

## Editors' Preface

On October 18, 1539, John Calvin attached to his first commentary a lengthy preface he called “The Epistle Dedicatory.” He not only honored his dear friend Professor Simon Grynaeus, but he also specifically referenced their “friendly converse” three years earlier, discussing “the best mode of expounding Scripture.” Two insights from this dedication are particularly relevant to The New Testament Exposition Commentary series. First, Calvin and Grynaeus “thought that the chief excellency of an expounder consists in *lucid brevity*.” Therefore, when Calvin wrote, he sought “to avoid the evil of tiring his readers with prolixity [wordiness].” Second, Calvin and Grynaeus believed the singular purpose of commenting on the Scriptures in written form is to “benefit the Church of God.” Calvin was emphatic on this point and added, there is “no other reason [for writing] than to promote the public good of the Church.”

The twenty volumes of the New Testament Exposition Commentary (NTEC) build upon the two observations by Calvin and Grynaeus. The NTEC’s purpose, “to promote the public good of the Church,” may be summarized as follows:

- We desire to exalt God through making His written Word clear to today’s readers.
- We desire to strengthen Christ’s church through a concise and readable exposition of the New Testament so that each believer may be “[trained] in righteousness” and adequately “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
- We desire to present God’s Gospel with compelling transparency so those readers who know Jesus Christ will deepen their love for Him and so those who have not embraced His salvation through faith will do so and find joy and peace in Him.

Our target audience for the NTEC series is the local church—pastors, deacons, teachers, and laypeople who desire to know the beauty and freshness of God’s Word. This series uses the English Standard Version (ESV) as its Biblical translation, and it features commentaries by conservative scholars from various colleges and seminaries, as well as proven pastors. Each of the 260 chapters of the New Testament will be arranged in three parts to optimize personal study:

- A concise **overview**, which functions as a map to lay out the chapter’s major ideas, explaining how each part fits and tracing the logic of the writer’s context.
- A verse-by-verse **exposition** of the chapter.
- A closing **reflection** from the commentator to help the reader focus on a significant application from the chapter.

As the senior editors of the NTEC series, we invite you to journey with

us through each book of the New Testament, chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse. Our pledge to you is to treat every word of the New Testament as originating from God, not man, and to strive to keep the words of the text in their Spirit-breathed context. In return, we kindly request that you, the reader, meditate with prayer on what you read. By doing so, we believe you will find both eternal treasure and worth within the pages of these commentaries.

Daniel Davey and Chris Miller, April 2023

## Author's Preface

Since the early church began to collect and arrange the books of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew has stood at the head of the collection, and for good reason. No other book offers such a tightly argued presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, making it the perfect bridge between the testaments. All that God promised Abraham, David, and the world has now come true in Jesus of Nazareth.

Our purpose in this commentary is to listen carefully to Matthew's explanation of how Jesus has fulfilled and will fulfill those expectations precisely in the way God's prophets expressed them in the Old Testament. Thus, we delight in the continuity between God's promises in the Old Testament, their fulfillment in Jesus, and His completion of them in the book of Revelation at the end of time. We have collected the best of scholarship; paid special attention to Matthew's literary skill as he arranges and tells his unique, inspired story; and then looked to present our exposition clearly and compellingly. Our ultimate aim is to honor God by enriching the lives of the church community: pastors, deacons, students, and engaged laypeople in the church. The measure of our success is for you, the reader, to determine.

To provide a smooth and user-friendly experience, we have organized the commentary's structure to mirror the Gospel of Matthew, ensuring that each commentary chapter aligns with the respective chapter in the Gospel. Moreover, Matthew clearly arranges his Gospel around five major teaching events from Jesus' ministry. Although the crowds overheard some of these teachings, the primary audience for each was His disciples. Thus, when Jesus issues His final command to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:19–20), the attentive reader will discern that Matthew has already walked us through Jesus' comprehensive five-part discipleship curriculum. Those who immerse themselves in this book will be equipped to fulfill the Great Commission.

I am grateful for those dear friends who encouraged and offered helpful critiques along the way: Daniel Davey, Trent Rogers, Daniel Clark, and the administration at Cedarville University, who graciously allowed me release time to begin this project. And I am thankful to you, the reader, for your interest in the book of Matthew. My prayer is that this work will help you fully realize the exceeding value of the kingdom of Heaven so that with joy you will go and sell all that you have to buy that field (13:44).

Chris Miller, April 2023



# Introduction

**Author** 13

**Date** 14

**Audience and Purpose** 14

**Old Testament Background** 16

**Structural Analysis** 23

**Chapter Level Meaning** 27

**Synthetic Overview** 29

**Interpretive Approaches and Definitions** 32

## Author

The Gospel of Matthew, like the other Gospels, never names its writer, although the earliest reliable tradition links it to Matthew, Jesus' disciple (9:9; 10:3). The unanimous external witness of the earliest church fathers and the title itself ("according to Matthew") date to about AD 125.<sup>1</sup> The list of witnesses includes the writings of Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Origen.<sup>2</sup> The internal evidence from the book shows that its writer possessed an extensive knowledge of the Old Testament, was familiar with scribal traditions, was fluent in Greek, and was a skilled writer. These characteristics would match the typical skill set of a first-century Jewish tax collector. If the account of Jesus' call of the tax collector is a self-portrait by Matthew (9:9–13), his occupation is the only thing that distinguishes him from his fellow disciples in the Biblical record. Parallel accounts of the call in Mark and Luke name him "Levi" (Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32), but both writers also identify him as "Matthew" in their list of the disciples (Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–16).<sup>3</sup> As Osborne concludes, "We can never know for certain who wrote it, but there is little reason to doubt the witness of the early church fathers."<sup>4</sup>

## Date

Some scholars insist that the Gospel was written after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 on the assumption that Matthew inserted Jesus' prediction of the event after the fact.<sup>5</sup> Those who believe in predictive prophecy are not bound by this assumption and must determine the date on other grounds. Writing before the end of the second century (AD 180), Irenaeus asserted a date in the early sixties: "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church."<sup>6</sup> Matthew himself suggests that some time has passed (though he does not say how much) between the events and the writing of the book when he uses the phrase "to this day" (cf. 27:7–8; 28:15). The latter example of this phrase (28:11–15) concerns the conspiratorial attempt of the chief priests to deny the resurrection, which suggests a date when Matthew's readers would still need to answer these fabrications with their Jewish neighbors. While we cannot pinpoint an exact date, the external and internal evidence suggests the sixties or perhaps even earlier.<sup>7</sup>

## Audience and Purpose

The people for whom Matthew writes and the purposes that he intends to accomplish among them are interrelated and most easily discussed together. Our challenge is that Matthew explicitly identifies neither his audience nor his purpose, unlike the apostle John, who at least clearly states the evangelistic intent of his work (John 20:30–31). Thus all we can do is make observations about the book that tentatively suggest both audience and purpose. Our proposal is that *Matthew writes mainly to readers (1) who are Jewish Christians (2) who need to navigate their world of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and (3) who are instructed to make disciples of all nations.*

### *Readers who are Jewish Christians*

The Gospel of Matthew traditionally stands at the head of the Gospels and is most closely connected with the message of the Old Testament. Matthew includes more quotations and allusions to the Old Testament than any other gospel writer, and he often draws upon themes that require a deep familiarity with the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> He begins his work with a genealogy that only those familiar with the purpose and form could appreciate. Unlike Mark, Matthew does not take time to explain Jewish customs or words, assuming that his audience is already conversant with Jewish society.<sup>9</sup> When referring to Gentiles, he often does so negatively, from a Jewish perspective, as those who do not know God (5:47; 6:7, 32; 18:17). This evidence suggests that the writer assumes his readers are knowledgeable in the Old Testament and Jewish culture.

But Matthew's original audience also believed that Jesus was the Christ. Matthew defines disciples by their repentance from sin and willingness to follow Jesus by faith (4:17–22). The most dominant structural feature of the book is its five major discourses, all of which Jesus addresses to His disciples.<sup>10</sup> The reader then naturally assumes the position of a disciple who hears the teaching of Jesus given to believers who can accept and understand His instruction.<sup>11</sup>

*Readers who need to navigate their world of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles*

First century Judaism was far from monolithic, as illustrated by the differing worldviews of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. Jesus offered an alternative to them all and was even welcoming toward Gentiles. In the decades after the ascension, Jewish believers in Jesus faced a multitude of questions about how they defined themselves in relation to the rest of Judaism and the world (e.g., Acts 1; 2; 15; 21:20b, 21). They faced issues such as interpreting Scripture; their relation to the law, traditions, and teachings of the synagogue; and their attitude toward the temple and sacrifices, fasting, prayer, marriage, divorce, Gentiles, and the absence of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Matthew supplies inspired answers from Jesus that give clarity to all these concerns. By contrast, Luke offers positive moral teaching similar to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, but Luke's version completely lacks the juxtaposition to pharisaical doctrine and practices (Luke 6:20–49).<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the extended (and unique) teaching in Matthew 10 about ongoing missionary efforts in Israel suggests that Matthew's audience will continue to engage with Jewish people after Jesus' ascension (10:16–42). Jesus' final public address (23), a comprehensive analysis and condemnation of the Pharisees, is unique to Matthew. This information would prepare Jesus' disciples for ongoing ministry with Jewish people who continued in synagogues, which the Pharisees controlled.<sup>14</sup> Matthew also provides apologetic information that would dispel persistent and false rumors among the Jewish community about the resurrection (28:11–15).

But Jesus also called His disciples to evangelize all nations, and Matthew offers motivation and guidance for dealing with Gentiles as well. He provides examples of friendly Gentiles who recognize Jesus as the King of the Jews and the Son of God from beginning to end (2:1–12; 27:54). Jesus' voluntary offer to enter the home of a Roman centurion (8:7) provides guidance for every disciple concerned with navigating the conflict between Jewish attitudes toward Gentiles and the Great Commission. Surely Peter's entrance into Cornelius's house (a Roman centurion), would have been far less traumatic for him and the leaders in Jerusalem if they had kept their eyes on Jesus' example rather than on the waves of Jewish customs (Acts 10:1–11:18).<sup>15</sup>

*Readers who are instructed to make disciples of all nations*

The last command of Jesus to “make disciples” by “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,” is unique among the Gospels and implies a whole curriculum of teaching in the five major discourses. Jesus disciples, or trains, the Twelve primarily through this teaching, which now forms the basis of their discipling efforts among the rest of the world. Through these discourses they understand the righteousness of the kingdom of Heaven (5—7), their call to mission (10), the mixed reception of the message (13), the values of God’s people (18), and how to live faithfully in view of Jesus’ delayed return (24; 25).<sup>16</sup>

**Old Testament Background**

Matthew captures the rich theology of his first verse in grammatically simple words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). Yet inside that small mustard seed of a phrase lives the Old Testament’s genetic code that will grow into a massive messianic tree as Matthew traces its development through twenty-eight chapters.<sup>17</sup> Only those who know the story of the Messiah in the Old Testament (the prequel) can appreciate how much truth Matthew packs into his first verse. His original audience was familiar with the Old Testament, especially of its theology of the Messiah, and would thus hear the volumes of truth in such concise phrases. This section will unpack the high points of that background, enabling the modern reader to hear Matthew’s messianic story in the same way. Our four-fold outline will be (1) *The book of the genealogy of Jesus*, (2) *Christ*, (3) *The son of David*, and (4) *The son of Abraham*.

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus*

With this very first phrase, Matthew draws his readers back to the nearly identical wording of Genesis 5:1, “The book of the genealogy of humankind” (LXX). During the dramatic scene of the Fall in Genesis 3, God promises a solution to the curse of sin through one of Eve’s offspring, Who would crush the head of the serpent (3:15). This hope explains Eve’s excitement upon the birth of her first child, Cain, whom she easily could hope to be the Deliverer (4:1). Of course, Cain turns out to be a killer rather than the Deliverer. The rest of the chapter details Cain’s failures and provides the genealogy of his descendants, who continue on his godless path (4:17–24). But in chapter 5 Moses starts over with another genealogy, this time tracing the line from Adam through Seth’s godly descendants, including Enoch and Noah. Thus begins the practice of tracing the line through each generation as they waited for the



Messiah. When Matthew repeats the words of Moses from Genesis 5:1 but critically replaces the word *mankind* with *Jesus*, it is nearly impossible to miss the connection—what Genesis began Matthew completes. The formal tracing of the original promise reaches the goal of the long-awaited Savior. The entire Old Testament looked forward to His coming and now He has arrived.

### *Christ*

We begin our Old Testament background of the title *Christ* (Hebrew, *Messiah*) with the first major promise concerning Him in Genesis 3, sometimes called the “first gospel” (*protoevangelium*).

#### **Genesis 3:14, 15**

<sup>14</sup>“The LORD God said to the serpent, . . . <sup>15</sup>I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The story of the Bible begins in a garden, where God gives His children the mandate and authority to rule over the earth as benevolent stewards (Gen. 1:27–28). God’s enemy, the Devil, wants to destroy God’s magnificent creation and tempts Adam and Eve to rebel. Their evil choice introduces death, both spiritual and physical, and gives up their authority over creation. The curse of the ground is an appropriate and just rebellion by the earth against its rebellious rulers. Adam and Eve cannot remedy their fate, but God promises a solution through one of Eve’s offspring. God speaks the word “to the serpent” as a judgment and “to the couple” as a promise, thus framing the Devil as the enemy and humans as the objects of God’s grace. God’s promise predicts continuing conflict between the Devil and his offspring (unbelievers) with Eve and her offspring (believers), and between the Devil and one particular descendant of Eve. This singular male will do battle with the serpent in which both will be wounded, but one worse than the other. The bruising of a heal speaks of a nonpermanent blow, while the bruising of the head is a fatal and permanent strike.

With hindsight we see in the gospel story that Jesus’ death, though actual, is not permanent, and the serpent’s head is crushed permanently, even if not immediately. The book of Revelation records the conclusion to this promise (19; 20), but Calvary sealed the enemy’s fate and the Rescuer’s victory. We have taken the liberty to understand the promise with the aid of later revelation, but we should remember what the original promise would have meant to Adam and Eve. God says nothing in Genesis 3 about the deity of the offspring, nor of the role of atonement for sins, nor even the title *Messiah*, but the main plot line is here in seed form, and these important elements will be developed as

the story unfolds. For now, the solution rests in a human male child from Eve, Who will defeat the enemy at tremendous cost to Himself, to regain life and authority over the earth.

Matthew recalls all this theology in his first verse by identifying Jesus as the Messiah (in Greek, *Christ*). Throughout the book Matthew will chronicle the ongoing battle between Jesus and Satan, sometimes directly as in the temptation account (4:1–11) and at other times indirectly as Jesus defeats demons (8:28–34) and contends with the Devil’s offspring in the Pharisees (12:22–32; cf. John 8:44). Matthew intends that Jesus’ control over creation in calming a wild storm, walking on water, providing abundant food, and healing sickness (14:13–36) shows a Messiah Who can reverse the effects of the curse and restore the earth to its Edenic perfection. Finally, as Jesus reverses death in His own resurrection and exercises all authority (28), we see the Messiah Who restores all that Adam lost in Genesis 3.

### **Deuteronomy 18:15**

<sup>15</sup> “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”

Because of Moses’ role in rescuing and forming the nation and in giving and writing revelation, he ranks as the greatest prophet in the Old Testament (Deut. 34:10–12). When God says He will raise up another prophet like Moses and adds that the people will listen to Him, He has established a precedent for another prophet who is like but greater than Moses. Thus, Moses serves as a prototypical pattern, causing the later generations to expect One Who significantly resembles him.

Matthew’s portrayal of this theme is often subtle and made with allusions to Moses’ life, but they are pervasive. For example, God providentially moves Joseph’s young family to Egypt so Jesus can come out of the country in an exodus of His own (2:23). When the angel commands Joseph to return to Israel, he uses words lifted from the pages of Moses’ life, “go to the land, . . . for those who sought the child’s life are dead” (2:20; Exod. 4:19). Jesus gives five major discourses, as Moses left five books of the Law, and Jesus is the consummate interpreter of Moses’ law (Matt. 7:28–29). Jesus often ascends mountains as Moses did (Exod. 19:3; 34; Matt. 5:1; 17:1; 24:3) and fasts for forty days before He brings God’s law to the people (Exod. 34:28; Matt. 4:1; 5:1–48). Moses brought an old covenant established with the blood of bulls; Jesus brings a new covenant established in His own blood (Matt. 26:28). The most explicit affirmation of the promise is the mountaintop Transfiguration, when the three disciples witness Jesus’ glory while He is accompanied by Moses (17:1–3). The Father quotes the words of Deuteronomy 18:15, admonishing the disciples to “listen to him” (Matt. 17:5). Moses’ face shone because

he was in God's presence (Exod. 34:30), but Jesus' shines because He is God (Matt. 17:2). Thus, Jesus is the fulfillment of the foreshadowing of Messiah found in Moses (cf. Acts 3:22–25).

**Daniel 7:13, 14**

<sup>13</sup>I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

This passage predicts the triumphant coming of God's kingdom over the whole earth, but emphasizes the King Who will rule. This One Who comes "with the clouds of heaven" is like a "son of man," or human being. He appears before God and receives the right to rule the whole earth forever. This passage presents the most comprehensive prophecy of the Messiah's eternal rule over the world.

The description of "one like a son of man" fits Jesus, the God-Man, perfectly. It is His favorite self-designation, which He uses about thirty times in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus uses the phrase with irony, that "the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (8:20) and as an unabashed claim to deity—"the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (9:6). He uses the phrase seven times in His last teaching about the Second Coming in power (24; 25), but the most telling usage comes at the apex of His trial before the Sanhedrin. When the frustrated high priest cannot find an accusation to use against Jesus, he finally asks Him to "tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). By quoting Daniel 7, Jesus answers the question the high priest should have asked: "But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (26:64).

**Isaiah 53:3–5**

<sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup>Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

These three verses from Isaiah must serve as a small sampling of prophetic statements about the suffering and atoning sacrifice of the Messiah on behalf

of His people. He cared for the people of God by paying the price for their sin, all the while suffering their rejection.

Matthew quotes from these verses specifically to show the fulfillment of Jesus bearing the griefs and carrying the sorrows of His people by healing them physically (8:17). But He also carried the sorrows of sin, and Matthew alludes heavily to the entire chapter of Isaiah 53 during the scenes of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and even burial (26:63; 27:31, 59–60).

### **Deuteronomy 30:1–6**

<sup>1</sup>And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, . . . and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, <sup>2</sup>and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>3</sup>then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup>If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. <sup>5</sup>And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

This passage assumes that the curses of Deuteronomy 28, including the ultimate curse of exile from the land (because of Israel's persistent unfaithfulness), have already happened (28:68; 30:1). More than physical removal from the land, the exile indicates the breaking of the covenant (which constituted the people into one nation) between God and Israel. Although the promises to Abraham are unconditional, the exile unravels the progress made so far with the promises of land and nation (Gen. 12:1–2). The solution to the people's unfaithfulness is a wholehearted returning to the Lord (Deut. 30:2). On the condition of this repentance, God promises to return the people to their land but also to an unprecedented position of favor, prosperity, and faithfulness (30:3–6). The entrance into this newly reconstituted nation will happen through an inner renewal, the circumcision of the heart, so the people will fulfill the demands of the covenant to "love the LORD your God . . . that you may live" (30:6). The physical return to the land in 536 BC, however, did not fulfill this promise, and foreign powers dominated those who did return, even in Jesus' day and beyond.

This passage speaks to a major goal and strategy of the Messiah and His forerunner. Both John the Baptist and Jesus knew that Roman military occu-

pation was a symptom and not the cause of Israel's problem, and they knew the cure was not rebellion against Rome but repentance toward God. Therefore, they both came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). This background also explains why Jesus' first major sermon calls for a renewed commitment to the rule and law of God over every aspect of life. The New Covenant, or constitution, which Jesus explains (Matt. 5—7), differs from Moses' covenant, not as much in its standards of righteousness as in its placement: on the heart versus tablets of stone. The standard for entrance and practice in the kingdom of God is not circumcision of the flesh but of the heart, and that begins with repentance (Rom. 2:28–29).

### *The son of David*

#### **Genesis 49:10**

<sup>10</sup> The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him. (New English Translation)

Jacob predicts that the kings of Israel will come from the line of Judah, and we see this fulfilled in part by the first king from the tribe of Judah, David, and all his sons who ruled until the exile. But Jacob also prophesied that the last king of Israel, the Messiah, to Whom the king's scepter ultimately belongs, will also rule over all nations and that they will render Him their complete obedience. This prophecy expands and specifies the theme of ruling seen in Adam's original mandate to rule (Gen. 1:26–28). Until now, the definition of *Messiah* described a human conqueror of the Devil (Gen. 3:15) and One Who blessed the nations (Gen. 12:3). This prophecy adds "king of Israel and of the world" to the definition.

Matthew's genealogy traces the line of Israel's kings from Judah through David through the kings of the Southern Kingdom to Jesus' stepfather, Joseph (1: 20), making the case for Jesus' royal right to rule. The wise men ask, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (2:2). Jesus' kingship was the chief topic of Pilate's questions for Jesus (27:11–13), of the Roman soldiers' mockery of Him (27:27–31), and of the scornful derision from the chief priests (27:42). Ironically, none of the nations of the world (including Israel) offer Him their obedience yet, but they will when He returns (24:30; 25:31). Nevertheless, Jesus is the King Who offers His kingdom (4:17), and Satan tries to tempt the King with what He is destined for—ruling the kingdoms of the world (4:8).

#### **2 Samuel 7:11–14**

<sup>11</sup>Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. . . . <sup>12</sup>I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a

house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

God promises that He will build a dynasty (“house”) for David, and that one of David’s sons would build a temple (“house”) for God. This Son will reign on His throne forever and will have a special Father-Son relationship with God. Solomon, as the first son of David, begins this dynasty and promise, but he does not fulfill it, simply because he does not reign on his throne forever. This passage narrows the messianic line through David but does not expand the boundaries of the promise beyond Israel. These verses speak of the throne and temple in Israel and remain nationalistic in their concerns. We have known that Messiah will be a king, and now we know that He will come through David and build a temple, but little more.

Matthew summarizes Jesus’ genealogy as “the son of David” and then “the son of Abraham,” reversing the chronological order, emphasizing the order of Jesus’ mission to Israel first and then to the nations (1:1; 10:5; 28:19–20). A Canaanite woman begs for extraordinary mercy from the son of David because she knows He has come to Israel first (15:22–27). The title *son of David* becomes almost synonymous with the title *Messiah*, with a focus on Jesus’ kingship (12:23). The angel who appears to Joseph calls him “son of David” as well, because the right to rule on David’s throne legally flows through him to his adopted son, Jesus (1:20). When Jesus rides on a donkey into Jerusalem, as Solomon had done one thousand years before on his way to being anointed as king, the crowds recognize the royal gesture and shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

### *The son of Abraham*

#### **Genesis 12:1–3**

<sup>1</sup>“Go . . . to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>And I will make of you a great nation, . . . <sup>3</sup>and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God’s judgment on the rebellion of the people at Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) by dividing them into language groups was painful but necessary to prevent more unified rebellion against Him. It was painful because it fragmented the world into nations, making God’s desire for unified, global worship seem even more distant. His solution was to make one faithful nation to reach the others by strategically placing that nation in a land at the crossroads of the world as a witness to them. Abraham would also be the channel for that one male Offspring Who would bless all the families of the earth. As Paul helps us to understand, the words “in you” (12:3) mean “through your line Messiah will come.” Paul rightly reads the promise to Abraham in light of the promise to Eve (3:15), and calls Genesis 12:3 “the gospel [spoken] beforehand to Abraham” (Gal. 3:8,

16). Thus, God promises to fix even the problem of rogue nations (Babel) by blessing them together in His Messiah, Abraham's offspring.

This theme is so important to Matthew's purpose that he bookends the entire work with it. He begins with the summary that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of "Abraham" (1:1) and then concludes with the command to reach all nations of the earth with the message of Jesus (28:19–20). Matthew inserts several Gentiles into Jesus' genealogy (Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, 1:5–6) and records the worship of Jesus by Gentiles from the East (2:1–12). He praises the faith of the centurion and predicts that he will join the Jewish patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—in the kingdom (8:5–13). Thus, including Gentiles into the people of God has always been part of God's plan to fix this broken world.

## Structural Analysis

### *Why is structure important?*

Today writers use a variety of techniques to help readers follow their train of thought, such as chapter titles, headings, subheadings, and paragraphs, not to mention a table of contents. Biblical writers had access to none of these methods, but they still effectively signaled their meaning and structure through repeated words, sentences, quotations, and themes. Recognizing these structural markers in the Bible may require more attentive observation, but close and careful reading offers great benefits in seeing more clearly the writer's meaning and emphases.<sup>18</sup>

### *How does Matthew structure his book?*

Matthew uses many literary markers that give structure to his book, but even with their help, the book does not easily submit to a tidy outline. Even telling the complex story of Jesus succinctly in twenty-eight chapters is almost a miracle. The illustration of a well-crafted musical score for a movie or musical might help. The melody of the principal theme will resurface throughout, though the rhythm and other elements may vary. Faster or slower, major or minor, front and center or discretely in the background, a melodic thread keeps the main theme ringing in our ears. A few notes from *Star Wars* are all it takes to transport us to another galaxy, far, far away. Likewise, Matthew keeps re-playing his notes and themes to tell the entire story of Jesus.

Thus the book's complexity will not allow a simple outline that conforms to Western ideas of logic, but following the writer's structural clues will help us follow his meaning. We find at least two kinds of structural markers on the macro level from Matthew: first, two major movements and, second, five sets of discourses combined with narratives.<sup>19</sup>

## TWO MAJOR MOVEMENTS

At the highest level of structure, Matthew uses identical phrases to describe two major movements of Jesus that divide the book into three sections.<sup>20</sup> He writes, “From that time Jesus began to” in 4:17 and 16:21.

**4:17** “From that time Jesus began to **preach**, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

**16:21** “From that time Jesus began to **show his disciples** that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

By using the same phrase, Matthew shows the similarity at the beginning and the difference at the end. We see two definitive starting points from which Jesus moves toward complementary goals. The first begins His public ministry of preaching and healing to the nation, while the second narrows His focus to the Twelve, preparing them for the cross and resurrection. These two divisions are not mutually exclusive but do represent different emphases. Jesus will address the crowds and perform some miracles after 16:21, but the focus is on the Twelve and His work of redemption.

The first phase of announcing the King and the kingdom (4—16) finds a fitting climax in Peter’s full confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God in 16:13–20. Peter grasps the first part of Jesus’ message, that He is the Messiah, but Peter’s knowledge is incomplete because he does not yet understand that Messiah must die. Jesus commends Peter but forbids him to tell anyone else (16:20). In the chapter’s flow this statement sounds like Jesus saying, “You understand the first part of the lesson but not the second, and are thus yet unprepared to tell the whole story.” Jesus temporarily decommissions Peter from telling the Good News. This prohibition serves as a contrastive parallel to Jesus’ commission of Peter at the end of the second section (28:19–20).

Jesus then announces the second phase of His ministry in the very next verse (16:21), which focuses on His preparation of the Twelve and His journey to the cross. Peter’s response to the news of the Messiah’s death is as poor as His first response was good. Both Peter and his brothers need intensive teaching about the Messiah’s atoning work, which Jesus gives them over the next twelve chapters. After the disciples are fully trained, Jesus commissions them to tell everyone (28:16–20). These two literary markers (found in 4:17 and 16:21) divide the book into three major sections:

- I. Introduction: Jesus’ Credentials as the Messiah (1:1—4:16)
- II. Public Proclamation: Jesus’ Preaching and Teaching Ministry to the Crowds (4:17—16:20)



### III. Private Preparation: Jesus' Training of the Twelve and Movement toward the Cross (16:21—28:20)

#### FIVE MAJOR DISCOURSES AND NARRATIVES

Overlapping these latter two major sections, Matthew also builds his story around five major discourses. We might loosely call them sermons, but they are large, uninterrupted blocks of teaching by Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Other Gospels include parts of these discourses, but not one of the other Gospels has the length or formal structure of Matthew's accounts. See the table below.

| Discourse   | Opening Statement   | Concluding Statement             | Content Summary                            | Geographical Movement  |
|---|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Sermon on the Mount<br>5:1—7:27                   | 5:1-2 "He went up on the mountain, and when he <b>sat down</b> , his disciples came to him. And [He] . . . taught them, <b>saying . . .</b> " | 7:28 "When Jesus finished . . ." | "these <b>sayings</b> "                    | 8:1 "He came down from the mountain."  |
| Missionary Instructions for the Twelve<br>10:1-42 | 10:5 "These twelve Jesus sent out, <b>instructing</b> them"   | 11:1 "When Jesus had finished"   | " <b>instructing</b> his twelve disciples" | 11:1 "He went on from there."  |
| Parables of the Kingdom<br>13:1-52                | 13:1-3 "Jesus . . . sat beside the sea. . . He told them many things in <b>parables.</b> "  | 13:53 "When Jesus had finished"  | "these <b>parables</b> "                   | 13:53 "He went away from there."   |
| Family Relationships among Believers<br>18:1-35   | 18:1-3 "At that time the disciples came to Jesus . . . and [He] <b>said</b> "   | 19:1 "When Jesus had finished"   | "these <b>sayings</b> "                    | 19:1 "He went away from Galilee."  |
| Second Coming of Jesus<br>24:1—25:46              | 24:3-4 "As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately . . . and Jesus <b>answered</b> them."                          | 26:1-2 "When Jesus had finished" | " <b>all these sayings</b> "               | 26:2 "He said . . . after two days . . . the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." |

Matthew deliberately structures each of these five sermons with an opening statement and a concluding statement with a summary of the content, followed by a note of Jesus' geographical movement afterward. Typically Jesus assumes the position of the teacher (sitting) in three sermons (1, 3, 5), while Matthew does not note His posture in two (2, 4). The most consistent phrasing for the concluding statement is "when Jesus finished." Matthew summarizes the content of the sermon three times with the general phrase "these sayings" (1, 4, 5) and once with "instructing" (2) and "parables" (3). The wording of the summaries ("sayings," "instructing," "parables") corresponds to the open-

ing statements, giving more definition to Matthew's structure. Notice also the addition of "all" to the final summary: "When Jesus had finished all these sayings." This inclusive language acknowledges the previous four discourses and concludes them all. Finally, Matthew notes Jesus' geographical movement after each discourse, except for the last one, where He is already in Jerusalem and there is nowhere for Him to go except to the cross. Matthew replaces the note of movement in this last statement with Jesus' words of prediction about the cross—His ultimate destination—two days hence (26:1, 2).

The primary audience in all these sermons—and the exclusive audience in at least three (2, 4, 5)—is the Twelve. In a book heavily focused on discipleship, these extended sermons record instruction essential for making disciples. They also give specific content to the last instructions of the Great Commission, where Jesus commands His disciples to make other disciples and teach "them to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:16–20). There is also at least a hint of Jesus as the prophet greater than Moses. As Moses delivered the law in five books, Jesus delivers at least five separate and coherent blocks of teaching.

But Matthew goes one step further and bundles each of these sermons with stories<sup>22</sup> that follow. Matthew provides clues to this structure that are at least twofold. First, each sermon concludes with the geographical note of where Jesus goes and what He does next, making a natural connection between the discourse and the narrative that follows. Second, Matthew specifically connects the first set of discourse and narrative together with a bookending sentence that serves as the introduction and conclusion to the entire unit (4:23; 9:35).

4:23 "And he went throughout all **Galilee, teaching** in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."

9:35 "And Jesus went throughout all the **cities and villages, teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the gospel of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and every affliction."

This bookending binds the discourse of chapters 5–7 together with the narrative of chapters 8 and 9. Matthew records a string of at least nine miracle accounts in chapters 8 and 9 that perfectly follow up the teaching of 5–7. In typical Biblical fashion, the sign miracles authenticate the truth of Jesus' teaching. Thus, Jesus gives His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, then Matthew follows with the nine miracle accounts in rapid succession to provide evidence of Jesus' divine authority to present such teaching. In this way, Matthew's structural markers direct the readers' and listeners' attention to his meaning. In each of the four following sets of discourse and narrative, we can trace Matthew's hand as well.<sup>23</sup> He does not set off the final four pairs of dis-

## Introduction

course/narrative with this level of definition, but the first pair does set the precedent of beginning each unit with Jesus' teaching.

This structure adds to our general outline:

- I. Introduction (1:1—4:16)
- II. Public Proclamation (4:17—16:20)
  - A. Discourse and narrative set 1 (5—9)
    - 1. Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (5—7)
    - 2. Narrative: Sign miracles (8; 9)
  - B. Discourse and narrative set 2 (10—12)
    - 1. Discourse: Mission of the Twelve (10)
    - 2. Narrative: Accounts of increasing hostility (11; 12)
  - C. Discourse and narrative set 3 (13—17)
    - 1. Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom (13)
    - 2. Narrative: Accounts of increasing rejection (14:1—16:20)
- III. Private Preparation (16:21—28:20)
  - Narrative (cont.): Stories of increasing hostility and training the Twelve (16:21—17:27)
  - A. Discourse and narrative set 4 (18—23)
    - 1. Discourse: Family Relationships in the Kingdom (18)
    - 2. Narrative: Approaching the cross (19—23)
  - B. Discourse and narrative set 5 (24—28)
    - 1. Discourse: The Second Coming of Jesus (24; 25)
    - 2. Narrative: The trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and commission (26—28)

The reader will notice that the last major division, Private Preparation in 16:21, awkwardly breaks the third narrative unit in two. At this point we could ignore Matthew's markers and create a more logical outline that might satisfy our sense of symmetry, or we could allow his indicators to stand and then conform our thinking around them. We have chosen the latter, which allows Matthew's internal structure to emphasize both the increasing hostility from the nation (evident in the narrative accounts of 14—17) along with Jesus' strategic development of the Twelve (evident in the shift at 16:21).

## Chapter Level Meaning

The chapter divisions are not original with Matthew, being added much later in history. However, they are helpful as they faithfully follow Matthew's major divisions. Matthew peppers his writing with more structural markers at the micro-level, but those are best noted in the commentary for each chapter. For simplicity we will approach our overview and the commentary portion one

chapter at a time aided by the following outline.

- I. Introduction: Jesus' Messianic Credentials (1:1—4:16)
  - A. Witness of the genealogy (1)
  - B. Witness of the Old Testament prophets (2)
  - C. Witness of the forerunner and the Father (3)
  - D. Witness of the enemy and beginning of ministry (4)
- II. Public Proclamation: Jesus' Preaching Ministry to the Crowds (4:17—16:20)
  - A. Constitution of the Kingdom (5—9)
    - 1. Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (5—7)
      - a. Kingdom constitution (5)
      - b. Kingdom practices (6)
      - c. Kingdom invitation (7)
    - 2. Narrative: Sign miracles (8; 9)
      - a. Miracles of the Messiah, part 1 (8)
      - b. Miracles of the Messiah, part 2 (9)
  - B. Multiplication of the message (10—12)
    - 1. Discourse: Missionary Instructions (10)
    - 2. Narrative: Stories of increasing hostility (11; 12)
      - a. Varying responses to Jesus (11)
      - b. Rejection of Jesus (12)
  - C. Parables and withdrawals (13—17)
    - 1. Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom (13)
      - a. Riddles for the people
      - b. Teaching for the Twelve
    - 2. Narrative: Stories of increasing rejection (14—16)
      - a. Withdrawal by Jesus and growth in the Twelve (14)
      - b. Withdrawal by Jesus and teaching for the crowds (15)
      - c. Withdrawal by Jesus and the confession of Peter (16)
- III. Private Preparation: Jesus' Training of the Twelve and Movement to the Cross (16:21—28:20)
  - A. Stories of increasing hostility and training of the Twelve (16:21—16:28)
  - B. Transfiguration of Jesus and training for the Twelve (17—23)
  - C. Instruction for Believers and Rejection of Unbelievers (18—23)
    - 1. Discourse: Community Life in the Kingdom (18)
    - 2. Narrative: Approaching the cross (19—23)
      - a. House rules of the kingdom (19)
      - b. The King's approach to Jerusalem (20)
      - c. The King's presentation to Jerusalem (21)
      - d. The King's rejection by Jerusalem (22)
      - e. The King's rejection of the leadership (23)

## Introduction

- D. The Coming and Victory of the King (24—28)
  - 1. Discourse: The Second Coming of Jesus (24; 25)
    - a. Return of the King, part 1 (24)
    - b. Return of the King, part 2 (25)
  - 2. Narrative: The trial, crucifixion, and resurrection (26—28)
    - a. Arrest and betrayals of the King (26)
    - b. Crucifixion and burial of the King (27)
    - c. Resurrection of the King and Great Commission (28)

### **Synthetic Overview**

This section weaves the major story lines of Matthew together, giving the reader a synopsis of the whole book.

#### *I. Introduction: Jesus' Messianic Credentials (1:1—4:16)*

Matthew uses the first four chapters of his work to make the reader want to listen to Jesus' teachings by proving that He is the Christ. In the first chapter Matthew develops Jesus' genealogical credentials to be the Messiah by tracking His lineage through both David and Abraham (1:1–17). Matthew then shifts attention to His deity, demonstrated through the role of the Spirit in Mary's virgin conception (1:18–25). Jesus is the fully human descendant from Eve, but He is also fully divine. Chapter 2 appears to be a travelogue of the Messiah's family, but Matthew uses it to trace His movements through the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In the third chapter Matthew calls on the human witness of John the Baptist and the divine witnesses of the Father and the Spirit, who all testify that Jesus is the Messiah. Even Satan serves as an unwilling witness (through his defeat in the temptation) that Jesus is the promised Seed Who will eventually crush his head (Gen. 3:15). Before Jesus utters His first words in public ministry, Matthew has prepared the audience to listen to Jesus' discourses as the authoritative words of God Himself.

#### *II. Public Proclamation: Jesus' Preaching Ministry to the Crowds (4:17—16:20)*

Jesus focuses the first phase of His ministry on publicly proclaiming the message that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Matthew arranges this period around three major discourses that are coupled with lengthy narratives.

##### A. CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM: DISCOURSE / NARRATIVE SET 1 (5—9)

The first major structural unit of discourse and narrative presents the constitu-

## MATTHEW

tion of Jesus' kingdom and then provides divine authentication for it through a series of miracles. This combination of teaching and healing exemplifies the holistic ministry of Jesus to His people.

### 1. SERMON ON THE MOUNT (5—7)

Whenever the Bible is ignored or not taught accurately, false teaching causes God's people to drift from their proper trajectory, and after time they require a major course correction. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' course correction for the nation. The scribes and Pharisees are focused on looking righteous rather than being righteous, and Jesus turns their world upside down as He explains the inner righteousness that the law really describes. He warns that their outward righteousness will not get them into the kingdom. So He preaches a sermon that serves as a kind of constitution of the kingdom, laying out the laws and principles that define the values and culture of kingdom citizens.

### 2. SIGN MIRACLES (8; 9)

Miracles in the Bible always serve as identifying badges, signifying that the miracle worker speaks for God. Moses establishes this pattern (Exod. 4) and Matthew follows it, arranging nine miracles in a row that authenticate Jesus as God's messenger and confirm the divine origin of the sermon He has just preached (5—7). These miracles build in power as they progress, and they cover a range of domains over which Jesus exercises His authority.

## B. MULTIPLICATION OF THE MESSAGE: DISCOURSE / NARRATIVE SET 2 (10—12)

Once Matthew has described Jesus' message, he then shows its natural multiplication through the ministry of the disciples. Chapter 10 is the second of the great discourses. It covers both the marching orders for the immediate mission of the Twelve to Israel (10:5–15) and their expanded mission to the world after the resurrection (10:16–38). The next two chapters describe the nation's growing response to the message, and the momentum begins to shift toward rejection (11; 12). Matthew ominously foreshadows this progression through the imprisonment of John that ultimately culminates in the blasphemy of the Spirit by the Pharisees.

## C. PARABLES AND WITHDRAWALS: (DISCOURSE / NARRATIVE SET 3 (13—17)

This section closes Jesus' public ministry. It begins with the third major discourse (13), uniquely composed of seven parables that hide truth from the crowds as a judgment upon them for their rejection of Jesus' message. The section continues in the next three chapters with a series of withdrawals by

## Introduction

Jesus as He moves farther away from the crowds, both geographically and personally. He then concentrates His efforts on the training of the Twelve so they can assume their future places of leadership. Their growing understanding of Jesus is marked by the confession of the group, “Truly you are the Son of God” (14:33), Peter’s profession, “You are the Christ” (16:16), and the witness of Jesus’ transfiguration by the three (17:1–2).

### *III. Private Preparation: Jesus’ Training of the Twelve and Movement to the Cross (16:21–28:20)*

Matthew composes the final major section of the book with two discourse/narrative units (18–23; 24–28). The Twelve believe and confess that Jesus is the Messiah, but from this point forward, and to their chagrin, Jesus will inform them that the Messiah must also suffer for the sins of the world. Jesus announces three times (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19) that He will die and shifts His attention toward training His disciples for their role in the kingdom after His death.

#### A. INSTRUCTION FOR BELIEVERS AND REJECTION OF UNBELIEVERS: DISCOURSE / NARRATIVE SET 4 (18–23)

Jesus teaches only the disciples in His fourth major discourse (18) about the dynamic of love and discipline among His people. He later includes others in the discussion as He broadens His teaching about life in the family of God (19; 20). He gives further instruction about marriage, singleness, children, and rewards. Jesus officially presents Himself as the Messiah, the Son of David, by riding into town on a donkey in fulfillment of prophecy (21). He then creates a storm by cleansing the temple, and He convincingly debates the nation’s leaders (22). Last He brings closure to His public teaching of the week by offering a final verdict of judgment on the scribes and Pharisees (23).

#### B. THE COMING AND VICTORY OF THE KING: DISCOURSE / NARRATIVE SET 5 (24–28)

Jesus speaks His final discourse (24; 25) privately to His disciples and warns them to remain faithful through the long wait for His glorious coming. Rather than giving a time line for His return, Jesus emphasizes the need for steadfastness and the sobering reality of judgment. The narrative that follows (26–28) completes the book with the rejection of Jesus by the leadership, His atoning death, triumphal resurrection, and authoritative commission. Matthew frames the death, burial, and resurrection to convince the most committed skeptic of the reality of every aspect. He appropriately concludes the book in “Galilee of the Gentiles,” where Jesus commissions His disciples to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded, especially the five main teaching discourses. The eleven apostles can do so with the full

assurance that God has given Jesus all authority in Heaven and on earth and that He will be, as always, Immanuel, “God with us,” to the end of the age.

## **Interpretive Approaches and Definitions**

### *The Nature of a Gospel*

We assume in this commentary that each of the four Gospels is the product of divine inspiration and that together they accurately reveal complementary portraits of Jesus. Through these works, God provides multiple perspectives of the Messiah, giving a clearer picture of Him than any individual work could. Each writer emphasizes different themes by selectively choosing his material and how he presents it. Therefore, the goal of every commentator and reader must be to understand the particular message of each book as it is written and to resist the temptation to “re-assemble” the Gospels into a singular presentation of the life of Christ. Such efforts have their place but are not the primary goal of this commentary.

Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, the prophet greater than Moses, and the King of Israel, while Mark presents Him as the active and suffering servant. Luke stresses Jesus’ humanity and His ministry to all people, no matter their station in life, and John pictures Jesus as the divine Son of God, Who offers life to all. We should not see these complementary emphases, however, as contradictory. The Gospels record actual history and do not invent sayings, events, or sermons, although the order of their accounts differ and they add or subtract historical details to communicate their points. For example, when Matthew tells how Jesus healed two blind men and Mark speaks only of one (Matt. 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52), we may assume that either they describe different healing events or that Mark’s purpose requires that he mention only one man. Likewise, when a woman anoints Jesus a few days before His death, John reveals that it was Mary, Lazarus’s sister, while Matthew leaves her unnamed (Matt. 26:6–13; John 12:2–8). So in this commentary we will not use John’s information about her name to supplement the account of Matthew as though he has overlooked important information; rather, we will follow his lead as he desires to emphasize the generosity of the act rather than the identity of the woman.<sup>24</sup>

### *Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount*

This discourse of Jesus is one of the best-known passages in all the Bible, but even with such familiarity, numerous questions remain over its interpretation.<sup>25</sup> Does Jesus disagree with the law of Moses? Is He presenting a new, more demanding law designed to drive people to repentance? Can anyone do what Jesus asks, or does He abolish the law by fulfilling it somehow? We offer



## Introduction

more detailed answers to these questions in the commentary on chapters 5—7, but here we will describe and summarize our interpretive approach to the Sermon on the Mount as a whole:

Jesus describes the faith-based obedience that the law of Moses requires and contrasts it with the shallow alternative of the Pharisees (overturning the religious status quo) to call disciples to godly living and to invite uncommitted crowds to join them.

### FAITH-BASED OBEDIENCE

The first act of Jesus' ministry that Matthew records is His preaching of repentance (4:17) and the second act is His call of the first disciples (4:18–22). These four men—Peter and Andrew, James and John—are prototypical disciples in the book, who respond to the call for repentance and show their faith in Jesus by immediately leaving their nets and following Him in the ministry of evangelism and discipleship (“fishers of men,” 4:19). These are the disciples who (four verses later) follow Him up the mountain and “came to him when he sat down” (5:1). Jesus speaks to these disciples when He says they are already in the kingdom (5:3, 10) and they are the light of the world (5:14). Thus, they are already regenerate people as Jesus instructs them to greater obedience, which springs from their faith.

### LAW OF MOSES

Jesus prefaces His teaching of the law (5:17–48) with the warning that He is not overturning the law of Moses; rather, He is interpreting it correctly, giving it the full meaning that Moses intended. He explains the genuine spirit of the law that calls for a sincere love for God and neighbors (Lev. 19:17–18; Deut. 5:21).

### ALTERNATIVE TO THE PHARISEES

Jesus argues throughout the sermon that there are two “paths” to keeping the law: one way is easy and the other hard; one gate is narrow, and the other is wide. He refers to the alternative “way” of the Pharisees and scribes who lower the standards that Moses set in the law, who perform their religious practices for the applause of men, and who will not enter the kingdom of Heaven. It is their interpretation of Moses, and not Moses, that Jesus contrasts when He says, “You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.”

### STATUS QUO

Since the common people look to the scribes and Pharisees as examples of

righteousness, Jesus turns their conception of what God requires on its head. Rather than the proud, satisfied, and popular people, Jesus commends the humble, meek, and hungry ones. Although Jesus bases His teaching in the Old Testament, which should be familiar to His audience, His words sound provocative in their culture (Matt. 7:28).

#### DISCIPLES TO GODLY LIVING

The standards of love, purity, self-control, honesty, and faithfulness to which Jesus calls His disciples can seem unattainable, and they are—without the power of God. But Jesus’ purpose is not to tease unbelievers with what they cannot do but to challenge His disciples to work out their salvation (cf. Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12–13). One theologian has rightly remarked, “To escape the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience.”<sup>26</sup>

#### INVITE UNCOMMITTED CROWDS

The uncommitted crowds are not Jesus’ primary audience, but we can safely assume that they eventually gather and listen, because Matthew records their response of amazement at the end (7:28). Thus, they may have heard Jesus’ teaching directed toward the disciples, been convicted by the message, and considered their own fates. Jesus likely extends His invitation, “enter by the narrow gate,” to these crowds.

#### *The Kingdom of Heaven*

Matthew uses the expression “kingdom of heaven” over thirty times in his Gospel and is the only Biblical writer to use it. The other gospel writers use the more common phrase “kingdom of God” forty-eight times, and Matthew uses it five times (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43), once synonymously with “kingdom of heaven” (19:23–24). Thus, Matthew probably uses the phrase that avoids the name of God without a material difference in meaning out of concern for the sensibilities of his Jewish audience.<sup>27</sup> The sense of both expressions is the place or realm where God is honored as King, and He rules.<sup>28</sup> Matthew uses the phrase “gospel of the kingdom” to summarize Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of Heaven (4:23; 9:35), and the kingdom of Heaven is a major theme of the Sermon on the Mount (5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21). Those who possess the kingdom or enter it (5:3, 9, 20) are God’s people whom He has saved. But the Old Testament has already defined the meaning of the expression, and it denotes more than the concept of salvation. The enemy hijacked the rule of God (Gen. 3:1–19), and Jesus, the King, reestablishes His kingdom rule. He will rule on David’s throne over the nation of Israel and the world, bringing peace

and reversing the curse. Jesus' disciples already experience some benefits of the kingdom now (note present tense verbs, 5:3, 10), but most blessings will only be realized when the King comes in His glory to rule in power (5:4–9; 6:10; 24:30). “Today the rule of God is shown in the lives of believers individually and corporately and as they relate to the world. In that day God’s rule will be extended to all mankind in judgment or redemption.”<sup>29</sup>

### *The Messiah*

*Messiah* is Matthew’s most comprehensive title for Jesus and the one he uses to introduce Jesus in the book (1:1). The term itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning “anointed” and is translated from Greek as *Christ*. On a popular level in Jesus’ day, the word referred to the anointed son of David Who would sit on his throne, deliver Israel from her enemies, and bring unprecedented prosperity. In the first sixteen chapters of Matthew, the disciples come to affirm these truths about Jesus, but they fail to recognize that He will also defeat mankind’s enemies—the Devil, sin, and death—through His own sacrificial death. Jesus announces these concepts (16:21) and teaches them to His disciples for the rest of the book. Other terms such as *son of Man* and *son of God* emphasize the Messiah’s authority and deity respectively (cf. Dan. 7:9–14; Matt. 26:64; 8:29; 14:33; 27:54).

### *The Role of Israel*

Jesus sends His disciples on missions twice in the book: first, within the borders of Israel (10) and second, to all nations (28). Some conclude that Jesus turns to the nations because He turns away from the nation of Israel and replaces it with the church.<sup>30</sup> We take a different approach in this commentary. Jesus is not surprised that His own people do not receive Him, because the Old Testament predicts His people will misunderstand, despise, and reject Him (Ps. 22; Isa. 53, et al.). Furthermore, God’s promises to Abraham include both Israel and Gentile nations (Gen. 12:2–3; Matt. 1:1) so that Jesus need not reject Israel in order to include all nations. Jesus does strongly reject Israel’s leaders and speaks of their replacement (21:43–45) by the new leaders He has prepared (19:27–28), but this is far different from replacing Israel with the church. Jesus indicates that evangelism within Israel will continue until the Second Coming (10:16–39) and that His disciples will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel when Jesus returns (19:27–28). Early in His ministry He predicts that believing Gentiles will join believing Israelites at the messianic banquet upon His return (8:5–12). When Jesus concludes His final public discourse, He reminds the crowds that they will happily accept Him in the future and say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” just as Hosea also predicted (Hos. 3:4–5;

Matt. 23:39). The Great Commission includes Israel and does not constitute a rejection or a replacement by Gentiles.

### *Church*

Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the word *church* (in Greek, *ekklesiā*), but even so we should not read back into the term the later revelation from Paul about the unique nature of the church. Matthew mentions nothing of the structure of the church, its leadership, or membership, which are all left for later revelation (Acts 10; Gal. 2; Eph. 2; 3; 1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 3—5; Titus 1). When Jesus speaks of disobedient believers, He suggests that they be treated as Gentile(s) (Matt. 18:17), suggesting that the disciples had no concept of later revelation about the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: 8–18*, ICC (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 2:7–8.
- <sup>2</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* in ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 1:33.
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew also identifies himself as “the tax collector” in his listing of the disciples (Matt. 10:1–4), giving consistent testimony that the Gospels describe one person with two names. Having two names for the same person is a common occurrence in the New Testament. Cf. *Simon* and *Peter* (Matt. 16:16–18), *Joseph* and *Barnabas* (Acts 4:36), and even *Saul* and *Paul* (Acts 8:1; 13:13).
- <sup>4</sup> Osborne, 34–35.
- <sup>5</sup> “The terminus a quo is the formation of the Gospel of Mark and the destruction of Jerusalem (22:7\*),” Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch in *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 58..
- <sup>6</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 1414.
- <sup>7</sup> Carson summarizes the matter: “While surprisingly little in the Gospel conclusively points to a firm date, perhaps the sixties are the most likely decade for its composition,” D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Matthew, Mark, Luke* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 821.
- <sup>8</sup> See the commentary for the four Old Testament quotations used in chapter 2 alone (p. 49).
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Mark 5:41; 7:34; 10:46; 14:36.
- <sup>10</sup> See “Structural Analysis” (p. 23) and “Synthetic Overview” (p. 29). The crowds hear the first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, but Jesus directs it to His disciples (5:1). The third discourse involves the crowds (13:2), but Jesus withholds more truth than He tells them. See the commentary on chapter 13.
- <sup>11</sup> As France has noted, “The characteristics we have noted make it virtually certain that Matthew’s Gospel was written in and for a church which was to a large extent composed of converts from Judaism,” R. T. France, *Matthew* in TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 29–30.
- <sup>12</sup> “Matthew’s gospel shows all the signs of being produced for a community (and by a community) that needed to formulate, over against the main body of Pharisaic and Sadducaic Judaism, its own line on such issues.” Cf. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1976), 103.
- <sup>13</sup> See Matthew chapters 5–7 for comparison with Luke 6:20–49.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. David L. Turner, *Matthew* in BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 14: “This commentary has adopted the view that Matthew’s community is still engaged with the synagogue.”
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Chris A. Miller, “Did Peter’s vision in Acts 10 pertain to men or the menu?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 3 (July–Sept 2002): 302–317.
- <sup>16</sup> Turner’s summary of Jesus’ discourses: “Matthew equips his Christian Jewish community with the Torah-fulfilling teaching of Jesus on righteous living [5–7], on opposition during mission [10], on the mixed external reception of the message [13], on the internal values that characterize his community [18], and on how to live in light of his coming [25]. This teaching along with Jesus’s powerful presence will enable the community to continue kingdom ministry to Israel and begin discipling the Gentiles,” Turner, 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Matthew employs 63 direct Old Testament quotations, uses 27 “fulfillment” passages, and makes 278 Old Testament allusions (as counted in the UBS Greek New Testament text).
- <sup>18</sup> The practice of narrative criticism “relates the parts of a Gospel to its whole instead of reading

- Matthew as an adaptation of Mark,” cf. Turner, 3.
- <sup>19</sup> H. J. Bernard Combrink, “The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 61–70.
- <sup>20</sup> Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 7–25.
- <sup>21</sup> W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Holt, 1930), 35.
- <sup>22</sup> The stories or narratives after the discourses often include teaching, but not in the uninterrupted format of the discourse. The narrative sections include teaching in the form of Jesus’ explanations of miracles, or fulfillment quotations from the Old Testament, or even Jesus’ instruction as He dialogues with friends or foes.
- <sup>23</sup> However, not all scholars agree on this last point. Though the connection between the discourses and narratives are well acknowledged, some would bundle the preceding narrative to the following discourse. For example, some see the narrative of chapters 3 and 4 closely connected with the discourse of chapters 5–7, in contrast to the way we suggest above. The first bundle of discourse (5–7) / narrative (8; 9) seems to be a definite package and so sets our order, but the book flows from one chapter to another so that there are almost always logical connections between every discourse and each narrative. Cf. Osborne, 41; and Davies and Allison who accurately warn, “We all know how to make out faces in the clouds, and it is possible to use the same talent to force an ancient text to fit a modern outline,” Davies and Allison, 2:69.
- <sup>24</sup> For more information about the nature of the gospel writings and their composition see Walter Ewell and Robert Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 69–76, 153–180.
- <sup>25</sup> Osborne counts thirty-six interpretations of the sermon, though he reduces those to nine major views, and Carson counts eight. Osborne, 159, and Carson, 8125.
- <sup>26</sup> A. W Tozer, *Paths to Power* (Nyack, NY: Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1940), 21.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Turner, 41–42.
- <sup>28</sup> “The mission of Jesus was to establish God’s kingship. The phrase ‘the kingdom of God’ therefore points not to a specific situation or event, but to ‘God in control’, with all the breadth of meaning that that phrase could cover. Attempts to *define* ‘the kingdom of God’ inevitably restrict this breadth, and so fail to do justice to the variety of its usage in the Gospels,” France, 49.
- <sup>29</sup> Turner, 43.
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. France, 54–59.
- <sup>31</sup> “But to recognize that Matthew records Jesus’ creation of a new community does not entail reading into his Gospel all the institutional paraphernalia which the word ‘church’ tends to suggest to us. Indeed, when this Gospel is compared with the letters of Paul, mostly written before even the earliest date suggested for Matthew, it is remarkable how lacking it is in ‘church’ terminology. . . . The impression one gains is that Jesus looked forward to, and Matthew is writing for, a community conscious of its own distinctive existence and calling as the people of the Messiah, but not yet formally structured as an institution. It is a community aware of its difference from unbelieving Israel, and of its potentially universal scope, but far from wishing to repudiate its Old Testament roots, it is anxious to affirm that in Jesus and his people Israel’s destiny is fulfilled,” France, 58–59.

# 1

## Witness of the Genealogy

### Matthew 1

Before Matthew even considers the story of what Jesus does, he builds an airtight case for Who Jesus is—the Messiah of God. Matthew then spends the first four chapters outlining the evidence of Jesus’ credentials for ministry: He defeats the Devil in the temptation (4:1–11) and before that receives the affirmation of both the Father and John, the forerunner (3). In the second chapter Matthew tracks all the movements of Jesus’ early childhood through the Old Testament prophets, but in chapter 1 he traces Jesus’ identity all the way back to Abraham.

Beginning the book with a genealogy may strike the modern reader as strange, but nothing could communicate more powerfully that God’s promises of a Savior and a Messiah have found tangible, human form in Jesus. Matthew begins with a summary title (1:1) of the three most important figures—Jesus, David, and Abraham—and then expands it with the details of Jesus’ genealogy (1:2–16). He carefully arranges the descendants into three groups of fourteen names each, connected by two hinge points (1:6, 11). The first group of fourteen names climaxes with the establishment of the kingship in David (1:6). The second group finishes with the loss of the kingship and the deportation of the nation to Babylon (1:11). And the last group concludes with the One Who will regain the throne of David and bring salvation to Israel (1:16). Finally, Matthew summarizes all this in the last verse of the section (1:17).

The last portion of the chapter (1:18–25) provides another genealogy of sorts, but this one deals with the divine rather than the human. Matthew focuses on the miracle of the virgin conception, revealing that the Holy Spirit was the active agent overseeing the beginning of God’s renewal of the world, just as He had done at the start (Gen. 1:2). This conception and birth fulfills prophecy (Isa. 7:14), and we learn why Jesus is a much better David. He will do what David could not—“save his people from their sins,” because He is more than David ever could be: “God with us” (Matt. 1:21–23).

#### A. Genealogy of Jesus (1:1–17)

<sup>1</sup>The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son

of Abraham. <sup>2</sup>Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, <sup>3</sup>and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup>and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup>and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, <sup>7</sup>and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, <sup>8</sup>and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, <sup>9</sup>and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, <sup>10</sup>and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, <sup>11</sup>and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. <sup>12</sup>And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, <sup>13</sup>and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, <sup>14</sup>and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, <sup>15</sup>and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, <sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. <sup>17</sup>So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

**1:1** Matthew's book explodes right out of the gate with meaning, history, and prophecy. Verse 1 may look like a slow beginning to a dull genealogy, but the simple words anchor Matthew's message to God's redemptive promises from Genesis, summarize Who Jesus is, and preview the theme of the entire book: Jesus is the messianic King of Israel, Who blesses all nations of the earth with salvation.

First, the phrase **the book of the genealogy of** connects to the beginning of God's redemptive program, because these words reflect Moses' first genealogy in Genesis 5:1 (in the Septuagint, a.k.a. LXX; i.e., the Greek translation of the Old Testament, ca. 250 BC).

After Adam sinned (Gen. 3), God promised that one of Eve's offspring would crush the serpent and regain all that Adam and Eve had lost (3:15). The genealogy in Genesis 5 traces the line of this promised Rescuer from Adam, through his believing offspring, including Seth, Enoch, and Noah (5:1-32), then all the way to Shem and Abram (Abraham, 11:10-26).



Without missing a beat, Matthew picks up the story directly from Moses, following the rest of the promised line from Abraham all the way to its goal: the Rescuer, Whose name we now learn is Jesus. The similar wording from Genesis 5:1, “the book of the generations of Adam,” found again in Matthew 1:1, **the book of the genealogy of Jesus**, clues the reader that God’s original promise has come true in Jesus and that creation’s only hope for salvation has finally arrived.

Second, verse 1 succinctly describes Who Jesus is. Matthew identifies His human name, **Jesus**, and His title, **Christ**. We might grasp the meaning better with a phrase: Jesus, the Christ, or Jesus, the Messiah. Otherwise, when we read His name and title together (Jesus Christ), they can easily sound like a first and last name, as though Joseph and Mary’s surname was Christ. Originally the Hebrew term *messiah* denoted “an anointed one” and applied to prophets (1 Kings 19:16), priests (Exod. 40:15), and kings (1 Sam. 9:16). These individuals were often anointed to their offices, but over time the term took on a more technical meaning. As the picture of the Rescuer gained clarity through the Old Testament, the term became reserved for the ultimate anointed One, Who would rescue His people Israel and rule over them as His father David had done (2 Sam. 7:11–17; Ps. 2:2). With this title, Matthew brings all the revelation of the Old Testament to bear upon the identity of Jesus.

Third, Matthew previews the theme of the book with the words **the son of David, the son of Abraham**. Both **David** and **Abraham** appear in the genealogy proper (1:2, 6), but Matthew gives them pride of place in the first verse because they represent more than links in the genealogical chain. God made covenantal promises to both men that define Jesus’ mission. As **the son of David**, Jesus will rule as king over the nation of Israel to bring justice and blessing (2 Sam. 7:11–17; Ps. 2). As **the son of Abraham**, Jesus will extend His redemption and rule beyond Israel to all nations of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 49:10; Isa. 11:10; Gal. 3:7–14). David’s promises are primarily national in their scope, while Abraham’s include all nations.

We should also notice that Matthew has subtly reversed the order of the names for thematic purposes. In the main genealogy (Matt. 1:2–16), he begins with the oldest first, **Abraham** (1:2), and then moves forward to the present time through **David** (1:6); but in the first verse Matthew lists the younger **David** before the elder **Abraham**. In so doing, Matthew skillfully previews the book’s theme.

In the course of His ministry, Jesus sends out His disciples on two mission trips: first in chapter 10 and then in chapter 28. His first commission extends not to Gentiles but only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:5–6), while the second and Great Commission extends to “all nations” (28:19). The timing of these two commissions illustrates Jesus’ purpose of coming first to Israel and then to Gentiles, or as Paul would later say, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

Who is Jesus and why has He come? According to Matthew's very first verse, Jesus is the human Rescuer promised in the early chapters of Genesis, Who will reign as Israel's king, the Messiah, and will bless Israel and all the nations of the earth with salvation.

**1:2** Although the body of the genealogy (1:2–16) might appear to be a simple list of ancestral names, it is actually a masterfully drawn portrait of Jesus. Matthew's subtle literary brushstrokes nuance his perspective of Jesus. Matthew includes certain names we would not expect in a first-century genealogy (women and brothers), and he excludes other names, presumably to round out the numbers. He divides the work into three major sections with two hinge points that his message pivots on (1:6, 11), and he insists on three equal divisions—almost.

While the first verse functions more like a title or summary, the formal genealogy begins here with **Abraham**. Unlike Luke, who shows his special interest in Jesus' humanity by tracing His genealogy all the way back to the first human, Adam, Matthew begins his genealogy with the father of the Jewish nation, **Abraham**. God promised him a land, a nation, and blessing for all nations (Gen. 12:1–3). Those promises passed down to **Isaac** and **Jacob** (Gen. 26:2–4; 28:13–14) and to all Jacob's sons, including **Judah and his brothers**. The mention of **his brothers** is technically unnecessary for a simple genealogy, because Jesus' ancestry bypasses them. It does, however, show that Matthew traces a larger story line: God is working through the entire nation of Israel, who are descendants of all these **brothers**.

Jacob prophesied that the kings of Israel would come from Judah and that eventually one of those kings would rule over all the nations (Gen. 49:10). Both the first king from Judah and the last (before Whom the nations will bow) appear in this genealogy: **David** and **Jesus**. Matthew's genealogy reminds attentive readers of all this teaching in just the first two verses.

**1:3, 4** Both **Perez** and **Zerah** are likely mentioned because they were twins, even though the line travels only through **Perez**. This may be a subtle nod by Matthew to God's sovereign selection of one line and not the other (cf. Rom. 9:6–13). Matthew breaks convention by listing **Tamar**, the first of five women in the chapter, and while we cannot be certain of all his reasons, mentioning them elevates their visibility and honors the contribution of women to the story—especially the last woman (1:16).

**1:5** Both **Rahab** (a Canaanite) and **Ruth** (a Moabite) began as outsiders to the covenant community but later followed the God of Israel by faith and eventually married Israelites from the tribe of Judah. By including these outsiders, Matthew both reminds his readers that God has always welcomed Gentiles, and prepares them for the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (28:19).

**1:6** Even though at least fourteen other people in this genealogy could rightfully claim the title, Matthew identifies only **David** as **the king**. He was

the first king from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and a prototypical shepherd, who rescued Israel from her enemies and led the people in righteousness (Ps. 78:70–72). God also declared that the Messiah would be a son of David and rule on his throne (1 Chron. 17:11–15), so Matthew emphasizes David’s title, not to honor David but to proclaim Jesus’ role.

In the middle of this verse, Matthew transitions to the second of three groups of fourteen names. This group includes all those from the line of Judah who sat on the throne in the Old Testament, extending from the first, **David**, to the last, **Jechoniah** (Matt. 1:6–11). When David was at his best, he was a model deliverer who rescued Israel from near spiritual extinction under the judges; but David was not always at his best. Israel does not need *another* David; she needs a *better* David.

Matthew identifies Solomon’s mother not by her name, Bathsheba, but as **the wife of Uriah**, calling attention to both David’s adultery and murder. The writer of 1 Kings praises David for his faithfulness to the Lord in all ways except one: “David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:5). And David was better than all who followed him.

Matthew skillfully structures his genealogy so we already have firsthand insight into the meaning of the angel’s declaration: Jesus will “save his people from their sins” (1:21).

**1:7, 8 Solomon**, the first son of David, also failed as a king (1 Kings 10:26—11:13; cf. Deut. 17:14–20), but it was **Rehoboam** who foolishly split the kingdom in two. The rest of the kings in this list ruled only the southern two tribes until the exile to Babylon (Matt. 1:11). **Joram** is described as **the father of Uzziah**, when we know from Chronicles that several generations intervened (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, 1 Chron. 3:10–14), but this is neither an inaccuracy nor a problem when considering Matthew’s purpose. When an ancestry is being traced, every generation does not need be counted as long as the record accurately follows the line. The language of the text also allows the accurate translation, “Joram was the ancestor of Uzziah.”

**1:9–11** Matthew also ignores the generation of Jehoiakim, between **Josiah** and **Jechoniah** (cf. Jer. 22:24–30). **The deportation to Babylon** is significant from Israel’s perspective, not only because it marked the official failure of the Old Covenant with the ultimate curse of exile (Deut. 28:68), but also because **Jechoniah** is the last son of David to reign on the throne of Israel. This marks a grim moment in Israel’s history: The people break the covenant, lose the land, and lose their king (2 Kings 24:14–16). Even more importantly the event casts doubt on the God Who promised that David would never lack a man to sit on his throne (2 Sam. 7:13; Ps. 89:29). How can God keep His promises when David’s throne is empty?

**1:12–15** After **the deportation to Babylon**, the empires of Babylon, Me-do-Persia, Greece, and Rome respectively dominated Israel, so the men in the genealogy from this point forward were only heirs to a throne they never occupied. In this last section of fourteen names, only **Shealtiel** and **Zerubbabel** appear in the Biblical record (Ezra 3:2). The Old Testament does not record the genealogy of Jesus through the four hundred years of prophetic silence between the testaments; therefore, Matthew’s list from this point forward is unparalleled. The sources for his genealogy, though probably scrupulously kept by scribes before the time of Jesus, are no longer known to us. Matthew’s inspired record is all that remains to trace this royal line to Jesus.

**1:16** Matthew deviates from his normal pattern by designating **Joseph**, not as the father of Jesus but only as **the husband of Mary**. Even his grammar **of whom** (feminine pronoun) **Jesus was born** unambiguously points back to Mary as Jesus’ only physical parent. So, what good does it do to trace this record to the last generation, only then to break the link in the physical chain? The answer is that Jesus would inherit the legitimate right to rule through his stepfather, Joseph, whom Matthew eagerly identifies also as a “son of David” (cf. 1:20). Matthew introduces his genealogy with the name of **Jesus** and the title **Christ** (1:1) and concludes it the same way, underscoring what is most important (1:16).

**1:17** In case the reader has been lost in the details of the first sixteen verses, Matthew now steps back and explains the bigger story line of his work. His initial audience was well-acquainted with the Old Testament and knew he had skipped several generations to arrive at his threefold listing of **fourteen generations**. This is not an attempt to rewrite history, nor is it an embarrassing historical inaccuracy. Matthew has more important goals than recording names: he composes an accurate and meaningful story. Dividing the list of names where he does results in three equal divisions with two critical hinge points. At the end of the first list of names, the reader arrives at **David the king**, when the kingship was established with the first promised son of Judah taking the throne (Gen. 49:10).

The middle listing of fourteen names covers David’s descendants who held the throne, and at the end of this list comes the second critical hinge point, the deportation to Babylon, when the throne was lost. The last list of fourteen names traces heirs, but not kings, until the final name announces the King Who will regain the lost throne of His father David. In this final hinge point, Matthew curiously substitutes the event of the **deportation** as the dividing line rather than the name **Jechoniah**. In this way, he leaves the reader to ponder just two names and a title in verse 17—**Abraham, David, and the Christ**.

Professional photographers rarely frame a picture to make all the details equally important. By choosing strategic angles and focus, they deemphasize some parts of the picture so the more important aspects receive more clarity.

Just as a wedding photographer keeps the bride in focus in all the shots, so Matthew always has Jesus in focus. Matthew writes about Jesus' ancestry in a way that highlights His royal status: this is **Jesus**, the **Son of David** and King of Israel. Matthew will remind his readers later and often that Jesus is "the son of David" (eight more times in Matthew: 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15; 22:42), but the emphasis begins in the genealogy.

## B. The Virgin Conception (1:18–25)

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the Prophet: <sup>23</sup>"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup>but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

**1:18** Matthew cleverly connects this major section (1:18–25) with the first (1:1–17) by the common Greek term *genesis*, translated as *genealogy* in 1:1 and *birth* in 1:18. Both English words are excellent translations of *genesis* in their context, but the English reader might miss the subtle connection Matthew draws between the two. As the first section explained Jesus' *human* ancestry, this section reveals the role of the *divine* in His conception. The first seventeen verses compared Him to his father David and introduced Him as the Messiah, while this section explains why He is far greater than David and why He will succeed where his father David failed. Matthew hints at the comparison between the first Genesis account of creation, which has the Spirit hovering over the waters, and this account of the beginning of a new creation, which has the Spirit hovering over Mary's womb (cf. Gen. 1:2; Luke 1:35).

Though Matthew mentions the **birth of Jesus** in both the first and last verses of this section (Matt. 1:18, 25), his interest lies in between on the details of the conception. He already signaled by his clear grammar in verse 16 that Jesus is the legal but not physical son of Joseph. Here Matthew directly states that Joseph did not produce the conception; rather, the Holy Spirit did. Such a unique and important miracle deserves clarification by relevant facts, which

Matthew, almost redundantly, details in the next seven verses. He explains this once-in-eternity kind of miracle five times in the following verses and phrases:

| Verse  | Meaning   |
|--|---|
| 1:18 <b>before they came together</b>                              | Joseph had no part in the conception.                                 |
| 1:18 <b>with child from the Holy Spirit</b>                        | The Holy Spirit caused the conception.                                |
| 1:20 <b>that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit</b> | An angel confirms Mary's conception to be divine.                     |
| 1:23 <b>the virgin shall conceive</b>                              | Isaiah predicted the divine miracle of virgin conception (Isa. 7:14). |
| 1:25 [Joseph] <b>knew her not until she had given birth</b>        | Joseph had no physical relations with Mary until after Jesus' birth.  |

**1:19** Jewish marriage involved two important stages: a **etrothal** and a wedding ceremony. The betrothal was a legal pledge to be married so that the two were legally considered husband and wife, even though they would not live together until after the wedding ceremony. To break off a **etrothal** required legal divorce proceedings, and **Joseph** being a **just man** resolved to divorce Mary in a private, merciful way. At this point Joseph is aware of the pregnancy but does not believe Mary's explanation. Who could blame him? Joseph's intention, if enacted, would ruin the plan, but his intention lends authenticity and explains why God sends an angel to intervene. Note how Matthew prepares his readers for Mary's situation by including four other women whose marital unions were, in various ways, unusual but that God providentially used to accomplish His plans and bring forth His Messiah (1:3, 5, 6). Who is to say that He would not save the most unusual and best surprise for last?

**1:20, 21** This is the first of three appearances of **an angel in a dream to Joseph** (see 2:13, 19). The **angel** calls him **son of David** (the only New Testament person to receive the label besides Jesus) because Joseph provides the critical legal right to David's throne. If he chooses not to go through with the marriage by divorcing Mary, then Jesus, though deity, is left without royal human credentials to sit on David's throne. Thus, the angel's task to convince Joseph is necessary. Now Joseph learns ironically that the conception which he assumed had resulted from Mary's marital unfaithfulness was actually a holy miracle caused by God's covenant faithfulness (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). Joseph will not only take Mary as his wife but will assume paternal responsibilities by naming the **son Jesus**.

The Greek form of the name **Jesus**, *Iesous*, is the same as the Hebrew *Yeshua*, or *Joshua*, meaning "Yahweh saves," a common name in the first century. This angelic explanation, **for he will save his people from their sins**, defines the difference between God's design for His Messiah and the popular expectations of the time. Jesus came to reign on David's throne as a political deliverer,

but only after delivering Israel from her fiercest enemies—sin and death—by humbling Himself on the cross.

**1:22, 23** After the angel finishes his speech, Matthew pulls the entire account together with the first of his many Old Testament fulfillment quotations, adding a prophetic exclamation point. Not only did God direct all of this work sovereignly, He also predicted it seven centuries earlier through Isaiah. **All this took place** refers at least to this section (1:18–25) but likely also to the entirety of chapter 1. Some have wondered whether the specific Greek term **virgin** (*parthenos*, 1:23) is the right translation of the elastic Hebrew (*almâ*, Isa. 7:14) “virgin / young woman.” This is due in part because Isaiah’s wife conceived and bore a son in the near context (Isa. 8:3–5). Matthew thought it was the right word, as he follows the lead of the translators of the Septuagint (c. 250 BC), who objectively translated the Hebrew word of Isaiah as *virgin* nearly three centuries before Jesus.

But Matthew’s inspired word choice here is more than a simple dictionary decision; ultimately, it is theological as well. Matthew likely took his cue from the whole theology of the Messiah developed in Isaiah 7–11, rather than from just one verse. The Old Testament prophet begins his teaching with the son born to the virgin who will be a sign that **God is with us** (Isa. 7:14) but then describes the land of Israel as belonging to **Immanuel**, Who will deliver it as well (8:8–10). This Child, Who will bear the government on his shoulders, is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” and sits “on the throne of David and over his kingdom” (9:6–7; 11:1–16). These titles are only befitting of Deity. How can this be? Mary knew! And the writers of the New Testament understood as well—the miracle of the God-Man, deity and humanity united perfectly in one person with no diminishment of either nature, lies at the center of Isaiah’s vision of the kingdom (John 1:1–3, 14; Heb. 1:1–3). Considering the magnitude of this miracle, the process of His birth by a virgin is at least a suitable sign of how eternally unique God’s work is. As Matthew summarizes, **all of this took place** through the Holy Spirit’s conception of Jesus to fulfill *all* of what Isaiah prophesied.

As important as the meaning of *virgin* is to his argument, Matthew is equally interested in the meaning of **Immanuel**, which he interprets, **God with us**. This name, affirming Jesus’ deity and ongoing presence, is a theme of this Gospel. Matthew even concludes the book with Jesus’ personal promise: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

**1:24–25** Joseph faithfully responds to the Lord’s command by following through with the marriage to Mary, respecting the work of God in her life by refraining from normal marital relations until after birth, and finally naming his new stepson Jesus. With this act of fatherhood, the genealogy of verses 1–17 becomes valid and Jesus becomes the adopted son of “Joseph, son of David” (1:20).

### Reflection

Sometimes names are just names; other times they overflow with meaning. We can always tell when names are significant in the Bible by how the writers explain and use the names in their accounts (cf. Gen. 17:5, 15, 19). Matthew wastes no time at all in identifying the Messiah with two names that are extraordinarily significant: Jesus and Immanuel. The first name, Jesus, reminds us “he will save his people from their sins.” Where Matthew places this name (1:21) would have come as a bit of a shock to his first audience. After seventeen verses dedicated to describing Jesus as the son of David, the Messiah, their minds would have raced to contemporary expectations of a political deliverer who would rescue them from Roman domination and elevate Israel to prominent, worldwide status. In these expectations they were correct, but their expectations were far too immediate and naive. As Jesus later promises (Matt. 24; 25), He will come a second time as a conquering warrior to establish His political kingdom and will sit on David’s throne. However, the people of Israel needed far more than military might, they needed spiritual cleansing from sin. Our minds, like theirs, easily go to what Jesus will do for our outward fortunes. We forget who we are. If Jesus’ identity is the One Who saves His people from their sins and we are His people, our central identity is those who are forgiven. That identity, if it is understood, produces humility, freedom, and concern for people who have yet to be saved from their sins.

But there is more. The name “Immanuel” (Matt. 1:23) comes from Isaiah’s prophecy about the Child whom the virgin would conceive. Interestingly, after Matthew repeatedly makes his point about the virgin conception in chapter 1, he never mentions it again. However, the focus on Immanuel (“God with us”) continues throughout the book and even sounds the final crescendo in the form, “Behold, I am with you always” (28:20). With these two names, *Jesus* and *Immanuel*, God meets our deepest needs: to be forgiven of sin and to be reunited with the presence of the living God. He reverses the fall of Adam and guarantees our return to the Garden of Eden. He is *Jesus* the Savior; *Immanuel*, Who surrounds us with the presence of God; and the *Messiah*, Who will bring Heaven to earth in His Kingdom.