

**Gabriel Orders Joseph to Return to Israel, Matt 2:20; Joseph Immediately Responds: He Follows the Coastal Route Back to Gaza, v. 21; News that Archelaus Rules Judea Makes Joseph Hesitate to Go There, v. 22a; Augustus Makes Archelaus Ethnarch**

**Matthew 2:20** - "Get up, take the Child and His mother and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."  
(NASB)

This quote of the angel begins exactly the same way as it did in Matthew 2:13: "Ἐγερθεῖς παράλαβε" ("Egertheis paralabe"): "Get up, take!" The verb is an aorist active imperative to take the Child – *paidion* – and His mother and "journey," the present middle imperative of the verb *πορεύομαι (poreuomai)*: to depart.

These imperative moods again challenge Joseph's volition, integrity, and courage. In Matthew 2:13 the command was to hurry from Israel into Egypt. Here the mandate is to depart from Egypt back into Israel.

In verse 13, Gabriel told Joseph the reason for having haste, "Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is on the verge of deploying a search and destroy mission to execute the Child."

Now, Gabriel is back with the order to depart with the assurance that those who wanted to kill Jesus are all dead.

The ones of whom Gabriel speaks are Herod and his son, Antipater, whom Herod had assassinated just a few days before he died. This cleared the way for Joseph to take Mary and Jesus back to Israel.

**Matthew 2:20** - "Get up, take the Child and His mother and depart for Israel; for those who sought to assassinate the Child are dead."

**v. 21** - So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. (NASB)

Joseph immediately responded to the command. In verse 16, he and his family were asleep. It's not evident if such was the case here; he may have been seated. However, Joseph immediately followed orders and departed Egypt and returned into the land of Israel.

There are several routes that one could take to travel through Palestine and two were available to Joseph. The route he took to Egypt could be chosen as the return route: (1) the Coastal Route to Gaza, (2) eastward through Lachish to Hebron, then (3) north to Jerusalem where he could then follow (4) the Central Ridge Route or (5) the Jordan River Route, each would take him northward to Galilee and Nazareth.

Or He could stay on the Coastal Route until he reached Caesarea then turn eastward through the Jezreel Valley Route to Nazareth. Circumstances dictate his choice.

In verse 21, Joseph immediately responded to the mandate to get up and take the Child and His mother and return to the land of Israel.

The key word in verse 21 is the aorist middle indicative of the verb *εἰσερχομαι (eiserchomai)* which is translated "came."

The aorist tense is ingressive which signifies a state or a condition and denotes the entrance into that state or condition. It looks at the action of the verb from the viewpoint of its initiation.

This verb thus describes the holy family crossing the border between Egypt and Palestine.

The middle voice may be described, in general, as follows:

**In the middle voice the subject performs or experiences the action expressed by the verb in such a way that emphasizes the subject's participation. It may be said that the subject acts "with a vested interest."**

**The difference between the active and middle is one of emphasis. The active voice emphasizes the action of the verb; the middle emphasizes the actor [subject] of the verb,<sup>1</sup>**

Again we see the integrity of Joseph. He fulfilled the mandate to remain in Egypt until Gabriel instructed him otherwise and once told he immediately packed the family's bags.

*Eisrchomai* is a compound made up of the preposition **εἰς (eis)** which connotes the idea of motion into a place.

**ἔρχομαι (erchomai)** is the verb "to come," and in this context with the prefix of *eis*, it means "to come back, or "to return into." A literal translation of this verse would therefore read like this:

**Matthew 2:21** - So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother and came back into the land of Israel. (CTL)

The return route is the Coastal Route that takes them up to Gaza where there is an option to proceed on the Coastal Route or turn east toward Lachish and Hebron. The latter is the route they took for the evacuation and would allow them to move through Bethlehem and Jerusalem. However, news along the route to Gaza caused Joseph to become concerned for the safety of his family.

**Matthew 2:22** - But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee. (NASB)

The verb "to hear" is the aorist active participle of **ἀκούω (akouō)**. When the main verb is also in the aorist it indicates that the two actions occur contemporaneously.

The main verb is the aorist middle indicative of **φοβέομαι (phobeomai)** and usually indicates "fear." However, it is followed by the aorist middle infinitive of the verb **ἄπέρχομαι (aperchomai)** which means "to go."

When the verb "to fear," i.e., *phobeomai*, is followed by a verb in the infinitive then its translation in this context is "hesitated to go."

When Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father as tetrarch over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria he hesitated to take the Central Ridge Route.

Joseph knew about Archelaus's character and concluded that he could potentially try to murder the Christ Child were he to return his family to Bethlehem.

Archelaus was a chip off the old block including the same heinous disposition of his father. Here is some background and a character sketch of the new leader of Judea:

As we have noted, Augustus Caesar and Herod were close friends. Upon Archelaus's succession to Herod's throne, Augustus agreed to elevate him from tetrarch to ethnarch:

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 414–15.

TETRARCH \tē'-trärk\ (τετράρχης, *tetrarchēs*): signifies a prince, who governs one-fourth of a domain or kingdom. The Greeks first used the word. Later on the Romans adopted the term and applied it to any ruler of a small principality. It is not synonymous with "ethnarch," at least the Romans made a distinction ... and sometimes it was used courteously as a synonym for king.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henry E. Dosker, "Tetrarch," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 4:2950.