

Christ's Call out of Egypt

Jeremiah 31:15 & Hosea 11:1

Introduction:

Thus far, we have studied several prophetic passages concerning the birth of Christ. For example, we studied about Christ's birth into the human family in **Isaiah 9:6**; His virgin birth in **Isaiah 7:14**; and His birth in Bethlehem in **Micah 5:2**.

In this lesson, we will study about the events which led up to, and which followed, His flight into Egypt with Mary and Joseph.



Our first prophecy was made by the prophet Jeremiah, somewhere around 606 B.C., during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. (We already learned quite a bit about Jeremiah's ministry in the last lesson.)

Our second prophecy was made by the prophet Hosea, somewhere around 740 B.C. Hosea lived during the lifetimes of the prophets Isaiah and Micah, and during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. Hosea prophesied of the coming captivity of Northern Israel by Assyria (which he saw in his lifetime); and he spoke of Israel as an unchaste and dishonoured wife, whom Jehovah would "divorce" because of her sin. However, he also prophesied that Israel would be restored to Jehovah.

Most of Jeremiah's and Hosea's prophecies concerning the Messiah had to do with Christ's second coming to earth; but in this lesson, we will see how they both prophesied of His first coming.

I. The occasion for Christ's sojourn in Egypt (Jeremiah 31:15)

Jeremiah 31:15

This short prophecy found its fulfilment in a tragic event which happened when Jesus was still a young child. At the time, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were living in the town of Bethlehem. Before Jesus' birth, they had lived in Nazareth of Galilee, in the north of Israel; but then, the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, forced them to go to Bethlehem to be taxed: and Jesus was born while they were there. Sometime after Jesus' birth, they moved residence from Nazareth down to Bethlehem, in Judea.

Luke 1:26-27 / 2:1-7

When Jesus was nearly two years old, wise men from the east came to worship Jesus; and the first place they went to find Jesus was in Jerusalem. (They figured that surely the King of the Jews would be living in the capital city of Jerusalem.) When Herod (the Roman king over the provinces of Galilee and Judea), heard that the King of the Jews had been born, he sent the wise men to go and find Him in Bethlehem, and to bring him word, so that he could go there and worship Him also. However, his real purpose was to kill Jesus, so that He would not become a threat to his throne. In a dream, God warned the wise men not to go back to Jerusalem, but to go back to their country by another way, because Herod intended to kill Jesus. Just after their departure, an angel of the Lord also appeared to Joseph, and warned him to take Mary and Jesus down into Egypt, to escape Herod's wrath.

Matthew 2:1-15

When Herod figured out that the wise men had given him the slip, he was infuriated. He sent his soldiers to kill every infant from two years old and younger in all the region around Bethlehem, so that he would be sure to kill Jesus. Little did he know that Baby Jesus had been secreted away to Egypt!

Matthew 2:16

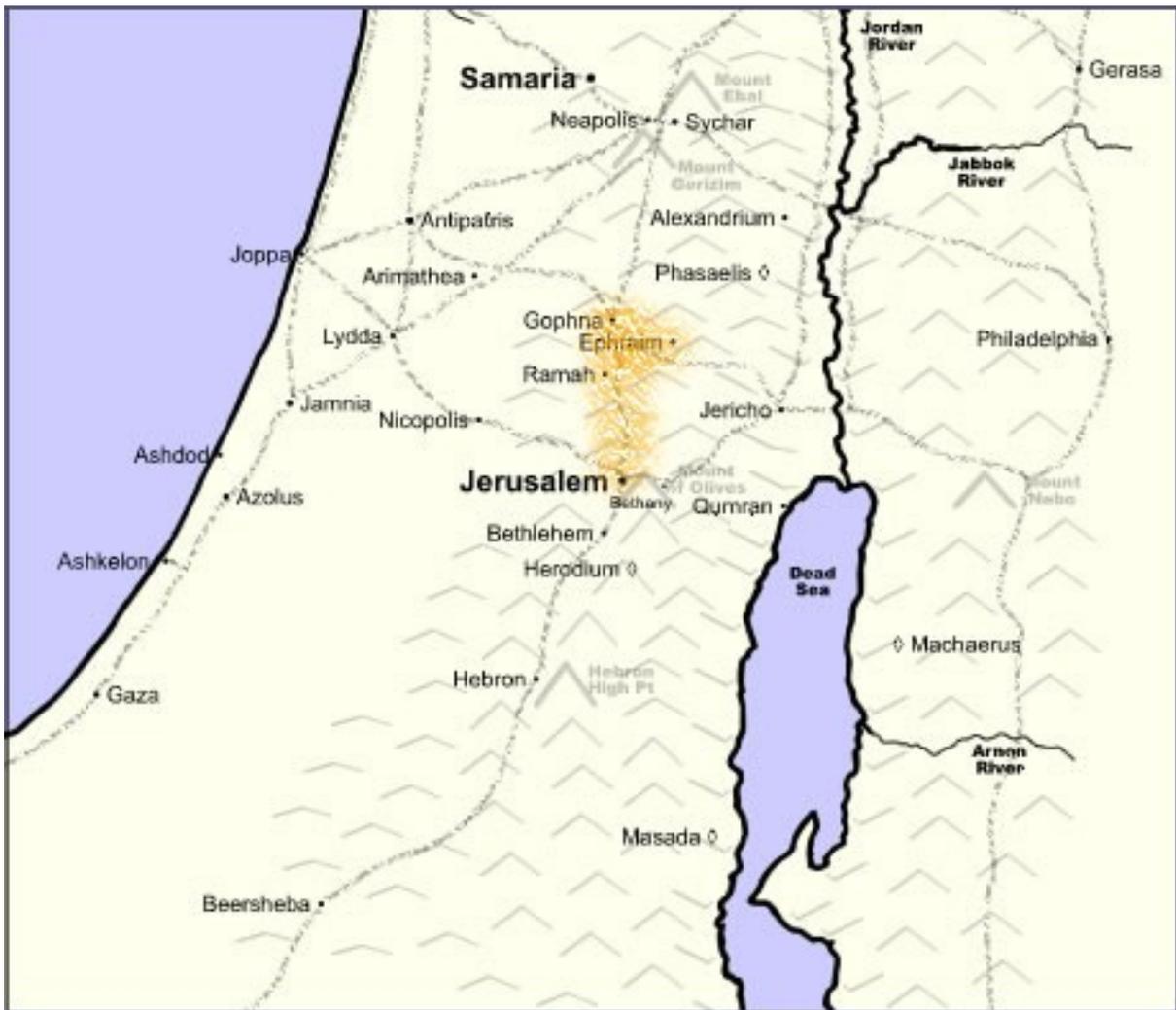
Historical Note: This account of Herod in the Bible is entirely in keeping with what we know about Herod from extra-biblical records. Herod the Great was the Roman king of all the provinces of Israel at the time when Jesus was born; and he was a very capable man. He not only built the fabulous Temple in Jerusalem, which was considered one of the wonders of the Roman world, but he also built whole cities. He built the city of Sebaste. He built the incredible seaport of Caesarea Maritima (which is still an engineering marvel to this day). Every city he built was loaded with baths and pools, and theatres for entertainment. He built the enormous palace complex of Herodium, as well as the palace of Masada, on a cliff high over the Dead Sea. Each of his palaces was loaded with pools, baths, and theatres. He also built palaces, pagan temples, theatres, baths, and other costly buildings in Jerusalem, Jericho, and Caesaria Philippi, as well as in the far-off cities of Damascus, Ptolemais, Byblus, Tyre, Sidon, and Tripoli!ⁱ

Yet, as accomplished a builder as he was, he was an incredibly wicked and immoral man. He often went into violent, jealous rages. He executed many of his closest friends and loyal servants. He murdered his father and mother, his brother-in-law, his second wife, and three of his sons. As he was dying, he ordered that at the time of his death, the “most illustrious men of the whole Jewish nation” be murdered, so that people would weep when he died! (He knew that no one would actually weep for *him!*)ⁱⁱ

This is where the prophecy in **Jeremiah 31:15** comes in. In the New Testament, Matthew points out that Herod’s slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem was the fulfilment of the prophecy of **Jeremiah 31:15**.

Matthew 2:17-18

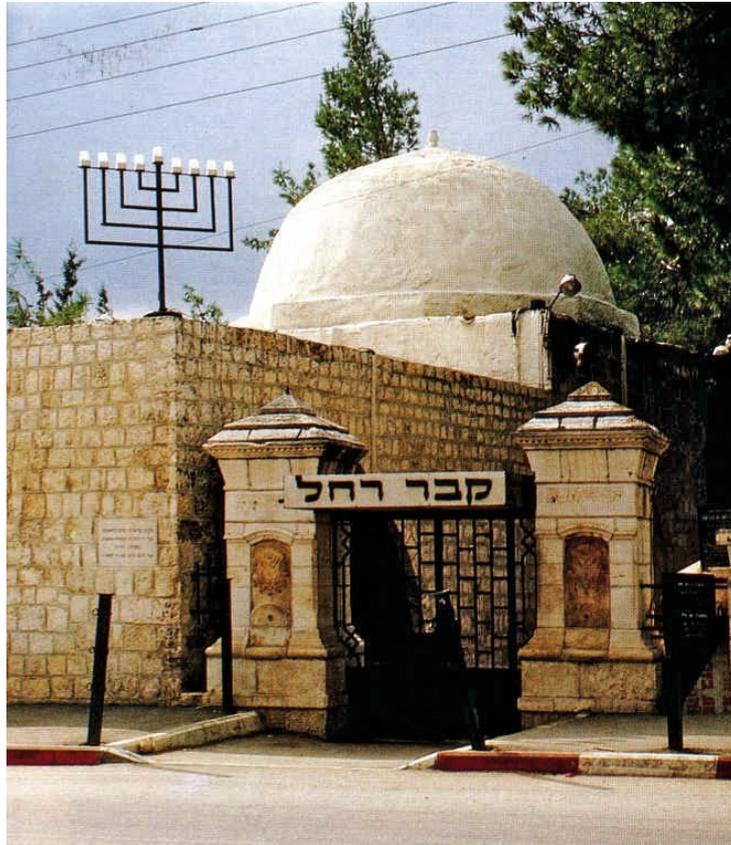
The fact that Jeremiah spoke of weeping and lamentation in Ramah shows how extensive Herod’s slaughter really was. The town of Ramah is located about 5-7 miles north of Jerusalem; and the town of Bethlehem is located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem. Thus, the radius of this slaughter went at least 10 to 12 miles out from Bethlehem!



It is little wonder that Jeremiah poetically speaks of **“Rachel”** (Rachel, the wife of Jacob) weeping for her children, as though she were rolling over in her grave and crying for the misfortunes of her descendants. Rachel was buried about a mile north of Bethlehem, between Bethlehem and Ramah. (Her grave is still well-known today.)

Most of this region of Rachel’s tomb was, in Old Testament times, inhabited by Rachel’s direct descendants—the descendants of her son, Benjamin, and the descendants of her grandson, Ephraim. Ramah was located on the border between the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Benjamin; and Bethlehem (though within the borders of Judah) was not far from the border of Benjamin.

In reality, Rachel was a “mother” to the whole nation of Israel, along with her sister Leah, and Jacob’s other two wives, Bilhah and Zilpah. Thus, Rachel is poetically depicted as “weeping” for all the Jewish babies who died in the region around her tomb.



Q'vur Rahel—“Rachel’s Tomb”

Genesis 30:22-24 (The birth of Rachel’s son, Joseph.)

Genesis 35:16-20 (The birth of Rachel’s younger son, Benjamin, and her death and burial in Ephrath, just outside of Bethlehem.)

Genesis 41:50-52 (The birth of Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.)

Judges 18:21-28 (Ramah was in the tribe of Benjamin; and Jerusalem was *originally* part of Benjamin. Though later part of Judah, Jerusalem was hard against the border of Benjamin.)

Now, it is important to see how this verse fits into the Scripture around it. This prophecy of Herod's slaughter of the babies in Ramah has a larger context; and there is more to it than immediately meets the eye. To get the full meaning, we need to look at the verses preceding **Jeremiah 31:15**, and at the verses following it.

Jeremiah 31:1-20

This whole chapter is a prophecy of the future return of Israel to their land in repentance and faith. This event is yet in the future. Though millions of Jews have returned to the land of Israel within the last century, the nation of Israel is still overwhelmingly in a state of spiritual deadness and unbelief. The LORD makes it clear here in **Jeremiah 31** that when the Jews return, they will return in repentance and belief. As we have learned in many past lessons, this national repentance and return to the land will happen at the time of Christ's return to earth, in the beginning of the Kingdom age. Multitudes of Jews will believe on Jesus as their Messiah during the Tribulation; and those who put their trust in Him will return to the land spiritually regenerated, and indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Thus, this whole passage is a joyous prophecy of Israel's return to the land. All, that is, *except* for **verse 15**. Right in the middle of this chapter, we suddenly read about Rachel's mournful weeping for her children, because they "***are not.***" Why this weeping, in the middle of such a joyful passage? The context shows us why. Let's look again at **verses 16 and 17**.

Jeremiah 31:16-17

After prophesying of Rachel's weeping for her children, the LORD urges Rachel to *stop* weeping for her children, because "***they shall come again from the land of the enemy.***" Clearly, Rachel is "weeping" because her descendants were taken away as captives into the "***land of the enemy***"—Babylon.

This prophecy was made by Jeremiah somewhere around 606 B.C.—about 20 years before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and Judah, and took his last wave of Jewish captives to Babylon. **Verse 15** is a prophecy of the bitter weeping which would take place when Rachel’s descendants would be taken away. The parents whose children were taken away to Babylon mourned and wept, because they knew that they would never see them again.

As it turns out, the city of Ramah was the “hub” where Nebuzar-adan (Nebuchadnezzar’s commanding general) gathered all the Jewish captives before taking them away to Babylon. It is no wonder that God *specifically* mentioned the mourning and weeping that would take place in *Ramah*.

Jeremiah 40:1

With all this in mind, we are faced with a question: Why did Matthew apply this verse to the weeping that took place in this region after Herod’s slaughter, when the context seems to show that the weeping was because of the carrying away of the Jews to Babylon in 586 B.C.? Did Matthew misunderstand the context of this Scripture? Not at all!

As with many other prophecies, this prophecy has a near application, and a far-off fulfilment. Matthew makes it clear that the Herod’s slaughter was the actual *fulfilment* of **Jeremiah 31:15**. This means that the weeping that took place in Ramah in 586 B.C. was a sort of *foretaste*, or *precursor* of the weeping that would take place 586 years later, just after Jesus was born.

It is important to remember that oftentimes in Old Testament prophecy, the LORD foretells of one far-off event, but then zooms backward in time to another future event, which is much nearer to the time when the prophecy was made. Such is the case in this chapter. **Jeremiah 31** is a prophecy of the Millennial Kingdom (which is still in the future); yet, right in the middle of this chapter, we find a prophecy of the event which would cause the Son of God to be brought down into Egypt.

This leads us to our second prophetic passage.

II. Christ's call out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1).

Hosea 11:1

On the surface, the meaning of **Hosea 11:1** seems obvious. The “son” whom God called out of Egypt is the nation of Israel, which was delivered from the bondage of Egypt under Moses. Throughout **Hosea 11**, the LORD continues to speak of the whole nation of Israel as though they were a “son.” For example, **verse 5** says, ***“He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.”*** In other words, the Assyrians became Israel’s rulers after the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity in 722 B.C., because Israel refused to **“return”** to their God in repentance.

Hosea 11:2-12

The Lord refers to the whole nation of Israel as **“Ephraim”** several times throughout this chapter. This hearkens back to the fact that the tribe of Ephraim was the given the “firstborn” status by Jacob.

Genesis 48:17-19

By calling the whole nation of Israel “Ephraim,” God was emphasising the fact that the whole nation of Israel is God’s “firstborn” among all the nations of the earth. All this agrees with the announcement that God gave to Pharaoh through Moses: ***“Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me.”***

Exodus 4:22-23

Clearly, the Old Testament Scriptures teach us that Israel is the “son” of Jehovah. Yet, when we come to the New Testament, the Lord reveals that there was a *deeper* meaning to this verse.

Matthew 2:7-15

Matthew was not ignorant of the context of **Hosea 11:1**. The average Jewish person was well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures; and both he and his Jewish readers would have known full well that Israel was the “son” of whom Hosea spoke. Yet, Matthew unashamedly identifies this “**son**” as Jesus. Why?

Well, we must remember that this was not Matthew’s idea. Matthew was not trying to “pull one over” on his readers. He was not trying to make the text say something that it doesn’t say. Like every other Scripture, this Scripture was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:3

The Greek word behind the phrase “*from the very first*” (the word *anathon*) literally means “*from above.*”

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (The word “*inspiration*” comes from the word *theopneustos*, which means “God-breathed.”)

2 Peter 1:20-21

God had a deeper meaning in mind when he gave Hosea the words of **Hosea 11:1**; and through the Apostle Matthew, God was now revealing what that deeper meaning is. The deeper meaning is this: Israel, as a nation, is the “son” of Jehovah; but Jesus Christ is the *greater* Son of Jehovah.

Jesus is the “**son**” of whom David, Isaiah, and other prophets prophesied.

Psalm 2:7, 12

Isaiah 7:14 / 9:6

The same is true when it comes to the Jehovah’s “servant.” In several passages in **Isaiah**, Israel, as a nation, is called “the servant” of Jehovah.

Isaiah 41:8

The above Scripture is just one of many Scriptures in which the LORD called the whole nation of Israel “**my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen.**” Yet, in the very next chapter, the “Servant” of Jehovah is portrayed as an *individual* from the nation of Israel.

Isaiah 42:1-8

The Servant described in the above Scripture is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The humiliation of this Servant, the earthly ministry of this Servant, and the death, burial, resurrection of this Servant, are further described in **Isaiah 49, 50, 52-53, and 61.**

Isaiah 49:1-8

Isaiah 50

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

Isaiah 61:1-2

Israel, as a nation, may be the “*servant of Jehovah*”; but Jesus Christ is the *greater “Servant of Jehovah.”* God used Israel, as a servant, to bring Jesus Christ into the world; but only Jesus Christ could do the service of taking the sins of the world upon Himself, and paying for them.

In light of these truths, it is not so hard to understand how **Hosea 11:1** is a prophecy of Christ. Israel is the son of Jehovah; but Jesus is *the* Son of Jehovah, who brings salvation. Why, then, would it not be fitting for Jehovah’s Son to follow the same journey that Israel followed when he was a “child”—the journey from Canaan down into Egypt, and then back to Canaan?

Genesis 46:1-4 (God’s call of His son, Israel, to go down into Egypt)

Exodus 12:40-41 (God’s call of His son, Israel, to come up out of Egypt)

Matthew 2:13 (God’s call of His Son, Jesus, to go down into Egypt)

Matthew 2:19-23 (God’s call of His Son, Jesus, to come up out of Egypt)

Conclusion: On the surface, it may seem that these prophecies are speaking of the captivity of the Jews under Nebuchadnezzar, and of God’s call of Israel out of

Egypt. However, the Lord had much deeper and more far-reaching meanings in mind when He gave these Scriptures to their authors. In these Scriptures, we see two prophecies concerning Christ's early childhood.

To the Old Testament saints (and to Satan himself), messianic prophecies such as these were latent and hidden—that is, until the events occurred, and God brought their true fulfilment to light. Jesus truly is God's Son, whom He called out of Egypt to bring salvation to His people!

i David Cloud, *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms* (London, ONT: Way of Life Literature, 2013), pp. 423-438.
ii *Ibid*, pp.439-441.