

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 1 (PART 3)

LAST TIME WE LOOKED AT THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT OF JOSEPH & MARY'S BETROTHAL AND THE OPTIONS JOSEPH WOULD HAVE HAD BASED ON THE MOSAIC LAW'S DIRECTIVES FOR WHEN A WOMAN IS FOUND PREGNANT OUT OF WEDLOCK. MARY KNOWS THAT THE CHILD IS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BUT JOSEPH LEARNS LATER BY A DREAM (MATTHEW 1:18-21). THE DREAM'S MESSAGE IS CONSEQUENTIAL: NOT ONLY TO QUELL JOSEPH'S FEAR AND CONFUSION BUT ALSO TO ANNOUNCE THE PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHILD.

MATTHEW 1:18-19, 20-25 - ANGELIC VISITOR FILLS IN THE DETAILS

THE ANGEL TELLS JOSEPH TO "NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE MARY AS YOUR WIFE" (V. 20) BASED ON THE FACT THAT THIS IS GOD'S DOING. THE ANGEL THEN TELLS JOSEPH THAT THE CHILD IS GOING TO BE THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. EVEN THOUGH THIS INFORMATION COMES VIA ANGEL, THAT'S STILL A LOT TO PROCESS!

A FEW KEY TERMS:

"JOSEPH SON OF DAVID" - THE ANGEL CALLS TO JOSEPH WITH A REFERENCE TO HIS DAVIDIC LINEAGE.

"JESUS" - (GK. *Ἰησοῦς*) WAS THE HISTORICAL, EVERYDAY NAME, AND IS *YESHUA' / YEHOShUA'* (JOSHUA) IN HEBREW, MEANING "YAHWEH SAVES" (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

"FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS..." - THIS IS A REFERENCE TO THE MEANING OF THE NAME "JESUS". IT'S COMMON IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE TO REFERENCE THE MEANING OF A NAME AT THE TIME OF THE GIVING OF THE NAME. HERE ARE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES:

GENESIS 5:29 - NOW HE CALLED HIS NAME NOAH, SAYING, "THIS ONE WILL GIVE US REST FROM OUR WORK AND FROM THE TOIL OF OUR HANDS ARISING FROM THE GROUND WHICH THE LORD HAS CURSED."

THE NAME "NOAH" IS RELATED TO THE HEBREW WORD FOR "REST" OR "RELIEF"

GENESIS 17:5 - "NO LONGER SHALL YOUR NAME BE CALLED ABRAHAM, BUT YOUR NAME SHALL BE ABRAHAM; FOR I WILL MAKE YOU THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS."

THE NAME ABRAHAM MEANS "EXALTED FATHER" OR "FATHER OF MANY"

EXODUS 2:10 - THE CHILD GREW, AND SHE BROUGHT HIM TO PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER AND HE BECAME HER SON. AND SHE NAMED HIM MOSES, AND SAID, "BECAUSE I DREW HIM OUT OF THE WATER."

THE NAME MOSES SOUNDS LIKE THE HEBREW WORD "DRAWING OUT"

SIMILAR STORIES ARE TOLD OF JACOB/ISRAEL AND HIS 12 SONS AND OTHER BIBLICAL FIGURES. MATTHEW USES THIS COMMON BIBLICAL PATTERN WHEN ANNOUNCING JESUS (JOSHUA), "THE ONE WHO WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS". THE MOST WELL KNOWN "JOSHUA" LED ISRAEL INTO

THE PROMISED LAND, THE FINAL STAGE OF GOD'S SALVATION OF THE PEOPLE FROM THEIR SLAVERY IN EGYPT AND FROM THE PAGAN NATIONS OF CANAAN. THIS GREATER "JOSHUA" WASN'T GOING TO SIMPLY SAVE THE PEOPLE FROM THEIR POLITICAL OR MILITARY ENEMIES - BUT FROM THEIR GREATEST ENEMIES - SIN AND DEATH. JESUS, A FITTING NAME FOR THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

"IMMANUEL" - THIS NAME COMES FROM A PROPHECY IN ISAIAH 7 WHICH HAS A DOUBLE MEANING - A MEANING FOR ISAIAH'S DAY AND A GREATER MEANING FULFILLED IN JESUS. YOU CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE WAY THE WORD IS USED IN MATTHEW IF YOU DON'T ALREADY KNOW THE WAY THE TERM WAS USED IN ISAIAH.

IN ISAIAH'S DAY, THE NATION OF JUDAH WAS FACING A VERY SERIOUS THREAT FROM TWO INVADING ARMIES (ARAM AND THE NORTHERN KINGDOM ISRAEL). THIS WAS DURING KING AHAZ'S REIGN IN JERUSALEM. ACCORDING TO 2 CHRONICLES 28, ENEMY ARMIES ATTACK AS A CONSEQUENCE OF KING AHAZ'S EVIL.

2 CHRONICLES 28:1-4 - AHAZ'S SINFUL REIGN

2 CHRONICLES 28:5-8 - ARAM AND ISRAEL AFFLICT JUDAH

SIN, IDOLATRY AND EVIL ABOUND. WHILE GOD'S TEMPLE IS PHYSICALLY IN JERUSALEM AND A KING RELATED TO DAVID SITS ON A THRONE, THEY ARE ONLY EMPTY SYMBOLS DEVOID OF THEIR SPIRITUAL POWER. THE LAND OF JUDAH HAS BEEN OVERRUN BY ARAM & ISRAEL AND NOW THEY ARE TURNING THEIR SIGHTS ON JERUSALEM.

IF THERE WERE ANY FAITHFUL PEOPLE LEFT IN JUDAH AND JERUSALEM, THEY WERE SCARCE AND SCARED. IF ANY GODLY PEOPLE REMAINED, THEY SURELY WOULD HAVE WONDERED - *"WITH ALL THE EVIL THAT HAS BEEN DONE, COULD GOD STILL BE WITH US?" HAVE WE FALLEN TOO FAR? IS HIS COVENANT PROMISE STILL IN EFFECT? IS THE GOD OF ABRAHAM STILL FOR US, STILL WITH US?*

WITH THE CITY OF JERUSALEM UNDER THREAT OF ATTACK, GOD TELLS THE PROPHET ISAIAH TO GO TO JERUSALEM AND MEET WITH THE KING. THINK ABOUT HOW A CITY WOULD HAVE BEEN FEARFUL AND ANXIOUS KNOWING AN ATTACK COULD HAPPEN AT ANY TIME. AND IN THIS CONTEXT, GOD TELLS ISAIAH TO NOT ONLY GO AND SEE THE KING, BUT TO BRING HIS OWN SON WITH HIM - SOMETHING YOU WOULDN'T NORMALLY DO IN A WARZONE! ISAIAH IS GOING TO BRING HIS CHILD WITH HIM AND IS TOLD TO BE COURAGEOUS AS HE GOES TO DEMONSTRATE TO KING AHAZ THAT ISAIAH IS NOT AFRAID BECAUSE GOD IS WITH HIM.

HERE IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS:

ISAIAH 7:3-4 - THEN THE LORD SAID TO ISAIAH, "GO OUT NOW TO MEET AHAZ, YOU AND YOUR SON SHEAR-JASHUB, AT THE END OF THE CONDUIT OF THE UPPER POOL, ON THE HIGHWAY TO THE FULLER'S FIELD, 4 AND SAY TO HIM, '**TAKE CARE AND BE CALM, HAVE NO FEAR AND DO NOT BE FAINTHEARTED** (*IN THE FACE OF THE THREAT OF THESE TWO KINGS*)...

THE LORD SPEAKS TO THE KING THROUGH ISAIAH AND SAYS THAT THE LORD IS GOING TO FIGHT FOR HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES. THE LORD TELLS THEM THAT EVEN THOUGH THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM HAVE SINNED AND DON'T "DESERVE" GOD'S HELP OR LOVE, HE IS GIVING IT TO THEM BECAUSE HE IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS. HE IS SAVING THEM, AND NOT ABANDONING THEM IN THIS MOMENT OF CRISIS (PLEASE READ ISAIAH 7 FOR ALL THE DETAILS). GOD SAYS OF THE POTENTIAL ATTACK AND DEFEAT:

ISAIAH 7:7 - THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD: "IT SHALL NOT STAND NOR SHALL IT COME TO PASS.

THEN, BEFORE ISAIAH (AND HIS SON) LEAVE THE KING, ISAIAH OFFERS THE KING A "SIGN" OF HOPE THAT THESE THINGS WILL SURELY COME TO PASS. HERE IS THE EXCHANGE:

ISAIAH 7:10-13 (NLT) - LATER, THE LORD SENT THIS MESSAGE TO KING AHAZ: 11 "ASK THE LORD YOUR GOD FOR A SIGN OF CONFIRMATION, AHAZ. MAKE IT AS DIFFICULT AS YOU WANT-- AS HIGH AS HEAVEN OR AS DEEP AS THE PLACE OF THE DEAD."

12 BUT THE KING REFUSED. "NO," HE SAID, "I WILL NOT TEST THE LORD LIKE THAT." 13 THEN ISAIAH SAID, "LISTEN WELL, YOU ROYAL FAMILY OF DAVID! ISN'T IT ENOUGH TO EXHAUST HUMAN PATIENCE? MUST YOU EXHAUST THE PATIENCE OF MY GOD AS WELL?"

IN OTHER WORDS, IF THE LORD SAYS: "I'LL GIVE YOU A SIGN THAT MY WORD WILL COME TO PASS - GO AHEAD AND ASK FOR ANY KIND OF SIGN YOU WANT" - ASK FOR A SIGN! SINCE KING AHAZ DOESN'T ASK FOR A SIGN, THE LORD HIMSELF SAYS HE WILL PROVIDE THE "SIGN". AND WHAT IS THIS SIGN SIGNIFYING? THAT GOD IS GOING TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR ENEMIES. THAT'S A KEY POINT TO CONNECTING THE DOTS FROM ISAIAH 7 AND MATTHEW 1.

HERE IS WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

ISAIAH 7:14-16 (NLT) - ALL RIGHT THEN, THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU THE SIGN. LOOK! THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE A CHILD! SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON AND WILL CALL HIM IMMANUEL (WHICH MEANS 'GOD IS WITH US'). 15 BY THE TIME THIS CHILD IS OLD ENOUGH TO CHOOSE WHAT IS RIGHT AND REJECT WHAT IS WRONG, HE WILL BE EATING YOGURT AND HONEY. 16 FOR BEFORE THE CHILD IS THAT OLD, THE LANDS OF THE TWO KINGS YOU FEAR SO MUCH WILL BOTH BE DESERTED.

IN THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT OF ISAIAH 7 THE BIRTH OF A CHILD WAS GOING TO BE THE SIGN THAT GOD WAS STILL WITH HIS PEOPLE AND THAT HE WAS GOING TO SAVE THEM. HE USES A CHILD AND REFERENCES HOW OLD THE CHILD WILL BE AS A TIMELINE TO FOLLOW FOR WHEN THESE THINGS WILL HAPPEN.

SOMEWHERE IN JUDAH AT THE TIME OF ISAIAH 7 A WOMEN WHO WAS CURRENTLY A VIRGIN WAS GOING TO GET PREGNANT - SHE WOULD HAVE A SON, NAME HIM IMMANUEL AND THEN THE CHILD WOULD AGE TO THE POINT OF BEING ABLE TO EAT YOGURT AND HONEY (WE KNOW THAT NEWBORNS SHOULD NOT EAT HONEY UNTIL THEY ARE AT LEAST 1 YEARS OLD BECAUSE OF A THREAT OF BOTULISM PRIOR TO THAT BASED ON THEIR INTESTINAL DEVELOPMENT). IN OTHER WORDS, BEFORE THE CHILD TURNS 1, THE TWO KINGS WILL NO LONGER BE A THREAT.

THE BIRTH OF THIS CHILD IS THE SIGN THAT GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE STILL. THEY ARE AFRAID AND FACING CERTAIN DEATH BECAUSE OF A STRONG ENEMY - AND GOD SAYS - HOLD ON A SECOND - A VIRGIN IS GOING TO HAVE A BABY AND THAT BABY BEING BORN IS GOING TO BE THE SIGN THAT GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE AND GOD IS GOING TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE!

AS YOU READ ON TO CHAPTER 8, THIS PHRASE "GOD IS WITH US" WILL BE USED AGAIN TO REMIND THE PEOPLE OF GOD OF THIS PROMISE, WITH A PLAY ON WORDS BASED ON THIS CHILD'S NAME. ISAIAH PROPHETICALLY SPEAKS TO THE ENEMIES AGAINST GOD'S PEOPLE THE FOLLOWING:

ISAIAH 8:9-10 (NLT) - "HUDDLE TOGETHER, YOU NATIONS, AND BE TERRIFIED. LISTEN, ALL YOU DISTANT LANDS. PREPARE FOR BATTLE, BUT YOU WILL BE CRUSHED! YES, PREPARE FOR BATTLE, BUT YOU WILL BE CRUSHED! 10 CALL YOUR COUNCILS OF WAR, BUT THEY WILL BE WORTHLESS. DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGIES, BUT THEY WILL NOT SUCCEED. FOR GOD IS WITH US!" (HEBREW: IMMANUEL)

SO, WHILE THIS IS A LOT OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY AND PROPHECY, IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW AND REMEMBER THESE THINGS IN THIS CONTEXT BECAUSE MATTHEW *SURELY KNOWS* THE STORY OF ISAIAH 7, AND SO DOES JOSEPH. IN THE TIME OF ISAIAH 7, A CHILD WAS GOING

TO BE THE SIGN THAT GOD HAD NOT ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE AND THAT HE WAS STILL WITH THEM. IN MATTHEW 1:18, A CHILD WILL BE BORN THAT WILL BE THE SIGN THAT GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE AND IS STILL WITH THEM.

IN ISAIAH'S TIME A VIRGIN WOULD HAVE GOTTEN MARRIED AND THEN GOTTEN PREGNANT AND THEN DELIVERED A CHILD NAMED "IMMANUEL." IN MATTHEW, GOD DOES ONE BETTER - A VIRGIN IS GOING TO BECOME PREGNANT (WHILE STILL A VIRGIN!) BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GIVE BIRTH TO A CHILD WHO WILL BE THE SON OF GOD - THE GREATEST DEMONSTRATION TO THE WORLD THAT "GOD IS WITH US."

JOSEPH AND MARY ARE LIVING IN A CHALLENGING TIME IN HISTORY - A PAGAN AND IMMORAL EMPIRE RULES ISRAEL, THERE IS NO DAVIDIC MONARCHY, AND THE POWERFUL AND DIRECT PROPHETIC MINISTRY OF ISAIAH'S DAY SEEMS LIKE A LEGEND. SURELY THEY WOULD HAVE WONDERED - *"WITH ALL THE EVIL THAT HAS BEEN DONE, COULD GOD STILL BE WITH US?" HAVE WE FALLEN TOO FAR? IS HIS COVENANT PROMISE STILL IN EFFECT? IS THE GOD OF ABRAHAM STILL FOR US, IS HE STILL WITH US?*

AND THEN...

LUKE 1:26-35 - NOW IN THE SIXTH MONTH THE ANGEL GABRIEL WAS SENT FROM GOD TO A CITY IN GALILEE CALLED NAZARETH, 27 TO A VIRGIN ENGAGED TO A MAN WHOSE NAME WAS JOSEPH, OF THE DESCENDANTS OF DAVID; AND THE VIRGIN'S NAME WAS MARY. 28 AND COMING IN, HE SAID TO HER, "GREETINGS, FAVORED ONE! THE LORD IS WITH YOU. 29 BUT SHE WAS VERY PERPLEXED AT THIS STATEMENT, AND KEPT PONDERING WHAT KIND OF SALUTATION THIS WAS.

30 THE ANGEL SAID TO HER, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY; FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD. 31 "AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BEAR A SON, AND YOU SHALL NAME HIM JESUS. 32 "HE WILL BE GREAT AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH; AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID; 33 AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER, AND HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END."

34 MARY SAID TO THE ANGEL, "HOW CAN THIS BE, SINCE I AM A VIRGIN?" 35 THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID TO HER, "THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL OVERSHADOW YOU; AND FOR THAT REASON THE HOLY CHILD SHALL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD.

THE NAME IMMANUEL IS NOT SO MUCH JESUS' LITERAL NAME BUT MORE A REFERENCE TO THE PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS BIRTH IN PARALLEL TO THE ORIGINAL USAGE. THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS THE GREATEST SIGN IN HISTORY OF GOD BEING WITH US - RATHER THAN ABANDONING US - JESUS WILL AND HAS SAVED US FROM OUR SINS!! REMEMBER, MATTHEW 1:23 IS AN OLD TESTAMENT QUOTE AND COMES ON THE HEELS OF VERSE 22 WHICH SAYS: "NOW ALL THIS TOOK PLACE TO FULFILL WHAT WAS SPOKEN BY THE LORD THROUGH THE PROPHET:" AND THEN VERSE 23 QUOTES THE PROPHET.

JESUS IS NOT THE FIRST JOSHUA, HE IS THE GREATEST. JESUS IS NOT THE FIRST IMMAUEL, HE IS THE GREATEST.

MATTHEW 1:24-25 - JOSEPH'S REACTION TO THE ANGEL

JOSEPH "DID AS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD COMMANDED HIM." IF THAT ISN'T A GOOD SUMMARY OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PERSON OF FAITH, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS! JOSEPH, A FIGURE WE DON'T KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT FROM SCRIPTURE IS A MAN OF KINDNESS (WANTED TO PUT MARY AWAY PRIVATELY RATHER THAN THROUGH PUBLIC DISGRACE, V. 19), A MAN OF WISDOM (HE WAS CONSIDERING WHAT TO DO ABOUT MARY'S PREGNANCY RATHER THAN JUMPING TO RASH CONCLUSIONS, V. 20), AND A MAN OF HUMILITY (HE OBEYS THE ANGEL AND KEEPS MARY A VIRGIN TILL SHE GAVE BIRTH TO JESUS, V. 24).

HIS PLANS ARE COMPLETELY TURNED UPSIDE DOWN. HE GETS MARRIED TO MARY RISKING HIS OWN PUBLIC DISGRACE BECAUSE OF THE TIMING OF HER PREGNANCY AND THEIR BETROTHAL. HE BECOMES A FATHER BUT NOT OF HIS OWN BIOLOGICAL DOING. HE WILL ADJUST HIS LIFE PLANS AND DREAMS IN LIGHT OF GOD'S PLANS AND PURPOSES.

HE DOES THIS BECAUSE GOD'S PLANS AND PURPOSES WERE BIGGER AND BETTER THAN JOSEPH'S. HE DID THIS BECAUSE HE WAS AWARE OF GOD'S DESIRE AND WILL. HE DID THIS BECAUSE JOSEPH WAS A DESCENDANT OF ABRAHAM AND DAVID, RAHAB AND RUTH, HEZEKIAH AND ZERUBBABEL - MEN AND WOMEN WHO COMMITTED THEIR LIVES AND THEIR WAYS AND THEIR PLANS TO THE LORD AND WHO SAID "NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE". AS THEY SAID THIS AND LIVED IN LIGHT OF THIS, THEY EXPERIENCED GOD FIRSTHAND AND SAW THEIR OWN LIVES BE A PART OF GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN! JOSEPH KNEW THAT LIVING FOR GOD WAS BETTER THAN MARRYING AND MARRIAGE, LIVING FOR GOD WAS BETTER THAN BEING A PARENT OR GRANDPARENT. JOSEPH BELIEVED THAT TRUSTING GOD WAS BETTER THAN SELF-RELIANCE. JOSEPH BELIEVED THAT OBEDIENCE WAS BETTER THAN PLOTTING HIS OWN COURSE. JOSEPH BELIEVED ETERNITY WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN IMMEDIACY.

JOSEPH'S FAITH AND HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE AND SURRENDER ARE ON FULL DISPLAY IN JUST THESE SHORT CLOSING VERSES OF CHAPTER 1 - AND WHILE JESUS' GREATEST TEACHER AND EXAMPLE AND MODEL WAS HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN, JOSEPH WASN'T A BAD HUMAN EXAMPLE AND MODEL FOR THE ONE WHO WOULD EMBODY FAITH AND HUMILITY, OBEDIENCE AND SURRENDER FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD.