

The Plan from the Beginning

Daily Bible Reading Plan

Class Notes for Week 39: Matthew Chapters 1-4

I. **How did we get here?**

- In order to understand the culture and environment of where Christ lived, we must understand what has taken place in the world in the over 400 years since the last narrative of the Old Testament. Events in Palestine, Greece, Rome and other parts of the Mediterranean world affected the world Christ lived in.
- It is interesting to note that many of the events and people you have heard of lived/occurred during this time frame (450 B.C. to 24 A.D.).
- These include:
 - 447-438 B.C. The Parthenon is constructed in Athens
 - 431-404 B.C. The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta
 - 399 B.C. Socrates executed
 - 384 B.C. Aristotle is born
 - 336 B.C. Alexander III (the Great) becomes king of Macedonia
 - 331 B.C. Alexander defeats Darius III and conquers Persia
 - 323 B.C. Alexander dies in Babylon at the age of 32
 - 301 B.C. Ptolemy occupies Judah
 - 277 B.C. Eratosthenes measures the circumference of the world within 2%, never leaving Egypt
 - 265-241 B.C. 1st Punic War between Rome and Carthage
 - 221 B.C. Construction begins on the Great Wall in China
 - 218-202 B.C. 2nd Punic War: Scipio def. Hannibal @ Zama, Rome now dominant power in Mediterranean
 - 200 B.C. Antiochus III defeats Ptolemy V, taking control of Judah for the Seleucid Empire.
 - 196 B.C. Approximate date of the Rosetta Stone carving for King Ptolemy V of Egypt
 - 167 B.C. The Maccabees revolt against the Seleucid Empire
 - 149-146 B.C. 3rd Punic War, Rome destroys Carthage
 - 146 B.C. Rome takes control of Greece after destroying Corinth
 - 140-37 B.C. The Hasmonean kings rule Judah
 - 73-71 B.C. Slave war led by Spartacus against Rome
 - 63 B.C. Pompey captures Judea for Rome
 - 49 B.C. Gaius Julius Caesar's army crosses the Rubicon in defiance of the Senate. Civil war ensues.
 - 44 B.C. Julius Caesar is assassinated on the Ides of March (March 15)
 - 37 B.C. Herod the Great becomes the puppet king of Judea
 - 31 B.C. Octavian defeats Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII at the Battle of Actium.
 - 27 B.C. Octavian becomes the 1st Roman "emperor" given the title Augustus
 - 19 B.C. Herod begins construction on the expansion of the Temple
 - 6-4 B.C. Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem in Judea
 - 14 A.D. Tiberius becomes Rome's ruler and will do so for the whole of Christ's ministry on earth.
- Another notable development that affected the life and time of Christ was the development of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Also worth remembering is that the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures date to this period-the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- Some other familiar names from this period might be Herodotus (world's "first" historian), Hippocrates (Hippocratic Oath), Plato (philosopher, student of Socrates), Euclid (father of geometry) and Archimedes (mathematician/engineer).

II. **42 Generations (Matthew 1)**

- Other than some recognizable names and proof of Jesus' descent from David, what can we learn from Matthew 1:1-17? We can recognize that not everyone comes from a perfect lineage and we cannot base our expectations of people on their family history. After all, not all of Jesus' ancestors were perfect: Judah (slept with his daughter-in-law, thinking she was a harlot), Rahab (made her living at one time selling sex), Solomon was born to David by the wife David killed to have, many kings (Rehoboam, Abijah, Joram, Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon) listed here did evil in the sight of God.
- Mary is found to be with child while engaged to Joseph, causing Joseph to want to break off the engagement, but not in a way to embarrass Mary.

- An angel appears to Joseph and explains the situation. The baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit and will fulfill prophecy. He will be called “Jesus”.
- Joseph carries through with the marriage and does not have sex with Mary until Jesus is born.

III. The Wise and the Jealous (Matthew 2)

- Ancient magicians and philosophers from the East (Magi-number unspecified in the Bible, despite the tradition of three) come to see the king of the Jews after seeing the star in the sky.
- Herod the Great is disturbed by this information and confers with his experts about the situation. Discovering that the person the Magi reference may be the one to usurp Herod’s power, he hatches a devious plan.
- Herod instructs the Magi to return to him and let Herod know where the child is, under the pretense that Herod desires to worship this predicted “King”. The Magi do indeed find the child (age at this time is unknown-Jesus, Mary and Joseph are at a “house”), worship Him and present gifts. The Magi are warned in a dream to avoid Herod and leave the region.
- Joseph is directed by an angel to take his family and flee to Egypt to spare Jesus from Herod’s forthcoming decree.
- Herod is enraged at the disobedience of the Magi and orders all male children under 2 to be killed throughout the area of Bethlehem
- Upon Herod’s death in 4 B.C., an angel informs Joseph that he can safely return to his homeland. Joseph does avoid Judea proper out of fear for Herod’s son, Archelaus. Joseph goes into Galilee to the town of Nazareth.

IV. They say Elijah must come first (Matthew 3)

- John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth and cousin in some manner to Jesus, begins to preach repentance and baptize people in the River Jordan.
- John is quick to criticize the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to where he was baptizing. He tells them they needed to bear the fruit of repentance, and not to rely on their ancestry for salvation.
- Jesus comes to John and desires that John baptize Him. John puts up resistance, humbly stating that it should be the other way around. Jesus states that His baptism would be necessary to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus was to be obedient to all of God’s commands although he certainly needed no remission for sins.
- Based upon Matt. 3:17, the act did in fact please His Father in heaven.

V. Temptations, callings and healings (Matthew 4)

- Jesus is led into the desert wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It is unclear as to whether the temptations described were the only ones He experienced, or Jesus was tempted for forty whole days. We know from Hebrews 2:18 & 4:15 that Jesus can only be sympathetic to our plight because He was tempted just as we are.
- After being miraculously sustained for 40 days with no food (a fast can mean several levels of food/water deprivation-see also Exodus 34:28 & I Kings 19:8), He was hungry. Satan tempts Christ with three things:
 - Satisfaction of His human desire for food
 - Testing the truth of God’s promises
 - The enticement of worldly power and authority
- Jesus refutes all Satan’s efforts with the Word of God. He resists the devil and the devil does indeed flee from him (cf. James 4:7).
- Jesus finds out that Herod Antipas has imprisoned John, He goes to Galilee. After spending some time in his home town of Nazareth, Jesus moves on to Capernaum and began to preach, beginning with the same phrase as John did in Matt. 3:2.
- Capernaum is on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee, and while Jesus is there, He recruits 4 fishermen as His disciples. Simon Peter and Andrew are convinced immediately to follow Jesus when He tells them they need to be “fishers of men”. Jesus also recruits James and John with a call convincing enough that they immediately leave their father behind in the family boat and follow Jesus. Luke records this story in more elaborate fashion in Luke 5:1-11. John’s account indicates that the first two might have had previous experience with Jesus (John 1:35-42).
- Jesus travels all around Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel and healing the sick. Jesus’ name and deeds become well known throughout Galilee and Syria and He attracts many followers from all the surrounding regions.