

Matthew (Part Two)

Jesus' Early Life; John the Baptist

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Given 22-Jul-81; Sermon #BS-MA02

When we left off, we were just getting to the place in Matthew 2 verses 7, 8, and 9 where Herod sent the people to Jerusalem with the instructions of killing the children who were under two years of age. I gave you a little bit of background on Herod and he is a real weirdo; but I guess maybe no worse than some people like we have today on the scene.

At any rate in Matthew 2, there is an insight that begins to develop. Jesus is just born, and we see three different cast of characters beginning to be formed as a result. These people that are the main characters in chapter two kind of characterize what those groups are.

First of all, there is the group that might be characterized by Herod. These are the people whose reaction is one of hatred and hostility. They very likely felt—well Herod did anyway—that Jesus was going to interfere with their lives—cut off their future—and so their reaction was let's kill Him or let's do away with Him.

On the other hand, there were those whose reaction was one of indifference, sort of take it or leave it; they could not care less. This reaction is characterized by the priests and the scribes. They seem to have no excitement at all. They gave Herod the information that he wanted, but there is no indication here that they were in any way drawn towards Bethlehem and worshiping Christ. And then there is the third group, the Magi who, at least at this time, came and worshiped Christ.

These same reactions are evident today. The same cast of characters of course are not always evident and sometimes they change position. Later on in Jesus' life, when He became 30 and began preaching, then the Scribes and Pharisees moved into Herod's place, and they began a campaign of rejection against Him. But I think that you will find this same grouping even today. There are those who are repelled and repulsed by Him for some reason; there

are those who are indifferent to Him; and there are those who do truly worship Him.

Going on a little bit further, let's pick it up in verse 11:

Matthew 2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him...

By the time that the Magi got there, He was no longer in the stable, in the manger, in the cave, or wherever it was; but He was in a house. He was no longer an infant, He was a young child so they could have come there a week, a month, or more after He was actually born. I do not know how long Mary's period of indisposition would have been at that time, but they did not appear immediately after Jesus was born.

Matthew 2:11 ...and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold is a gift that is customarily representative or symbolic of kingship. It is what you give a king. When you come into his presence, you give him something that is representative of his high station. On the other hand, frankincense is very closely related to the sacrifices. If you go back to the book of Leviticus, you will find that—especially in the meal offering—frankincense was offered with the meal offering. And then myrrh was one of the spices that was used by the people in those days to embalm a body. So, there is at least symbolically represented in the gift: Christ's kingship, His high priesthood as represented by the gold and frankincense, and the fact that He was going to die—the savior aspect of His life—represented by the myrrh.

Matthew 2:12-13 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the

young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

Where did he go in Egypt? Well, I guess there any one of 100 places that he could have gone. But historical sources tell us that especially in the city of Alexandria, there was a very large population of Jews. In fact, one source says that at the time of Christ there were one million Jews in Alexandria, Egypt.

Alexandria was the center of learning. It was a place with a great deal of merchandizing going on and probably was the port city—even though it is a little bit inland—it is nonetheless a port city for the rest of Egypt. So, it would be a place that Jews with their ability to make money in merchandizing, trading, and in academic areas, would be drawn to. It would also be a place that I am sure a small family of Jews could hide themselves very easily and be beyond, not only the power and authority, but even beyond the ability of Herod to find them or maybe even the Egyptians to find them if Herod was that zealous about trying to get to them. So even though the Bible does not say that they went to Alexandria, there is at least a chance that they did.

Matthew 2:15-16 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son [That is a quote from Hosea 11:1]. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

Now that is interesting because it was *apparently* about two years before Christ's birth that these Magi first observed this light, the Angel in the sky. It took that long apparently for them to become attracted to it, study it, noticed that it was moving, make preparations, and follow it. God probably just did not put it into their heads to follow that star, He made them figure it out. And then the journey I am sure took a great deal of time, because they no doubt had nothing any faster than horses or camels.

I have never bothered to measure the distance between Media and Jerusalem, but it is a considerable distance. I would guess 600 or 700 miles, but at any rate, it took them quite a bit of time for this whole thing to unfold.

This is certainly another indication that God did not do these things in a corner. He did not try to hide it at all. If the Magi saw that star, then other people must have seen the star too. It is very possible that these Magi had to have some kind of financing in order to even make the trip. And then when they got back from their trip, they had to give an account of what in the world went on. And so, this story then began to get back into that part of the world. There are all kinds of scenarios that you can come up with here. And they are of course, assumptions and speculation. But I think that there is a measure of truth in those things. God was not trying to hide the birth of His son in any way.

Matthew 2:17-18 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Now, there is always some speculation as to how many children were killed. Based upon population estimates, the figure that comes up the most by these people is somewhere between 20 or 30 children. It may have been more, it may have been less, but judging by the records the Jews have left as to an estimate of the population of Bethlehem at that time; and how many of that population would be at the bearable age; and how many of them were likely to be pregnant; and how many children were likely to be in the neighborhood of up to two years old. The best they can come up with is an estimate somewhere around 20 or 30 children. I will give you that for what it is worth. But you know, killing 20 or 30 children, it just gives you some sort of an idea of how far some people will go to protect what they have. Here was this king who was so paranoid about hanging onto his throne, that he was willing to go to that extent in order to protect it.

Matthew 2:19-20 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.

When Herod died, he recognized that of his three remaining sons, none of them were as capable as he was. Maybe there was a bit of vanity involved in that—I am sure there was—but at least these three sons, he did not try to kill. He divided his kingdom—which was given to him by the Romans—into three. Down in Jerusalem was the son by the name of Archelaus. Now, Archelaus inherited his father's paranoia in regard to the protection of his throne. So immediately upon coming into power, he ordered the death of 3000 of the leading Jewish citizens so that he could wipe out anybody who would be any kind of competition for his position.

That is why he is mentioned here in verse 22:

Matthew 2:22-23 But when he [that is Joseph] heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: [This is how it came that Jesus, rather than being reared at the capital city, came to be reared in the northern part of Palestine in Galilee.] And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

I think that those things are interesting because it gives us a bit of insight into the way God works. God can do anything he wants; he could have killed Archelaus and put somebody else on the throne. But he did not. He left that corrupt ruler on the throne and instead ordered Joseph to go live somewhere else. Why did He do that? We would like for God to just clear the way out in every case so that we could have smooth sailing in everything. But we have to be able to see that He does not work that way. He does not willy-nilly kill people and try to bend people to His will. I think those things are so interesting.

So at any rate, Jesus then was reared in Nazareth, which incidentally was not a little backwater town. It was not all that large in comparison to Jerusalem or Damascus. It was not any great metropolitan area, but nonetheless, the more archaeologists find out, the more they are impressed by the fact that Jesus grew up in an area that was very cosmopolitan. All you have to do is look on a map of that ancient time and you will see that Nazareth was not very far from the road. The main trading road ran between Damascus and Egypt. It came down the western side of the sea of galilee, and then cut through the valley of Jezreel, went over toward the Mediterranean, and there it met the road called the “Way of the Sea.” The Way of the Sea ran from up around Tarsus, where Paul was born, came all the way down the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, and eventually ended up in Alexandria.

Jesus grew up in an area that was being crisscrossed by the caravan. They were carrying all the goods between Syria and Egypt. And of course, Syria and Jerusalem. He grew up coming in contact with very large numbers of different kinds of people because they came right by His doorstep. He was not shielded, and I am sure He received quite a cosmopolitan education.

Before we go into chapter three, I think that we better consider something. You will see that the first verse in chapter three begins, "in those days came John the Baptist" and chapter two ends with Jesus being a young boy and the family being established in Nazareth. Now, how old Jesus was whenever this took place can be reasonably determined because Herod died in early three BC and Jesus was born in four BC. Jesus could not have been much older than one year old by the time that His family came back. Or we could say that He was two. Perhaps the family remained in Egypt for another year until Archelaus was done killing 3000 people and the kingdom became settled down a little bit after having new kings.

That means then, that between the end of Chapter two and the end of Chapter three—where Jesus was just about ready to begin His ministry—is a gap of 28 years in which nothing is recorded except for that brief little interlude in Luke two where Jesus was 12 years old and the family was shown coming to Jerusalem to keep the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. We have that brief little insight that is about 10 verses long where Jesus was separated

from the family—I believe it was about three days—and then the family returned to Jerusalem and there was Jesus sitting in the temple, asking and answering questions that were put to Him by the priest.

That is not very much insight. There are 28 years of His life is missing. What was going on in those 28 years? Well, I think that there are some reasonable speculations that we can make.

Hebrews 4:14-15 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

A priest.

Hebrews 5:1-2 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

A priest's responsibility is to act on behalf of God for men. He stands as a mediator between God and man. Moses of course was the ideal under the Old Covenant and he was the mediator of the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ is the mediator and high priest under the New Covenant. Now, maybe we can understand a little bit of the high priest responsibility by understanding one Latin word that you may be familiar with and have probably pronounced every one in a while. That is the Latin word for priest. Does anybody know what the Latin word for priest is? Does anyone want to guess? [Someone answers] No, it is not Pope but you are getting close. What is the Pope called? [Someone answers again] There you go. He is the *Pontifex Maximus*.

What does that word mean? High priest. Now, he is the high priest of their religion. What does the word *Pontifex* mean? You will be surprised. It means bridge builder. The Pope is the high bridge builder, he is the number one bridge builder.

He is the bridge builder in what area? In spiritual areas. He builds bridges between God and man in order that there might be a connection, a relationship between the two. It is interesting that Mr. Armstrong is called a bridge builder between nations. He is a mediator; he bridges the gap between various groups of people. Well, that is what a high priest does. He builds bridges between God and man in order that there might be a relationship.

That is exactly what God is saying here in Hebrews four and five. Jesus Christ is high priest. He is the one who makes the connection between God and man. He bridges it.

Now, Jesus Christ is a very unique individual because He was God and man at the same time. What do you think was going on in those 28 years while He was growing up there in Nazareth, before He began His ministry? He was learning to be a man—of course, He was learning to be a priest too—but He was learning to understand humanity.

Sometimes we have a rather naive idea that when Jesus was born, He was born with a full set of teeth and He came out of the womb quoting Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but it was not that way at all. When Jesus was born, He could not control his bowels, He could not control His urinary tract at all either. He had to be fed by His mother or He would starve to death. As Jesus was growing up, His teeth came in when He was six months, seven months, eight months old. He had to be taught how to walk and He toddled between His father and His mother until He was able to control His legs.

What I am saying is that when God was born as a man, He had to go through the routine of learning to become a human being; of growing up and maturing just like everybody else—just as you did, just as I did—now that was the human side of things. When He became one or two years old and His mother began to put Him on the potty and He learned to control His bowels, and He learned to be weaned from the breast and began to take solid food just like everybody else. He had to learn to say “mama” and “papa” and all those things that go with learning a language.

I have no doubt that He was very bright, but I kind of shrink from the idea of Him being a prodigy, like Mozart playing the piano at the age of four and composing music when he was four and five years old. I do not think God's

Son did that kind of thing, rather He was far more normal in terms of His humanity. So, in those 28 years He was learning what it was like to be a human being.

Hebrews 5:8-10 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

I think that there was no doubt that Jesus was growing up in a good home. It is inconceivable to me that God would entrust His Son to somebody that He did not trust would be a good mother and a good father to His child. I am sure that He very carefully scoured the area of Palestine to come up with someone who would be legally of the line of David and also fit to be the “father and mother” of His son, because I am sure that He wanted Him to be brought up in a good household.

I am sure that when those people came on the scene that God prepared them for that path. Like the rest of God's servants, they were handpicked, and they were trained to be the father and mother of His child. I have no doubt in my mind that He grew up in an atmosphere of peace and harmony and a good attitude, with people that we would call upright—in the ordinary sense of the word—and people who were devoted to their children and to their families. I think that He got off to a good start that way.

By the time we get to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Joseph is no longer mentioned in the story. What happened to him? Is his absence there an indication that he was dead? I feel that it does indicate that he was dead because Jesus' other close relatives are all mentioned. His brothers are mentioned by name, His sisters are mentioned, His mother is mentioned, His cousin is mentioned, but His father is never mentioned. I think that is a strong indication that Joseph was dead.

There is a legend that Joseph died in an accident by drowning. How true that is, I do not know, but the legend goes that he drowned trying to save some sheep from a torrential rainstorm that trapped them in an arroyo. In trying to save them, he himself gave his life for his sheep. How true that is? I have no idea, but at any rate, the Bible does indicate that he was not on the scene. So

when did he pass from the scene? I think that God would be inclined to leave Joseph around until He felt that Jesus was old enough to pick up on the responsibility of being the eldest son.

Jesus then began to get the experience—as the eldest son—of providing for a family. Because once Joseph was out of the way, somebody had to take over the family business; somebody had to provide for all the brothers and sisters that had been born; somebody had to provide for His widowed mother. Now, who did that responsibility fall on? It fell on Jesus. So, Jesus began to get experience in family life, in providing for a family, and also for taking care of a widow, so that He would begin to experience what a widow's life was like. Things that He would later inspire His ministers to write about: undefiled, pure religion and to take care of a widow in her plight.

He would have then had experience in enduring terrible tragedy. I am sure that He loved His father very much and I am sure that His father loved him. And so He would have experienced what is like to lose somebody that you love very much. He no doubt had spent a great deal of time with Joseph and had learned the trade from him. And then suddenly he was no longer there and the burden of responsibility fell upon Him. So even as a human being, He was enduring the very things that we go through: tragedy through death, sudden death, enduring the responsibility of providing for a family.

There was also the responsibility of caring for a business because the Bible does say that He was a carpenter, which is a much broader term than when we use the term carpenter. It is more likely He was like a general contractor. Therefore, He would come into contact with customers, He would have to deal with and endure the criticism of dissatisfied customers. He would have to deal with people who did not pay their bills. He would have to deal with other merchants in buying materials. He would have to estimate jobs and who knows, draw blueprints and all kinds of things like that. So, He was getting a very broad education in what it is like to be you and me. And He learned those principles and those principles in turn are to be used by Him as high priest.

We have a high priest that can be touched by the feelings of our infirmity, because He experienced them too. He experienced, the very things in principle that we go through. This is no doubt one of the major reasons why

it says in the Bible that all judgment has been committed to Jesus, the son, because He has experienced things in a realm that His father—with all of His father's wisdom, with all of His father's experience with all of His father's power, His insight, His character, His justice, His mercy, and everything—never experienced being a human being. And so, in order to protect you and me, He has committed judgment to the Son so that we will receive the benefit of every doubt that might arrive.

That is what a high priest does; he bridges the gap between humanity and God. And we have a high priest who experienced all of these things and so then what He was doing, He was faithfully performing all of those little tasks that were preparing Him for His big job. The first step in that big job was the preaching of the gospel, but He did not go on to that until after He had first performed favorably the things that led up to that.

He had to learn the Bible the same way that you and I do. He had to read it, He had to study it, He had to compare scripture with scripture, and He had to get a thorough understanding through spending hours poring over those scrolls. Those things did not just all pour into His mind, He had to study them the same way that we did. And He did it and He set us a very fine example.

At any rate, Jesus then understands life in all of its perspective, having experienced it as a human being, He was prepared for that.

Matthew 3:1-6 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now the introduction there I think is very interesting because of the connection that is made with or between John the Baptist and Elijah. Notice

back in I Kings 17, where Elijah is introduced. He is introduced the same way as John the Baptist:

I Kings 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God is Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

It is very similar to the way John the Baptist is introduced: there is a brief story of the events surrounding his conception and birth, not even his birth, just his conception in the book of Luke. Then there is nothing, just bang! Suddenly there he is. He just appeared. And I think that what it does is it gives us an indication of exactly how he appeared on the scene, the same way that Elijah did: *boom* there he was. And that any preparation of John the Baptist apparently did not take place in a public place.

In other words, he was not like Billy Graham. If you have read any of the biographies of Billy Graham after he became converted at that seminary down there in Florida, they sent him out to small churches all over the place where he began to practice. That is the way most of us do, we come to our growth through constant practice and Billy Graham did this all over central and northern Florida. He was practicing everywhere he could possibly preach for half an hour, 45 minutes or so until you know, gradually through the years he became a well-established evangelistic personality.

There is no indication that this happened with John the Baptist, he just says that he came out of the desert and boom, he was just suddenly on the scene. Now there is another indicator there that I feel is very interesting and that is that John had no or very little contact with the rabbinical school—he was no doubt familiar with them—but like Jesus, he was not taught by them. You see, he came out of the desert. Now that is a phrase that is used in other places in the Bible.

There are other connections that we can make. For example: the apostle Paul *did* go through the rabbinical school, but when he was converted on the road to Damascus, what does he say happened? He immediately he went out to the desert where he spent three years with Jesus being taught. Paul had to go through a brainwashing in order to get all the goop out of his mind and all of

the right ideas and attitudes and knowledge put in. So, he was with Jesus Christ in the desert for a period there unlearning and then relearning everything from his right perspective and then after he was out on the desert, then he began his preaching.

Now that is what happened to John the Baptist and it is very similar to what Mr. Armstrong said about himself; he was reared in the Quaker faith, but he quit attending virtually by the time that he was in his early 20's. Then when God converted him, he brainwashed it out. These past couple of weeks, when we were up there in Charlotte, Mr. Armstrong went through all that again with the ministry of how when he was converted it began with the Sabbath. But Mr. Armstrong had no work to do and so he had months on end that he just spent the entire day from morning to night studying the Bible and so he got things as he said from God's written word, comparing scripture with scripture. He feels that he was taught, not exactly in the same manner as the apostle Paul, but yet with the same word. So, what went into his mind was the pure undiluted word of God.

Well, that is the way it was with John the Baptist, it seems to indicate that he did not have normal religious training. But rather, he came out of the desert where he had been prepared by God for the responsibility of preparing the way for Jesus Christ. Hold your finger there in Matthew three and let's go to Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:7-11 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind[that is somebody very weak]? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment[that is a rich person]? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee[that is from Malachi 3:1]. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

He did not say that John the Baptist was the greatest among men, He just said that there were none greater. Now that would leave room for a lot of people to be on the same level: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. He just said that there were none greater than John the Baptist. What Jesus was actually doing was pointing to the fact that they had witnessed somebody who was on a stature equal to Moses and Abraham, whom the Jews looked upon as being the greatest men who had ever lived. But what Jesus was saying was that John the Baptist was their equal.

Matthew 11:12-15 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's go back to Malachi the third chapter:

Malachi 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

There are two different messengers involved in that first verse. The first messenger Jesus said was John the Baptist. The second messenger was Jesus Christ, the messenger of the covenant, the one who came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Malachi 3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: [Now he's talking about the second messenger, the messenger of the covenant] And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

It is very obvious that Jesus did not fulfill verses two and three when He came His first time. He is therefore evidently talking about His second coming, when those things will occur. Now that becomes even more evident as you continue through the context in chapter three. As you get to the end of the chapter he is obviously talking about the second coming of Jesus Christ, chapter four is even more obvious.

Talking about a day of judgement:

Malachi 4:1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up,[Talking about the Lake of Fire which is obviously far beyond the second coming] saith the LORD of hosts, that is shall leave them neither root nor branch.

Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

The Day of the Lord will occur just prior to and during the return of Jesus Christ, so Elijah is going to appear just prior to the Day of the Lord. Therefore, it is impossible that John the Baptist could fulfill that responsibility as Jesus stated in Matthew the 11th chapter. Now go with me back to Matthew the 17th chapter.

Now, the transfiguration had just occurred and Jesus, Peter, James, and John were coming down off the mountain:

Matthew 17:10-12 And His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias[or Elijah] must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Elias[or Elijah] truly shall first come, and restore all things. [You can see that is obviously in the future tense] But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they [liked] listed.

How can these verses be reconciled? How can they be reconciled with Matthew 11 and Malachi three and Malachi four? They can only be reconciled if there are two who are going to come in the spirit of Elijah. That one has already come and was the forerunner before Jesus Christ in His first ministry. That another must come and also be a forerunner prior to Christ's second ministry that begins at the time of His second coming.

Now there is a clue in verse 11 where it says "Elijah truly shall come." He did not restore anything. He prepared the way, but he restored nothing.

Let's go back to Matthew the 25th chapter. Now remember Jesus stated in Matthew 16 that He would "build His church; and the gates of the grave would not prevail against it." That is, it would never pass from existence that it would continue to exist all through the ages. However, in Matthew 25 there is a modifier there in verse five where we have the parable of the Ten Virgins. Five were wise and five were foolish and they represent the church.

Matthew 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried [After the bride groom (Christ) returned to heaven. He did not return to earth right away, but He waited a period of time and in fact He is still waiting. He is tarrying and], they all slumbered and slept.

In other words, the church went to sleep. When you are asleep you continue to live, you continue to exist, but you are not doing much work.

The New Testament contains in the writings of Paul, James, Peter and John at least a skeletal framework of what occurred in that first century that put the church to sleep. By the time the apostle Paul wrote the book of Galatians, he said in the first chapter, "I marvel that you are so soon removed from the Gospel" You have been persuaded by another Gospel, which is not a gospel. Well, you see, this was about 60 AD. Already the church was beginning to be devastated by the preaching of another Gospel that was much easier to accept, much easier to get along with because it did not demand changes in your life and did not demand all of the strictures that true Christianity does.

When we leap to the books of James, Peter, and John, we see that there was a well-organized effort made to suppress the true Gospel and to virtually demolished the church. Those things did occur and the church went to sleep. By about 100 AD, it was doing very little preaching of the gospel.

Now, we are not the only ones to discover this. Mr. Armstrong refers you every once in a while to that book, *A History of the True Religion* by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut—I think we have that book in our library back there—where that man states that when the curtain arises on the second century, we find a church far different from the one that Jesus Christ began. And indeed, it was different because it was a different church altogether and the true church had virtually gone underground.

Revelation 3:1 "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

This was the church just prior to the one that we are living in now. It is the one in which Mr. Armstrong was introduced to the truth. Notice that they are alive, but they are not doing any work, they are dead. They are not producing anything, they went to sleep.

Revelation 3:7-8 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

I want you to focus in on the key of David. What is it? [Someone answers] You are on the right track, but not specifically the Sabbath and the Holy Days. [Someone else answers] The identity of Israel is more specifically what it is. Let's get even more specific. David was king. What did God promise to David? He promised him a throne and for that throne there would never fail to be a man or woman who would be sitting on that throne.

It also states in Luke that when Jesus Christ returns, He is going to take over the throne of His father David. The Bible states on one hand that the throne of David is always going to be in existence. Therefore, in order for Jesus to take over a throne, it is going to be a living throne. One that is going to be continuous from the time of David until the time of the return of Jesus Christ. Where is that throne? We all know that it is in England.

Once you have located where that throne is, you have located where Israel is. Once you have located where Israel is, then all of the prophecies for the end time open up for your understanding because now you know who those prophecies are intended for. It is not that little country down there that is called Israel today, that is Judah, but rather it is intended for *Israel*, the place where the throne sits.

Once that is laid bare, then all of the other parts of the government of God begin to fit into place including the keeping of His commandments which includes the Sabbath which includes the Holy Days. It opens up the gospel and what man's potential is; what born again really means and that man is intended to be born into the Kingdom of God. It also begins to open up to our understanding that we should not be keeping Christmas and Easter, and all those other things begin to fall into line.

Now you see what was given to Mr. Armstrong, the key of David, in order that he might do what? Restore all things. You see? So, what is the conclusion? Mr. Armstrong is a modern antitype of Elijah, because he is the one who is restoring the true religion to this world. That which was lost whenever the church went to sleep, and was retained only by the church itself and not disseminated to the whole world, is now being disseminated to the whole world by a modern Elijah, who is preparing the way for Christ to return to an operation that is working, that is in good order, and is going along.

So, we have two different Elijah's at two different periods of time in history. The one began to restore the truth to the Jews of Christ's day. The other is restoring the true religion to this world.

Let's go back to Matthew three where we can begin to see characteristics of John the Baptist arising. First of all, it states that he came from the desert, which implies that he did not go through the normal preparation process, but rather that God isolated him. God alone was his teacher. When I say alone, I mean in the spiritual areas in preparing him for Christ, I do not mean that his father taught him nothing or his mother taught him nothing or anything of that nature. I do not mean that at all.

Two, he urgently summoned men to repent, to change, and to turn to righteousness. The first thing out of his mouth that is recorded here is "repent."

Three, we are going to see more and more that he fearlessly denounced evil. It did not matter where it was. He called a spade a spade and eventually it cost his life when he accused Herod of living in adultery. Even though Herod somewhat liked the guy, Herod's wife—that he was living in adultery with—did not like him and of course got to ask for his head and Herod gave it.

The fourth thing is, it is very obvious that he pointed beyond himself, but he did not try to get a gathering for himself to start a church or anything like that. His entire efforts were bent towards pointing toward the one who is going to follow him. He was aware that somebody greater than him was coming along. It says in verse three that he prepared the way of the Lord and it says make his paths straight.

It is kind of interesting to look at this because I feel certain that those people back in the time of Christ and beyond built roads. Well, maybe built is even wrong, but rather they followed roads or paths that had previously been followed by animals. If any of you are familiar with the way an animal travels, they tend to follow the path of least resistance. Up in Pennsylvania, we have a lot of hills and so a lot of pasture land is very hilly. I do not know whether you have ever noticed how a cow goes up a hill. You ever see a cow go up a hill? They do not go straight up the hill, they go around it. They zigzag and tend to go around it. So you see the path that an animal would make is not straight, it goes around and it just kind of meanders and wanders all over the place.

Whenever men move into an area, they first tend to follow the path that animals have made before them. And so they tend to follow the line of least resistance as well. And they pathed them, which eventually developed into roads which very rarely are straight. Now, this was especially true in Jerusalem, or Palestine, which is very hilly. Very much like Pennsylvania, very much like western North Carolina; very hilly with some valleys interspersed in between the mountains. So a straight road is almost unknown.

The only time they had a straight road is when the king built one and then he would use a lot of laborers working like coolies. They did not have any bulldozers, they did not have any big dragline equipment or anything like that and so they had to build their roads by hand. He would get thousands of people out there and it would take that many to build a road. That is why roads were not straight unless the king built one. Once in a while the king would build a road. If he wanted to get from, let's say Jerusalem to some other part of his realm in a hurry, then he would make up a road that was straight. And that road became known as the king's highway or the king's road.

Now, whenever the king decided that he wanted to go somewhere. What did he do? He sent somebody out in front of him to clear all the traffic off the highway so that whenever he came through, he could go right on with his chariot and nothing would hold him up.

Don't we do that same thing today? Whenever President Reagan goes anywhere, they send the motorcycles out in front of him with police on them. And what do they do? They clear the way so that whenever the king comes behind, he can go right through without anybody stopping. It is a good analogy. This is exactly what John the Baptist did, only he did it in a spiritual way. He did not literally make the road straight, but he prepared it. In what way? What did he preach? He preached repentance to prepare people for Christ.

When we see Jesus in His first real evangelistic preaching situation, what is the first word He said? He said, "repent." You see, He just echoed John the Baptist. It says, "repent and believe the gospel." That is the first indication of His preaching that is given in the Bible: Mark 1:14-15, where He said "repent and believe the gospel."

Matthew 3:7-12 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The first picture that you get here, where he says, "oh, generation of vipers who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come" is of animals fleeing a forest fire, where they are just helter-skelter, pell-mell fleeing for their lives. Where natural enemies—ones who would normally be fighting against one another in terror or fear—are running side by side to escape. I know that I have seen pictures of forest fires taken in Africa, where there was a tremendous abundance of game and there would be lions and antelopes and gazelles and things like running side by side.

Their fear of the fire, removed any fear of each other. Normally the gazelle would be food for the lion but he was not paying it any attention because he was running for his own life. Well this is the picture that John is giving here. He said, "hey, you guys, where are you running? Why are you out here?" Do you fear the wrath of God or what are you here for? And it opens up the way for his telling them that unless they repent, there is no use doing anything else.

Now, what about this repent? We are going to spend just a little bit of time here because Jesus began his preaching that way and John began his preaching of preparing the way for Christ that way as well.

When it comes down to it, there are only two conditions for establishing a good relationship with God. The first of course is that you have to believe, but in a case like this with us, and also with these people, the existence of God was a foregone conclusion. They did not doubt that God existed and neither do we doubt that God exists. So really when it comes down to it, the only condition for a good relationship with God is to repent.

Repent. What does it mean? I think that sometimes we have a tendency to get confused and make it far too complicated. I am hoping to simplify it for you before we leave this area. There is one other thing that I want you to consider as we are going through here. Some of us, get very concerned about not having enough strength to overcome. Why do not we have enough strength? I think you are going to find that it is directly connected to repentance.

Let's go back to Isaiah the 59th chapter, we will not be back in Matthew three for quite some time. This is a chapter that ought to be studied, and studied thoroughly. God is speaking here on a national scale, he is castigating Judah for their conduct of their lives. Now think of this personally, because it applies just as personally as it does nationally.

Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that is cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that is cannot hear.

Why would he say that? Because spiritual strength is required to overcome spiritual problems, it is not required for overcoming some things. But for overcoming spiritual problems it is required and for growth in producing the fruits of the spirit it is required. Now why do we not have spiritual strength? Because we do not have enough of God's spirit. Where is the source of that spirit? God. That is why he says, "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save." God can give us strength, but because the connection between us and him is not good we lack that strength that saves us from our problem.

Isaiah 59:2-3 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not

hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

He goes on and on and explain various aspects of various sins about how deceitful their hearts are.

Isaiah 59:8-9 The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings[that is that they do not have common sense]: they have made them crooked paths[not straight paths]: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace[you ever feel a lack of contentment? Ever feel dissatisfaction, discouragement, and frustration]. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.

We do not seem to get answers to our problems and our lives then seem to become hopeless. And instead of having release, we seem to sink deeper and deeper into depression and discouragement.

Isaiah 59:10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night.

That is graphic language, is not it? It is beautiful as he describes these things.

Isaiah 59:13 In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.

He goes on and on to show that eventually he is going to send the Redeemer. Turn with me to Proverbs 13:21 where Solomon puts it very succinctly:

Proverbs 13:21 Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.

He does not mean there, that the that the righteous are not going to have problems, but they are going to have problems that will be resolved. They

are going to have problems and see them in the right light. They are going to see good in them. They are going to have a good attitude about them. They are going to tackle them and overcome them. They are not going to be frustrated by them and they are not going to be filled with dissatisfaction and discontentment. But on the other hand, the evil will never have enough. They will always be frustrated, always discontented, always having a feeling of hopelessness that despite the amount of money that they might have, they are going to feel as though the world is going to cave in at almost any moment and on and on it goes.

Turn with me to Ezekiel and let's begin to clear this up:

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have not pleasure in the death of the wicked [That is where the evil that pursues the sinner is going to eventually take it: to death. And ultimately to the second death. So He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked]; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Now, most of us are very familiar with the Greek word for repent. It is *metanoia*, but with the Hebrew word, I bet there is not one person in here that knows what it is. I did not even know it and I should know it. But it is so much simpler than the Greek word. It is the word *peshubah*. And what does it mean? You just read it there, it means to turn. It does not have any particular connotation of feeling. Whereas the Greek word does. With the Greek word, there is a feeling of compunction with the turning. Now the Hebrew just simply means to turn.

Now get the picture here are the wicked, they are going down the road and the road is leading to death. God says "*turn!*" He does not even say how far, He just says *turn* because if you keep going in the direction that you are going on, you are going to die! But if you turn your direction and at least go off on a tangent, you have a chance of ending up someplace else. So He simply says *turn* away from the direction that you are going.

At this point, as I said, He does not say how far to turn. He just simply says to turn. In verse 14, he repeats it:

Ezekiel 33:14-15 Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.

If he *turned* away from his iniquity, that is away from his lawlessness. If he turned away from his sin. There is something very interesting there because he intimates that the sinner should make reparations. Think about that for a little bit.

Now, let's go back to Isaiah 55:

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD...

This is obviously written to somebody who has had contact with God. Someone who already has a relationship with God and has drifted from God through iniquity, through lawlessness, through his thought, that is ones own thoughts. There is a way that seems right under man, but the end thereof is the way of death, and so what God is saying to this person is "let him return unto the Lord". How? By forsaking his way! There is nothing complicated about that. A man has not repented until he *quits* breaking the law of God. It is that simple. The person has not repented until he *quits* breaking the law, then he has to forsake it.

Isaiah 55:7-9 ...and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. What he is saying there very briefly, is that these sins start

from our thoughts, and if we start thinking more about God's thoughts, we are going to do less sinning. And so we have to even forsake our own thoughts.

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

What he is saying there are two things. One, that repentance is *always* available to us. It is open to us. Some of us worry as to whether or not God is granting us repentance. Because it does say in Romans 2, "do not you know that the goodness of God leads us to repentance?" Brethren, if God is removing ignorance, if He is giving you truth, if He is revealing knowledge to you, if He is convicting you of wrong, He is leading you to repentance. The way is *open!* The burden is completely on us. If you know a thing is sin, God has granted repentance to you. And if you are not taking advantage of it, woe is you. You are just rejecting His effort and rejecting His word.

And then in verses 12 and 13, he shows very clearly that for those who do repent, strength begins to flow in their direction:

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

It is symbolic language, but that is what he is saying. He says to those who repent and obey Him strength flows in their direction from God so that they can continue to overcome. Now let's go to the book of Jonah. In my bible is on page 1126, such a skinny little book it is easy to pass by. It is right after Obadiah, which is even skinnier. It is right before Micah which is a little heavier. You know the story:

Jonah 3:5-10 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? [That was what was published by the king] And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

He did not look and say, "boy, don't they feel sad." He did not say "look at their good intentions." He did not say, "oh what a sorrowful feeling they have in their heart." It was not until they *turned* on that path that they were going on and then he in turn repented and did not bring the evil upon them that He had prophesied would occur. That is so simple to repent, is to quit sinning.

Now, is there feeling associated with it? The answer to that is yes. But it will obviously be in varying degrees from person to person. Now, you can write these scriptures down:

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Numbers 5:5-7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed.

I chose those scriptures to show you one thing. The Bible shows very clearly that sin must be confessed. It must be admitted to God in order for forgiveness. But you have to ask Him and you have to confess it. In other words, God wants you to be very specific about it. "God, I did this." "God, I did that."

Let's go to Psalm 51, which is David's psalm of repentance. Now, what song 51 does is emphasize his feeling. I want you to notice David's attitude in that. It is exceedingly important because it shows the state of mind that repentance will accompany. We could go through this in a great deal of detail, but it is already two minutes after nine. But I want you to read this and I want you to notice that David never once justified his position. He never says, "I did it because..." He never says, "I did it because I was weak." "I did it because Bathsheba tricked me into it." "I did it because I was hungry or anything." He gives not one excuse but accepts the blame absolutely and entirely. And says, "God, I am throwing myself on your mercy whatever you want to do, you are completely justified in doing. If you want to kill me, God, I know I deserve it." That is what he says in verse four. There is no hemming, no hauling, no trying to shift blame, no rationalization, no justification, no excuses. He simply pours himself out and says, "God, I did it."

Now, let's go back to a final scripture in II Corinthians 7. There is compunction, deep sorrow—or let's just say sorrow—associated with repentance. But sorrow, often by itself, is not repentance. Feeling sorry that you have done something wrong is not enough. It has to be accompanied by the turning. If it is not, it is simply not repentance. Now, that is what Paul explains here:

II Corinthians 7:8-9 For though I made you sorry with a letter[that he had previously written], I do not repent["I do not regret" is what is should say], though I did repent[that is for a while after he wrote it, he felt sorry that he had done it. But now he says, I do not feel sorry. I do not regret it]: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance...

You see sorrow or conviction or compunction *can* produce repentance. But then again, maybe it will not. It all depends on the state of your mind.

II Corinthians 7:9-10 ...for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow [produces] repentance to salvation not to be repented of[that is you do not have to repent of salvation]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Why? It does not produce a turn. It does not produce change. As long as you are getting sorry, but it does not make you change, you have not repented. You are kidding yourself. Your heart is deceiving you. All you are feeling sorry for is yourself. That you are having to suffer this pain, discouragement, dissatisfaction, or whatever. You are sorry for the effect on yourself, you are not sorry that God is being injured by your sins. You are not sorry, that Jesus Christ was put to death because of your sins. You are not sorry toward God. You are only sorry for yourself.

That will not by itself produce repentance. All you have to do is ask God. You cannot work it up yourself, but all you have to do is in all truthfulness and sincerity, ask him to grant you repentance. But I will tell you in order to bring you to repentance—I mean, a Godly repentance—He might make you really hurt because it might be the only thing that will make you sorry enough to really quit.

So repentance may be preceeded by sorrow, but the real repentance is that state of mind that produces a turn away from the sin.

The last thing we had there in Matthew 3 was the baptism of Christ. I am just going to say very briefly that He was baptized in order to set an example. He was also baptized symbolically in that sense, to show His commitment to the work that He was going to be involved in.