

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 9, Chapter 4

As we work our way through the Gospel of Matthew and discover so many important details buried in the text, and also discover those present in Christian traditions and just as importantly in the ancient Jewish traditions, we are regularly going to step back and review what we've studied from a more panoramic vantage point. Therefore before we open our Bibles to Matthew chapter 4, let's briefly sum up the first 3 chapters.

Matthew opens with an extensive, but purposeful, genealogy of Yeshua. Because Matthew is a well educated Jewish Believer, and because he is well versed in Jewish Tradition as well as in the Hebrew Bible, all that we uncover from here forward will have a decidedly Jewish flavor and worldview. The genealogy he presents, then, is given in a particularly Hebrew style; it is given in descending order with the oldest ancestor named first. In this case that oldest ancestor is Abraham. Why did Matthew start with Abraham? Because Abraham is the Father of the Hebrews and Matthew's intent is to prove Yeshua's fundamental Hebrew connection.

The next point to recognize is that King David is central to Christ's genealogy in order to prove His right to royal inheritance, but also to prove His credentials as the Messiah. David's name consists of 3 Hebrew consonants that have a total gematria value of 14. Thus, the genealogy is given to us in 3 sets of 14 names each, with David's name as the 14th in the 1st set. The list is not complete and exhaustive; some generations are skipped not because Matthew didn't know they existed or who those people were, but because he needed to have his list add up to 42 (3 times 14 equals 42) to match with Daniel's extensive use of the number 42 in his book of prophecy that was highly popular at this time. Interestingly, 4

women are included in the genealogy (it's not usual to include women), but even more stunning is that the 4 women mentioned all began their lives as gentiles. In this way, Matthew is showing that while Jesus is thoroughly Jewish, a connection to gentiles exists in His underlying biology and so cannot be overlooked.

About halfway through the 1st chapter Matthew tells the story of Yeshua's birth circumstances, beginning with the odd, if not shameful, situation of his biological mother not having a completed marriage with his non-biological father. In typical Jewish courting and marriage custom, Joseph is betrothed to Mary. However soon thereafter Mary turns up pregnant and the scandal cannot be contained because Joseph knows it's not his child. Biblically, betrothal is closer to marriage than it is to engagement as we think of it today. A marriage contract between the husband and the woman's father is executed at the time of betrothal. As of that moment the man is called husband and the woman is called wife. Still the woman remains with her father's household for a time, usually about 1 year. At the end of this time the woman moves out of her father's home and into her husband's home where consummation occurs. The marriage is only then fully completed.

Mary being pregnant while still living with her father brings a loss of honor to all parties, and by the Law of Moses it is a crime that demands the death penalty to the girl. Joseph doesn't want that for Mary, so he decides to divorce her quietly; but an angel comes in a dream and tells him not to do that. Rather he is to continue on with the marriage process. In faith and trust in God, he obeys.

Joseph is told that Mary was not pregnant by normal human means but rather the male seed is supplied by the Holy Spirit. The son that will be produced is to be named Yeshua, which means "Yehoveh saves". We are also to notice that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary (meaning he did not consummate the marriage) until after the child was born. So by every Jewish standard, Christ was born to a mother whose marriage was incomplete.

Chapter 2 begins by explaining that Mary's child was born in the small town of Bethlehem of Judea, during a historical time when Herod the Great ruled. Now unfolds the story of some non-specified number of pagan magi (astrologers) coming to Judea. They say they know that a new king of Judea has been born and this is because they have seen the portent of it in the sky.

They arrive in Jerusalem and begin asking around where this new king is, because in their minds where else would a Jewish king be located other than in

the capital city of Jerusalem? The news of these magi reaches Herod, he is alarmed by it, and calls together his advisory council; he asks them where the Messiah would be born. They respond: in Bethlehem. Herod immediately summons the magi, sends them to Bethlehem, and tells them to report back to him exactly who this child is.

Notice: the pagan magi are the first to be aware of Christ's birth, even before the Jewish people. Also notice that they come to Judea looking for a king and not for a Messiah or a god. The magi's purpose for their visit is purely political. Herod's concern makes the leap from the political to the religious. He knows enough of the ancient prophecies (and the hopes of his people for a Deliverer) to realize that perhaps this child the magi are searching for could be the foretold Messiah. And if true, then it presents a real problem for him hanging on to his throne.

The magi leave for Bethlehem. It is short 3 or 4 hour walk on a well traveled trail from Jerusalem. The text says that a star led them to Bethlehem and to the house where the child was located.

We spent some time investigating what it was that these pagan astrologers saw that convinced them to make a long journey to find this new king. In the end we discovered that Matthew had researched enough to use astrological language in his report about the magi such that it seems that these seers had observed the placement of a conjunction of 3 planets in the Zodiac sign of Aries. Aries was believed by them to represent the region of Judea. This conjunction of planets was, for astrologers, an unmistakable omen that a new king had been born there. They wanted to go and pay homage to this new king (realizing, of course, that this new king was but a baby). But such was the politics of the day that it usually paid off to make such a connection with a future king as soon as possible.

The magi knew before they left their homes that they were traveling to Judea, and just as obviously to the seat of government of Judea if they were going to find this new king: Jerusalem. The Jews on the other hand, because they shunned astrology, had no hint of the event the magi came for and were confused and startled when the magi began inquiring of them about it. However, in the fields of Bethlehem the Glory of God burst upon some humble Jewish shepherds, producing a blinding light, and an angel vocally announced the birth of their Deliverer..... the long promised Messiah. The Shepherds went to the house in the village where the Messiah lay in a feeding trough, because that was the sign that the angel gave to them as a means to find and positively identify

him. The year of Our Lord's advent was likely 6 B.C. by our modern calendars, since Herod the Great died a couple of years later in 4 B.C. (the year of Herod's death is well attested).

The magi also locate the child, believe him to be the new king their astrological portent had revealed, honor him with very expensive gifts, and leave for home without reporting back to Herod. Herod soon realized they weren't coming back to him with the information he wanted and so in a homicidal rage, taking no chances, he ordered all male children in and around Bethlehem to be murdered so that which ever of these children this Messiah might be, he wouldn't survive. Before the slaughter began an angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him to flee with his family at once to Egypt and there to await word from this same angel for when the family could return to the Holy Land. They were in Egypt for probably around a year before this same angel returned with the good news that Herod was dead and the danger had passed. Even so the succeeding king, one of Herod's sons, was about as bad as his father and ruling over Judea, so Joseph decided it would be the safer choice to go to the Galilee and live in Nazareth, a small and remote country village.

As we entered chapter 3, the subject turned to John the Baptist; therefore several years passed from the end of chapter 2 to the beginning of chapter 3..... perhaps as many as 30 years. John was a desert dweller, and apparently dressed much like the prophets of old, wearing a camel's hair garment with a leather belt around his waist. There is little doubt in my mind that he thought of himself as a successor to Elijah, and the Jewish people believed he might be the return of that ancient prophet.

John's message to the Jews was twofold: 1) the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, and 2) people should prepare for it by turning from their sins to God. He is called John the Baptist because those who heeded his message also came to be ritually immersed by him in the Jordan River. Although the Gospel accounts don't entirely agree on the exact purpose of John's baptism, it seems to me that it was mostly about a public declaration of repentance and the immersion was a symbol of cleansing from the old and putting on the new. During this era, due to the ruthless and painful occupation of the Romans, the Jews generally believed they were living in the End Times. So when a Prophet comes along who declares that the Kingdom of God is about to appear (something that was thought to accompany the End of Days) many pay attention if for no other reason than out of fear and self preservation.

Apparently the number of people flocking to John was substantial enough to alarm the religious leadership of both the Temple and the Synagogue. Holy men who gathered enough disciples could present a challenge to their authority, or worse upset Rome, and so the Pharisee and Sadducee leadership came to John to investigate. John knew they didn't come to him sincerely, and so he didn't welcome them. In fact he chided them, saying that they were snakes, and that their heritage of Abraham as their ancestral father was in no way sufficient to protect them from God's wrath. John went on to explain his own purpose as the one who was to prepare the way for the emergence of a great man; a man who was far greater than himself. And when this great man comes, one of the things he will do is to identify the righteous from the unrighteous and separate them the way a winnowing fork separates the wheat from the chaff.

We hear not one word about Christ's youth. It is now that Yeshua, as an adult, enters the picture as He comes from Galilee to John in Judea to be immersed. John balks at such a notion, feeling that he is not worthy to do so. Yeshua insists and upon immersion the Holy Spirit in some visible, detectable form descends upon Him in dove-like fashion. A voice booms from Heaven that can be none other than the Father. He says that this is His son, and that He is well pleased with Him. What comes next is the subject of Matthew chapter 4. Open your Bibles to that chapter.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 4 all

The theme for chapter 4 is the beginning of Yeshua's ministry. Interestingly the first thing Matthew deals with is a string a 3 temptations Jesus faced, orchestrated by Satan. It is curious that we are told that it was the "Spirit" that led Yeshua into the wilderness (the Judean desert that John the Baptist called home). The Spirit has to be referring to the Holy Spirit; so it is God that guided Christ into the desert to have an encounter with the Devil. The term "The Devil" comes from the Greek word used here, which is **diabolos**. It is an attempted translation of the Hebrew term Satan, which itself means adversary. So these several terms for the evil arch enemy of God like Devil, Satan, Evil One, Adversary, and others are equal and referring to this same evil spiritual being.

Sometimes we can forget that Satan, like all other beings or objects, was created by the only Creator that exists: The God of Israel. Naturally, even though he wants to be, Satan is not equal to his Creator. The Bible makes it clear that Satan is the source of all evil, all degradation, and thus the underlying cause of all sin.

Let me state without hesitation that those who say there is no God, and that as humans they are the superior beings of this planet (if not Universe), are operating in the image of the Adversary. Those who in English are called atheists are the most dangerous creatures on this planet because they embody the very essence of the Devil: those who oppose the Creator, see themselves as equal to Him, and desire to take His place.

We won't find a great deal of information in the Bible about the realm of the Devil, nor much about the realm of God. This is because the writers of the Bible didn't know much about those 2 realms and because they assumed that their readers (at the minimum) accepted the idea that there exists two opposing spiritual regimes: those beings that are loyal and obedient to God the Creator who represents light and perfection, and those beings that are loyal and obedient to Satan, God's adversary, who represents darkness and evil. So there is no need to explain it.

Please notice that of the 3 temptations the Devil offers Yeshua, Yeshua rebukes them all by quoting Scripture. And the Scripture He quotes is from the Torah; specifically Deuteronomy 6 and 8. One of the reasons these particular passages are appropriate is because of something we discussed in an earlier lesson: Jesus is being depicted as a kind of second Moses, and thus Jesus is echoing Israel's experience in the wilderness: the Exodus. As Davies and Allison so eloquently put it:

"Having passed through the waters of a new exodus at his baptism, he enters the desert to suffer a time of testing, his 40 days of fasting being analogous to Israel's 40 years of wandering. Like Israel, Jesus is tested by hunger. And like Israel, Jesus is tempted to idolatry".

In Deuteronomy 8 we read this that was spoken to Israel as they navigated the trials of the wilderness and were about to emerge into the Promised Land:

CJB Deuteronomy 8:2-3 ² You are to remember everything of the way in which ADONAI led you these forty years in the desert, humbling and testing you in order to know what was in your heart- whether you would obey his mitzvot or not. ³ He humbled you, allowing you to become hungry, and then fed you with man, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, to make you understand that a person does not live on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of ADONAI.

God led the fleeing Israelites through the desert; He did so intentionally in a way to achieve a specific purpose: to teach them, through testing and humbling, that what was hidden in the deepest recesses of their hearts would pour out in response to their circumstances. One of those humbling experiences they faced was that they became hungry, and God's purpose for them enduring this was to teach them that God's people don't live on food alone, but rather on what pours forth from His mouth.....that is, His Word. His truth. His laws and commands. Yeshua, as a sort of second Moses, would now face similar trials.

Indeed as verse 2 says, out in the desert Yeshua went without food for 40 days and nights, and of course He became hungry (a rather significant understatement!). For the Jews, the desert was not just a dangerous place it was also a scary place. Even in the God commanded observances of Yom Kippur, one of the rituals involved the Scapegoat. One of the goats was killed, and the other was set free to wander in the desert and face evil.

CJB Leviticus 16:8-10 ⁸ Then Aharon is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for ADONAI and the other for 'Az'azel. ⁹ Aharon is to present the goat whose lot fell to ADONAI and offer it as a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat whose lot fell to 'Az'azel is to be presented alive to ADONAI to be used for making atonement over it by sending it away into the desert for 'Az'azel.

There has always been mystery associated with this '**Az'azel**'. However the general consensus within Judaism is that '**Az'azel**' was a powerful demon whose earthly realm was the Judean desert. Notice in Leviticus how of the two goats, one goes to God, the author of good, and the other goes to a demon, the author of evil. And sure enough, out in the lonely desert, the starving Jesus (the One designated to become our sin offering) encounters the Evil One. And what does the Evil One do? He tempts Yeshua.

I want to inject here that what the Devil did towards Yeshua he does to us all, even to Believers. At our weakest and most unexpected moments he tempts us to go against God. Yeshua gave us the formula for resisting the Evil One. Satan knew, of course, exactly who Yeshua is and what God's purpose is for Him. And yet it didn't deter him whatsoever from attempting to pervert Yeshua's destiny and mission.

Yeshua was beyond famished after 40 days and nights of not eating: His body was literally deteriorating. It is interesting that Matthew says the fasting lasted for

40 days **and nights** and not just 40 days because adding in the "and nights" is not usual when speaking of periods of time in the Bible. Not surprisingly there were a couple of famous Bible characters who came before Yeshua that spoke of periods of time in the same way. Moses said:

CJB Deuteronomy 9:9 ⁹ I had gone up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets on which was written the covenant ADONAI had made with you. I stayed on the mountain forty days and nights without eating food or drinking water.

So here we again see the connection between Moses and Christ, and the idea that Christ is reliving the experience of Israel and the exodus. But even more there is another important connection that is being made.

CJB Jonah 2:1 ADONAI prepared a huge fish to swallow Yonah; and Yonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. ² From the belly of the fish Yonah prayed to ADONAI his God;

Everyone in ancient times understood that a day meant one entire sun and moon appearance; daytime and nighttime in sequence. So the addition of the phrase "and nights" is not a usual Hebrew expression but rather is rare. When something is rare in the Bible, we need to pay attention. Later in His ministry Christ will make use of this rare phrase and it's prophetic connections:

CJB Matthew 12:38-40 ³⁸ At this some of the Torah-teachers said, "Rabbi, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." ³⁹ He replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign? No! None will be given to it but the sign of the prophet Yonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Yonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.

It is the addition of the phrase "and nights" that is the connecting tissue that pulls all of this together.

Although I've never experienced hunger to the level that Jesus was experiencing it, I'm told it is painful. The Devil, however, has an easy solution for Him; he tells Yeshua that IF He is *really* the Son of God, then turn the stones that are laying all around Him into bread. The Devil of course is trying to sow self-doubt into Jesus. IF....what a big word IF is; it is word meant to describe uncertainty. Have we all

not heard deep within our minds: "If you are really saved, you would not have had that bad thought or done that bad thing". "If you really love Jesus, He would enable you to live a perfect life and do everything God wants you to do". At the same time, this temptation of IF happens early in Christ's ministry and there is ample biblical evidence that He indeed is still struggling with exactly who He is, where He fits in His Father's plan, and how to justify or perhaps balance His humanness with His divineness. I suspect that most of us will, similar to Yeshua, struggle our entire lives to understand and balance our new Godly nature with our old corrupted human nature. It is to be expected; and yet it is also fertile ground for the Adversary to strike us at any moment. What do we do? We follow Our Savior's example.

Yeshua responded to this attack by quoting the Bible; and as we discussed earlier in the beginning of today's lesson, it was from the Torah that Yeshua spoke to rebuke the Devil. He says from Deuteronomy 8:3: ***a person does not live on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of ADONAI.***

This verse was of course spoken 1400 years earlier by Moses. The circumstance was even similar. Listen to the entire passage:

CJB Deuteronomy 8:3 ³ He humbled you, allowing you to become hungry, and then fed you with man, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, to make you understand that a person does not live on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of ADONAI.

God provided starving Israel with manna, but they grumbled and complained about it, endlessly. They were thankful only for a moment. Would Christ, The Son of God (remember, God also called Israel Son of God), behave as Israel did in the wilderness? Or would he be faithful? As the second Moses, He quotes Moses and passes the test. So far Yeshua is, indeed, the ideal Israel and not the unfaithful one.

Next in verse 5 the Adversary takes Jesus to Jerusalem and the Temple. Note that it was God who took Yeshua to the desert for testing (just as God took the Israelite refugees to the desert for testing); but this time it is The Devil that takes Yeshua to the holy city of Jerusalem for testing. He takes Him to the pinnacle of the Temple and once again tries to sow seeds of doubt. He says "IF you are The Son of God then jump." Will Yeshua have the faith to do the most fearful thing

one can imagine? Will He jump and trust His Father to somehow, miraculously, catch Him, saving His life? Wouldn't that be the result IF He was actually the Son of God? Satan goes so far as to quote Scripture to Jesus in order to convince Him to take the leap.

Instead of trying to prove Himself or prove God by throwing Himself off this high place, He quotes Scripture to the Devil in response to the Devil using Psalm 91 to make his point. There we read:

CJB Psalm 91:11-12 ¹¹ *for he will order his angels to care for you and guard you wherever you go.* ¹² *They will carry you in their hands, so that you won't trip on a stone.*

This is legitimate Scripture Satan is using. Even the context for it (which is about God caring for His own) seems correct. Yeshua's response is more than appropriate, it is a caution to us His disciples. Many of us are very good at remembering Scripture passages. And sometimes when we encounter a difficult or stressful situation or a tough decision, we can find ourselves hearing one of those biblical passages in our minds telling us to do something challenging or even frightening. But then we have to remember a principle that Jesus teaches right here:

CJB Deuteronomy 6:16 ¹⁶ *Do not put ADONAI your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah [testing].*

Let me give you a quick Hebrew lesson. While often in English translations we see the idea of testing or tempting used twice in this verse, in fact that's an illusion because it is three times. The Hebrew actually makes a play on words. In the first use of the word test or tempting, the original Hebrew is **nacah** (pronounced naw-saw). The 2nd time we see test or tempt in this verse the original Hebrew is the same: **nacah**. But the 3rd use is **Massah**, and it mostly means a **place** of tempting. In fact, **nacah** in this context is not best translated as tempt or test as it is in many translations; rather **nacah** is meant in a judicial sense, like putting someone on trial. So what this passage in Deuteronomy is meaning is to not put God on trial, as Israel tried to put God on trial at the place of tempting. God took Israel to a place to tempt them, thus putting their faith on trial. But Israel tried to turn it around and put God on trial. We are never to put God on trial; we are never to judge Him. And jumping off of a tall building trying to prove to someone (perhaps even to yourself) that you have faith in God (because

God is certainly able to catch you if He wants to) is to put God on trial and that is never right.

I cannot tell you how many emails I get from sincere persons who are assured in their minds, and backed-up with a Scripture verse, that they are to do something that seems abundantly foolish, but they think they should do it for God. They are among the hardest to persuade that what is really happening is that either the Devil or more likely their own evil inclination is putting them in a losing situation, which when it fails they will blame on God or at least they will lose a substantial measure of faith and trust in Him. It is that they are certain that God's will for them is to do something that appropriate Scripture teaching, in context, tells them to do otherwise. And almost always it is because they so badly want to do what their own will wants to do, they are blind to the error of it.

Yeshua rebukes this test of Satan by recalling the **Massah** incident during Israel's exodus from Egypt.... once again providing connection between He and Moses.

In verse 8, again the Devil leads Yeshua to a high place; this time even higher than the pinnacle on the Temple. It is to a mountain top in order to gain a wide vantage point so that Satan can dramatically make his offer. Notice how we go from a low place, the desert, to a high place, the pinnacle of the Temple, to the highest place..... a mountain top. And in lockstep with the ascending geography is the ascending temptations. Now the Devil offers Christ the world that he lays out before Him. He makes it clear that he has the ability to give Messiah all the world's kingdoms for Him to rule over. The price? Bow down and worship him. The point is not hard to see. It is Satan's attempt to replace God. I don't know whether Yeshua, at this point in time, already knows that He is God's agent to rule the world, or not. Nevertheless the world belongs to God because He is the Creator of it. It is His and His alone to rule over, or to assign the rule to another.

Interestingly the Devil's offer of Christ worshipping him in exchange for world rule uses the same word in Greek that the magi used when worshipping Yeshua: **proskuneo**. It is better translated as homage. That is, just as the magi paid homage in the political sense to the Christ Child (who the magi saw as a king), so is the Devil telling Yeshua to pay homage in the political sense and much less so in the religious sense because the Devil sees himself as ruler (king) of the world. Satan is proposing a role reversal since we know from other Bible passages that God has designated Yeshua to be the ruler of the world, with

Satan bowing down to Him.

Yeshua again rebukes the Evil One with Scripture.

^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 6:13** *You are to fear ADONAI your God, serve him and swear by his name.*

The next words of this Gospel of Matthew are: "***Then the Adversary left Him alone***". At that moment the Devil's hopes were crushed. The testing was over; there was nothing left to test. He had failed to shake the faith of Our Messiah, The Son of God.

We'll continue with chapter 4 next week.