

## LESSON FOURTEEN:

# Gospel Fulfillment and Urgency

## Matthew and Mark

### Introduction:

In this lesson we shall look at the content of the first two gospels briefly. These are joined together in our study due to their proximity in the New Testament and also because they are somewhat distinct from the other two gospels, as we shall note.

Major emphasis will be given here to the content of Matthew, since the two gospels contain much of identical or similar content. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that the two gospels each have a distinctive emphasis; and for this reason, we shall also note the content of Mark in the light of its special emphasis. Many who hold to a synoptic view of the first gospels (a view that the three gospels were written from a similar viewpoint) stress the priority of Mark. This may be so, but it is not a necessary assumption, inasmuch as Matthew was an eyewitness to the things he records, and Luke was a careful historian who did a great deal of research before writing his gospel.

Many favor a harmony-of-the-gospels approach to the four gospels, trying to put the various parts of the individual gospels together in an effort to trace the chronological events of Jesus' life and the content of the gospels. While harmonies of the gospels certainly have their advantages, particularly in comparing the content of one gospel with the other, harmonies also destroy the unity of the individual writer's message and his unique emphasis. We shall, therefore, not study the gospels in harmony form, but taking each gospel, seek to determine its particular emphasis, and leave the harmonizing of the contents of the four to others.

### What Do We Find Here?

#### **MATTHEW: The Gospel of Fulfillment**

In both Matthew and Mark, we shall divide the ministry of Jesus into two major parts: the ministry in Galilee and the ministry in Judea. In Matthew, this ministry covers the first eighteen chapters. In this section, Matthew uses the word "fulfilled" ten times,

whereas Mark, by contrast, in the same comparable section, uses the term only once. We shall show that in addition to the use of this term, there are many other evidences that Matthew is particularly concerned to show that Jesus is indeed, in his teaching and in his life and work, the fulfillment of all that the Lord promised in the Old Testament, in terms of the salvation of His people.

#### **Matthew 1-18 — The Galilee ministry**

As the Gospel of Matthew opens, we are immediately confronted with the author's interest in the Old Testament prophecies and message concerning the Christ. The Old Testament word "Messiah," meaning "anointed one," has come over into the Greek as "Christ," meaning the same thing. He calls his work the "Book of the genesis of Jesus Christ." (Greek: meaning "generation" or perhaps "genealogy") You will note that it is the same word that is used to name the first Book of the Old Testament. In a sense, then, with Matthew's gospel, we have a new beginning — the account of the Second Genesis and the Second Adam.

#### *1. The Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1-4:11).*

The brief genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17), is summarized in verse one: "the son of David, the son of Abraham." This immediately links Jesus with the Old Testament promises pertaining to the seed of Abraham and of David (II Sam. 7:12ff.; Gen. 22:18 — see Gal. 3:16). Within the genealogy itself are some names of particular interest, such as *Tamar*, the woman who bore the illegitimate son of Judah (v.3), *Rahab*, the Gentile harlot of Jericho who was saved from destruction and married into Judah's tribe (v. 5), *Ruth*, the Gentile who married Boaz, having been drawn into God's people by the love of Naomi, (v. 5), and the unnamed *wife of Uriah* (Bathsheba) who became David's wife and bore to him Solomon (v. 6). It is clear from this genealogy that Jesus did not come from a sinless line, humanly speaking. Therefore, his unique sinlessness did not come from his ancestors' efforts. In fact, Joseph is described as the husband of Mary, but it does not say

that Joseph “begat” Jesus, as the preceding verses use that word (v. 16).

The latter part of the first chapter, therefore, shows that the origin of Jesus was from God, not man, though he was truly a man. He was truly a man because he was born of a woman, but he was also truly God, being born of a virgin as the prophets foretold (Isa. 7:14) (See the Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 8, II).

The name Jesus, given to him, is, in Hebrew, the same as Joshua, and means “Yah (an abbreviation for Yahweh, i.e. the LORD) is salvation.” The Old Testament Joshua was able to bring the people into the land of Canaan, but not into an inheritance that was eternal (see Heb. 4:8ff.).

Detail of the birth of Jesus includes the fact that he was born in Bethlehem, which, as Matthew points out, was also prophesied beforehand (Matt. 2:1-6). The magi who came to Jesus shortly after his birth, guided by the star, were perhaps heirs of a long line of wise men of the ancient east. We saw that there were many at Nebuchadnezzar’s court in Daniel’s day. The fact that Balaam was a prophet from the east (Mesopotamia) and that he prophesied of a star in connection with the birth of Israel’s King (Num. 24:17), may be quite significant in relationship to the preservation of that tradition among the non-Jewish population of Mesopotamia. Remember, too, that the Jews had lived for many centuries in Babylonia after the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 BC. The Herod mentioned in 2:1, is, as we will note in the “Additional Information” section, Herod the Great. In our study of Luke, we shall say more about him, but suffice to say here that he died in 4 BC. which immediately points to the fact that our counting of the years is in error. Jesus had to have been born before Herod died, possibly as much as three years prior to his death. Therefore Jesus’ birth may be placed at about 7 B.C. If we were counting the years accurately, then, this year (2019) would be 2026, at least!

Matthew tells next of Jesus’ trip into Egypt where he stayed until Herod died (Matt. 2:13-15). This too, Matthew connects with the Old Testament (Hos.

11:1). Here is an example of a prophecy which pointed both to the past and to the future. Remember, the verb “prophecy” is not the same as the word “predict.” Prophets spoke of the past, the present *and* the future; they spoke *God’s Word*, referring to the past, the present and the future in God’s dealing with His people. When Hosea wrote this prophecy, he was, no doubt, primarily thinking of God’s having called Israel out of Egypt in the time of the Exodus. But God’s Holy Spirit had also further meaning which may well have been beyond Hosea’s comprehension, pointing to the time when Jesus would go into Egypt by the command of the angel of the Lord. The prophets did not always understand the full meaning of what they spoke by the Holy Spirit (I Pet. 1:10ff.). In the following section, again, Matthew points to Scripture fulfilled in an event in Jesus’ early life (2:18). At the end of the chapter, there is note of another prophecy in reference to Jesus being called a Nazarene (2:23) from Nazareth. From Mark’s Gospels, we learn that Jesus was called a Nazarene in reference to his home (Mark 1:24). The Old Testament does not mention the place Nazareth, but in Isaiah 11:1, in the Hebrew, it does speak of the Christ as a “branch” (*netzer*, in Hebrew) out of Jesse. So perhaps Matthew is using a play on words and this would be better understood as an allusion rather than a direct quotation.

Thus, in, the first two chapters of Matthew, there have been seven specific references to Old Testament passages fulfilled in connection with the birth of Jesus. From this, it is safe to conclude that Matthew is particularly concerned to show that the person and work of Jesus Christ are the fulfillment of all that, in the Old Testament, the Lord had promised to do in connection with the salvation of His people. But to know Matthew’s Old Testament orientation, we must go beyond those passages which specifically cite Old Testament fulfillment, and indeed note that on every page, in every paragraph, Matthew has in mind Old Testament fulfillment of the promises of the Lord in connection with the coming of Jesus Christ and with his earthly ministry.

The remainder of the preparatory matters pertaining to Jesus' ministry have to do with the ministry of John (3:1-12), the baptism of Jesus by John's baptism (3:13-17), and the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (4:1-11). In connection with John's ministry, Matthew again cites the Old Testament (Isa. 40:3). The description of John (3:4) is very reminiscent of Elijah (II Kings 1:8); and John's message (3:7-12) is like the messages of the Old Testament prophets. Calling them offspring of vipers, hearkens back to the seed of Satan (the Serpent). The demand for fruit to be seen in their lives recalls Isaiah 5:1ff. And the picture of the axe laid to the root of the tree reminds us of God's Words spoken through Isaiah (see Isa. 10:5, 15). Reference to the baptizing by the Holy Spirit points to Joel 2:28, and the picture of the wheat and the chaff recalls Psalm 1. John was a man steeped in the Old Testament but also uniquely pointing to the beginning of the New Testament.

Jesus' baptism and intention to fulfill all righteousness shows Jesus' own consciousness of the need for all the Scripture pertaining to himself to be fulfilled (3:15), and may have reference to Isaiah 53:9, which speaks of his sinlessness and Genesis 18:19, which requires righteousness of all of the seed of Abraham. The verbal testimony from heaven leaves no doubt about the identity of Jesus, perhaps in reference to Psalm 2:7 (Matt. 3:17).

The account of the temptations of Jesus, his final preparatory experience before beginning his public ministry, is replete with the Old Testament, showing how Jesus depended totally upon its truth in doing battle with Satan by utilizing three passages from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16,13). Each of the temptations may be compared with similar temptations faced by the first Adam and his wife, Eve: food, pleasure, ambition (good for food, delight to eyes, desire to make wise) (cf. I John 2:16). It is with this same confidence in the Word of God written that Jesus next moves out into his public ministry.

## 2. *The Galilee ministry briefly summarized (Matt. 4:12-25).*

Matthew recognizes that the Galilee ministry itself was a fulfillment of Scripture (Isa. 9:1,2). The brief summary of that ministry (4:17), recalls the words of God through Daniel pertaining to the establishing of God's Kingdom on earth to triumph over the kingdoms of this world (Daniel 2:44).

The call of men to follow him (4:18-22) is significant, in that these fishermen were called in connection with the talents and gifts which the Lord had given to them to be fishers. He would teach them how to utilize their experience to become fishers of men, thus glorifying the Lord in that which they did. It is apparent that all through their time with Jesus, they never quit being fishermen for fish; but at the same time they were learning how to be, more importantly, fishers of men.

The brief description of Jesus' Galilee ministry (4:23-25) is further expanded in the chapters that follow. This description, however, recalls for us the words of Isaiah (61:1-3; 35:5-10). A look at the map on page 10 of this lesson indicates how widely the word of Jesus' ministry had spread.

## 3. *Jesus' teaching ministry in Galilee (Matt. 5-7)*

This section is usually called the Sermon on the Mount, but it is, no doubt, typical of the kind of teaching Jesus did throughout Galilee. Here, too, we note a strong emphasis on the Old Testament revelation. The opening words, dealing with the blessings of God's children (5:1-12), recall the opening words of Psalm 1. Many of the terms used by Jesus here: "they that mourn," "the meek," "they that hunger and thirst after righteousness," "the pure in heart" — are drawn from the Old Testament (Isa. 55:1, 61:2; Ps. 24:4; 37:11, etc.). In reference to the expectation of persecution for those who follow God's will, he points back to the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus' treatise on the Law shows not only the Law's validity for the Kingdom of God now, but also teaches the full intent of the Law as God has given it (5:17-48). The call to be perfect as God is perfect,

certainly recalls God's words to Abraham long before (5:48; cf. Gen. 17:1).

The warnings against hypocrisy in worship (6:1-18) recall Isaiah's similar warnings in the opening chapter of his prophecy and also the vivid portrayal by Jeremiah of the importance of our hearts being right with God if our worship is to be acceptable. In this section, the Lord's Prayer is replete with Old Testament significance: the *holiness* of the Father (Isa. 6), the *coming* of God's *Kingdom* (Dan. 2), God's will being done on earth (the promise through the prophets), *request* for our *daily bread* (as God supplied it in the wilderness and promises to all who trust in Him —Ps. 37:25), *forgiveness of our sins* (Ps. 51), and *deliverance from the evil one* (Gen. 3:15). Jesus has taught us to pray for that which the Lord has promised already to those who trust in Him (see the similarity with Eph. 1:4 — cf. Shorter Catechism, Q. 98).

Instructions regarding the single eye and commitment to God's Kingdom and righteousness (6:16-34), recall the First Commandment on total commitment to the Lord. When he speaks of God's great love for us, we cannot forget the messages of Hosea and the Song of Songs.

The narrow way, and the few who enter it (7:12,14), remind us of the Old Testament doctrine of the remnant who were saved out of all the people of Israel. Finally, the call to wisdom (to *the doing* of God's Word and not merely hearing it) points to the words of Wisdom as taught in the Proverbs. We see, therefore, Jesus drawing from all portions of the Scripture to teach those who follow him. As Jesus Himself knew the Word and lived by it (Matt. 4:1-11), so, too, he taught his followers to do the same.

#### 4. *Jesus' mighty works in Galilee (Matt. 8-9:26).*

In rapid succession, we see Jesus cleanse a leper (8:1-4), heal a centurion's servant (5-13), and many others (vs. 14-17) — all of which, Matthew notes, is in fulfillment of Scripture (Isa. 53:4). He also calms the sea in the midst of a storm (vs. 23-27; cf. Ps. 107:23-32) and casts out demons from two wretched men (vs. 28:34).

But Jesus' mighty works go beyond healing and power over the elements: Jesus also forgives sins (9:1-17). When he is challenged in this by the Pharisees, Jesus shows that this is the heart of his mission; and he freely associates with sinners — showing the same compassion for them which was formerly demonstrated by the Lord in the Old Testament. Here is the Lord of the Old Testament — as in Isaiah 1:18,19, He had said He would do — now indeed sitting down with sinners, helping them to come to grips with their sins and to look to Him in faith. Here is the Lord of Isaiah 57:15, who said He would dwell with those of a humble and contrite heart, even now so doing — as he calls Matthew the writer of this Book to follow him. Here is the Lord of Isaiah 58, who rebuked the false fasting of the Israelites in that day, now showing that men's obedience and service to the Lord must be on God's terms, not their own.

To leave no room for doubt that men owe to him that faith which they could put only in the Lord, Jesus raised one from the dead (9:18-26). Blind men could "see" that he was the Messiah, and called him the son of David (9:27-31). Even the fickle multitudes marvelled at Jesus' works. But the Pharisees accused him of having a demon (v. 34).

Once more, Jesus showed that He was, indeed, the Lord (9:35-38). In the manner of the Lord's compassion and patience in the Old Testament, even here, Jesus, rejected by the leaders of his people, nevertheless looked on them all in compassion, reflecting that glory of God shown to Moses long before (Ex. 34:6,7) or to Samuel, later (I Sam. 8:7).

#### 5. *Jesus' ministry in Galilee rejected by the leaders (Matt. 10-16:12).*

Jesus intensified his efforts to reach the lost sheep of Israel (10:1-42), instructing his apostles (those "sent") in how they should carry out this ministry. There are here many allusions to the Old Testament lessons: they are sent as sheep among wolves (10:16) a reminder of the similar missions of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 1, Ezk. 2:3); and they can expect to be

hated and persecuted as the prophets before them were, for the Lord's sake (10:21-23).

When asked by John the Baptist whether he was indeed the Christ, Jesus' response was first to show that he fulfilled what Isaiah had said that the Christ's ministry should be (11:4,5; cf. Isa. 61:1ff). Then, the Lord showed that John himself was a fulfillment of God's promise through Malachi (11:10; see Mal. 3:1). He also called John the fulfillment of the promise that Elijah should come before the Christ (11:14; see Mal. 4:5).

As Isaiah did, Jesus compared the cities that were rejecting him — the Lord — to Sodom and Gomorrah (see Isa. 1:10ff). And in accord with the words of Jeremiah, Jesus offered rest for the souls of those who would trust in him (Jer. 6:16; 31:25; Matt. 11:28, 29).

The leaders of the Jews did not stand idly by and fail to challenge Jesus. In chapter twelve, we see how they contested his use of the Sabbath, to which Jesus answered with the Scripture (12:7). Indeed, Jesus' own gentleness toward His accusers manifested His identity as the One who had come to save, as Matthew shows, quoting from Isaiah 42:1ff. (12:18-21).

When the crowds began to agree with the conclusion of the blind men that he was indeed the promised seed of David (12:23), then, the Pharisees called him, instead, a man of Satan (Beelzebub) (12:24).

We noted the gentleness with which Jesus dealt with his enemies so long as their accusations were against him personally, but when they began to blaspheme the Holy Spirit by whom Jesus was conceived, he turned to them in wrath, calling them, indeed, the seed of Satan (12:34) and an evil and adulterous generation (12:39). Thus, as they rejected him, so Jesus rejected them — even as we learn from Psalm 1: “sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous.” Only those who believe and follow Christ have any place with Jesus (12:50).

Matthew notes that at this point, Jesus turned to his disciples to teach them of the Kingdom — no

longer addressing his enemies — and in accord with the Scriptures, he taught his own in parables (Matt. 13; see Isa. 6:9,10; Ps. 78:2). Essentially, by the parables, Jesus teaches that only those who bear fruit will please God (Isa. 5); and that out of all who hear, only a remnant will be saved (Matt. 13:24-30 — see Amos 9:7-15). The parable of the mustard seed recalls again the lessons of the growth of the Kingdom of God given in Daniel. The Old Testament concept of the two seeds is also clearly taught here by Jesus (Matt. 13:36-43 — cf. Gen. 3:15, etc.).

The arrest of John the Baptist prompted Jesus to withdraw increasingly with those who would hear him (14:1ff.). He fed them when they hungered, as the Lord had in the wilderness (14:13-21); and he calmed them when they feared, as the Lord did Job or Habakkuk, when the storms of life swirled around their heads (14:22-33).

When the Pharisees challenged his teachings by their traditions, Jesus stripped off the veneer of their hypocrisy and showed, as the Lord had in the Old Testament, that their hearts were far from the Lord — though they professed to be His followers (15: 1-9). He again pointed to the Scripture (Isa. 29:13). Like the Lord who spoke through Moses and Jeremiah regarding the corruption of the hearts of the Israelites, Jesus here pointed *to the heart* as the great problem in the lives of his enemies (15:18).

Jesus, thus, closed this phase of his ministry with a stern warning against the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were like the false prophets who opposed Him in Israel long ago (16:1-12).

6. *Jesus, rejected by the leaders of Galilee, turns to his own to teach them (Matt. 16:13-18:35).*

The evidence is now in for Jesus' true identity. The Pharisees have rejected it. What will his disciples do? Peter answers for them. They know that he is the Christ and the Son of the living God, even as Psalm 2 had taught (16:13-20). Jesus declares that this knowledge of who he is and faith in him has come, not

from human effort, but by God's Spirit, even as he had taught through Ezekiel long before (Ezek. 36:27).

The subsequent *instructions* regarding the necessity of his death are in line with the words of Isaiah 53, which teach the necessity for Christ to die for us; and the *experience* of the transfiguration, in which Moses and Elijah (perhaps representative of the Law and the Prophets — the entire Old Testament testimony) appear with him, *both* draw heavily from the Old Testament message and show that it all comes to fruition in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:21-17:8).

The remainder of Jesus' Galilee ministry was spent in teaching the disciples their particular needs for the days to follow: *faith in the ultimate triumph of Jesus* (17:22-23 — cf. Hos. 6:2); *humility* before one another (18:1-6cf. Isa. 57:15); *a sense of responsibility* for others (18:7-14-cf. Ezk. 3:16-21); *discipline among* them should any sin, in accord with the words of Deuteronomy 19:15 (18:15-20); and *a bond of love and compassion* reflecting the love, compassion and forgiveness of God for them (18:21-35-cf. Lev. 19:17-18).

### **Matthew 19-28 — The Judea Ministry**

While we could continue to show how Matthew emphasizes the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the ministry of Jesus, even as he goes to Judea, space will not allow us to do this at this time, to the extent that we have in his Galilee ministry. Instead, we shall emphasize three themes which are interwoven here: Jesus' instructions to his followers; the opposition of his enemies; and Jesus' rebuke of his enemies.

Chapter 19 marks a change in Jesus' ministry. From now on he turns southward toward Jerusalem, clearly intent on fulfilling the will of His Father in regard to his mission. Though here too, multitudes were following him at the beginning, we see them at last turn on Jesus and cry for his death. Overall, in this time, Jesus was seeking to instruct his disciples before his completed work, very conscious himself of the nearness of the end.

His enemies were waiting for him, though, and he was forced to give some of his precious time to answering them. They were well prepared. Perhaps they had received word from the Pharisees in Galilee who had badgered him already. They doubtlessly got word that he was devastating in his knowledge of God's Word. By research they thought that they could hang him in the Word itself. They found two contradictory passages! — or so they supposed. Did not Malachi say that God was displeased with their divorces? (Mal. 2:14-16). Yet Moses allowed divorce! (Deut. 24:1-4). If Jesus sided with Moses, then they could point out Malachi. If he was opposed to divorce, then they would point out Moses' words. They had him trapped — they thought. Jesus beautifully illustrated how Scripture must be compared with Scripture in getting to the truth, and put them to silence. He was living up to his reputation gained in Galilee.

Then came another, asking him how to have eternal life. Jesus, seeing that he was rich, pointed to his love of riches over the Lord, thus his inability to get beyond the First Commandment (19:16-22).

After this, for a while, Jesus was able to instruct his own. He warned them not to think like the world — in terms of works and rewards — as the rich and those desirous of being rich did, but to see that all they had was a gift from the Lord and could never be earned by them (19:30-20:16).

After reminding them of his inevitable death, he had to correct their self-seeking pride, even in their faith in him. Two sons of Zebedee among his disciples, sought the preeminent place with Jesus in his glory. While we disdain their self-seeking, we note that they did believe that out of this trial to come, Jesus would triumph as the Son of God (20:20-28). He showed them that greatness in God's Kingdom consists not in self-accomplishment and exaltation — as in the world — but in humility and self-sacrificing service to one another. It was but one aspect of Christian love.

The multitude was still with Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem (21:1-11). Again we see Jesus' consciousness of the need to fulfill all of Scripture (21:5; see also Zech. 9:9). This was likewise apparent

as Jesus cleansed the Temple of those who defiled it (21:13,14 — see Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11).

His cleansing of the Temple was the occasion of several more attempts of the enemies of Christ to bring dishonor to him. When they asked by what authority he did what he did, Jesus, in turn asked about the authority of John, who, by now, had become a hero to the multitudes (21:23-27). Jesus added the parable of The Two Sons, teaching them that while they, the favored few, were well versed in Scripture and ought to have known him, they rejected him; others, sinners as they called them, had believed in Jesus and were preferred by God over the Pharisees (21:28-32). Another parable taught them that they had, indeed, in rejecting Jesus, rejected God's own Son (21:33-46) — again citing Scripture to support his contention (Ps. 118:22).

The next series of questions to Jesus were designed to embarrass Jesus politically, theologically, and exegetically. They were all clever questions which the normal man would have difficulty answering with impunity. But Jesus took the occasion to teach them that men, created in the image of God, belong rightly to the Lord alone (22:21), and that not only is the doctrine of the resurrection so, but that God taught it directly to Moses (22:22-32), and that the greatest commandments are those which are the essence of all the commandments: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (vs. 37, 38). In all of this, Jesus showed himself again the master of God's Word and able rightly to use it. He showed, too, that God has not swerved at all in His great purpose to have a people holy (belonging totally to Him), without blemish, in God's presence (the God of the living), and in a bond of love (love for God and for one another.)

Then Jesus, turning the questions on them, showed how Scripture teaches that, indeed, Jesus is David's Lord and ought therefore to be theirs (22:41-46). They, in contrast to Jesus, were completely baffled by God's Word as Jesus taught them.

The issue was now clear. The Pharisees, leaders of the Jews (23:2) — much as the false prophets were leaders of the Israelites long before — had totally

rejected Jesus. Therefore, Jesus, in strong words of denunciation, condemned them for their unbelief (23:1-36). Then, in words reminiscent of Lamentations, Jesus mourned over Jerusalem; which, from its first coming into the hands of Israel, had time, and again, repelled those whom the Lord had sent — even now, the Lord himself!

In quick succession, sensing the urgency of the times, Jesus instructed his own, after this, regarding the signs of the end of time, regarding the Kingdom and the urgency for all believers to obey, and regarding the pointing to the time when all would stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of all that they had done, good or bad — in accord with the words of Ecclesiastes 12:14 (ch. 24,25).

He showed, as Isaiah long before had, that ultimately, there are *only two destinies* possible: eternal punishment for the seed of Satan or eternal life for the seed of God, through faith in Jesus (Matt. 25:46-cf. Isa. 1:27,28; 66:22-24).

Chapter 26 traces the last hours of Jesus' Judean ministry: as it begins with his warnings to the disciples of the imminence of his death (26:1ff.) and continues to his arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin. Peter, even with all the warning of what was to come, was not sufficient in himself — in spite of his great friendship with Jesus — to refrain from self-interest when the choice came (26:69-75). Again, God's Word had proven to be right (26:31 — see Zech. 13:7).

It is interesting that in chapter 27, relating to the trial of Jesus before Pilate and to Jesus' execution on the cross, time and again the pagans spoke of Jesus as the king of the Jews (27:11,37) and Son of God (27:54), but his own received him not as such (27:29,42).

Mention of Jesus' burial with the rich man no doubt hearkens back to Isaiah 53:9. Though the Jewish leaders sought to make sure that he did not rise again, nevertheless, he did — as he promised — triumphing over death and sin for us — as he promised (Gen. 3:15). Chapter 28 gives some detail of the resurrection; but here we shall focus on his great commission to his

church, his last word before his ascension to the right hand of the Father (28:18-20).

Virtually quoting from Psalm 2:8,9, Jesus makes plain that all authority in heaven and earth is in his hands. As God had taught through Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar long before, the nations of the earth would soon crumble and fall and in the end be destroyed (Daniel 2; cf. Ps. 2:9). But Jesus — still with compassion on the lost — *looking* now *beyond* the lost sheep of Israel to the lost of the world, and in harmony with the words of Psalm 2:10-12, as the great Lord of the Harvest, commissions his disciples — those taught by him — to go forth into the world. Before the nations are destroyed and the earth and all in it are burned, as Isaiah had warned, they are to make disciples of all nations, in accord with the promise of God to Abraham, that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:17,18). Now, the work of the *Father*, of the *Son*, and of the *Holy Spirit*, the triune God, who in the beginning created man in His image to have eternal fellowship, with the Lord (Gen. 1), would be sealed by baptism which Jesus here ordained. It was a *baptism* to be *accompanied*, both in the home with children, and in the church with the professing believers, *by teaching* — teaching all that Christ, the Lord had taught. This included not only what we find in the gospels, but *all* of the Word of God, the whole counsel of God, the Books of the Old and the New Testaments. Thus, the same command the Lord once gave to Abraham, respecting his children (Gen. 18:19), he now gives to his disciples, respecting all from the nations who shall believe and be baptized. Indeed, the seed of Abraham will grow and spread throughout the earth.

Jesus closes with reassuring words reminiscent of words once spoken to Moses, when the Lord called him (Ex. 3:12): “Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” THIS IS INDEED IMMANUEL — GOD WITH US!

### **MARK: Gospel of Urgency**

Here we can only briefly point out some of Mark’s characteristics which distinguish his Gospel from the others. Above all, Mark is brief in the opening

and the close, compared to the others. In the body of his Gospel, he deals with the same or similar subject matter in comparative detail. Since there is very little covered by Mark, not to be found in Matthew as well, in terms of content, we will here simply note that Mark is particularly concerned to relate the urgency of Jesus’ message and does this by use of the term “straightway” with great frequency. He uses it 37 times (Greek text) in relating the Galilee ministry (Mark 1-9) — much more than any other single author or two authors, for that matter. Mark uses it more, therefore, than other writers of the New Testament for a good reason.

Of course, the significance is not in the use of this particular word, but in the way, by repeating “straightway” or “immediately” he traces the public ministry of Jesus in terms of the urgency of his message for the people of that day. He does little to tie Jesus’ ministry either to the past or to the future. It is as though he prepared it for those living in that day in particular, who had seen his ministry and who were quickly to pass through life, as Jesus had passed by where they lived in Galilee, and in Judea.

This is not to say that Mark’s gospel, written for that generation, has no significance for us. By no means! What we learn here is that, just as Jesus came and went in the life span of his generation, so too, the opportunity for us to believe in the gospel is now. It is urgent, therefore, for us to believe now. That was Mark’s message to his generation. But it is still true for our generation today. The time is short. We pass this way only once.

The God-given opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ and the gospel is right now, not tomorrow, not next week, nor next year, but NOW! That is what Mark is saying. Jesus did not tarry long anywhere in Galilee or Judea, to his generation and Mark’s. Neither can we presume on the Lord that the opportunity to believe in Him will tarry long with us.

It is possible that Mark knew Jesus. Some believe that Jesus stayed in Mark’s home. We do know that Mark (called John) came from a home which early believed in Jesus (Acts 12:12).



## What Additional Information Is Helpful?

As we come to the New Testament, we are aware that things have changed over the years between the close of the Old Testament revelation of Malachi and the New Testament times. We notice almost immediately that a new power is now in control of the political world — the Romans. This affects geographical terminology to some extent. We speak now in terms of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, terms not often used in the Old Testament. In addition to the mention of the Temple in Jerusalem, we now often read of synagogues in various places where the Jewish people are worshipping. A whole new group of leaders in the religious domain are introduced: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, the Sanhedrin, and Scribes. In addition to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, there is much mention as well of the traditions of the elders. Finally, the language which prevails has also changed. Much spoken Aramaic is evidenced in the conversations, and the written work is now Greek and not Hebrew or Aramaic.

Four hundred years of history have transpired since the closing words of Malachi, and we need at least to see briefly what has happened to give to us the world of the New Testament.

By the time of the close of the Old Testament period, Persia, then the predominate power in the world, was on the wane. Artaxerxes II, was in power in Persia at the end of the 5th Century (400 BC.) — the close of the Old Testament era. The Persian empire was showing definite signs of weakness when Artaxerxes' brother, Cyrus, attempted to overthrow his power, using some 10,000 Greeks to do so. This venture was immortalized in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a classic Greek historical work of the Fourth Century, B.C.; and though it failed, it showed the weakness and deterioration of the Persians.

Before the end of the 4th Century (300s BC), Alexander, to be known as "the Great," was on the rise and moved into Asia Minor out of Macedonia, having brought the Greeks under his control. Alexander had been taught by, among others, Aristotle, the famous philosopher. In 333 BC, he defeated the Persians at

Issus and went on to conquer Tyre, Gaza, Jerusalem and Egypt. He founded in Egypt a learning center that was to have great influence on the ancient world for many centuries: Alexandria.

Alexander himself, besides having the desire to conquer the world, also wished to make the world Greek and so spread Greek culture and language everywhere he went.

After finally defeating the Persians in 331 B.C., he went on eastward into India; but his own career was cut short when he died at the age of 33. The empire he had established did not last long after his death, but the culture and language of Greece which he had spread over the areas of the world he conquered had long-lasting effects.

After the dissolution of the Alexandrian Empire, Palestine was controlled for a little over a century by the Ptolemies in Egypt (312-198 B.C.). During the time of Ptolemy II, it is thought that the translation of the Scriptures into Greek was begun. It is better known as the Septuagint or the LXX (70 in Roman numerals, indicating the number involved in its translation). Ptolemy IV, brought gifts to the Temple and tried to enter into the Holy of Holies, but was hindered by devout Jews. Ptolemy V, lost that political area to the Seleucids of Syria, so that control of Palestine passed from Egypt to Syria at this time (198 B.C.).

For a while, the Jews fared better under the control of the Seleucids who controlled the territory a little over half a century. Notable among these rulers were Antiochus III, who fought against the expanding Romans to whom he lost Asia Minor, and Antiochus IV, better known as "Epiphanes."

Antiochus Epiphanes made himself notorious by seeking to Hellenize the Jews, building in Jerusalem Greek buildings and a gymnasium. He gave the high priestly office to the highest bidder and taxed the people unmercifully. He is said to have offered swine on the altar of the Temple. Such doings drew the wrath of the Jews and brought on the formation of the Chasidim or group which was radically opposed to Greek influence.

In 167 B.C., one from the priests' family, Mattathias, had enough and led a revolt against the Seleucids. He died shortly after beginning the revolt, and his son, Judas Maccabaeus, led the revolt from 165-161 B.C. The revolters succeeded in taking the Temple and Jerusalem. Two other brothers ruled after him from 160—134 B.C. (Jonathan and Simon). In the days of Simon, freedom was truly established and a treaty with Rome prevented further infringements by the Seleucids against the Jews.

Following the death of Simon Maccabaeus, the Jews were ruled by John Hyrcanus and two Aristobulus (I, II) who did not always act in the best interests of the Jewish people. Their dominance ended in 63 B.C., when Pompey of Rome entered into the land and took over control in the name of the Romans. Following some years of intrigue politically and religiously, Herod, known as Herod the Great, was appointed by the Romans as king over the Jews and ruled from 37

BC. until about 4 B.C. It was, of course, in his days that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. We shall leave further historical data until we study the Book of Luke. This will suffice to bring us to the time of Jesus' birth and the content of the first two Gospels.

