

In Matthew's Gospel, the warfare between Christ, "the Seed of the Woman," and Satan reaches a climax in the events surrounding His Birth in Bethlehem. In this week's notes, King Herod, in his Satanic hatred of Christ, slaughters the innocent children of Bethlehem. In the same way today, many of God's people cry aloud, persecuted even unto death by a world that hates their Savior. "Lord, please comfort your suffering church on earth – and protect her." This should be our prayer.

Monday: Read Matthew 2:13-18 & Jeremiah 31:15-17**Weeping and Comforting**

By quoting words that describe Rachel's grief from Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew calls to our minds the grief spiritual "Rachel" suffered when her offspring, Benjamin and Joseph (a name used to include all Ten Tribes gathered for deportation into Assyria in 722 B.C.) were sent out of the Promised Land. Tradition says that it was in the boundaries of the Tribe of Benjamin, in the region of Ramah, that the exiles gathered as prisoners of war to be sent to Assyria. Rachel wept for the loss of her sons, (and their inheritances in God's Land) when they were taken away by the wicked king of Assyria.

In the same way, in Matthew 2:16 a godless king broke Rachel's heart again by murdering all the male children under two in Bethlehem, in his effort to kill the Messiah whom the Magi came to visit.

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. (Matt. 2:16)

Here we see that King Herod was the human cause of the grief described:

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted,
because they are no more."* (Matthew 2:17-18)

Meditate and Pray: Father, the wages of sin are indeed bitter and heavy. Thank you for the promise of your Word: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!" (Psalm 126:5) Lord, the sowing sometimes seems heavier than we can bear, so send us comfort along the way. Send comfort to all your children who are paying a cost for faithfulness to the Truth today.

Tuesday: Read Exodus 1:15-22 & Matthew 2:13-18**Comfort under Persecution**

Herod's bloodthirstiness against the male children of Bethlehem reminds us of another wicked king who sought to remove the Seed of God's covenant people in Exodus 1:15-22. When Pharaoh saw the flourishing of the Hebrews, even under harsh slavery (Exodus 1:8-14), he gave instructions that all male children of the Hebrews should be slain, eventually decreeing that "every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile ...," (Exodus 1:22).

The Enemy hated the race that would produce the Messiah, but God raised up Moses to victoriously lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. That great delivery (Exodus 14) is called the Exodus.

Meditate and Pray: Praise God that all Satanic efforts to rid this earth of all who follow Christ will never succeed. Sing *Trinity Hymnal* #347.

*The Church shall never perish, her Dear Lord to defend,
to guide, sustain and cherish, is with her to the end.
Though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale,
against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.*

Wednesday: Read Psalm 105:36-45**Comfort through Justice**

The Exodus became a banner day for celebration on the calendar of Israel. For example, in the fall of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles (celebrated in Jesus' day at the temple in Jerusalem in John 7 & 8) was a great joy as Israel remembered how God liberated His people through the Red Sea miracle (Exodus 14) and then provided for them through manna and water in the desert, giving His people shelter for forty years of wandering in the wilderness. But those years of God's provision for His people depended first on the Passover, when God killed the Egyptians and rescued His own, after sheltering them through the blood of the Passover lamb from the plague upon all the first-born of Egypt. This last plague is described in Psalm 105:36: "*He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first-fruits of all their strength.*"

But that is not all God did. Upon leaving Egypt, the Lord loaded His people down with the riches of Egypt (Psalm 105:37-38) thereby making up for all the lost wages of His people when the Egyptians so fearfully oppressed them as slaves.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that redemption for God's own *always involves both the exaltation of the lowliest believer in Jesus Christ and the casting down of the proud from their places of exaltation.* Mary put it in her song, in Luke 1:46-55.

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;*

*he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
 and exalted those of humble estate;
 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent away empty.
 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

Thurs/Fri/Sat: Read Hosea 11:1-4 & Matthew 2:13-16

Comfort from His Humble Invitation

“Leaving Egypt” became a symbol of God’s redemption for Israel, freeing His people from sin in Hosea’s day just as He freed them from slavery in Egypt. Matthew points out that this ultimately is a prophecy that points to Christ.

But then, why is our sinless Savior (as a Babe taken to Egypt to protect Him from murderous Herod) described as being led as God’s Son by His Father, out of Egypt – as if He too needed redemption? He surely did not have any sin or any need for redemption from the slavery of sin, so graphically illustrated by the Exodus from slavery in Egypt!

In answer, consider that *both* Christ’s being chased to be murdered and being taken to Egypt as a refugee – all this is part of His obedient suffering in our place. The Son of God was born in our nature for this. He learned obedience by what He suffered (Hebrews 5:8) and was qualified in His office as our Savior by “*being perfected through suffering*” (Hebrews 2:10). But what a powerful difference in life-giving power to save between His sinless obedience in our place and His own people’s sin, *despite God’s redeeming grace in bringing them out of Egypt!*

Yes, the purpose of God in redemption was the same for corporate Israel as it was for Christ. He brought them out of Egypt “that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws” (Psalm 105:45). But how terribly they failed. Though God brought them out of Egypt “on eagles’ wings” (Exodus 19:4) in order that they might be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) they sinned with terrible rapidity. As soon as Moses was up on Mt. Sinai for forty days (Exodus 32:1-6), they made the golden calf!

But for Christ, being brought back down *into Egypt*, was no lasting threat to God’s saving purposes. To the contrary, when wicked king Herod died, Christ returned with His parents to Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:19-23), thus fulfilling the prediction of Hosea 11:1, “*Out of Egypt I have called my son.*”

So Christ assumed every mile of our journey in order to suffer for our sins. We are alienated by sin, from childhood wandering in a dark, hostile world. So Christ became an alien who wandered down to Egypt – with all the threats that such an alien status brought.

By dwelling in Egypt, Christ suffered the obscurity of living in a foreign land to which Israel was commanded never to return! His hallowed ties to Bethlehem, the city of David, were forgotten. Christ became anonymous, so that the festal crowds of John 7:40-43 are offended by Christ’s supposed origin in Galilee, and not in Bethlehem!

By coming out of Egypt and being driven to live in the backwoods of Galilee, because of the threat of yet another hostile king (Matthew 2:22), Christ dwelt in what was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 9:1), the oppressed highway for invaders from the North that lay in the region of Galilee. *But even this fulfilled Scripture!*

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that Jesus took the lowly station of foreigner and alien, in order to invite sinners to come unto Him for rest. If Christ had not gone down as low as this, how could He find us in our low condition? Isn't that what the Christmas carol says?

2 For Christ is born of Mary;
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth.

3 How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still,
the dear Christ enters in.

O Little Town of Bethlehem, *Trinity Hymnal* #201)