

The Book of Matthew

The Ministry Begins

Lesson #2 for April 9, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 3:1-12; 4:1-12,17-22; 2 Peter 1:19; Philippians 2:5-8; Isaiah 9:1-2.

1. This lesson will focus on John the Baptist and his ministry as the forerunner of Jesus as well as the early ministry of Jesus Himself. As we study the preexistence of Christ, His birth, His life and death, His ministry in heaven, and finally, His second coming, do we find answers to the most important questions in the universe? What are those existential questions? Where did we come from? Why are we here? How can we get the most good out of life? Where do we go after we die?
2. The story of redemption and the great controversy behind it give us the full answers to those questions. We are blessed to have access to all of these answers.
3. Read Matthew 3:1-6. Try to imagine yourself going down to the Jordan River, crossing the river, and seeing John the Baptist in his rough clothing, giving those powerful sermons that shook all of Judea and Galilee. How do you think you would have responded? What do you think John had in mind when he said to almost everyone who came, “Repent”? What is God asking of us today? Isn’t the message the same? For those who have been lifelong members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, do we still need the message to repent and be baptized?
4. Notice that to give veracity and authenticity to his message, John—like other New Testament authors after him—quoted the Old Testament. Did John ever perform any miracles? Jesus gave the disciples authority and permission to perform miracles as they went through Galilee, preaching and teaching. We do not know how many miracles they performed nor of what nature? Jesus actually told them to raise the dead! (Matthew 10:8; compare Acts 9:36-42.) He did it! Did they ever do that? Nevertheless, despite all of that as a proof of their message, they always quoted from the “sure Word of prophecy.” (2 Peter 1:19)
5. Read Matthew 3:7-12. Try to picture the scene with priests and Pharisees, the rich and the poor, sinners and publicans, all there to hear what John had to say. And what was the basis of his messages? He told them to change their ways and be baptized and not to rely on their claim of being descendants of Abraham. To be saved one must accept and follow Jesus. He will be the final Judge of all things.
6. Notice that even in this preliminary message prior to the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist was already talking about events which would occur during the first coming and linking those events to the judgment and what will follow at the second coming. Was there any reason for Jesus to come the first time if He does not plan to come back a second time to rescue His friends?
7. Why did Jesus go to John the Baptist to be baptized? Jesus was not a sinner. He did not need to be baptized to turn away from sin.

Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account. He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.2.

8. Read Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1. Are these two verses in contradiction with each other? Why did Jesus go into the wilderness alone? Were there wild animals there? Try to imagine the scene from Satan’s perspective. Remember that this was not the first time Satan and

Christ had faced each other in serious combat. On the most obvious previous occasion, Satan had started the rebellion in heaven. Christ moved among the angels as Michael the Archangel, and two thirds of the angels joined His side by remaining loyal to Him; Satan, formerly Lucifer, managed to convince one-third of the angels to join him. After a very serious war of words and ideas, Satan and his followers were forced to leave heaven because no one would listen to him any more. What about the Garden of Eden? The flood?

9. But, this time, with Christ having fasted for 40 days and looking weak and emaciated, Satan appeared as a bright, shining angel, feeling that he had the upper hand.

When Satan and the Son of God first met in conflict, Christ was the commander of the heavenly hosts; and Satan, the leader of revolt in heaven, was cast out. Now their condition is apparently reversed, and Satan makes the most of his supposed advantage.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 119.2.

10. How would you describe the differences between Satan's kingdom and Christ's kingdom? Satan was motivated only by selfishness and the desire to put himself above others. Christ was selfless and motivated only by love. That is the essential difference between righteousness and sin. So, how did the selfish Satan approach the loving Jesus?
11. Compare Isaiah 14:12-14 with Philippians 2:5-8. We believe that Satan (formerly Lucifer) is and was incredibly intelligent. How could he be so self-deceived at that point? Did he really think that he could tempt his Creator and King, even asking Jesus to bow down to someone He Himself had created? What do you think the onlooking universe thought as they watched that conflict?
12. How did Lucifer, now Satan, become so proud, selfish, and egotistical? What do the temptations of Jesus reveal to us about God and about Satan? (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) Would any of the temptations of Jesus be a temptation for you? None of us have ever been tempted to turn a stone into a loaf of bread because we could not do it anyway. On a personal note, I remember a time when at the end of a long day I was hiking up from the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and I certainly wished I could turn a rock into a loaf of bread!
13. Each of those temptations was designed to tempt Jesus to doubt His relationship with the Father. There was always that "if" stated or implied in each temptation. The Jewish people had developed a legend that the Messiah would appear on the pinnacle of the temple and descend to the courtyard to help them conquer and remove the Romans. No doubt, if Jesus had been willing to do that, they would have rallied around Him!
14. Since God's kingdom is a kingdom of love, heaven can accept only people who will act lovingly for the rest of eternity, putting others first. Heaven is not a place for us to be served, floating on clouds, playing harps, but for us to serve others with joy and love.
15. Satan tried to conquer Jesus in His weakened condition by a one-on-one attack. Every one of his temptations was completely selfish, and he was foolish enough to think that Jesus would be tempted by selfishness. Jesus had gone into the desert to have time alone to commune with God and prepare for His upcoming mission; but, Satan sought to take advantage of His condition.

He [Jesus] had been separated from His mother for quite a length of time. During this period He had been baptized by John and had endured the temptations in the wilderness. **Rumors had reached Mary concerning her son and His sufferings. John, one of the new disciples, had searched for**

Christ and had found Him in His humiliation, emaciated, and bearing the marks of great physical and mental distress. Jesus, unwilling that John should witness His humiliation, had gently yet firmly dismissed him from His presence. He wished to be alone; no human eye must behold His agony, no human heart be called out in sympathy with His distress.

The disciple had sought Mary in her home and related to her the incidents of this meeting with Jesus, as well as the event of His baptism, when the voice of God was heard in acknowledgment of His Son, and the prophet John had pointed to Christ, saying “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” For thirty years this woman had been treasuring up evidences that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Saviour of the world. Joseph was dead, and she had no one in whom to confide the cherished thoughts of her heart. She had fluctuated between hope and perplexing doubts, but always feeling more or less of an assurance that her son was indeed the Promised One.—Ellen G. White, 2SP 99,100; 5BC 1132.2-3. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.] How did Ellen White learn about that?

16. Do you think Mary worried about Jesus? Had she come to trust Him implicitly? John was quite young at that time. What did he think? Considering what you know about the temptations of Jesus and those 40 days in the wilderness, how would you have responded?
17. Those temptations were specifically meant to challenge the idea that Jesus as that weakened Human Being could somehow be the mighty Creator and King of the universe. None of us could turn a stone into bread—even if we tried. Very few of us would be willing to jump off a high tower just to “prove” that God would catch us! I am not sure how many of us would be willing to bow down to Satan in order to get control of the entire world, but some would be selfish and egocentric enough to try.
18. Clearly, Jesus went to the wilderness to be alone with God and prepare for His future ministry. It was certainly not for the purpose of placing Himself deliberately in the way of temptation.
19. In one respect, the temptations of Jesus were similar to the temptations of Adam and Eve. They were tempted to eat, and He was tempted to eat. But, what a contrast in their position. Adam and Eve were not hungry. They could have freely eaten of the tree of life whenever they needed to. They also had all the other trees in the garden. Christ had not had anything to eat for 40 days. By His victory, Jesus showed clearly that there is never any excuse for sin. He was tempted, and we are all tempted. But, we do not have to fall. Through faith and submission to God’s will, we can overcome. When Christ finally dismissed Satan, he left!
20. Read James 4:7-8. Have you ever had the experience of forcing Satan to flee by resisting him? What about drawing near to God? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, April 5 asks:

How does this account, by showing us in such a powerful way that there is no excuse for our sin, make our need for Christ’s righteousness so essential? Imagine if we had to stand in our own righteousness without that covering and without justification for our sins! What hope would we have?
21. So, what is the “covering” that is provided by Christ’s righteousness? Why is it necessary? Is it so that the Father cannot see what terrible sinners we really are when we slip into heaven? Would Jesus ever try to deceive the Father? Surely, there is nothing wrong with

the Father's vision! To be covered with Christ's righteousness means to be transformed by taking on His character, and that happens by a well-known process.

22. Our only hope is in God's promise that "by beholding we can become changed." (2 Corinthians 3:18; GC 555.1) If we are willing to take the time to contemplate the life and death of Jesus and come to understand why He came and what He was trying to teach us, God will work within us to change us to become more like the Jesus we worship and admire. By contrast, read Psalm 115:8 and 2 Kings 17:15. It works both ways.
23. If you look at the ministry of Christ in parallel with the experiences of John the Baptist, you will discover that when John was imprisoned, Jesus moved His ministry to Galilee. Later, when John was killed, Jesus and His disciples left Galilee and moved into Gentile territory for the last year of His ministry, trying to avoid conflict with the Jewish authorities.
24. For the first one and one-half years of His ministry, Jesus worked fairly quietly in Judea (more or less under the radar), sometimes working with disciples at His side and sometimes working alone. (DA 201.3) When John was imprisoned, Jesus understood that things were becoming very hostile in Judea; so, He moved His ministry to Galilee where the Pharisees and Sadducees had less influence. It was at that point that Jesus called the twelve disciples and began His very public ministry in Galilee.
25. Read Isaiah 9:1-2 and Matthew 4:13-16. What do we know about the area of Zebulun and Naphtali? What do they have to do with the ministry of Jesus? Zebulun and Naphtali were two of Jacob's sons. (See Genesis 35:23-26.) Unfortunately, they fathered two of the ten tribes that separated from Judea after the reign of Solomon; and then, later, those tribes were conquered by the Assyrians and scattered throughout the Assyrian kingdom. We have lost track of them and have no idea what became of them after that.
26. There is one famous prophet in the Old Testament who came from the Galilean territory; his name was Jonah! It is also possible that Nahum came from Galilee because the town of Capernaum actually is named "Kaphar Nahum" or the village of Nahum. Of course, we do not know if it is the same Nahum whose book is in the Old Testament.
27. So, we see that during almost His entire lifetime, Jesus lived among the rude, backward, unenlightened people of Galilee. Both Nazareth and Capernaum were in Galilee. When His ministry began, Jesus moved from Nazareth and made His home with Peter in Capernaum. Why do you think Jesus chose to live and work primarily in Galilee as opposed to Judea? Wouldn't it have been better to establish Himself closer to Jerusalem? Or, as we see in the Gospels, it was conflict in Jerusalem that caused all the problems! And we must always remember that the people of Galilee were also God's children. We certainly have no reason or authority to judge them.
28. Read Matthew 4:17-22; compare John 1:35-51. After the baptism at the Jordan by John the Baptist and His disappearance into the wilderness for 40 days, Jesus returned to the Jordan to where John was baptizing. John saw Him and identified Him as "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." What do you think people thought he had in mind? How did they understand those words? Some of John the Baptist's closest followers heard John's words and became excited to know more about Jesus. They followed Jesus and began to ask questions. Information about the next one and one-half years of the ministry of Jesus, we know almost nothing. Based on what Ellen White said, some of His disciples were with Jesus some of that time; and during some of that time, Jesus worked alone.
29. Shortly after beginning His Galilean ministry, Jesus officially called His disciples. The account recorded in Matthew 4 tells how He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Clearly, that encounter was not the first time those men had had a relationship with Jesus Christ. Based on some tenuous evidence, some have suggested that James and John were actually cousins of Jesus. That may have been true. But, all of them had spent some time following Jesus earlier in their lives. But, when Jesus officially called them, they walked away from everything to dedicate their lives to following Jesus. What and how do you think they told their families about their decision? How did their families expect to be supported while they followed Jesus? Jesus knew that He was God. Did He ever tell anyone? (John 8:58)

30. In the times of Jesus, a rabbi was regarded as a very special person. Many people would crowd around a rabbi to hear what he had to say. But, it was regarded as a very special privilege to be asked by a rabbi to become his disciple.
31. Many people reading Matthew 4 think that was the first time that Peter, Andrew, James, and John had any contact with Jesus. John 1-5 make it very clear that is not true.

Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable,—men whom He could educate for His work. In the common walks of life there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world's most honored men. The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His colaborers; and He gave them the advantage of association with Himself.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 250.1. [Bold type is added.]

32. We have seen briefly in this lesson how important the Old Testament was in support of the gospel in the New Testament. There really is no separation between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

An evangelist came to town and advertised his meeting by this invitation: "Come see a preacher tear a page out of the Bible!" That, no doubt, brought a crowd. He then stood before them, opened his Bible, and—to their astonishment—tore out a page. "This page," he said, "never belonged there. It's the page separating the Old Testament from the New." Whatever one might think of his theatrics, the preacher made a good point. These two books are, really, one.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, April 8.

33. Jesus Himself repeatedly quoted from the Old Testament. All of the writers of the New Testament did so as well. Some scholars suggest that the book of Revelation quotes from or alludes to the Old Testament 550 times! While it is true that we no longer practice a sacrificial system of killing animals, there are still many very important lessons for us to learn from the Old Testament.
34. Jesus knew that He was the divine Son of God. So, why did He bother to quote Scripture when dealing with Satan instead of just demanding that Satan leave by exercising His divine power? Was it because He wanted to teach us how we can meet and defeat Satan in our temptations?
35. The Bible has an answer to every temptation that we might face. We need to become so familiar with its teachings so that when we are tempted, the appropriate Scripture comes to mind. Jesus was incredibly humble. How can we learn to be more like Him? Why is it so natural and so comfortable for us to be selfish? If we study the life of Jesus and truly seek to become like Him, will we become more humble?

36. The Gospels speak a great deal about the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven.” That expression occurs 106 times in the Gospels. Of those, 49 times are in Matthew; 16 are in Mark; 38 are in Luke; and 3 are in John. What do we need to know about the “kingdom of heaven”?

The kingdom of God’s grace is now being established, as day by day hearts that have been full of sin and rebellion yield to the sovereignty of His love. But the full establishment of the kingdom of His glory will not take place until the second coming of Christ to this world.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 108.1.

37. In the early ministry of Jesus as well as in the ministry of John the Baptist, we are taught about five spiritually dynamic essentials in the Christian life: 1) Repentance; 2) The kingdom of heaven; 3) The importance of baptism by water, by the Spirit, and by fire; 4) The importance of victory over Satan; and 5) How to become “fishers of men.” Do we clearly understand each of those concepts? What does it mean to be “baptized by fire”? In ancient times, one of the few ways they had of purifying a metal was by heating it very hot so that impurities were burned away. Thus, *baptism by fire* represents God’s method of removing the impurities and the sins from our lives.
38. Repentance, and when appropriate, baptism, should be the dividing line in the attitudes, priorities, and directions of one’s life. The description of our behavior should be quite different after we meet Christ than before we meet Christ.
39. Malachi 4:5 prophesied that a forerunner would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. Four hundred years later, the prophetic silence was broken when John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea. (Matthew 3:1) In what ways did John prepare the people of Israel for the ministry of Jesus Christ? Did Jesus really need the ministry of John the Baptist?
40. Review the essential message of John and of the early ministry of Jesus: “Repent and be baptized.” Both John and Jesus challenged the Jewish preconceived ideas about the Messiah. Both told them that they needed to stop depending on the fact that they were descendants from Abraham as if that were some kind of guarantee of salvation.
41. *To repent* means to change one’s mind which in turn leads to a change in attitudes and a change in behavior. John spoke about the judgment as if it were like an axe cutting down a tree or a winnowing fan blowing away the chaff from the pure wheat. What do these pictures conjure up in your mind?
42. Read Isaiah 1:16-17. What are these two verses challenging us to do? Some Jewish scholars have said that there are nine separate things that God is calling us to do: 1) Wash ourselves; 2) Make ourselves clean; 3) Put away the evil of our doings from before My eyes; 4) Cease to do evil; 5) Learn to do good; 6) Seek justice; 7) Rebuke the oppressor; 8) Defend the fatherless; and 9) Plead for the widow. Would you agree with their assessment?
43. Besides giving an example for us to follow, the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus made it very clear to Jesus Himself as well as to those observing that He was/is the Messiah. The voice of the Father was heard, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. All three Members of the Godhead were present on that occasion. What better way to launch the ministry of Jesus?

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