



SUNDAY SCHOOL DECEMBER 28, 2025

Prayer:

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Old Testament: Isaiah 63:7-9

Context: These verses recall God's past mercy and faithfulness to Israel, emphasizing that God's love was not distant or abstract, but personally shared in their suffering and deliverance.

GOD'S MERCY REMEMBERED

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done for us
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
For he said, "Surely they are my people,
children who will not act deceitfully,"
and he became their savior
in all their distress.
It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and pity it was he who redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

OVERVIEW

Isaiah 63:7–9 is a **hymn of remembrance**. The prophet pauses amid warnings and judgment to recount God's steadfast love—especially how God did not merely rescue Israel from afar but **entered into their suffering**. This passage reframes divine power not as domination, but as **compassionate presence**.

At its heart, this text asks:

What happens when a people forget the character of the God who carried them?

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

These verses echo Israel's foundational salvation memory—especially the Exodus narrative found in Book of Exodus. The language recalls God seeing affliction, hearing cries, and acting decisively—not for Israel's merit, but because of divine love and mercy.

The phrase "*the angel of his presence*" reflects a common Hebrew Bible theme: God's nearness as both guidance and protection, seen also in prophetic poetry like Book of Hosea and the Book of Lamentations.

Importantly, this passage shifts the tone from **what Israel has done wrong to who God has always been**.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Isaiah 63 belongs to the **post-exilic reflection period**, when Israel is wrestling with trauma: exile, loss of land, shattered identity, and political insignificance under imperial rule.

This remembrance functions politically as well as spiritually:



- It resists the narrative that Israel's suffering means abandonment.
- It re-centers identity not in power or territory, but in **relationship**.
- It counters despair by anchoring hope in lived history, not ideology.

This is theology written **from the ashes**, not from the throne.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Event Recalled:** Exodus (traditionally dated c. 13th century BCE)
- **Prophetic Reflection:** Late 6th century BCE (post-Babylonian exile)
- **Function:** A backward look meant to shape forward faith
Israel is being taught to interpret the present through the lens of remembered mercy.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

*Scholars often describe this passage as **corporate memory theology**—the belief that remembering God's compassion is itself an act of faith.*

The radical line is verse 9:

"In all their distress, he too was distressed."

Metaphorically, this portrays God not as a distant rescuer, but as one who **absorbs suffering alongside the people**.

In Grant County terms:

- This is the God who shows up in hospital waiting rooms.
- The God who bears the weight of job loss, addiction, cancer diagnoses, and economic anxiety.
- Not the God of slogans—but the God who stays.

It challenges a transactional faith ("If we behave, God helps") and replaces it with a relational faith ("God helps because God loves").

Christianity is NOT TRANSACTIONAL!

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Practice intentional remembrance**
Faith grows by recalling where mercy has already shown up—in families, churches, and communities.
- **Reject distant-God theology**
This text does not support a God who watches suffering from afar. It calls us to embody presence.
- **Let compassion guide response**
If God shares distress, then so should God's people—especially toward the marginalized and hurting.
- **Tell the stories that anchor hope**
Communities survive not by denying pain, but by remembering love that carried them through it.

Isaiah 63:7–9 reminds us that faith is sustained not by forgetting hardship, but by remembering a God who never suffered alone.



Gospel: Matthew 2:13-23

Context: This passage shows that from the very beginning of Jesus' life, faithfulness to God involved danger, displacement, and hard choices—and that God's purposes often unfold through exile, grief, and ordinary obedience.

THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT, THE MASSACRE OF THE INFANTS AND THE RETURN FROM EGYPT

Now after they had left, 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 about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt and 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 have called my son.”

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.”

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.

There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

OVERVIEW

Matthew 2:13–23 recounts the **flight of Jesus' family into Egypt, King Herod's massacre of the infants**, and the family's eventual **resettlement in Nazareth**. The passage portrays Jesus not as a sheltered Savior but as a **refugee child**, preserved through divine warning and human obedience. Matthew frames these events as fulfillments of Scripture, showing that God's redemptive plan unfolds amid political violence, fear, and suffering—not apart from them.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Matthew's Gospel is deeply concerned with showing Jesus as the **true fulfillment of Israel's story**. This passage intentionally echoes earlier biblical narratives:

- Like **Moses**, Jesus survives a ruler's decree to kill children.
- Like **Israel**, Jesus goes **down into Egypt** and later returns.



- The quotations from **Hosea** and **Jeremiah** are not isolated prooftexts but part of Matthew's pattern of presenting Jesus as **embodying Israel's history**, not bypassing it.

The emphasis is not on miraculous rescue but on **God guiding ordinary people**—Joseph listens, moves, and protects.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Herod the Great** ruled Judea as a client king of Rome, known historically for paranoia and brutality. The slaughter of children in Bethlehem fits his documented behavior, even if not recorded outside the Gospel.
- **Egypt** was a logical refuge. It lay outside Herod's jurisdiction and had established Jewish communities.
- Roman client kings maintained order through **fear and force**, and peasant families had little legal protection.
- This passage reminds us that **political power often feels threatened by hope**, especially when that hope is not controllable.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **c. 6–4 BC** – Jesus is born during the final years of Herod's reign.
- Shortly after the visit of the Magi, Joseph receives warning in a dream.
- The family flees to Egypt and remains there **until Herod's death in 4 BC**.
- After Herod's death, Judea falls under **Archelaus**, whose brutality prompts the family to settle instead in **Galilee**, in **Nazareth**.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars often note that Matthew is not simply recounting events but **reframing Israel's story through Jesus**:

- **Exile is not failure**; it is often where faith is preserved.
- **God's will is not safety**, but faithfulness.
- **Obedience looks like movement**, not certainty.

Modern & Grant County Connection

In Grant County terms, this passage speaks powerfully to:

- Families forced to relocate for work, safety, or stability.
- People who feel displaced by economic shifts, housing insecurity, or cultural change.
- The reality that **“doing the right thing” often comes with cost**, not applause.

Joseph does not protest, theologize, or wait for clarity—he **acts**. In communities like ours, faith often looks less like bold declarations and more like:

- Protecting children quietly
- Choosing less desirable options
- Starting over without guarantees

Jesus' story begins not in triumph but in **survival**.



HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Recognize the Vulnerable Christ**
 - Jesus begins life as a displaced child. Our faith must take seriously the vulnerable—especially children, refugees, and families living on the edge.
- **Value Obedient Action Over Religious Certainty**
 - Joseph models faithful responsiveness, not spiritual bravado. Sometimes the most faithful act is simply moving when it is time to move.
- **Resist the Herod Instinct**
 - Herod represents fear-driven power. We should examine where fear causes us—or our institutions—to protect control rather than people.
- **Trust That God Works Through Unseen Faithfulness**
 - Nazareth is not a destination of honor. Yet it becomes holy ground. Faithfulness often unfolds quietly, far from the center of attention.

Matthew 2:13–23 reminds us that **God's redemptive work often moves through the margins**—through refugees, through grief, through people doing the next right thing in uncertain times. The question this passage leaves us with is not *“Do we believe God?”* but *“Will we move when God nudges us—even when it costs us?”*

