

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XIII. Christ's Identity Shown By God's Protection In His Infancy
(Matthew 2:13-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Learning about the birth of Israel's Messiah greatly threatened paranoid King Herod the Great, and since we know from Revelation 12:2-4 that Satan sought to destroy Christ at His birth in part through Herod's efforts to kill Him, God worked to protect His Son from Herod, doing so in ways that also fulfilled Scripture prophecy.
- B. This protective work of God adds even more evidence to the identity of Jesus as God's true Messiah and Son.
- C. Matthew 2:13-18 demonstrates this fact, so we view the passage for our insight and edification (as follows):

II. Christ's Identity Shown By God's Protection In His Infancy, Matthew 2:13-18.

- A. When the Magi came to Jerusalem asking for the newborn king of the Hebrews, it troubled both Herod and Jerusalem. Herod's killing some of his family to retain power exposed his insecurity that news of a Hebrew Messiah would heighten, leading to more slaughter of Hebrews, Matthew 2:1-3. (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 68)
- B. Thus, "the path of the Magi to Bethlehem was followed by many curious individuals whose excitement or interest had been aroused by their coming. A report" would have "soon reached Herod as to Jesus' dwelling place," and Herod would then want to take "action to remove this competitor" to his throne, Ibid., p. 69-70.
- C. Herod did not want to kill Bethlehem infants with the Magi being there: the Magi were from Persia, military rivals of Rome, and they had entered Israel, an outskirt of Roman territory with a cavalry escort, so trying to kill Jesus while the Magi who worshipped Him still there would risk conflict between Herod's Roman forces and a Persian cavalry that would only upset Caesar. (Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, vol. Four, p. 34)
- D. Accordingly, God guided the Magi and Joseph, Mary and Jesus so that God might protect His Son and His earthly family from harm while also remarkably fulfilling Bible prophecy (as follows), Matthew 2:12-18:
 - 1. The Lord warned the Magi in a dream not to return to Herod, Matthew 2:12.
 - 2. When the Magi had left Bethlehem headed to their own country without returning to Herod in Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to direct him to take Jesus and his mother Mary and "flee, seek safety in flight" (the Greek verb *pheugo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 863) into Egypt and remain there until he brought Joseph word again, Matthew 2:13a. The angel explained that Herod would seek the young child Jesus in order to destroy him, what would have motivated Joseph to rise out of sleep and immediately take his family and flee into Egypt, Matthew 2:13b.
 - 3. Joseph had earlier been informed to act by God's angel through means of a dream in Matthew 1:20-21, so as he had done in that previous event, Joseph rose from sleep in the night and immediately took his wife Mary and her Infant Jesus and fled safely away from Herod into Egypt, Matthew 1:24 with Matthew 2:14.
 - 4. Joseph with Mary and Jesus stayed in Egypt until Herod's death (Matthew 2:15a), and their sojourn there fulfilled the Hosea 11:1 prophecy that God would call His Son out of Egypt. Hosea 11:1 initially spoke of Israel being God's "son" whom God had called out of Egypt in the Exodus, but in the cases of Israel and Jesus, "the descent into Egypt was to escape danger, and the return was important to the nation's providential history," and Messiah is often identified with Israel in Bible prophecy. (B. K. C., N. T., p. 22)
 - 5. When Herod learned that the Magi had tricked him by leaving Israel without returning to him, he was very angry, and ordered all the Hebrew boys ages two years and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity to be slain, Matthew 2:16. Jesus was far younger than two years old, but paranoid King Herod thought that by killing the boys ages two and under, he would be sure to eliminate the Hebrew Messiah, what to Herod was the terrifying Competitor to his throne. (H. W. Hoehner, Chron. Aspects of the Life of Christ, 1979, p. 23-24)
 - 6. Herod's slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem and its vicinity fulfilled "Jeremiah 31:15, which depicts the wailing at the time of Israel's exile. That calamity and Herod's new atrocity are viewed as part of the same broad picture" of Israel's suffering under divine punishment, Matthew 2:17-18; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Matthew 2:17-18.

Lesson: *Though Satan was motivating Herod the Great to try to kill the Infant Messiah Jesus, God worked to protect His Son's physical life and simultaneously sovereignly to fulfill Bible prophecy regarding His relocation and calling out of Egypt and the grief of Herod's slaughter of Bethlehem's infants.*

Application: *May we rejoice in God's sovereign protection of His Son and trust that Jesus is His Son and Messiah.*