

Matthew Chapters 3-4 – Pre-Ministry Testimony of Jesus – Part 1

Review

Matthew begins with the genealogy and the birth of Jesus the Messiah focusing upon the line of Joseph and how Jesus' birth was foretold in Scripture. Matthew 2 is about the early life of Jesus Christ. The emphasis is still not on the words or actions of Jesus Himself but on the circumstances and actions of others that demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah.

Concluding the last lesson, we observed how those who should have seen did not, and those who were not expected to see the coming Messiah not only saw but participated in it. Joseph was a forgotten person in the line of David but was faithful to the Lord, to Mary, and his adopted son, Jesus.

Matthew 3:1 – John the Baptizer

Context is very important when coming into this section. We must remember that John is a well-known figure throughout Israel and to the diaspora, the dispersed Jews in Gentile regions. Introducing John at this time is consistent with all the accounts of Jesus: Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1.

Luke gives the birth history of John, but even without it, he was regarded universally as a prophet and his testimony, message, and the One to whom he points is very compelling evidence of Jesus being the Messiah. The four accounts imply that without John the Baptizer's testimony, the Messianic claim for Jesus is incomplete.

Mark 6:17-20

Luke 20:3-7

John 5:33-36

Acts 10:34-37

Acts 13:23-25

Acts 18:24-25

Acts 19:1-4

Why is John so important? To understand that we need to remember Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet in 1 Kings 17-22; 2 Kings 1-2. He was taken up to heaven, and God gave his mantle to Elisha.

In Malachi 4:5, the prophet reiterates the clearing of the way mentioned in Isaiah 40:3-5 and identifies that the one who comes will be in the spirit of Elijah. The reference to his attire is given in 2 Kings 1:8. His diet demonstrates that he had no luxury in this life and his only resources were from the Lord.

It is often understood that prophets were strange. We have seen how Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others were very symbolic in their appearance and actions to demonstrate the message of the Lord—laying on their sides for days on end, marrying prostitutes, putting yokes around their necks, putting their head between their knees. In other words, they were rememberable.

The words and actions of John the Baptizer were equally rememberable, and he is the one who came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah, something Jesus reiterated.

Matthew 11:7-19, 17:9-13

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Matthew 3:1-12 – Ministry of John the Baptizer

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This word has been studied in the past and is available in our lessons, and a copy of the word study will be attached to this lesson.

The definition of “μετανοέω *metanoēō*” is NOT “turn from sin,” “be contrite,” or “to be fully penitent.”

It IS:

1. To change one’s mind
2. To relent, abandon one’s position
3. Realization and admitting to having the wrong viewpoint or attitude

To understand what is being instructed, one must understand what the problem is. What is the issue with Israel? The people were living in the manner as was described by Malachi.

- They doubt His love for them (Mal 1:2).
- They don’t understand how God views their offerings (Mal 2:13-14).
- They forget the way God values justice (Mal 2:17).
- They neglect their tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8).
- They claim that serving God is useless (Mal 3:13-15).

Malachi’s warning and promise:

- To destroy those who are arrogant and evildoers; God will set them ablaze
- Healing and victory over enemies of those who fear the Lord
- Malachi 4; Matthew 3:12

They need to change their minds because the Messiah and His kingdom are at hand. Israel is commanded to reconsider, change their mind, realize their error, and prepare for their Messiah.

Observations:

1. This is not for eternal life (the message in John)
2. This is not for personal salvation (Paul’s message)
3. This is not to go to heaven, the eternal state.
4. This IS to be prepared to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In our study of the Old Testament in dealing with the kingdom of the Messiah, have we ever seen any conversation about how an individual becomes reconciled to God? Historically speaking, this topic is not readily addressed. The righteousness of God is provided to a person when he believes in YHWH (Genesis 15:6) and is provided by grace.

The preparation of Israel for the kingdom of heaven is a real earth-bound kingdom. This is not a referent to a spiritual kingdom. This is a promise to restore Israel to full prominence and to have all the kingdoms be subject to Israel.

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What is the baptism of John?

John did use water, immersing them in his teaching and immersing them into the water. As with repentance, a study on baptism will also be attached to this lesson.

The use of water has perplexed most; the bigger problem is when we want to replicate this. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture, outside of the gospels, that this baptism of repentance is to be duplicated.

As believers in Jesus Christ, water baptism is not commanded, and there is no text saying that water baptism has any spiritual benefit.

As we concluded in our study about baptism, we need to observe into what they are being immersed. This is an immersion in water, why? Is getting wet and immersed in water accomplishing anything in John's ministry? Or is the reality that of repentance?

This water baptism seems to be ritualistic, having the person who is immersed into water being identified with John's call to repentance.

Fruit worthy of the repentance.

John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him, and he called them a brood of vipers. The question that he poses demonstrates that they were not there to prepare for the kingdom of heaven, but rather they were there under false pretense. Do not suppose that you have Abraham as our father. They depended upon their pedigree to get them into the kingdom. That they were Israeli was not the end factor for getting into the kingdom. Rather they were to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The literal translation is "Therefore you do (make) fruit worthy of the repentance."

This is one of the classic examples of refuting claims through proper translation and understanding. Most say that true repentance means to stop sinning and do good works or that true repentance will automatically produce good works.

John commands them to do (make, bear) good fruit in association with the repentance. If it were automatic, then there is no need to instruct people what to do. John does not challenge their mind change, rather he challenges them in their preparation.

They were there for show and did not think that they needed any "μετάνοια metanoia."

In Luke 3:7-14, John gives them what to do. The Pharisees and Sadducees were not the ones who had asked, it was the people. What does this tell you about the religious leaders?

The instructions of John the Baptizer fit within the structure of the Law—love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40, 23:23; Micah 6:8).

The message of John the Baptizer was not to only believe differently (repentance), but also to do the things worthy of that change of mind (bear fruit). Without both of these, the person would be left out of the kingdom and cut down and destroyed, being left out of the kingdom of Messiah.