckless Archelaus on the throne. *There* implies Joseph's first intention to return to Judea probably to resettle in Bethlehem where they had lived since the birth of Jesus until the flight into Egypt. What could be more natural than that they should desire to bring up the Child in His ancestral home until the time of His appearing as King to Israel? It is an open question whether Joseph had heard of the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem. Nazareth is forgotten for the moment, although they had lived there earlier. (Lk. 2:4) Matthew's first geographic notice is at Bethlehem, implying that Joseph's residence there had been interrupted only by Herod's plot, and now that that danger is past, Joseph seems determined to return there. Why?

1. Because Galilee was despised by the Judeans as the fringe area of piety due to its proximity to the great pagan commercial centers and heathen influences and environment in general.
2. It was inhabited by a mixed population whose dialect of Aramaic was marked by more frequent errors and malpronunciation than that of the Judean or Jerusalem dialects. Religiously, they tended to be less bound by traditions than Judeans. These differences fed the general rabbinic contempt for all that was Galilean. (cf. Jn. 7:52)

3. Jerusalem, on the other hand, was the center of the Jewish world, while Galilee was, religiously speaking, about as far from that center as was Rome. In Jerusalem stood the Temple and here was the vital center of Judaism. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 221ff)
4. Mary had kinfolk in the Judean area (Lk. 1:39).

And yet, should they have returned to Bethlehem, the danger would arise that they would be recognized, remembered and exposed to the wrath of the parents who had been deprived of their baby boys or else to the cruelty of Archelaus. Common prudence dictated the withdrawal from the dominion of Archelaus, and yet the courageous Joseph might have been thinking that, despite these objections, the proper home for the young Messiah would be in the ancestral home of David rather than in the half-Gentile Galilee. Clearly, a message from God was needed to indicate the proper solution to his dilemma.

The verb translated "warned" (ASV) may simply mean "to receive a divine communication or revelation" of any kind. The content of that revelation is not given, leaving to conjecture how much of Joseph's actions are in direct response to an express command. At least, he moved the little family to Nazareth of Galilee as a result of that word from God. This move demonstrates the foreknowledge and wisdom of God:

1. Because Galilee was then under the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, brother of Herod Archelaus, but who was also his competitor for the throne of Herod the Great, their father. It would not be as likely that Antipas would deliver the Child Jesus to Archelaus. (Cf. *Antiquities*, XVII, 11, 4 also 9, 4)
2. Because within just a few short years Judea was bathed in the blood and constant uncertainty of civil wars, whereas remoter Galilee was relatively spared (*Ant.*, XVII, 10), until Jesus could come to the years of His majority.

2:23 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets that he should be called a Nazarene. There is no one OT prophet who specifically promises that the Messiah shall be called "Nazarene." Matthew, using the plural "prophets", draws attention either to several prophets in particular or to the prophetic books in general or perhaps to the message of the entire Old Testament.

If Matthew has in mind several particular prophetic writings, which? Some maintain that "Nazareth" comes from the Hebrew stem *netzer*, meaning "root, sprout, shoot or branch," thus linking Jesus "of Nazareth = *Notsri*" with the famous "Branch" prophecies of Isaiah 11:1 and, by extension of the "root" idea to other Hebrew words and prophecies: 11:10 (*Shoresh*); 53:2 (*Shoresh*); Jer. 23:5 (*Tsemach*); 33:15 (*Tsemach*); Zech. 3:8; 6:12 (*Tsemach*). According to this view, Jesus would bear in popular speech the exact equivalent of one of the best-known designations of the Messiah. The difficulty with this view lies in its entire dependence upon a play on words, perhaps obvious to the Hebrew mind but not at all obvious to a Greek reader of this Gospel. Further, the extension of the idea to synonymous Hebrew roots spoils the supposed homonymity upon which the interpretation depends.

If, on the other hand, Matthew refers to the prophetic message in general or to the burden of the entire OT regarding the person and position of the Messiah, then, a specific prophecy is not needed to satisfy Matthew's description. Rather, the basic question would be: what does it mean to be called a Nazarene? A Nazarene is one who hails from Nazareth, but, as a slander, that libellous label contained, at least, the description of an insignificant town out of which nothing great or good was expected (cf. Jn. 1:45, 46), and, at most, when applied by the unbelieving Jews to Jesus and His followers, it spat out all the hate and odium possible (Ac. 24:5). Jesus' being called a "Nazarene," due to His having lived there, fulfilled the message of the prophets in this respect that He was to be despised and rejected. "Nazarene" was the label that marked the Jews' rejection of Him. This rejection was abundantly predicted (Psa. 22; Isa. 49:7; 52:13—53:12). Though Jesus was by birth and family stock a Bethlehemite (Mt. 2:1; Lk. 2:3, 4), Matthew draws attention to that circumstance which occasioned Jesus' being considered a "Nazarene," and to the fact that all was according to the foreknowledge of God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. How did God make known His will to Joseph?
2. What were God's instructions to Joseph for the Babe's protection?
3. When did Joseph put into effect God's plan for the escape?
4. How long did the family remain in the foreign country?
5. What was apparently God's provision for the sojourn in that country?

6. Who said, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son," and where is this quotation originally located? What is meant by the original quotation as viewed in light of the second?
7. What was the reaction of Herod when his plan was frustrated? Is this what might have been expected of the man from what is known of him from other historical notices?
8. Which prophet wrote the words: "A voice was heard in Ramah . . ."? To what event did he refer? How is it possible for Matthew to cite these words with reference to the slaughter of the infants?
9. Where did Joseph apparently think of settling as he brought the family back into Palestine?
10. Who now ruled in the province of Judea? In the province of Galilee?
11. What is known of the city of Nazareth?
12. List all the facts since Jesus' birth that secured His safety during those critical months.
13. Why should Jesus be called a "Nazarene," when He was born in Bethlehem?
14. In what sense can it be said that His being called a Nazarene was predicted by the prophets? What prophets predicted this?
15. Luke 2:39 says, "And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth." But, Matthew tells this long, involved story of the wise-men, the slaughter of infants, the flight into Egypt and return to Israel, all of which must be inserted between the presentation of the Baby Jesus in the temple and return to Nazareth. How is it possible that Luke should have ignored such a thrilling story if it is true? It is possible that Matthew could have invented that gruesome story? How could both writers be telling the truth?
16. List several reasons why Josephus, our most important, secular Jewish historian, would probably not have recorded the coming of the wise-men to Herod, the excitement of Jerusalem and the slaughter of the infants, even if he had known about these events.
17. List all the miracles or apparently miraculous details that are connected with the birth of Jesus.
18. List all the names and titles applied to Jesus in these early chapters: Matthew 1:3; Mark 1; Luke 1:3; John 1.

19. List the facts and problems connected with the date of Jesus' birth. Prove as well as you can the date of His birth.
20. List all the prophecies fulfilled in the incidents connected with the early years of Jesus, as stated by Matthew.
21. Tell why the fulfillment of such prophecies is so significant to the Jews.
22. Explain how this historic fulfillment of prophecies lends support to a belief in the inspiration of the OT which contains them.
23. Discuss the childhood and youth of Jesus: tell all we know about it and what we may reasonably suppose.

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER TWO

"TREASURING THE TRUTH"

No sooner was Jesus born into this world than men began grouping themselves into three groups, into which men are always divided by the Lord. In the historic facts of this chapter we have the types of these classes which have ever demonstrated their true nature by their reaction to God's truth:

- I. HATRED AND HOSTILITY: those who are fearfully alarmed at the truth. Like Herod, they may seek it and yet violently hate the truth when it interferes with their plans. Others, like Herod, may know the prophecies of Christ's coming but hope they would not be fulfilled in *their* lives and time, preferring their Herods with peace to the Messiah with revolution which would disturb their lives and plans. But look at the absurdity of all their crafty counsels to overthrow the truth: if the "truth" be not at all true, they need not worry, since nothing will come of it. But if the "truth" be the very word of God, their efforts to thwart it and Him must ever be fruitless and useless! If the Child be not the Messiah, Herod need not have been alarmed; but if He be the Christ, all of Herod's best plots could never succeed.
- II. COMPLETE INDIFFERENCE: those who rest in the letter of the truth but do nothing about it. The scribes and Pharisees, who were called into council by Herod to answer his demand for truth, knew the right answers. But when faced by Him who arose from Bethlehem to proclaim Himself to

be the Truth, they rejected the truth. It is shocking that those who had the most knowledge regarding the coming of the truth into the world were not the ones most interested in searching for it. If they had any wish to go to Bethlehem to investigate or any inclination to surrender their worldly lust for reputation and position, it was insufficient to make them brave Herod's wrath or the scorn of their fellows.

III. ADORING WORSHIP: those who earnestly seek and affectionately guard and willingly obey the truth:

A. The Magi, at great pains and expense, had willingly followed every bit and piece of divine revelation entrusted to them.

B. Joseph and Mary were, from the very first, ever ready to lay their lives and reputations on the line, to act at a moment's notice to obey God's will by protecting and rearing Him who would be God's clearest demonstration of His truth.

CONCLUSION: Why do we seek God's truth?

1. To hate and attempt to thwart its effect in our lives when we see that it contradicts our will, our desires and our plans? Do we seek it to attempt to mold it around our ambitions? The man whose one desire is to do what he likes never has any use for Jesus Christ. The Christian is he who has ceased to do what he likes, surrendering his life to do what Jesus wills.
2. Or, do we seek God's truth in order to rest in our rigid orthodoxy and knowledge, however accurate, of the letter of the Scripture, never condescending to expend time and energy to investigate the message nor make careful application to our own lives? Are we so interested in our own affairs that Jesus Christ, frankly, does not interest us?
3. Or, are we earnestly seeking the truth as heaven's highest prize and earth's most precious reward? Do we know the meaning of instant obedience to the voice of God? Do we desire to lay our lives at the feet of Jesus, the noblest gifts we may bring?

SPECIAL STUDY:

HOW DOES MATTHEW USE THE PROPHECIES?

Under this innocent title lies a very vital question which touches not only the veracity of an apostle, but also the question of his inspiration, and, consequently, the question of inspiration in general, and the acceptability of the NT books as an authoritative, normative collection of historic documents as a basis of Christian faith. These statements are characteristic of the problems touched by this question:

1. What becomes of Matthew's supposed reliability as an eyewitness of the events he records, if he unblushingly uses as a prophecy about Jesus just any OT text which can be made verbally to fit, even though the ancient text originally had nothing to do with Matthew's material, and was never meant to have anything to do with it? If he unconscionably misappropriates texts in the revered prophets to bolster his case, perhaps he invents facts to support it as well. If an apostle be shown to be intellectually dishonest at this point, who could trust him to tell the truth about the resurrection of Jesus?
2. Perhaps the so-called "fulfillments" of prophecy are merely convenient interpretations of then present circumstances in order to support the pretences to Messiahship made by Jesus of Nazareth, who in reality had no right to that grand title and deserved to be crucified for his blasphemous assertions of Messiahship. (Cf. Lk. 4:16-29)
3. Are there more ways than one in which the word "fulfill" may be understood, so that both the veracity and inspiration of Matthew may stand, thus indicating something of the authority of an apostle's declaration that "this was done with the result that it fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet"?

A proper understanding of this third problem will help solve the other two. For, if it be possible to ascertain the intended meaning of Matthew behind the word "fulfilled" in each case of its use, it will lead to a clearer answer to the question of Matthew's use or supposed misuse of a given prophecy. In attacks upon Matthew's integrity, the assumption is generally made that he used the word "fulfilled" in an exact, fixed sense in every instance, somewhat along the lines of this definition: "The fulfillment of any prophecy must conform in every

respect to the details of the supposed prediction." But does our author so intend his word in every case? What is the evidence?

Two particular observations should be made at the outset regarding Matthew's use of the word "fulfill:"

A. *Matthew never precisely defines "fulfill"* in such a way as to require a precise, literal fulfillment of a prophet's words in every case. Rather, he uses the word in its popular sense in a manner suited to each specific prophecy in question, leaving to his reader to decide in each case what is meant by the term. Had Matthew limited himself by so precise a definition as would require a point-by-point fulfillment, the reader would not have this liberty of interpretation according to the requirements of each case, and Matthew would then be chargeable with flagrant manipulation of OT texts.

B. It must be noted that the word "*fulfill*" is used in popular speech, both among the Jews and their writings as well as in modern English, to mean not only "point-by-point identification" but also the more general "*realization or more complete manifestation of a design, plan or intention.*" To force one specific meaning arbitrarily upon Matthew's word would violate the most basic rule of interpretation of human writings: the only correct interpretation of an author is that which he intended to say by the words he used. If the author does not declare his intended meaning for specific words he uses, the only recourse is to the general use of the word among his contemporaries. The word "fulfill" is used in the Scriptures and in other writings in the following senses:

1. A fulfillment is said to occur when a thing predicted clearly comes to pass as predicted. Or, it may be that there was a partial, literal fulfillment in the days of the prophet which leaves the remainder of the prophet's words for later fulfillment. This is the way Matthew (1:22, 23) makes use of Isaiah 7:14, since the promise of a virgin-born Son who would be called Immanuel is not at all fulfilled in Isaiah's day, although other parts of the prophecy were certainly fulfilled, as a sign to king Ahaz. Here, then, Matthew uses "fulfill" in its strictest sense. In 2:4-6, where the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is quoted by the Jewish authorities as the literally-predicted birthplace of the Christ, Matthew tacitly accepts the traditional reading of this passage with almost verbal insistence upon its strict, literal fulfillment. (cf. 2:1)

2. It is well-known that a writer sometimes speaks more than he or his age can comprehend. Should it be thought strange that God should make his prophet the partially unconscious agent for the expression of a great truth the implications of which might be hidden to the prophet himself or to his age? Depths of meaning, hidden both from the original writer or from his earlier interpreters, may be disclosed only by later historical developments. Such is the case with Matthew's treatment of the prophecy of Hosea (11:1). Hosea's words, taken at face value, amount up to the nation of Israel only. However, God's intention, voiced through Hosea's words and seen through the perspective of the history of Israel which focuses itself upon Jesus, was to bring His Son out of Egypt. From the naturalistic viewpoint, we would say that Matthew read history more accurately than all his contemporaries, since he had already seen in Jesus the fulfillment of all of Israel's prophecies. Accordingly, the personal exodus of Jesus from Egypt merely facilitated the true deduction that God, speaking through Hosea, really intended Jesus. On the other hand, speaking from the point of view that for good and sufficient reasons accepts the supernatural inspiration of Matthew, one could say that God inspired Matthew to reveal his correct interpretation of Israel's history, and thus also of Hosea's words regarding that history. Thus, Matthew is revealing the real meaning that God intended behind Hosea's words. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 215) comments:

In point of fact the ancient Synagogue *did* actually apply to the Messiah Ex. iv. 22, on which the words of Hosea are based. See the Midrash on Ps. ii. 7. The quotation is given in full in our remarks on Ps. ii. 7 in Appendix IX.

3. In describing the broken-hearted mothers of Bethlehem, Matthew (2:17, 18) chose rather to use the touchingly beautiful symbol used by Jeremiah (31:15) of the weeping Rachel. Here Matthew uses the word "fulfilled" in a clearly figurative sense, since the fulfillment was not of a prediction of the prophet, but of certain of his words due to their aptness to describe a different situation. There is no predictive element in Jeremiah's words except the promise of Israel's return from captivity, which is not used by Matthew.

Once again the voice of weeping motherhood is heard in Israel. The tender and beautiful imagery is applicable in this sense and is used with true insight, but with no intention of trying to justify a claim of prediction and fulfillment in the literal sense.

4. Frequently, the apostles speak of Jesus as not only fulfilling specific predictions but also fulfilling the very trend or message of the prophets. (See Jn. 1:45; 6:45; Ac. 3:18, 24; 10:43; 13:40; Ro. 1:2) It is in this general sense that Matthew describes Jesus in 2:23 as fulfilling the prophets by His being called a "Nazarene." Thus, Matthew uses "fulfill" literally, although the prediction to which he refers is found in no one prophet, but in the general trend of the prophets who describe the Messiah as "God's Suffering Servant." (Cf. Lk. 24:44ff)
5. There is a fifth use of prophecy and fulfillment that indicates how "fulfillment" may be intended: language is said to be fulfilled when, though it was used to express one event, it may be used to express another. Sayings, fables, parables and other such figures, drawn from a particular event, may have "fulfillment" in another event similar to the case from which they were originally taken. For example, Jesus asserts (Mt. 13:14) that in the unbelief of the people of His day the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, 10 is fulfilled. While the words of Isaiah were not predictive, they are susceptible of repeated application or realization, because of the general principle they contain. They applied to the prophet's own day. They also apply, and in that sense are fulfilled, to Jesus' own day. By a legitimate extension of meaning, they apply to the stubborn unbelief of any age.

Therefore, we should stand as warned against a too-rigid and literal interpretation of any formula implying fulfillment. While it may certainly be intended to imply literal prediction and an equally literal fulfillment, it may also be intended to suggest nothing more than a harmony of principle. Since our author does not define which of these intentions he is using in each case, we are not at liberty to assert dogmatically a meaning that manifestly does not permit to Matthew the same liberty accorded to other writers in their use of words.

A major difficulty is seen in Matthew's use of a formula which implies fulfillment: "thus it was done to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet." This formula is his consistent expression both for a literally predicted fulfillment and a figurative, general fulfillment of some figure of speech or of a principle. However, Matthew's Gospel, directed as it was to one segment of a popular, oriental mind of his period, must not be charged with inaccuracy or misappropriation of prophetic texts by those of a critical, western mentality fond of mechanical precisions. If it be objected that Matthew's formula is a loose use of language, let it be answered that Matthew is in good company and that such an objection ignores the cultural background within which the Evangelist wrote. (Cf. Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:32; 19:24, 28, 36)

Are the fulfillments of prophecy merely convenient interpretations of co-incidental circumstances made to support Jesus' pretensions?

"In the one point where the identification of Jesus with the Messiah by His followers can be tested most severely, they are most completely triumphant. It would be comparatively easy to invent incidents suggested by OT prophecies, and to take dignities and titles wholesale from the same source—but given all these, to find one capable of realizing and fulfilling the expectations so aroused is the chief problem. Here fabrication is impossible. And here too the NT meets and answers the challenge of truth." (ISBE, 2518b)

The anti-supernaturalist might ask, "But can it be said that the apostles, who were for the most part no scholars, could more correctly interpret the OT, better even than their own religious leaders? It is not likely that fishermen understood the prophets better than the Sanhedrin and the rabbis who gave their time to nothing but the study of the Law and the prophets." To this it may be replied, yes, but such simple men had not all the prejudices of rabbinical learning to forget as they studied under Jesus, although they admittedly had their own rabbinically-oriented prejudices. (Cf. Mt. 15:12ff; 16:5-12, 21-23) According to Jesus, almost all of the Jews had either ignored the spirit of the Law or misinterpreted the prophets (Mt. 5:17-48; 9:10-13; 11:12; 15:1-20; 22:15—23:39; Jn. 5:38-40, 46, 47; 7:19-24; 12:34), and consequently were not expecting the kind of Messiah that God actually had sent in the person of Jesus. Those fishermen and tax-collectors, who accepted Jesus' authority on the basis of His prof

of identity as the Revealer of God, were indeed better interpreters of the OT than the rabbis, because they had sat under Him who was the Author of that testament! (I Pe. 1:10-12) They had heard His expositions of those prophetic passages (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-48), and, were they to be considered from a mere naturalistic viewpoint, they would still be better qualified to interpret the Scriptures than any rabbi! But their source of authority is always Jesus. Back of the question of the authority and supernatural inspiration of the apostles always stands the more basic demand: What do you think of Jesus? If He be the Revealer of God, then, the interpretations of the OT He teaches the apostles to declare to the world are the only correct, possible interpretations. If Jesus fulfilled His promise to empower them to reveal truth as yet unknown to them, then, the apostles may be trusted when they declare with all the authority of God: "This was done with the result that it fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet."

The same Spirit which foretold through the lips of the prophet now interprets the fulfillment, using the pen of the Apostle. Are we at liberty to differ with the conclusions of an Apostle?