

## **Down Into The Land Of Slavery** by Jeff Strite

Matthew 2:13-2:15

OPEN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLc81CS7TY4>

(We turned the video's sound down as I explained the artist and artwork that was being shown).

I'm not much for modern art, but this particular piece of artwork intrigued me. It's the work of the renowned French artist Bernard Pras. He's known for creating his masterpieces with common objects as he does here. If look closely you'll see that this composition is made from the specific placing of a guitar, a sofa, a bicycle seat, a piece of luggage and so on.

You'll also notice that the only way you can see what artist intended is to look at it only from the perspective he wants it seen from.

In the same way, God often uses common objects and arranges them in such a way that if you look at them in a certain way you can see exactly what He wants you to see. And that's what's happening here in Matthew 2. God is telling us a story (that many of us have heard ALL our lives) and puts common objects together in such a way that -if you look at it from His angle - you'll see exactly what God wants you to see.

First let's break it down.

Jesus is now about 2 years old. It appears that his family has gotten a house in Bethlehem and settled into life there and it seems that maybe Joseph's family in Bethlehem has helped him establish himself there.

But then something happens that is out of the ordinary. Wisemen show up from the East with gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Some have speculated that there may have been as many as 300 men in that caravan – servants, a military escort and others – who have come to this humble town of Bethlehem - city of little more than 1000 residents. This entourage probably caused quite a stir as they worshiped this new child and give their gifts to the family.

Then as mysteriously as they've come, the Wisemen return to their homes by another road.

That night, Joseph is warned in a dream that the family needs to flee for their lives. Joseph is told "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." Matthew 2:13

Now Herod had found out that a child had been born in Bethlehem just a couple days before. This child, he was told, was to be the new King of the Jews. But, of course, that job was already spoken for. Herod was king, and he had no intention of sharing throne.

Herod had a reputation for jealously protecting his power.

- When his 16 year old bro-in-law tried to make a name for himself Herod playfully held the boy's head under water until he died.

- Years later, one of his many his wives, became involved in a plot to have her family rise to power... he had her executed.
- And, a couple of years before his death, he heard rumors that two of his sons, were engaged in a plot to kill him – he had them executed as well.

So when the angel warned Joseph to take his family and flee to Egypt... that was good advice.

But there was someone else watching for this new child.  
Someone else who knew roughly when the Messiah was to come and where He'd be born.  
Someone else who had every intention of destroying this new child.  
Any idea who that might be?

Revelation 12:4b tells us: "The dragon (Satan) stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child (Jesus) the moment it was born."

Herod may have wanted this child dead but Herod was little more than a pawn. Satan was the real power behind the throne, and he knew the Messiah was a threat to his power. This was his 1st opportunity to destroy him and would be followed by many other attempts to destroy Jesus, until he finally arranged for Christ's crucifixion.

So the family flees to Egypt. (PAUSE)  
But why Egypt?

Well, Matthew tells us that it was to fulfill the prophecy in Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Well, that nice and all - but it still doesn't answer the question... why Egypt?  
I mean, Egypt is so far away.  
Joseph probably doesn't know ANYBODY there.  
And he's not a rich man. It will take time for him to restart his business.  
Where's he going to get the money to get started again?  
Where's he going get the money to supply for his family?

Well, it just so happens, God had already supplied it.  
Matthew 2:11 tells us "On coming to the house, (the Wisemen) saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh."

How many of you own gold?  
Not many of you do. And do you know why most folks don't own gold? Because it's so expensive to buy! And, back then, frankincense and myrrh cost more per ounce than gold did. So, Joseph is a very wealthy man. In fact, Joseph could probably afforded to buy the Inn that turned them away, and still have had enough left over for a sizable 401K.  
His family had more than enough money to survive in the land of Egypt.

But still - why Egypt?

I mean, Egypt would have been the last place I'd have thought God would have sent them.

Now granted, Egypt is mentioned A LOT in Scripture... 569 times. And, as one man noted, Egypt is the only other place aside from Jerusalem that is mentioned at least once in almost every book of the Bible. (Abraham Shanklin)

But almost every time Egypt is mentioned in Scripture the Bible is hardly complimentary.

- In the 10 Commandments God declared: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Exodus 20:2
- Repeatedly God reminds Israel "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you..." Deuteronomy 15:15
- God uses Egypt as a reminder to call His people to be honest: "Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt." Leviticus 19:36
- And God reminds them of Egypt to call His people to purity "You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live.... Do not follow their practices." Leviticus 18:3

In addition, every year, Israel took part in a Passover Feast to remind themselves that once upon a time - they were slaves in Egypt, and that God had redeemed them and rescued them from that slavery.

One author noted that "Egypt is forever to be locked in Scriptures as a place of bondage, oppression, pride, arrogance, idolatry, and sinfulness."(Abraham Shanklin)

And this is where God sends Mary and Joseph to escape from Herod?

Egypt's not a nice place!!!

If you asked me - it seems like jumping out the frying pan into the fire.

If you asked me there'd have much better places to send this family for safety.

But, of course (pause) God didn't ask me.

He didn't ask my opinion.

True artists don't ask for opinions.

True artists create works of art that convey the message THEY want to express.

And Egypt was chosen by God for ONE purpose: to express the message God wanted to declare.

Egypt wasn't JUST a convenient place for Joseph and Mary to go and hide. God had planned for them to go there. It fulfilled prophecy made 100s of years before Christ was born.

"Out of Egypt I called my son."

You see, God was painting a picture for us here and Egypt was His canvas.

There was something - in sending Jesus to Egypt - God wanted to say to us.

And if we don't look at His artwork from His perspective we'll miss the point

I believe Egypt was chosen specifically because of its reputation.

It was chosen because it was a land of slavery and oppression.  
It was chosen because it was a place of pride, and arrogance, and idolatry, and sinfulness.  
THIS was the place Jesus was sent.

And Jesus was sent there because that's WHY He came to begin with.

Jesus said: "...I have NOT come to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:17  
Again, He declared: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10  
And Paul wrote: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners— of whom I am the worst." 1 Timothy 1:15

That's what Jesus came to do.

And that's why His family went to Egypt.

Just like the other places associated with Jesus' birth, Egypt was an object lesson.

Egypt was specifically chosen because it WAS a land of sin and slavery and death.

But it was that sin and slavery and death that Jesus came to destroy.

That's what God wanted us to see.

Knowing this, there are a couple of lessons we can learn from this story:

1st- Jesus' family was sent to Egypt to declare that Egypt was part of God's plan.  
Egypt was NOT a Jewish nation. It was a pagan place filled a pantheon of gods they bowed down to. But they did not bow to YHWH. When Jesus went down to Egypt, God was declaring that all mankind - including Egypt - were being called to belong to Christ.

There's an old fallacy that says "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere". You can be Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim and you'll be alright, if you're just sincere in your faith. You'll all be saved in the end.

Another way of saying it is "All roads lead to God." No matter what you believe, the road of your particular faith will eventually lead to the one true God.

But that's patently absurd.

It's like saying "all roads lead to Logansport".

I mean Logansport's a nice place and all... but not all roads lead here.

It's a bizarre statement.

One man put it this way: The differences are too deep to conclude that all religions lead to the same destination. I suspect that people who support such a view have never really examined where the different faith groups diverge.

A god who would devise such a system is one of two things. He's a liar, telling one group "This is the way" and another group "That is the way."

Or he's schizophrenic. He has a multiple personality disorder. One day he's Shiva, the destroyer. Another day he's Brahma an impersonal force pervading the universe.

The god you get depends on what day you bump into him." (Joel Smith)

We need to realize and make no apology for the fact that Jesus is exclusive.

There's no room for other gods once you get to know who Jesus is.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

Egypt had many gods, but the God of Scripture had plans on how to change that. In Isaiah, God declared: "Blessed be EGYPT my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." Isaiah 19:25

In the book of Romans, Paul is writing to a church that is split between Jews and Gentiles. There's an underlying conflict in that church because of their differences. And one of the conflicts has to do with the fact that the Jewish Christians believed they were the people of the covenant. The Gentiles were "johnny-come-latelys" who just happened to make it into the faith because God felt sorry for them. They weren't actually part of what God had intended.

But they were wrong. And in Romans 15, Paul quotes several Old Testament prophecies to prove that Gentiles were indeed part of God's original plan. One of those verses was from Isaiah 11:10 and Paul said that verse was specifically fulfilled in the age of the church. Then, in the verse right after the one, Isaiah said this: "In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower EGYPT, from Upper EGYPT (and others)....Isaiah 11:11

In other words, God had planned to save the Egyptians along with everybody else. God was going to call them out of the religion they'd been raised in... to follow Christ.

And when did that happen?  
(At Pentecost)

Acts 2 tells us that the crowd on that day had "... residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, EGYPT and the parts of Libya..."Acts 2:9-11

So Jesus was sent to Egypt to proclaim that Egypt had been part of God's and God intended to call Egypt out of paganism into the worship of the one true God.

2ndly, when Jesus went down into Egypt it proclaimed this message:  
Jesus came for ALL sinners... not just for the good ones

That's why God chose Egypt for Jesus to go to.  
Egypt was NOT a nice place to go. It was the "sin city" of the day.  
Their advertising slogan could have been: "What happens in Egypt, stays in Egypt."  
It was a place that represented slavery and sin.

And Egypt was a land that was hated by the Jews. From childhood they'd been taught that virtually nothing good came out of Egypt. They recognized Egypt as a nasty place. A land no righteous person would live. The idea that God would ever have anything to do with Egypt never occurred to them. The idea that God would ever save such evil people would never have crossed their minds.

And that kind of mindset has carried over into modern day thinking.

When it comes to church, most folks think only nice, sinless folks should belong there. Even pagans think that way. One of the prominent reasons they'll give for not going to church is that they think the church is filled with "hypocrites."

What they're saying is they believe churches ought to be filled with saints who never sin.

Is that true?

Of course it's not!

All sin and fall short of the glory of God.

Even the best of church people mess up once in awhile.

But that kind of thinking also reflects a misunderstanding of what church is all about.

Someone once wrote that "The church is not an ark for the saving of a select few. It's a lifeboat for the rescue of sin-wrecked and perishing souls."

Even church folks can get to thinking that way.

ILLUS: About a century ago, there was an evangelistic service in a city in New York State. The invitation was given at the close of the sermon for all those who wished to turn their lives over to Christ and be forgiven. And one of the 1st persons to walk down the aisle was a well-known prostitute. She wept and showed every mark of real repentance.

But then she expressed the desire to become a member of the church.

In that particular church, you became a member by a majority vote of those in the congregation. But no one spoke up to ask for that vote. There was nothing but a deafening silence.

Finally, a leader in that congregation named Samuel Colgate rose and said,

"I guess we blundered when we prayed that the Lord would save sinners. We forgot to specify what kind of sinners. We'd better ask him to forgive us for this oversight. The Holy Spirit has touched this woman and made her truly repentant, but the Lord apparently doesn't understand that she's not the type we want HIM to rescue. We'd better spell it out for him just which sinners we had in mind."

Immediately, a motion was made and unanimously approved that the woman be accepted into membership in the congregation.

By going down into Egypt, Jesus was declaring that He had come for ALL sinners... not just those who are "nice" people.

Lastly, Jesus didn't just go DOWN into Egypt. He came UP out of Egypt.

Matthew says it was to fulfill the prophecy: "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

Jesus went down into the Egypt to be in the land of sin and slavery and death, and He came UP out of it to give life. From there He returned to Israel to eventually begin His ministry of preaching and teaching... and ultimately dying on the cross for us and rising from the dead.

I believe Egypt was all about the message from Jesus that He had come to seek and save

the lost. But He didn't come to STAY in that world. He came to lead us OUT of this world and into life in Him.

The question this morning is this: are you still in the land of Egypt?  
Are you still living in a land of sorrow and bondage and sin?  
And do you want to change that?

The message from Scripture is that it's not that hard to leave that old land behind.

1st you need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That He came down out of heaven to die for your sins. And of course that leads to...

2nd - Repentance for the sins that have kept you in bondage.

3rd - Confession that Jesus is now going to be your Lord and Master.

4th - Baptism into Christ, where you allow yourself to be buried in the waters of baptism and rising up from those waters to live a new life in Christ.