

MATTHEW 1-4

JESUS IS BORN, IS BAPTIZED, AND COMMENCES HIS MINISTRY

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew opens with the earthly genealogy of Jesus, starting with Him as a descendant of Abraham (the father of the covenant) and then David (king of Israel). The Savior's genealogy runs through David and on back to Abraham because the Messiah, who was to be descended from David, was not only the ruler of Israel but also the promised descendant of Abraham. Through the Abrahamic covenant, all the nations and people of the earth will be blessed according to their faithfulness.¹

From those two significant ancestors, the genealogy of Jesus is listed down to Joseph, Mary's husband. As Bruce R. McConkie noted, the words "Book of the Generation" correspond with the modern terms *lineage*, *genealogical chart*, and *family tree*. The word "Book" refers to that genealogical list, not to the Gospel of Matthew.²

Why genealogy? Genealogies were important in the ancient world for many reasons: to prove that a person was not a fatherless slave, for establishing tribal and priesthood lines of inheritance or authority, and to demonstrate royalty, social status, and legitimacy as a rightful heir to a throne. In Jewish culture in Jesus's day, knowing one's genealogy was important in determining such things as belonging to a particular tribe, such as Levi or Judah. Under Roman law, the institution of adoption fully legitimized the legal status of a child. So in the ancient mind, because Joseph was Jesus's adoptive father, Jesus would be seen as a legitimate heir of King David and Abraham.

Two genealogical lists. The New Testament offers two different genealogical records for Jesus: this one in Matthew 1 and the other in Luke 3. Most biblical scholars agree that Matthew's genealogical list is that of Joseph's royal lineage, which shows the sequence of actual successors to the royal line of Judah, while the list in Luke is Joseph's biological genealogy from King David. Luke, a Gentile interested in all the nations of the world, continued Jesus's ancestry back to Adam, the father of the whole human race.

Heavenly Father desires that we search out our ancestors. Genealogy is important not only in this life but eternally so that all families and the whole human family can eventually be together forever. Elder Gerrit W. Gong encouraged all people to learn their story:

Do you know your story? . . .

Still very much alive, our ancestors deserve to be remembered. We remember our heritage through oral histories, clan records and family stories, memorials or places of remembrance, and celebrations with photos, foods, or items which remind us of loved ones. . . .

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of—a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven.” The sociality we create here can exist with eternal glory there. . . .

We each have a story. Come discover yours. Come find your voice, your song, your harmony in Him. This is the very purpose for which God created the heavens and the earth and saw that they were good.

Praise God’s plan of happiness, Jesus Christ’s Atonement, continuing restoration in His gospel and Church. Please come find your family, all your generations, and bring them home.³

1:3–6. Four female ancestors. Matthew mentioned four women, by name or by implication, in his genealogy of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Each of these women had unusual experiences in the process of motherhood that may have led some to be suspicious of their worthiness. However, each of these women eventually received divine approval. Matthew may have included these four in an effort to forestall unwarranted concerns about Mary the mother of Jesus. Like the events in the lives of these four women, Mary’s experiences were extraordinary and occurred through divine powers and approval. We are thus wise to refrain from judging others whose experiences have been different from ours. For all we know, their atypicality may play a role in God’s divine plan.

1:16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ. Joseph Smith, in the Joseph Smith Translation, added the phrase “as the prophets have written.” This emphasizes one of the main themes in Matthew’s Gospel—namely, that prophets testified of Jesus Christ. Prophecies of His mission are found not only in the Old Testament but also in the Book of Mormon. For example, Nephi beheld Mary, “the virgin . . . the mother of the Son of God,” in vision (1 Nephi 11:18). King Benjamin bore testimony that His name would be “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:8).

1:17. Three periods of fourteen generations. Matthew divided the genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations—Abraham to David (about 1900 BC to about 1000 BC), David to the Babylonian captivity (about 1000 BC to 587 BC), and the Babylonian captivity to Jesus (587 BC to the birth of Jesus). The number fourteen is significant because it is seven times two, and the number seven can be associated with the seven days of the Creation. The number is also significant in the ancient practice of *gematria*,

in which each letter of the alphabet had numeric value. In the Hebrew name David (*dwd*), the Hebrew letters are *daleth*, *waw*, and *daleth*—note that ancient Hebrew was written without vowels—and their numeric value adds up to fourteen (*daleth* 4 + *waw* 6 + *daleth* 4 = *dwd* 14), thus emphasizing again the kingly descent of Jesus from David. The broad range of people, including women, in the record shows Matthew’s emphasis on the universal mission of the gospel. God’s love and grace include both Israelites and Gentiles, both men and women, both the faithful and the sinners.

Matthew 1:18–25. Event 1: The Angel Assures Joseph about the Holy Birth of Jesus Christ

Many elements in the account of the Nativity show support and guidance coming from Heaven as Mary and Joseph navigated a very difficult route. We, too, can look to the Lord for help. Through the Holy Spirit, we can have the guidance we need in making complicated decisions in our path of life.

The visit of the angel to Joseph is mentioned in the New Testament only by Matthew. Many details in Matthew’s Christmas story can be matched with points in Luke, but these two Gospels each tell the story from a different position. Matthew told the Nativity story almost completely from the standpoint of men, especially Joseph, and we see the concerns that he, King Herod, the Wise Men, chief priests, and others had. In Luke’s account, however, the viewpoint is much more from women, particularly Elizabeth and Mary, along with ordinary people such as the shepherds in the fields and the elderly in the temple. This contrast does not mean that one story is right and the other is wrong; it just means that there is a difference of perspective.

1:18. Espoused and betrothed. Matthew’s account specified that Mary and Joseph were “espoused.” Sometimes the term used is “betrothed.” Either way, the term means “to be engaged to be married in a formal and legal sense.” For some purposes, betrothed couples were viewed as husband and wife legally (Deuteronomy 22:23–24), and any sexual relations during the period of engagement were treated as adulterous. Thus, between the times of the betrothal and the wedding ceremony, a very strict code of chastity was enforced (Matthew 1:18, 25).

1:20. “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David.” Joseph, “being a just man” (1:19), received divine guidance, and he was obedient. The first example of Joseph’s faithful obedience occurs here, where Matthew reported that Joseph did exactly as the angel had asked him and took Mary as his wife.

Joseph had been considering putting Mary away (that is, ending their intended marriage) “privily” (meaning “privately,” without a court procedure). That alone would have been a kind decision. But Joseph was stopped when the angel of the Lord appeared to him.

Joseph Smith changed the word “dream” found in the King James Version to “vision.” *Onar* in Greek means either “a dream” or “a vision associated with sleep.” However, “vision” has a religious connotation

that “dream” does not. Joseph Smith emphasized that this event was a visitation from an angel, like the daylight visits he had received, rather than a common nighttime dream.

1:20. Angels. Latter-day Saints take seriously the existence of angels and heavenly beings. These are not the winged beings in artistic pictures but divinely created people like those who have lived or will live on the earth. “One definition of the word *angel* is ‘any being who acts as a messenger for our Heavenly Father.’”⁴ The Greek word for “messenger” is *angelos*.

The Prophet Joseph Smith explicitly said, “An angel of God never has wings.”⁵ He also proclaimed in modern revelation that “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:5).

Bruce R. McConkie said, “Angels may be Spirit beings, as Gabriel who came to Zacharias (Luke 1:11–20); translated beings, as Moses and Elijah who appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1–7); or resurrected beings, as Moroni who ministered to Joseph Smith.”⁶

1:21–22. You will call his name Jesus (Yeshua’). Matthew and Luke (Luke 1:31) both record the instruction that Mary’s child was to be named Jesus. This name had been given ahead of time to prophets through inspiration.⁷ More important, though, is the explanation given by Matthew: “For he shall save his people from their sins.” Jesus is the latinized version of the Greek *Iēsous*, which in turn comes from the Hebrew *Yeshua’* or *Yehōshua’*, meaning “Jehovah saves.” We have inherited this name directly from the Hebrew in the English name Joshua.

In Matthew 1:21–23, the first of Matthew’s prophetic reminders points out that the birth of Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. As Matthew characteristically said, “now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (see Isaiah 7:14). This phrase, “that it might be fulfilled,” is used at least fourteen times in Matthew to demonstrate the prophesied messiahship of Jesus.⁸

Joseph Smith translated this verse as “Now this *took place*, that all things might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the *prophets* saying.” Joseph’s translation is much clearer and less archaic than the King James Version. The Greek term *prophētou* (“the prophet”) is in the singular, but throughout Matthew’s Gospel, when Matthew quotes the prophetic tradition he usually speaks of “the prophets,” implying that many bore witness of different stages of the Savior’s earthly ministry.

1:24. Awaking out of his vision. Joseph Smith changed “being raised from sleep” in the King James Version to “awaking out of his vision,” emphasizing that Joseph regained his normal consciousness. The Greek here is *hypnou* (the root of the English word “hypnotize”), from which one typically awakes.

1:24. Joseph . . . did as the angel commanded him. Joseph Smith taught that “every man who has a calling to minister to the world, was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven.”⁹ Mary and Joseph were no doubt called to carry out their individual sacred responsibilities connected with this most holy and singular event in the history of the world.

1:25. And he did not consummate their marriage until. Mary bore other children after Jesus, as the words about Jesus’s mother and brothers in Matthew 12:47 imply. John Chrysostom (circa 337–407) taught: “[Matthew] used the word ‘till,’ not that thou shouldest suspect that afterwards he did know her, but to inform thee that before the birth the Virgin was wholly untouched by man. . . . As to what follows, it leaves thee to make the inference.”¹⁰ In Luke 2:7 and in some early manuscripts of Matthew, Jesus is called Mary’s firstborn (*prōtotokon*), implying that she bore other children, but other manuscripts of Luke 2:7 just say that she gave birth to “a son.” Latter-day Saints, understanding that Jesus Christ was the “firstborn of every creature” (Colossians 1:15) and of the Father, feel no need to insist on Mary’s state of virginity after the birth of Jesus.

Matthew 2:1–12. Event 2: Magi and Herod Seek the Prophesied King in Opposite Ways

Herod. Herod the Great was made king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 BC and ruled until his death in 4 BC. Although he was not Jewish by nationality (his family was Idumean—that is, Edomite, descendants of Esau), Herod’s loyalty as a client king of Rome ensured imperial favor and economic strength throughout his long and mostly successful reign. In the end, however, his cruelty and paranoia did nothing to endear him to his subjects, most of whom were Jewish.

Who were the Wise Men? The “wise men from the east” have been interpreted in many different ways over the years. Does “the east” mean Jordan or Mesopotamia or Persia or beyond? Because three expensive gifts were involved, it is common for the Wise Men to be portrayed in Nativity scenes as three “kings,” one each from Europe, Africa, and the far east, but that has no factual foundation. Some scholars suggest that the magi were chief priests expelled from the temple in Jerusalem who knew the prophecies of Daniel, which some people were reading as expecting the coming of the Messiah around that time. Their gifts (gold, incense, and myrrh) would have been perfect gifts for a new high priest. Each of those gifts was used extensively for specific sacred purposes in the temple.

When we find Him. Thomas S. Monson asked, “And when we find him, will we be prepared as were the wise men of old to provide gifts from our many treasures? They presented gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are not the gifts Jesus asks of us. From the treasure of our hearts Jesus asks that we give of ourselves. ‘Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; . . .’ (D&C 64:34). In this marvelous Dispensation of the Fullness of Times, our opportunities to give of ourselves are indeed limitless, but they are also perishable. There are hearts to gladden. There are kind words to say. There are gifts to be given. There are deeds to be done. There are souls to be saved.”¹¹

2:2, 7. We saw his star in the east. Herod asked diligently, as we read in verse 7, not how the Wise Men knew the star was the indicator of the Messiah’s birth but the time at which it appeared, apparently taking for granted that he would then know when this child was born.

There is no clear messianic prophecy referring to a new star in existing Bible texts. The closest reference is recorded in Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17: “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” However, five years before the birth of Jesus, the Book of Mormon prophet Samuel the Lamanite proclaimed, “And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you” (Helaman 14:5). At the time of Christ’s birth, the Nephite people recorded seeing such a star: “And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word” (3 Nephi 1:21).

The King James Version’s “in the east” suggests a connection between Christ’s first coming and His Second Coming, which will be “as the light of the morning [that] cometh out of the east” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:26).

2:3. *When Herod the king heard of the Child, he was disturbed.* Herod was predictably “troubled” by the Wise Men’s inquiry about some other “King of the Jews” (verse 2); after all, this was the title that the Roman Senate had conferred upon him. However, Herod—known from other sources as a sly political operator—did not let his displeasure be known. After determining the prophesied place of the Messiah’s birth as Bethlehem, Herod feigned interest in the Wise Men’s errand and asked that they bring back a report. Herod’s brutal reputation was so widely known that Matthew does not feel any need to tell the reader that Herod was operating with murderous intentions.

2:4. *He inquired of them where Christ should be born.* There are two slightly different variants of the Joseph Smith Translation for this verse. The longest one reads as follows (Joseph Smith Translation in italics): “And when he had gathered all the chief priests, and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, *saying, Where is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which Christ should be born? For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.*” Joseph Smith emphasized Matthew’s testimony that there were many prophets who testified of the Savior’s life and mission, as the scriptures of the Restoration confirm.

2:5. *“for thus it is written by the prophet.”* This is the second of five prophecy fulfillment statements in the Nativity story and the second of at least fourteen such fulfillments in Matthew’s Gospel. Herod’s priests explained that the birth would be “in Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,” and they reference Micah 5:2: “But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

2:6. *And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah.* There are two variants of this verse in the Joseph Smith Translation. The most doctrinally significant one reads: “*The word of the Lord came unto us, saying, And thou Bethlehem, which lieth in the land of Judea, in thee shall be born a Prince, which art not the least among the princes of Judea: for out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel.*” The Joseph Smith Translation bears testimony that Jesus is the Messiah who will save Israel—a powerful and central truth of the gospel.

2:11. Coming into the house. Informed by Herod that Bethlehem was to be their destination, the wise men followed the star to the house where Mary and Joseph were then residing, and there they presented their expensive gifts. It makes sense that the family remained in the stable for only a short time, perhaps leaving it once the family visitors had gone back to their homes after registering for the tax census that had brought them to Bethlehem. Because Palestinian homes at the time had mangers at the edge of the living area, with the animals either downstairs or in one end of the house if it was a one-room house, this house could have been part of the same family home in which Jesus was born.

2:12. Onar. As previously defined in Matthew 1:20 the Greek term *onar* means either “a dream” or “a vision associated with sleep.” Again, Joseph Smith changed “dream” to “vision,” which has a religious connotation that “dream” does not. Joseph Smith emphasized that this event was a visitation from an angel, like the visits he had received, rather than a common dream. Matthew uses *onar* six times in his Gospel, but it is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Those six are in Matthew 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22; 27:19.

Mathew 2:13–23. Event 3: The Flight to Egypt and Return to Nazareth Fulfill Further Prophecies

From these episodes, we know that Jesus must have been born before the death of Herod the Great, which can now be securely dated to the spring of what we would call the year 4 BC. The months preceding his death provide the latest possible date for the birth of Jesus. The chronological marker of two years previous, which Herod obtained from the wise men, provides the earliest possible date.

Matthew reminds us that Herod’s cruel murder of all the male children less than two years of age in that town had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 31:15). Referring to the dual nature of the prophecy, Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “In this massacre of the innocents, the evangelist found a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s fateful voicing of the word of the Lord, spoken six centuries earlier and expressed in the forceful past tense as though then already accomplished.”¹²

This prophecy was first given in the context of the Ephraimites’ sorrows at the time of the Babylonian captivity, and then it was reused by Matthew as a prophecy of the slaughter of the children around the time of Christ’s birth.

Not all scholars are unanimous on this point. As opposed to the common Latter-day Saint view of a dual prophecy in the meaning of Jeremiah 31:15, Adam Clarke, a nineteenth-century Methodist commentator, claimed, “St. Matthew . . . applies these words, Mt 2:17, 18, to the massacre of the children at Bethlehem. That is, they were suitable to that occasion, and therefore he so applied them; *but they are not a prediction* of that event.”¹³ However, Latter-day Saints are much more accepting of multiple layers in prophetic meaning.

Herod’s personal life was in shambles. He was constantly paranoid of intrigue. He often killed potential usurpers. Josephus described Herod’s atrocities,¹⁴ including the murder of one of his wives and even

three of his own sons. It should be noted that Herod's life was in direct contrast to Jesus's ministry. Herod only lived for himself, while Jesus gave of Himself completely. Herod killed any potential usurpers, while the Savior brought freedom from spiritual and temporal death.

2:13. *Take the child and his mother.* Matthew's text is always careful to differentiate between "Joseph and the child" and the child's mother. Mary is always called his mother, but Joseph is not generally called his father, although Christians would have easily understood Joseph as Jesus's guardian or stepfather.

2:13. *An angel again came to Joseph with a warning.* "Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." After a time, though exactly how long is not given, the angel returned and said that the family could return to Israel because Herod was dead. However, Joseph was subsequently warned in a dream to avoid the area around Jerusalem because Herod's son Archelaus had taken over as the ruler. Thus, they went to Nazareth.

2:15. *Out of Egypt have I called my son.*" Speaking of Jesus's temporary residence in the land of Egypt, Matthew pointed out another fulfillment of prophecy, from Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (some translations capitalize "son"). Besides its application to the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, Matthew applied the verse in this new sense. The ancient Israelites, who had lived for a time in Egypt and then left it, thus became a type of the Son of God living for a time in and then coming out of Egypt. This is the third note of fulfillment contained in the Nativity story.

2:16. *Herod . . . slew all the children who were in Bethlehem and all its coasts, from two years old and under.* There are striking parallels between what happened to Moses in Egypt and what happened here with the birth of Jesus. There is no question that Matthew wanted readers to remember those details precisely in order to present Jesus as the prophet like Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:15). Jesus is the new Moses, the new Lawgiver, the Great Revealer, and the new head of house of Israel.

2:16–18. *The baby-killing episode.* The slaughter of infants two years old or less in a town the size of Bethlehem (total population about three hundred) at this time would have been a local incident, perhaps carried out in utter secrecy and darkness and affecting maybe a few dozen male infants. Thus, it was probably unknown to Josephus and most others at that time. All this was completely in line with Herod's known character—Herod was known to be especially protective of his title, "King of the Jews," which had been conferred upon him by the Roman Senate.

Herod had asked his chief priest and the scribes to search the scriptures to determine where Jesus might have been born and asked the Wise Men when the star appeared. Other than those facts, he had no information on which to base his decision to kill the children of Bethlehem and the environs who were two years old and younger "according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" (2:16). There is no way, from this arbitrary decision made by Herod while he was "exceeding wrath," that the date of, or Jesus's age at which the Holy family went to Egypt, can be calculated.

2:19–21. *The parallels between the incidents involving Moses in Egypt and the birth of Jesus.* New Testament scholars have identified parallels between the incidents involving Moses in Egypt and the birth of Jesus.¹⁵

Matthew 2:19–21

But when Herod was *dead*, behold,

an *angel of the Lord appeareth* in a dream to Joseph *in Egypt*

Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for *they are dead which sought the young child's life.*

And he arose, and *took the young child and his mother*, and came into *the land of Israel.*

Exodus 4:19–20

After these days the king of Egypt *died* [in LXX only].

And *the LORD said* unto Moses *in Midian*,

Go, return into Egypt: for *all the men are dead which sought thy life.*

And Moses *took his wife and his sons*, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to *the land of Egypt*: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

As Davies and Allison also note, the use of the plural “they” in Matthew 2:20, “for they are dead which sought the young child’s life,” is striking because *Herod* is the only stated antecedent. They consider the lack of grammatical adjustment deliberate to make the parallel with the story of Moses unmistakable.

2:19–23. *Take the child and the child’s mother and go into the land of Israel.* Sometime after Herod’s death, Joseph was again visited by an angel in a dream, advising him to return home from Egypt. It seems that Joseph’s intention was to settle in Judea, perhaps in his ancestral home in Bethlehem, but the fact that Archelaus had succeeded his father, Herod the Great, appears to have dissuaded him. Herod Archelaus was made tetrarch over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea upon the death of his father. Archelaus inherited his father’s cruelty but none of his organizational skills and was removed from power by Augustus in AD 6. Archelaus’s reputation, along with a warning from God (2:22), led Joseph to settle the family in the small village of Nazareth in southern Galilee.

2:19–23. *Jesus of Nazareth.* The phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” occurs seventeen times in the Gospels and Acts. Nazareth was a small town in Lower Galilee with a more diverse population than Judea. Galilee was crisscrossed by major trading routes between east and west and north and south that ensured that it would never be isolated from the wider economy of the region and the life of the Roman empire.

As John Drane explained about Nazareth:

Nazareth . . . was not an important place and is never mentioned in the rest of the Bible, or in any other contemporary literature. . . . It was never a large place, and even at its most expansive had a population of only about 200 people. Its size alone would ensure that it was never mentioned in most official records, but in addition it was in Galilee—an area that was always despised by the strictest

religious people, who felt that the inhabitants of Galilee were too relaxed in their dealings with explicitly non-Jewish culture. . . . Here Jesus would meet and mix with many people who were not Jewish. . . . One of the special advantages of growing up in Galilee was that Jesus would probably be fluent in three languages. By now Hebrew was no longer the normal language of the Jewish people, and only continued in use because it was the language of the ancient scriptures. For several centuries, Aramaic had been the everyday language, and Jesus would use this at home and among his friends. . . . Since there were so many non-Jewish people in Galilee, Jesus must have spoken Greek as well, for this was the international language of commerce and government used everywhere throughout the whole of the Roman empire [in the east].¹⁶

2:23. Again, this fulfilled prophecy. Matthew asserted that Jesus living in Nazareth fulfilled prophecy: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” In Matthew’s view, the fact that the Messiah came from Nazareth was guided by a revelation from God and was spoken of in some scripture that has not been found—note Matthew’s vague “the prophets.”

Latter-day Saint scholars Kelly Ogden and Andrew Skinner summarize the debate about there being no extant prophecy. “We have no specific reference in extant biblical literature to prophets declaring that the Messiah would be a Nazarene, unless it is an allusion to Isaiah 11:1. Isaiah prophesied that a ‘Branch’ (*netzer*) would grow out of the root of Jesse—that is, from the Davidic line—and thus Jesus would be a Nazarene (*notzri*). Both Hebrew words come from the same root.”¹⁷

2:23. Additional information on Jesus’s early years. The prophet Joseph Smith added the following information, which we do not have in any gospels: “And it came to pass, that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.” This added verse explains that the Savior anticipated and prepared Himself for His ministry. It also contains the powerful doctrine that Heavenly Father and the Holy Ghost can teach more eternal truth than any human could or should ever teach.

Matthew 3:1–12. Event 4: John the Baptist Preached and Prepared the Way for the Lord’s Coming

The temporal marker “in those days” picks up the narrative from the end of chapter 2, when Jesus and His family had returned from Egypt and settled in Nazareth. Although this could technically be any time after Herod the Great’s death in 4 BC, details from the rest of the narrative and the other Gospels make it clear that “those days” were sometime in the late 20s AD. Matthew does not offer any extensive background on

the figure of John the Baptist (as does Luke), probably assuming that his main audience was familiar with Jewish scriptures and history in general and the overall story of John the Baptist in particular.

The first half of Matthew 3 introduces John the Baptist and the sacred ordinance of baptism by immersion by one having authority. John baptized many people in the River Jordan. His divine calling as a forerunner of Christ was known by his parents at his birth (Luke 1:76). His father was Zacharias, a high-ranking priest; his mother was Elizabeth, a cousin of Mary. John's name was predetermined and was revealed by the angel Gabriel. John's mission, like the Savior's, had been prophesied, and Matthew recorded the fulfillment of those prophecies in Matthew 3:3 (quoting Isaiah 40:3) and in Matthew 11:10 (quoting Malachi 3:1).

Matthew makes two things especially clear in his presentation of John: He was a prophetic-looking figure, dressing and living a lifestyle similar to that of the ancient prophet Elijah. John baptized near the place where Elijah was taken up at the end of his mortal life. John's message had wide circulation and great popularity.

John the Baptist did more than cry warnings; he also taught repentant people values to live by in preparation for being baptized. Jesus taught several of those same things. The teachings of Jesus and John (who were cousins) were consistent with each other, preparing people to be worthy to enter into covenants and, in the end, to enter into the presence of God.

The Book of Mormon includes words of other prophets who were also authorized to administer the covenantal ordinance of baptism before the commencement of Christ's ministry. See Alma's teachings at the Waters of Mormon in Mosiah 18:7–10:

And he did teach them, and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord. And it came to pass that he said unto them: . . . and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

On May 15, 1829, John the Baptist restored the Aaronic Priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the woods near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Of John the Baptist, Joseph Smith later said, "He had his authority from God, and the oracles of God were with him and the kingdom of God for a season seemed to rest with John alone. . . . No man could have better authority to administer than John and our

Savior submitted to that authority himself by being baptized by John.”¹⁸ Speaking of this event, President Henry B. Eyring taught:

John the Baptist returned to earth to restore the priesthood that the young men hold. He held the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood. It was John to whom Jesus turned to be baptized. John knew who called him. He said to the Lord, ‘I have need to be baptized of thee.’

John knew that the priesthood of Aaron ‘holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins’ when the Lord sent him to ordain Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on May 15, 1829.¹⁹

3:1–6. *John the Baptist’s work was prophetically foretold.* Matthew strongly indicates that the work of John the Baptist was prophesied by Isaiah.²⁰ It was also foreseen by Lehi and Nephi.²¹ None of those prophecies mention John the Baptist by name, but it becomes clear that they were speaking of John and his mission. He baptized many before he baptized Jesus, and he was praised by the Savior for his attention to his ministry and for the importance of his work. “Jesus described him as a ‘burning and shining light’ (John 5:35); an unexcelled prophet (Matthew 11:7–15), and an example of righteousness whose testimony would condemn in the day of judgment all who refused to obey what he taught.”²²

John the Baptist was an Elias, which means a forerunner, a preparer of people, and a proclaimer of the Messiah. Forerunners anciently would run before the chariot of the king and clear the path of rocks or other obstacles and loudly proclaim the coming of the ruler. See 1 Samuel 8:11, 1 Kings 1:5, and Isaiah 62:10.

3:2. *Cry unto this people.* The Spirit taught the same principle to Alma the Younger in the Book of Mormon: “But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth” (Alma 7:9). The Lord has similarly declared in this dispensation that repentance is what we should proclaim: “Open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying: Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Doctrine and Covenants 33:10). See also the commission given in 1831 to the elders in Ohio: “And ye shall go forth baptizing with water, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Doctrine and Covenants 42:7). This remains what missionaries and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are expected to still do today.

3:3. *I am He.* The Joseph Smith Translation affirms not only that John was recognized as this prophet spoken of by Isaiah but that John himself openly declared, “I am he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah.” This was not a later recognition by Matthew or others. John’s boldness would soon cost him his head.

3:7. *You brood of vipers (poisonous snakes).* Before the Savior’s ministry, according to Luke 7:29–30, the humble had accepted John’s baptism, but the Pharisees had not. Not much later in His ministry, the Savior referred to the Pharisees as vipers who “could not speak good things, being evil” (Matthew 12:34). At the end of His three-year ministry, Jesus pronounced eight woes against the Pharisees (see

23:13–16, 23, 25, 27, and 29) and again referred to the scribes and Pharisees as a brood of vipers that will not escape the “damnation of hell” (23:33). Since honor and respectable social standing in Jesus’s day came largely from the status of one’s birth family, to call someone a member of a brood (or family) of poisonous snakes was extremely strong language.

God has used similar language in modern times. While Joseph Smith was illegally held for months in Liberty Jail, Missouri, he prayed desperately for the Saints who were being persecuted. In a revelatory response, the Lord similarly called the perpetrators of those actions in western Missouri a generation of vipers who would not “escape the damnation of hell” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:23). As the persecutors were believers of the Bible, this allusion to the words of John the Baptist would not have been lost on them.

3:7–12. *Were Pharisees and Sadducees interested in repenting or merely curious and concerned?* John the Baptist questioned the sincerity of the temple administrators who came down from Jerusalem to the Jordan River to investigate what he was doing. He advised and warned them not to consider themselves exempt from repentance and baptism simply because they were descendants of Abraham. Apparently, they had misunderstood the nature of the covenant of God with Abraham, thinking that it was absolutely unconditional, depending in no way on their righteousness or obedience to the Lord’s commandments.

3:7–9. *Why do you not receive?* At the end of verse 7 and expanding on into verse 9, Joseph Smith added or changed these italicized words: “*Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children into Abraham.*” In Hebrew the words for children (*bānîm*) and stones (*abānîm*) would have sounded very similar, adding an effective wordplay to John’s answer here.

3:11. *The coming one will be greater than John the Baptist.* In the Joseph Smith Translation, John the Baptist adds that while he bore record of the one who came, he was not able to fill Jesus’s place. Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, John remained humble and did not overstate his position.

3:12. *Joseph Smith bore record of John’s calling and authority.* In his translation of the Bible, Joseph Smith expanded the traditional reading of this verse significantly, adding the following italicized words: “*And it is he of whom I shall bear record, whose fan shall be in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but in the fullness of his own time will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Thus came John, preaching and baptizing in the river of Jordan; bearing record, that he who was coming after him, had power to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.*”

John the Baptist spoke also of a coming judgment, for which repentance was the only appropriate preparation. This judgment would be inaugurated by one “mightier” than John the Baptist, one who would baptize with fire and separate the wheat from the chaff. In Doctrine and Covenants 19:31, the Lord

declared that “fire,” defined spiritually, is “even the Holy Ghost.” By introducing Jesus in Matthew 3:13, Matthew then made it clear that Jesus was that one of whom John was speaking.

Matthew 3:13–17. Event 5: Jesus Is Baptized and Is Acclaimed by Father in Heaven and the Dove

Matthew follows John’s words of prophecy with the actual arrival of Jesus—the very one whose advent John the Baptist predicted and bore record of. Only in Matthew do we hear John’s complaint that he was unworthy to baptize somebody so great as Jesus (3:14), but Jesus explained that it must be allowed “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15). This intriguing phrase was clarified in 2 Nephi 31:4–9 by the prophet Nephi, who explained that fulfilling all righteousness is accomplished by total obedience to all of God’s commandments. This episode also demonstrates that so long as the standards of personal worthiness are met, we should not doubt the efficacy of holy ordinances. The one who administers the ordinance does not need to be perfect or mighty—only worthy. The power of the ordinance comes through God’s perfection.

The revelation from heaven that consummated Jesus’s baptism is slightly different in Matthew 3:17 than in the other three Gospels. A voice from heaven declared, “*This is my beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased,” echoing Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Mark’s and Luke’s heavenly voice began by saying, “*Thou art my beloved Son*,” a second-person declaration addressed to Jesus Himself. By contrast, in Matthew the statement is in the third person, which allows it to stand as a moment of revelation for John the Baptist and all those who were present and could hear. God was demonstrating the truth of His son Jesus Christ to all.

What is the origin of the word baptism? The origin of the word is the Greek word *baptizō*, which has a couple of meanings. Before it was used by Christians—and we have no evidence of its being used before Christians except in nautical situations—the dominant meaning was “to sink.” A ship is baptized when it sinks. It means “to capsize, to go to the bottom of the ocean.”

Was baptism by immersion? There is no doubt that baptism was by immersion; the word *baptizo*, which Greeks in the first century used to describe what happened to a person when they went under the water, is also the word they also used for inundation, capsizing, sinking, or going down into the burial of death. In fact, Paul talks about baptism as dying and then coming back up out of the water (Colossians 2:12). Some of the English translations record that the Baptist said, “I baptize *with* water, but he who comes later will baptize with the Holy Ghost.” However, in the Greek, John says, “I baptize *in* the water,” not “with water.” The Greek clearly says “*in* water” (*en hydati*) and “coming straightway, immediately, *out of* the water” (*apo tou hydatos*), which cannot be read any other way than immersion.

Why might John the Baptist and others have used this word that described a ship going down? When one is baptized, the old person dies and is “born again” and comes back up in a new life. Like the sign of Jonah, no matter how deep you go, the Lord will find you and bring you up out of that

death. That is why someone must perform the baptism. He represents the Lord, who pulls the candidate up from the bottom of spiritual chaos and symbolic death. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot bring ourselves out of death, but baptism represents how through the power of God, we can be brought up from the depths.

3:13–15. Elder Dallin H. Oaks commented on this section. “Those who seek to follow the Savior will understand the importance of the ordinance of baptism. The Lamb without Blemish saw fit to submit himself to baptism by one holding the authority of the priesthood in order to ‘fulfil all righteousness.’ How much more each of us has need of the cleansing and saving power of this ordinance and the other ordinances of the gospel.”²³

3:15. “it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” John the Baptist felt awkward and suggested, humbly, that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. The thought that someone without sin did not need baptism or that baptism should be administered by superior to an inferior has raised questions over the years. However, Jesus had a powerful answer—that the baptism would “fulfil all righteousness.” The importance of following God’s plan was emphasized. By being baptized, Jesus recognized His kinship with the people of Israel (Matthew 16:21–23). It was a firm example of obedience for all who desire to follow the Savior.

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi gave four reasons as to *how* the Lord fulfilled all righteousness in being baptized:

1. He humbled himself before the Father;
2. He covenanted to be obedient and keep the Father’s commandments;
3. He had to be baptized to gain admission to the celestial kingdom; and
4. He set an example for all to follow (2 Nephi 31:4–11).

“To fulfill all righteousness is to perform every ordinance, keep every commandment, and do every act necessary to the attainment of eternal life.”²⁴

3:16. How long did Jesus remain immersed under the water? The King James Version says “straightway,” and the Greek word (*euthysis*) really does mean “immediately.” He went down but came up immediately out of the water. That is the manner of Latter-day Saint baptisms as restored by John the Baptist on May 15, 1829.

A river baptism was a serious matter because of the hazards of rivers in that day—even the Jordan has large flash floods when it rains heavily on the Golan Heights. These faithful people were risking their lives. River speeds and depths were not monitored or in any way controlled. In very deed, these baptismal candidates were indicating, “I confess my sins, and to show that I am absolutely committed and serious about my confession to God, I will submit myself to this ordeal.”

3:16. “the heavens were opened.” Mark, who was interested in describing the power and the drama of things, used the phrase “ripped open” (*schizō*), rather like a lightning bolt effect (Mark 1:10). Matthew presented it more gently—the heavens “were opened” (*anoigō*; Matthew 3:16). Apparently, this

was a very dramatic event. The text specifies that the heavens were “opened unto John, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting upon Jesus.” Modern revelation tells us that spiritual matter is indeed matter and can be seen by spiritually pure eyes. John’s spiritual eyes were opened to see the pure, refined matter (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8). Joseph Smith made clear that not only Jesus but also John the Baptist saw the heavens open. John the Baptist’s own testimony of seeing that “the heavens were opened unto him [Jesus],” as is recorded in Matthew, was recounted in May 1833: “And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:15).

The Holy Ghost is the same who testifies to us the truthfulness of what we learn in the scriptures. More often, we may experience the influence more as Elijah did, as a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11–12), or as a gentle internal assurance. Noted New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg summarized the event thus:

Matthew does not describe Jesus’ baptism itself but rather what happens immediately afterwards. As Jesus comes up out of the river, God places his stamp of approval on him in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit descends ‘like’ a dove, which suggests that no actual bird appeared but that some visible manifestation of the Spirit led observers to recognize that God was revealing himself through those attributes regularly associated with a dove—e.g., superintending over creation (cf. Gen. 1:2), offering peace (as in Gen. 8:10, gentleness in contrast to the judgment of vv. 7–12, or as the “loving character of divine life itself.”²⁵

3:16. “like a dove.” Worth noting is the sign of the dove here. It can mean many things. A dove returned with an olive branch to signal to Noah the end of the great Flood (Genesis 8:8–11), signaling God’s covenant of peace with Noah, a type of His baptismal covenant with each of us. Also, a dove (or messenger pigeon) would signal to those witnessing the baptism of Jesus that the words of God were a true message from heaven. Moreover, the words for “dove” in Hebrew and the name Jonah are closely related, and thus these two expressions, “the sign of the dove” and “the sign of Jonah,” sound similar. In addition, just as Jonah went down into the depths of the great waters and made a covenant with God to serve his mission and to go to his temple (Jonah 2:4–9), so all who are baptized go down to the foundations of their beings as they repent, as Jonah did, and have their sins remitted and come forth with a covenantal promise to serve the Lord and make additional vows in the temple.

3:17. “a voice from heaven.” People not only saw but also heard. The Lord referred to a voice from heaven during the Restoration. We learn that “the day cometh that the Lord shall utter his voice out of heaven” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:18), that the Lord confirmed the priesthood upon some of the early leaders “by mine own voice out of the heavens” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:42), and He testified of His calling Joseph Smith, “whom I did call upon by mine angels, my ministering servants, and by mine own voice out of the heavens, to bring forth my work” (Doctrine and Covenants 136:37).

In modern revelation, Jesus verified John the Baptist’s record that “there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son” at His baptism (Doctrine and Covenants 93:15). The Savior also specified that information from God is the same whether He speaks to humans in person or to His authorized servants to be relayed (Doctrine and Covenants 1:38). He added the caveat that “if my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:45).

The joy of hearing the voice of the Lord was expressed by Joseph Smith several times. Recording the vision of the heavens, he said, “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:40). Ten years later, in a letter about baptism for the dead, he recorded, “Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven. . . . [How] glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms, principalities, and powers!” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:19, 23).

Matthew 4:1–11. Challenge 1: Jesus Rebuts Satan’s Three Tests by Citing Scripture

The challenge in Matthew 4:1–11 is the first of fifteen challenges raised against Jesus by various opponents, according to Matthew’s record. Jesus was, in this case, directly challenged by Satan one-on-one—three times. The subsequent fourteen challenges were issued by surrounding people, such as Jewish leaders.

This episode is usually referred to as the temptation of Jesus, but the Greek word used here for “to tempt” (*peirazō*) means “to test” or “to prove.” About half of the time that *peirazō* is used in regular language, it means “to test; to prove what kind of a person one is; to really test one’s mettle,” as when Abraham proved himself by being willing to sacrifice Isaac. The “temptations” were the means by which Jesus was tested. This word, *peirazō*, has another meaning: “experience.” We are to learn by our experiences.

In the temple today, the words “proving them herewith” mean the same thing, but not in any negative sense; it is an opportunity to prove who we are. We have a better attitude and less self-pity about the terms *tested* or *proved* than we do about *tempted*.

Satan used three enticements that represent the various temptations faced by humanity. The first one, turning stones into bread, was a temptation to satisfy the appetites and passions. All temptations to satisfy selfish interests, or earthly appetites, are exemplified by this offer. The second one, to throw Himself off the temple and be caught by the angels in full view of the crowd, was the temptation to gain earthly honor and glory. It addressed social temptations, seeking the praises of others rather than doing what will really help those around us. The third one, “bow down and worship me, and I will give you the world” is a huge violation of the commandment to “love the Lord thy God.” Jesus already had the power to own all that He saw, having initially participated in the creation of it, but He had no intention of betraying His

Father and failing in His commitment. The entire interchange is, in a way, a scripture contest, with Satan using one scripture from Deuteronomy after another to try to get Jesus to misuse His divine powers.

4:1. “into the wilderness.” In the King James Version, Matthew tells us that Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” The Joseph Smith Translation, however, explains that Jesus was not *driven* out there by the Spirit (Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 1:12); He was led and went voluntarily. In addition, He did not go there to be tempted for forty days—at the end of Jesus’s forty days of fasting, Satan tried to tempt him—but as the Joseph Smith Translation clarifies, he went there to be with God and to commune with God.

These tests happened shortly after His baptism, after He had been told by the Father’s voice from heaven, “Thou art my beloved son,” and just after He had received the gift of the Holy Ghost. However, the temptations were allowed as part of the test to be sure that Jesus had learned all that He needed and had benefitted from the communion. He was required also to experience all earthly trials to be able to support and aid humankind. “Behold, and hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, your advocate, who knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (Doctrine and Covenants 62:1).

The importance of this experience is that it demonstrated a significant qualification for Jesus’s ministry. People saw—and commented—that He could tell Satan and his army to leave (see Luke 4: 36). That is how we know that His miracles are not coming from the power of the dark side.

4:1–4. First temptation: stones to bread. Presumably, Jesus’s forty-day period of fasting included much reflection, meditation, and prayer in preparation for His upcoming ministry. It seems that the tempter did not trouble Him until after this period of reflection. It is interesting that the first name Matthew used for Satan was “the tempter,” making it clear what he had come to do. Appealing to what must have been, by then, a ravenous appetite, the devil tempted Jesus to misuse His creative powers. Satan surely remembered Jehovah’s role in the Creation, but Jesus, too, remembered that such power is not to be exercised for self-gratification. Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, He dismissed the temptation with an assurance that God’s word is infinitely more nourishing than any mortal bread.

Jesus overcame these temptations in the same way that we can—by quoting back to Satan the word of God. In each of the three tests, Jesus recited the relevant law to Satan straight from Deuteronomy. If we are tempted, there are scriptures that the tempter cannot fight against. He can move along to something else, but we can present authority and he must accept it.

Where did Jesus get the word of God that he quoted? Jesus used the Law in Deuteronomy.

- “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3)
- “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 6:16)
- “Thou shalt have no other God before me” (Deuteronomy 6:13–14)

In addition, Deuteronomy 10:12–13 says, “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day *for thy good?*” (emphasis added).

The book of Deuteronomy contains the final words of Moses to the house of Israel, and Jesus picked up right where Moses had left off. This provides great examples of both His knowledge and use of scriptures and His role as the new Moses. It is ironic that Jesus was the God who gave these commandments to Moses in the first place. The devil knew this.

4:5–7. *Second temptation: the pinnacle of the temple.* The “pinnacle of the temple” was likely the southwest corner of the Temple Mount’s retaining wall, which stood over 160 feet above the plaza below. It was a highly visible and ritualized space. The devil twisted scripture (Psalm 91:11–12) in an effort to convince Jesus to put His Father’s protection to the test. But Jesus knew that divine protection was not to be profaned by a reckless act of showmanship. His confidence in His Father had been built through hours of quiet communion rather than moments of brash adventurism. He rebutted the quotation of Psalms by citing the more authoritative Torah, this time from Deuteronomy 6:16.

4:8–11. *Third temptation: the kingdoms of the world.* The devil’s final effort was aimed at the human desire for power, if any such desire were to be found in the mortal Jesus. All the kingdoms of the world were on the table, and Jesus did not retort that they were not Satan’s to offer, nor did He deny the devil’s power, but rejected it outright with final quotations from Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20. Satan was dismissed and departed for a time, but he would return to test and challenge Jesus and His inner circle again later.

Satan was, and is, extremely audacious; the effrontery was of itself diabolical.²⁶ He tested Moses (Moses 1:12–22) and Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith—History 1:15) in attempts to prevent the upcoming dispensations. We should not take lightly that Jesus was able to tell him to leave. We all are or will be tempted and tested to one degree or another in the ways found in Matthew 4. This event is an example for us to use the scriptures as powerful words and important tools.

When Jesus drove out devils in Matthew 8 and 9, He used only words, as He did when He told Satan, “Get thee behind me.” The Greek word there is *hypage*, which means “depart.” There are other manuscripts that mention “get behind me,” but the main verb—and the oldest manuscripts have only this one word—is *hypage*, “depart!” This is a very powerful word when spoken by proper authority; Satan cannot ignore this command.

Matthew 4:12–17. Event 6: Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry, Fulfilling a Prophecy of Isaiah

The Savior began His ministry in Galilee, specifically in Capernaum, which was by the lake on the shores of Zabulon and Nephthalim. A spectacular characteristic of this Evangelist is that he demonstrated the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew did not elaborate on Jesus's location at the beginning of His ministry simply to ensure that the geography was clear. He again linked the events to the old prophecies with one of his "that it might be fulfilled" statements. In describing Jesus's location, Matthew plainly referred to the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the lands of Zabulon and Nephthali in Isaiah 9:1–2 that were tied to this location.

Although people often connect this prophecy to the birth of the Savior and His early years in Nazareth, Matthew used it here to demonstrate that the light of the gospel was brought to the people of that area, as prophesied. He saw the re-arrival of Jesus as the introduction of a great light upon Galilee: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:1–2).

The idea of Matthew 9:3 may be included as well: "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and increased the joy." Jesus's initial preaching announced the imminent arrival of the kingdom of heaven. This fits an ancient pattern: in preparation for a visit from the emperor, heralds were sent ahead to announce his arrival. Jesus was doing the same and was preparing the people for the arrival of their heavenly king. Latter-day Saints support the view that "the 'dimness' and 'darkness' were apostasy and captivity (Isa. 8:20–22); the 'great light' is Christ" (Isa. 9:6–7)."²⁷

Jesus immediately began His preaching and ministering by calling the residents to repent in preparation for the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. Our rendition, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," is the same message we give today.

Matthew indicated the truth of the many messianic prophecies and indeed provided an example for trusting righteous prophets. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we accept, and occasionally take for granted, that the words of the prophets will be fulfilled.

The Lord revealed on November 1, 1831, "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:38). The Lord has promised fulfillment of all prophecy to the saints of the restoration.²⁸

Matthew 4:18–22. Calling 1: Jesus Calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and They Follow Him

There are five instances in Matthew in which Jesus issued a calling. Four of them refer to the calling and empowerment of various members of the Twelve. In this first one, Jesus called His first four disciples—the fishermen Peter, Andrew, James, and John—to follow Him.

Joseph Smith significantly expanded this verse to detail Jesus's special witness of His messiahship before inviting fishermen to follow Him, which provides a good reason that the Apostles would have chosen to immediately abandon their former professions. Matthew added Jesus's personal testimony of His own mission, which would have helped these fishermen desire to exercise their faith and follow Him. The

Joseph Smith Translation reads, “And he *said* unto them, *I am he of whom it is written by the prophets; follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*”

Elder Robert D. Hales explained that this call to follow Him will be accompanied “with gifts, talents, and the strength to do His will . . . allowing us to go beyond our comfort zones and do things we’ve never before thought possible. It means preparing ourselves to answer His call by saying, ‘I’ll go where you want me to go; I’ll say what you want me to say; I’ll do what you want me to do; I’ll be what you want me to be.’”²⁹

Joseph Smith’s translation added the detail of faith as these Apostles, “*believing on his words, left their net and straightway followed him.*”

Joseph Smith’s translation implied that these Apostles recognized Jesus as the Messiah, exercised faith according to their understanding of what Jesus said, and chose to follow Him.

4:22. James and John left their father “in” the ship. Joseph Smith clarified that James and John left their father *in* the ship instead of leaving the ship *and* their father. While the King James Version literally follows the Greek, Joseph Smith’s translation seems to have better expressed in English how they left their father behind.

The Gospel of Mark mentions that John and James “left their father Zebedee in the ship with the *hired servants*” (Mark 1:20; emphasis added), which indicates that the fishermen were not poor. The sparse evidence we have suggests that fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were likely organized collectively, either into family-based operations or occupational guilds, as they were in Egypt and elsewhere in the Mediterranean.³⁰

Matthew 4:23–25. Event 7: Jesus Teaches, Heals, and Attracts Followers throughout the Region

At this point, Jesus’s ministry became known over a wide area, “from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan” (Matthew 4:25). Overshadowing the gentile god Asclepius and previous prophets in ancient Israel, Jesus’s ability to heal and raise individuals from the dead testified strongly that He was indeed the real omnipotent God.

Jesus’s teaching and miraculous healings brought great popularity initially. We also get the sense of His great energy as he circled around Galilee, teaching, preaching, and healing in many locales. The report of His power drew people from across the region and from as far away as Jerusalem and the Trans-Jordan. But at this point it was unclear whether His newfound followers truly grasped who He was or the importance of His message.

We read in Mosiah 3:5–6 of King Benjamin prophesying to his people that the Savior would indeed perform such miracles: “For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent . . . shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.”

Nephi, the son of Lehi, also witnessed and prophesied of the healing of a multitude in a vision. These Galilean multitudes may have been the ones Nephi saw in a vision more than six hundred years before (1 Nephi 11:31). Then again, Nephi may have seen the multitude that we read of in Matthew 15:30–31 or any of the other unspecified crowds. This was a huge feature of the earth-life of our Savior. As He said in a revelation to Joseph Smith and six elders in 1830, “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that *all things* unto me are spiritual” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:34; emphasis added).

As the Son of God, Jesus healed God’s children physically and spiritually. For this reason, we read in Matthew 11:2–4, which speaks of the imprisoned John the Baptist sending his followers to Jesus to ask who He was: “Now when John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent a *message* through his disciples. It said to him, Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?” Jesus sent the messengers back to John with the advice to “return and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them” (authors’ translation).

John the Baptist, then, was expected to know from prophecy that these events would be characteristic of the Messiah. For example, Isaiah 35:5–6 says, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”

At this point in his narrative, through John the Baptist, Matthew the Levite bore a powerful witness that Jesus was in fact an omnipotent God, overshadowing all others, in His ability to bless, heal, and save from spiritual and physical death in all times and places.

4:23. Faith precedes the miracle. Joseph Smith added to the end of the verse “*diseases* among the people *which believed on his name*,” incorporating for Latter-day Saints the important gospel principle that faith precedes the miracle.

The “things of the kingdom” are defined as “my gospel” in Doctrine and Covenants 71:1. “Open your mouths in proclaiming my gospel, the things of the kingdom.” The requirement to preach “the gospel of the kingdom” is taught repeatedly in the new dispensation, with no or only slight modification and with the addition of further instruction for the preachers of the gospel.³¹

Notes

1 Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

2 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 1:95.

3 Gerrit R. Gong. “We Each Have a Story,” April 2022 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

4 *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, comp. Jerreld L. Newquist, vol. 1 of 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Zion’s Book Store, 1957), 53.

- 5 “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. 72, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/10>.
- 6 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 3:141.
- 7 See 2 Nephi 25:19; Mosiah 3:8; Moses 6:52.
- 8 See also Matthew 2:15, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–18; 13:14–16, 35; 21:4–5; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35.
- 9 “Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock,” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-may-1844-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/1>.
- 10 Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 5.3.
- 11 Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, October 1965, 143.
- 12 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 100.
- 13 Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible: [. . .] with a Commentary and Critical Notes Designed as a Help to a Better Understanding of the Sacred Writings*, 8 vols. (New York, NY: Daniel Hitt and Abraham Paul, 1817), <https://stepbible.org/?q=version=Clarke|reference=Jer.31>; emphasis added.
- 14 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 14–18.
- 15 W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:271.
- 16 John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2001), 50–51, quoted in Ed J. Pinegar, K. Douglas Bassett, Ted L. Earl, *Latter-day Commentary on the New Testament: The Four Gospels* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002), 30.
- 17 D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The New Testament*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 1:66.
- 18 “Discourse, 22 January 1843, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” pp. [5–6, 7], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-22-january-1843-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/2>; spelling and capitalization silently modernized.
- 19 Henry B. Eyring, “Act in All Diligence,” May 2010 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 20 Isaiah 40:3–5; see also Malachi 3:1; Luke 7:27.
- 21 1 Nephi 10:7–10; 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:4, 8.
- 22 Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1994), 44, 46–47.
- 23 Dallin H. Oaks, “Always Remember Him,” April 1988 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 24 Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2002), 1:123

25 Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 81–82.

26 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 132.

27 Topical Guide, “Darkness, Spiritual,” online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

28 See Doctrine and Covenants 3:19; 24:14; 42:39.

29 Robert D. Hales, “Being a More Christian Christian,” October 2012 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

30 See John S. Kloppenborg, “Jesus, Fishermen and Tax Collectors: Papyrology and the Construction of the Ancient Economy of Roman Palestine,” in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 94, no. 4 (2018): 592–593.

31 See Doctrine and Covenants 68:8; 73:1; 84:86.

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