

The Church of the Servant King

Home Bible Study

Survey of the Bible Series

The Gospel of Matthew

(Lesson SB-2)

Matthew Chapters 1:18 – 2:23

Matthew 1:18 – The pregnancy of Mary

- A key to understanding the virgin birth of Jesus is found in the word *betrothed*. In Hebrew culture, there were several phases of the marriage process. After the bride had been selected (usually by the young man's father), the couple entered a betrothal period that usually lasted a year. This period was initiated with a formal proceeding which was usually undertaken by a friend or legal representative on the part of the bridegroom and by the parents of the bride on the part of the bride. It was confirmed by oaths and accompanied by presents to the bride, i.e. a dowry. Many times presents would also be given to the relatives of the bride. Typically, the dowry given was consistent with the status of the bride and this no doubt prevented many poorer men from taking brides from more well to do families. The act of betrothal was celebrated by a feast. After the elapse of a period of time (about a year), the bridegroom would adorn himself in festive dress and placing a garland upon his head, he would leave his house with a procession of others to the bride's father's house. Usually the procession would consist of his groomsmen, musicians and/or singers, and others with lamps. When he arrived at the bride's house, the bride and her companions awaited his arrival. He would then lead the procession with his bride back to his own or his father's house to enjoy a feast. Along the way, other friends of both parties would join the procession and would include a party of young girls (virgins). The feast would last anywhere from seven to fourteen days. The guests were provided by the host with wedding clothes and the entertainment would consist of riddles and other amusements. The last act of the ceremony would be when the bridegroom conducted the bride into the bridal chamber.
- During the betrothal period, a formal divorce could occur if there was any unchastity found in the bride.
- During this period, the man and woman were called husband and wife.

Matthew 1:19 – Joseph, a just man

- During the one year waiting period, Mary became pregnant and apart from divine revelation, Joseph could only conclude that Mary had been unfaithful.
- This verse demonstrates the character of Joseph. Joseph would have been within his rights to make the divorce a public matter and grant her a certificate of divorce as was the custom in ancient Israel (see Deut 24:1 and Jer 3:1, 8).
- One can only imagine the disappointment and soul searching that must have occurred in Joseph's mind. There would have been some time to have elapsed between when Mary became pregnant and when she began to show signs of being pregnant.

Matthew 1:20 – Joseph, son of David

- Matthew's emphasis is upon Jesus' legal right to the throne of Israel, therefore Matthew continues the theme he established in the genealogy of verses 1-17.
- That theme is that Jesus had legal claim to the throne of Israel even though he was not the physical descendant of David through Joseph.

Matthew 1:21 – the son's name – Jesus

- Jesus is the Greek word Ἰησοῦς and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *Yeshua*. It means "the Lord shall save."
- The name expresses Jesus' work on earth to save (spiritual) and deliver (physical).

Matthew 1:22-23 – fulfillment of Isa 7:14

- Points regarding Matthew's use of the word fulfillment in relation to Old Testament passages:
 - On twelve occasions, Matthew uses the word fulfill in order to describe some event in the ministry and life of Jesus in relationship to the Old Testament.
 - The twelve occasions are 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; and 27:9.
 - When one compares the Matthew narrative of the particular event with the Old Testament passage that is stated as having been fulfilled, one discovers that not only is the fulfillment less than exact on most occasions, but in some cases there is uncertainty as to whether there is a specific Old Testament passage being fulfilled.
 - The fulfillment passages in Matthew can be grouped into four different categories:
 - *Literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment* – This represents a case in which the New Testament event is an ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. The prophesied event or events have completely transpired not to occur in the future. This also includes cases in which there is dual or *multiple fulfillment* in the Old Testament as well as the passage in Matthew.
 - *Literal plus typical* – The Old Testament passage is seen as a type of the New Testament event.
 - *Literal plus application or illustration* – The New Testament event has one point of similarity with the Old Testament event and the Old Testament event is quoted as an application.
 - *Summation* – There is no actual quotation of any specific Old Testament passage. There is only a summary of what the prophets said.
- Matthew 1:22-23 represents a case of *multiple fulfillment*; therefore Matthew 1:22-23 falls into the category of *literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment*.
 - In Isa 7:14, Israel and Judah were in the midst of a complex international set of power struggle dynamics. In the west, Assyria had been expanding its borders and wealth under Tiglath-Pileser III(744-727 B.C.) by making vassal states out of conquered nations. The northern kingdom of Israel had been paying tribute to Assyria until Pekah aligned himself to Rezin, king of Damascus about 734 B.C. to revolt against Assyria. However, Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to join and Pekah attempted to depose Ahaz and install a puppet king. Ahaz did not have the faith in Yahweh that Isaiah had and he sought to preserve his throne by submitting himself as a vassal to the Assyrian in exchange for the Assyrian's help against Judah.
 - God sent a sign to Ahaz in the form of a child. The child symbolized judgment upon Israel and Syria.
 - The Hebrew word translated *virgin* in this passage can mean a young woman of marriageable age or it can mean a virgin.
 - Isaiah's wife is most likely the prophetess in Isa 8:3-4 who bears a son to whom the Lord commands Isaiah to give the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Before he would be able to speak, Assyria would plunder Israel.
 - Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz means *speed the spoil, hasten the booty*.
 - In Isa 7:15, the child of *the virgin* who was to be named Immanuel is prophesied to eat curds and honey (verses bread and wine from cultivated lands). This represented the simple diet of Judah after the Assyrian invasion. There was no cultivated land and the diet was associated with hard times.
 - It is possible that the *virgin* in Isa 7:14 was Ahaz's wife. Therefore, the *virgin* in 7:14 and the prophetess (Isaiah's wife) would be different.
 - If the *virgin* in 7:14 was Ahaz's wife, the child would have been Hezekiah, Ahaz's successor. Hezekiah would be a sign to Ahaz that

God was in control: the Lord was with Ahaz; He would save Judah from the enemies that surrounded Ahaz, enabling his son to inherit the throne.

- I tend toward the view that the son of 7:14 and the son of the prophetess in 8:3-4 are two different sons of Isaiah. I base this view on 8:18 in which Isaiah says that he and his children are signs in Israel. If Isaiah had only mentioned one child as a sign in 8:18, then an argument could be made that the son in 7:14 and 8:3-4 were the same child.
- Immanuel represents God's salvation (deliverance) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz represents God's judgment. God would judge Israel in 722, but He would also deliver Judah.
- Therefore, the immediate fulfillment of Isa 7:14 was historical. The son of Isaiah would be a sign to Ahaz, king of Judah of God's judgment upon Israel (and Samaria). He would also be a sign of God's mercy and salvation.
- The more distant fulfillment of Isa 7:14 would occur in Matt 1:22-23.
- Jesus was born of a virgin and will ultimately deliver Judah (as well as all Israel) from all enemies and establish His reign of peace at His Second Advent.

Matthew 1:25 – Joseph did not know her

- On two other occasions, Matthew affirms the virgin birth (see verses 18 and 20)
- Verse 25 is also an affirmation. Joseph is said to not have known Mary until she gave birth to Jesus.
- Matthew uses the imperfect tense of the Greek word *eginosken* which could be literally translated *was not knowing*.
- Joseph violated all custom by taking Mary into his home before the one year betrothal period had elapsed. No doubt Joseph endured the insinuations that he was the father of a child conceived out of wedlock.

Matthew 2:1- – the wise men see the star

- The magi came some time after the birth of Jesus.
 - Jesus, Mary and Joseph were still in Bethlehem, but now in a house (v. 11).
 - Jesus was called a child, not an infant (vv. 9 & 11)
 - Herod murdered all the male children under two years old.
- Almost every Gentile nation had wise men who studied astronomy and the religions and traditions of other nations. It is quite possible that the scrolls of Hebrew Scripture were copied and spread to Gentile nations during the Babylonian captivity by Jews who were deported. There is likely a connection between the magi's comments regarding "His star" and Balaam's prophecy concerning the star that would come out of Jacob in Num 24:17.
- It is possible that the "star" which the Magi saw was the Shekinah glory of God. This is the same Shekinah glory that led Israel through the wilderness and that had last been seen just prior to the deportation to Babylon. Ezekiel records the progressive departing of the Shekinah glory from the temple in Ezekiel 10.
- Herod the king is Herod the Great, who reigned over Palestine from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C.
- Herod is the name of a family or a surname that belonged to all the generations of the Herodian house. All the descendants of Herod the Great down to the fourth generation, who were identified with the government of Palestine and are mentioned in the New Testament are known in history by the surname Herod.
- Herod the Great was an Idumaeen and as such a descendant of Esau. The Idumaeans occupied a southern district of Palestine known as the Negeb, located between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea and southward. Even though the Idumaeans had largely embraced the Jewish religion, the Jews regarded them with a great deal of suspicion and prejudice. Jews considered them half Jews. To conciliate the Jews who had been alienated by his cruelties, he rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. While Jewish tradition contends that the temple was built by the priests in a year and a half, the cloisters and outer enclosures were eight years in construction. Additions were

- continually made from year to year so that the Jews would assert to Jesus that the Temple was built in 46 years (John 2:20).
- Having been exposed to the Jewish religion, Herod knew that he was not the rightful heir to the throne. He was not a king from the line of David. The Jews hated him and never truly accepted him as king.

Matthew 2:5-6 – a fulfillment passage relating to Jesus' birth

- Matthew quotes from Micah 5:2 which is a prediction of the town of Christ's birth, i.e. Bethlehem.
- This is a use of the fulfillment language by Matthew that would fall into the category of *literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment*.
- The Jewish religious authorities who became Christ's enemies later, unintentionally affirmed that Jesus had fulfilled a messianic prophecy in His birth.
- Principle: Truth can be spoken by those that the Bible would classify as enemies of truth.

Matthew 2:11 – the gifts of the Magi

- Gold symbolized royalty.
- Frankincense was a fragrance
- Myrrh was the ointment of death used for embalming.

Matthew 2:15 – a fulfillment passage

- The OT passage that is quoted is Hosea 11:1.
- The context of Hosea 11:1 is that of a prophet attempting to emphasize the ongoing love of Yahweh for His people in the midst of words of warning of impending judgment prior to the Assyrian captivity. He married a faithless harlot as an illustration of God's love for His faithless people. The original context is not a prophecy, it is an historic event.
- The literal meaning in context of Hosea 11:1 is a reference to the Exodus.
- The words "My Son" in Hosea 11:1 refer to Israel and not a literal son as in **The** future Son of God.
- Matthew uses *fulfillment* for apologetic purposes consistent with the needs of a Jewish audience. He uses *fulfillment* in the same sense in which we might use the word type or picture, yet with an emphasis upon the divinely orchestrated purpose in the events of history.
- This use of *fulfillment* probably best falls into the category of *literal plus typical*.
- Since Israel is the Son of God, the history of Israel is a typical anticipation of the life of the Messiah.

Matthew 2:17 – a fulfillment passage

- In Jer 31:15, Jeremiah is describing a literal event that is soon to come as the Babylonian captivity begins. The young men of Judah passed by the town of Ramah as they marched toward Babylon. Not too far from Ramah is where Rachel was buried and she was the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As the young men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they would never see again. Jeremiah uses poetic imagery to describe the entombed Rachel weeping for the Israelites who are being deported to Babylon.
- Jer 31:15 is not even a remote prediction of the death of babies in Bethlehem. It names the wrong city (Ramah versus Bethlehem), the wrong action (captivity verses death), and the wrong outcome (return from captivity verses no return from death).
- The only point of comparison is the sadness felt in the hearts of both groups of women.
- This is a good example of the *literal plus application* category of fulfillment.

Matthew 2:23 – He shall be called a Nazarene

- Matthew is not quoting an Old Testament passage, rather he is summarizing what OT prophets had said regarding the Messiah.
- No OT prophet stated that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

- Examples of these OT passages that Matthew summarizes include Psa 22:6-9 and Isa 53.
- The name Nazarene carried the idea of that which was despicable or despised.