

Path To Nazareth

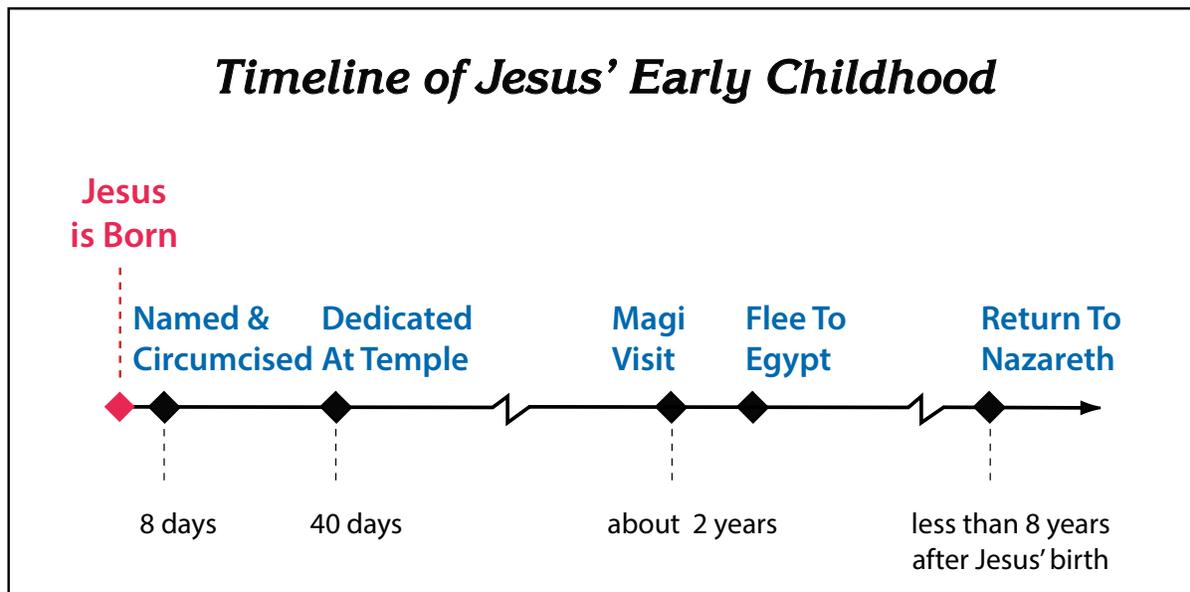
In our last study of the Life and Heart of Jesus, we found that God had warned the magi not to go back to Jerusalem and visit King Herod but to go home a different way. These magi must have believed God to have followed the star, to have worshipped Jesus, and then to have obeyed God and returned home a different way. Many of us want to know God's will for our lives, and many desire to know God's will day-to-day. God helped these men find Jesus, and He hid the location of Jesus from Herod. God showed His love and compassion to the magi and revealed His will through a dream, but concealed His will from King Herod, as we will see in this study. Our God is a revealer of secrets, and yet He hides Himself from us (Matt. 6:6; Isa. 45:15). He reveals Himself to those who seek Him and hides things from those who hate Him. The magi were seekers who found God. King Herod sought to kill Jesus, and God denied him even a brief look at our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This entire study is about those who seek God's will and those who do not care. Herod was silver tongued pretending to want to worship Jesus, but the magi truly wanted to worship and they did.

FLIGHT TO EGYPT. After the magi left, God revealed His will to Joseph in a dream through an "angel of the Lord."

Just imagine yourself asleep in your bed and then you have a dream. We do not know what Joseph saw in his dream, but we are told that he heard a voice, "Get up!" The voice was probably very loud and forceful. "Get up! Take Jesus and Mary to Egypt immediately."

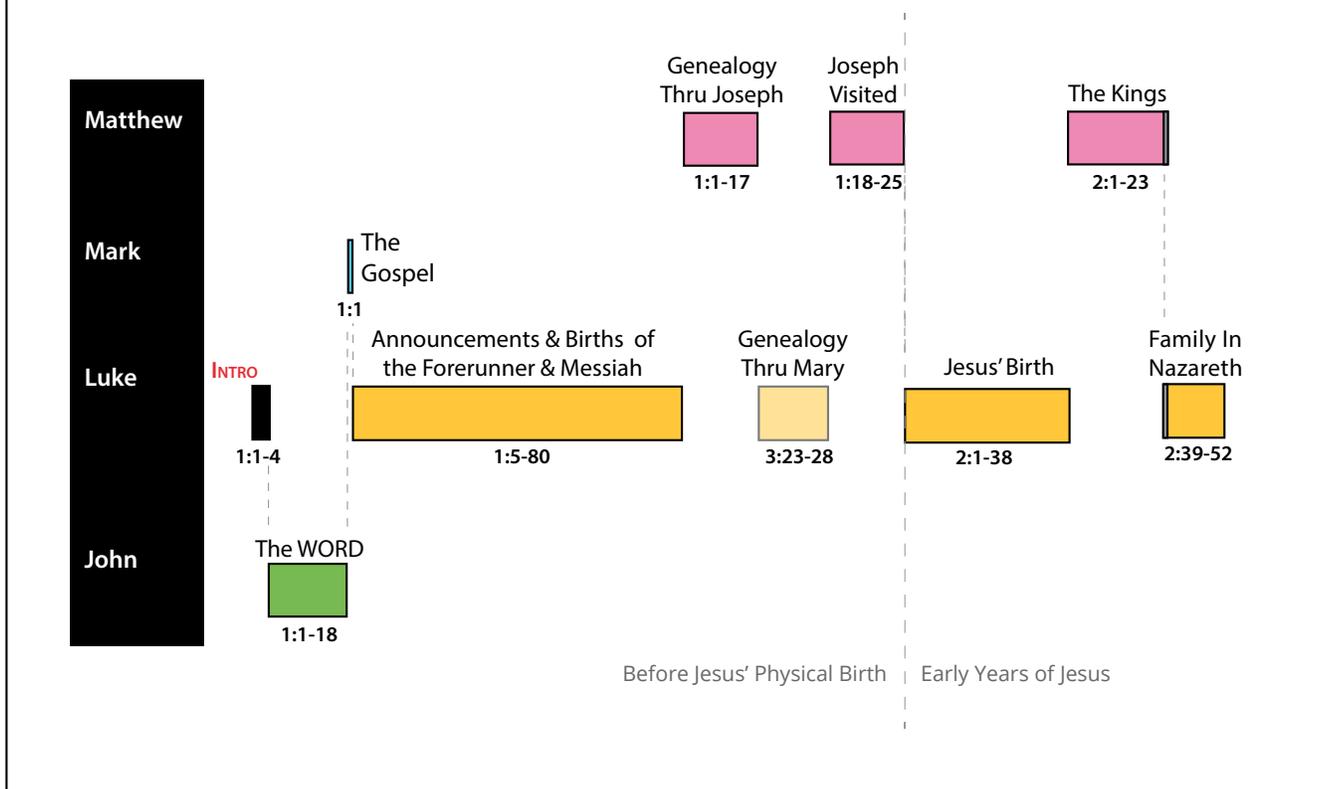
Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." (NASB) Matt. 2:13

So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. (NASB) Matt. 2:14



Life and Heart of Jesus

Before Jesus' Physical Birth - Early Years of Jesus



Notice that Joseph got up and left in the middle of the night with Mary and Jesus. The trip from Bethlehem to Egypt was a long trip. It would have been about 75 miles (120.7 Km) from Bethlehem to the border of Egypt. According to Philo, the distance from the border of Egypt to the Jewish settlement within the country was about 100 miles (160.9 Km). This means that their trip would have taken several weeks to complete, and it would not have been an easy journey.

How many of us would have been so eager to do God's will that we would have gotten up in the middle of the night and left for Egypt? That is a good question to think about. We are usually eager to obey when it is something we want.

But the opportunity to do God's will occurs every day. It is not a once for all event that occurs only in our youth and not again. God has a desire or "a will" for each one of us that changes with time. The question is, "Do you really want to know and follow?" The magi did and Joseph did.

As we have already read, the angel of the Lord told Joseph why he had to take the trip. God does not always say why He wants us to do certain things. This time Joseph was told to remain until King Herod was dead because Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Joseph was to remain in Egypt until he was told to leave. That would have been hard for most of us to follow. We want to plan our lives. We want direction, but God said to wait until He tells us to leave!

Did Mary enjoy the uncertainty of their visit in Egypt? Did it make sense for her to get involved in the activities at the synagogue? Why should she spend time knowing her neighbors when she might leave tomorrow? If they stayed a long time, then she would have other options. In short, life was uncertain and all that God said through the angel of the Lord was, ". . . remain there until I tell you . . ."

He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill

what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." (NASB) Matt. 2:15

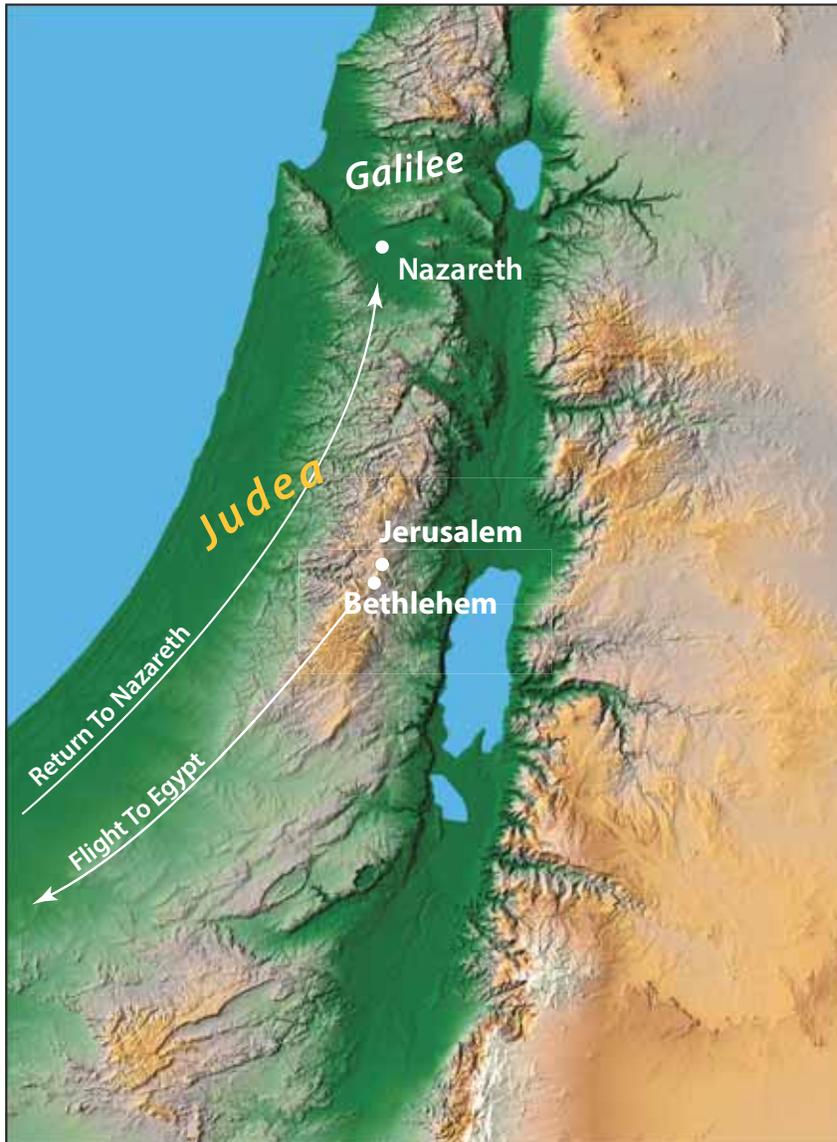
So Joseph remained in Egypt because he wanted to do God's will. He wanted to please God. Joseph's faithfulness resulted in the fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Hosea 11:1. What would have happened to that prophecy if Joseph had not been faithful? Yes, the prophecy would have been fulfilled in some way, but Joseph could have missed the joy of having been used by God to bring it about. That is always true. God calls us to do His will in good and bad situations. Then we have the joy of allowing the Potter to use us for His divine purposes.

THE MURDERS. Herod soon discovered that the magi had ignored him, and then the one who claimed he had a desire to worship revealed that he really wanted to murder the child.

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. (NASB) Matt. 2:16

So King Herod ordered every child under two years of age to be murdered. Herod selected two years because the star had been visible for two years. Herod understood that Jesus was probably about two years old.

Historians tell us that Herod was a very wicked man. Here is an important quote from Everett Ferguson which helps us understand King Herod.



“Though it may be true that Herod was an extremely able ruler, it is also true that he was intensely jealous of his position. He killed the two sons of Mariammne when his suspicions were aroused that they might become the rallying point for Jewish patriotism. Mariammne herself was killed when his mind was poisoned against her by his sister. The slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem (Matt. 2) finds no independent confirmation in sources outside of the New Testament, but the incident fits well the reign of terror of Herod's last years. A man who killed a large part of his own family

and arrested large numbers of the most prominent citizens with orders for their execution when he died so there would be mourning at his death (Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. 17.6.5) . . . would not have caused much of a stir by liquidating a score of children in an obscure village. Knowing of Herod's conduct

and the Jewish scruples about pork, the emperor Augustus was reported to have said that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son."¹

the Child's life are dead." So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. (NASB) Matt. 2:19-21

So Herod killed the children to satisfy his own lust for significance and power. Once again God had predicted that this would happen. This event was the completed fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15.

"Get up! and take the child to Israel." That was God's will. Once again Joseph was faithful to do God's will. But when he arrived in Israel, he became afraid.

 God calls us to do His will in the bad and good situations. Then we have the joy of allowing the Potter to use us for His divine purposes.

Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

"A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;
AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."

(NASB) Matt. 2:17-18

The prophecy in Jer. 31:15 was partially fulfilled when King Nebuchadnezzar forcefully deported many Jews from Palestine to Babylon. The final and complete fulfillment of the prophecy occurred here when King Herod murdered the children under two years of age. Unknowingly, King Herod fulfilled God's prophecy. The wicked man proved that God tells the truth.

RETURN TO NAZARETH. King Herod died in 1 B.C. and sometime after his death the angel of the Lord visited Joseph one more time and said, "Get up!"

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there . . . (NASB) Matt. 2:22

He was afraid because Archelaus was ruling over Judea. Archelaus was so evil that he made King Herod look like a good guy. Ancient historians tell us that he had a reputation for being very brutal. He was also an incompetent ruler and consequently Rome eventually removed him in A.D. 6. Therefore, it is possible that an angel of the Lord could have waited until sometime near A.D. 6 before he told Joseph to "Get up!" Jesus could have been as old as eight years of age.

Joseph had to go through the region - Judea - over which Archelaus was ruling before he could reach God's appointed final destination. So when Joseph heard that Archelaus was in power, he became afraid. Would Joseph have left Egypt if the angel of the Lord had told him that Archelaus was ruling over Judea? We will never know the answer, but it is a great lesson for us. Sometimes we are afraid to do God's will when we sense danger.

Joseph might have stayed in Egypt if God had told him about Archelaus. So apparently God decided not to tell him about Archelaus. As with Joseph and Mary, God does not always tell us what lies ahead for us. He wants us to trust Him and to walk through the shadow of death with Him - holding His hand. His will is His will. He wants us to follow

1. Ferguson, Everett. Backgrounds of Early Christianity. Eerdmans Publishing. 1993. p. 390

Seeking God's Will?

God has already told us that His will for those who believe in Him, Christians, includes at least five things:

Be filled with Holy Spirit	Eph. 5:17-18
Be sexually pure	1 Thess. 4:3-8
Give thanks always	1 Thess. 5:18
Submit to your government	1 Pet. 2:13-15
Be willing to suffer for God	1 Pet. 4:19

whether it is fearful or joyful. He has a purpose that He wants us to accomplish.

So when fear came upon Joseph, the angel of the Lord appeared in another dream and told him to go to Nazareth. Nazareth would be their home.

... Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene." (NASB) Matt. 2:22-23

It was the city in which the parents of Joseph and Mary lived. As a result, Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

Luke 2:39-40 ignores the details of the magi visit in Bethlehem and the events surrounding the travels of Joseph and Mary to and from Egypt and simply says,

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Luke 2:39-40 (NASB)

Luke 2:40 adds that Jesus continued to grow and increase in wisdom during His childhood in human flesh. He was fully God and knew all things, but in human form He needed to learn. Hebrews 5:7-8 also tells us that He learned obedience in His humanity. Such is the mystery of the God-man.

CONCLUSION. Joseph willingly obeyed God's will many

times. Many of us want to obey God's will. Is that true of you? If you desire to know God's will for your life, you can discover it in the New Testament. In the New Testament God has revealed His will for our lives at least five times. Ephesians 5:17-18 says that God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thess. 4:3-8 we are told that God wants us to be sexually pure. In 1 Thess. 5:18 He wishes that we would always give thanks in everything. 1 Peter 2:13-15 encourages us to submit to all governmental authority, and 1 Peter 4:19 says that God wants us to be willing to suffer.

Are you willing to suffer for Him? Do you desire to be sexually pure, to always give thanks, to submit to authority, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit? That is God's will for each one of us. That is where we should be if we really want to be in the center of His will. If you are doing these things, then the next verse will apply to you.

Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. (NASB) Ps. 37:4

The desires of your heart will actually be His desires, and He will give them to you.

Do you want to do His will? Then start with the issues that are clear and then pursue Him with the passion of your heart. Delight in Him!