

## The Book of Matthew Study Guide

### Chapters 3-4

30 years have passed between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

#### 3:2

John the Baptist says “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Repent Heb: *teshuvah* = “turn” Grk: *metanoeo* = “think differently” (from sin to God).

Grk *gar* = “for” (assigns a reason for statements) Think ‘because’ instead of ‘for’

“at hand” = lit. “near.” So the reason for repenting is that a significant occurrence was imminent. The Kingdom of heaven (heaven interchangeable with God) occurs 32/36 times in Matthew.

#### 3:3

The reason Matthew could report about John as being God’s messenger is that it had been prophesied by Isaiah (40:3). How can we know if someone claims to represent the Lord today was actually sent by Him? His message will be purely consistent with Scripture (cf. Mat 4:17). He will not bring new revelation (Heb 1:1-2). If he claims to be a prophet, he must be 100% accurate (Dt 18:22). What about the person’s appearance or behavior. Will that be an indicator of validity? John was poor and quirky – dressed in camel hair garments, ate locusts and honey. So you can’t look on the outside – it’s what’s inside that counts. And we should not discount someone because of an apparent lack of position or some behavioral oddity.

#### 3:5-7

Revival – everyone wants to experience this spiritual happening. And some Pharisees and Sadducees come down to see for themselves. It is important to have a proper understanding of who these people were. And the only way to do that is to know their history.

#### **History of the Sadducees and Pharisees**

When Judah went into Babylonian captivity, the people no longer had the ability to carry out Temple worship and the influence of the *cohanim*/priests was lessened. So the first spark was ignited among the people regarding a religious life centered around Torah alone. Then the Jewish people were allowed to return to Jerusalem. But only a small percentage did, about 50,000 in 4 waves, and this included the *cohanim* who resumed Temple worship. Over the centuries that followed they formed a party of priests and supporters of priestly authority. They became known as the *Tz’dukim* (Sadducees). Because of their emphasis on the Torah and temple worship, their beliefs were limited to what was established in Torah. They did not believe in the resurrection and the immortality of the soul or life after death, which became developed after the Torah as God’s full revelation was given in the prophets and the other writings of Scripture. Their focus was on the here and now, primarily on temple worship. So most of the Sadducees were priests or had formerly served as priests.

The great majority of the people stayed behind in Babylon, about one million altogether and they remained when Babylon was conquered by Persia. In fact it is estimated that 20% of the population at the height of the Persian Empire was made up of Jews. That is a very substantial number. And all this was taking place while the biblical account was continuing to unfold to the west in the land of Israel. So for those in Babylon/Persia, it required much

adaptation for practicing Judaism without the Temple and that meant considerable opinions how to do it.

Over time these opinions took on the weight of authority, and altogether they became an oral tradition that was regarded as being equally valid to the written Torah (considered the Word of God). Some of these sages eventually made their way to Jerusalem, but their form of Judaism remained the same as those who never left Babylon. You can see that similarity reflected in their respective writings – The Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. Both of these texts contained the oral commentaries of the ancient rabbis from their respective communities. The Babylonian version is larger because more rabbis lived there than in Jerusalem. By the time of Yeshua, these men who lived in Jerusalem were known as the *P'rushim* (Pharisees). According to Josephus they only numbered 6,000 (*Ant. 17.42*). Because of their openness to other opinions outside of Torah, they held beliefs that were more diverse than the Sadducees. The Pharisees did in fact believe in the resurrection and the immortality of the soul. And eventually they became the majority and formed the basis for Judaism after the destruction of the Temple.

So there were some fundamental differences in belief and practice between these 2 groups. But it is important to note that John's reaction by calling them a "brood of vipers" is not a reflection of their beliefs. After all, some of the Pharisees like Nicodemus and Paul became believers. But the problem was their attitudes....

### 3:9

John was aware of both parties' propensity toward elitism and superiority. Both groups were proud of their heritage and association with the patriarch Abraham. So John cuts them off before they even had a chance to act all snooty.

### 3:11-12

John gives some parallel between his act of baptism and the work of Yeshua. What are those parallels? Immersion in water ~ immersion in the H.S and Cleansing/purifying of water ~ cleansing/purification of the people/Israel (barn).

### 3:13-16

The baptism of Yeshua. Why was John reluctant to baptize Yeshua? He didn't need it – *mikveh* – He was ritually clean. He had committed no sin. Why did Yeshua have John baptize Him? To demonstrate His purity. To identify with sinful humanity. What does this passage teach about the ordinance of baptism? It is not the means of salvation.

### 3:17

Yeshua is identified as the Son of God in a rather clear manner.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Psalm 2:7

Proverbs 30:4

Daniel 7:13 (Son of Man)

### 4:3-4

Devil/Satan/Adversary attacks that reality – "If you are the Son of God..." What does that say about the tactics of Satan? He attempts to cause doubt, even when we have undeniable evidence of the truth. The Devil tempts Yeshua in three different ways that can also easily compare to the ways that he tempts us. After all, why re-invent something when it works so well?

**1st temptation** – Yeshua is hungry after fasting for 40 days.

“...command that these stones become bread.”

How would you characterize that kind of temptation? When we are vulnerable in some way, he tempts us to compromise our standards in order to satisfy that vulnerability. In Yeshua’s case, it would have negated His spiritual time of fasting and trivialized His authority, reducing His actions to self-indulgence rather than being purposeful. So Yeshua responds by quoting from the Torah in Deut 8:3. What does it mean to live on both bread and the Word of God? Life is not just about having your personal needs and desires met.

#### 4:4-5

**2nd temptation** – at the pinnacle of the temple (est. 450’ above the Kidron Valley below).

This temptation is a challenge regarding the Father’s declaration of love of the Son in 3:17. The Devil challenges Yeshua to prove the Father’s love by jumping off the side of the pinnacle, forcing the Father to use His angels to catch Yeshua and save Him. What does that say about the tactics of Satan? He knows what Scripture says and twists it for his purposes. He distorts our thinking by proposing ideas that are not part of God’s stated plan for humanity and this world, thus distracting us with empty speculation. Yeshua answers again by quoting from Torah (Deut 6:16) – “You shall not tempt Adonai your God.” Why would He respond that way? God is not a spiritual “force” that can be manipulated and used for human purposes.

#### 4:8-10

**3rd temptation** – at a high mountain

The Devil offers to make Yeshua king over all the nations of the world. He would just have to worship the one making the offer. What does that say about the temptations of Satan? He appeals to our human nature that craves power, wealth and pleasure. He tries to get us to compromise our integrity in the process (in this case it comes across like an illegal mafia deal). Yeshua answered by quoting from Deut 6:13, which addressed the primary issue – We are to worship and serve Adonai alone. But what about the other issue – Yeshua ruling over the nations? Why was it important for Yeshua to refuse to rule over the nations at that time? He had not yet earned the right to that rule. That would come when Yeshua was victorious over death. Eph 1:20-21 “...when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

#### 4:11

The angels came and ministered to Yeshua – provided the very things that the Devil was offering (food, angels bearing Him up, worshiping). That illustrates the importance of waiting upon the Lord for our needs and desires, for His provision in His timing.

#### 4:12-16

John gets arrested – Yeshua carries on alone. He leaves His hometown of Nazareth and goes to *K’far Nachum* (Capernaum). In this section Matthew employs a *remez* (hinting) interpretation.

Read Isa 9:1-2. The prophet declared that in particular darkness would come upon the region of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, but later on a great light would be revealed there and the people would see it. The prophecy did not say specifically what that light would be, but the hint at recognizing it would be an association between the 2 tribal lands. Nazareth was in the land of

Zebulun and Capernaum was in the land of Naphtali. And Matthew recognized that Yeshua was bringing true spiritual light into the world. So when His first 2 places of ministry were in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, Matthew rightly identified that moment as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

#### 4:17

Yeshua echoes the exact same words of John – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” But John was announcing the kingdom of God; Yeshua was inaugurating - implementing it. So we will see various aspects of the kingdom developed as we go along.

But a couple of points should be noted now – The kingdom of God is not a place and it is not a period of time. It is the state of humanity existing under the reign of God and becoming free from the consequences of sin and death and disease. In addition, the kingdom would be given progressively – it is both present and yet to come in its totality. Thus we should expect to see these aspects of the kingdom being revealed in this gospel, which is describing the coming of the kingdom. Some aspects are manifested right away....

#### 4:18-22

What impresses you about the way that the first disciples responded to Yeshua's call for them to follow Him? They dropped everything. They recognized it as being the most important thing they could do.

#### 4:23-25

The passages foretelling the kingdom of God like Isa 61:1; 65:27-25 include descriptions of freedom from sin and disease. So it should be no surprise that Yeshua immediately began implementing kingdom characteristics by healing people from a variety of illnesses. And, as a result, we are told that a multitude began following Him.