

Matthew, chapters 3-4**“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”—has come near—is here!****The Kingdom of Heaven/God has come in the person of the King! The Gospel is the proclamation that ‘God rules!’ and the Good News of Jesus Christ and His salvation!****CONTEXT & MAKING THE CONNECTIONS**

1 / We want to cover **chapters 3 and 4 of Matthew** in this lesson—if only in a summary / outline / talking points fashion. There is so much here that we won’t be able to give much commentary on the rich details of history and theology contained in these narratives. We could spend hours on each of these paragraphs and their significance to our salvation from sin and life in the Kingdom of God.

2 / But, what we most want to do is show how these two chapters are connected with what Matthew has written in the first two chapters...and how they will ‘set the stage’ for what will come after, especially when Jesus begins His teaching ministry in **chapter 5** and following throughout the structure, message plan, and ‘logic’ of his Gospel account.

3 / We are keeping in mind here from the beginning that Matthew knows the conclusion of his Gospel account: how Jesus will declare His Kingly/Lordly **“authority in Heaven and on earth,”** and by that authority commissions and sends His disciples to **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”**

4 / So, Matthew has begun his Gospel narrative by clearly defining precisely who this Jesus is through His genealogy and virgin birth—because we need to know who He is before we can make disciples of Him. Matthew does this by revealing who Jesus is—His identity...and quoting the OT Scriptures repeatedly to give evidences, [or ‘receipts,’ as we say nowadays:] ***The Christ, The King, Emmanuel, Savior, and we can also add Son of God [ch 3.17].***

5 / Then in **chapter 2**, Matthew chronicles Jesus’ immediate recognition and reception by the ‘nations’ of the Gentiles by the visit of the Magi...contrasted with the malicious and murderous reception He received from Herod and the religious elders of the Jews. These themes will be developed throughout the remainder of the narrative.

6 / Another major theme that is developed in **chapters 1 & 2** is how God delivered and preserved **‘the seed of the woman’** from all His enemies who have set themselves to destroy His coming from the beginning of the world ... and then personally when He did come by His human-incarnation birth [see **again Revelation 12 for a summary synopsis of this opposition to The Christ**].

7 / Now in **chapters 3-4**, Matthew will devote the narrative to the preparation for the public ministry of the King ... and how He inaugurated and commenced His public ministry. *We’ll pay special attention to the theme of the Gospel that Matthew will focus on: “The Kingdom of Heaven.”* This defining phrase is written more than fifty times in Matthew. It is more than just a catch-phrase—it is what the Gospel is [**‘the Gospel of the Kingdom,’ v 23**], what salvation is, and who Jesus is. We’ll say more about that in our comments on the texts.

8 / We’ll follow these two chapters and tie them together paragraph by paragraph. We’ll divide up this study passage into two distinct ‘acts’ and other ‘scenes’ within the acts:

- **ACT 1: PREPARATION FOR JESUS’ MINISTRY**
 - John the Baptist proclaims the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven
 - Jesus is baptized
 - Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and is victorious over the Devil
- **ACT 2: INAUGURATION OF JESUS’ MINISTRY**
 - Jesus begins His public ministry in Galilee
 - Jesus calls His first disciples
 - Jesus expands His public ministry into the surrounding regions and demonstrates His Kingdom grace and power.

ACT 1: PREPARATIONS FOR JESUS’ MINISTRY

I | ch 3.1-12 | John the Baptist appears to prophetically announce the arrival of the King

1 / Israel had not had a prophet for 400 years—since Malachi. But Malachi had extensively prophesied Christ’s coming [for example, ch 3.1-5], but he also prophesied from Yahweh “**Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet before the great and awesome day of The LORD comes**” [Malachi 4.5]. Jesus said that John the Baptist [Baptizer, Dipper] was that Elijah, **Matthew 11.14**. John the Baptist first appeared **in the wilderness of Judea**. This was a dry, arid, and sparsely-populated area east of Jerusalem. He came in the likeness of Elijah in his ascetic lifestyle, dress, diet, and message [**2 Kings 1.1-8**]*—calling Israel to repentance, both personal and national.*

2 / Isaiah also had specifically prophesied the ministry of John the Baptist. John was also a close relative of Jesus through Mary, **Luke 1.5-25, 39-45, 57-80**, and his birth also was extraordinary, miraculous, and supernatural.

3 / John the Baptist’s message was simple: “**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**” The word **Kingdom** is more than just a noun—it is a ‘noun of action.’ When the Bible refers to the **Kingdom of God / Heaven**, it is God’s way of declaring His absolute Lordship and sovereignty over all things, especially His covenant salvation: ‘**The rule of God / God rules.**’

4 / God sent John the Baptist to **prepare the way of the Lord** by announcing His arrival and the Gospel of His salvation of His people, **John 1.6-8**. *The Kingdom of God/Heaven ‘is at hand / come near / here’ in the Person of the God-King Himself! The Kingdom is where the King is!*

5 / John’s baptism was a public profession of personal faith in the Gospel of the Christ-King John was proclaiming. By submitting to John’s baptism, the believers were giving testimony to their confession of sins, repentance from them, and commitment to follow the Kingdom way of life.

II | ch 3.13-17 | Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist to commit Himself to His mission and to be publicly confirmed by God’s voice

1 / God had sent John to announce, introduce, present, and publicly confirm The Christ by His baptism [**John 1.29-34**]. Jesus’ baptism was an identification with the repentant sinners He had come to save. They confessed their sins and repented from them; Jesus was baptized with them to declare that He was their Sin-Bearer and Savior. Also, Jesus’ baptism was His commitment to the Father **to fulfill all righteousness**. Jesus **fulfilled all righteousness** by His own active obedience in keeping all the law’s requirements [**Matthew 5.17-18**]; and by committing Himself to the death, burial, and resurrection pictured in baptism **to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**.

2 / God publicly and verbally ‘credntialized’ and gave His Heavenly confirmation to The Christ by sending the ‘anointing’ of the Holy Spirit on Him and by speaking from Heaven “**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**” God would re-affirm Jesus’ Divine Lordship and Kingly authority at other junctures throughout His ministry. Jesus Himself would steadfastly and consistently do everything He did in His ministry **in the power of the Spirit**. *How much more must we!*

III | ch 4.1-11 | Jesus is tempted by the Devil in the wilderness...and proves Himself to be without sin & victorious Sovereign over the Devil—the ‘god of this age’ and Prince of the Kingdom of Darkness

1 / These three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are so much more than His own personal struggles against sin [**Hebrews 2.14-18**]; **4.14-16**—Jesus is standing as our Redeeming Substitute in the places of the two most prominent ‘federal heads’ of the human people of God: namely Adam and Israel. You have to see this fulfilled enactment of the two most prominent ‘*pre-enactments*’ of human failure in the OT: Adam in the Garden of Eden & Israel in the wilderness.

2 / **Adam** fell into sin and brought sin upon our whole race by yielding and succumbing to the temptations of the serpent who was acting as the mouthpiece of the Serpent-Devil. **Israel** failed in their wilderness testings when they yielded to all their temptations to reject God’s Kingdom rule over them and rebel

against His Sovereign Lordship. They also yielded to the temptations to surrender to the rule of their own will, desires, and lordship over their own lives.

3 / And so, when Jesus submitted Himself to the rule of God and His will in His own life and ministry, He gained the victory over Satan and sin, not only for Himself, but also for us who are in Him by faith in His Gospel of salvation. This victory would be fulfilled to completion in His Gethsemane temptations also and His death on the Cross. That victory would be publicly proclaimed by His resurrection from death!

4 / Jesus’s victory over the Devil and all his temptations would also provide the template, pattern, and power of life for us in our own temptations: supreme love for God, unconditional surrender to God’s rule and will in our lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to the Word of God.

ACT 2: INAUGURATION OF JESUS’ MINISTRY

IV | ch 4.12-17 | Jesus begins His public, preaching ministry by proclaiming the same message John the Baptist proclaimed to announce His arrival

1 / Having been announced, proclaimed, introduced, and presented by John the Baptist; and having been baptized as a public confirmation as the Son of God and commitment to His mission; and having proven His sinless obedience to God by His victories over the Devil’s temptations—Jesus now begins His preaching and teaching ministry.

2 / When Matthew says “**...He withdrew into Galilee,**” we are to understand that for the first few weeks or maybe months, He had been preaching and ministering in the same regions of the Judean wilderness/desert where John the Baptist had been preaching and where He was baptized in the Jordan.

3 / This comes at the juncture of John’s arrest and martyrdom as described in **ch 14.1-12**. John the Baptist has fulfilled his ministry God had sent him to do. Jesus returns to Nazareth from Judea; and then leaves Nazareth where He had been brought up and moves His center of ministry a few miles north to ‘**Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali—Galilee of the Gentiles.**’ Here is another direct ‘*OT fulfillment formula*’ quotation from **Isaiah 9.1-2**.

4 / Note again: Jesus has come to **make disciples of all the nations**. This region is called **Galilee of the Gentiles** because it is ‘**The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.**’ If you take a map of the tribal allotments from the days of Joshua and lay it over this region, you’ll see that Zebulun and Naphtali settled in these same regions. This was in the northern kingdom of Israel which was conquered and deported by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Then the Assyrians imported numerous other conquered nationalities to come in and re-settle in these same regions that had been evacuated by the Israelites, **see especially 2 Kings 17.24-41**. This is also where the Samaritan/Jew rivalry and clash of culture originated. Many of those same foreign Gentile ethnicities still lived in enclaves throughout this region. That’s why it was called **Galilee of the Gentiles** all the way back to Isaiah’s prophecy and on into Jesus’ day as well. ***But Matthew’s message is that Jesus had come to call them to repentance also, save them, and incorporate them into the new Israel through faith in the Gospel of the Messiah-Savior!*** You need to read here the entire prophetic covenant redemptive purpose in Yahweh’s words in **Isaiah 9.1-7**.

5 / Jesus preached the same message that John the Baptist had preached when he made his Messianic introduction: **From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand [has come near, is here]!”** Compare chs 3.2 & 4.17.

V | ch 4.18-22 | Jesus calls His first disciples to begin teaching and training them to carry His Gospel to the nations

1 / So, let’s follow the writing plan Matthew is following here to lead us into the ‘content’ of Jesus’ ministry in **ch 5**:

- Jesus has been born;
- [Jesus grows up in Nazareth];

- John the Baptist appears to prophetically proclaim His long-awaited and much-hoped-for arrival;
- Jesus is baptized to publicly credentialize Him for His ministry;
- Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by the Devil to test and approve Him;
- and now He will begin to call His disciples to believe in Him, follow Him, be with Him, and learn from Him.

2 / We need to see here that Matthew’s summary account of Jesus’ calling of His first disciples is not a chance encounter [“Oh, look! Some fishermen! I think I’ll call them to follow Me as my disciples!”]. Nor was it Jesus’ first encounter with them. John describes Jesus’ previous encounters [and maybe the first] with these two sets of brothers in **John 1.35-42**. And there were other encounters also. In their previous encounters, these first disciples had been introduced and acquainted with Jesus and had come to believe He was their promised Messiah. But what Matthew is doing here is combining and ‘compressing’ all of their encounters into one summary narrative to give us another ‘step’ in the flow of how Jesus began His public ministry.

3 / The significant response Matthew emphasizes here is that **“Immediately they left their nets and followed Him [v 20] ... Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him [v 22].”**

VI | ch 4.23-25 | Jesus expands His outreach and ministry into the surrounding regions...and shows His Kingdom, saving powers

1 / Jesus’ ministry immediately received widespread fame, recognition, and reception. **V 25: And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.** Check your map of the life of Jesus and His ministry. Many of these regions were heavily populated by Gentiles. He had come to include them in the Kingdom of Heaven, too!

2 / Matthew gives us a three-faceted manifestation of Jesus’ ministry:

[1] teaching in their synagogues;

[2] proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom;

[3] and healing every disease and every affliction among the people: **So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and He healed them.** These physical miracles were an ‘physical’ demonstration of the ‘spiritual’ operation of the Kingdom of God—God’s rule.

3 / ALL of these ministries were prophesied as signs and evidences that the King and His Kingdom had come! **Especially Isaiah 32.3-4: Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will give attention. The heart of the hasty will understand and know, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly** [both physically and spiritually]; **and 35.5-6: Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and tongue of the mute sing for joy.**

4 / And so, as Jesus preached and taught the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and performed all these miraculous signs, in doing so He was fulfilling the prophesied hopes and promises of the Kingdom of God!

5 / Beginning next, in **chapter 5**, Matthew will begin giving us accounts of the content of Jesus’ teachings concerning the Kingdom of God, or as he will recount from Jesus’ Great Commission in **ch 28.16-20: “...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”**

“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel!” ~Mark 1.15