

The Incarnation Part 10 - 'The First Prophecy'

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Christ's life and death, highlighting His identity as the Messiah and His role as the mediator of salvation.

Scripture: Exodus 4:22, Isaiah 60:3, Hosea 11:1, 1 Corinthians 10:4, Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 1:12

Topics: "Christ's Birth", "Old Testament Prophecies"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into the profound prophecies fulfilled in the early history of Jesus, focusing on the journey of the wise men, the flight into Egypt, and the return to Nazareth, all guided by ancient prophecies. He emphasizes the divine significance of Christ's birth, the symbolism behind the gifts of the wise men, and the miraculous events surrounding the Holy Family. Charles explores the deep mysteries of Old Testament prophecies pointing to the redemption brought by Jesus, highlighting the eternal presence and compassion of God throughout history.

Transcript

Matthew ch. 2 : We have before us not a text, but an entire chapter wherein we shall consider the journeying of the wise men from the east and their strange appearance at Herod's palace in Jerusalem; their redirection according to ancient prophecy, and their worshipping of the Saviour in Bethlehem; the presentation of their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and their return by another way, being warned of God; the subsequent flight of the family (Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus) into Egypt for safety, until the death of Herod, and their return, not to Bethlehem (for fear of King Archelaus, the son of Herod), but to Galilee, where they dwelt in Nazareth. Now all these movements in the early history of our Lord were governed by prophecy. Matthew is very careful to tell us what those prophecies are, for we have recorded in his second chapter the fulfilment of three great prophecies. First, the flight into Egypt and the return; according to verse fifteen, That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'. Second, the subsequent slaughter of the innocent babes at Bethlehem by the cruel King Herod fulfilled, says Matthew in verse seventeen, That which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet saying, 'In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not'. The third prophecy appears in the last verse of the chapter: And He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'.

Now we want to look at these three remarkable prophecies, a task which is not often undertaken, and even more seldom are they dealt with adequately as they ought to be, because there are difficulties about them. Two of them do not really appear to be related to the events to which Matthew attaches them, and the third, "He shall be called a Nazarene", can scarcely be found in Old Testament prophecy. To complicate matters, Matthew uses a term in the plural: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'. In the second one he says it was Jeremiah the prophet, and in the first, That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son', referring to a specific prophecy. Now we shall see presently what these difficulties are, and far from it being hard to resolve them, we shall find that they unerringly are designed to point to the fact that the time of fulfilment had come, for which all the earth had waited from the moment that the first sin had been committed, and the human race was cast out from the presence of God, as unholy.

The time had come when the promise that was made was about to be fulfilled in the redemption which was procured by our Saviour Jesus Christ, and this redemption, and this fulfilment would fill the hearts of all God's people with great joy and peace, assurance and confidence. This is what we all need and what many of us are seeking; we need to be sure that these things are true, and by the response of our hearts to that assurance which God gives, accept that they are true of us, and know that we are even now receiving the benefits of them, and shall do through all eternity.

Not Matthew, but the Holy Spirit of God, guiding Matthew, has caused these things to be set down in the manner and form in which we find them. This is no idle statement, for we are perfectly sure that, unaided by the spirit of God, Matthew could not possibly have made this effort, this prophetic effort, in recording the facts of Christ's early history upon earth. First of all in this chapter, we see him invested with royal dignity; He has come from the very throne of Heaven. He has emerged upon the earth, by what the Psalmist mysteriously described as being curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth; that is the shade of that Holy Temple, the virgin's womb. The Lord appeared, unseen by any but the eye of God the Father, in that germ of life implanted there. Mysteriously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth, He came forth; what a mystery and what a wonder was His birth!

Birth happens so frequently, of course; at the present time it is happening more frequently than death. The human race is being replenished and increased so frequently, and on so vast a scale, that it is often viewed not as a wonder, but almost as a natural calamity. Every birth is a holy thing in the sight of God, for no human beings would ever be born unless the hand of God had curiously wrought them in the lowest parts of the earth. Let us remember that life is no accident; it may seem to be so and may be treated as such. But the believer in God, and in His Word, knows that it is no accident; that only the Lord of life can give life. Not even the lambs which are born in the field of the labouring ewe, nor the foal that comes forth in the springtime, nor the replenishing of the herd of calves, nor the mystery of the birth of wild animals in the desert, in the wilderness and in the jungle; none of these things can happen without the intervention of the power of God. Remember that the power of God is a personal thing; it is not simply some diffused sort of impulse which is found in all parts of creation. Wherever the power of God is, there is God! Let us remember that! God does not just introduce an impulse into the human race, so that the process is carried on automatically. There is a purpose written in the decrees of God, concerning every child that is born, and every individual who dies. However great the problems which this may create in our mind, they are nothing like the problems which would exist, and which would trouble us, if we thought that God did not control our appearance in this world. We are here because He appointed us to be here before the foundation of the world, whatever our destiny may be in that eternal world to which we shall return.

Whatever that destiny may be, for good or ill, we are here by the appointment of God. Every act we perform, every word we speak, every thought which passes through our mind, is recorded in the eternal book of the divine memory, and some day the book will be open.

So the Saviour, the Prince of us all, the King of glory, comes by the same means by which we came into the world; curiously wrought until the time came when Mary brought forth her first born son, and they called Him Jesus, for he would save His people from their sins. If Joseph and Mary had any doubt as to their office, and the significance of this child who had been miraculously born of the virgin, it must have been dispelled by the subsequent events, not the least being the appearance of the wise men from the east crying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. Unannounced, unheralded, they had come to knock at their door, possibly late at night or early in the morning. When they opened the door, what did they see? A troupe of men, perhaps many more than three. The threefold nature of their gifts, from which people have only too readily concluded that there were three men, each carrying one of the gifts, is very misleading. Their store of gold, frankincense and myrrh may have been brought in all at once, and laid at the feet of Him who, despite the shroud of meekness and humility, a family without distinction, they recognised as the coming Deliverer, the Redeemer, the Light of the Gentiles. At His cradle rude and bare they poured forth their riches. We were never told what happened to the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What did Joseph and Mary do with it? In all probability it paid their expenses for the next two years in Egypt.

When they saw the gifts and the distinguished visitors who had brought them to their humble home, they knew, or had it confirmed to them, that it really was an angel who had spoken to them; that it was a miracle of birth which had taken place, such as has never happened in the world before. Oh yes, it was a natural birth, but it was a divine conception by the Holy Spirit, the implanting of that germ of life, and now the wonder was beginning to unfold, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (60:3): And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. How long they stayed we do not know. Perhaps they stayed all that day, or maybe they camped out in the vicinity; they would have been used to that for they had travelled a long way already, by day and by night. We know that they remained long enough to sleep again, and in their sleep to have a dream in which the angel of God warned them not to go back to Jerusalem, but to return to their own country by a different route.

Now there is confirmation of the fact that here was One who was invested with royal dignity, as the King of the ages, the Master of the Heavens, the Almighty, the Ruler of heaven and earth, and in particular the Redeemer of His people who should come to Him from north, south, east and west, of which these Kings were a symbol of His future triumphs, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Their visit was followed by the flight of the family into Egypt. Herod discovered that the wise men were not returning, with sufficient amount of time having elapsed to arouse his suspicion, and to give time for Joseph, Mary and the child to get clear away beyond the boundaries of his dominion, safely into Egypt, where he could not follow them. He did not even know where they had gone, so his agents could not discover them. He sent his soldiers to perpetrate one of the most barbarous massacres ever known in history, a massacre of babes alone. Not their parents, just the babies, snatched away from the loving arms of their mothers; slain, and dashed to pieces on the spot. How many we do not know. Whether Herod's intentions and plans covered the whole area round about, we are not told. Some people have said that it could not be true, because it is not recorded anywhere in the annals of the reign of Herod. It is scarcely likely that it would be, that he would permit the historians and secretaries of the royal palace to make special note that he had destroyed thirty or forty children in this manner. But that he was capable of doing

it we know well enough, because he actually murdered members of his own family, and put some of his own sons to death to make sure that, when he died, there would be plenty of tears shed, because no one would have shed tears for him. Now this is true, and it is recorded, not in the Bible but in history. He was a cruel monster of a man; if you wanted an illustration of the depths to which human nature had sunk and needed redemption, we have it in the events attendant upon Christ's birth.

The first of these three prophecies is, Out of Egypt have I called my son. This prophecy is taken from Hosea 11:1, where we read, When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. The critics say that Matthew had no right to use this scripture, because it has no real relevance to the event; it has to do with past history. Hosea is speaking about the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt in the days of Pharaoh, by the hand of Moses. He sent Moses to Pharaoh (Exodus 4: 22-23) with these words: Israel is my son, even my first born: And I say unto thee, 'Let my son go that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first born'. This is the message which Moses took from God to Pharaoh. Israel as a nation was the son of God; hence, Out of Egypt have I called my son. This took place when they passed over the Red Sea and were brought eventually into the promised land. Why, then, does Matthew say it was fulfilled in Christ, hundreds of years later? There is undoubtedly substance in the critics' complaint that Matthew had wrongly taken Hosea's statement about a historical fact and applied it to the flight of the Lord into Egypt and His subsequent return, as being a fulfilment of that statement. They say that it is all nonsense; that it has nothing whatever to do with Christ's return from Egypt. But we may depend upon it that the inspired Matthew knew what he was doing; he was an Israelite himself and knew the whole history of his people. He knew well that Hosea was looking back to the deliverance of the people of Israel when he said, When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Furthermore, the remainder of the eleventh chapter of Hosea just proves that the prophet was speaking of the earthly Israel.

How then does Matthew use it of Christ? Here we have a deep mystery; it is only as Israel was considered in Christ their mediator, that God could address them as "my son, my first born", and that Christ was with His people in all their past history. In all their afflictions, He was afflicted; in all their bondage, He suffered with them. The apostle Paul tells us that when the rock was smitten in the wilderness, that rock was Christ. But surely it was just a hard rock. No! Paul says (1 Corinthians 10: 4), For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. Here is a great mystery and the wonder of prophecy, that we see symbols, and behind them we see the reality. Here, in the bringing of Israel out of Egypt, we see the reality that in the heart of God the history of His people is recapitulated, that it is re-enacted. So that in their suffering, He suffered; in their afflictions, He was afflicted! And now the time had come when all these things should be focused in one great event; and that is the humiliation, the suffering of the Son of God for our redemption, and for our deliverance. So He must retrace the footsteps of His people, and go down into Egypt, in order that He might come out of Egypt, and that we might see, not just that He was retracing their historic steps by being identified absolutely with them, but it was more than likely that the reverse was true, and that it was they who followed His footsteps out of Egypt. And the fiery and cloudy pillars, which led them all their journey through, and which leads us all our journey through too, is that same Saviour, Redeemer, Deliverer, whom we know is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is always with His people, in their sufferings, in their trials and temptations, and in yours and mine. He does not stand over us watching in order to chastise us for our wrong doing. There is chastisement of course, but it is chastisement of love. He does not stand over us with a whip; He stands over His children in deep compassion, and as you are tempted, so He is tried; and in your weakness, He feels your affliction. "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," said Jesus, and that was so from the beginning; He

was with His elect people, and will be with them, even unto the end.

So now we see the depth of Matthew's quotation, which the prophets and righteous men of Old Testament times did not understand, though they spoke these things by the Spirit of God. Peter (1 Peter 1: 12) says of the prophets, Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. So we must look very, very deeply into all the prophetic mysteries, and to understand our Old Testament we should not merely take surface meanings; we have got to dig deep down, and find Christ everywhere. And when we think we see the nation of Israel, we do not see them at all, for they are a symbol. It is Christ whom we see; it is He who was there all the time, marching forth at the head of His people, and it is comforting to know that it is the same with us today. It takes place throughout our lives, throughout all our journeying pilgrimage, and those who rest in Jesus should never think that they are alone. He was and still is with His people every step of the way. Let us sing with the hymnist, "Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through."

Out of Egypt have I called my son. Let us learn from this verse. When He came out of Egypt He did not come alone; He brought us with Him, because we were there too. Because this is an eternal, continuing act, you and I are there too; it happens in your life and it happens in my life. He brings us up with Him out of Egypt. Though it took two thousand years of time to catch up with insignificant me, it is just as true as if I were there with Him, because Egypt itself is only a symbol: a symbol of the house of bondage, a symbol of our unredeemed state, a symbol of our sinful condition, under the hard taskmasters of the law. The chastisement of conscience, the fear, the dread, the darkness, and then the glorious deliverance! Egypt is only a symbol, and although He really went down to Egypt, and really came up out Egypt, it was in order that we might understand the prophetic nature of what Egypt represents. You all know what it is supposed to be, because you have been singing about it for years:

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,

Pilgrim through this barren land;

I am weak, but though art mighty,

Hold me with thy powerful hand;

Bread of Heaven,

Feed me till I want no more.

Open thou the crystal fountain

Whence the healing stream doth flow;

Let the fiery, cloudy pillar

Lead me all my journey through;

Strong Deliverer,

Be thou still my strength and shield.

We know that this is a picture of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, and when we sing the hymn, invariably with great enthusiasm, we make it our own. Yet still our faith so often flags and fails; still we feebly complain; still we struggle as if it were not true.

Out of Egypt have I called my son; He came with us, and we with Him, one mighty glorious hope, from the Garden of Eden, until eternal glory; one nation, one people all the way. And He is there, ever present: "Lo, I am with you always"; "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." What a redeemer! What matters if we can but grasp this simple and yet profound truth that God is telling His people: that He is with them, that He suffers for them, that He has redeemed them. He came from heaven's glory to such humiliation, that He might know in Himself what it is to flee, what it is to be menaced, what it is to suffer, what it is to live, what it is to die. And above all, what it is to take our place, to be our Substitute, our Advocate, our Mediator, our Redeemer. Consider what God has done, in the whole vast sweep of history, to convince us, to assure us, to fill us with the comfort of His grace, and the knowledge of His glorious, full and free pardon of our sins, through the shedding of His own precious blood. May God help us to understand and appreciate the wonder of these great mysteries.

Amen

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