

Summary

- Matthew 1-2 have dealt with the infancy of Jesus. His lineage, conception, birth, initial reception by Jews and gentiles, temporary exile, and settlement in Nazareth.
- Now, in chapters 3-4, we jump forward to Jesus' adult life. Matthew records two key events that directly precede the public ministry of Jesus. His baptism, and the temptations.
 - This takes place around AD 27 (Luke 3:1)
 - Matthew begins and ends with quotations from Isaiah
 - 3:3 quotes from Isaiah 40:3
 - 4:15-16 quotes from Isaiah 9:1-2
 - There are other quotations from the OT that are a part of the narrative
 - God's words in 3:17 quote from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1
 - The conversation between Jesus and Satan in ch. 4 contains several quotations.
- Chapter 3
 - We are introduced to John the Baptist (3:1-11) who also features later in Ch. 11
 - His prophetic role and character (3:1-6)
 - His condemnation of the Jewish leaders (3:7-10)
 - His message of the coming Messiah (3:11-12)
 - Then Jesus comes to John to be baptised (3:13-17)
 - Jesus and John discuss the need for Jesus to be baptised (3:13-15)
 - Following the baptism, there is a divine manifestation and voice from heaven (3:16-17)

3:1-12 – The Ministry of John the Baptist

- John's message is summarized as "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 - John called people to turn from their sins and turn back to following God.
 - The reason people should do this is God's kingdom was coming near.
 - People have interpreted this in several ways and much has been written on the subject.
 - The Old Testament sets an expectation that one day Israel's kingdom, through the rightful Son of David, will be reestablished, and that through it God will rule over the whole world and bring about an age of perfect peace and justice. This is the context of the quotation from Isaiah 40 used to describe John.
 - The new testament affirms this view explicitly or implicitly in several places. e.g. Matt. 6:10; Luke 13:28-29; Mark 9:47; Acts 1:6
 - But the new testament also calls us to recognise the kingdom in a (secondary) spiritual sense. e.g. Matt 12:28; Luke 17:20-21; Rom. 14:17
 - We might say that the coming of Christ (and ongoing Christian testimony) is a taste of the kingdom that will one day be fully realized.
 - We might go further and say that the coming of Christ to the people of Israel was an invitation to accept God's kingdom by accepting God's chosen king. But they rejected Jesus as king, so God's kingdom has been delayed (from a human perspective) while God reaches out the rest of the world through the gospel.
 - The OT also makes clear that before the kingdom could be established, there would need to be widespread national repentance from the Jews. This was what the message of John sought to accomplish. E.g. Deuteronomy 4:25-31
- John baptised people
 - Baptism symbolises the washing away of sin and the beginning of renewed life.
 - There is no mention of baptism "saving" people from their sin - Remember that that is why Jesus was born (Matt. 1:21). Instead it is accompanied by confession and repentance. The Bible teaches us that these are necessary but not sufficient for our salvation. In other words, John was preparing the people for the salvation offered by Christ.
 - True repentance brings about "fruit". It is seen in our lives and is tested by how we respond to Christ.

- John challenged the Jewish leaders
 - This is a big theme in Matthew.
 - Religious privilege or heritage is no guarantee of God's favour. The Pharisees and Sadducees (religious sects) came to observe John's baptism, but they did not participate. They consider John's message necessary for others, but not for themselves.
 - The Jewish leaders in Matthew are a warning to anyone who calls themselves a Christian also. God is not fooled by external prestige, tradition or appearance. He looks on the heart.
 - Notice the mention of judgement.
- John announced the Messiah
 - This was the critical part of his message. This is what he meant by "the kingdom of God being near". This is why he called people to repentance, so that their hearts might be ready to receive the word of Christ.
 - He would baptise with the Spirit and fire - That is, he would have the power to enact real change in people's hearts which baptism could not do.

3:13-17 – The Baptism of Jesus

- John is shocked at Jesus request to be baptised.
 - In other words, John, who called all people, even the most religious, to repentance, saw no need that Jesus should do such a thing. He recognised that as the divine Christ, he had no sin.
- But Jesus insists and gives the reason "to fulfil all righteousness".
 - This is a bit of a cryptic saying that might cause us to scratch our heads. But here is some possible significance:
 - Jesus, though not sinful, still identifies himself fully with humanity, and that includes humbling ourselves before God, as in baptism.
 - Jesus affirmed John's ministry and did things "by the book" to avoid any criticism that might be levelled against him or John
 - It formally commences Jesus' ministry. As he takes the lowly place, God exalts him by identifying him as his beloved Son.
- God gives his approval
 - Lest we should think that Jesus, in identifying with humanity, was himself sinful, God speaks clearly and precisely. This is his Son (sharing in his nature). He is beloved (the object of his favour). He is pleasing to God (the perfect servant).