

# Matthew 2:14, 15

## - A Wake-Up Call -

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### Introduction

- ❖ In Matthew 2:15, the writer of the Gospel refers to Hosea 11:1. Hosea didn't speak about the future, but about the past and the hardness of heart of the people in his own days. How can we understand the story of the escape to Egypt as a fulfilment of a prophecy? This exegetical study and sermon outline presents the purpose of Matthew as a wake-up call.
- ❖ It served as a wake-up call for the first-century Jewish people. They had to be aware of the signs when Herod killed the young boys and the child and his mother and Joseph had to escape to Egypt.
- ❖ By referring to Hosea (11:1), Jesus is identified with son, whom God called out of Egypt. He is identified with the people of Israel.
- ❖ This story serves also as a wake-up call for the church of today. The church must be aware of the spiritual war (Gen 3:14, 15; Rev 12), which is still going on. The killing of the boys by Herod served as a wake-up call because this war never ceased and was still going on, as it is today.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines which are taken from the Gospel of Matthew, and it is part of a series "The temptation of Christ." This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone". You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

### Context

- ❖ Matthew 2:13-23 is part of the introductory chapters of the Gospel of Matthew:

**The origins of Jesus (Mt 1:1-2:23)**

Mt 1:1-17	The genealogy of Jesus
Mt 1:18-25	The announcement and the birth of Jesus
Mt 2:1-12	The visit of the Magi to Jerusalem and Bethlehem
Mt 2:13-23	The escape to Egypt an return from Egypt
<b>The start of the ministry of Jesus (Mt 3:1-4:11)</b>	
Mt 3:1-17	John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus
Mt 4:1-11	The temptation of Jesus in the Desert

## Form and structure

- ❖ There are three different scenes in this narrative. Each scene is concluded with a “fulfilment.” The first and third scene are parallel in structure and partly in wording:

<b>A. The escape to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15)</b>	
<i>Time:</i>	When they (the magi) had gone,
<i>A Message from the Lord:</i>	an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.  “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”
<i>Action by Joseph:</i>	So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.
<i>Fulfilment:</i>	And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:  “Out of Egypt I called my son.”
<b>B. The Killing of the Boys (Mt 2:16-18)</b>	
<i>Time:</i>	When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi,
<i>Action by Herod:</i>	he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.
<i>Fulfilment:</i>	Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:  “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing

	to be comforted, because they are no more.”
<b>A'. The return to the Land of Israel (Mt 2:19-23)</b>	
<i>Time:</i>	After Herod died,
<i>A Message from the Lord:</i>	an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,  “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”
<i>Action by Joseph:</i>	So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.
<i>Fulfillment:</i>	So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets:  “He will be called a Nazarene.”

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### Background

- ❖ A Comparison between Moses and Jesus illuminates the first chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.

<b>Moses</b>		<b>Jesus</b>	
Exodus 1:22	The killing of all the Hebrew boys in Egypt.	Matthew 2:16	The killing of all the boys in Bethlehem.
Exodus 4:22-23 and Hosea 11:1	This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.”	Matthew 2:15  Matthew 4:10	And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” “Worship”
Exodus 14 1 Corinthians 10:3	They (Israel) were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.	Matthew 3:14-17	The baptism of Jesus by John.

Exodus 15:22	Moses and the people of Israel were led into the desert	Matthew 4:1	Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
Exodus 15:26	I am the LORD, who <b>heals</b> you.	Matthew 4:23	Jesus <b>healed</b> every disease and sickness among the people.
Exodus 19:20	The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up.	Matthew 5:1	He went up on a mountainside.
Exodus 20:1-17	The law (Ten Commandments)	Matthew 5:17	“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

More striking parallels

<b>Genesis – Exodus</b>	<b>Matthew</b>
Joseph, son of Jacob, in Egypt	Joseph, husband of Mary, in Egypt
Joseph and his dreams	Joseph and his dreams
The killing of the Boys	The killing of the Boys
One was saved (Moses)	One was saved (Jesus)
Out of Egypt, I called my Son	Out of Egypt, I called my Son

Herod the Great

- ❖ **Herod the Great** was king and ruled Jewish Palestine from 37 BC to 4 BC. This means that Jesus must have been born around the year 6 BC (Mt 2:1–19). Herod was of Idumean descent. He became king because of their loyalty to Rome. In the first years of his rule, Herod was almost obsessively concerned about the security of his rule. During his reign, he killed many of his opponents. He executed his wife Mariamme to prevent any Jewish uprising (29 BC). His successful meetings with Augustus provided a firm basis for the successes of his reign during its peak (27-13 BC). During these years, Herod exercised complete control over all key institutions, including the Sanhedrin (the highest tribunal). This is reflected in Matthew 2:4: “When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.”

It is understandable that some pious Jews might have looked askance at Herod's lineage; they might have been upset that an Idumean assumed the title of king that was historically associated with the house of David (Mt 1:1).

Herod made use of spies. They were everywhere. This is in accordance with the Gospel of Matthew: "Herod called the Magi **secretly** and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared" (Mt 2:7).

Herod had an extensive building program. It included cities (Caesarea and Sebaste, to honour the Roman Emperor), fortified cities to secure his own position, many palaces and also pagan temples(!). His building program also involved the temple and its courts (Mt 24:1, 2).

After his death, a Jewish delegation to Rome complained about his reign of terror. The killing of the Boys in Bethlehem and its surroundings (Mt 2:16) was not an incident.<sup>1</sup>

## Exposition

### Verse 13-14

- ❖ **"When they had gone"** concludes the previous story and it functions as a transition to this new scene. **"They"** are the magi or wise men.
- ❖ **"appeared."** This is a historical present.<sup>2</sup> A historical present is used to make story-telling vivid. This is enhanced by the word "behold" (ESV), which is not translated in the NIV. For reasons of vividness, it is better to translate: "Look, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and says:"
- ❖ **"Herod."** See above.
  - This is what the king said to the magi: "As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him" (Mt 2:8). But as soon he realized that the Messiah was born, he made already plans to kill him secretly.  
This is what he did when he realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi: "he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under" (Mt 2:16).
- ❖ **"he said."** Compare **these commands** of the angel with **the actions** of Joseph (Mt 2:13-15 AND Mt 2:19-21):
  - **Get up,** he said, **take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you,** for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." **So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.**

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<sup>1</sup> Levine, L. I., *Herod the Great (Person)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.) (1992, Vol. 3, pp. 161–169).

<sup>2</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 45).

- After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.
  - This shows the obedience of Joseph to the commands of the Lord.
- ❖ “the child and his mother.” Matthew doesn’t mention the name of the child nor of his mother, although he could have done so (Mt 1:18-25, 2:10). In the previous section of the narrative (2:1-12), Joseph is not mentioned, only “the child with his mother Mary” (Mt 2:10).
  - In this scene, the spotlights are on Joseph. He is listening, he is acting.

Verse 15

- ❖ “Fulfilled.” At first, looking at the words of Hosea, it is remarkable that Hosea (11:1) didn’t speak about the future but about the past. and the special relation Israel had with the Lord, and the present day of the prophet and looking into the nearby future, the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is, therefore, necessary to read the citation in its original context. The Jewish readers of the Gospel of Matthew probably knew this context by heart.

Hosea 11:1-5	
<p><i>Recalling the Past: (Hosea 11:1-4)</i></p>	<p>“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (= Mt 2:15) But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.</p>
<p><i>Warning for the nearby future: (Hosea 11:5-)</i></p>	<p>“Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?”</p>

- Hosea recalled the command given by the Lord to Moses in the desert (Ex 4:21-23) into memory:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘When you return to Egypt, (...) Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is

what the Lord says: **Israel is my firstborn son**, and I told you, **'Let my son go**, so he may worship me.'"

- A similar use of a prophecy is found in Matthew 1:22-23:

<p><i>Matthew 1:22-23:</i></p>	<p>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <b>"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"</b>—which means, "God with us."</p>
<p><i>Isaiah 7:10-17:</i> <i>The sign given to King Ahaz (you):</i></p> <p><i>Fulfillment during the reign of King Ahaz (you):</i></p>	<p>Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, <b>you</b> house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will <b>you</b> try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give <b>you</b> a sign: <b>The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.</b></p> <p>He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings <b>you</b> dread will be laid waste. The Lord will bring on <b>you</b> and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."</p>

- In this case, Isaiah prophesied with nearby future in view. This prophecy was already fulfilled during the reign of Ahaz and served as a sign to this king.
  - Is this a case of a double fulfillment?
    - 1. The virgin (or princess) gave birth to Immanuel during the days of King Ahaz (Isa 7:14).
    - 2. The virgin (Mary) gave birth to Immanuel, God with us, God incarnate, Jesus (Mt 1:23).
- It is better to call both prophecies a re-enactment. In both cases there is also an identification:
  - Re-enactment (or recapitulation):
    - Hosea ushered a wake-up call: Israel remember your calling and the love of God! Matthew cites the words of Hosea as a wake-up call.

- Isaiah gave a sign to an unbelieving and rebellious king, the birth of Immanuel. Matthew cites these words in the context of unbelief and distress.
- Identification:
  - Jesus is identified with the people of Israel, he will gather the people of God into one flock (Israel).
  - Jesus is identified with Immanuel. He is truly Immanuel.
  - This double identification is important for the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus is the unique son of God and in Jesus is the God continues to gather his people, his flock. “Just as God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt to inaugurate his original covenant with them, so again God is bringing the Messiah, who fulfills the hopes of Israel, out of Egypt as he is about to inaugurate his new covenant.”<sup>3</sup>
  - “Jesus fulfills Israel’s call.”<sup>4</sup> (See also Isa 42:1–4; 43:10; 49:1–3).

## Application

### Praise

- ❖ Praise God because he is faithful to and fulfils all his promises.

### Verse 13-14

- ❖ Pay attention to the spiritual war behind the scenes. King Herod and his plan to kill the child is part of the spiritual war behind the scenes, which was already announced in Genesis 3:14,15:
  - “So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’”
  - Read also Revelation 12:1-4  
“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on

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<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, C. (1992, p. 67).

<sup>4</sup> Keener, C. S. (2009, p. 109).

his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born."

- Revelation makes clear that the "dragon" and the Roman Empire (Rev 13) are working together. King Herod was a vassal king of the Roman Emperor.
- ❖ Pay attention to the soul of Herod:
  - His soul is full of hatred and revenge. He doesn't care about the lives of young boys and the grief of their mothers.
  - He did(!) believe that this child was the Messiah. His belief was not unto salvation but unto death.
- ❖ Pay attention to the faith and obedience of Joseph.

#### Verse 15

- ❖ Pay attention to the Son of God:
  - He is identified with the people of Israel.
  - This identification is also found in his baptism (Mt 3:16, 17) and the temptation in the desert (Mt 4:1-11).
  - The Lord and Father of Jesus Christ, our Savior, continues to gather his people to worship him (Ex 4:21-23; Ex 19:3-6; Mt 4:1-11).
- ❖ Comfort the people who are dealing with oppression and persecution, Christians who fled to other parts of this world to find a safe haven.
- ❖ This story serves also as a wake-up call for the church of today. The church must be aware of the spiritual war (Gen 3:14, 15; Rev 12), which is still going on. The killing of the boys by Herod served as a wake-up call because this war never ceased and was still going on, as it is today.

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