



## Chapter 4

*Credibility*--defined one place as “the quality of being trusted and believed in”--is essential for anyone in a position of authority. Without it, would-be followers lose heart or grow cynical. This chapter has everything to do with demonstrating Jesus’s credibility as the Messiah and the one who would “save his people from their sins” (1:21).

1. Have you ever been asked to follow someone who lacked credibility? If so, why did they lack it and what was the outcome?

To this point, Matthew has shown us that Jesus has the Messiah’s pedigree (1:1-17), that his life’s purpose will be to save his people from their sins (1:21), and that Jesus would be God’s physical presence on earth (1:23). In chapter 2, we see the magi visit with gifts to worship the baby, the escape of Jesus’s family to Egypt and their eventual return to Nazareth following Herod’s death. Next, Matthew introduces John the Baptist as a prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus’s ministry, culminating in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.

### Verses 1-11

This section of Matthew takes us through the final preparation for and beginning of Jesus’s ministry. These verses contain unmistakable parallels with Israel’s journey through the wilderness as recorded in Exodus to Deuteronomy. Jesus’s credibility is on full display as he succeeds where Israel failed. It’s remarkable that this section begins with the statement that Jesus was “led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (v. 1). In other words, the devil is part of the scene, but only under the sovereign plan of God.

2. How did Israel fail in the wilderness and how does Jesus succeed in these verses?
3. How do Jesus’s actions here build his credibility as the Messiah, the Son of God?
4. Most of us hope to avoid trials(!), but the Bible seems to consistently depict them as essential for learning to depend on God. Talk about a time when a trial helped you...or perhaps, *should have helped you*...learn to rely more deeply on God.

### Verses 12-17

Matthew begins now to transition into the story of Jesus’s active ministry. The resettlement to Capernaum fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy and reminds us, once again, that this is all going according to God’s sovereign script...even as John the Baptist is imprisoned. In addition, we see another reminder that Jesus’s mission will extend beyond the ethnic and geographic boundaries of Israel. Jesus now picks up where John the Baptist left off as he repeats John the Baptist’s call in v. 17 (see 3:2).

5. *Repent* in v. 17 includes the idea of *feeling remorse that leads to a change in behavior*. How can something so seemingly negative be a part of the good news?

### **Verses 18-25**

We should take note that Jesus begins his ministry by calling a “Messianic community” of people to gather together around himself. The instructions for this community are clear: they are to follow and fish...for people! With this core of disciples around him, Jesus travels throughout the region, teaching, proclaiming the good news, and miraculously healing the people. As we should expect, Matthew notes how the crowds swelled around Jesus as people from all across the area--including areas outside Israel--wanted to see and hear this wonder-working teacher.

6. What do these verses reveal about Jesus’s heart for people, and especially those who are hurting?

7. How did Jesus’ miracles influence his credibility with the crowds? How should these same miracles impact our view of Jesus’ credibility today?

### **Tying the Bow**

These first four chapters of Matthew have made a clear case for Jesus’s credibility as the Messiah and Son of God. Now, as his ministry begins, we should be leaning forward in our seats as we hear his words. Thankfully, that’s what we’re about to get as we embark on chapters 5-7, the so-called “Sermon on the Mount.” It is arguably the greatest sermon ever preached, and one that helps us learn what life looks like in this community of “followers and fishers.” We encourage you to see this as an opportunity to gather around Jesus as well!