

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JESUS THE MESSIAH
WEEK 7 – “. . . THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED” - JESUS FULFILLED OT
PROPHECY

Matthew is presenting Jesus as King. In chapter 1, Matthew presented Jesus as King by virtue of His birth – His lineage. In Matthew chapter 2, he presented Him as King by virtue of the circumstances that surrounded His birth. The Magi honored Him as the King of the Jews. Herod hated Him – thinking that he, Herod, would lose his crown to this Child – who was a threat to Herod’s throne. Therefore, Herod acknowledged Jesus as King.

In the Gospel of Luke, following the birth day of Jesus, we are told of three ceremonies following Jesus’ birth. Firstly, it’s crucial to note that these ceremonies were followed because Jesus was born of a woman, under the law – He had to fulfill every aspect of the law.

Luke 2:21-23 – *“And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”*

Circumcision (Luke 2:21; Lev. 12:3)

The eighth day after birth, the ceremonial surgery took place that set a male child apart as a son of Israel. The procedure was usually performed by the father.

Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen. 17). Circumcision symbolizes the need to cut away sin and to be cleansed! It was the male organ which most clearly demonstrated the depth of depravity because it carried the seed that produced depraved sinners. Circumcision symbolizes the need for a profoundly deep cleansing – to reverse the effects of depravity.

Even if the eighth day of the newborn’s life fell on the Sabbath, when work of any kind was forbidden, circumcision could be performed. Over the years it became the custom to hold the circumcision and the naming of the child on the same day (Luke 1:59; 2:21) – though it wasn’t prescribed by the Mosaic Law.

Redemption of the firstborn (Luke 2:23; Num. 18:15-16; Ex. 13:2)

Since the firstborn of Israel, of both man and animal, were untouched by the 10th plague in Egypt (death of the first born in all homes where Passover was not observed) – it was fitting that the firstborn of Israel be set aside – consecrated to the Lord for His purposes. (The children of Israel were people belonging to God through the covenants. He had redeemed them from bondage in Egypt.) A firstborn son was to be considered especially set apart – holy unto the Lord - for and belonging to the Lord – for His

purposes. Soon after he was a month old, he was to be taken to the Temple and a redemption price of five shekels was to be paid to the priest in the child's behalf.

Purification after childbirth (Luke 2:22, 24; Lev. 12)

For forty days after the birth of a son, a Jewish woman was required to avoid the Temple and all religious ceremonies (for a daughter – eighty days). Scripture does not mention who was in the Temple for Jesus' circumcision and naming. This was considered her time of "purification." On the forty-first day, she could be declared ceremonially clean if she went to the Temple and made two offerings – a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove for a sin offering.

Lev. 12:8 – *“And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.”*

It is estimated that the trip from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem for these last two ceremonies was made when Jesus was approx. six weeks old. The circumcision and purification ceremonies were necessary as a reminder that we are all born in sin ([Psalm 51:5](#)). Jesus *could* have been excused because He was not born in sin. Yet, we see Him even as a baby, identifying with sinners, as He did at His baptism and on the cross.

The Messiah Watchers

Israel has been a nation in waiting. They've always been a nation in waiting. God promised them a Redeemer – the Messiah – the Kingdom of God. Waiting exhibits dependence upon God!

Zacharias had been watching for the Messiah, evidenced in his blessing in Luke 1:68-79. God has visited His people as He had promised.

And we read of Simeon. . . .

Luke 2:25-35 – *“And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.' And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'”*

Simeon believed he was seeing God's salvation in personal form – the light by which the Lord would reveal Himself not only to Israel but to “all peoples.” This was a fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Simeon spoke prophetically of this Child:

- He will cause many people to fall. To those who rejected Him, He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (I Pet. 2:8).
- He will cause many people to rise (John 5:21; 11:25-26 – Jesus is the resurrection and the life)
- He will be opposed and rejected (John 1:10-11- the world that He created did not know Him; He came unto His own and His own didn't receive Him) (Luke 2:34)
- He will expose the thoughts of people's hearts (John 3:19-21 – men love darkness rather than light – because light exposes who they are) (Luke 2:35)

We see Anna in the Temple, thanking God. Anna also recognized the Child as the One Who would bring about “redemption in Jerusalem.”

Luke 2:36-38 – “Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

Matthew 2 clearly reveals that Jesus, in the events around His birth, fulfilled Old Testament prophecy – which strengthens his message regarding Jesus as King. These prophecies concern locations: Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, and Ramah. These prophecies are usually overlooked. But, they shouldn't be overlooked. These prophecies have been seen as “complex” – which further proves to us that the birth of Jesus could not have been in any way coincidental!

Bethlehem – when the Magi travel to Jerusalem, they approach Herod the King and ask “Where is this king to be born? We have seen His star.” Herod calls his scribes and they bring out the scrolls and read Micah 5:2

Why is Bethlehem mentioned in the book of Micah? Briefly, Micah's message is a message of destruction. Destruction is going to come upon the northern kingdom, Israel, and destruction is going to come upon the southern kingdom, Judah. God, through Micah, directs much of His assault on the leaders in those two kingdoms. In the midst of God's message through Micah – a message that brings to the people the recognition, again, of the wretchedness of their leadership – we read in Micah 5:2 that a ruler will be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (northern side of Bethlehem – closer to Jerusalem – closer to the Temple) – and this Ruler will be One Whose days are from everlasting! This Ruler is the Messiah – He is God in the flesh – Immanuel!

Psalm 78:70-71 – “He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.”

The Messiah would be from the line of David. We have an explicit Old Testament prophesy that says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem and He was.

We next have the prophecy concerning Egypt – following the Magi’s visit:

Matthew 2:13 – *“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’”*

It was the middle of the night after the Magi had left to return to Babylon/Persia. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and spoke with urgency. The Magi had not returned to “report” to Herod, but had taken another route. Herod raged (as he very often did). That night Herod ordered a regiment of his soldiers to go to Bethlehem, break into every home, and to kill every male child two years old and younger. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were on their way to Egypt. The trip from Bethlehem into Egypt would have been more than 150 miles.

Historical documentation reports that thousands of Jewish refugees (perhaps some relatives of Joseph and Mary) lived in a number of Egyptian cities. These Jewish refugees fled Israel during the Intertestamental period – the 430 years between the close of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew – which Hellenism was being forced upon Jewish people and there was much persecution.

It’s recorded that a million Jewish people lived in Alexandria alone (about 300 miles from Bethlehem). This is found in a treatise written by Philo (an Egyptian Jew) 40 years after the birth of Jesus.

Why Egypt? Couldn’t they have returned to Nazareth? The answer is in Matthew 2:14-15 - *“When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’”*

“Out of Egypt did I call My Son” - ???

Jesus, as a Child, goes to Egypt, into exile, so that he can be called out of Egypt and fulfill the prophecy. Where was it prophesied in the OT? In Hosea 11:1 – *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”* God is speaking of when He led Israel out of Egypt at the first Passover. Where is Jesus in Hosea 11:1? Israel is a type of the Messiah. A “type” is an analogy – a type will take a person or an inanimate object and compare it to another person or inanimate object only in certain ways, perhaps only in one way.

Israel’s very existence points to the Messiah. Israel brought the Messiah into the world and Israel, upon their restoration, their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation, will cause Jesus to return. (Hosea 5:15 – “I will return again to My place until they acknowledge their offense”; Matt. 23:39 – “You will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.’”).

“Out of Egypt” – as the Messianic Nation, Israel, was called out of Egypt, so was the Messiah Himself. Israel’s destiny is connected to the Messiah – it’s wrapped up in the Messiah! Israel will only be restored in the Messiah!

In Exodus 4:22, when Moses was crying out to Pharaoh to let his people go, we read God saying of Israel, *"Israel is my son, my firstborn."* To the Egyptians, the firstborn son was special and sacred. Pharaoh considered himself the only son of the gods. Moses told Pharaoh that Israel (God rules) was designated as God's firstborn – they were declared and treated as first in rank, pre-eminent with the rights, privileges and responsibilities of being the firstborn. God used the term "firstborn" to express His relationship with Israel who were His people, a treasured possession (Deut. 7:6), a kingdom of priests, a holy (set apart for a purpose) nation (Ex. 19:6). The nation of Israel was chosen as God's firstborn (pre-eminent) among nations to be a nation of priests – representing God's means of bringing earth His blessings and message of salvation (Ex. 19:6; Isa. 43:10).

Jesus, God's Son, God the Son, is His firstborn.

"Firstborn" – priority of position – pre-eminence of position or rank. In both the Greek and Jewish cultures the firstborn was the ranking son who had received the right of inheritance from his father whether or not he was born first (Esau sold his birthright to Jacob; Jacob/Israel who, not being the first nation, was, however, the preeminent nation (Deut. 7:6; Deut. 32:8-9; II Sam. 7:23-24; Rom. 9:4).

Jacob blessed Ephraim over Manasseh; Manasseh was the son who was physically born first – Gen. 48:17-19)

In the book of Isaiah, Christ is called the servant of the Lord and so is Israel (Isa. 42 through 53).

Israel is called out of Egypt and so is Christ.

Israel's destiny is connected to the Messiah; Israel's destiny is wrapped up in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, God's firstborn.

Ramah. . . .

Matthew 2:16-18 – *"Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'"*

Herod slaughtered every male child, two years old and under, in the whole area to prevent one from growing up and becoming a threat to his throne.

I cannot imagine the horror enveloping that little village of Bethlehem and the area surrounding it. We can hear the weeping and wailing and see in our mind's eye the

people rushing to hide their babies to save their lives. And this travesty fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Jer. 31:15 – *“Thus says the LORD: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’”*

Jeremiah was prophesying the captivity of the southern kingdom, Judah, as the Babylonians invaded and killed children. Jeremiah mentioned a location called Ramah. Where was Ramah? Ramah was 5-6 miles north of Jerusalem – on the border of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. It was where those from the northern kingdom and from the southern kingdom were assembled and taken into exile. Ramah wept when the northern tribe was carried away by the Assyrians (722 BC). Ramah wept when the southern tribe was carried away by the Babylonians (3 deportations: 605, 597, & 586 BC). Ramah represents both kingdoms. It was here that the Jewish captives were assembled in chains among whom was Jeremiah himself (Jer. 40:1; 39:8-12). It is believed that at Ramah people were slaughtered – those who were weak, too young and too old. It was felt that these were not thought to be worthwhile in terms of transporting them to Babylon. Thus, the words of this prophecy.

Why is Rachel mentioned? Why is Rachel weeping for her children? Rachel was the mother of both kingdoms. Her husband, Jacob, was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. One of Rachel’s sons, Joseph, had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim was identified with the northern kingdom. The northern kingdom is called both Israel and Ephraim. Rachel was also the mother of Benjamin who, along with Judah, comprised the southern kingdom. So, Rachel weeps when Israel is taken captive and she weeps when Judah is taken captive. This prophecy of Jeremiah has a near fulfillment in the captivities of both kingdoms.

How does Jeremiah’s prophecy look to a future fulfillment in Jesus? One mile north of Bethlehem scholars tell us there was an area that was also known as Ramah where Rachel’s tomb is located. So, in this other location known as Ramah, centuries after the exile into Babylon, mothers weep again because their children are slaughtered.

Nazareth is mentioned in Matthew 2.

Matthew 2:19-23 – *“Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.’ Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region*

of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'”

Archelaus was cruel and tyrannical. He was eventually banished by Rome in 6 AD. Joseph was again told by God in a dream to go to the land of Israel. Joseph obeyed. When he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea, God warned him in another dream to turn aside to the region of Galilee. They dwelt in Nazareth “. . . *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'*””

Where in the Old Testament does it say that Jesus shall be called a Nazarene? The answer: No where. But it says in Matthew 2 that the prophets said “He shall be called a Nazarene.” They did. It just wasn't recorded in the Old Testament. When you read for example in the Old Testament about messages that were spoken about prophets you don't necessarily have every word they spoke. Sometimes you might have a summary of what they said even as you do of the sermons of Jesus in the Gospels. There is a reference in the book of Jude to the prophecy of Enoch which isn't recorded in the Old Testament either. But here the Holy Spirit refers to it. It was a prophecy.

As John said at the end of his Gospel if everything was written about the Lord Jesus Christ that could be written, the books of the world couldn't contain it. So there was much about Jesus Christ that was supernatural that is not recorded in the New Testament and there was much in the Old Testament that was done by God and spoken by God through prophets that was not recorded.

Nazareth was not a well-liked town. Nazareth had a nasty reputation for immorality. When the disciple Nathaniel heard that Jesus grew up in Nazareth, he said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Nazareth was a “nowhere town.” To be called a “Nazarene” was to be called a “good-for-nothing.” The root word for Nazareth meant *germ* – something despised! Despised! And He was called “Jesus of Nazareth”! Isa. 53:3 – “*He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*”

The Messiah, Who came from glory, Who emptied Himself of His glory (but never His deity) to come to earth to identify with mankind – came from humble beginnings in this world.

In Isa. 6 we find that there would only be a remnant of faithful Jews – and this was represented by a stump – the stem of Jesse (Isa. 11:1) from which a Branch would grow. Branch denotes new growth!

Nazareth is connected with another Hebrew word, *nezer*, which means *branch*.

Branch is a Messianic title in Scripture:

- Isa. 4:2 – “. . . *the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious.*”
- Jer. 23:5-6 – “*Behold, the days are coming,*’ says the Lord, *‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: the LORD our righteousness.’*”

Is this Jesus the King? Is He the Messiah? His credentials prove it. He is of the line of David. His virgin birth. . . Bethlehem, the place where he was born. . . Egypt, the land from which he came out of after going into exile. . . Ramah, the town that wept. . . Nazareth, the city he dwelled in. . . all indicate this is the Messiah. The evidence is overwhelming!

Many years intervene between the end of Matthew chapter 2 and the beginning of Matthew chapter 3. Jesus grows from being a toddler to his ministry. And, there’s silence – aside from two events:

- When Jesus went to the Temple at age 12 and listened to the Jewish teachers and confounded them with His questions.
 - This process – asking questions and listening to the teachers was how the young rabbis were trained. It is the method Jesus would later use in training His disciples.
- His growing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. That's all we know about those silent years until he embarks upon his ministry.

But Matthew knew that the evidence was complete and satisfactory to anyone with a heart to believe. To those who do not have a heart to believe or who do not YET have a heart to believe – the evidence is not satisfactory.

Jesus returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary following His time in Jerusalem at age 12 during Passover for another 18 years, and voluntarily submitted to their parental authority.

Jesus grew up as the oldest of the children in his earthly family. It appears that Joseph died during the period before Jesus’ public appearance.

In presenting Jesus as King, Matthew has one other approach here in the beginning of his Gospel to show us that Jesus is King. God sent a King’s herald to announce the arrival of King Jesus! Who is that herald? John!

Matthew 3:1-3 - “*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*”² *and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’*³ *For this is he who*

was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.""

Matthew 3:1 - "In those days. . ."

We have a gap between Matthew 2 and Matthew 3

At the end of chapter 2, Jesus, Mary and Joseph had just arrived in Nazareth, and Jesus is still a child perhaps a bit older than two years old. And now in those days, John the Baptist is announcing the King is coming.

Luke 3:1-2a – *"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, . . ."*

The best reckoning, per Bible scholars, puts the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar anywhere between 27 to 29 AD. Luke lists the political leaders of the region. Luke gives us a real, historical framework. PLUS – Luke tells us of what was happening in that day:

Tiberius was an emperor known for his cruelty and severity.

Pilate was known for his brutal massacres of the Jewish people in Judea and his overall insensitivity toward the Jewish people.

Herod the Great's family was known for their corruption and cruelty and paranoia.

The historical reality of these rulers is beyond dispute. Archaeologists have verified that these people lived and ruled in these places at these times.

Caiaphas and Annas – Caiaphas was the High Priest; Annas was his father-in-law. As the patriarch of the family, Annas had influence and power among the priests. They were corrupt. They were more interested in power.

BUT this was GOD'S time. . . .

Luke 3:2b-3 – *" . . . the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"*

We see that John had been living in the wilderness – in the desolate wilderness – away from the "system" of the day! God called John at this time!

Matthew 3:1 - *"In those days came John. . . "* . . . the verb *came* in Greek speaks of the arrival of an official. John was an official herald announcing the arrival of a King.

Matthew 3:2 – John's message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." And at hand means it's imminent. It's the next thing to occur.

Matthew 3:3 - "He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'"

John was a herald; he was a way-preparer – for the King. He was calling the people to work on the path to get it ready for the King to arrive. This was the custom of the day. However, John was heralding the King of Kings. Do the Jewish people know about John?

Isaiah 40:3 speaks of John – *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord.”*

Malachi 3:1 - *“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.”*

Whose way is John preparing? John’s message was to prepare the people for the Lord – for His ways to take hold in their hearts! What was involved in preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah, the King? They needed to repent! Their hearts needed to change. That was God’s message throughout the entire OT! Isaiah 55:7 – turn Israel! Turn from your sinful ways; submit to God; trust in Him alone for your salvation!

In his preaching repentance – John was addressing the entire nation of Israel. God had promised them the Kingdom – but they needed to repent and get right with God! THEN the King – the Messiah would come and rule and reign from Jerusalem

In the history and culture of the day, it was the custom of some Eastern monarchs to send heralds before them to announce that they were on their way. They would send an envoy to ensure that the roads were safe. So – obstacles had to be cleared away, causeways had to be built, and crooked roads straightened, and the land leveled. Dramatic verbiage re: valleys – that which is low – being exalted and mountains (which are high and lofty) and hills being brought low. John was calling the people to repent because the King was coming! John – in his message - was NOT preparing a physical road, but an entrance, so to speak, into men’s hearts – for the King to enter. Valleys – which were low – would be exalted; mountains and hills – that were high would be made low; the crooked – would be made straight.

Matthew 23:12 – *“And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

As we’re reading from Isaiah 40, I would like for us to consider the book of Isaiah for a moment. From the outset of Isaiah – from chapter 1 through to chapter 39 – we have the creation of man, the sinfulness of man, the judgment of man.

In the book of Isaiah, 39 chapters address creation, rebellion, sin, and judgment. How many books are there in the OT? 39!!!

Then we come to Isaiah 40:1-2 - *“‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ Says your God. ² Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.’”*

This is a shocking transition from the first 39 chapters in Isaiah! In fact, Isaiah 40 launches the rest of the book of Isaiah – all the way to chapter 66 – into the message of salvation and restoration through the Kingdom of God and the great King – and speaks of His joy and peace! We move from sin and judgment in 39 chapters of Isaiah to salvation and restoration for Israel in the last 27 chapters of Isaiah.

How many books are there in the OT? 39

The first 39 chapters in Isaiah speak of judgment.

We get to Isaiah 40 and we see hope, restoration, salvation, the Kingdom of God, the Eternal State - clear through to Isaiah 66 – which equals 27 chapters.

How many books are there in the NT? 27 – beginning with Matthew.

Isaiah 40:3 – “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert^a highway for our God.*”

Where do we also read that? In Matthew – the first book of the NT.

Isaiah, a book comprised of 66 chapters (39 + 27 = 66) has been labeled the Bible in miniature!

The OT is portrayed in chapters 1 through 39 of Isaiah.

The NT is portrayed in chapters 40 through 66 of Isaiah.

Matthew equates to chapter 40 in Isaiah – comfort, yet, comfort My people – the voice of one crying in the wilderness. . . .!

The message of Isaiah: the same God who has judged Israel for sins will some day save Israel. The same God who promised terrible judgment on a sinning Israel, promises salvation on a penitent Israel. The message to Israel is not that you've been excluded, the message to Israel is comfort, comfort, comfort. Sin is paid for, all can be forgiven.

AND, John's appearance and his message from God signals the beginning of the official ministry of Jesus the Messiah. For 30 years, Jesus had been living in relative obscurity; but with the arrival of John is the announcement that triggers the beginning of Jesus' official ministry. John means Jehovah graciously gave; Jehovah's gracious gift.

Where had John been living up until this time? He was in the wilderness. The wilderness of Judea – is a wilderness. It's the south end of the Jordan Valley – the north part of the Dead Sea. It's BLEAK – arid, bleak dry. Desolation. It was there that John spent his life. Perhaps there was something symbolic in his existence in the wilderness. John was chosen to call the people away from the system – the manmade system – the Rabbinical system. John was calling the Jewish people away from how Judaism had been perverted – by the religious leaders adding onto the 613 commandments given to them by God. John was calling them away from the manmade system, and calling them out to a desolate spot where they could begin to focus on the desolation of their hearts.

What was John's message? REPENT! The word repent, metanio, means more than just sorrow.. It means to turn around. It means a change of opinion. A change of purpose. A change of direction. A change of mind. A change of will. A change from sin to holiness – because one has been declared righteous by God – in justification one has been clothed in God's righteousness. John's message was a shock to the Jewish leadership esp. John was challenging the prevailing Jewish belief that they were already saved. That they were already righteous. They were the seed of Abraham – and they were. They were the people of God – and they were. They were ones in the covenant – and they were (see Rom. 9:4-5). They were the chosen – and they were. They were NOT righteous apart from genuine faith in God (Hab. 2:4) – in Who He is and in what He has promised which points to His redemption through the Messiah!

AND, immersion – that was a purification rite – the Jewish people call it a mikvah – it's immersing yourself as a Jew. There were ceremonial washings after going through a pollution of some sort – encountering the dead, after a women's menstrual cycle, after being healed from leprosy, etc.

Gentiles who came to believe in the God of Israel (called proselytes) - those believing Gentiles who had been outcasts – outside of the assembly of Israel – were immersed by the Jewish people.

John was immersing Jews???? Unheard of! In essence he was telling them they were OUTCASTS – if they didn't repent!

John was calling Israel to realize that their nationality couldn't save them. Their race couldn't save them. God's choosing Israel as a nation – for His purposes – never assured that they – within that nation – would all be saved individually. They had to individually forsake sin and be forgiven and declared righteous by God.

Was John standing out in the Jordan River – in the wilderness alone? Matthew 3:5-6 - *“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”*

Jerusalem was spilling out to hear John – all Judea was flocking to the Jordan – and all the area around the Jordan came to hear John. And, they weren't just going out to him – they were being baptized by him and confessing their sins. There was nothing strange in the ceremony of immersion (baptize means to immerse). The uncommon aspect of this account – Jews were submitting to being immersed. Again, it was a common ritual for Gentiles who wanted to be included in the assembly of the Jews. For a Jew to submit to being immersed was to say, “I'm as bad as a heathen Gentile.” This is truly an act, on the Jews' part – those who submitted to John's baptism – of humble repentance, a radical submission to the Lord!

Homework

Read Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3, and John 1:19-28

Why was Jesus baptized?

What's was your take-away?