

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 3

KEY PEOPLE & TERMS FROM MATTHEW 3

PHARISEES - "A LAYMEN'S FELLOWSHIP, POPULAR WITH THE COMMON PEOPLE AND CONNECTED TO LOCAL SYNAGOGUES, CHIEFLY CHARACTERIZED BY ADHERENCE TO EXTENSIVE EXTRABIBLICAL TRADITIONS, WHICH THEY RIGOROUSLY OBEYED AS A MEANS OF APPLYING THE LAW TO DAILY LIFE (ESV STUDY BIBLE)." PHARISEES WERE ZEALOUS TO KEEP THE LAWS OF MOSES AND OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES AS JESUS' CHIEF OPPONENTS IN THE GOSPELS.

SADDUCEES - "A SMALL GROUP WHO DERIVED THEIR AUTHORITY FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TEMPLE. THEY WERE REMOVED FROM THE COMMON PEOPLE BY ARISTOCRATIC AND PRIESTLY INFLUENCE AS WELL AS BY THEIR COOPERATION WITH ROME'S RULE" (ESV STUDY BIBLE). SADDUCEES TYPICALLY DID NOT BELIEVE IN SOME OF THE MORE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS OF JUDAISM - EX: THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, ANGELS & DEMONS.

JOHN THE BAPTIST - JOHN WAS RELATED TO JESUS THROUGH MARY'S RELATIVES ZACHARIAH AND ELIZABETH (LUKE 1). HE WAS A BOLD AND STRANGE FIGURE. "JOHN'S APPEARANCE (CAMEL HAIR) WOULD HAVE EVOKED IMAGES OF PROPHECIES ABOUT "ELIJAH," WHO WAS TO RETURN TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR GOD'S WRATHFUL APPEARANCE (CF. 2 KINGS 1:8; MAL. 3:1; 4:5-6). JOHN'S GARMENTS WERE COMMON TO NOMADIC DESERT DWELLERS AND THUS WERE ASSOCIATED WITH POORER PEOPLE. LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY WERE NOT AN UNUSUAL SOURCE OF FOOD FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN THE DESERT. THE DESERT LOCUST IS A LARGE GRASSHOPPER, STILL EATEN TODAY BY POORER PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA." (ESV STUDY BIBLE). LEVITICUS 11:20-23 PERMITS EATING SUCH INSECTS. HIS LIFESTYLE VISIBLY DEMONSTRATES THAT HE HAS REJECTED THE LUXURIES OF LIFE. THOUGH JOHN APPEARS HERE AND THEN A FEW OTHER TIMES IN THE GOSPELS BEFORE HIS EARLY EXECUTION, (MATTHEW 14) HIS MINISTRY WAS WIDELY SUCCESSFUL AND FAR REACHING - BEYOND WHAT WE READ IN THE GOSPELS ALONE. (EX: ACTS 19).

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - THE EXPRESSION "KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" IS TYPICALLY RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. FOUND ONLY IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL (33X), "KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" IS INTERCHANGEABLE WITH THE EXPRESSION "KINGDOM OF GOD", WHICH IS FOUND IN THE OTHER GOSPELS (CP 19:23-24, MK 10:24-25, LK 19: 24-25). MATTHEW'S "KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" REFLECTS THE HEBREW EXPRESSION *MAŁKUT SAMAYIM*, FOUND ABUNDANTLY IN JEWISH LITERATURE. A FEELING OF REVERENCE & A DESIRE TO NOT BLASPHEME INADVERTENTLY THE NAME OF GOD (EX. 20:7) LED THE JEWS AT AN EARLY DAY TO AVOID AS FAR AS POSSIBLE ALL MENTION OF THE NAME OF GOD. "HEAVEN" IS ONE OF THE USUAL SUBSTITUTIONS FOR THE NAME OF GOD..." (MICHAEL WIKINS, "NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY: MATTHEW", PAGE 132). THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN/GOD IS THE PHRASE WHICH ENCAPSULATES THE BIBLICAL HOPE, ROOTED IN THE OT COVENANTS AND PROMISES - WHEN GOD IS AGAIN KING OVER THE EARTH AND ALL EVIL AND WRONG IS REMOVED. IT IS SEEN IN EDEN, HOPED FOR THROUGH ABRAHAM, MOSES & DAVID & DREAMED OF THROUGH THE PROPHETS. THIS IS A MAJOR THEME OF MATTHEW & IT'S ASSUMED THE READER ALREADY KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS.

MATTHEW 3:1-6 - JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY BEGINS

V. 3 - QUOTE FROM ISAIAH 40:3

JOHN'S MINISTRY WAS TO PREPARE THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL FOR THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH. HE PREACHED A MESSAGE WITH A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON REPENTANCE AND THE COMING JUDGMENT. HIS PRACTICE OF BAPTISM (IN WATER) WAS A SYMBOL OF CLEANSING AND A NEW

BEGINNING. IT'S ALSO LIKELY THAT HIS MINISTRY LOCATION (WILDERNESS AND JORDAN RIVER, V.1 & 6) IS SYMBOLIC OF ISRAEL'S OWN JOURNEY FROM WILDERNESS TO PROMISED LAND.

"JOHN'S MESSAGE SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF EVERY STRATUM OF ISRAEL. BUT THEY DO NOT GO OUT JUST TO WATCH A SHOW. IT WAS NO EASY MATTER TO GO INTO THE DESERT, ESPECIALLY FOR CITY DWELLERS. BUT, GRIPPED BY HIS STARTLING DECLARATION OF THE NEARNESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM, THEY DEMONSTRATE THEIR REPENTANCE BY 'CONFESSING THEIR SINS'". (WILKINS, PAGE 134)

MATTHEW 3:7-12 - JOHN'S MESSAGE

JOHN "CALLS FOR THE PEOPLE TO GET THEMSELVES READY - TO PREPARE THEIR HEART AND LIFE - FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE COMING ONE WITH THE KING OF HEAVEN. IN THIS SENSE, THEN, WE CAN SAY THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, BUT THE FULL MANIFESTATION OF THAT KINGDOM HAS NOT YET ARRIVED (WILKINS, PAGE 132)."

JOHN ENCOURAGED TRUE REPENTANCE (μετάνοια *METANOIA*), WHICH BEGINS WITH AN INTERNAL CHANGE OF MIND THAT MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY OBSERVABLE CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR.

Q - WHAT WAS ONE OF THE EXCUSES THAT JOHN ADDRESSES IN THIS PASSAGE THAT POTENTIALLY WOULD DISCOURAGE SOMEONE FROM REPENTING?

V. 11 - JOHN'S BAPTISM WAS ALSO A PICTURE OF THE "GREATER BAPTISM" THAT WOULD BE DONE BY THE MESSIAH - A BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BAPTISM IN FIRE. (THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TO BE BAPTIZED BECAUSE THEY RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT). THE TWO BAPTISMS OF THE MESSIAH ARE ONE OF SALVATION (HOLY SPIRIT) AND/OR ONE OF JUDGMENT (FIRE). VERSES 11 AND 12 MUST BE READ TOGETHER TO UNDERSTAND THE FULL MEANING. WITH THE COMING MESSIAH YOU ARE EITHER IN THE BARN OR THE BONFIRE BASED ON YOUR RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE AND MOMENT.

V. 12 - WINNOWER - A (1) : TO REMOVE (SOMETHING, SUCH AS CHAFF) BY A CURRENT OF AIR. (2) TO TREAT (SOMETHING, SUCH AS GRAIN) BY EXPOSURE TO A CURRENT OF AIR SO THAT WASTE MATTER IS ELIMINATED (SOURCE: MERRIAM WEBSTER DICTIONARY VIA M-W.COM)

Q - HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE JOHN'S MINISTRY?

Q - WHAT CHALLENGES YOU PERSONALLY FROM JOHN'S MESSAGE?

MATTHEW 3:13-17 - JESUS' BAPTISM

JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN NOT BECAUSE HE NEEDED TO REPENT OF HIS SINS BUT TO SERVE AS A TRANSITORY MOMENT IN THEIR OVERLAPPING MINISTRIES, TO SIGNAL THE START OF JESUS' OWN MINISTRY AND TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE FOR JESUS' OWN FOLLOWERS.

IT IS ALSO A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT IN THAT GOD PRONOUNCES HIS FAVOR AND LOVE FOR JESUS IN THIS MOMENT, ALLUDING TO ISAIAH 42:1:

ISAIAH 42:1 - "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT, WHOM I UPHOLD; MY CHOSEN ONE IN WHOM MY SOUL DELIGHTS. I HAVE PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM; HE WILL BRING FORTH JUSTICE TO THE NATIONS.

THE LORD HAD NOT SPOKEN DIRECTLY IN 400 YEARS AND NOW SPEAKS ONCE AGAIN TO SPOTLIGHT HIS SON JESUS - WHO WILL SPEAK AND EMBODY THE WORD OF THE GOD (HEBREWS 1:1-2, JOHN 1:14)