

Gospels: Lesson One,
Jesus' Birth and Onset of Ministry
Matthew 1-4, Luke 1-2, John 1

Subject: Matthew presents Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism, and temptations.

Main Idea: Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of Heaven in His first advent.

Principles:

1. *Christ's Kingdom was divinely orchestrated and entrance into it continues to be divinely orchestrated.*
2. *Jesus' Kingdom inspires worship.*
3. *The Kingdom of Heaven challenges conventional religious thinking.*
4. *The Kingdom of Heaven is powerful in overcoming evil and advancing righteousness.*

Introduction

Between 1949 and 1954, C.S. Lewis wrote his best-known work, a series of children's novels known as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Since that time, the books have sold over 100 million copies in 47 languages. They are a classic of children's literature. The stories revolve around four siblings, Peter, Susan, Edward, and Lucy, who are sent to temporarily reside in the rambling mansion of an elderly relative for their safety during the Second World War. One day, they enter a large wardrobe and much to their surprise, stumble into another world: the world of Narnia. There, they discover themselves to be royalty, sons and daughters of Aslan the King, but in the end they find that they are still very much a part of life in England. Two realities coexist, neither less real than the other. Even with a world war going on in Europe, Narnia turns out to be the place of greater danger for the children, but also the place of greater victory and joy. For the most part, however, the people of London go about their business totally unaware that this other reality exists.

Narnia represents the very real kingdom in which every believer is a royal son or daughter of Jesus the King, even while living out the remainder of our earthly lives. Matthew emphasizes the "Kingdom of Heaven" in his Gospel, showing that Jesus inaugurated this Kingdom in His earthly ministry. The other Gospel writers favored the term "Kingdom of God," but since the Jews believed that speaking God's name was irreverent and Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, he preferred the term "Kingdom of Heaven" (using it 33 times and "Kingdom of God" only four times). This Kingdom is both present and future. It is evident today in its members who have accepted Christ as King and are working out His purposes on earth. It will be brought to completion and perfection at Christ's second advent. It is a spiritual Kingdom, and yet it is a very real Kingdom in which Christ presently reigns over His subjects. It is present wherever He is present. Forces that oppose it are being subjected and will one day be completely overthrown in a final battle.

Most people live oblivious to the existence of this Kingdom. Even believers often go about their business, forgetting that they have been miraculously birthed into a new humanity and spiritually raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6, 15), in His Kingdom. The first four chapters of Matthew point out significant truths about this Kingdom: It is heavenly in its origins, it inspires worship, it is radically different than preconceived ideas about it, and it is powerful.

I. A Divinely Orchestrated Kingdom (The Genealogy of Jesus) –

Matthew 1:1-17

A. Purpose of Biblical Genealogies: For centuries before Matthew’s time, Jews were concerned with genealogies, for two particular reasons. First, many prayed and hoped to be the parents of God’s promised Deliverer, the One promised to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15), who would descend through Abraham (Genesis 12:3b) and King David (2 Samuel 7:13, 16). Old Testament genealogies are especially concerned with the lineage of these particular individuals for that reason. Secondly, in the late 8th Century BC, the people known as Samaritans came to live in the land of Israel. The Jews despised them and considered them to be half-breeds, prompting concern for the purity of the race. Thus, Matthew, a Jew writing to a Jewish audience, begins his Gospel of Jesus Christ with a record of Jesus’ genealogy.

B. Content of Matthew’s Genealogy

- i. The Legitimate King: Matthew’s opening words are “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew’s genealogy offers proof that Jesus of Nazareth legally descended from the Davidic kings and had the right to David’s throne. Later, in chapter two, Matthew contrasts Jesus with Herod, to whom the Roman senate had granted the illegitimate title “King of Judea.”
- ii. A Selective Genealogy: Matthew’s genealogy lists three sets of fourteen names each. The first group of names begins with Abraham, the second group with David, and the third with the Exile of the Jews (possibly because the Jews saw Messiah as the one who would restore what the Exile had taken from themⁱ). The names of several known kingly descendants of David are omitted (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah), making the list a selective one. However, its symmetry made the genealogy memorable.
- iii. Comparison with Luke’s Genealogy: Luke also gives a genealogy of Christ in chapter three of his Gospel, one that traces Christ’s origins back beyond Abraham to Adam and God. The names after David in Luke’s genealogy differ from those in Matthew’s. Luke traces David’s lineage through his son Nathan, while Matthew traces it through David’s son Solomon. Two primary thoughts have emerged about the reason for this difference. One is that Luke traced Mary’s genealogy while Matthew traced Joseph’s. The other is that Luke gave Jesus’ actual human ancestry through Joseph, while Matthew gave a legal ancestry that shows him to be the legitimate heir to David’s throne (a throne succession list would not necessarily have passed from father to son, but would remain within the familyⁱⁱ).

- iv. **Jesus' Ancestors:** Among those included by Matthew in Messiah's ancestors are not only men but women, not only Jews but Gentiles, not only good kings but wicked kings, and not only godly individuals but those whose sin was well known! This was an embarrassment to pious Jews, but it is a beautiful picture of Jesus' identification with sinners and God's willingness to use the weak in order to bring Himself glory.

Summary Statement: God had promised to send a Messiah who would be a descendant of Abraham and King David. Matthew's genealogy shows that Jesus qualified, implying divine foreknowledge and intervention.

Principle: *Christ's Kingdom was divinely orchestrated and entrance into it continues to be divinely orchestrated.*

Application: In Ephesians 1-2, Paul teaches that God chose each believer for membership in Christ's Kingdom before the creation of the world (1:4). We were predestined for the praise of His glory (1:23). Paul emphasizes that, in our sinful state, we are powerless to bring ourselves to salvation. So powerless are we to effect our salvation that Paul says Kingdom members were previously "dead in our sins" (2:1). In love, God graciously made us alive in Christ (2:4-5), birthing us into His heavenly Kingdom (2:6). He did this "in order that in the coming ages, He might *show the incomparable riches of His grace*, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus [my emphasis]" (2:7). He did it for the sake of His glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12; 2:7).

Our sin nature and narcissistic cultures encourage us to look inwardly. We are probably unaware how much of the time we view everything through the lens of self, what *I* can get out of anything and everything. God has indeed given us great privilege, but He ordained it for the sake of *His* glory. He ordained our salvation; He deserves the glory!

Is the focus of your personal faith in Christ primarily on the benefits to *you* or on God's glory? Ironically, when we are inwardly focused, we enjoy the benefits of Kingdom membership far less! The more we live to the praise of God's glory, the more richly we experience them.

Transition: Matthew's genealogy points out that Jesus' Kingdom was divinely ordained. The birth of Christ reveals yet another fact about the Kingdom.

II. A Worship Inspiring Kingdom (The Birth of Jesus) – Matthew 1:18-2:23, Luke 1-2, John 1

A. The Annunciation – Matthew 1:18-24, Luke 1:26-38

- i. Announcement to Mary: While Matthew tells us about the angel announcing the birth of Jesus to Joseph, we have to go to Luke's Gospel to get the longer version that includes more information about Mary. By custom, Mary may not have been more than a young teenager when she was betrothed to Joseph. The angel Gabriel appeared and told her that, although a virgin, she would conceive a son. This Son would be great and called the Son of the Most High. He would inherit the throne of David and His Kingdom would never end. These descriptions of Mary's child are in line with Old Testament descriptions of the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:13-14, 16, Psalm 2:7, Daniel 2:44, 7:14, 27).
- ii. Announcement to Joseph
 1. When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he considered divorcing her. According to the custom of the day, the arrangement of a marriage was a legal matter and could only be broken by divorce. A couple did not typically consummate the marriage and begin living together until after the wedding, but from the time of the legal arrangement, they were still considered husband and wife.
 2. Joseph was a brave, obedient, patient, and godly man. At the angel's instructions, he took the pregnant Mary as his wife. He waited until after Jesus was born to consummate the marriage.
 3. Joseph was told to name the child "Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent to "Joshua," which means "the Lord saves." Joseph surely wondered over the destiny of this Son that he and Mary would raise!

B. The Incarnation – John 1:1-18: John begins his Gospel with amazing statements about the deity of Christ. He calls Jesus "the Word" and indicates that He existed at the beginning of time, He is God and with God, all that has been created was made through Him, He put on flesh and came to live on earth, He is full of grace and truth, He is the instrument of God's ultimate blessing to us and the revelation of God to humankind. In theological terms, God putting on human flesh is called the "incarnation." In C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, he suggested that the closest we might come to understanding God condescending to be human would be by imagining one's self suddenly becoming a slug or a crab.ⁱⁱⁱ

C. Five Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus' Birth – Matthew 1:18 – 2:23: Matthew indicates five different ways that Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecy.

- i. First Prophecy (Virgin Birth): The first is that Jesus' mother would be a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). Mary conceived a child by a special work of the Holy Spirit of God (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27-37). Although many today are eager to dismiss the virgin birth as impossible, if one accepts that God created everything from nothing (Genesis 1), no other Biblical miracle is difficult to accept. *God* was Jesus' Father and Mary was His mother. For this reason, Jesus could be both fully human and fully divine. As fully God, He was worthy to atone for our sin. As fully human, He could represent us and be our substitute. The implications of the virgin birth are therefore critical to the doctrines of our salvation.
- ii. Second Prophecy (Bethlehem): The second prophecy that Jesus's birth fulfilled concerned the location of His birth in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-6, Micah 5:2, 4). According to Luke's Gospel, Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee (1:26, 2:4). Jesus' birth some 60 miles to the south in Bethlehem was unlikely. However, right at the time the baby was to be born, a census was ordered and Mary and Joseph were required to travel to his family's hometown, which just happened to be Bethlehem!
- iii. Third and Fourth Prophecies (Flight to Egypt and Mourning Mothers)
 1. The third fulfilled prophecy concerned the fact that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15, Hosea 11:1). Joseph took Mary and Jesus there at the instructions of the angel in order to protect them from the jealous wrath of Herod. Herod the Great was a troubled, suspicious man who is known in history to have had his wife, his mother-in-law, his eldest son and two other sons murdered. He tolerated no potential rivals, so when the wise men told him they sought one born "king of the Jews," Herod secretly set in motion a plan to have the baby killed.
 2. The magi were probably non-Jewish astrologers. Their study led them to infer the birth of a great Jewish king, whom they journeyed to meet. Luke also tells of angels and shepherds who worshipped Jesus (Luke 2:8-20). The arrival of these visitors surely encouraged Joseph and Mary that they were not alone. However for us, the Magi are also reminders that Christ's Kingdom will include Gentiles as well as Jews.
 3. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus escaped to Egypt, but not knowing this, Herod had all the baby boys in the vicinity of Bethlehem up to two years of age killed, fulfilling the fourth prophecy (Matthew 2:16-18, Jeremiah 31:15). Herod died in the year 4 BC, which is traditionally considered to also have been the year of Jesus' birth.

- iv. Fifth Prophecy (Called a Nazarene): After Herod's death, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him to take Mary and Jesus back to Israel. Joseph was also warned in a dream to avoid Judea, so they returned to Nazareth. Matthew 2:23 says this fulfilled the prophecy that Messiah would be "called a Nazarene." No specific Old Testament verse says Messiah would be "called a Nazarene." However, many have embraced the theory of Jerome (4th century AD) that "'Nazarene' was a slang or idiomatic term for an individual from a very remote or obscure place."^{iv} The humble circumstances into which Jesus was born are impressed in the Gospels. But in terms of Old Testament prophecy, Isaiah 52-53 clearly speaks of Messiah's obscurity (Isaiah 52-53).

D. The Boyhood of Jesus – Luke 2:41-52

- i. Journeys to the Temple: The only information the Gospels give us about Jesus' childhood are found in Luke 2, where we read of His circumcision (2:21), His consecration to the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem (2:22), and His annual trip to the Temple with His parents for the Feast of Passover (2:41-52). Luke records the family's blessing by the devout Simeon and Anna. The Holy Spirit had revealed to them that Jesus was the Messiah. Luke also tells of a particular Passover festival in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old and the astonishment of everyone at Jesus' wisdom.
- ii. Joseph's Probable Death: It seems likely that Joseph died while Jesus was still growing up. The last Biblical reference to Joseph's life is found in Luke 2:50, stating that "they" (he and Mary) did not understand Jesus' explanation about why He remained behind at the Temple on the occasion of the Passover just mentioned. As the oldest son, Jesus would have assumed responsibility to support His family. It seems that He took Joseph's place as the local carpenter and that Joseph and Mary had other sons and daughters (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3). If Joseph died young and Jesus helped raise His siblings, He surely experienced some of the challenges of parenting.

Summary Statement: Just as Matthew's genealogy is intended to prove that Jesus is Messiah, so are the repeated references to the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled at His birth. Yet there is one other thing we learn about the Kingdom through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth. This Kingdom inspires worship!

Principle: *Jesus' Kingdom inspires worship.*

Worship is the expression of appropriate fear and awe when God's great glory and worth is manifested to us.

According to the Gospels, those involved in the story of Jesus' birth responded in fear and wonder.

- The Shepherds were appropriately terrified when the glory of the Lord shone around them. When they encountered Jesus, they returned glorifying and praising God (Luke 2:9, 20). That is worship!
- When the wise men came face to face with Jesus, they bowed down, worshipped Him, and offered Him gifts (Matthew 2:11).
- Mary's response to the announcement of Jesus' birth was in song. She began, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). She was worshipping.
- The unborn John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother's womb in the presence of the unborn Jesus in Mary's womb (Luke 1:44). That is worship!

Application: Kingdom-members worship God and His Christ naturally, freely, and spontaneously because they have encountered the Living Christ. Is this your experience? Have you encountered the Jesus of the Gospels, the Jesus whom you cannot help but worship? The Jesus who leaves you in absolute awe? Have you ever met *this* Jesus?

Perhaps you will say, "I once did. But I rarely encounter this Jesus now. I cannot remember the last time I found myself trembling and in awe of Him." If you find this to be your experience, that can only be for one of two reasons. Either you are not yet a member of Christ's Kingdom or you are not paying attention to the news of the Kingdom.

- Has someone spoken a word of encouragement to you? Praise God! It is actually He, encouraging you through them! This is Kingdom news.
- Do you know someone who recently understood something more about what it means to enter the Kingdom? Praise God! He is at work! This is Kingdom news.
- Perhaps one you love is struggling. Praise God! He is building character in them and in you! A host of created beings in the spiritual world are waiting with baited breath to see how God brings this to resolution, and with each small step, they explode with joy and applause!

We tune into the news of Heaven by seeing life with spiritual eyes, and when we do, we cannot help but encounter the King at the center of the Kingdom and worship Him. Are you a worshipper? Have you trained yourself to tune into Kingdom news?

Transition: Christ's Kingdom is divinely orchestrated and worship inspiring. Matthew 3 reveals yet another fact about it.

III. A Radically Different Kingdom (The Baptism of Jesus) – Matthew 3

A. John's Radical Character and Message

- i. Character: Matthew tells us that John the Baptist's ministry occurred in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah (Matthew 3:1-3, Isaiah 40:3). John was the son of a priest named Zechariah and a formerly barren woman named Elizabeth (Luke 1). He was also Jesus' cousin (Luke 1:36). He lived in the desert, eating locusts and wild honey, and wearing clothing made of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist (Mark 1). As the last of the Old Testament prophets and the forerunner of Christ (John 1:23), John announced that someone greater than he was coming (Luke 3:16, John 1:15), and he announced the Kingdom of heaven was near.
- ii. Offense to Religious Leaders: In Matthew 3:7, we have the first mention of the Pharisees and Sadducees. You will recall from the previous lesson that the Sadducees were priestly aristocrats of Jerusalem with a sharp interest in politics and matters pertaining to the Temple. The larger body known as Pharisees were teachers of the Law from the synagogues all over the land, primarily interested in keeping traditions of their own making, traditions that enabled them to remain separate from anything "unclean." The Jewish Supreme Court, known as the Sanhedrin, was comprised of members of both sects. Despite their differences, the Pharisees and Sadducees were united by their common dislike of John and Jesus, whose message represented a threat to their interests. John had harsh words for these religious leaders, insisting that their interest in his message was a pretense (Matthew 3:7) and that their Jewish birth was no guarantee of protection from God's judgment (Matthew 3:7-10). He told them they did not produce the good "fruit" that was pleasing to God and a crucial evidence of true repentance (Matthew 3:8). His message greatly offended them.
- iii. Message of Repentance: John and Jesus preached a message of repentance and the nearness of God's Kingdom (Matthew 3:2, 4:17). Both insisted that true repentance involves inner transformation, not just outward conformation to a code. The idea that, first and foremost, God requires inward transformation is clearly taught in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5), but the religious leaders of the day focused on outward appearances. They would have thought it fine for Gentiles to need a baptism of repentance, but Jews had received the sign of circumcision, which they believed was sufficient for salvation. John's message was therefore *radical* to their ears and the ears of the common people, who were instructed by them.

- iv. The Kingdom of Heaven is Near: The Jews had interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures as teaching that God's Kingdom would be set up suddenly and decisively at the day of God's judgment over Israel's enemies. They did not see any evidence that Israel's enemies were about to be overturned. No Messiah had yet appeared to rescue them from Roman oppression and to re-establish the physical kingdom of Israel. Therefore, John and Jesus' message that the Kingdom of Heaven was *near* was indeed radical.

B. Purpose of Christian Baptism

i. Jesus' Baptism

1. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Yet Jesus, the sinless Son of God, asked John to baptize Him. John was confused by the request, but Jesus insisted it was proper "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). In Jesus' baptism, He put His stamp of approval on John's renewal movement. Furthermore, His baptism identified Him with sinners, indicating that He, the sinless Son of Man, would willingly be our representative, our substitute.
2. Immediately thereafter, the Spirit of God alighted on Jesus in the form of a something like a dove and affirming by a voice from heaven that Jesus was His Son and He was well pleased with Him. This message reflected prophetic words concerning the Messiah from the Psalms (2:7) and Isaiah (42:1).
3. One might say that Jesus' baptism initiated Him into His public ministry. Just as Jesus put His stamp of approval on John's ministry on this occasion, God the Father put His stamp of approval of His Son Jesus.

- ii. Our Baptism: Jesus commanded believers to be baptized upon repentance, that is, salvation (Mark 16:16), as a symbol of our death with Him on the Cross and our resurrection with Him into new life (Romans 6:6, 8; Galatians 2:20). Our baptism is therefore an act of obedience and also a public symbol of our unity with Christ.

Summary Statement: Matthew's portrayal of John and the baptism of Jesus reveal that the Kingdom Jesus was inaugurating was far different than what the majority of Jews expected. The preaching of John and Jesus certainly challenged conventional religious thinking about what God requires of us.

Principle: *The Kingdom of Heaven challenges conventional religious thinking.*

The message that we are helpless sinners is never a popular one. We prefer humanistic philosophies that claim we can fix our own problems and are inherently good. Among those who confess their sin, there are some, like the Jews of Jesus' day, who believe that membership in an religious organization, ethnic identity, or some other affiliation will ultimately save them. A great many more believe they are capable of earning their salvation by good deeds. They cling to moral codes for salvation rather than clinging to the King of the Kingdom, who alone can effect inner transformation.

The apostle Paul explains that it is only because of what the Son, King Jesus, has done that we can be forgiven. He saves us and transfers us from the kingdom of darkness into His own Kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). It is His work, not ours, that makes us suitable for the Kingdom.

Application: I have included a letter on salvation with this lesson for the purpose of explaining this more fully. Many people who think they will be saved from God's wrath will not (Matthew 7:14). Jesus' Kingdom challenges conventional religious thinking. Do you know with certainty that you are part of this Kingdom?

Transition: Christ's Kingdom is divinely orchestrated, worship inspiring, and challenges conventional religious thinking. In Matthew 4, we find a fourth truth about the Kingdom Jesus inaugurated in His earthly ministry.

IV. A Powerful Kingdom (The Temptations and Early Ministry of Jesus)

– Matthew 4 Chapter 4 of Matthew tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert immediately following His baptism. In the Christian life, victory is often followed by trials and testing. This is what we see here. Jesus' baptism was triumphant. The heavens opened and God announced that Jesus was His Son. Thereafter, Jesus met with temptation. Before we consider the temptations themselves, it is necessary to note the identity of the tempter: the devil, the Ancient Serpent, and Satan are only a few of the names the Bible gives him.

A. Power Over Evil

i. Who is the Devil?

1. Although the Bible does not speak directly of his origins, two Old Testament prophetic passages (Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14) appear to reference it indirectly. Both passages address the evil of a known human king, while suggesting the origin, position, and future of an evil ruler of far greater significance. They describe a guardian angel, created by God as a model of perfection, who became proud and corrupted by His beauty and aspired to be God's equal. God cast him to the earth and destined him for destruction.

2. God permitted this evil one a degree of authority on earth. Paul called him the “ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) and Jesus referred to him as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).
 3. Satan (one of his many names) is cunning. He seeks our destruction and in order to gain it, he tempts us cunningly. He tempts us to doubt God’s goodness and thus, grow discontent with God’s will for our lives, but he never presents his case so openly. He subtly drops thoughts within our minds that usually sound fair and right on the surface. Jesus called him “the father of lies” (John 8:44).
- ii. The Three Temptations: Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, the same amount of time Moses went without food and water (Exodus 34:28). At the end of that time, when Jesus was physically weak and hungry, He was tested with regard to His resolve to fulfill God’s plans.
1. First, the devil tempted Jesus to use His divine power to provide for His physical needs (to turn stones into bread).
 - a. Certainly, Jesus was capable of doing this. He later turned water to wine (John 2) and caused a few loaves of bread to feed 5000, with leftovers (Matthew 14:20). However, if Jesus was to fulfill God’s purpose for Him in going to the Cross, He had to be willing to “accept privation... without ‘pulling rank’.”^v
 - b. Jesus replied to this temptation, as He did all three, by quoting from Deuteronomy. When the Israelites were in the desert, the Lord fed them with manna. The Deuteronomy verse Jesus quoted says, “[The Lord] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” The Israelites had to learn to depend on the Lord for their provisions, and likewise, Jesus had to be willing to lay aside His divine rights and trust Himself to His Father’s care.
 2. Secondly, Jesus was tempted to gain popular favor by casting Himself from the Temple roof and calling on angels to rescue Him. Again, Jesus had the power to do this, but as Jesus’ reply points out, the devil was asking Him to force God’s hand. He again quoted from Deuteronomy (6:16), “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus knew it was not proper for Him to do anything out of His Father’s will, whatever the reason. The only way for Him to fulfill His Father’s purposes was to remain within His will.

3. Thirdly, the devil offered to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for being worshipped by Jesus. In essence, Satan offered to give Jesus *immediately* what He would *ultimately* gain anyway. He was tempting Jesus to shortcut the Cross on the road to glory. Jesus had the right to these kingdoms, but the cost of having them immediately would have been our souls. Likewise, Satan often offers us success or power today for the price of our souls. In worshipping these, we ultimately worship him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

B. Power For Good (Events of Jesus’ Early Ministry)

- i. List of Events: The balance of Matthew 4 relates aspects of Jesus’ early ministry in a summarizing fashion. Jesus’ early ministry was spent in constant service to others, prompted by His love for them. He called His first disciples, preached the good news, and healed the sick. Mark and Luke tell of Jesus casting out demons, forgiving sins, and spending time in early morning prayer. John adds a few specific stories about Jesus’ early ministry that are not included in the other Gospels: Jesus’ first miracle (changing water into wine at Cana in Galilee), His clearing of the Temple, His discussion about being born again with the Pharisee Nicodemus, and His discourse with the Samaritan woman and resulting belief of many Samaritans.
- ii. Purpose in Summarizing: All of these passages deserve careful study. Hopefully, your appetite is being whetted to study them in detail throughout your lifetime. However, since our goal is to understand the overall story of the Bible and therefore, in this *Gospels* study, to be introduced to the person and work of Jesus (the central figure of the Bible), we are merely listing these particular events.

Summary Statement: Matthew’s record of Jesus’ temptations emphasizes the power of Christ’s Kingdom to overcome evil. Following that, Matthew’s summary of the events of Jesus’ early ministry emphasizes the power of Christ’s Kingdom to advance righteousness.

Principle: *The Kingdom of Heaven is powerful in overcoming evil and advancing righteousness.*

1 Corinthians 4:20 says, “For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” The error of many Christians is in assuming that membership in a powerful Kingdom means *they* will be more powerful. Not at all! The secret of accessing the power of the Kingdom is in accessing the King Himself. The King is central to the Kingdom. The power is in Him, not in us. And His power is most evident in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Application: If you are a member of Christ’s powerful Kingdom, what evidences of His power have you seen this past week in and around you?

- Has the Holy Spirit revealed a truth to you?
- Have you overcome a nagging temptation?
- Have you experienced inner transformation?
- Have you exercised spiritual gifts effectively and benefited as others have exercised theirs?
- Have you witnessed someone being rescued from the kingdom of darkness?
- Have you seen people come together in unity that naturally would not?

Praise God! Our King is indeed a powerful King!

Conclusion

The Chronicles of Narnia are fiction, but Matthew intends for us to see that Christ inaugurated a very real Kingdom in his first advent, a Kingdom that was, and continues to be, divinely orchestrated, a Kingdom that inspires worship, a Kingdom that challenges conventional religious thinking, and a Kingdom that is powerful in overcoming evil and advancing righteousness.

The next lesson introduces Jesus’ teaching ministry with the Sermon on the Mount.

ⁱ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, pp. 53–54). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱ France R.T. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., Mt 1:1–17). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) 179-180.

^{iv} Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 70). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^v France, R.T. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 910). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.