

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 10, Chapter 4 continued

The Early Church Father Chrysostom said this about the temptations of Christ: ***"The devil begins with the temptation to indulge the belly. By this same means he cast out the first man, and by this means many are still cast down."***

In our study of Matthew chapter 4, immediately Yeshua is led into 3 temptations. As Chrysostom comments, it is not a coincidence that Yeshua and the first man Adam (or better, first couple) were tempted with food by the Evil One. Food is a powerful need in humans and therefore can be a powerful force in swaying humans. And yet Chrysostom sees that there is more to food than only the nutrition and calories that it necessarily provides.

For those who have studied the Torah with me (and I hope you all have because you'll get so much more out of any study of the New Testament), you'll recall that Adam and Eve were originally given, by God, what I call "a one-law Torah". And what was the first and only law God gave to them while they were still being allowed to inhabit the Garden of Eden? Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And, of course, they broke that law. The breaking of that law is known in various Church doctrines as the Fall of Man, the Fall from Grace, and a few other titles. So the first law ever given to mankind involved diet: food. And the breaking of a law about food completely redirected the destiny of all of humanity in innumerable and painful ways that would require a Redeemer to fix it. Centuries later, at Mt. Sinai, God would give Israel a more extensive set of laws regarding diet; laws that have come to be popularly known as Kosher food laws.

Nearly all of the Earliest Church Fathers whose commentaries on Matthew's Gospel have survived, noticed this connection between Adam and Christ, and some of them noticed this matter of food as the object of a temptation they both faced. In Adam's case he had an abundance of food in the Garden. And still when the Devil tempted him by making this one specific food off-limits, Adam succumbed to it. While in Christ's case of the temptation in the wilderness He had no food, this starving man was also tempted by the Devil by telling Him to turn stones into food to satisfy His gnawing hunger (which, apparently, Yeshua could have done as He did not dispute Satan on the matter except that He should not do such a thing). Yeshua resisted the temptation and was victorious.

I find it instructional that the Early Church Fathers were so very aware of the relationship between Adam and Yeshua's temptations, and that food was the object of the first temptation for both of them. But then these same Church Fathers seem to ignore or rationalize away that God goes on in the Torah to carefully lay out what the diet for humans ought and ought not to be. That is, what God ordains as permissible for eating versus what is forbidden. One could argue that this God-commanded diet was only meant for Hebrews, or perhaps that gentile Believers in Yeshua are also to be included along with the Hebrews. I would respond that all mankind was meant to eat this way. However it is logical and it is human nature that only those who trust in the God of Israel and believe His Word would think to follow the food laws. All others would find such instructions as irrelevant to them.

So, fellow Believers and followers of Jesus of Nazareth, what say you? I say unequivocally that we are to eat biblically kosher. Is it sin not to follow those food laws? Of course it is. The definition of sin is to disobey God's commandments. Note I say *biblically* kosher food commandments because I don't accept the large body of manmade Rabbinical Tradition about kosher eating that has taken but one chapter in Leviticus concerning food and turned it into scores of pages of arcane eating rules.

It is a curious truth that even in the secular world of medical science, it is said that "we are what we eat". It has been understood for a long time that our diet plays a significant role in our lives. Although Doctors, scientists, and nutritionists are speaking only of our physical biological lives, God views diet as affecting primarily our spiritual lives (and that didn't start at Mt. Sinai but rather in the Garden of Eden). In the spiritual realm the Lord is the first to tell us that in His eyes "we are what we eat". On the surface the matter of food is a rather simplistic

one: God has set down what is food for humans and what is not. Edibility is not the point of the food selection process, and for the most part neither are health benefits. God, in His supremacy and perfection, has deemed and commanded the proper human diet. As Believers in Him, then all that is left for us to decide is: will we obey or not? Yes, the issue is obedience versus sin and nothing else. Don't be searching for scientific rationale for whether you should or should not follow the biblical food laws; lots of things we could eat are no doubt delicious and physically healthy. Rather be considering your position before the Lord, and whether you want to be seen by Him as faithful or not. God did not set the food laws down as an option for us; Adam found that out the hard way, and we've all been affected by that rebellious act ever since. Yeshua, in the most stressful and painful of circumstances, chose to trust and obey His Father and so refused to take the Devil's bait in order to satisfy His want of food. We've all benefited by that faithful act of Our Savior ever since.

The second temptation of Christ involved Satan taking Him up to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem, and inviting Him to jump off. Taunting Him that **IF** He was truly God's Son, His Father would send angels to catch Him. The Devil was trying to sow seeds of doubt into Yeshua by employing the "if" word. But He swatted that one away by quoting God's commandment in Deuteronomy 6:16 that man should not put God on trial by doing such a foolish thing as jumping off a high place and expecting God to catch us. The Early Church Father Hilary of Poitiers, at about the turn of the 3rd to the 4th century, made this fascinating observation in his commentary on Matthew. Hilary says: **"He (the Devil) set Him (Christ) on the pinnacle of the Temple, as if towering over the laws and the prophets"**. In other words, Satan indeed was trying to put himself above God's laws and commandments, which by definition means he was trying to put God on trial. Let that gestate for a few seconds. When we think that we... mere created beings.... can set aside our Creator's laws and commands by manufacturing new doctrines and commands that please us better, we are putting God on trial. We are putting ourselves towering above God, towering over His laws and commands, thus behaving exactly as the Devil did in this second temptation of Christ.

In the very next chapter of Matthew, which begins Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua makes sure that His followers understand what I just told you.

^{CJB} **Matthew 5:17-19** ¹⁷ **"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.** ¹⁸ **Yes indeed! I**

tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So even Christ did not put Himself above God's laws and commands such that He could add to or subtract from them. Even though the vast bulk of the institutional Church has for centuries not been faithful or truthful on this matter, and instead has instituted new manmade doctrines that has told billions of Christians that for them God's laws and commands are dead and gone because Christ did away with them, Christ Himself said otherwise. In Matthew 4 when Yeshua fights the Devil He specifically uses Scripture passages from the Torah as His weapon. Now, why, if His purpose was to abolish the Torah would He use it as an example for us to follow? Why would He soon follow up in His Sermon on the Mount and specifically declare that not only didn't He come with the purpose of abolishing the Torah and the Prophets, but also warning that whoever might think to disobey these laws and commands of the Torah and teach others to do so is going to find him or her self occupying the lowest possible rung on the Heavenly Ladder in God's Kingdom society. It pains me to no end that the Church has done such a damaging and unscriptural thing primarily with the purpose of trying to achieve gentile superiority over the early Church's Jewish leadership. It has led to nothing but disobedience and a weakening of Christian faith. But now you know the truth, and you are seeing it for yourself in God's Word. So how you respond to this scriptural knowledge will have much to do with your personal eternal future and where you might be placed within God's Kingdom structure.

The third temptation of Christ was that the Devil offered Yeshua rulership over the entire planet in exchange for bowing down to him. Jesus's response to him was "away with you Satan" or more popularly "get behind Me, Satan". Next we read: "Then the Adversary let Him alone..." In an anonymous Christian commentary on Matthew, written sometime in the 5th century; a work that has been labeled by Theologians as The Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 5, its unknown writer offers us this uplifting perspective about what happened with Yeshua and how this applies to us.

"He (Christ) put an end to the Devil's tempting when he said 'Get behind me

Satan!". The devil could progress no further with his temptation. But we can rightly understand and reasonably ascertain that he withdrew not as though in obedience to the command. Rather it was the divinity of Christ or the Holy Spirit in Christ who drove away the Devil. This gives us great consolation, for the Devil cannot tempt God's people as long as he wishes. He can tempt them only so long as Christ or the Holy Spirit who is in them allows him to."

What a wonderful and important point of view for us to grasp. It is not the mechanical quoting of Scripture passages that blocks the Devil, just as it is not the mechanical doing of God's laws and commands that satisfies the Lord. When we are saved, and Christ or the Holy Spirit (however we choose to phrase it) dwells within us, and when as Believers we find occasion to rebuke the Devil's temptations by speaking God's Word to him, it is the power of God within us that the Devil flees from; not from our human ability to remember and quote it.

So now let's move on in Matthew chapter 4 to learn about what follows the temptation of Christ. Open your Bibles to Matthew 4.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 4:11 - end

I'd like to remark here that the implication that after Satan withdrew and let Jesus alone that angels ministered to Him, is sort of mysterious to me. How, exactly, did angels minister to Him? Did they bring Him food? Did they comfort Him in some way? Did they congratulate or praise Him? Why couldn't regular humans, instead of angels, do most of this for Him? I don't think I have a solid enough answer to this because there is simply no further information provided to us. Yet let's not overlook the plain matter that apparently Yeshua, Himself also being God, **needed** to be ministered to. It can be very complicated and challenging to either separate or combine Yeshua's humanity with His divinity and speak of it and think of it in some orderly and comprehensible way. Since God has no needs, then in this case it can only be that Jesus, the human being, did.

We're not told how long it was between each of the 3 temptations or if they occurred in rapid succession. After a person has not eaten in 40 days, a couple of hearty meals doesn't bring a person back to good health. So perhaps a time of regaining His physical strength had something to do with the ministration of the angels. I suspect that it also had to do with His spirit and His emotions. I cannot even imagine the stress He was under and the physical exhaustion that

accompanied it; He knew the weight of the world, and the eternal fate of humanity, rest upon His shoulders. The Devil tried to take advantage of this fact; I think the angels came to give Jesus rest in a way that can only come from Heaven.

Verse 12 shifts the subject. Here we learn that John the Baptist has been arrested but we're not given any particulars about it. Later in chapter 14 Matthew will address this in more detail as kind of a flash-back. Nonetheless John's arrest occurred while Yeshua was in Judea and so it became a signal to Yeshua that He needed to leave and go back home to the Galilee. Some commentators see what Yeshua did as fleeing because He is so intimately connected to John that He thinks He'll be the next to be arrested. And yet the Galilee isn't all that far away and if Antipas really wanted to find Yeshua and arrest Him it wouldn't have been terribly difficult. Others think that the arrest of John, and Jesus going back to the Galilee, are not necessarily linked. It's just that Matthew is only telling us two separate things: 1) John had been imprisoned, and 2) Jesus went back to the Galilee to begin His ministry. I'm not at all sure which is the case. However the next verse may give us some more information that gives us a clue about it.

Verse 13 says that He went back to His hometown of Nazareth, but then moved to Capernaum. Was He doing this to evade the authorities? Perhaps. But Matthew says in verse 14 that the reason for this move was in order to fulfill a prophecy of Isaiah. In other words, some of the things Christ did, He did purposely for little other reason than to fulfill ancient Messianic prophecies concerning His coming and His mission as Israel's Messiah.

Capernaum is an English translation of the Hebrew ***K'far Nahum***, which means "the village of Nahum". The village was located on the Sea of Galilee (and it is still there), so a goodly part of its economy depended on fishing. That Matthew tells us that the village was near the border between the tribal territories allotted to the tribes of Zevulun and Naphtali further indicates that Matthew resided in the Holy Land and that he was quite studied in the Hebrew Bible because in no way were those tribal territories meaningful any longer even to most Jews. Once the Assyrians conquered the north of Israel towards the end of the 8th century B.C., and then 130 years later when the Babylonians conquered the south, the tribal territory names (other than for Judah) were mostly erased and whatever boundaries they had been given by Moses and Joshua disappeared. This all happened centuries before Christ's era. So mention of the tribal territories of Zevulun and Naphtali solidifies that Matthew's intended audience was Jews

because the old tribal geography and those old tribal names would have had no meaning outside of the Jewish population.

Next Matthew quotes the pertinent section of the prophecy that he says Jesus is fulfilling by His moving to *K'far Nahum*, and it comes from Isaiah chapters 8 and 9. Most Believers have heard this passage in Matthew a number of times. However remembering that this came from a Prophet that lived 7 centuries earlier, and the circumstances of his day were entirely different than they were in Christ's era, I want to take the time to put this prophecy in context because it becomes all the more meaningful. So let's read all of Isaiah 8 and then the first 6 verses of Isaiah 9. Turn your Bibles there, now, and read along with me.

READ ISAIAH CHAPTER 8:1 - 9:6

The mention of Ashur at the beginning is speaking of the Assyrian Kingdom that Isaiah says will conquer the 10 northern tribes of Israel and carry them off. History shows that they were scattered all over Asia and Northern Africa. This exile from their land is judgment upon all Israel by Yehoveh for their idolatry and unfaithfulness. And at the same time, while the Lord has prepared and drawn in gentile nations to be the earthly sword of God's judgment, He's going to shatter them for being so hard on His people. So God sort of says to these gentile nations: go ahead and laugh now, because you won't be laughing later.

The people of Israel, however, are oblivious to their own rebellion and idolatry and the coming consequences, even though God has sent Prophets, including Isaiah, to warn them. The 12 tribes are like a disabled ship bobbing around on a churning sea having lost its rudder. Each man is doing what is right in his own eyes. The 10 northern tribes, especially, have been blatantly bowing down to other gods along with insincerely worshipping Yehoveh for some time; and the 2 tribes that form Judah are being slowly drawn into the same destructive behavior. Finally the breaking point is reached; what Isaiah describes next is the Israelites reaching out frantically in all directions for the solutions to their growing frustrations, misfortunes and overwhelming problems. They try pressuring their Prophets into contacting the dead for answers. They try sacrifice to other gods hoping for their favor. They quit consulting God's Word for direction and look to others or to themselves. There is only one word to describe the condition of Israel at this time: confusion.

Starting in Isaiah 8:11 the Prophet says that God told him that even through

these are Isaiah's own people, he is not to join them in this nonsense. Don't listen to the conspiracy theories and don't buy in. Don't dread what the people dread, don't fear what the leaders fear. In other words, don't listen to all the noise of a disjointed society and become as anxiety driven as they are. What perfect wisdom that is for us, God's Believers, in our day. What Israel was doing 2700 years ago sounds amazingly similar to what the entire world is doing today. And it has led to a state of confusion and chaos that even the Church has not escaped. Hear and do what God says to us, His worshippers. We have no choice but to observe what is occurring all around us but we don't have to participate. Even more, we are to seek the Lord God of Israel and not other gods for answers and for wisdom. We are not to run after the gods of other religions, the gods of science and technology, the gods of prosperity, the gods of government and political ideology, nor the gods of self and self pleasure. The only remedy for the ever shifting sands of confusion is to reverse course and return to the safety of the Rock.

Then we arrive at Isaiah 8 verse 23. Time passes..... God's people wait for their deliverance.... they wait....more time than the people of Israel thought would pass drifts by at glacial speed. Naturally they hoped that what Isaiah told them was going to happen might play out in months, maybe a few years. But no..... 700 years goes by to the point that the people now living in the lands of Zevulun and Naphtali (in Yeshua's time known best as the upper Galilee) are barely aware whose tribal lands they stand upon. In fact, it's not the tribal members of Zevulun and Naphtali who live there anymore, because during Yeshua's day those tribes had still not returned to their land but rather they remained in exile. Those other people consist of not just a few gentiles, and they don't know the land's history.

As we have arrived at the biblical passage that forms verses 15 and 16 in Matthew chapter 4 and we compare it to Isaiah 8 and 9, we note first of all that Matthew paraphrases Isaiah's prophecy for his own purpose and applies it to Capernaum and the surrounding areas, and to Yeshua as the Messiah (another use of *remez* or perhaps *drash* in Bible interpretation). Those areas that the Isaiah prophecy describes are in Christ's era the several Jewish lake front villages ("lake" is a term that is used to this day in Israel when speaking about what gentiles call the **Sea** of Galilee). The passage also describes areas on the east side of the Jordan River (because in 700 B.C. Israel still held substantial tribal territories there, but that was no longer the case in Yeshua's time). And then finally we hear of the Galilee of the Gentiles because so many gentiles occupied areas around the west side of the Sea of Galilee, and even more so on

the east side. The reality is that Rome was in charge of that entire region.

All of these areas around the Galilee that Isaiah describes are home to the people he says have been walking "in great darkness"; but now these same people have seen a "great light". In Hebrew the word "darkness" as used in Isaiah's prophecy is **choshek**. This is not a word that speaks of the darkness of nighttime or of a darkened room. Rather **choshek** is used to describe obscurity, oppression, and deception. So the great darkness is a great **spiritual** darkness.... evil ... shared by Israelites and gentiles alike. And the great light that Isaiah prophesies about is in its original Hebrew **owr**. It is a type of light that is not the kind that comes from the sun, or from a torch or a light bulb. Rather **owr** means enlightenment..... truth.... revelation; the qualities of good that are the foundation of God's (and Messiah's) nature. These are the same words used to describe various aspects of Israel's experience in Egypt. Matthew takes the term "great light" in Isaiah's prophecy to mean the Messiah (and I have no doubt that is exactly what Isaiah was prophesying). When we hear about those living in the region as living in the shadow of death, I think the ultimate meaning is the shadow of **eternal** death..... a spiritual death is being contemplated much more than a physical death that all humans will experience. Also because thus far in Isaiah's prophecy the terms concerning the dark condition of the people and then the arrival of the great light are spiritual terms.

In verse 17 we have Yeshua using the same words that John the Baptist used as he called people to his baptism: turn from your sins to God, and the Kingdom of Heaven is near. He used the same words as John because that is exactly what His purpose was for His coming. Those same words are not on the lips of the Prophets that prepare the way for Yeshua's return at the End of Days, nor are they what Yeshua will speak when He comes back in power and glory. This is because upon His first appearance He came as His Father's agent to redeem. The next time He comes (His return), He comes as His Father's agent to carry out God's wrath and vengeance. First coming: salvation. Second coming: judgment. Therefore the message is that God's Kingdom on earth has just been inaugurated, and the only means to gain membership is to sincerely repent. Why? Because the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) is not a place; it is not like an enormous Shangra La. Rather it represents God's rule that itself is expressed in the lives of human beings. If you are a Believer, the Kingdom of God is already within you. And while that Kingdom is, for now, fully spiritual in nature, in time it will transform and become the spiritual AND physical condition of the new heavens and new earth.

This is why the concept that we find playing out in Matthew that the Kingdom of Heaven is present, it is coming, and it is also future can be so confusing and the subject of several varying Church doctrines that usually focus on but one, perhaps two, of those three aspects of it. Although I'll have more to say about it as our lessons in Matthew continue, for now just know that it was John the Baptist who inaugurated the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, it is Yeshua and later with the help of His disciples (then and now) who are expanding the Kingdom by means of spreading the Good News, and then finally the Kingdom reaches its completed form when the old heavens and old earth pass away to make room for the new heavens and new earth. I'll say this another way: the Kingdom of Heaven does not belong only to a moment in history, but rather it consists of its establishment by means of a series of events over a period of time. That time period is not precisely specified, however the so-called End Times prophets (such as Daniel and Ezekiel) together with the Book of Revelation give to us the major milestone events and some semblance of their order.

Before I move on to the next verse I also want to say how fortunate we are and continue to be. We still live in an extended era that began around 30 A.D. whereby repentance and sincere trust in God and His Son deliver us from the coming wrath of God. We still live in an extended era when we, as God's worshippers, can tell others.... some who we know and love, some who we don't know at all..... about Yeshua and the Kingdom of Heaven, and they still have the opportunity to repent and be delivered from the coming wrath of God. The time is coming when this option and opportunity ends with no exceptions.

Verse 18 speaks of when Yeshua began His ministry in earnest, and He did so by choosing some disciples. We are told that he walked along Lake Kinneret; or as the Greek manuscripts have it "the Sea of Tiberias". English versions call it "the Sea of Galilee". Kinneret is based on the Hebrew word *kinnar*, which means harp; the lake was harp shaped in Jesus's day. Calling it the Sea of Tiberias is because Tiberias was the name of a large city located near the lake's southwestern shore. And the Sea of Galilee was called that for the obvious reason that the large lake was located in the Galilee. Yeshua spotted a couple of brothers, fishermen who were fishing at the time, and offered to make them fishers of men. One was called Andrew, the other in English is Simon Peter. In Hebrew Simon Peter is Shimon Kefa. Kefa is actually an Aramaic word that means rock. In Greek the word rock is petros. Petros became Peter in English. Sometimes we'll see his name as Cephas.

We're told that these 2 brothers didn't hesitate. They left their net and followed Yeshua. As the 4 Gospels tend to do, they agree on substance but not always on detail. The Gospel of John has Yeshua gaining His first 2 disciples slightly differently than how Matthew frames it.

CJB John. 1:35-42 ³⁵ *The next day, Yochanan was again standing with two of his talmidim.* ³⁶ *On seeing Yeshua walking by, he said, "Look! God's lamb!"* ³⁷ *His two talmidim heard him speaking, and they followed Yeshua.* ³⁸ *Yeshua turned and saw them following him, and he asked them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi!" (which means "Teacher!")* *"Where are you staying?"* ³⁹ *He said to them, "Come and see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and remained with him the rest of the day- it was about four o'clock in the afternoon.* ⁴⁰ *One of the two who had heard Yochanan and had followed Yeshua was Andrew the brother of Shim'on Kefa.* ⁴¹ *The first thing he did was to find his brother Shim'on and tell him, "We've found the Mashiach!" (The word means "one who has been anointed.")* ⁴² *He took him to Yeshua. Looking at him, Yeshua said, "You are Shim'on Bar-Yochanan; you will be known as Kefa." (The name means "rock.")*

So John's Gospel has it that Yeshua was walking near John the Baptist and 2 of John's disciples. John says "Look, God's Lamb" and quickly John's 2 disciples go after Jesus. They caught up to Him and ask Him where He was staying (it was Capernaum at this time). One of the two was Andrew, who took Christ to his brother **Shimon Bar-Yochanan** where Yeshua said he'd be called **Kefa** (the rock) from here on. So what we find is that Andrew was first a disciple of John the Baptist; but he left him to become one of Christ's original 12. We don't know what happened to the other disciple of John who had tagged along. And according to John, it was Yeshua who gave Simon his nickname of Kefa..... Peter.... the rock.

Next week we'll continue with Yeshua calling His first disciples and then move into chapter 5.