

Summary Handout

“Prepare Ye the Way . . . Of the Lord”

Lesson

4

Summary

Matthew 3; John the Baptist preaches in Judaea—Jesus is baptized and the Father acclaims him as his Beloved Son.

Matthew 4; Jesus fasts forty days and is tempted—He begins his ministry, calls disciples, and heals the sick.

John 1:35-51; John, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael believe in Christ and follow him.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

Anointing: The word Messiah literally means “the anointed one.” Anointing includes the practical and symbolic qualities of softening and healing. “Anointing also figured in the coronation of the king, in the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests, and in the purification of a person suffering from leprosy. These anointings . . . symbolized the new rank and power given to the anointed person and they evoked God’s blessing on him.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Four Basic Principles (for Jews): As late as 11th century, there were still some Jewish scholars who saw, as basic to the Jewish religion, the following four principles: (1) belief in God; (2) belief in the prophets; (3) belief in the World to Come; and (4) belief in the coming of the Messiah. The latter two items of a belief in a world to come and in the coming of the Messiah have greatly diminished in modern Jewish society.

The Messiah and The Gathering: “. . . The gathering of the Jews and the coming of the Messiah are linked. To the Jews, there is no question about the gathering of the Jews, but where is the Messiah? “Isaiah describes a glorious age, “. . . in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people” (11:11). With the coming of the Messiah, Jews will come home to Jerusalem, the everlasting city . . . the majority of religious leaders believed that there could be no return to Zion before the coming of the Messiah . . .” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Jewish Concepts of the Messiah: Let us examine Jewish thought about the Messiah to understand our brothers’ points of view. The comparisons might be helpful in identifying the true Messiah and what He would really do. “‘I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.’ This is the 12th of Maimonides’ 13 articles of faith and clearly expresses what has become a cardinal belief of traditional Judaism.” “In traditional Judaism, the Messiah will be a human being --- albeit it a perfect one --- who will come and bring harmony to the world. He will not have a divine aspect other than having been chosen by God for his task. The Hebrew word for Messiah, *mashi’ah*, means “anointed” and indicates that the Messiah has been chosen by God. The coming of the Messiah therefore has come to mean the redemption of the Jewish people and an end to its suffering and tribulations.”

Messianic Claims: Throughout history many men have presented themselves as the Messiah . . . the most famous was Jesus, although Christianity deviated from Judaism in ascribing to him divine characteristics . . . According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph. “An early example of messianic expectation took place during the period of the Second Temple in Judah. The turbulence accompanying the rule of King Herod and, later, that of the Romans led to the emergence of messianic leaders, each of whom claimed to be the “king of Israel,” about to free the Jews from the hated foreign rulers. Many of these, like Jesus of Nazareth, were crucified for their efforts. (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What Good Came from the Herods? The Herods preceding and during Jesus’ time had a significant role in establishing a political and economic era that provided an environment of enough religious freedom that the ancient law and priesthood could be restored, albeit in a rather insignificant way. People desired to be delivered from the cruelty of the Romans (brought on by the traitorous onslaught of Jewish zealots) and the corruption of the Jewish priesthood. This was the precise time that events would result in the Savior’s great atonement for all mankind, a deliverance, largely unnoticed at the time, that had eternal implications for everyone. “Herod’s rule had destroyed the internal organization of the Jewish community and displaced the authority of the Torah. Though a Jew himself, he was hated by the people. One of the few productive aspects of his reign was the large number of cities, fortresses and palaces he had built . . . he

also employed 11,000 workmen to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and it was so beautiful that people said: "He who has not seen the Temple does not know what beauty is." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Wise Men Came Two Years after the Birth of Jesus: The New Testament reports that it was this Herod who ordered all babies in the nearby town of Bethlehem up to two-years old to be killed. This was in response to the "wise men" who came looking for the "new king" about two years after he was born. The Herod that dealt with Jesus at the end of his mortal life was Herod Antipas.

Occupation Not Always Oppressive: It is important to note that Herodian and Roman rule was not always onerous. Most of the difficulties that the Jews encountered were caused by a fairly small segment of society, the Zealots, who made murderous raids against the Roman government. "Agrippa I (10 B.C.E. - 44 C.E.) became a beloved and respected king of Judea . . . he was sympathetic to the Pharisees and careful to observe Jewish laws. Thoughtful and sincere, Agrippa once stopped his own procession to let a bride's pass first. He was not proud, and celebrated the festival of First Fruits with other residents of Jerusalem. When called to read the Torah he stood, although a king was allowed to sit. When he read the passage: "One from among thy brethren shalt thou set a king over thee: thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee" (Deuteronomy 17:15), his eyes filled with tears, since he was not of pure Jewish descent. But the rabbis called out, "Agrippa, you are our brother." His death (44 C.E.) was sudden and mysterious. It was thought that he had been poisoned by Romans who feared his popularity with his subjects." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Prophet, Teaching "First Principles," Precedes the Messiah: Immediately preceding Jesus' life, another series of events paralleled the political and economic events of the time. A prophet was preparing the way for a deliverer. His effort was to teach the people to have faith in the true redeemer, repent, and make covenants so that they might receive the Holy Spirit which the redeemer would give them. Using the *Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*, Judaism views, Faith, Repentance, Baptism (immersion–Mikveh) and the Holy Spirit as follows. **Faith:** "... The biblical word *emunah* . . . is often translated as "belief" really means "trust" or "confidence . . ." Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism." **Repentance:** "A unique aspect of the Jewish faith is that although God rules the world with absolute justice, He is also merciful and forgives sins against Him. The doctrine of repentance is based on this belief . . . Although Judaism sees sin as a most serious matter, even the sinner is not without hope. One of the most important theological doctrines of both the Bible and the Talmud is that if a sinner repents his bad deeds, God will forgive him. Repentance consists of several stages --- firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realize that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin. This confession is not made to any other human being but is made by the sinner directly to God. However . . . his repentance is still not final until he has been exposed to the same temptation and withstood it. Of course he should not deliberately put himself on that spot again." "Repentance in Hebrew is known as *teshuvah*, which literally means "return," and signifies a return to God . . . when a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be *mitzvot*. This is perhaps the most comforting doctrine that Judaism has given to the world." **Conversion - Immersion:** "A convert to Judaism is considered a new-born child, and, from the halakhic point of view, he has no father or mother. Thus, if a whole family converts, the children and the parents start their lives as Jews with no legal relationship. Because of this state of affairs, converts are always named as though they were the sons of Abraham, the first Jew. A husband and wife who convert must also have another wedding ceremony in order to be married under Jewish law." "A potential convert (or proselyte) is first questioned by a court (*bet din*) . . . for both males and females the *bet din* oversees their immersion in a ritual bath (*mikveh*)." **Holy Spirit:** "*Ruab ha-Kodesh* (holy spirit) is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruab ha-kodesh* which also can be attained by doing good deeds."

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