

# INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW

## **AUTHOR**

Technically anonymous, but early Christian tradition assigned this Gospel to the apostle Matthew.

## **DATE**

AD 55–65

## **BIG PICTURE**

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, created the church, and commissioned his followers to tell others the good news.

## **SUMMARY**

Matthew divided his Gospel into three sections: the introduction (1:1–4:16), body (4:17–16:20), and conclusion (16:21–28:20). He began by recounting events surrounding Jesus's birth (1:18–2:23) and then moved to Jesus's baptism and temptation (3:1–4:16), which prepared him for his three-year ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing (4:23). Perhaps no portion of Scripture is as well known as Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7). In chapters 8–10 Matthew recorded 10 miracles in which Jesus demonstrated his authority over disease, natural catastrophes, demons, and death. Matthew showed a variety of responses to Jesus's authority and recorded a series of Jesus's parables (chaps. 11–18). Chapters 19–25 mark the transition from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and taught why he did what he did and who he was. In chapters 26–28 Matthew related the conspiracy that ended in Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

## **KEY VERSES**

*Matthew 28:19-20:* “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

That Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations shows the inclusive nature of the gospel. Abraham, from whom Matthew traced Jesus's lineage (1:1-2), was told that he would bring a blessing to all nations (Gn 12:1-3). Matthew presents Jesus as the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose by faith to follow him. Throughout Christian history believers have sought to take the good news of salvation in Jesus to all peoples and nations. We call them missionaries. We call them witnesses. We call them obedient!

## **TAKEAWAY**

The Great Commission that concludes Matthew's Gospel (Mt 28:16-20) informs us that the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world, has appointed us and will enable us to make disciples of all who will believe.

## **PRINCIPLE TO LIVE BY**

*The Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20).*

Since the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring salvation to all who believe, we are to do what we can to deliver this message to the whole world.

## THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

**1** An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

## FROM ABRAHAM TO DAVID

- <sup>2</sup> Abraham fathered<sup>A</sup> Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers,  
<sup>3</sup> Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Aram,  
<sup>4</sup> Aram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon,  
<sup>5</sup> Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse,  
<sup>6</sup> and Jesse fathered King David.

## FROM DAVID TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

- David fathered Solomon<sup>B</sup> by Uriah's wife,  
<sup>7</sup> Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa,<sup>C</sup>  
<sup>8</sup> Asa<sup>C</sup> fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram,<sup>D</sup>  
<sup>9</sup> Joram fathered Uzziah, Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah,

- <sup>10</sup> Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon,<sup>E</sup> Amon fathered Josiah, and Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

## FROM THE EXILE TO THE CHRIST

- <sup>12</sup> After the exile to Babylon Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor,  
<sup>14</sup> Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud,  
<sup>15</sup> Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob,  
<sup>16</sup> and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Christ.

<sup>17</sup> So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Christ, fourteen generations.

<sup>A</sup>1:2 In vv. 2-16 either a son, as here, or a later descendant, as in v. 8 <sup>B</sup>1:6 Other mss add *King* <sup>C</sup>1:7 Other mss read *Asaph*  
<sup>D</sup>1:8 = Jehoram <sup>E</sup>1:10 Other mss read *Amos*

**1:1** The title of this genealogy introduces several important themes in Matthew. Jesus is identified as the **Christ**, Messiah, the King anointed by God to rule over his people. This is reiterated by identifying Jesus as **Son of David** (v. 20; 2:2; 9:27; 12:3,23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9,15). OT prophecies like 2Sm 7:16 and Is 9:2-7 foretold that Messiah (the "anointed one") would be a descendant of King David. Jesus's Davidic lineage shows that he meets this qualification. Though the genealogy is otherwise arranged in chronological order, Matthew shifted "Son of David" ahead of **Son of Abraham** to lay emphasis on the royal title.

The title "Son of Abraham" implies that just as Abraham was the father of national Israel, Jesus will be the founder of a new spiritual Israel. The phrase **an account of the genealogy of Jesus** is unusual. OT genealogies are consistently named after the earliest ancestor in the lineage because the Jews considered that person to be most significant since everyone else derived from them. That Matthew names his genealogy after Jesus, the final descendant in the lineage, implies that Jesus is more important than anyone who preceded him.

**1:2-6** Matthew mentioned four women in his genealogy, all of them Gentiles. **Tamar**

was a Canaanite. **Rahab** was from Jericho. **Ruth** was a Moabitess. **Uriah's wife** Bathsheba was probably a Hethite. The mention of these women signals God's intention to include Gentiles and women in his redemptive plan. Several kings are named also, but only David is explicitly given the title **King**. This highlights that the Son of David (Jesus) will likewise be a kingly figure.

**1:7-16** Matthew's genealogy agrees with the genealogies of 1Ch 1-3 and Lk 3:23-38 from the generation of Abraham down to David. After David, Matthew's genealogy agrees with that of 1 Chronicles except for a few intentional gaps, but departs significantly from Luke's. Some interpreters argue from this that one or both of the NT genealogies is inaccurate. However, Jews in David's line carefully preserved their genealogies because they knew from the OT prophecies that one of their descendants would be the Messiah. David's descendants also had the privilege of providing firewood for the altar in Jerusalem (*m. Ta'an.* 4:5). Naturally, they kept careful records to demonstrate their Davidic descent and preserve their privileges. Evidence in Josephus (*Life* 1) and rabbinic texts suggests that genealogical archives were kept in public registers.

Scholars suggest several ways in which the genealogies of Matthew and Luke may

be harmonized. First, one may preserve the genealogy of Jesus through Mary and the other through Joseph. Second, the custom of levirate marriage resulted in a child having different biological and legal fathers. Perhaps one genealogy follows the biological line while the other follows the legal. Third, one genealogy may trace David's legal descendants who would have reigned if the Davidic kingdom had continued, while the other lists descendants in Joseph's specific line. A combination of these approaches is also possible.

In English, it is difficult to identify the antecedent of the first occurrence of the pronoun **who** in v. 16. However, in Matthew's Greek, the pronoun is feminine. Thus, although the rest of the genealogy focuses on fathers and only rarely mentions mothers, Matthew identified a human mother but not a human father of Jesus, thus implying Jesus's virginal conception. **1:17** Matthew's arrangement of Jesus's genealogy into three sets of **fourteen generations** is probably an example of gematria, a system that assigns numerical value to letters of the alphabet (e.g., A = 1, B = 2, etc.) in order to communicate a subtle message. In Hebrew, the numerical value of the letters composing the name *David* is fourteen. Thus Matthew's artistic

## THE NATIVITY OF THE CHRIST

<sup>18</sup> The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged<sup>A</sup> to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel,<sup>B</sup> which is translated “God is with us.”

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her<sup>25</sup> but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son.<sup>C</sup> And he named him Jesus.

## WISE MEN VISIT THE KING

**2** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”<sup>D</sup>

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

<sup>A</sup>1:18 Or *betrothed*   <sup>B</sup>1:23 Is 7:14   <sup>C</sup>1:25 Other mss read to *her firstborn son*   <sup>D</sup>2:2 Or to *pay him homage*

arrangement probably highlights Jesus’s Davidic lineage. If Matthew did intentionally use gematria, this supports the view that he originally wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, for the gematria functions in the Hebrew version of the genealogy but not the Greek.

**1:18** The words of **Jesus Christ** are in an emphatic position in the Greek text, implying that the circumstances of Jesus’s birth differed from those of everyone else in the genealogy. Although several of those people were conceived by miracles, they all had a human father. Only Jesus was born of a virgin. **Mary had been engaged to Joseph.** However, ancient Jewish engagement was as legally binding as marriage. The couple did not live together or engage in sexual intercourse. But the engagement could only be ended by divorce (thus, Joseph’s decision in 1:19). **Before they came together** means that Joseph and Mary had not yet had intercourse. Joseph thus assumed that Mary had been unfaithful. **Pregnant from the Holy Spirit** means that Mary’s pregnancy was a miracle performed by the Spirit, not that God assumed material form and physically impregnated her. This makes Jesus’s conception dramatically different from Greek myths that speak of children born to gods who lay with women.

**1:19** Joseph did not want to humiliate Mary publicly because he was a **righteous man**. His peers most likely expected him to expose her apparent sin, but true righteousness is characterized by compassion and mercy, an important theme for Matthew (5:6-7, 21-26, 38-48).

**1:20** God spoke to Joseph through dreams, just as he did to his OT namesake (Gn 37:1-11). The title **son of David** reminded Joseph of his royal lineage and prepared him for the announcement of Messiah’s birth. On **conceived . . . from the Holy Spirit**, see note at v. 18.

**1:21** **Jesus** is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* which means “Yahweh saves.” The angel explained that Jesus’s name revealed his purpose: He would rescue sinners from the punishment they deserve. This salvation would be experienced by **his people**, identified as those who follow Jesus.

**1:22** **Spoken by the Lord through the prophet** implies that God was the ultimate author of the messages spoken and written by the prophets. The grammar that Matthew uses to introduce the quote from Is 7:14 (see Mt 1:23) suggests that the angel quoted this verse to Joseph during his announcement. Some interpreters argue that Matthew mishandled Is 7:14, but he seems to have handled it just as the angel did, which means his usage is backed by angelic authority.

**1:23** The name **Immanuel** (God with us) implies Jesus’s deity. Mary’s virgin-born Son would be God himself living among his people. The Immanuel of Is 7:14 is to be identified with the person described in Is 9:2-7 and 11:1-9.

**1:24-25** These verses emphasize Joseph’s absolute obedience to the angel’s instructions, a prevalent theme in these early chapters (2:13-15, 19-21). Joseph is a model of the obedience that should characterize Jesus’s disciples (5:19-20). **Did not have sexual relations with her** confirms again that Jesus was the product of a virginal conception.

**2:1** The **wise men** were magi. Eastern magi mixed Zoroastrianism with astrology and black magic. They are described in Dn 2:2, 4-5, 10, where they are associated with diviner-priests, mediums, and sorcerers. The term *magos* (sg of *magi*) appears only once in the NT. It describes the sorcerer whom Paul portrayed as “full of all kinds of deceit and trickery” and a “son of the devil and enemy of all that is right” (Ac 13:6-10).

The magus of whom Paul spoke would have held beliefs that were similar to those of the wise men. Thus, the summons of the magi to visit Jesus demonstrates God’s intention to save Gentiles from their futile religions. As an adult, Jesus cast out demons and broke Satan’s grip on beleaguered people. Here we see that even in his infancy, Christ plundered Satan’s kingdom and set captives free. The **east** may refer to Babylonia or Persia. **King Herod** was actually a client king ruling under Roman authority. Though he was Idumean and not a Jew, the Roman Senate named him king of Judea in 40 BC. He was an able ruler but brutal and suspicious.

**2:2** The question posed by the wise men was an unintentional challenge to Herod’s reign. Jesus was **born king** in the sense that he was from David’s line and thus king by birthright. Herod, however, was neither a full Jew nor a descendant of David and thus was not genuinely qualified to reign as king. The word translated **star** can indicate many different astronomical phenomena, including comets, meteors, or planetary conjunctions. Matthew later (v.9) described the star as moving through the sky in order to point the magi to Jesus’s precise location. This indicates that it was no ordinary star. **At its rising** indicates that the star mysteriously appeared in the eastern sky to signal Messiah’s birth. The interest of the magi in astrology, a practice condemned in the Bible (Is 47:13-15), probably first directed their attention to the star. In another profound display of grace, God condescended to use the magi’s pagan superstitions to draw them to Jesus. **2:3** Herod was **disturbed** by reports of the birth of a legitimate claimant to his throne. The people of **Jerusalem** were equally disturbed because they feared Herod’s paranoid and delusional rages. In the past he had killed even his favorite wife and sons in order to protect his rule.

## DIFFERENCES IN THE GOSPELS

ROBERT H. STEIN

Serious readers of the Gospels notice various differences between them. One difference involves geographical arrangement. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus visits Jerusalem only once during his entire ministry. For instance, all of the events in Mark 1:1–11:10 take place either in Galilee (1:1–8:21) or on the way to Jerusalem (8:22–11:10). Only from 11:11 forward is Jesus recorded as entering Jerusalem. The Gospel of John takes a different approach. John records Jesus visiting Jerusalem several times throughout his ministry (2:13–4:45; 5:1–47; 7:1–10:40; and 12:12–20:31), including an early temple cleansing (John 2:13–22). The Synoptics say nothing about an early temple cleansing, and John in turn says nothing about the later cleansing that the Synoptics recount (Mt 21:12–13; Mk 11:15–18; Lk 19:45–48). It seems the authors chose different ways of using geography as a tool for arranging their accounts of Jesus's life. Mark, whose Gospel likely predated and influenced Matthew and Luke, chose not to discuss any of Jesus's doings in Jerusalem until the climactic events beginning in 11:11. This literary approach builds a steady tension that finally explodes with Jesus's crucifixion in the sacred city. John, writing years after the Synoptics, took a different approach, sprinkling Jerusalem throughout his account.

Another literary consideration that helps account for differences among the Gospels is how the authors chose to group Jesus's teachings. Matthew is organized around alternating blocks of Stories of Jesus and Teachings of Jesus. Here is the arrangement: chapters 1–4 (S); 5–7 (T); 8–9 (S); 10 (T); 11–12 (S); 13 (T); 14–17 (S); 18 (T); 19–22 (S); 23–25 (T); 26–28 (S). Luke, on the other hand, places the teachings of Jesus in two large sections: 6:20–8:3; and 9:51–18:14. Different approaches such as this explain why the Gospel authors often place sayings of Jesus in different contexts, as for instance when Matthew records the Lord's Prayer early in Jesus's ministry (6:9–13) while Luke places it later (11:1–4). The Gospel writers arranged much of their material on topical and logical grounds rather than chronological. The earliest reference to any Gospel was made by Papias, a church father who in the first decade of the second century stated that Mark wrote accurately but *not in chronological order* the traditions he learned from Peter. Thus early readers noticed the differences between the Gospels, understood some of the basic

causes of the differences, and did not regard them as problematic.

Another reason for differences involves the literary style of individual evangelists. In Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 we have two accounts of Jesus healing a centurion's servant. In Luke the conversation takes place between Jesus and Jewish elders who speak on behalf of the centurion. In Matthew the conversation is directly between Jesus and the centurion. There is no conflict in these accounts when we realize that Matthew has abbreviated the story (103 words compared to 186 words in Luke). Matthew omitted material unessential to the story, and the elders (serving as go-betweens) are the least important element in the story. Thus, just as modern-day journalists report on meetings between heads of state without mentioning the go-betweens, Matthew makes no mention of the elders.

Furthermore, the evangelists understood themselves to be inspired interpreters, not mere stenographers of Jesus's acts and teachings. They felt free to clarify and add explanatory comments to the traditions they were recording. For example, whereas Matthew in 7:11 records Jesus as saying God the Father gives "good things" to those who ask, Luke has Jesus saying God gives "the Holy Spirit." In this case, Luke has done some interpretive extension: of all the good things God gives, the Holy Spirit is the best of them. Other examples of inspired editorial work include:

### THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

- In Matthew 3:17 the voice from heaven states, "This is my beloved Son."
- In Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 the voice states, "You are my beloved Son."
- Explanation: In Mark and Luke, God's voice addresses Jesus. Matthew shifts the audience to the bystanders in order to make clear to his readers that God would have them know that Jesus is his Son. The overall meaning is unchanged.

### THE BEATITUDES

- In Matthew 5:3 the first beatitude reads, "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ."
- Luke 6:20 has, "Blessed are you who are poor . . ."
- Explanation: Matthew gives a "thought for thought" rather than "word for word" translation of the original. He adds "in spirit" to help

his readers understand that in this context “poor” refers to spiritual humility. A similar usage of “poor” occurs in Psalm 86:1, where King David (who was financially wealthy) speaks of being “poor and needy.”

#### HOUR OF THE CRUCIFIXION

- In Mark 15:25 Jesus is crucified at “nine in the morning” (the third hour).
- In John 19:14 Jesus is crucified at “about noon” (the sixth hour).

#### PETER’S DENIAL OF CHRIST

- Mark tells his readers of Peter’s denial in 14:53-54 and 14:66-72. Wedged between this two-part account is the story of Jesus’s trial.
- Luke completes the entire account of Peter’s denial before telling of Jesus’s trial.

- **Explanation:** Rather than a chronological discrepancy, these are two different ways of telling two separate stories. Mark follows one of his favored stylistic techniques and “sandwiches” Jesus’s trial between the two halves of the story of Peter’s denial. Luke chooses to treat them separately.

We have avoided terms such as “discrepancy” and “contradiction” when discussing differences among the Gospels. When we seek to understand what the Evangelists are doing as interpreters of Jesus’s life, we often find that their different approaches help clarify and draw out implications from Jesus’s acts and teachings. This often entails sharing the stories of Jesus’s life in a topical or logical order, not chronological. In this light, alleged “discrepancies” and “contradictions” are seen as mere “differences.”

<sup>4</sup> So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.

<sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> **And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”<sup>A</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”<sup>B</sup>

<sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. <sup>c</sup> Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

#### THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

<sup>13</sup> After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up!

<sup>A</sup>2:6 Mc 5:2 <sup>B</sup>2:8 Or *and pay him homage* <sup>C</sup>2:11 Or *they paid him homage*

**2:4** Herod summoned expert scribes to learn where the OT said the Christ would be born. To this point the star had guided the wise men near to Jesus, but now the witness of the Scriptures was necessary before God caused the star to reappear and pinpoint the exact location. Thus the value of biblical revelation was upheld even as new revelations unfolded.

**2:5-6** The “chief priests and scribes” (v. 3) knew Scripture well enough to identify Bethlehem as Christ’s birthplace (Mc 5:2; Jn 7:42), but nevertheless they later opposed his teachings. Knowledge of Scripture does not guarantee that your heart is right with God. The priestly opposition to Jesus is foreshadowed here by the fact that they made no effort to go visit him even as the magi undertook the last leg of a long journey to do so. Micah 5:2 foretold that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of a king, a ruler who would shepherd... Israel. Although

Micah said that the promised prince would “rule” over Israel, Matthew’s translation says that Messiah will “shepherd” Israel. Matthew likely chose this word to reflect Micah’s use in 5:4 and thus show that the entirety of Mc 5 applies to Jesus. This indicates that Jesus is eternal since Micah says, “His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times” (v. 2). Micah’s prophecy also said that the shepherd’s “greatness will extend to the ends of the earth” (v. 4).

**2:7-8** Herod questioned the magi about the exact time of the star’s appearance under the assumption that the star first appeared at the time of the child’s birth. On the basis of this date, he ordered the execution of all male children in Bethlehem two years of age and under (v. 16). This implies that the magi’s journey was lengthy and involved great sacrifice. Herod’s pretended desire to worship Messiah highlights his deceitfulness.

**2:9-12** In contrast to the stable in which Jesus was born (Lk 2), Jesus’s family now lived in a house. This shows that the magi visited Jesus after the visit of the shepherds described by Luke. The magi worshiped Jesus openly, as did many other people during his lifetime (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17). Jesus’s reception of worship reinforces his identity as Immanuel, “God is with us” (1:23). **Gold, frankincense, and myrrh** were costly gifts. The latter two are aromatic resins. Frankincense was used in making incense and perfume (see Ex 30:34-35). Myrrh was used as an ingredient in anointing oil (30:23-25), as a perfume (Ps 45:8), and in burial preparations (Jn 19:39).

**2:13-14** Again an angel visited Joseph in a dream warning him of Herod’s intent. Herod was a cruel and paranoid ruler. See note at 2:3. So it is not surprising that he would commit treachery against children

Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him."<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt.<sup>15</sup> He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**<sup>A</sup>

#### THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men.<sup>17</sup> Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> **A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping,<sup>B</sup> and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children;**

**and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.**<sup>C</sup>

#### THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,<sup>20</sup> saying, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead."<sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel.<sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee.<sup>23</sup> Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

#### THE HERALD OF THE CHRIST

**3** In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>A</sup>2:15 Hs 11:1 <sup>B</sup>2:18 Other mss read *Ramah, lamentation, and weeping,* <sup>C</sup>2:18 Jr 31:15

due to a perceived threat (v. 16). Joseph promptly obeyed when he was told to flee to Egypt. See note at 1:24-25.

**2:15** That what was spoken had to be fulfilled indicates that the Bible is inspired by God and authoritative over history. In its original context, the calling of the son out of Egypt in Hs 11 is a reference to Israel's exodus from Egypt, not young Messiah's trip back home. Matthew understood this, but under the Spirit's direction he recognized Jesus as the new Moses who will lead a new and climactic exodus. Just as Moses delivered his people from slavery to Pharaoh, Jesus will deliver people from slavery to Satan. Thus Matthew rightly regarded Hs 11:1 and other portions of the OT as foreshadows of Jesus and events in his life.

**2:16** Skeptics deny that Herod ever slaughtered the boys of Bethlehem since no extrabiblical source documents this horrific event. However, the murders are consistent with his documented dealings, such as his murdering his own family. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that Herod arranged for many Jewish nobles to be murdered upon his death in order to ensure that the land mourned his passing (*Ant.* 17.167-69). Herod's behavior is reminiscent of Pharaoh's around the time of Moses's birth (Ex 1:15-22). This and other striking similarities to Moses's birth narrative strengthen Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the new Moses whom God promised in Dt 18:15-19. Ancient Jews thought of Moses as a deliverer (Ac 7:25,35). By highlighting parallels between Moses and Jesus, Matthew shows that Jesus was the promised deliverer who would save his people from their sins (see notes at Mt 1:7-16 and 2:20-21). Herod killed all boys two years old and under in and around Bethlehem because the star had appeared to the magi two years previously, presumably at the moment of Jesus's birth.

**2:17-18** Once again Matthew introduces a quotation in a way that implies that the OT author (Jeremiah in this case) was used by God to proclaim his message. This was the unquestioned view among religious Jews from the day of the prophets down to Jesus's day. In v. 18 Matthew quotes Jr 31:15, which originally expressed the lament of mothers who grieved over sons who were sent into exile. Matthew's application here implies that Israel was again in exile, estranged from God, and in need of redemption. Since Jr 31 includes the weeping and then climaxes with the joyous promise that God would establish a new covenant with his people, one in which he would forgive their sins and write his law on their hearts, Matthew likely intends to call this to mind and apply it to the Bethlehem massacre and the coming of Jesus. Just as the weeping of mothers preceded the promise of the new covenant in Jr 31, so now the weeping of mothers preceded the establishment of the new covenant through Jesus (see note at 26:27-28).

**2:19** Since Herod died in 4 BC and since Jesus was born roughly two years before Herod ordered the massacre of the Bethlehem boys, it seems that Jesus was born in 5 or 6 BC. It also seems likely that the shameless Bethlehem massacre was one of Herod's final acts.

**2:20-21** The angel's words are almost identical to the words the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Ex 4:19, LXX). This allusion to the Moses narrative again identifies Jesus as the new Moses (see notes at 2:15 and 2:16). Jesus, now perhaps three years old, returns from Egypt with his family.

**2:22-23** Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, inherited his father's violent traits. His rule over Judea signaled that the holy family should settle elsewhere, and so Joseph led

his family to resettle in the obscure Galilean village of Nazareth, where Joseph and Mary had previously lived (Lk 1:26). Matthew states that the decision was a fulfillment of an OT prophecy that Messiah would be called a Nazarene. Rather than a specific OT text, Matthew was probably referring to an OT theme, the prophecies that describe the Messiah as a "branch." The term used for "branch" in Is 11:1 (netser) may be transliterated with the first three consonants (nwr) that compose the nouns "Nazareth" and "Nazarene." This messianic prophecy is closely connected to others (Is 4:2; Jr 23:5; 33:15) that told of a righteous descendant of David whose wise and just rule would be empowered by the Spirit and who would bring salvation to Judah.

**3:1** In those days means "during the time of Jesus's residence in Nazareth" rather than "during the reign of Archelaus." After all, Archelaus reigned from 4 BC to AD 6, too early for John the Baptist to have begun his ministry since he would have been under age twelve. In OT usage, "in those days" often refers to a time of prophetic fulfillment (Is 10:20; Am 9:11; Zph 1:15; Zch 12:3-4). Matthew probably used the phrase in conjunction with his references to fulfilled prophecy to emphasize that God's promises were being fulfilled through Jesus and John the Baptist, herald and predecessor of Messiah. The location of John's ministry (wilderness of Judea) is reminiscent of the ministry of the prophet Elijah (1Kg 17:3; 19:3-18; 2Kg 2:1-12), whom many Jews believed would appear again to prepare the way for Messiah (Mt 17:10-13). Josephus described John's ministry in a way that closely matches the Gospel accounts (*Ant.* 18.114-119).

**3:2** John's message focused on repentance and the coming kingdom of heaven.

saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"<sup>3</sup> For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:

**A voice of one crying out  
in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way for the Lord;  
make his paths straight!**<sup>A</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.<sup>5</sup> Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him,<sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup> When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you

to flee from the coming wrath?"<sup>8</sup> Therefore produce fruit consistent with<sup>B</sup> repentance.<sup>9</sup> And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.<sup>10</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with<sup>C</sup> water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove<sup>D</sup> his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.<sup>12</sup> His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out."

<sup>A</sup>3:3 Is 40:3 <sup>B</sup>3:8 Lit *fruit worthy of* <sup>C</sup>3:11 Or in <sup>D</sup>3:11 Or to carry

Jesus emphasized the same thing from the outset of his ministry (see note at 4:17). The kingdom is defined as the rule that God exercises through the person, work, and teachings of Jesus. The call to **repent** means we must abandon sinful lifestyles and express sorrow for sins.

**3:3** Matthew's application of Is 40:3 to John the Baptist tells us as much about Jesus as it does about John. After all, in its original context the prophecy spoke of one who prepared the way for the coming of the Lord, God himself. By using a text about the coming of the Lord to describe the coming of Jesus, Matthew proclaims that Jesus is divine.

**3:4** John's **garment** was similar to Elijah's (2Kg 1:8) and his ministry and lifestyle paralleled Elijah's also, including his residence in the Judean wilderness, his austere diet, his call for Israel to repent, and his confrontation with an evil king and his wife. Jesus explained the significance of these parallels in Mt 11:14; 17:12-13.

**3:5-6** Although Jews required Gentiles to immerse themselves in water in order to convert from paganism to Judaism, John demanded that repentant Jews be **baptized** as well. This bold move implied that Jews did not belong to God merely by virtue of their descent from Abraham (see note at vv. 7-9). Like anyone else, ethnic Jews needed to repent in order to enter the coming kingdom. Unlike the repetitive ritual washings of other religious groups, John's baptism appears to have been a one-time event associated with a permanent repentance and a transformed life.

**3:7-9** In Mt 2:4 the chief priests and scribes identified the place of Christ's birth but made no effort to visit him. Their attention was on worldly power instead. That negative portrayal is now followed by John's charge that the leading priests of the Jews were a **brood of vipers** (see 12:34; 23:33) fleeing from God's **coming**

**wrath**. The **Pharisees** were the largest and most important Jewish religious group. They controlled the synagogues and exercised great control over the population. The **Sadducees** were an aristocratic party of high priestly families. They had charge of the temple and accepted only the Pentateuch (first five books of the OT) as authoritative. John stressed that the coming kingdom would be accompanied by blessing for God's people and by punishment for the unrepentant. John knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees had no intention of confessing their sins because they presumed that descent from Abraham guaranteed that they would escape God's wrath. This belief was reflected in the Mishnah, which stated: "All Israel will have a share in the world to come." John's statement about raising up **children for Abraham from these stones** involves a wordplay in Aramaic. The word "child" (*ben*) sounds similar to the word "stone" (*eben*). A stone has no intrinsic value, yet Almighty God can transform worthless rock into a person and include him in his covenant people if he so chooses (Is 51:1-2). Consequently, descent from Abraham gave the Jews no grounds for boasting. John's warning foreshadows the incorporation of believing Gentiles into the people of God, an important theme in Matthew's Gospel.

**3:10** Just as the owner of an orchard laid **the ax** to barren trees, so too God will punish those who fail to produce "fruit consistent with repentance" (v. 8). In the teachings of John and Jesus, **fruit** represents good works that result from a miraculous inner transformation (7:15-20; 12:33; 13:23). Later, the cursing of the fig tree and the parable of the wicked tenants illustrated the consequences of failing to produce good fruits (21:18-22, 33-43).

**3:11** Removing the master's **sandals** was a task so menial that Hebrew slave owners could not require it of Hebrew slaves.

John, however, saw himself as unworthy to perform for Jesus the very task that slaves were spared from performing. John expressed this deep humility because Jesus was **more powerful** than he, and this greater power expressed itself through a new baptism that was vastly superior to John's. John's baptism was a public expression of **repentance**, but his baptism could not change a person's heart. Jesus, however, baptized the repentant **with the Holy Spirit**, making them holy through inner transformation. Matthew's quotation from Jr 31:15 in Mt 2:18 was probably intended to remind his readers of the promise of the new covenant (Jr 31:31-34). The reference to baptism with the Spirit recalls the related promise in Ezk 36:27 in which God declared, "I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances." This work of the Spirit was highlighted again at Jesus's baptism (3:16). Jesus would have the power to transform human character in a way that John could not. Jesus would also baptize people with **fire**, a reference to divine judgment against unrepentant sinners.

**3:12** A **winnowing shovel** was used to toss grain into the air. The wind would blow the useless husks (called **chaff**) aside, while the heavier grain kernels fell to the threshing floor. The chaff would then be gathered up and burned. John's parable thus described a coming divine judgment in which all people are sifted, with the result that Christ's followers will be preserved by God, while the unrepentant are gathered for punishment. Though chaff is highly flammable and burns away quickly, possibly giving the impression that divine judgment is only temporary, John made clear that the fire that awaits the unrepentant will never go out. God's punishment against unrepentant sinners is eternal.

## MARY: THE MOTHER (AND FIRST DISCIPLE) OF JESUS

Mary had a front-row seat for an unbelievable life full of amazing stories: the angel Gabriel showing up out of the blue to tell her that she, a virgin, was *pregnant* (see Lk 1:26-38)—and not just expecting, but expecting *the Son of God*; the baby's birth in an animal shed far from home (see Lk 2:1-7); the odd parade of well-wishers saying beautiful and occasionally frightening things (see Mt 2:1-12; Lk 2:8-38); the mad dash to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath (see Mt 2:13-14).

After Herod's death, Mary and her husband, Joseph, eventually returned to the land of promise and settled again in Nazareth (see Mt 2:19-23). They had other children (see Mt 13:55). But her oldest son, the one the angel had insisted they name *Jesus* (which means "the Lord saves"), was different.

When he was twelve, she watched him dumbfound the religious experts at the temple in Jerusalem (see Lk 2:41-50). When he was a young adult, she had to watch him leave home in obedience to the call that was infinitely deeper than her own fierce love.

Every veteran mom knows that parenting is a whole lifetime of learning to let go. The mother of a son knows this truth even more acutely: *I can't keep him. He has to live his life.* For Mary it was deeper and more excruciating than even that: *I can't keep him. He has to give his life.*

She was there for his first miracle—providing exquisite wine for a wedding reception in Cana of Galilee (see Jn 2:1-11). She heard the stories of his skyrocketing popularity. Perhaps for a time she thought back to the old gentleman she'd met at the temple, just eight days after Jesus's birth (see Lk 2:25-35), who had spoken of ominous things, warning of opposition to this child so intense it would pierce Mary like a sword. As public sentiment grew for Jesus to become Israel's next king (see Jn 6:15), one wonders if Mary thought, *Maybe the old man at the temple was wrong—maybe he was just a kindly old fool.*

If she had such thoughts, she was jerked back to reality when she heard the reports of her son's increasingly heated verbal confrontations with the Pharisees and scribes. Then, when someone told her the Sadducees and Sanhedrin were getting involved, she felt nauseated. Vicious political

enemies and bitter religious foes aligning in lock-step against her son? Her mother's intuition told her, *This is it; you need to be there.* So she went.

Mary was there when the Roman authorities (with the full approval of the Jewish leaders) took her oldest boy, hammered his battered and naked body to a wooden cross, and lifted him up before the mocking crowd. Helpless to do anything, she could only shake with grief as she watched his precious life ebb away. She was there when he drew his final breath.

You have to believe she was never able to forget the gruesome images of those terrible hours. You hope that somehow they paled next to that beautiful gesture by Jesus in his final moments when, from his bloody perch, he arranged for his mom's care (see Jn 19:25-27).

The Bible isn't clear if Mary was there for all the joyous confusion surrounding Jesus's resurrection, but she is mentioned a few weeks later as being with the group of disciples who were waiting in Jerusalem for the outpouring of God's Spirit.

It's worth noting that the last recorded words we have of Mary are found in John 2:5: "Do whatever he tells you." And maybe at the end of it all, that's how she would most want to be remembered—less as Jesus's loving mother and more as his obedient follower.

### TAKEAWAY

Some people incorrectly (and unhealthily) revere Mary. Others don't honor her near enough. She wasn't (and isn't) divine, but she is most definitely worth studying—and emulating.

When called as an unmarried virgin to become the mother of the Messiah (with all the difficult social implications that came with it), her response was immediate and utterly submissive: "I am the Lord's servant . . . May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

We marvel at that kind of surrender, but Mary's reply sounds an awful lot like the attitude displayed by her son Jesus when he faced his own excruciating calling. He told his Father in heaven, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Lk 22:42).

We speak of kids being like their parents. In this case, it was the other way around.



### THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup> Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized.

<sup>16</sup> When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, <sup>a</sup> and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

<sup>a</sup>3:16 Other mss omit for him <sup>b</sup>4:4 Dt 8:3

**3:13** Apparently Jesus and his family still lived in Nazareth (in Galilee) at this time.

**3:14** John tried to stop him because he recognized Jesus's superiority. By his protest John further identified Jesus as the one who would come after him (v. 11). John knew that he needed Jesus's baptism, the baptism of the Spirit, but he also understood that sinless Jesus did not seek water baptism as an expression of repentance.

**3:15** Jesus explained that baptism was essential to his perfection. Jesus wished to please his Father by obeying the commands of the prophets (John was the greatest of the prophets, 11:9-13) and by identifying with God's righteous cause among the people. If he had refused to participate in John's baptism, Jesus would have seemed like a rebel rather than one who came to fulfill all righteousness.

**3:16** The opening of the heavens demonstrates that both the voice and the descending Spirit came from heaven and were divine. First-century Jews associated the dove with the Spirit since Gn 1:2 describes the Spirit as hovering over the primeval waters. The Hebrew verb translated "hover" is the same word used to describe a bird rapidly fluttering its wings. Consequently, both the Qumran Scrolls and the Talmud associated God's Spirit in Gn 1:2 with the dove. The descent of the Spirit thus alludes to Gn 1 and identifies Jesus not only as one empowered by the Spirit but also as one who brings new creation (2Co 5:17; Gl 6:15).

**3:17** The Father speaks directly only twice in Matthew—here at Jesus's baptism and later at the transfiguration. On both occasions he identified Jesus as his Son and expressed approval of him (see 17:5). The Father's words at Jesus's baptism blend together two important OT texts: Ps 2:7 and Is 42:1. Psalm 2 was a song sung at the crowning of Israel's kings. The Father's application of this text to Jesus identified him as a divinely appointed King who would rule with divine authority

and whose kingdom would extend to the ends of the earth (Ps 2:1-12). The allusion to Is 42 identified Jesus as the Servant, the messianic figure whom Is 53:5 promised would be "pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities." Matthew 12:18-21 explicitly applies Is 42 to Jesus, and Mt 8:17 explicitly applies Is 53 to Jesus. With this OT background in mind, we see that the Father's words identify Jesus as King and Savior.

**4:1-2** The temptation of Christ highlights numerous parallels between Jesus and OT Israel. Deuteronomy 8:2-3 says that the Lord led Israel into the wilderness to be tested for forty years. Similarly, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested for forty days. The three temptations Jesus faced parallel the tests Israel faced in the wilderness, and every Scripture that Jesus quoted in response to his temptations were drawn from God's message to the Israelites about their wilderness test (Dt 6-8). Israel failed its tests, but Jesus passed his and in doing so "fulfilled all righteousness" (see Mt 3:15). Thus he is qualified to create a new spiritual Israel. Several features of Matthew confirm Jesus's intention to gather a new people for God. He chose twelve disciples to parallel Israel's twelve tribes. This was a conscious effort to identify his followers as the new Israel. The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that he was truly human as well as divine.

**4:3** The stones that littered the wilderness floor resembled small round loaves of bread in shape, size, and color. Interpreters disagree as to why it would have been wrong for Jesus to transform and eat the stones. Most suggest that he was tempted to exercise supernatural power rather than depend on God's provision. Clues in the text suggest that the Spirit, who led Jesus into the wilderness, commanded this fast. Thus, breaking the fast prematurely would have been an act of disobedience, preventing Jesus from fulfilling every act of righteousness (3:15). Jesus aimed to end his fast when the test

### THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

**4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

<sup>4</sup> He answered, "It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**"<sup>b</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written:

**He will give his angels orders concerning you,**

was over and no sooner. God would signal the end by providing food. Matthew 4:11 shows that at fast's end, angels came and "began to serve" Jesus. The verb *serve* means "to serve as a table-waiter" and implies that the angels fed Jesus. During their wilderness wanderings, Israel failed to trust God to provide food and water. Jesus, the embodiment of the new Israel, had unwavering trust in God's care. On Son of God, see note at 3:17.

**4:4** Jesus quoted Dt 8:3. His reference to every word that comes from the mouth of God recalls the OT theme that God's words are not idle but are to be received as commands. Deuteronomy 8:1,6 emphasize the need to obey God's commands, and Dt 8:1 teaches that man lives by following God's commandments just as 8:3 says that man lives by what comes from God's mouth (Dt 6:24). Thus the OT text that Jesus quoted teaches that obeying God is more important than being well-fed. Israel struggled to learn this truth (Ex 16:3; Nm 11:4-5). In contrast, Jesus hungered for righteousness more than bread and thirsted for obedience more than water. He urged his disciples to have the same priority (Mt 5:6).

**4:5-7** Satan quoted Ps 91:11-12 out of context, trying to convince Jesus that the Father would supernaturally protect him even if he gambled with his life. Jesus responded by quoting Dt 6:16 which refers to the time when Israel, angry and thirsty, questioned God's presence until he miraculously produced a stream of water from a rock: "They tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" (Ex 17:7). Had Jesus succumbed to Satan's temptation, it would indicate that his faith was frail and depended on God's miraculous action. Jumping from the pinnacle of the temple would test God by attempting to force him to perform a miracle.

Satan implied that God is trustworthy only when he rescues us from suffering and danger. Jesus knew better. God is trustworthy even when he allows us or even causes us to suffer. True faith

and they will support you  
with their hands  
so that you will not strike  
your foot against a stone."<sup>A</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Jesus told him, "It is also written: **Do not test the Lord your God.**"<sup>B</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.<sup>9</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."<sup>C</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus told him, "Go away,<sup>D</sup> Satan! For it is written: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.**"<sup>E</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

#### MINISTRY IN GALILEE

<sup>12</sup> When he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup> This

was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>15</sup> **Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,  
along the road by the sea,  
beyond the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles.**

<sup>16</sup> **The people who live in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those living in the land of the  
shadow of death,  
a light has dawned.**<sup>F,G</sup>

<sup>17</sup> From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

#### THE FIRST DISCIPLES

<sup>18</sup> As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen.

<sup>19</sup> "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for<sup>H</sup> people."<sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>A</sup>4:6 Ps 91:11-12 <sup>B</sup>4:7 Dt 6:16 <sup>C</sup>4:9 Or and pay me homage <sup>D</sup>4:10 Other mss read "Get behind me" <sup>E</sup>4:10 Dt 6:13 <sup>F</sup>4:16 Lit dawned on them <sup>G</sup>4:15-16 Is 9:1-2 <sup>H</sup>4:19 Or you fishers of

recognizes this and perseveres through hard times. When Jesus suffered on the cross (27:41-44), those who tormented him used arguments similar to that of the devil: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." They even quoted Ps 22:8 to argue that Jesus would be rescued if God really loved him, much as Satan quoted Ps 91:11-12 to argue that God would rescue Jesus from a deadly fall if he were really God's Son. Again, Jesus knew better. He trusted God even through a brutal scourging, even when nails were driven through his limbs, and even when God let him suffer a horrible death.

**4:8-9** Although Satan exercises some authority over the world (Lk 4:6; Jn 12:31), the **kingdoms of the world** belong to God, and he promised to give them to his Son (Ps 2:8).

**4:10-11** Jesus responded to Satan by quoting from Dt 6:14 and 10:20. If Jesus had worshiped Satan in order to gain worldly power, it would have indicated that he valued creation more than the Creator and the kingdoms of the earth more than the kingdom of God. Jesus insisted that **only God is worthy of worship**. After citing Dt 6:13, Jesus's reception of worship later in this Gospel (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17) without rebuking the worshiper (cp. Ac 10:25-26; 14:11-15) strongly implies his deity. That the **angels came to serve** Jesus further implies his superior status.

**4:12** John the Baptist had been **arrested** because he dared to say that Herod Antipas's marriage to his brother's wife was immoral. As tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Lk 3:1), Herod did not have juris-

diction over Judea, the locale of Jesus's baptism and wilderness temptation. Thus Jesus fearlessly marched into the heart of Herod's territory when he heard of John's arrest. In Lk 13:31-33, the Pharisees urged Jesus to leave Galilee in order to escape arrest by Herod. Jesus replied by calling Herod "that fox" and insisted that he would travel to Jerusalem only because it was necessary for him to die there, not to flee Herod. Jesus caused kings to tremble (2:3; 14:1-2), but he himself feared no man. **4:13** At this point Jesus made an important strategic move by shifting his headquarters from **Nazareth to Capernaum**. Nazareth was an obscure village, but Capernaum was a much larger fishing center on the shores of Lake Galilee. It boasted a tax collection station and a Roman garrison of at least a hundred soldiers. **By the sea** alludes to Isaiah's prophecies, which describe the area as "the way of the sea," an ancient trade route stretching from Damascus down to Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. By the time of Christ, the Romans had built a stone road along the route, allowing caravans to travel from Syria and pass through Capernaum on the way to Caesarea. Since Capernaum was on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, it also provided easy access to every other city along the Galilean coast. Thus by choosing high-traffic Capernaum as his headquarters, Jesus was able to reach many Jews and Gentiles.

**4:14-16** Matthew's quotation of Is 9:1-2 highlights the international focus of Jesus's ministry by describing Galilee as **Galilee of the Gentiles**. Second Kings

15:29 and 17:24-27 show that after the Jews were deported from the northern kingdom of Israel, foreigners flooded into Galilee. For instance, reports from the geographer Strabo and first-century Jewish historian Josephus show that Egyptians, Arabians, Phoenicians, and Greeks lived in Galilee. The Apocrypha (1 Macc 5) says Galilee's population was largely Gentile and heathen. Jesus's move to Galilee and the strategically located city of Capernaum shows his intention to save Gentiles as well as Jews. Matthew's application of Is 9 also shows that Jesus was the great King called "Mighty God" who would reign from David's throne over a universal and eternal kingdom, liberate God's people from spiritual slavery, and bring peace and joy to the world (Is 9:3-7). **4:17** The words from **then on Jesus began** to introduce the main body of Matthew's Gospel (cp. 16:21). Jesus's message was identical to the message proclaimed by John the Baptist before his arrest. This identifies Jesus as the one who came after John (3:11) whom John had identified as the Lord God himself (Is 40:3; see note at Mt 3:3).

**4:18-22** Jesus's command, **Follow me**, urged the disciples not just to accompany him on his travels but to follow his example and emulate his character. Following Jesus involved significant sacrifice for **Simon . . . Andrew . . . James, and John**. They abandoned their careers as fishermen. The words **they left . . . their father** indicate that following Jesus also required the disciples to place commitment to Jesus above commitment to their own families (10:37; 19:29).

## SIMON PETER: ORDINARY GUY, EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY

According to Matthew 4:18-20, “As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who was called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ‘Follow Me,’ he told them, ‘and I will make you fish for people!’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

The fact that Jesus directed those words to a fisherman like Simon Peter—a rough-hewn, blue-collar type with no formal religious training and no elite position in Jewish society—says a lot about Jesus. He was not the type to surround himself with arrogant, status-obsessed priests and “experts” of Old Testament law like those to whom the Jews looked for religious guidance. He chose to change the world through a different type of person.

Jesus’s call to discipleship also says something about Simon Peter. Jesus saw something in him that no one else—not even Peter himself—could see. Jesus saw Peter’s potential. He looked past his exterior, his penchant for making rash decisions and folding under pressure, and into Peter’s heart. There he saw abilities and a spirit of willingness that were valuable to him. He focused on qualities he could work with, abilities he could mold.

That first seaside encounter is perhaps the only unremarkable reference to Simon Peter in the Gospels. For better or worse, the man’s personality leaps off the page of practically every Bible story that mentions him.

Simon Peter was a complex man. He proved himself to be courageous and loyal, yet capable of stunning lapses in judgment. His mercurial nature resulted in more than a few ups and downs in his relationship with Jesus. Yet if Simon Peter seems to be on the receiving end of more than his share of divine rebukes, it may be due to the fact that he dared to risk more than his fellow disciples.

Along with James and John, Simon Peter was part of Jesus’s inner circle—the companions to whom he turned for support at critical times. Even among that trio, Simon Peter stood out. He may have been Jesus’s best friend.

The New Testament contains more information about Peter than about the other 11 disciples *combined*. According to Matthew 8:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:5, for instance, Peter had a Christian wife who assisted him in his later missionary work. The Gospels mention nothing specific about the marital status of any other apostle.

In stories involving the disciples, Simon Peter is often at the center of the action. During the precarious

crossing of the Sea of Galilee described in Matthew 14:22-32, only Simon Peter had the courage and desire to step out of the boat in the middle of a raging storm in order to walk on the water to Jesus.

When thoughts and questions occurred to him, Simon Peter didn’t spend a lot of time in deep contemplation over them. He simply blurted them out. Sometimes that earned him high praise from the Lord, as when he declared Jesus to be “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” in Matthew 16:16. Other times it put him in the proverbial doghouse, such as when he dared to object to Jesus’s prophecy of his impending death. Jesus’s sharp rebuke, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (Mt 16:23), likely affected him deeply.

Aside from Judas Iscariot, probably no other apostle experienced the kind of despair and self-loathing that Simon Peter did after he denied knowing Jesus three times on the night the Lord was arrested and put on trial.

Yet Simon Peter didn’t stay down for long. After Jesus’s resurrection, he seized an opportunity to make amends with Jesus and restore their relationship. From that point on, the man was virtually unstoppable as a driving force in the first-century Christian movement. He fulfilled the destiny Jesus laid out for him in Matthew 16:18: “I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.”

Simon Peter boldly proclaimed Jesus’s message throughout the Jewish world—and later throughout the Gentile world—until his own death. According to church tradition, Simon Peter was crucified upside down because he didn’t believe he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

### THE TAKEAWAY

Simon Peter serves as a mirror for Christians who read the Gospels and the book of Acts. His decisions are relatable. His human nature is all too recognizable. His boldness and his cowardice touch our hearts.

In Peter, Christians can see their potential. For all his bluster, confusion, wrongheadedness, and mistakes, the man was deemed useful—even essential—by the Son of God. Jesus looked past his dross and saw the gold, just as he does for anyone who follows him. If you ever feel unworthy in your walk with Christ, look to the apostle Peter for inspiration.

<sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

### TEACHING, PREACHING, AND HEALING

<sup>23</sup> Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every<sup>a</sup> disease and sickness<sup>b</sup> among the people. <sup>24</sup> Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics,

and the paralytics. And he healed them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

**5** When he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then<sup>c</sup> he began to teach them, saying:

#### THE BEATITUDES

- <sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.  
<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>a</sup>4:23 Or every kind of <sup>b</sup>4:23 Or physical ailment <sup>c</sup>5:2 Lit Then opening his mouth

**4:23** Jesus’s ministry in the **synagogues** shows that he initially focused his ministry on the Jewish population of Galilee, but this focus then widened to include Gentiles from there and beyond. The **good news of the kingdom**, the primary topic of Jesus’s preaching, was that the long-awaited Christ, the human ruler through whom God would establish his reign on earth, had come at last. This was the message proclaimed by John the Baptist (3:2), preached by Jesus (4:17), and emphasized by Matthew through his mention of Jesus’s Davidic lineage, the account of his miraculous birth, and his record of the visit of the magi. Jesus healed **every disease and sickness among the people**. The adjective “every” shows that no type of ailment was beyond Jesus’s power to heal. In the Greek text, the adjective “every” is repeated, placing emphasis on Jesus’s unlimited power to heal (9:35). **4:24** **Syria** was located just north of Galilee. Not surprisingly, word of Jesus’s healings quickly **spread** to that region, crossing geographical and language barriers. Soon Syrians began bringing their sick for Jesus to heal. By consenting to this, Jesus distinguished himself from some later Jewish interpreters who urged Jews to give no aid to a drowning Gentile or a Gentile woman giving birth (Maimonides). Matthew says Jesus healed **demon-possessed** people, but some scholars argue that these people were just epileptics. However, this verse distinguishes epilepsy from demon possession, which proves that the ancients differentiated between the two conditions.

**4:25** Jesus’s earliest followers hailed from Jewish and Gentile regions. **Jerusalem** and **Judea** were Jewish regions, **Galilee** had a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, and **the Decapolis** was a group of predominantly Gentile cities. These geographical references and the diverse peoples entailed by them demonstrate Jesus’s desire to serve, heal, teach, and save all the nations of the earth (28:18-20). He came as the world’s Messiah.

**5:1-2** Jesus ascended a mountain **when he saw the crowds** because he deemed the mountainside to be a better setting for teaching a large group. As the new Moses, his delivery of God’s message from a mountaintop provides yet another parallel with the ancient Moses. The Greek words translated **he went up on the mountain** are used three times in the Greek OT (Ex 19:3; 24:18; 34:42), and all three fall in the section describing Moses’s ascent of Mount Sinai. This fits with Matthew’s repeated theme of drawing out parallels between Moses and Jesus. For instance, Jesus’s birth paralleled several events surrounding Moses’s birth. Herod attempted to kill the infant Christ by ordering the slaughter of Bethlehem’s boys (Mt 2:16-18) much as Pharaoh ordered the execution of newborn male Israelites (Ex 1:15-18,22). Furthermore, the angel’s pronouncement that danger had passed (“those who intended to kill the child are dead,” Mt 2:20) is a clear echo of Ex 4:19, “All the men who wanted to kill you are dead” (see note at Mt 2:15).

**5:3** Since Matthew introduces the Sermon on the Mount by highlighting the connection between Jesus and Moses, the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) should probably be read against the backdrop of Moses’s teachings. The only time the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the OT) used the adjective “Blessed” (Gk *makarios*) to translate Moses’s words was in his blessing on Israel (Dt 33:29): “How happy [or “blessed”] you are, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is the shield that protects you, the sword you boast in. Your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread on their backs.” Israel’s blessing had both a historical and future focus. “Saved by the LORD” referred to Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The remainder of the blessing assured the Israelites of success in their conquest of the promised land. Against this backdrop, the blessings of the new Moses identify Jesus’s disciples as the new Israel who will enjoy a new exodus and conquest. The new Moses is

a spiritual deliverer rather than a political one, and his promises must be understood in that light. In the Beatitudes, the new Moses pronounces spiritual salvation (exodus from slavery to sin) and promises spiritual victory (conquest and inheritance of a new promised land) to the new Israel. This background is confirmed by the allusion to Israel’s exodus and conquest in the promise that the meek will “inherit the earth” (5:5).

In the OT, the **poor** were those who cried out for God’s help, depended entirely on him for their needs, had a humble and contrite spirit, experienced his deliverance, and enjoyed his undeserved favor (Ps 86:1-5). In light of this background, Jesus was describing his disciples as unworthy sinners who depend on God’s grace for salvation. Although the promises in Mt 5:4-9 are expressed in the future tense, the affirmation **the kingdom of heaven is theirs** is in the present tense (5:3,10). This suggests that the kingdom had already arrived through the coming of Jesus but that the fulfillment of many kingdom promises will occur only in the future. This future fulfillment awaits Christ’s second coming. The statement “the kingdom of heaven is theirs” appears at the beginning and end of the main body of the Beatitudes (5:3,10). This bracketing device suggests that the Beatitudes constitute promises only to those who belong to the kingdom. Isaiah 61:1 promised that Messiah would bring good news to the poor. This beatitude serves as a fulfillment of that prophecy (Lk 4:16-21).

**5:4** This beatitude is also dependent on Is 61: “He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted . . . to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion; to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, festive oil instead of mourning, and splendid clothes instead of despair” (vv. 1-3). The context of Is 61 portrays mourning as expressive of Israel’s sorrow over the exile that their sins had caused. In this light, Mt 5:4 expresses the grief of those suffering the consequences of sin. Theirs is an attitude of repentance.