

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW



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Chapter 1

Gospel of St. Matthew

The position of the Gospel according to Matthew as the first of the four gospels in the New Testament reflects both the view that it was the first to be written, a view that goes back to the late second century AD, and the esteem in which it was held by the church; no other was so frequently quoted in the non-canonical literature of earliest Christianity. Although the majority of scholars now reject the opinion about the time of its composition, the high estimation of this work remains. The reason for that becomes clear upon study of the way in which Matthew presents his story of Jesus, the demands of Christian discipleship, and the breaking-in of the new and final age through the ministry but particularly through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The gospel begins with a narrative prologue (Matthew 1:1-2:23), the first part of which is a genealogy of Jesus starting with Abraham, the father of Israel (Matthew 1:1-17). Yet at the beginning of that genealogy Jesus is designated as “the son of David, the son of

Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). The kingly ancestor who lived about a thousand years after Abraham is named first, for this is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the royal anointed one (Matthew 1:16). In the first of the episodes of the infancy narrative that follow the genealogy, the mystery of Jesus’ person is declared. He is conceived of a virgin by the power of the Spirit of God (Matthew 1:18-25). The first of the gospel’s fulfillment citations, whose purpose it is to show that he was the one to whom the prophecies of Israel were pointing, occurs here (Matthew 1:23): he shall be named Emmanuel, for in him God is with us.

The announcement of the birth of this newborn king of the Jews greatly troubles not only King Herod but all Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1-3), yet the Gentile magi are overjoyed to find him and offer him their homage and their gifts (Matthew 2:10-11). Thus his ultimate rejection by the mass of his own people and his acceptance by the Gentile nations is foreshadowed. He must be taken to Egypt to escape the murderous plan of Herod. By his sojourn there and his subsequent return after the king’s death he relives the Exodus experience of Israel. The words of the Lord spoken through the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” are fulfilled in him (Matthew 2:15); if Israel was God’s son, Jesus is so in a way far surpassing the dignity of that nation, as his marvelous birth and the unfolding of his story show (see Matthew 3:17; 4:1-11; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16; 27:54). Back in the land of Israel, he must be taken to Nazareth in Galilee because of the danger to his life in Judea, where Herod’s son Archelaus is now ruling (Matthew 2:22-23). The sufferings of Jesus in the infancy narrative anticipate those of his passion, and if his life is spared in spite of the dangers, it is because his destiny is finally to give it on the cross as “a ransom for many” (20, 28). Thus the word of the angel will be fulfilled, “. . . he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21; cf Matthew 26:28).

In Matthew 4:12 Matthew begins his account of the ministry of Jesus, introducing it by the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12), the baptism of Jesus that culminates in God’s proclaiming him his “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:13-17), and the temptation in which he proves his true sonship by his victory over the devil’s attempt to deflect him from the way of obedience to the Father (Matthew 4:1-11). The central message of Jesus’ preaching is the

coming of the kingdom of heaven and the need for repentance, a complete change of heart and conduct, on the part of those who are to receive this great gift of God (Matthew 4:17). Galilee is the setting for most of his ministry; he leaves there for Judea only in Matthew 19:1, and his ministry in Jerusalem, the goal of his journey, is limited to a few days (Matthew 21:1-25:46).

In this extensive material there are five great discourses of Jesus, each concluding with the formula “When Jesus finished these words” or one closely similar (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These are an important structure of the gospel. In every case the discourse is preceded by a narrative section, each narrative and discourse together constituting a “book” of the gospel. The discourses are, respectively, the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:3-7:27), the missionary discourse (Matthew 10:5-42), the parable discourse (Matthew 13:3-52), the “church order” discourse (Matthew 18:3-35), and the eschatological discourse (Matthew 24:4-25:46). In large measure the material of these discourses came to Matthew from his tradition, but his work in modifying and adding to what he had received is abundantly evident. No other evangelist gives the teaching of Jesus with such elegance and order as he.

Canonicity

The earliest Christian communities looked upon the books of the Old Testament as Sacred Scripture, and read them at their religious assemblies. That the Gospels, which contained the words of Christ and the narrative of His life, soon enjoyed the same authority as the Old Testament, is made clear by Hegesippus (Eusebius, *Church History* IV.22.3), who tells us that in every city the Christians were faithful to the teachings of the law, the prophets, and the Lord. A book was acknowledged as canonical when the Church regarded it as Apostolic, and had it read at her assemblies. Hence, to establish the canonicity of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we must investigate primitive Christian tradition for the use that was made of this document, and for indications proving that it was regarded as Scripture in the same manner as the Books of the Old Testament.

The first traces that we find of it are not indubitable, because post-Apostolic writers quoted the texts with a certain freedom, and principally because it is difficult to say whether the passages thus

quoted were taken from oral tradition or from a written Gospel. The first Christian document whose date can be fixed with comparative certainty (95-98), is the Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians. It contains sayings of the Lord which closely resemble those recorded in the First Gospel (Clement, 16:17 = Matthew 11:29; Clem, 24:5 = Matthew 13:3), but it is possible that they are derived from Apostolic preaching, as, in chapter xiii, 2; we find a mixture of sentences from Matthew, Luke, and an unknown source. Again, we note a similar commingling of Evangelical texts elsewhere in the same *Epistle of Clement*, in the Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles, in the Epistle of Polycarp, and in Clement of Alexandria. Whether these texts were thus combined in oral tradition or emanated from a collection of Christ's utterances, we are unable to say.

³⁵₁₇ The Epistles of St. Ignatius (martyred 110-17) contain no literal quotation from the Holy Books; nevertheless, St. Ignatius borrowed expressions and some sentences from Matthew ("Ad Polyc.", 2:2 = Matthew 10:16; "Ephesians", 14:2 = Matthew 12:33, etc.). In his "Epistle to the Philadelphians" (v, 12), he speaks of the Gospel in which he takes refuge as in the Flesh of Jesus; consequently, he had an evangelical collection which he regarded as Sacred Writ, and we cannot doubt that the Gospel of St. Matthew formed part of it.

³⁵₁₇ In the Epistle of Polycarp (110-17), we find various passages from St. Matthew quoted literally (12:3 = Matthew 5:44; 7:2 = Matthew 26:41, etc.).

³⁵₁₇ The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles (*Didache*) contains sixty-six passages that recall the Gospel of Matthew; some of them are literal quotations (8:2 = Matthew 6:7-13; 7:1 = Matthew 28:19; 11:7 = Matthew 12:31, etc.).

³⁵₁₇ In the so-called Epistle of Barnabas (117-30), we find a passage from St. Matthew (xxii, 14), introduced by the scriptural formula, *os gegraptai*, which proves that the author considered the Gospel of Matthew equal in point of authority to the writings of the Old Testament.

³⁵₁₇ The "Shepherd of Hermas" has several passages which bear close resemblance to passages of Matthew, but not a single literal quotation from it.

³⁵₁₇ In his "Dialogue" (xcix, 8), St. Justin quotes, almost literally, the prayer of Christ in the Garden of Olives, in Matthew 26:39-40.

³⁵₁₇ A great number of passages in the writings of St. Justin recall the Gospel of Matthew, and prove that he ranked it among the Memoirs of the Apostles which, he said, were called Gospels (I Apol., lxvi), were read in the services of the Church (ibid., i), and were consequently regarded as Scripture.

³⁵₁₇ In his *Plea for the Christians* 12.11, Athenagoras (177) quotes almost literally sentences taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44).

³⁵₁₇ Theophilus of Antioch (Ad Autol., III, xiii-xiv) quotes a passage from Matthew (v, 28, 32), and, according to St. Jerome (In Matt. Prol.), wrote a commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew.

³⁵₁₇ We find in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs - drawn up, according to some critics, about the middle of the second century - numerous passages that closely resemble the Gospel of Matthew (Test. Gad, 5:3; 6:6; 5:7 = Matthew 18:15, 35; Test. Joshua 1:5, 6 = Matthew 25:35-36, etc.), but Dr. Charles maintains that the Testaments were written in Hebrew in the first century before Jesus Christ, and translated into Greek towards the middle of the same century. In this event, the Gospel of Matthew would depend upon the Testaments and not the Testaments upon the Gospel. The question is not yet settled, but it seems to us that there is a greater probability that the Testaments, at least in their Greek version, are of later date than the Gospel of Matthew; they certainly received numerous Christian additions.

³⁵₁₇ The Greek text of the Clementine Homilies contains some quotations from Matthew (Hom. 3:52 = Matthew 15:13); in Hom. xviii, 15, the quotation from Matthew 13:35, is literal.

³⁵₁₇ Passages which suggest the Gospel of Matthew might be quoted from heretical writings of the second century and from apocryphal gospels - the Gospel of Peter, the *Protoevangelium* of James, etc., in which the narratives, to a considerable extent, are derived from the Gospel of Matthew.

³⁵₁₇ Tatian incorporated the Gospel of Matthew in his "Diatesseron"; we shall quote below the testimonies of Papias and St. Irenæus.

For the latter, the Gospel of Matthew, from which he quotes numerous passages, was one of the four that constituted the quadriform Gospel dominated by a single spirit.

³⁵ Tertullian (Adv. Marc., IV, ii) asserts that the “*Instrumentum evangelicum*” was composed by the Apostles, and mentions Matthew as the author of a Gospel (De carne Christi, xii).

³⁷ Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* III.13) speaks of the four Gospels that have been transmitted, and quotes over three hundred passages from the Gospel of Matthew, which he introduces by the formula, *en de to kata Matthaion euaggelio* or by *phesin ho kurios*.

It is unnecessary to pursue our inquiry further. About the middle of the third century, the Gospel of Matthew was received by the whole Christian Church as a divinely inspired document, and consequently as canonical. The testimony of Origen (“In Matt.,” quoted by Eusebius, *Church History* III.25.4), of Eusebius (op. cit., III, xxiv, 5; xxv, 1), and of St. Jerome (“De Viris Ill.,” iii, “Prolog. in Matt.,”) are explicit in this respect. It might be added that this Gospel is found in the most ancient versions: Old Latin, Syriac, and Egyptian. Finally, it stands at the head of the Books of the New Testament in the Canon of the Council of Laodicea (363) and in that of St. Athanasius (326-73), and very probably it was in the last part of the Muratorian Canon. Furthermore, the canonicity of the Gospel of St. Matthew is accepted by the entire Christian world.

Authorship of the First Gospel

The question of authenticity assumes an altogether special aspect in regard to the First Gospel. The early Christian writers assert that St. Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew; this Hebrew Gospel has, however, entirely disappeared, and the Gospel which we have, and from which ecclesiastical writers borrow quotations as coming from the Gospel of Matthew, is in Greek. What connection is there between this Hebrew Gospel and this Greek Gospel, both of which tradition ascribes to St. Matthew? Such is the problem that presents itself for solution. Let us first examine the facts.

Date and place of composition

Ancient ecclesiastical writers are at variance as to the date of the composition of the First Gospel. Eusebius (in his Chronicle),

Theophylact, and Euthymius Zigabenus are of opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was written eight years, and Nicephorus Callistus fifteen years, after Christ’s Ascension - i.e. about A.D. 38-45. According to Eusebius, Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew when he left Palestine. Now, following a certain tradition (admittedly not too reliable), the Apostles separated twelve years after the Ascension, hence the Gospel would have been written about the year 40-42, but following Eusebius (*Church History* III.5.2), it is possible to fix the definitive departure of the Apostles about the year 60, in which event the writing of the Gospel would have taken place about the year 60-68. St. Irenæus is somewhat more exact concerning the date of the First Gospel, as he says: “Matthew produced his Gospel when Peter and Paul were evangelizing and founding the Church of Rome, consequently about the years 64-67.” However, this text presents difficulties of interpretation which render its meaning uncertain and prevent us from deducing any positive conclusion.

In our day opinion is rather divided. Catholic critics, in general, favour the years 40-45, although some (e.g. Patrizi) go back to 36-39 or (e.g. Aberle) to 37. Belser assigns 41-42; Conély, 40-50; Schafer, 50-51; Hug, Reuschl, Schanz, and Rose, 60-67. This last opinion is founded on the combined testimonies of St. Irenæus and Eusebius, and on the remark inserted parenthetically in the discourse of Jesus in chapter xxiv, 15: “When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place”: here the author interrupts the sentence and invites the reader to take heed of what follows, viz.: “Then they that are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains.” As there would have been no occasion for a like warning had the destruction of Jerusalem already taken place, Matthew must have written his Gospel before the year 70 (about 65-70 according to Batiffol). Protestant and Liberalistic critics also are greatly at variance as regards the time of the composition of the First Gospel. Zahn sets the date about 61-66, and Godet about 60-66; Keim, Meyer, Holtzmann (in his earlier writings), Beyschlag, and Maclean, before 70, Bartiet about 68-69; W. Allen and Plummer, about 65-75; Hilgenfeld and Holtzmann (in his later writings), soon after 70; B. Weiss and Harnack, about 70-75; Renan, later than 85, Réville, between 69 and 96, Jülicher, in 81-96, Montefiore, about 90-100, Volkmar, in 110; Baur, about 130-34. The following are

some of the arguments advanced to prove that the First Gospel was written several years after the Fall of Jerusalem. When Jesus prophesies to His Apostles that they will be delivered up to the councils, scourged in the synagogues, brought before governors and kings for His sake; that they will give testimony of Him, will for Him be hated and driven from city to city (x, 17-23) and when He commissions them to teach all nations and make them His disciples, His words intimate, it is claimed, the lapse of many years, the establishment of the Christian Church in distant parts, and its cruel persecution by the Jews and even by Roman emperors and governors. Moreover, certain sayings of the Lord—such as: “Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church” (16:18), “If he [thy brother] will not hear them: tell the Church” (xviii, 10) - carry us to a time when the Christian Church was already constituted, a time that could not have been much earlier than the year 100. The fact is, that what was predicted by Our Lord, when He announced future events and established the charter and foundations of His Church, is converted into reality and made coexistent with the writing of the First Gospel. Hence, to give these arguments a probatory value it would be necessary either to deny Christ’s knowledge of the future or to maintain that the teachings embodied in the First Gospel were not authentic.

Examination of the Greek Gospel of St. Matthew

Our chief object is to ascertain whether the characteristics of the Greek Gospel indicate that it is a translation from the Aramaic or that it is an original document; but, that we may not have to revert to the peculiarities of the Gospel of Matthew, we shall here treat them in full.

St. Matthew used about 1475 words, 137 of which are *apax legomena* (words used by him alone of all the New Testament writers). Of these latter 76 are classical; 21 are found in the Septuagint; 15 (*battologeîn biastes, eunouchizeîn* etc.) were introduced for the first time by Matthew, or at least he was the first writer in whom they were discovered; 8 words (*aphedon, gamizeîn*, etc.) were employed for the first time by Matthew and Mark, and 15 others (*ekchunesthai, epiusios*, etc.) by Matthew and another New Testament writer. It is probable that, at the time of the Evangelist, all these words were in current use. Matthew’s Gospel contains many

peculiar expressions which help to give decided colour to his style. Thus, he employs thirty-four times the expression *basileia ton ouranon*; this is never found in Mark and Luke, who, in parallel passages, replace it by *basileia tou theou*, which also occurs four times in Matthew. We must likewise note the expressions: *ho pater ho epouranios, ho en tois ouranois, sunteleia tou alonos, sunairein logon, eipein ti kata tinos, mechri tes semeron, poiesai os, osper, en ekeino to kairo, egeiresthai apo*, etc. The same terms often recur: *tote* (90 times), *apo tote, kai idou* etc. He adopts the Greek form *Ierisiluma* for Jerusalem, and not *Ierousaleu*, which he uses but once. He has a predilection for the preposition *apo*, using it even when Mark and Luke use *ek*, and for the expression *uios David*. Moreover, Matthew is fond of repeating a phrase or a special construction several times within quite a short interval (cf. ii, 1, 13, and 19; iv, 12, 18, and v, 2; viii, 2-3 and 28; ix, 26 and 31; xiii, 44, 45, and 47, etc.). Quotations from the Old Testament are variously introduced, as: *outos, kathos gegraptai, ina, or opos, plerothe to rethen uto Kuriou dia tou prophetou*, etc. These peculiarities of language, especially the repetition of the same words and expressions, would indicate that the Greek Gospel was an original rather than a translation, and this is confirmed by the paronomasiæ (*battologeîn, polulogia; kophontai kai ophontai*, etc.), which ought not to have been found in the Aramaic, by the employment of the genitive absolute, and, above all, by the linking of clauses through the use of *men . . . oe*, a construction that is peculiarly Greek. However, let us observe that these various characteristics prove merely that the writer was thoroughly conversant with his language, and that he translated his text rather freely. Besides, these same characteristics are noticeable in Christ’s sayings, as well as in the narratives, and, as these utterances were made in Aramaic, they were consequently translated; thus, the construction *men . . . de* (except in one instance) and all the examples of paronomasia occur in discourses of Christ. The fact that the genitive absolute is used mainly in the narrative portions only denotes that the latter were more freely translated; besides, Hebrew possesses an analogous grammatical construction. On the other hand, a fair number of Hebraisms are noticed in Matthew’s Gospel (*ouk eginosken auten, omologesei en emoi, el exestin, ti emin kai soi*, etc.), which favour the belief that the original was Aramaic. Still, it remains to be proved that these Hebraisms are not colloquial Greek expressions.

General character of the Gospel

Distinct unity of plan, an artificial arrangement of subject-matter, and a simple, easy style - much purer than that of Mark - suggest an original rather than a translation. When the First Gospel is compared with books translated from the Hebrew, such as those of the Septuagint, a marked difference is at once apparent. The original Hebrew shines through every line of the latter, whereas, in the First Gospel Hebraisms are comparatively rare, and are merely such as might be looked for in a book written by a Jew and reproducing Jewish teaching. However, these observations are not conclusive in favour of a Greek original. In the first place, the unity of style that prevails throughout the book would rather prove that we have a translation. It is certain that a good portion of the matter existed first in Aramaic - at all events, the sayings of Christ and thus almost three-quarters of the Gospel. Consequently, these at least the Greek writer has translated. And, since no difference in language and style can be detected between the sayings of Christ and the narratives that are claimed to have been composed in Greek, it would seem that these latter are also translated from the Aramaic. This conclusion is based on the fact that they are of the same origin as the discourses. The unity of plan and the artificial arrangement of subject-matter could as well have been made in Matthew's Aramaic as in the Greek document; the fine Greek construction, the lapidary style, the elegance and good order claimed as characteristic of the Gospel, are largely a matter of opinion, the proof being that critics do not agree on this question. Although the phraseology is not more Hebraic than in the other Gospels, still it not much less so. To sum up, from the literary examination of the Greek Gospel no certain conclusion can be drawn against the existence of a Hebrew Gospel of which our First Gospel would be a translation; and inversely, this examination does not prove the Greek Gospel to be a translation of an Aramaic original.

Quotations from the Old Testament

It is claimed that most of the quotations from the Old Testament are borrowed from the Septuagint, and that this fact proves that the Gospel of Matthew was composed in Greek. The first proposition is not accurate, and, even if it were, it would not necessitate this conclusion. Let us examine the facts. As established by Stanton ("The

Gospels as Historical Documents", II, Cambridge, 1909, p. 342), the quotations from the Old Testament in the First Gospel are divided into two classes. In the first are ranged all those quotations the object of which is to show that the prophecies have been realized in the events of the life of Jesus. They are introduced by the words: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet," or other similar expressions. The quotations of this class do not in general correspond exactly with any particular text. Three among them (ii, 15; viii, 17; xxvii, 9, 10) are borrowed from the Hebrew; five (ii, 18; iv, 15, 16; xii, 18-21; xiii, 35; xxi, 4, 5) bear points of resemblance to the Septuagint, but were not borrowed from that version. In the answer of the chief priests and scribes to Herod (ii, 6), the text of the Old Testament is slightly modified, without, however, conforming either to the Hebrew or the Septuagint. The Prophet Micheas writes (5:2): "And thou Bethlehem, Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda"; whereas Matthew says (ii, 6): "*And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda*". A single quotation of this first class (iii, 3) conforms to the Septuagint, and another (i, 23) is almost conformable. These quotations are to be referred to the first Evangelist himself, and relate to facts, principally to the birth of Jesus (i, ii), then to the mission of John the Baptist, the preaching of the Gospel by Jesus in Galilee, the miracles of Jesus, etc. It is surprising that the narratives of the Passion and the Resurrection of Our Lord, the fulfillment of the very clear and numerous prophecies of the Old Testament should never be brought into relation with these prophecies. Many critics, e.g. Burkett and Stanton, think that the quotations of the first class are borrowed from a collection of Messianic passages, Stanton being of opinion that they were accompanied by the event that constituted their realization. This "catena of fulfillments of prophecy", as he calls it, existed originally in Aramaic, but whether the author of the First Gospel had a Greek translation of it is uncertain. The second class of quotations from the Old Testament is chiefly composed of those repeated either by the Lord or by His interrogators. Except in two passages, they are introduced by one of the formula: "It is written"; "As it is written"; "Have you not read?" "Moses said". Where Matthew alone quotes the Lord's words, the quotation is sometimes borrowed from the Septuagint (v, 21 a, 27, 38), or, again, it is a free translation which we

are unable to refer to any definite text (v, 21 b, 23, 43). In those Passages where Matthew runs parallel with Mark and Luke or with either of them, all the quotations save one (xi, 10) are taken almost literally from the Septuagint.

Analogy to the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke

From a first comparison of the Gospel of Matthew with the two other Synoptic Gospels we find

- ³⁵₁₇ That 330 verses are peculiar to it alone; that it has between 330 and 370 in common with both the others, from 170 to 180 with Mark's, and from 230 to 240 with Luke's;
- ³⁵₁₇ That in like parts the same ideas are expressed sometimes in identical and sometimes in different terms; that Matthew and Mark most frequently use the same expressions, Matthew seldom agreeing with Luke against Mark. The divergence in their use of the same expressions is in the number of a noun or the use of two different tenses of the same verb. The construction of sentences is at times identical and at others different.
- ³⁵₁₇ That the order of narrative is, with certain exceptions which we shall later indicate, almost the same in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- ³⁵₁₇ That Mark is to be found almost complete in Matthew, with certain divergences which we shall note;
- ³⁵₁₇ That Matthew records many of our Lord's discourses in common with Luke;
- ³⁵₁₇ That Matthew has special passages which are unknown to Mark and Luke.

Let us examine these three points in detail, in an Endeavour to learn how the Gospel of Matthew was composed.

(a) Analogy to Mark

- ³⁵₁₇ Mark is found complete in Matthew, with the exception of numerous slight omissions and the following pericopes: Mark 1:23-28, 35-39; 4:26-29; 7:32-36; 8:22-26; 9:39-40; 12:41-44. In all, 31 verses are omitted.
- ³⁵₁₇ The general order is identical except that, in chapters 5-13, Matthew groups facts of the same nature and sayings conveying the same

ideas. Thus, in Matthew 8:1-15, we have three miracles that are separated in Mark; in Matthew 8:23-9:9, there are gathered together incidents otherwise arranged in Mark, etc. Matthew places sentences in a different environment from that given them by Mark. For instance, in 5:15, Matthew inserts a verse occurring in Mark 4:21, that should have been placed after 13:23, etc.

- ³⁵₁₇ In Matthew the narrative is usually shorter because he suppresses a great number of details. Thus, in Mark, we read: "And the wind ceased: and there was made a great calm", whereas in Matthew the first part of the sentence is omitted. All unnecessary particulars are dispensed with, such as the numerous picturesque features and indications of time, place, and number, in which Mark's narrative abounds.
- ³⁵₁₇ Sometimes, however, Matthew is the more detailed. Thus, in 12:22-45, he gives more of Christ's discourse than we find in Mark 3:20-30, and has in addition a dialogue between Jesus and the scribes. In chapter 13, Matthew dwells at greater length than Mark 4 upon the object of the parables, and introduces those of the cockle and the leaven, neither of which Mark records. Moreover, Our Lord's apocalyptic discourse is much longer in Matthew 24-25 (97 verses), than in Mark 13 (37 verses).
- ³⁵₁₇ Changes of terms or divergences in the mode of expression are extremely frequent. Thus, Matthew often uses *eutheos*, when Mark has *euthus*; *men . . . de*, instead of *kai*, as in Mark, etc.; the aorist instead of the imperfect employed by Mark. He avoids double negatives and the construction of the participle with *eimi*; his style is more correct and less harsh than that of Mark; he resolves Mark's compound verbs, and replaces by terms in current use the rather unusual expressions introduced by Mark, etc.
- ³⁵₁₇ He is free from the lack of precision which, to a slight extent, characterizes Mark. Thus, Matthew says "the tetrarch" and not "the king" as Mark does, in speaking of Herod Antipas; "on the third day" instead of "in three days". At times the changes are more important. Instead of "Levi, son of Alphaeus," he says: "a man named Matthew"; he mentions two demoniacs and two blind persons, whereas Mark mentions only one of each, etc.

³⁵ Matthew extenuates or omits everything which, in Mark, might be construed in a sense derogatory to the Person of Christ or unfavorable to the disciples. Thus, in speaking of Jesus, he suppresses the following phrases: “And looking round about on them with anger” (Mark 3:5); “And when his friends had heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him. For they said: He is beside himself” (Mark 3:21), etc. Speaking of the disciples, he does not say, like Mark, that “they understood not the word, and they were afraid to ask him” (ix, 3 1; cf. viii, 17, 18); or that the disciples were in a state of profound amazement, because “they understood not concerning the loaves; for their heart was blinded” (vi, 52), etc. He likewise omits whatever might shock his readers, as the saying of the Lord recorded by Mark: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (ii, 27). Omissions or alterations of this kind are very numerous. It must, however, be remarked that between Matthew and Mark there are many points of resemblance in the construction of sentences (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Matthew 26:47 = Mark 14:43, etc.); in their mode of expression, often unusual. and in short phrases (Matthew 9:16 = Mark 2:21; Matthew 16:28 = Mark 9:1; Matthew 20:25 = Mark 10:42); in some pericopes, narratives, or discourses, where the greater part of the terms are identical (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 26:36-38 = Mark 14:32-34; Matthew 9:5-6 = Mark 2:9-11), etc.

(b) *Analogy to Luke*

A comparison of Matthew and Luke reveals that they have but one narrative in common, viz., the cure of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13 = Luke 7:1-10). The additional matter common to these Evangelists, consists of the discourses and sayings of Christ. In Matthew His discourses are usually gathered together, whereas in Luke they are more frequently scattered. Nevertheless, Matthew and Luke have in common the following discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7, the Sermon in the Plain, Luke 6); the Lord’s exhortation to His disciples whom He sends forth on a mission (Matthew 10:19-20, 26-33 = Luke 12:11-12, 2-9); the discourse on John the Baptist (Matthew 11 = Luke 7); the discourse on the Last Judgment (Matthew 24; Luke 17). Moreover, these two Evangelists possess in common a large number of detached sentences, e.g.,

Matthew 3:7b-19:12 = Luke 3:7b-9, 17; Matthew 4:3-11 = Luke 4:3-13; Matthew 9:37-38 = Luke 10:2; Matthew 12:43-45 = Luke 11:24-26 etc. (cf. Rushbrooke, “Synopticon”, pp. 134-70). However, in these parallel passages of Matthew and Luke there are numerous differences of expression, and even some divergences in ideas or in the manner of their presentation. It is only necessary to recall the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12 = Luke 6:20b-25): in Matthew there are eight beatitudes, whereas in Luke there are only four, which, while approximating to Matthew’s In point of conception, differ from them in general form and expression. In addition to having in common parts that Mark has not, Matthew and Luke sometimes agree against Mark in parallel narratives. There have been counted 240 passages wherein Matthew and Luke harmonize with each other, but disagree with Mark in the way of presenting events, and particularly in the use of the same terms and the same grammatical emendations. Matthew and Luke omit the very pericopes that occur in Mark.

Destination of the Gospel

The ecclesiastical writers Papias, St. Irenæus, Origen, Eusebius, and St. Jerome, whose testimony has been given above (II, A), agree in declaring that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Jews. Everything in this Gospel proves that the writer addresses himself to Jewish readers. He does not explain Jewish customs and usages to them, as do the other Evangelists for their Greek and Latin readers, and he assumes that they are acquainted with Palestine, since, unlike St. Luke he mentions places without giving any indication of their topographical position. It is true that the Hebrew words, *Emmanuel*, *Golgotha*, *Eloi*, is translated, but it is likely that these translations were inserted when the Aramaic text was reproduced in Greek. St. Matthew chronicles those discourses of Christ that would interest the Jews and leave a favourable impression upon them. The law is not to be destroyed, but fulfilled (v, 17). He emphasizes more strongly than either St. Mark or St. Luke the false interpretations of the law given by the scribes and Pharisees, the hypocrisy and even the vices of the latter, all of which could be of interest to Jewish readers only. According to certain critics, St. Irenæus (Fragment xxix) said that Matthew wrote to convert the Jews by proving to them that Christ was the Son of David. This interpretation is badly founded. Moreover,

Origen (In Matt., i) categorically asserts that this Gospel was published for Jews converted to the Faith. Eusebius (*Church History* III.24) is also explicit on this point, and St. Jerome, summarizing tradition, teaches us that St. Matthew published his Gospel in Judea and in the Hebrew language, principally for those among the Jews who believed in Jesus, and did not observe even the shadow of the Law, the truth of the Gospel having replaced it (In Matt. Prol.). Subsequent ecclesiastical writers and Catholic exegetes have taught that St. Matthew wrote for the converted Jews. “However,” says Zahn (Introd. to the New Testament, II, 562), “the apologetical and polemical character of the book, as well as the choice of language, make it extremely probable that Matthew wished his book to be read primarily by the Jews who were not yet Christians. It was suited to Jewish Christians who were still exposed to Jewish influence, and also to Jews who still resisted the Gospel”.

Contents of the First Gospel

The author did not wish to compose a biography of Christ, but to demonstrate, by recording His words and the deeds of His life, that He was the Messiah, the Head and Founder of the Kingdom of God, and the promulgator of its laws. One can scarcely fail to recognize that, except in a few parts (e.g. the Childhood and the Passion), the arrangement of events and of discourses is artificial. Matthew usually combines facts and precepts of a like nature. Whatever the reason, he favours groups of three (thirty-eight of which may be counted) - three divisions in the genealogy of Jesus (i, 17), three temptations (iv, 1-11), three examples of justice (vi, 1-18), three cures (viii, 1-15), three parables of the seed (xiii, 1-32), three denials of Peter (xxvi, 69-75), etc.; of five (these are less numerous) - five long discourses (v-vii, 27; x; xiii, 1-52; xviii; xxiv-xxv), ending with the same formula (*Kai egeneto, ote etelesen ho Iesus*), five examples of the fulfillment of the law (v, 21-48), etc.; and of seven - seven parables (xiii), seven maledictions (xxiii), seven brethren (xxii, 25), etc. The First Gospel can be very naturally divided as follows:-

1) Introduction (1-2)

The genealogy of Jesus, the prediction of His Birth, the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, the Massacre of the Innocents, the return to Nazareth, and the life there.

2) The public ministry of Jesus (3-25)

This may be divided into three parts, according to the place where He exercised it.

A) In Galilee (3-18)

(a) Preparation for the public ministry of Jesus (3:1 to 4:11)

³⁵₁₇ John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, the Temptation, the return to Galilee.

(b) The preaching of the Kingdom of God (4:17 to 18:35)

1. The preparation of the Kingdom by the preaching of penance, the call of the disciples, and numerous cures (iv, 17-25), the promulgation of the code of the Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount (v, I-vii, 29);

2. The propagation of the Kingdom in Galilee (viii, I-xviii, 35). He groups together:

³⁵₁₇ the deeds by which Jesus established that He was the Messiah and the King of the Kingdom: various cures, the calming of the tempest, missionary journeys through the land, the calling of the Twelve Apostles, the principles that should guide them in their missionary travels (viii, 1-x, 42);

³⁵₁₇ various teachings of Jesus called forth by circumstances: John's message and the Lord's answer, Christ's confutation of the false charges of the Pharisees, the departure and return of the unclean spirit (xi, 1-xii, 50);

³⁵₁₇ finally, the parables of the Kingdom, of which Jesus makes known and explains the end (xiii, 3-52).

3) Matthew then relates the different events that terminate the preaching in Galilee: Christ's visit to Nazareth (xiii, 53-58), the multiplication of the loaves, the walking on the lake, discussions with the Pharisees concerning legal purifications, the confession of Peter at Cæsarea, the Transfiguration of Jesus, prophecy regarding the Passion and Resurrection, and teachings on scandal, fraternal correction, and the forgiveness of injuries (xiv, 1-xviii, 35).

B) Outside Galilee or the way to Jerusalem (19-20)

Jesus leaves Galilee and goes beyond the Jordan; He discusses divorce with the Pharisees; answers the rich young man, and teaches self-denial and the danger of wealth; explains by the parable of the labourers how the elect will be called; replies to the indiscreet question of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and cures two blind men of Jericho.

C) In Jerusalem (21-25)

Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem; He curses the barren fig tree and enters into a dispute with the chief priests and the Pharisees who ask Him by what authority He has banished the sellers from the Temple, and answers them by the parables of the two sons, the murderous husbandmen, and the marriage of the king's son. New questions are put to Jesus concerning the tribute, the resurrection of the dead, and the greatest commandment. Jesus anathematizes the scribes and Pharisees and foretells the events that will precede and accompany the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

3) The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus (26-28)

A) The Passion (26-27)

Events are now hurrying to a close. The Sanhedrin plots for the death of Jesus, a woman anoints the feet of the Lord, and Judas betrays his Master. Jesus eats the pasch with His disciples and institutes the Eucharist. In the Garden of Olives, He enters upon His agony and offers up the sacrifice of His life. He is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. Peter denies Christ; Judas hangs himself. Jesus is condemned to death by Pilate and crucified; He is buried, and a guard is placed at the Sepulchre (xxvi, 1-xxvii, 66).

B) The Resurrection (28)

Jesus rises the third day and appears first to the holy women at Jerusalem, then in Galilee to His disciples, whom He sends forth to propagate throughout the world the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 2

Judaism and Torah in the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew is a Gospel of Law and differs radically from Paul's epistles which are based of Faith. The intrinsic difference between these lies in the fact that Paul's audiences were Gentiles whereas Matthew was preaching to Jewish believers-in-Jesus and was faced with competition by the developing Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism at that juncture in history differed significantly from that practiced by the Qumran Community and by the Sadducees; both largely destroyed in the Roman War.

In order to place the Gospel of Matthew in an historical perspective one must understand the context in which it was composed (80-90 CE). The Temple had been destroyed and Jews had began their rejection of sectarianism. Believers-in-Jesus were being rejected by Rabbinic Judaism and had begun the path towards a Gentile religion. Matthew's position *vis a vis* the Law is a most controversial issue among theologians. Was Matthew Jewish or Gentile? Did he preach to Jews or

to Gentiles? Does the anti-Judaism sections found in Matthew suggest that he was preaching against the Jews? Some scholars believe he was a Jew himself (W.D. Davies & H.D. Hummel), some have concluded that he came from Qumran (K. Stendahl) while others that he was a Gentile (G. Strecker & J. Meier). I find most compelling the argument that Matthew and his community were composed of Jewish believers-in-Jesus which competing with the traditional Synagogue as stated by Anthony Saldarini and J. Andrew Overman convincing. Matthew appears to be preaching to those believing in Jewish law and custom and his style of argumentation bears much resemblance to Jewish modes of thought and argument.

In the Gospel of Matthew it is clear that the Law - Halakha - is the expression of God's will. The Law of Moses is still in force (Matt. 23:3) but Jesus is the new teacher of the law (Matt. 23:8). Jesus assumed for the Matthean community a stance parallel and equal to Moses for the Jews. In the Gospel of Matthew there is no denigration of Moses - in stark contrast to the Gospel of John. Moses, the giver of the law, is a figure of great importance for Matthew. Many parallels are explicitly drawn by Matthew between Moses and Jesus; danger from death at the hand of Pharaoh and Jesus from Herod, both live in exile in Egypt, Moshe's forty years in the desert is compared to Jesus' forty days of temptation and both ascend the mountain in order to proclaim the law.

As Eusebius stated 'no one but our savior can be shown to resemble Moses in so many ways'. More than sixty quotations from the scriptures times appear in Matthew. In chapter 3 we compared Jesus statements to similar ones of Hillel; all these Jesus statements come from Matthew. (Luke twice seems to copy Matthew's quotes). The law in Matthew's Gospel is in fact stricter than that of Moses. It is not Pharisaic law that is being criticized but the ethics and hypocrisy of individual Pharisees. David Flusser has noted that 'All the motifs of Jesus' famous invective against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 are also found in rabbinical literature'.

Matthew (and Mark) claims that the Pharisees not only criticized Jesus for having performed healing on the Sabbath but weighed the option of having him executed with the help of Herod Antipas (Mark 3:6, Matt 12:14). In Luke, after the event of delivering the curing of

the Sabbath, it is the Pharisees who warn Jesus of Herod's plan to kill him (Luke 13:31). Mark and Matthew may have been referring to the followers of Shammai who opposed healing on the Sabbath and Luke to the followers of Hillel who did not.

Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew stated a ringing affirmation of the law. "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 5:17-19)

These verses are an unambiguous statement about the importance of the Law. There is a statement in the Talmud which seems to quote Jesus 'I come neither to destroy the Law of Moses nor to add to the Law of Moses' (BT Shabbat 116b This, of course is almost a quote of Matthew's phrase from above.

Matthew's definition of Jesus' Law is defined in chapters 5-7, beginning with the 'Sermon on the Mount'. The Sermon of the Mount (5:3-11) begins with a statement about the blessedness of the poor, the gentle, the mourners and the righteous. This ethical statement which reminds the people to act righteously towards the underprivileged is highly reminiscent of the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Matthew then proceeds to introduce stringent appendices to the Law:

- ❖ The Torah commands Do not murder - Matthew orders do not be angry - 5:21
- ❖ The Torah commands Do not commit adultery - Matthew orders not even in your heart - 5:27
- ❖ The Torah allows divorce under several conditions - Matthew rules No divorce except in the case of adultery - 5:31
- ❖ The Torah says fulfill your vows - Matthew says do not make vows - 5:33

❖ The Torah says Love your neighbor - Matthew says Love your enemies - 5:43 - offer no resistance to the wicked and offer the other cheek - 5:39. (Matthew's statement that Judaism teaches 'hate your enemy' (Matt. 5:43) in fact appears no Jewish text.)

Each of these statements by Matthew (with the exception of 'hate your enemy') can be found in the multi-faceted streams of Judaism that existed during the lifetime of Jesus.

A Rabbinic statement declares 'Keep aloof from what leads to sin and from whatever resembles sin'. Furthermore what does the commandment 'do not covet' imply? If you covet your neighbor's wife and act upon it you have committed adultery. As an example we find in the Talmud the following statement: "Whoever looks lustfully at a woman is like one who has had unlawful intercourse with her". (*BT Yoma* 29a)

If one covets one's neighbor's house and acts upon it he has stolen. What therefore is the sin of coveting? Is it not that lust itself and anger itself are sins in and of themselves? Can Jesus' statement 'love your enemies' be interpreted as referring to Rome, the premier Jewish enemy at the time and can it mean do not resist the Roman enemy? The statement which many Jews reject as being specifically Christian 'love your enemy' has many Jewish underpinnings: Lamentations states that one should 'offer one's cheek to the striker' (Lam. 3:30). Despite the hostility of sinners in the Qumran community David Flusser discovered in their documents 'I will not return evil to anybody, good will I will pursue'. The Essene Manuel of Discipline states 'My son, Be not angry for anger leads to murder'... Be not lustful, for lust leads to adultery'. And from the Testament of Benjamin 'If one betrays a righteous man, the righteous man prays'.

The conflict surrounding plucking and eating on the Sabbath or healing on the Sabbath, issues which were greatly debated in this gospel, are also lie within the acceptable range of interpretations found in the many sides of Judaism in the first century. Jews are forbidden to go hungry on the Sabbath (although it can depend on the degree of hunger) and if one is hungry one would be allowed to pluck. In regard to healing on the Sabbath when Jesus said to the man with a withered hand "hold out your hand" (Matt. 12:13) he did nothing to violate

Jewish law. Speaking or asking God to heal is not a violation of any Jewish law on the Sabbath. There is nothing in Jesus' position, as announced by Matthew, regarding the Sabbath suggesting abrogating the law. Furthermore questions about circumcision or dietary are not raised in Matthew in contrast to the Gospel of Mark (chapter 7). Jesus is fact behaving in ways similar to the Prophets who criticized sacrificing and the Temple. He concentrated on the ethical content of Judaism rather than ritual law. Divorce was forbidden to community of Qumran and among Galilean Jews.

The anti-Judaic statements of the Gospel of Matthew begin in chapter 10 and continue in chapter 15, 22, 23 and 27. In chapter 10 Jesus warns his disciples that they will find hostility within the Jewish community when they attempt to missionize them. Jesus is clear 'do not travel to into Gentile lands and do not enter any Samaritan cities' (Matt. 10:5). In view of the above it appears unlikely that Jesus would say after his resurrection 'you are to go and make followers of all the people. You are to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19). Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew told his followers not to go and preach to Gentiles. The phrase 'in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' came in a later stage of Christology, not during the lifetime of Jesus.

Chapter 23 begins with recognition of both the scribes and Pharisees authority to interpret the law. 'Do and observe what they tell you'. (23:2) the gospel proceeds to list the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in seven categories. They are accused of being blind guides and fools (five times -16, 17, 19, 24, 26) being liars (18) of being corrupt and lawless men (25, 28) and of committing murder (29-39). This vitriolic list of those who have the authority to interpret the law, suggests a family feud or sibling rivalry carried to an unfortunate extreme. Jesus also tells us that the Pharisees 'sit in Moses' seat: you must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practice what they preach' (Mt. 23:2-3). Jesus required of his disciples that they exceed that of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20).

What do other Jewish writers tell us, in the first Century of Jewish intramural conflict?

I *Enoch*, an apocalyptic mystical writer said the following: “For the sinners shall alter the word of truth and many sinners will take it to heart: they will speak evil words and lie and they will invent fictitious stories and write out my scriptures on the basis of their own words.” (104:10). the writer of I Enoch and his community believed that sinners do not follow the law instead they lead people astray. The Scriptures are known only by the righteous and wise men of that community.

The writer of the *Psalms of Solomon* believed that false and lawless leaders had corrupted and defiled the Temple. They break the law (4:1), misuse it (4:2) and are hypocrites. (4:8, 22; 8:9) Only the faithful remain true to God’s law (14:1-2) and the devout few will inherit life (14:10)

The Qumran community led by the Teacher of Righteousness fought a man called in the texts a ‘Wicked Priest’, who was probably the High Priest in Jerusalem. The ‘Wicked Priest’ persecuted him and may have killed him. The ‘Teacher’ is also called the ‘interpreter of the law’ and their Halakha - their law - was quite different than pharisaical Halakha. Their solar based calendar made all holidays fall on different days than the traditional Jewish lunar calendar. This difference in calendars is more important than any of the disputes discussed in the Christian Bible since it meant that communal life between the two groups was impossible. The Teacher’s knowledge of the end of days would make him, at the least, a special Prophet. His community was persecuted by the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They called the Pharisees ‘seekers of falsehood’.

All of these groups of Jews believed themselves to be true heirs of God’s word. They also all agreed that the Jewish establishment leadership was corrupt and they alone represented the remnant following God’s law. They were very hostile to the Jewish leadership.

Finally in chapter 27, after Pilate washes his hands the Jewish crowd is reported to have said ‘every one of them’ [?] says ‘His [Jesus’] blood be on us and on our children’. (27:25) this statement redacted by Matthew 50-60 years after Jesus’ death is not mentioned in any of the other Gospels. It may be that the words ‘on us’ and the ‘on our children’ came from different periods in the life of the Matthew church. It is certainly problematic that Jews would put this curse

upon themselves. From the perspective of preaching to future generations this may be the most anti-Judaic statement in the Christian Bible. ‘The main theme in religious hostility towards Jews has been that they are under a curse’. ‘This passage has been taken as proof that the Jews voluntarily accepted eternal guilt for the death of Jesus’.

Can a text be simultaneously being considered the most anti-Jewish and the most Jewish at the same time? This question has been raised in the Gospel of Matthew (as well as in the Gospel of John). Part of the answer depends of the definition of the question. Anti-Judaism can be defined as an internal critique as used by Biblical prophets – Jeremiah and Ezekiel as prime examples. Anti-Judaism can also be defined from a Jewish-Christian perspective – it is still an internal critique. Gentile anti-Judaism can no longer be called an internal critique but an external polemic that removes Jews from salvation history and substitutes Jews for a New or True Israel, thus having Christianity supercede Judaism. As Levine notes if Jackie Mason, the Jewish comedian (who is also a Rabbi) directed his material towards African-Americans or Richard Pryor, the African-American directed his material towards Jews it could not be called an internal critique. Given that Matthew’s Gospel is a Gospel of Law – of Halakhic law – this polemic was a ‘family argument’ – a civil war. Civil wars are the most acrimonious of all wars. Matthew does not refer to a New or True Israel as does John. Can one be both polemical and respectful? George Smiga who calls Matthew’s texts a ‘subordinating polemic’ states ‘I am persuaded that such a combinations fits the text of Matthews rather well’. Whether Matthew was Jewish may be debatable; however that he acted against the traditional synagogue is beyond doubt. The Synagogue hypocrites (Matt. 6:2, 5) ‘have no synoptic parallels’. He preached to Jewish Christians (note his continual use of the Bible, used however through his Christological lenses) who were leaving the synagogue (Matt. 10:17). But does this not suggest that the ‘Parting of the Way’ had already begun? Begun Yes, completed no.

Saldarini concludes his study of the Gospel of Matthew’s with the words ‘it seems clear that he sees himself and his group as part of Israel and that he hopes to attract members of the larger Jewish community to his form of Judaism’.

The Jews as a nation were rejected because of their sins, and were to have no part in the Kingdom of Heaven. This rejection had been several times predicted by the prophets, and St. Matthew shows that it was because of its incredulity that Israel was excluded from the Kingdom, he dwells on all the events in which the increasing obduracy of the Jewish nation is conspicuous, manifested first in the princes and then in the hatred of the people who beseech Pilate to put Jesus to death. Thus the Jewish nation itself was accountable for its exclusion from the Messianic kingdom.

Universal proclamation of the Gospel

That the pagans were called to salvation instead of the Jews, Jesus declared explicitly to the unbelieving Israelites: “Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof” (xxi, 43); “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. And the field is the world” (xiii, 37-38). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come” (xxiv, 14). Finally, appearing to His Apostles in Galilee, Jesus gives them this supreme command: “All power is given to me in heaven and in earth, going therefore, teach ye all nations” (xxviii 18, 19). These last words of Christ are the summary of the First Gospel. Efforts have been made to maintain that these words of Jesus, commanding that all nations be evangelized, were not authentic, but in a subsequent paragraph we shall prove that the entire Lord’s sayings, recorded in the First Gospel, proceed from the teaching of Jesus.

Chapter 3

Christology of the First Gospel

Immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, Peter preached that Jesus, crucified and risen, was the Messiah, the Saviour of the World, and proved this assertion by relating the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord. This was the first Apostolic teaching, and was repeated by the other preachers of the Gospel, of whom tradition tells us that Matthew was one. This Evangelist proclaimed the Gospel to the Hebrews and, before his departure from Jerusalem, wrote in his mother tongue the Gospel that he had preached. Hence the aim of the Evangelist was primarily apologetic. He wished to demonstrate to his readers, whether these were converts or still unbelieving Jews, that in Jesus the ancient prophecies had been realized in their entirety. This thesis includes three principal ideas:

³⁵₁₇ Jesus is the Messiah, and the kingdom He inaugurates is the Messianic kingdom foretold by the prophets;

³⁵₁₇ Because of their sins, the Jews, as a nation, shall have no part in this kingdom

³⁵₁₇ The Gospel will be announced to all nations, and all are called to salvation.

Jesus: The Messiah

St. Matthew has shown that in Jesus the entire ancient prophecies on the Messias were fulfilled. He was the Emmanuel, born of a Virgin Mother (1:22-23), announced by Isaias (7:14); He was born at Bethlehem (ii, 6), as had been predicted by Micheas (v, 2), He went to Egypt and was recalled thence (ii, 15) as foretold by Osee (11:1). According to the prediction of Isaias (40:3), He was heralded by a precursor, John the Baptist (iii, 1 sqq.); He cured all the sick (viii, 16 so.), that the Prophecy of Isaias (53:4) might be fulfilled; and in all His actions He was indeed the same of whom this prophet had spoken (xiii, 1). His teaching in parables (13:3) was conformable to what Isaias had said (6:9). Finally, He suffered, and the entire drama of His Passion and Death was a fulfilment of the prophecies of Scripture (Isaiah 53:3-12; Psalm 21:13-22). Jesus proclaimed Himself the Messias by His approbation of Peter's confession (16:16-17) and by His answer to the high priest (26:63-64). St. Matthew also endeavours to show that the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ is the Messianic Kingdom. From the beginning of His public life, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (4:17); in the Sermon on the Mount He promulgates the charter of this kingdom, and in parables He speaks of its nature and conditions. In His answer to the envoys of John the Baptist Jesus specifically declares that the Messianic Kingdom, foretold by the Prophets, has come to pass, and He describes its characteristics: "The blind see, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them." It was in these terms, that Isaias had described the future kingdom (35:5-6). St. Matthew records a very formal expression of the Lord concerning the coming of the Kingdom: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (xii, 28). Moreover, Jesus could call Himself the Messias only inasmuch as the Kingdom of God had come.

Jesus: The New Moses

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the New Moses, begins by identifying Jesus as 'the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matthew 1:1), thus indicating his Davidic/royal and Abrahamic/Jewish heritage, respectively. Throughout this Gospel, Matthew also presents Jesus as 'the New Moses' for the people of Israel."¹ Interestingly, recent research has discovered that the name "Moses" is actually an

Egyptian name that means "Child of God."² "Admittedly, the name 'Moses' is not directly used in a Christological Title, nor can Jesus be called the 'Son of Moses,' since Jesus belongs to the Tribe of Judah, while Moses belongs to the Tribe of Levi. ... However, Jesus is portrayed as being very similar to Moses in several interesting and significant ways:

1. Just as Pharaoh (the King of Egypt ca. 1300 BC) killed all the baby boys of the Hebrews, and only Moses is saved (Exod 1:22 – 2:10), so also Herod (the King of Israel at the birth of Jesus) kills all the male babies in Bethlehem, and only Jesus is saved (Matt 2:13-18).
2. When Moses' life is in danger, he flees from Egypt to Israel, but returns to Egypt after many years (Exod 2:15; 7:6-7); when Jesus' life is in danger, he takes the reverse itinerary: from Israel to Egypt and later back to Israel (Matt 2:13-21).
3. Just as Moses goes up to a mountain to receive the Law (incl. the Ten Commandments) from God (Exod 19:3), so also Jesus goes up to a mountain to give a new Law (incl. the Nine Beatitudes) to the people (Matt 5:1)."³ The Historical Jesus XIV: The Gospel of Matthew Page 1 of 3 "Through blood Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Through blood Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant." "Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a great teacher, prophet and lawgiver, equal to or even greater than Moses."
4. Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant . . . that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words' [Exodus 24:8]. . . . Through blood Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Through blood Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant."
5. Just as Moses does not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights while on the mountain, recording God's Law (Exod 34:28), so also Jesus fasts for forty days and forty nights in the desert, being tempted by Satan (Matt 4:2)."
6. Just as the lawgiver, at the close of his life, commissioned Joshua both to go into the land peopled by foreign nations and to observe all the commandments in the law, and then further promised his

successor God's abiding presence, so similarly Jesus: at the end of his earthly ministry he told his disciples to go into all the world and teach observance of all the commandments uttered by the new Moses; and then he promised his abiding presence."

7. "Tradition tells that [at Moses' death] the angels mourned, the heavens were shaken, lightnings flashed, and a heavenly voice spoke... [So] several strange things happened... when Jesus died. The sun went dark ([Matthew] 27:45). Then the temple veil was rent (27:51). Then the earth quake (27:51). And then the dead rose up (27:52-53)."
8. Just as Moses was thought to have written the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut), so also the teaching of Jesus is contained in five speeches or extended 'discourses' in Matthew (ch. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 22-25).
9. Overall, Moses was considered the greatest teacher, prophet and lawgiver in the Hebrew Bible (and throughout the NT); so also Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's Gospel as a great teacher, prophet and lawgiver, equal to or even greater than Moses."

Other Christological titles in Matthew

Jesus is addressed by a number of titles in Matthew. These include 'Son of David', 'Son of God', 'Rabbi' (only the once in Matthew in 26.25, but compare Mark 9.5; 11.21; 14.45) and 'Teacher' (didaskalos - 8.19; 12.38; 19.16; 22.16, 24, 36). He spoke of Himself almost exclusively, (but not totally so), as 'the Son of Man', an expression which in the Gospels is only found on His lips, apart from Luke 24.7; John 12.34 where words of Jesus are specifically cited. Matthew also clearly emphasizes His kingship.

The Greek word 'Teacher' is the equivalent of the Aramaic 'Rabbi' (23.8; John 1.38), and very much has in mind a similar teaching function (10.24). But while using it of outsiders, when translating 'Rabbi', Matthew never has didaskalos on the lips of a disciple, preferring 'Lord' (kurios) or the original 'Rabbi' (but the latter only the once). Didaskalos is, however, so used in the other Gospels (Mark 4.38; 9.38; 10.35; 13.1; Luke 7.40; 21.7, (although Luke preferred epistata, 'master'); John 1.38; 8.4; 13.13; 20.16). In this regard 'Lord' (kurios) could have a number of meanings ranging from a description of God

Himself as 'Lord of all' to an address of reverence and submission to a prophet, to simply indicating 'Rabbi' or 'Sir'. The disciples' use was probably nearer to signifying 'Master' (compare Luke's regular use of epistata), and even 'Rabbi', while the use by outsiders (although not always) was mainly a respectful and somewhat awed address to a prophetic figure. There can, however, be no doubt that Matthew himself regularly intends his readers to see an even higher significance behind 'Lord', especially when it is related to some important miracle (e.g. the series in 8.2, 5, 8, 21, 25).

Son of David

Matthew opens his Gospel by stressing that Jesus is the Son of David (1.1), and makes clear that he means this to be taken literally, for he depicts Him as being descended from the royal house of David, and speaks of an angel who describes Jesus' adoptive father as the son of David (1.20). Indeed it is because He was a son of David that His birth could be traced to Bethlehem (2.4-5). Nor is there any real reason to doubt the genuineness of the genealogy, a good part of which is taken from the Old Testament, (see especially 1 Chronicles).

There are good historical reasons for recognising that genuine genealogies of the Davidic descent were known at the time, for we know that in secular history they were appealed to by others to 'justify' their own descent, (although not always genuinely), and the Romans took an interest in the question because they saw the danger of such ancestors of David causing trouble. All knew that the Jews were looking forward to a descendant of David to deliver them from the Romans (Psalms of Solomon 17.23-48). Indeed we are told that the grandsons of Judas, Jesus' brother, were arraigned before Domitian for that very reason and admitted their Davidic ancestry, only to be dismissed with contempt because their gnarled hands and peasant appearance revealed them to be mere sons of the soil. Similarly Simeon, a relative of Jesus, and successor to James as leading elder of the Jerusalem community, was denounced as being of David's line and was crucified. And there is some evidence that each of the emperors Vespasian, Domitian and Trajan carried out an extermination policy against all those of Davidic descent, who were clearly therefore traceable, and were seen as a hotbed of troublemakers. There is no reason to doubt any of these stories. Nor did the Jews, even when it

would have been very advantageous for them to be able to do so, ever question the facts behind the claim that Jesus was descended from David. And this was simply because they knew that it could be backed up by evidence.

Furthermore we must remember that to the Jews the maintenance of lines of descent of people with important privileges was seen as important. Those who wanted the privilege of supplying wood to the altar had to justify their pure descent from the right families, and pure ancestry had also to be evidenced in order for people to enjoy certain civic rights, and to take up certain public offices. The most important positions were regularly taken up only by full Israelites of pure ancestry, especially membership of the Sanhedrin, or of local 'sanhedrins'. Furthermore any woman wanting to marry into a priestly family had to produce evidence of purity of descent going back five generations. And all families who saw themselves as of pure descent sought to ensure inter-marriage with others of pure descent. By this they considered that they remained true sons of Abraham (theoretically), and there was a strong belief among them that this ensured their future salvation. So genealogies were taken very seriously. It must therefore be accepted as quite certain that such an important descent as that of David's heirs would have been preserved assiduously. All this is confirmed by the fact that Herod the Great, piqued because he had no such ancestry as these 'pure Jews', is reputed to have set about destroying public genealogical records.

This idea of Jesus as 'the Son of David' is then linked by Jesus Himself, towards the end of His life, with the Messiah (22.42 compare 2.4-5), although in that case as greater than David. It had already in fact been so linked in the Psalms of Solomon 27. 23, 'Behold O lord, and raise up to them their king, the Son of David' (in order to obtain freedom from the Romans and subsequent worldwide power). The implication in Matthew that Jesus was the Messiah is therefore made quite clear by this title, even though it was not a commonly used Messianic title as far as we know. Yet we cannot doubt that it certainly did lie behind the whole idea of the popular Messiah, for he was undoubtedly to be of Davidic descent, (although certain special sects had varying ideas also about a priestly Messiah).

Matthew, however, also records other uses of the term 'Son of David' by a variety of people. 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; 20.30-31; 21.9; 1.14-15.

While the examples are so few that dogmatism must be ruled out, the continual connection of the title 'son of David' with the healing of the blind and devil-possessed, when seen in the light of Solomon's undoubted reputation in the latter field (even if it was only legendary) must surely be seen as significant to say the least. It might very well suggest the idea that the title 'the son of David' was at that time seen as in some way very much related to such healings, so that as a prominent Son of David Jesus could be expected, even by foreigners, to provide a similar remedy from the God of Israel. (For Solomon as specifically 'the son of David' see 1 Chronicles 29.22; 2 Chronicles 1.1; 13.6; 30.26; 35.3; Proverbs 1.1, and consider the use of 'the Son of David' in the Psalms of Solomon 27.23 as indicating Solomon's coming heir).

³⁵/₁₇ With others 'Son of David' would, of course, have had significance because of its Messianic associations. Healing was not a prominent aspect in popular Jewish hopes concerning the Messiah as we know them, nor indeed for that matter was the title Son of David. Nevertheless the latter was certainly, as we have seen, used as such in the Psalms of Solomon (1st century BC) and Jesus certainly expected that such healings would convince John that He was the Coming One (11.5). This latter was presumably mainly in the light of Isaiah 29.18; 32.3; 35.5; 42.7, 16; 61.1-2; Jeremiah 31.8.

We should also perhaps note that Jesus mentions the healing of the blind first (followed by the lame) when sending His message to John. This might suggest that He knew that in certain circles among the pious Jews this healing of the blind was something which would be especially expected of the Messiah as a part of His overall 'salvation' (Luke 1.77; compare Matthew 9.12). See also John 9.26-32; 10.21; 11.37 for the impact caused by opening blind eyes. We actually know very little about the beliefs of the common people in Palestine at the time apart from what we find in the Gospels, and that is especially true of the spiritual remnant.

Furthermore these ideas might have been especially enhanced in people's minds in the light of the fact that kings were regularly

superstitiously connected by the common people with healing powers (compare 2 Chronicles 30.18-20; Malachi 4.2 contrast Zechariah 11.16), as were prophets. (Compare how in more superstitious days, people even believed this healing power to be true of Kings of England). And in the case of Israel we might have expected it especially to have been so as their kings were seen as the anointed of God, and as intercessory priests after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110.4; Jeremiah 30.21; 2 Chronicles 32.20). Such powers might well therefore have especially been seen as applying to a 'son of David' who was so clearly approved of God.

So the use of the term 'Son of David' in cases where it was used by those seeking healing and the casting out of evil spirits, is very much explicable in terms of the above environment and expectancies of Jesus' day, not so much as a Messianic title but as one connecting Him with Solomon. But it would then certainly help many to link Jesus with the Messiah as the successor to Solomon and as Son of David supreme as revealed by His mighty works, and we may thus see why Matthew took up their usage of the term in order to confirm Who Jesus was. Mark and Luke would not be so interested in it (they both only mention one such incident, and that for another purpose). To most Gentile readers there would be no such background to the idea of 'the Son of David'.

Son of God

This title also was not a recognised Messianic title, even though kings of Israel/Judah were seen as adopted sons of God. But the idea is present through the voices after His baptism and at the Transfiguration (3.17; 17.5). Jesus, however, rarely used it of Himself (John 9.35-37; 11.4) but clearly admitted to it on the lips of Satan (4.3, 6; Luke 4.3, 9); evil spirits (8.29; compare Mark 3.11; 5.7; Luke 4.41; 8.28) those awed at His awesome powers (14.33); and Peter (16.16). It was also hurled at Him by the chief priests (26.63; 27.40, 43; Mark 14.61; Luke 22.70), who claimed that He spoke of Himself as such (27.43), and it was then guardedly acknowledged by Him (Luke 22.70). It was finally used by a number present at the cross, including the centurion in charge of the execution party, in the light of awesome signs that they had seen (27.54; Mark 15.39). Thus in Matthew, apart from when used by His enemies, it was used by others at times of 'other worldly' significance, either in confrontation with those

connected with such a world (Satan, evil spirits), or in a voice from God or after the revelation of awesome power. Luke also has the equivalent used by an angel (Luke 1.32). It must therefore be seen as signifying more than the popular idea of the Messiah, that is, as signifying Someone of even more unique significance, Someone greater than Satan, Someone on the divine side of reality.

In John's Gospel John the Baptist bears witness to Him as the Son of God as a result of the signs following His baptism (1.34), and Nathaniel also sees Him as 'the Son of God and the King of Israel' following Jesus' reading of his mind (1.49). The former use witnesses to John's supernatural understanding, the latter at least to Jesus' Messiahship and possibly more (see also John 11.27), for he may well have seen Jesus' ability to know his thoughts as having a divine source. To the Apostle John, not to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God would result in final condemnation (3.18). For only those who hear His voice speaking out on the day of resurrection will rise at the last day (5.25).

As a result of the great miracle wrought on him Jesus calls on the former blind man to acknowledge Him as the Son of God (9.35-37 - note again the connection with the blind). For He is the Son of God as the One Whom God had set apart in holiness and sent into the world (10.36). Through the raising from the dead of Lazarus the Son of God will be glorified (John 11.4). In all this the title is firmly connected with supernatural events. It is probable therefore that we must read that into John 11.27, and that Martha's Messianic expectation was to be seen as exceptional. Indeed the main reason for the antipathy of the Jewish leaders was His claim to be the Son of God (19.7), and that they saw that as signifying more than the Messiah comes out in their charge. It was not a crime in Jewish eyes to claim to be the Messiah. But it was a crime to claim to be the Son of God. So they knew what He meant.

The Son of Man

The phrase 'the Son of Man' in the Gospels is found only on the lips of Jesus, apart from two instances, one where His own words are being cited by an angel (Luke 24.7) and the other where He is being questioned about His use of the title (John 12.34). Outside the Gospels it is used of Jesus in His glorified state in both Acts 7.56

(with the article) and Revelation 1.13; 14.14 (without the article). The idea that such a limited use, both in the narrative of the Gospels, and in the letters of the Apostles, could have been maintained had the title been in general use is unlikely to say the least. It is clear that it was seen as exclusive to Jesus. This was possibly because the early church did not understand it, and yet used it when referring to words of Jesus because they were faithful to His words. It may also possibly be because it would have had the wrong significance to Gentiles with no background in the Old Testament Scriptures. It would seem that they did not take it up and use it themselves because it would simply have caused problems to those who heard it, while by this stage there was no problem with calling Him 'the Christ'.

Its use in the Gospels in this form (by Aramaic speakers), and with the article, points to a recognition that it had a unique meaning, and that the unusual use was deliberate. Any attempt to arrive back at the 'original Aramaic' stumbles at that stumblingstone. Why should Aramaic speakers translate a well known phrase in a way other than in terms of what they knew it to mean? So we have really no idea what Aramaic expression Jesus used that would produce this translation 'the Son of Man'. It is not the natural translation for *bar nasha* and yet it is noteworthy that it was nevertheless agreed by all the evangelists. So any attempt to defend any Aramaic expression which does not explain this phenomenon simply suffers from being the result of the 'bias' of its inventor. If we are not careful we can invent what we think that He should have said, and then argue as though He had said it. It is, of course, true that at times when in one Gospel 'the Son of Man' is used, another replaces it by a personal pronoun, but that indicates no more than an attempt to make what is said clear to the reader. It is not necessarily saying that the one is the equivalent of the other, nor that the term 'the Son of Man' has been introduced by one of the writers. In fact it is more probable the other way. The clarification is far more likely than the making obscure.

We can, however, discover an approximation of what it would have been from considering its possible sources. But the problem then is that in no case is it translated in LXX by using the article. There is therefore no precise parallel in LXX and we must therefore beware of simply assuming direct connection. The case is not the same. The connection must rather therefore be in idea. Its possible sources may be seen as:

³⁵₁₇ Its use in Psalm 8.4, 'what is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you visit him?' Here 'son of man' equates with man, but it is extremely doubtful if we could therefore translate it in the Psalm as 'The Son of Man', and in LXX it is without the article. The idea in the Psalm is mainly of the weakness and relative unimportance of man in the scheme of things. He cannot compete with the heavens. It is, however, then emphasized that he is not as lowly as it seems because God has given him dominion over all living creatures. This is what was originally involved in being 'human', both connection with the heavenly and dominion over the beasts (Genesis 1.26-28).

³⁵₁₇ Its use in Ezekiel (2.1 and often) where it is the expression regularly used by God with which to address Ezekiel, with a similar idea to Psalm 8 in mind. Again in LXX it is without the article. It reminds him that he is creaturely, and that God is God. And yet there is in its relatively unique use the recognition that Ezekiel is His chosen one from among men, and represents His people before Him.

³⁵₁₇ Its use in Daniel 7, again in LXX without the article. Here its significance is a little more complicated. We have here a vision in which four beasts arise which represent kings who are over 'world empires' (7.17). The idea is that these kings behave like wild beasts, rampaging around with their armies generally and behaving as those without scruples or conscience. Each can be pictured as a wild beast, and as behaving like a wild beast. It is a picture of man without God, with his thoughts centred wholly on earthly things. Over against them, and in direct contrast with them is 'a son of man' Who will in the final analysis, having gone through suffering at the hands of the beasts, come to the throne of God to obtain everlasting rule. But He, along with His people, differs from the wild beasts because He will behave with conscience and scruples, and as God intended human beings to behave. He will take heed to the revelation of God that has come from Heaven (Deuteronomy 17.18-20). He and His people will walk in accordance with God's instruction as 'true men', fulfilling the destiny that He planned for them when He first created man.

By analogy with the beasts (verse 17) this 'son of man' in verse 13 represents Israel's king, but as king over those who are true in Israel. The king represents the people. They saw their life as coming from Him (Lamentations 4.20). Just as the beastly kings also

represented their beastly empires, so does this truly human son of man also represent those of His people who walk 'as men' rather than beasts, men whose destiny, as in Psalm 8, is to have dominion over the beasts. To begin with, as God's purposes go forward, the wild beasts are to be allowed their way for a time, and He with His people will necessarily therefore be trodden down and will have to go through intense suffering (verse 21, 25), for He Himself represents, and is one with, 'the holy ones of the Most High'. And this suffering will in fact continue until the time comes to receive the kingdom (verse 22). Then it is He, and they, through their king, who will come out of their suffering and receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever (verses 14, 18, 22, 27). Even among the Jews it was recognised that not all Jews would inherit the Kingdom, but only those who were faithful to His Law.

From this we can appreciate more clearly Jesus' words, 'the Son of Man must suffer'. Such suffering is revealed by Daniel to have been necessary before He receives His Kingly Rule, but the suffering will then be followed by His triumphant approach to the throne of God to receive dominion, and glory, and kingship, and an eternal rule (verses 13-14), in which His people will finally join Him, having themselves endured similar suffering.

When we consider the way in which Jesus presented the idea of the Son of Man from different angles we can see quite clearly its connection with the three passages above, and especially the one in Daniel. He was very much aware that in Him the prophecies concerning Israel must be brought to the full (2.15). He applies Scriptures spoken to Israel to Himself (4.1-8), and also relates Himself to the Servant prophecies of Isaiah (20.28; Mark 10.45; Luke 4.17-18; 22.37).

Indeed one possible solution to the question of why there is a definite article with 'the Son of Man' in Jesus' teaching, would be that it intended to signify 'the One spoken about in the Scriptures/in Daniel 7', with Jesus applying it to Himself as the King Who has come to suffer at the hands of men. It can then also be seen as leading on to signify His true people who will suffer with Him, which will then be followed by His and their triumph. But we must not see this 'son of man' as just a blanket description of Israel, even in Daniel, for Israel

contained its own share of 'beasts', (as all parties would have agreed) and itself has regularly behaved in beastly fashion. It is those from among Israel, those who are God's Israel, whose hearts are right towards God so that they walk as true men, 'the holy ones of the Most High', who are represented in a secondary way by the son of man. This can then Scripturally be expanded to all who commence walking as true men, who can also come under His Kingly Rule (Exodus 12.48-49; Genesis 12.3) for He had come as a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42.6; 49.6).

The ideas in the three passages are similar, but it is the last passage in Daniel that most illuminates Jesus' use of the term and takes in all the aspects which He applies to it. The sayings of Jesus concerning Himself as the Son of Man can in effect be split up into four groups, the first referring to His walk among men in humiliation under the wild beasts (8.20; 11.19), the second referring to His suffering at the hands of the wild beasts as the suffering King and yet exercising power on earth on behalf of His people (9.6; 10.23; 12.8; 12.32, 40; 13.37; 16.13; 17.12, 22; 18.11; 20.18, 28; 26.2, 24, 45, compare Psalm 22.12-13, 16), the third referring to His approaching the throne of God to receive His Kingly power and glory, a Kingship which He has already been enjoying but which will now become more effective because being backed by His presence on the throne (16.28; 17.9; 19.28; 26.64; 28.19-20), and the fourth His manifestation of that power and glory as He comes to judge (13.41; 16.27; 24.27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25.13, 31). This last is the only aspect not mentioned in Daniel 7, but the idea of final judgment is unquestionably assumed there.

The recognition of the significance of these Scriptures, combined with the Isaianic prophecies, is consonant with the genius of Jesus, and with no one else of His era. Others had partial glimpses. He alone had the independence of mind and ability to appreciate them, and to bring out their meaning as He did, although He was of course helped by the fact that He was the Coming One to Whom they pointed.

The King

The idea of Jesus as the King is prominent in Matthew's Gospel. This comes out in that Jesus is immediately declared to be the son of David in the first verse of the first chapter 1.1, and His Kingship is stressed by the emphasis found in the subsequent genealogy which depicts the royal line. It is then further revealed as being in fulfillment

of prophecies, both concerning the birth of the coming King (1.23), and concerning His birthplace (2.6). The king then flees from the wrath of the beast to Egypt, from which He will eventually emerge to settle in Nazareth, in Galilee, commencing to lay the foundation for His rule (Isaiah 6.2-7). He is introduced by His herald (3.3) and is confirmed as King after His baptism ('This is my beloved Son' - 3.17). After this He enters the wilderness where He is offered a throne and power and dominion the easy way (4.9). Having refused this He goes out to proclaim that the Kingly Rule of Heaven is near, and calls men to respond in repentance and faith (4.17, 23). As promised by Isaiah the light has come in preparation for the government to be placed on the shoulders of God's King (Isaiah 6.2-7).

In accordance with the test of a true King of Israel (Deuteronomy 17.18-20) He now lays down the laws for those who comes under His Kingly Rule (5-7), having Himself studied thoroughly the Book of the Law and having learned to fear the Lord (see Deuteronomy 17.18-20). And this is followed subsequently by the blind recognizing in Him the Son of David (9.27-31, see above on the Son of David), after which He continues to proclaim the Good News of the Kingly Rule as present among them (9.35).

Having commissioned His disciples He reveals His Kingly authority by giving them authority over unclean spirits (compare 12.28), and to heal every disease and infirmity (10.1). Here was a greater than Solomon, who had himself had a lesser reputation for doing something similar (see above on the Son of David). He gives them His power so that they can spread the word of the Kingly Rule of God and reveal its presence by miraculous acts of goodness. In 12.22-23 His exorcisms and healings again raised the question as to whether He was the son of David, with powers greater than Solomon. But the Pharisees had their own solution, considering that He was in league with the Satan, at which Jesus pointed out that His power over Satan was in fact evidence that the Kingly Rule of God had come (12.28), after which He emphasised that He was here as a greater than the great King Solomon (12.42).

Once a king was appointed it was always necessary for messengers to go out proclaiming His appointment and calling for loyalty. This was partly the idea of chapter 10 and in chapter 13 we have seven parables indicating the spreading of the message of His Kingly Rule

which will lead up to the final judgment. Then in 15.21 He is hailed even by a foreigner as the Son of David. This leads up to chapter 16 where His disciples at last recognise that He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of the living God (16.16). His Kingship is now firmly established to such an extent that He can hand over the keys of His Kingly Rule to Peter, because they will shortly see Him as having come in His Kingly Rule to the throne of God and thus having been crowned as Lord of all (16.28). And this is shortly prefigured in the Transfiguration where He is again declared to be God's beloved Son (17.5). Thus when challenged about paying the Temple Tax He points out that as the King's Son He has no liability to do so (17.26).

However, in chapter 26-28 the thought returns to His coming enthronement and sending out of His disciples to the entire world. After He has died He will once again drink with them under His Father's Kingly Rule (26.29). Indeed after this point in time He will shortly be seen by the current Jewish leadership as being seated at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of Heaven, both ideas linking with His coming to the throne of God in Daniel 7.13-14 (26.64), and indicating that the commencement of the establishing of His Kingly Rule after His resurrection will be made apparent to them in some visible way (as in Acts).

Before Pilate He confirms that He is the King of the Jews (27.11), and it is as the Messiah that He is sentenced and crucified (27.17, 22). Above His head on the cross is written then written the superscription 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews' (27.37). This annoys the Jewish leaders who then mock and say, 'If He is the king of Israel, let Him come down from the cross and we will believe in Him'. (Had He come down they would not, of course, have believed but would immediately have charged the Roman soldiers with re-arresting Him. For by this time their hearts were too hardened). One of His final cries on the cross then echoed the words of a Psalm of David (27.46). And finally in Galilee He appeared and declared that all authority had now been given to Him in Heaven and earth (see Isaiah 9.7; Daniel 7.14). His Kingship is now being revealed and they are to go out declaring it to all nations (28.18-20), as He had said (24.14).

Chapter 4

Matthean Infancy Narratives

The birth of Jesus is narrated at the beginning of the **Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke**, but is not mentioned in Mark, and alluded to very differently in John. Although the story may seem familiar, a close analysis shows that there are *many significant differences* between the Matthean and Lukan accounts, with *hardly anything in common* between them. The following are the only commonalities, and even these contain significant differences in the details:

Common Elements in Both Infancy Narratives:

- Main characters: *Mary, Joseph, Jesus*
- Supporting characters: *Angels, Holy Spirit*
- Titles attributed to Jesus: *Christ, son of David*
- Heritage: *children of Abraham/Israel, house of David*
- Place names: *Nazareth in Galilee, Bethlehem in Judea*
- Historical period: *during the reign of King Herod*

Different Contents of the Two Accounts:

Matthew 1–2 (<i>only 48 verses, including genealogy</i>)	Luke 1–2 (<i>total of 132 verses, plus 16 more in genealogy</i>)
1:1 - Title of the Gospel	1:1-4 - Literary introduction to the Gospel
1:2-17 - The Genealogy of Jesus (from Abraham to King David to Exile to Joseph)	(<i>Genealogy included later, in Luke 3:23-38</i>)
-	1:5-25 - Angel Gabriel announces John the Baptist's birth
-	1:57-58 - Elizabeth gives birth to her son (John the Baptist)
-	1:59-80 - John the Baptist is circumcised & named (incl. Zechariah's "Benedictus")
-	2:1-5 - Joseph & Mary journey to Bethlehem for the census
1:25 & 2:1a - Mary's son is born in Bethlehem of Judea, and named Jesus	2:6-7 - Mary gives birth to her son in Bethlehem of Judea
-	2:8-14 - Angels appear to some shepherds (incl. the "Gloria" of the angels)
-	2:15-20 - Shepherds visit Mary & Joseph & the infant lying in a manger
-	2:21 - The infant is circumcised & named Jesus
-	2:22-38 - Jesus is presented to God in the Temple (incl. Simeon's "Nunc Dimittis")
2:1b-12 - Magi from the East come; they first visit Herod, then Jesus	-
2:13-21 - Joseph & Mary flee to Egypt with the child Jesus; the Innocents are murdered; the Holy Family returns to Israel	-
2:22-23 - They journey to Nazareth	2:39-40 - The family returns to Nazareth
-	2:41-52 - At age twelve, Jesus & his parents visit the Jerusalem Temple

Different Theological Emphases of Each Narrative:

	Matthew 1-2	Luke 1-2
Driving Force:	<i>Hebrew Scriptures</i> are fulfilled (1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23)	<i>Holy Spirit</i> is at work (1:1, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-27)
Jesus' Heritage:	* Son of <i>David</i> , son of <i>Abraham</i> (1:1-17) * Legal son of Joseph, but child of the Holy Spirit (1:18-25)	* Son of <i>God</i> , son of <i>Mary</i> by the Holy Spirit (1:26-38) * Heir to David's throne, over the house of Judah (1:32-33; 2:4)
Names & Titles:	* Messiah (1:1, 16-18; 2:4) * Jesus: "For he will save his people from their sins" (1:21, 25) * <i>Emmanuel</i> : "God with us" (1:23) * <i>King of the Jews</i> (2:2) * "A ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel" (2:6) * Nazorean (2:23)	* Jesus (1:31; 2:21) * Son of the Most High; Son of God (1:32, 35) * He will be great, holy, full of wisdom and grace (1:32, 35; 2:40) * "Of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:33) * A <i>Savior</i> is born... who is Messiah and <i>Lord</i> (2:11, 26) * A light for revelation to Gentiles and for glory to Israel (2:32)
Characters Emphasized:	<i>Men</i> : King David, Joseph of Nazareth, Magi from the East, King Herod, chief priests & scribes, Ethnarch Archelaus	<i>Women</i> : Virgin Mary of Nazareth, Elizabeth, Anna <i>Poor & Aged</i> : Shepherds, Zechariah, Simeon
Themes:	obstacles, conflict, fear, murder, politics	glory, praise, joy; poverty, humility, faith
OT Parallels:	Dreamer Joseph (Genesis 37-41) Baby Moses (Exodus 1-2)	Birth of Samson (Judges 13) Birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1-2)
Number Symbolism:	[King] David = 14 (DVD = 4+6+4); three groups of 14 generations in genealogy; focus on royalty	70 weeks from Gabriel's first Annunciation to Presentation in Temple? Related to 70-week prophecy by angel Gabriel in Danie 19: 24 - 27?

1. Jesus' genealogy through Joseph (1:2-16)

a. Abraham to Joseph: This genealogy establishes Jesus' claim to the throne of David through his adoptive father Joseph. This is not blood lineage of Jesus through Mary, but the legal lineage of Jesus through Joseph. The Gospel of Luke provides Jesus' blood lineage through Mary.

- "The Jews set much store by genealogies, and to Jewish Christians the Messiahship of Jesus depended on its being proved that he was a descendant of David." (Bruce)
- There are some genuine problems in sorting out the details of this genealogy, and reconciling some points to both Luke's record and those found in the Old Testament.
- The author is persuaded that Matthew records the genealogical record of Joseph and Luke the record of Mary; but this is not accepted without dispute by some. "Few would guess simply by reading Luke that he is giving Mary's genealogy. The theory stems, not from the text of Luke, but from the need to harmonize the two genealogies. On the face of it, both Matthew and Luke aim to give Joseph's genealogy." (Carson)
- Nevertheless, genealogical difficulties should not prevent us from seeing the whole. Matthew Poole acknowledged that there were some problems with the genealogies, and in reconciling the records of Matthew and Luke. Yet he rightly observed.
 - ❖ The Jews kept extensive genealogical records, and so it is not unwise to trust such records
 - ❖ We should remember Paul's warnings about striving over genealogies, and not get into arguments about them (1 Timothy 1:4 and 6:4; Titus 3:9).
 - ❖ If the Jewish opponents of Jesus could have demonstrated that He was not descended from David, they would have disqualified His claim to be Messiah; yet they did not and could not.
 - ❖ "And therefore it is the most unreasonable thing imaginable for us to make such little dissatisfactions grounds for us to question or disbelieve the gospel, because we cannot untie every knot we meet with in a pedigree." (Poole)

❖ The Jewish interest in genealogies could sometimes be a dangerous distraction. Therefore Paul warned Timothy to guard against those who were fascinated by endless genealogies (1 Tim 1:4) and gave a similar warning to Titus (Tit 3:9).

b. The Women: Tamar ... Rahab ... Ruth ... her who had been the wife of Uriah: This genealogy is noted for the unusual presence of four women. Women were rarely mentioned in ancient genealogies, and the four mentioned here are worthy of special note as examples of God's grace. They show how God can take unlikely people and use them in great ways.

❖ **Tamar:** She sold herself as a prostitute to her father-in-law Judah to bring forth **Perez and Zerah** (Genesis 38)

❖ **Rahab:** She was a Gentile prostitute, for whom God took extraordinary measures to save from both judgment and her lifestyle of prostitution (Joshua 2; 6:22-23).

❖ **Ruth:** She was from Moab, a Gentile and until her conversion, out of the covenant of Israel (Ruth 1)

❖ **Her who had been the wife of Uriah:** Bathsheba (who is mentioned by implication in Matthew 1:6) was an adulterous, infamous for her sin with David (2 Samuel 11). "Matthew's peculiar way of referring to her, 'Uriah's wife,' may be an attempt to focus on the fact that Uriah was not an Israelite but a Hittite." (Carson)

i. These four women have an important place in the genealogy of Jesus to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was not royalty according to human perception, in the sense that He did not come from a pure aristocratic background.

ii. These four women have an important place in the genealogy of Jesus to demonstrate that Jesus identifies with sinners in His genealogy, even as He will in His birth, baptism, life, and His death on the cross. "Jesus is heir of a line in which flows the blood of the harlot Rahab, and of the rustic Ruth; he is akin to the fallen and to the lowly, and he will show his love even to the poorest and most obscure" (Spurgeon).

iii. These four women have an important place in the genealogy of Jesus to show that there is a new place for women under the

New Covenant. In both the pagan and the Jewish culture of that day, men often had little regard for women. In that era, some Jewish men prayed every morning, thanking God that they were not Gentiles, slaves, or women. Despite that, women were regarded more highly among the Jews than they were among the pagans

iv. By far the most amazing thing about this pedigree is the names of the women who appear in it" (Barclay).

v. "Men and women, notorious for their evil character, lie in the direct line of his descent. This was permitted, that He might fully represent our fallen race" (Meyer).

Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ: Matthew wanted to make it clear that Joseph was not the father of Jesus; rather he was the **husband of Mary**. "The new phraseology makes it clear that Matthew does not regard Jesus as Joseph's son physically. The genealogy is this clearly intended to be that of Jesus' 'legal' ancestry, not of his physical descent." (France).

3. (17) Matthew's organization of the genealogy.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

a. Fourteen generations ... fourteen generations ... fourteen generations: With this Matthew made it clear that this genealogy is not complete. There were not actually 14 generations between the landmarks he indicates, but Matthew edited the list down to make it easy to remember and memorize.

For example, Matthew 1:8 says *Joram begot Uzziah*. This was Uzziah, King of Judah, who was struck with leprosy for daring to enter the temple as a priest to offer incense (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Uzziah was not the immediate son of Joram; there were three kings between them (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah). Yet as Clarke rightly says, "It is observed that omissions of this kind are not uncommon in the Jewish genealogies."

b. So all the generations: The practice of skipping generations at times was common in the listing of ancient genealogies. Matthew did nothing unusual by leaving some generations out.

Another of the royal line that Matthew passed over was in between Josiah and Jehoniah (Matthew 1:11), and his name was Jehoakim (2 Chronicles 36:5-8). Jehoakim was so wicked that through the Prophet Jeremiah, God promised that no blood descendant of his would sit on the throne of Israel (Jeremiah 36:30-31). This presented a significant problem: If someone was a blood descendant of David through Jehoakim, he could not sit on the throne of Israel and be the king and the Messiah because of this curse recorded in Jeremiah 36:30-31. But, if the conqueror was not descended through David, he could not be the legal heir of the throne, because of the promise made to David and the nature of the royal line.

ii. This is where we come to the differences in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. Matthew recorded the genealogy of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ (Matthew 1:16). He began at Abraham and followed the line down to Jesus, though. Luke recorded the genealogy of Mary: being, (as was supposed) the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23). He began with Jesus and followed the line back up, all the way to Adam starting from the unmentioned Mary.

iii. Each genealogy is the same as it records the line from Adam (or Abraham) all the way down to David. But at David, the two genealogies separated. If we remember the list of David's sons in 2 Samuel 5 we see that Satan focused his attention on the descendants of the royal line through Solomon - and this was a reasonable strategy. According to Matthew 1:6, Joseph line went through Solomon (and therefore Jehoakim, the cursed one). Jesus was the legal son of Joseph, but not the blood son of Joseph - so the curse on Jehoakim did not affect him. Joseph did not contribute any of the "blood" of Jesus, but he did contribute his legal standing as a descendant of the royal line to Jesus. Mary's line - the blood line of Jesus - did not go through Solomon, but through a different son of David, named Nathan (Luke 3:31). Mary was therefore not part of that blood curse on the line of Jehoakim

The Birth of Jesus (1:18-25)

This account, as its heading says, is about the birth of Jesus the Christ. If we had to identify a principle actor in the narrative, it would have to be the Lord, moving behind the scenes to bring about the birth of Christ. Mary is found to be with child (the verb is passive, and so the story is not emphasizing anything she did). Joseph is about to act, but is prevented from doing so by the Lord through a dream. His actions are in response to the revelation from God. But it is God who is at work in the narrative: God the Holy Spirit brings about the conception in Mary, the angel from God reveals the mystery to Joseph and gives him the instructions, and all of this is a fulfillment of what God had prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

With the emphasis being on the work of God like this, the birth can only be seen as supernatural. This is the tone that Matthew wants to set at the outset of his gospel - there is nothing purely human about this Jesus. The birth was of God, explained by God, in fulfillment of a prophecy by God. God planned it, God carried it out, and God made sure the main participants understood it (as much as they were capable of understanding). The whole thing was supernatural.

Identifying the subject matter and the main "character" in the story helps us stay close to the point of the story, or at least to do justice to the tone of it.

Cultural Aspects of the Story

It will be helpful to deal with the cultural aspect of marriage at this point since it comes up so quickly in the story line. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married, betrothed as some versions translate it. In that culture the betrothal was tantamount to being married, except that they waited for a period of about a year before they actually consummated the marriage. This was to show that the couple remained pure until they were united. If there was a violation in that period - as this appeared at first to be - then it would take a divorce to end the engagement-marriage. For more on the subject of marriage and betrothal you can read relevant discussions in the Bible dictionaries. A good general work to look for (it may be temporarily out of print) is the work by Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (published in paper back

in two volumes by McGraw-Hill; one volume on religious institutions and one on social institutions - like marriage).

Another subject you may wish to think about, if you have time, is the importance of dreams in the Bible as a means of divine revelation. Here too you can start with Bible dictionary discussions. Dreams given to Israel in the Bible usually have verbal revelation at the center; dreams that concern the nations often are symbolic and require an interpreter, usually a Hebrew (like Joseph or Daniel). The dreams at the birth of Jesus are clearly revelation. In other words, these dreams are not ordinary dreams capable of various interpretations. They bring a clear word from God. And the people knew about such things because the Old Testament had a good number of them in the revelation of God's program.

The Meaning of the Names

There are not a lot of words in this passage that need defining. But at the heart of the revelation is the giving of the name "Jesus." Here too you could get help from a good Bible dictionary. But to cut the process short I will summarize what you would find. This is a good Hebrew name very similar to the Old Testament name "Joshua." The Hebrews loved to give names with meaning; and the meaning usually involved some word play on the name. The word play with this name is on the verb "to save." That verb in Hebrew is *yasha'*. Names like Hosea, Isaiah, and Joshua, to name but a few are all based on this verb. The name "Jesus," like the name "Joshua," would mean "the Lord saves," or shortened would mean "he saves." This is why the significance of the name is then explained, "For he shall save his people from their sins."

This latter clarification was necessary because in the Old Testament the verb "to save" is most often used for physical deliverance - saved from enemies, from disease, from oppression, from death. It is also used in the sense of salvation from sin, but folks would probably think of other types of salvation first. In fact, the followers of Jesus often thought more in the sense of a national deliverance from Rome than in a spiritual salvation from sin. The word from God makes it clear from the outset that the salvation Jesus will bring will be a salvation from sin. Once sin is dealt with, then the results of the sin can be

taken care of as well (and there will be deliverance from the problems that sin has caused).

The Angelic Revelation

Since we are considering the giving of the name, we might as well deal with the whole revelation through the angel at this point as well. The core of the revelation is that "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." This is completely supernatural, of course, and beyond any human comprehension. The point is simply made that Jesus was born of Mary and without a human father.

The genealogy in the chapter prepared us for this: verse 16 said, "and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of who was born Jesus, who is called Christ." It does not list Jesus as a son of Joseph. He was born of Mary. We will come back to this when we discuss doctrinal meanings based on the text. But at this point we should simply recall how Jesus so often said things like "I am from above, you are from below," or that "God sent His Son into the world." There was a birth in Bethlehem to be sure. Jesus, the human, was born of Mary; the child was conceived supernaturally in her womb by the Holy Spirit. But the Son, the divine Son, was sent into the world from heaven by the Father. And the person of Jesus Christ has these two natures, the earthly human and the eternal divine, supernaturally united in Him.

The point of the supernatural birth, the revelation about it, and the giving of the name, follows a long tradition of such things in the Old Testament. It all underscored that this one would be a child of destiny, a Godsend as it were. But all of those provisions of children of destiny were mere shadows in comparison to this one, the coming of the Son of God into the world. The body of Jesus was specially prepared by God the Spirit for the Son who came into the world.

The Fulfillment of the Prophecy

Now we need to study the other clarifying section of the passage, the note that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy by Isaiah. This will be a little more involved because most Christians are not that well-versed in Isaiah, and may find it a little complicated to sort through. Any time there is a mention of a prophecy that was fulfilled you have to go back and read it in the Old Testament within its context in order

to understand the prophecy, and then see how it was fulfilled in the New Testament.

Here is where a good commentary on the Bible would save you some time; you could read the chapter in Isaiah and then the chapter's commentary to give you an idea of what is going on. But I shall cut the process short here by summarizing what it going on in Isaiah 7 and how it points to this amazing birth. But you should read the chapter in Isaiah.

The setting: The setting for the chapter was an impending invasion about 734 B.C., just a few years before the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed (722). The threat was from an alliance being made between the king of Damascus (Rezin) and the king of Israel (Pekah) against the king of Judah in Jerusalem (Ahaz). To put it in understandable terms, it would be like modern Syria joining with the people of the West Bank (which is the heart of Samaria/Israel) against Jerusalem - except that in those days the people in Samaria/Israel were Israelites. The troubling alliance sought to remove the king in Jerusalem and replace him with a puppet king, the son of Tabeel.

The prophet was called to go and meet the king as he checked the water supply for the siege. The word from God was that there was no reason to fear these two northern kings - they were smoldering brands or stubs of wood. The invasion was not going to happen. The word of the Lord was that in a few years the whole northern territory would be destroyed and taken into captivity and Judah would survive.

But the message to the king demanded faith if he was to have a part in the future program of God: "If you do not believe, you will not be confirmed" (v. 9). In modern expression we would say that Isaiah told the king that God had a future planned for the kingdom of Judah, but he was not a part of it. Isaiah knew that this king was not going to trust the Lord.

In fact, the prophet offered a sign to the king. To guarantee the reliability of the word from the prophet, the king could have asked for any sign, no matter how strange or how supernatural. But this put him in a dilemma. You see, he was not a believer, not by any means (read 2 Chronicles 28). So he did not want to submit to the prophet's advice or call for faith; but he did not want to appear as an unbeliever before

the people. So he pretended piety and refused to ask for a sign, saying he did not want to test the Lord.

This angered the prophet (and the Lord) and so a sign was given to the House of David (in general, not to this king) anyway. The sign was that there would be a birth that would guarantee the future of the dynasty. War was coming; extinction was possible; but God was guaranteeing a future for the royal Davidic family by an unexpected birth: a virgin would conceive and have a son. The Davidic Covenant would remain in place - but Ahaz would have no share in the future.

The prophecy: Biblical scholars have different interpretations on how this prophecy worked, and you can spend a lot of time sorting them out if you like. Some argue that because this is such a special prophecy it has only one fulfillment, the birth of Jesus. But a careful reading of the passage indicates that some partial fulfillment or application of the words was expected in their lifetime, for things would be happening before the child reached a certain age. It seems more likely that there was a birth in the days of Isaiah, not an actual virgin birth, but an unexpected birth of a young prince to a woman in the royal family, a woman who was a virgin at the time. The unexpected birth would be seen as a Godsend because it was a sign that the royal family would continue. It would tell them that God was with them.

The Hebrew word translated "virgin" essentially means a young woman who is mature enough, or ripe enough, for marriage. But this context would require the connotation of "virgin" since this was a birth of a prince in the royal family, but more importantly it was a sign from God.

Some scholars have suggested it looks to the birth of the good king Hezekiah. Others suggest it is a prophecy of Isaiah's own son recorded in similar terms in Isaiah 8. But the text does not say; it is simply the oracle given in anticipation of the birth.

We do know that the prophecy has its fullest meaning and its divinely intended fulfillment therefore, in the birth of Jesus. The Davidic royal family was almost non-existent (Herod was not even a Jew); Rome was completely dominating the political scene. And in the middle of all this a sign was given, which was a fulfillment of the ancient sign

of Isaiah: there would be an actual virgin birth in the lineage of David. Any partial fulfillment in Old Testament times would merely have been a foreshadowing of the true fulfillment in Jesus. We shall see this pattern of the way prophecy works again and again.

Please note: the doctrine of the virgin birth does not depend on the etymology of the Hebrew word for “virgin” or “young woman.” The doctrine is clearly taught in the Gospel accounts. But the word for “virgin” has its very specific nuance in reference to the birth of Jesus.

The context in Isaiah: Now, one further thing is necessary for understanding the announcement of this prophecy - its context. Isaiah 7 - 11 is called the Book of Immanuel. Let me walk you through it so you can see the significance of the section from which this prophecy comes. In chapter 7 the sign of an extraordinary birth is announced, ultimately a virgin birth and the one born will be known as Immanuel, God with us. In other words, the birth would be evidence of God’s presence with his people. In the Old Testament, that presence could be felt in a number of ways. But in the New Testament, in the incarnation, Jesus was fully “God with us.” The sign was that the Davidic family would continue, and would have a future; but sharing in that future required faith.

Then in chapter 8 Isaiah the prophet lets people know that Immanuel, this king, will be either a stumbling stone or a foundation stone, depending on whether they believe in him and make him their sanctuary or not. If they do not, if they continue to go after spiritists and necromancers and the like, they will find no answer. Why should they seek the answer among the dead? They should seek the living God. (The angels in the garden tomb used this line: Why do you seek the living among the dead?).

Then in chapter 9 Isaiah identifies this wonder king, Immanuel, and gives him throne names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. He will reign with peace and righteousness. Amazingly Isaiah says that a child will be born, a son will be given. The fulfillment in Christ shows how precise this distinction would be and then according to Isaiah 11, Isaiah says that this king will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring about universal changes in all creation. So the announcement of the supernatural birth

of Messiah is in a context filled with descriptions of this coming king. He is, to say the least, much more than a mortal king. He is supernatural in every sense of the word. And from that context the New Testament writers knew that this Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, was the fulfillment of the prophecy given some 700 years earlier. They may not have always understood it, but they soon came to realize that Jesus was indeed God with them, in the flesh (incarnation). When Matthew explains that the verse in Isaiah 7 finds its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus, he is also saying that everything in Isaiah 7 - 11 that describes the one born of the virgin applies also to Christ.

New Testament Correlations

The better you come to know the New Testament the easier it will be for you to make the connections to related passages. Once you know how to describe what the passage is about - the incarnation, the supernatural birth of Jesus, the virgin birth - then you can look these up in Bible dictionaries and they will include references in the Bible in their discussions. Or, a commentary you might be using should have some cross references as well.

Gospels: It will be easy to look at the other Gospels to see what they say about the birth of Jesus. I have already mentioned the account in Luke 1. There the annunciation to Mary described Jesus as “the Son of the Most High” and “the Son of God.” And it declared that he would reign forever. Obviously the passage is not talking about just another king. This one is special. This one is divine. But John offers some more clarification. He describes Jesus as the “Word,” the complete revelation of the Godhead. This Word, Jesus, is the creator of all things (1:3). And this Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacle) among us (1:14). And John said that they be held his glory, the glory of the only begotten Son. His description of Jesus as the “only-begotten” is crucial (I think the NIV has made the translation very weak). The verb “beget” (unlike verbs such as create or make) can only mean that the one begotten shares the nature of the father. If Jesus shares the nature of God the Father, it means that Jesus is divine and therefore eternal. There never was a time that he did not exist. Therefore the word “begotten” must not be understood to mean that he had a beginning, but that his nature is divine. And John does

not mean “divine in any watered down sense of “godlike”; rather, he means that in this aspect Jesus is truly unique. So he adds the word “mono-” to the front of the Greek word “begotten” - “the only begotten Son.” There is only one in the human race that is truly divine. The historic creed of the church got it right when it wrote that Jesus was “begotten, not made.” Jesus is God manifested in human flesh.

There are two supernatural signs that speak of Jesus’ nature. The first is the supernatural birth that shows he was not born as we are. The other is the resurrection that shows that he is not limited to this world’s experiences as we are. He is above it all. Both of these signs attest to the fact that He is the Son of God. Epistles. There are many passages in the apostles’ writings that address the birth and what it signified. Two stand out above the rest. The first is Gal 4:4, which says “In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” It was on time because God prophesied it; it was a birth through a woman, without a human father, and it was for the purpose of redemption. If Jesus had had a normal birth with a human father, he would have been totally human and a sinner like us. Redemption required the work of someone different, someone above it all, from on high, sinless and supernatural. Without this description of Christ our salvation would be without any foundation.

Phil 2:6-11 should also be read. This tells how He did not cling to his lofty position and power in heaven, but laid aside his privilege of divinity and took on the form of a servant, born in human likeness. He humbled himself, even to the death of the cross. Therefore, God the Father has highly exalted him in glory, and someday everyone will exalt and praise him. Someday everyone will acknowledge that Jesus Christ was not simply a good man from Nazareth, not simply a teacher or a prophet, but God in mortal flesh.

Applications and Conclusions

The passage is clearly written to inform the readers, us, that Jesus Christ came into this world supernaturally. The child Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God in the womb of Mary. We do not know how that was done. But we do know from the rest of Scripture that this was only the human part formed in the womb - the divine Son

was sent into the world. The natural response to this is that it is incredible, incomprehensible, impossible, amazing. Of course, once one actually believes in God, nothing is impossible for God. But unbelief has trouble accepting something like this. So we are not surprised to see skeptics trying to explain it away. In fact, there is some evidence that even in the time of Jesus people considered his birth “troubled”: John 8:41 records the enemies of Jesus saying, “We are not born of fornication,” possibly hinting at some question about his birth. But Jesus’ response to them was that He was from above, and they were from below, from their father the devil.

So the first response we are to have to the passage is to consider what it is asking us to believe. The Old Testament prophecy, the angelic revelations, the account of the event, and the other witnesses and explanations of it, all declare that the birth of Jesus was completely supernatural, because He is not a mere mortal. While some might balk at this at first, as the chapters unfold in the Book of Matthew it will become clear that no one could do these things if merely mortal. So if at the outset this is hard to grasp, continue through the book and see how the works of Christ attest to His nature. After all, it took the disciples a long time to come to grips with this. The natural corollary to this response is then to consider what we should do in response to the revelation of the passage. Other passages in Matthew will spell out the application - give to the poor, give thanks to God, pray, or a number of things like that. This one does not so specify. But the natural response would be one of adoration and worship. If this child born of Mary is indeed who Scripture says He is, then He deserves our devotion. And it begins with our faith response to Him as the Messiah sent from Heaven.

This has been the theme captured by so many of the writers of carols celebrating the birth of Jesus. Matthew quotes the famous Immanuel prophecy. Matthew sounds the note from the very beginning. God has visited this planet in order to redeem people from their sins. It all began with the extraordinary birth through a virgin, Mary, which had been foretold centuries earlier. Everything about this incarnation was to be supernatural, or it would not work. And so from the outset we are confronted with the divine nature of Jesus the Messiah, and with the purpose of his coming into the world. As Isaiah said, this

would all be a stumbling block to some, but a foundation stone to those who believe. Whether people believe this first sign or not, the point is clear as to what the Word of God is clearly saying about Jesus. Matthew will now build on this introduction through the chapters. Now if you were organizing this little section for a Bible study, it can be outlined rather neatly. The first few verses would cover the situation, the unexpected pregnancy and Joseph's response to it (vv. 18, 19). Then, the next few verses explain the pregnancy (vv. 20-23): the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and would be the Savior of the world, and this child would be Immanuel, the wonder king prophesied by Isaiah. The final section would then report the obedience of Joseph in marrying Mary and naming the child "Jesus."

In addition to the main idea of the revelation about Jesus Christ, the passage also illustrates a practical principle for God's people that would be applicable in many other situations. The works of God are always supernatural, and so the revelation about His works must be studied in order to discern what the divine plan is and how it should be embraced by faith. Those who believe in the Lord will receive His Word and obey it.

Visit of the Wise-men from the East (2:1-12)

As early as the second century, Bethlehemites believed they could identify the exact cave where, following Luke's account of the manger, Jesus had been born (Stauffer 1960:21; Finegan 1969:20-23; for echoes of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem in early rabbinic disputes, see Herford 1966:253-55).

A microcosm of Matthew's Gospel as a whole, this passage reminds us that we must preach the gospel to all people because we cannot always predict who will hear the message and who will not. Those we least expect to honor Jesus may worship him, and those we least expect to oppose him may seek his death. This passage confronts Matthew's readers with a summons to personal decision by contrasting the main characters (contrasting characters was a standard ancient literary device; see, for example, Schuler 1982:50). The Magi worship Jesus; Herod seeks his death; Jerusalem's religious elite-fore-runners of the opponents of Matthew's audience-take Jesus for granted. The reader must identify with the pagan Magi rather than with Herod or

Jerusalem's religious elite, and hence are compelled to recognize God's interest in the mission to the Gentiles. The God who sought servants like the Roman centurion (8:5-13) from the pagan west also sought previously pagan servants *from the east* (2:1; compare Is 2:6) like the Magi (see 8:11).

Matthew challenges prejudice against pagans. The first story after Jesus' birth opens with Magi who have traveled a long distance to offer homage to a new king born in Judea. They enter Jerusalem with a large enough caravan to attract the city's attention (2:3); they must have assumed that they would find the newborn king in Herod's palace in Jerusalem.

Magi were astrologers from the royal court of the king of Persia. Part of their job description was to make the king of Persia look good, but here they come to promote another king. Kings would often send congratulations to new rulers in other realms, but the king of Persia called himself "king of kings," that is, the highest of kings (compare, for example, Ezra 7:12; Dan 2:37). We might not expect the Magi to worship Jesus, especially if they found him not in the royal palace but in a cave. More unexpectedly, these Magi are astrologers, which is why they noticed the star to begin with. Many sources from this period report the skill of Magi in divination, but Matthew's audience would probably recall first the Magi of their Greek translation of the Old Testament: Daniel's enemies, whom Daniel's narratives portray in a negative light as selfish, incompetent and brutal pagans (Dan 2:2, 10). (Their identity is even clearer in some later Greek versions of the Old Testament. In this period the Magi probably would have been Zoroastrian, but Matthew's readers would think more of Daniel's pagan accusers.)

Although the Bible forbade divination (Deut 18:9-13), which includes astrology (Is 47:13; see also Deut 4:19), for one special event in history the God who rules the heavens chose to reveal himself where the pagans were looking (compare Acts 19:12, 15-20). Without condoning astrology, Matthew's narrative challenges our prejudice against outsiders to our faith (see also 8:5-13; 15:21-28): even the most pagan of pagans may respond to Jesus if given the opportunity (compare Jon 1:13-16; 3:6-10). What a resounding call for the church today to pursue a culturally sensitive yet uncompromising commitment to

missions! Yet even supernatural guidance like the star can take the astrologers only so far; for more specific direction they must ask the leaders in Jerusalem where the king is to be born (2:2). That is, their celestial revelation was only partial; they must finally submit to God's revelation in the Scriptures, preserved by the Jewish people (see Meier 1980:11).

Matthew challenges prejudice that favors political power. Another central character in this narrative is Herod (2:3, 7-8). That Herod is dismayed by the Magi's announcement is not surprising (2:3); in this period most Greeks, Romans and even Jews respected astrological predictions. Further, a cosmic signal of another ruler would necessarily indicate the end of the current ruler's reign (as in Suet. *Vespasian* 23; Artem. 2.36). Other rulers also proved paranoid about astrologers (see MacMullen 1966:133; Kee 1980:71), and some had been ready to kill their own descendants to keep the throne (Herod. *Hist.* 1.107-10). But as many incidents during Herod's reign illustrate, he was more paranoid than most other rulers (see comment on 2:16). For Herod, little room existed for two kings in his realm: although he was Idumean by birth (Jos. *War* 1.123, 313; see Deut 17:15), he considered himself *king of the Jews* (compare 2:2). Here the one who reigns as king of God's people acts just like the oppressors of old: in Jewish tradition, both Pharaoh and his people feared when they learned in advance of the coming of Israel's deliverer (Jos. *Ant.* 2.206; Allison 1993b:146).

Herod's brutal power, played out in the following narrative, contrasts starkly with the human defenselessness of the Child and his mother (2:11, 19, 21). Whereas pagan Magi act like God's people (v. 11), the king of God's people acts like a notorious pagan king of old (v. 16; compare Ex 1:16). When we side with the politically powerful to seek human help against common foes, we could actually find ourselves fighting God's agendas (compare Is 30:1-5; 31:1-3). Jesus came and served among the weakest, depending solely on God's vindication (Mt 11:29; 12:19-21; 18:3-4; 19:14).

Matthew challenges the prejudice that respects spiritually complacent religion. Not knowing himself where the king would be born, Herod gathers the religious experts, the chief priests and scribes

(2:4), most of whom in this period were loyal to his agendas (compare Jos. *Ant.* 15.2, 5). These experts immediately identify the place where the Messiah will be born on the basis of Micah 5:2 (Mt 2:5-6). But while the religious leaders know where the Messiah will be born, they do not join the Magi in their quest. These are the religious leaders, but they fail to act on all their Bible knowledge. Jesus is just a baby, and they take him for granted.

Although these authorities did not desire to kill Jesus as Herod did, their successors a generation later-when Jesus could no longer be taken for granted-did seek his death (26:57, 59). One is tempted to note that the line between taking Jesus for granted and wanting him out of the way may remain very thin today as well. And we must not forget that the sin of taking Jesus for granted is the sin not of pagans who know little about him, but of religious folk and Bible teachers.

Matthew reinforces these points by reminding us that it is the pagans who worshiped Jesus. After the Magi have left Jerusalem, they come and worship Jesus (2:9-11). A road led south to Bethlehem, which was about six miles from Jerusalem, so the rest of the Magi's journey probably did not take very long. That they offer Jesus both homage and standard gifts from the East (2:11) fits Eastern practices; for instance, royal courts there used frankincense and myrrh (though these spices also had many other uses). The Magi's homage to Jesus may reflect biblical language alluding to the pilgrimage and homage of nations in Psalm 72:10 or Isaiah 60:6, or to the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13), or to all three texts; a late midrash on the queen of Sheba story includes a miraculous star (Bruns 1961). If Matthew has Psalm 72 or 1 Kings 10 in mind, he expects us to recognize Jesus as King Solomon's greatest son (compare Mt 1:6-7; 12:42).

At any rate, the threefold repetition of homage (2:2, 8, 11) reinforces the point of the narrative: if God's people will not honor Jesus, former pagans will (Harrington 1982:17). Throughout this Gospel, homage to Jesus reflects some degree of recognition of his identity (as in 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25), climaxing in the ultimate homage of 28:9, 17, a context that declares Jesus' royal authority equivalent to the Father's (28:18-20). But such a hint may be present even in this Gospel's first

example of homage: Matthew's audience may have expected Persians like the Magi to have intended more than merely human respect when they offered homage (compare Esther 3:2).

That the Magi needed a supernatural revelation to warn them not to return by way of Jerusalem (2:12) suggests their innocent naiveté. Even without Herod's unadmirable character (see comment on 2:16), few kings would be ready to surrender their own rule to a nonrelative some foreigners hailed as king! (For that matter, not only powerful people in society but many others today seem reluctant to acknowledge Jesus' right to direct their lives.) The Magi's innocence compared to Herod's murderous shrewdness again reminds Matthew's readers not to prejudge the appropriate recipients of the gospel (compare 13:3-23). Jesus is for all who will receive him, and God may provide Jesus' servants with allies in unexpected places if we have the wisdom to recognize them.

The Persecuted Child (2:1-13)

This passage where God Protects Jesus and His Family (2:13) provides some important lessons for Matthew's first audience and for us today. Matthew here narrates God's protection for Jesus (2:13-15) and Herod's brutal massacre of other children (2:16-18). Although the narrative rings with inspired grief and rage against Herod's act, God does not stop the injustice in this narrative any more than in most of the narratives we hear played on the evening news. Yet this narrative contains a kernel of good news that human reporters often cannot adequately discern until after the fact: the injustice of a world run by rebels against God cannot thwart his ultimate purposes for justice in that world.

Jesus Is a Refugee, a Model for Suffering (2:14)

If we read 2:13-14 in the context of Matthew's Gospel, we realize that even in his childhood the Son of Man already lacked a place to lay his head (8:20). Disciples would face the same kind of test (10:23; 24:16).

Jesus' miraculous escape here should not lead us to overlook the nature of his deliverance (compare, for example, 1 Kings 17:2-6). Jesus and his family survived, but they survived as refugees, abandoning

any livelihood Joseph may have developed in Bethlehem and undoubtedly traveling lightly. Although travel within Egypt was easy for visitors with means (Casson 1974:257), many Judeans had traditionally regarded refuge in Egypt as a last resort (2 Macc 5:8-9; compare 1 Kings 11:17, 40; Jer 26:21).

Some Christians in the West act as if an easy life were their divine right, as if to imply that suffering Christians elsewhere lack faith or virtue. Yet from its very beginning the story of Jesus challenges such a premise. Of the millions of refugees and other impoverished people throughout the world (for reports, see, for example, B. Thompson 1987), some are our brothers and sisters in Christ; many others have never yet heard how much he loves them. Reports of hundreds of thousands of civilians being tortured or slaughtered each year for political, ethnic or religious reasons can inoculate us against the reality of the human pain involved, but firsthand accounts from some of my closest African friends have brought the tragedy of this plight home to me. Many could resonate with the story of Jesus the refugee who identified with their suffering. Indeed, Western Christians should not be so arrogant as to think that we could never face such affliction ourselves; in due time Christians in all nations will receive their share of hardship (see 24:9).

Like other episodes in Matthew's first narrative section (1:18-4:25), the accounts of Jesus' childhood fulfill Scripture, with at least one explicit quotation per section. But all four stories in chapter 2 also surround place names rooted in Scripture. Jesus is "forced to wander from place to place," King of a world hostile to him (Schweizer 1975:41, 45). The world's treatment of Jesus likewise promises little better for his followers (10:23-25). While Christians are right to work for change within this world, we should not be surprised when we face hostility, false accusations or even death for Jesus' name (10:17-39; 13:21; 16:24-27; 24:9-14; compare 1 Thess 3:3; 1 Pet 4:12-13).

In Jesus the Anticipated Salvation of God's People Has Begun (2:15)

When Matthew quotes Hosea, he knows Hosea's context. The past exodus with which Jesus identified (Hos 11:1) was the historic sign of the covenant anticipating a new exodus (Hos 11:11). By

quoting the beginning of the passage, Matthew evokes the passage as a whole and shows how Jesus is the forerunner of the new exodus, the time of ultimate salvation. Matthew uses God's pattern in history to remind us that our call and destiny, not the ridicule of outsiders, must define us. We are the people of the new exodus, the people of God's kingdom.

Matthew declares (2:15) that Jesus' sojourn in Egypt fulfills Hosea's prophecy *Out of Egypt I called my son* (Hos 11:1). But this second line in Hosea's verse directly parallels the first, "When Israel was a child, I loved him." Thus by citing Hosea 11:1 Matthew evokes the new exodus in Jesus, who embodies Israel's purpose and mission (Longenecker 1975:144-45). But by emphasizing that Jesus' return from *Egypt* reveals his sonship, Matthew again emphasizes that Jesus' mission is for all peoples (compare Acts 6:13; 7:33). Matthew's quotation from Hosea also reminds us that Jesus identifies with his people's heritage. Jesus appears as the promised one greater than Moses (Deut 18:18; compare Mt 4:2; 17:2) and the heir of God's call to Israel. As God protected Moses when Pharaoh killed the male Israelite children, so God protects Jesus. Further, Jesus goes to Egypt like Israel under the first Joseph, and like Pharaoh, Herod slays male Israelite children (Ex 1:16-2:5; Ps-Philo 9:1). To persecuted Christians, Herod's Pharaoh-like behavior is significant. Infanticide and more frequently child abandonment constituted typically pagan offenses that the Jewish people despised (for example, Wis 12:5-6; 14:23; Ps-Philo 2:10; 4:16); only such pagan evildoers as Antiochus IV Epiphanes had repeated Pharaoh's murder of Israelite babies (1 Macc 1:60-61; 2 Macc 6:10; 8:4).

Part of the moral of the story is therefore how it reflects on rulers among God's people: if a supposed "king of the Jews" can be a new Pharaoh, one cannot necessarily count on one's own people for allies. Matthew again challenges his readers' prejudice against Gentiles, reminding them of their opposition from fellow Jews. In a world still divided by racial and national ties, Christians from all peoples must remember that no group of people is incapable of producing evil. Herod's behavior may thus summon us to examine the sins of our own people first (compare 7:1-5).

A Ruler's Injustice Is Denounced (2:16-17)

We lack concrete historical record for Matthew's next episode (except a garbled account from Macrobius; Ramsay 1898:219), but it certainly fits Herod's character (France 1979; compare Soares Prabhu 1976:227-28; Stauffer 1960:35-41). When Herod's young brother-in-law was becoming too popular, he had a "drowning accident" in what archaeology shows was a rather shallow pool; later, falsely accused officials were cudged to death on Herod's order (Jos. *War* 1.550-51). Wrongly suspecting two of his sons of plotting against him, he had them strangled (Jos. *Ant.* 16.394; *War* 1.550-51), and five days before his own death the dying Herod had a more treacherous, Absalom-like son executed (*Ant.* 17.187, 191; *War* 1.664-65). Thus many modern writers repeat the probably apocryphal story that Augustus remarked, "Better to be Herod's pig than his son" (Ramsay 1898:219-20).

The murder of the children of Bethlehem thus fits Herod's character; yet it is not surprising that other early writers do not mention this particular atrocity. Herod's reign was an era of many highly placed political murders, and our accounts come from well-to-do reporters focused on the royal house and national events. In such circles the execution of perhaps twenty children in a small town would warrant little attention—except from God (see France 1979:114-19). Matthew does not simply report this act of injustice dispassionately; he chooses an ancient lament from one of the most sorrowful times of his people's history. Jeremiah 31:15 speaks of Rachel weeping for her children, poetically describing the favored mother of Benjamin (standing for all Judah) mourning because her descendants were led into exile (see Montefiore 1968:2:10-11). Rachel, who wept from her grave in Bethlehem during the captivity, was now weeping at another, nearer crisis significant in salvation history (compare Mt 1:12, 17).

More important, however, the context in Jeremiah 31 also implies future hope. Rachel weeps for her children, but God comforts her, promising the restoration of his people (Jer 31:15-17), because Israel is "my dear son, the child in whom I delight" (Jer 31:20; compare Mt 2:15; 3:17). This time of new salvation will be the time of a new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). The painful events of Jesus' persecuted

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childhood are the anvil on which God will forge the fulfillment of his promises to his people, just as the cross will usher in the new covenant (Mt 26:28).

This text shows that God called his son Jesus to identify with the suffering and exile of his people (as in 1:12, 17; compare Jer 43:5-7) as he identified with their exodus (Mt 2:15). In his incarnation Jesus identified not only with humanity in an abstract sense but with the history of a people whose history is also spiritually the history of all believers (because we have been grafted into their history and use their Scriptures).

Yet we may also suspect that this identification speaks of a God who feels our human pain as deeply as we do. While philosophers and theologians must address the problem of evil intellectually, many grieving people inside and outside our churches face it existentially. To broken people wounded by this world's evil, Jesus' sharing our pain offers a consolation deeper than reasoned arguments: God truly understands and cares-and paid an awful price to begin to make things better.

Chapter 5

Preparation for Public Ministry

Just as God revealed his purposes in advance to his prophets in ancient Israel (Amos 3:7; compare Is 41:22-29; 42:9; 43:9, 19; 44:7-8, 24-26; 45:21; 46:10; 48:6), God sent John the Baptist to prepare Israel for his climactic revelation in history. John was a wilderness prophet proclaiming impending judgment; for him repentance (Mt 3:2, 6, 8) was the only appropriate response to the coming kingdom (3:2), its fiery judgment (3:7, 10-12) and its final judge, who would prove to be more than a merely political Messiah (3:11-12). Given the widespread view in early Judaism that prophecy in the formal sense had ceased (Keener 1991b:77-91), John's appearance naturally drew crowds (3:5). (Modern proponents of the view that miraculous gifts have ceased have not been the first people in history surprised when God's sovereign activity challenges their presuppositions; see Judges 6:13; Deere 1993.).

Warnings of a Wilderness Prophet

The warnings in this passage serve two functions for Matthew's persecuted readers: judgment against persecutors both vindicates the righteous they oppress and warns the righteous not to become wicked (Ezek 18:21-24). Matthew's tradition probably mentioned the "crowds" in general (compare Lk 3:7), but Matthew focuses in on a specific part of the crowds: *Pharisees and Sadducees* (Mt 3:7). Like a good pastor, Matthew thus applies the text to the needs of his own congregations: their Pharisaic opponents were spiritual Gentiles (3:6, 9). Yet later chapters in this Gospel warn Matthew's audience that they can also become like these Pharisees if they are not careful (24:48-51; compare Amos 5:18-20).

John's Lifestyle Summons Us to Heed God's Call (3:1-4)

John's location, garb and diet suggest a radical servant of God whose lifestyle challenges the values of our society even more than it did his own, and may demand the attention of modern Western society even more than his preaching does.

First, John's location suggests that the biblical prophets' promise of a new exodus was about to take place in Jesus. So significant is the wilderness (3:1) to John's mission that all four Gospels justify it from Scripture (3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23; Is 40:3): Israel's prophets had predicted a new exodus in the wilderness (Hos 2:14-15; Is 40:3). Thus Jewish people in John's day acknowledged the wilderness as the appropriate place for prophets and messiahs (Mt 24:26; Acts 21:38; Jos. *Ant.* 20.189; *War* 2.259, 261-62).

Further and no less important to John's mission, the wilderness was a natural place for fugitives from a hostile society (as in Heb 11:38; Rev 12:6; *Ps. Sol.* 17:17), including prophets like Elijah (1 Kings 17:2-6; 2 Kings 6:1-2). John could safely draw crowds (Mt 3:5) there as he could nowhere else (compare Jos. *Ant.* 18.118), and it provided him the best accommodations for public baptisms not sanctioned by establishment leaders (see Jos. *Ant.* 18.117). Thus John's location symbolizes both the coming of a new exodus, the final time of salvation, and the price a true prophet of God must be willing to pay for his or her call: exclusion from all that society values—its comforts, status symbols and even basic necessities (compare 1 Kings 13:8-9, 22; 20:37; Is 20:2; Jer 15:15-18; 16:1-9; 1 Cor 4:8-13).

Although true prophets could function within society under godly governments (as in 2 Sam 12:1-25; 24:11-12), in evil times it was mainly corrupt prophets who remained in royal courts (1 Kings 22:6-28; compare Mt 11:8) as God's true messengers were forced into exile (1 Kings 17:3; 18:13). Most Jewish people in the first century practiced their religion seriously; but the religious establishment could not accommodate a prophet like John whose lifestyle dramatically challenged the status quo. A prophet with a message and values like John's might not feel very welcome in many contemporary Western churches either. (Imagine, for example, a prophet overturning our Communion table, demanding how we can claim to partake of Christ's body while attending a racially segregated church or ignoring the needs of the poor. In most churches we would throw him out on his ear.)

John's garment (Mt 3:4) in general resembled the typical garb of the poor, as would befit a wilderness prophet cut off from all society's comforts. But more important, his clothing specifically evokes that of the Israelite prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8 LXX). Malachi had promised Elijah's return in the end time (Mal 4:5-6), a promise that subsequent Jewish tradition developed (for example, Sirach 48:10; compare 4 Ezra 6:26; *t. 'Eduyyot* 3:4). Although Matthew did not regard John as Elijah literally (17:3; compare Lk 1:17), he believed that John had fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah's mission (Mt 11:14-15; 17:11-13).

John's Elijah-like garb thus tells Matthew's readers two things: first, their Lord arrived exactly on schedule, following the promised end-time prophet; and second, John's harsh mission required him to be a wilderness prophet like Elijah. Following God's call in our lives may demand intense sacrifice.

John's diet also sends a message to complacent Christians. Disgusted though we might be today by a diet of bugs with natural sweetener, some other poor people in antiquity also ate locusts (3:4), and honey was the usual sweetener in the Palestinian diet, regularly available even to the poor. But locusts sweetened with honey constituted John's entire diet. First-century readers would have placed him in the category of a highly committed holy man: the pietists who lived in the wilderness and dressed simply normally ate only the kinds of food that grew by themselves (2 Macc 5:27; Jos. *Life* 11). Matthew is telling us that John lived simply, with only the barest forms of

necessary sustenance. Although God calls only some disciples to such a lifestyle (Mt 11:18-19), this lifestyle challenges all of us to adjust our own values. Others' needs must come before our luxuries (Lk 3:11; 12:33; 14:33), and proclaiming the kingdom is worth any cost (Mt 8:20; 10:9-19).

For that matter, John's lifestyle, like that of St. Anthony, St. Francis, John Wesley or Mother Teresa, may challenge affluent Western Christianity even more deeply than John's message does. John's lifestyle declares that he lived fully for the will of God, not valuing possessions, comfort or status. Blinded by our society's values, we too often preach a Christianity that merely "meets our needs" rather than one that calls us to sacrifice our highest desires for the kingdom. Too many Western Christians live a religion that costs nothing, treats the kingdom cheaply and therefore does not demand saving faith. Saving faith includes believing God's grace so sincerely that we live as if his message is true and stake our lives on it. May we have the courage to trust God as John did, to stake everything on the kingdom (13:46) and to relinquish our own popularity, when necessary, by summoning others to stake everything on the kingdom as well.

John Has an Uncomfortable Message for Israel (3:5-10)

Although most Jewish traditions acknowledged that all people need some repentance (see 1 Kings 8:46; 1 Esdras 4:37-38; Sirach 8:5), John's call to his people (Mt 3:5-6, 8-9) is more radical. John's "repentance" refers not to a regular turning from sin after a specific act but to a once-for-all repentance, the kind of turning from an old way of life to a new that Judaism associated with Gentiles' converting to Judaism. True repentance is costly: the kingdom "demands a response, a radical decision... Nominalism is the curse of modern western Christianity" (Ladd 1978a:100). In various ways John warns his hearers against depending on the special privileges of their heritage.

First, John's baptism confirms that he is calling for a once-for-all turning from the old way of life to the new, as when Gentiles convert to Judaism. Although Judaism practiced various kinds of regular ceremonial washings, only the baptism of Gentiles into Judaism paralleled the kind of radical, once-for-all change John was demanding. In other words, John was treating Jewish people as if they were Gentiles, calling them to turn to God on the same terms they believed

God demanded of Gentiles. As F. F. Bruce puts it, "If John's baptism was an extension of proselyte baptism to the chosen people, then his baptism, like his preaching, meant that even the descendants of Abraham must... enter... by repentance and baptism just as Gentiles had to do" (1978:61).

Second, John's hearers were not all good descendants of their ancestors anyway. "Viper" was certainly an insult, and *brood of vipers* (offspring of vipers) carries the insult further. In the ancient Mediterranean many people thought of vipers as mother killers. In the fifth century B.C. Herodotus declared that newborn Arabian vipers chewed their way out of their mothers' wombs, killing their mothers in the process. Herodotus believed that they did so to avenge their fathers, who were slain by the mothers during procreation (Herod.Hist. 3.109). Later writers applied his words to serpents everywhere (Aelian *on Animals* 1.24; Pliny *N.H.* 10.170; Plut. *Divine Vengeance* 32, *Mor.* 567F). Calling John's hearers vipers would have been an insult, but calling them a *brood of vipers* accused them of killing their own mothers, indicating the utmost moral depravity. That Matthew applies this phrase to religious leaders may be unfortunately significant.

Third, employing the image of a tree's *fruit*, both John and Jesus demand that one's life match one's profession (3:8; 7:16-17; 12:33; 13:22-23; 21:34, 43). In contrast to some forms of modern Christianity, Judaism also insisted that repentance be demonstrated practically (*m. Yoma* 8:8-9; Montefiore 1968:2:15). Thus no one could simply appeal to ethnic character or descent from Abraham (compare Deut 26:5). Biblical tradition had already applied the image of a *tree* being *cut down* (Ezek 31:12-18; Dan 4:23) or burned (Jer 11:16) to the judgment of a nation. Most small trees that could not bear fruit would have been useful, especially for firewood (N. Lewis 1983:139).

Fourth, John's admonition that out of stones God could raise up children for Abraham (compare Gen 1:24; 2:9) warns his hearers not to take their status as God's people for granted. Jewish people had long believed they were chosen in Abraham (Neh 9:7; Mic 7:20; E. Sanders 1977:87-101), but John responds that this ethnic chosenness is insufficient to guarantee salvation unless it is accompanied by righteousness (compare Amos 3:2; 9:7). Prophets were not above using witty wordplay at times (Amos 8:1-2; Mic

1:10-15; Jer 1:11-12), and *children* and *stones* probably represent a wordplay in Aramaic; the two words sound very similar (Manson 1979:40). (At any rate, John's symbolism should not have been obscure: God had previously used stones to symbolize his people in Ex 24:4; 28:9-12; Josh 4:20-21.)

Salvation demands personal commitment, not merely being part of a religious or ethnic group. No one can take one's spiritual status for granted simply because one is Jewish, Catholic, Baptist, evangelical or anything else. As the saying goes, God has no grandchildren; the piety of our upbringing cannot save us if we are not personally committed to Christ. Even depending on our past religious experience is precarious. Whereas historic Calvinism teaches that the elect will persevere to the end and Arminianism allows that apostate converts may be lost, neither supports the now-common view that those who pray the sinner's prayer but return to a life of ignoring God will be saved. Yet at a popular level, vast numbers of people believe they are saved because they once prayed a prayer. If this modern popular misunderstanding of the once-saved-always-saved doctrine is false, it may be responsible for millions of people's assuming they are saved when they are in fact lost. John's message constituted a decisive challenge to false doctrines of his day that cost people their salvation; John's successors in our day must be prepared to issue the same sort of unpopular challenges.

John Proclaims the Coming Judge and Judgment (3:10-12)

In Matthew, John is mostly what narrative critics call a "reliable character": we can trust the perspective of most of what he says (11:7-11). The only point at which Matthew needs to qualify John's proclamation is John's inability to distinguish works inaugurated at the first coming of Jesus (such as baptism in the Spirit) from those inaugurated at the second (such as baptism in fire); Jesus addresses this lack of nuance in 11:2-5 (see comment there).

Although Matthew and Luke retain Mark's emphasis on the Spirit (the Spirit-baptizer himself becomes the model of the Spirit-empowered life-Mk 1:8-12; see Keener 1996: 29-30), they report more of John's preaching of imminent judgment than Mark does. Matthew emphasizes the kingdom, the Coming One and the judgment he is bringing (Mt 3:2, 7-12).

First, John emphasizes that the *kingdom* is coming. In Matthew's summary of their preaching, both John and Jesus announce the same message: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near* (3:2; 4:17). Matthew intends us to see John's and Jesus' preaching about the kingdom as models for our preaching as well (10:7); the Lord is not looking the other way in a world of injustice but is coming to set matters straight. Therefore those who believe his warnings had better get their lives in order. Most Jewish people in Palestine expected a time of impending judgment against the wicked and deliverance for the righteous. But most expected judgment on other peoples and on only the most wicked in Israel (compare *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1; E. Sanders 1985:96); Jewish people, after all, had certain privileges. Oppressed by surrounding nations, Israel had good reason to long for deliverance, but many people within the nation, including its political leaders, needed to look first to themselves. Amos sounded a clear warning, to his generation, to Jesus' generation and to ours, when we prove more quick to judge others than ourselves: "Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD," for it will be a day of reckoning (Amos 5:18). Sometimes skeptics appeal to evil in the world to deny God's existence; instead they should be applauding his mercy in giving them time to repent, because when God decisively abolishes evil, he will have to abolish them (see 2 Pet 3:3-9).

Second, John warns that the wicked will be burned, just as farmers destroy useless products after the harvest. Harvest and the threshing floor (3:8, 10, 12) were natural images to use in agrarian, rural Palestine. Earlier biblical writers had used these images to symbolize judgment and the end time (as in Ps 1:4; Is 17:13; Hos 13:3; Joel 3:13; Jesus (Mt 9:38; 13:39; 21:34) and his contemporaries (4 Ezra 4:30-32; *Jub.* 36:10) also used the image. (Fire naturally symbolized future judgment, as in Is 66:15-16, 24; *1 Enoch* 103:8.) Villagers carried grain to village threshing floors; large estates worked by tenants would have their own (N. Lewis 1983:123). When threshers tossed grain in the air, the wind separated out the lighter, inedible chaff. The most prominent use of this chaff was for fuel (*CPJ* 1:199). But while chaff burned quickly, John depicts the wicked's fire as *unquenchable*. Many of his contemporaries believed that hell was only temporary (for example, *t. Sanhedrin* 13:3, 4), but John specifically affirmed that it involved eternal torment, drawing on the most horrible image for hell available in his day.

Many of us today are as uncomfortable as John's contemporaries with the doctrine of eternal torment; yet genuinely considering and believing it would radically affect the way we live. That John directs his harshest preaching toward religious people (Mt 3:7) should also arouse some introspection on our part (see also Blomberg 1992:142-43). Even for the saved, the knowledge that all private thoughts will be brought to light (10:26) should inspire self-discipline when other humans are not watching. Our culture prefers a comfortable message of God's blessing on whatever we choose to do with our lives; God reminds us that his Word and not our culture remains the final arbiter of our destiny.

Finally, John warns of the coming judge, who is incomparably powerful. Judgment is coming, but the coming judge John announces is superhuman in rank (3:11-12). Only God could pour out the gift of the Spirit (Is 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:29; Zech 12:10), and no mere mortal would baptize in fire (in the context, this clearly means judge the wicked-3:10, 12).

Further, whereas Israel's prophets had called themselves "servants of God" (as in 2 Kings 9:7, 36; Jer 7:25; Dan 9:6, 10; Amos 3:7), John declares himself unworthy even to be the coming judge's slave! In ancient Mediterranean thought, a household servant's basest tasks involved the master's feet, such as washing his feet, carrying his sandals or unfastening the thongs of his sandals (see, for example, Diog. Laert. 6.2.44; *b. Baba Batra* 53b). Although ancient teachers usually expected disciples to function as servants (as in Diog. Laert. 7.1.12; 7.5.170; *t. Baba Mesi`a* 2:30), later rabbis made one exception explicit: disciples did not tend to the teacher's sandals (*b. Ketubot* 96a). John thus claims to be unworthy to even be the Coming One's slave. Indeed, the One whose way John prepares is none other than the Lord himself (Is 40:3; Mt 3:3). Matthew's readers would not need to know Hebrew to realize that John was preparing the way for "God with us" (1:23). No wonder John is nervous about baptizing Jesus (3:14)!

Baptism of Jesus (3:14-17)

Given the embarrassment of some early Christian traditions that Jesus accepted baptism from one of lower status than himself, it is now inconceivable that early Christians made up the story of John

baptizing Jesus (E. Sanders 1985:11; 1993:94; Meier 1994:100-105; pace Bultmann 1968:251).

Although Jesus alone did not need John's baptism-he was the giver of the true baptism (3:11)-he submitted to it to fulfill God's plan (3:14-15). In a traditional Mediterranean culture where society stressed honor and shame (Malina 1993), Jesus relinquishes his rightful honor to embrace others' shame. After Jesus' public act of humility, God publicly honors Jesus as his own Son (3:16-17; compare 2:15)-that is, as the mightier One whose coming to bestow the Spirit John had prophesied (3:11-12).

John Recognizes Jesus as the Ultimate Baptizer (3:14)

Why would the fire-baptizer seek baptism like an ordinary mortal? Whereas John recognizes Jesus' superiority, Jesus humbly identifies himself with John's mission: *It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness* (Meier 1980:26-27). Although John undoubtedly recognized the Spirit's empowerment in his own ministry (Lk 1:15-17), he recognized that Jesus had come to bestow the Spirit in fuller measure than even he as a prophet had received, and he desired this baptism (Mt 3:11; compare 11:11-13).

Various schools of thought today dispute exactly what the New Testament writers meant by Spirit baptism; some think the term refers to conversion only, and others only to a subsequent experience. It may be that John applied the expression to the entire sphere of the Spirit's work in our lives, including both conversion and subsequent experiences of empowerment (see Keener 1996:17-78), in which case both main schools of thought would be correct. But regardless of our view about the specific meaning of his language, most of us fail to grasp the power God has provided us. If Jesus has bestowed on us even more spiritual power than he bestowed on John and the Old Testament prophets, today's church should be trusting God for a much deeper empowerment in our life and witness than most of us currently experience.

Jesus "Fulfills All Righteousness" by Identifying with His People (3:15)

As noted above, on behalf of others Jesus voluntarily accepted a lower status than he deserved. Since "fulfilling righteousness"

elsewhere in Matthew may pertain to obeying the principles of the law (5:17, 20; compare, for example, *Sib. Or.* 3.246), Jesus presumably here expresses his obedience to God's plan revealed in the Scriptures. But Jesus sometimes also fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures by identifying with Israel's history and completing its mission (Mt 2:15, 18). This baptism hence probably represents Jesus' ultimate identification with Israel at the climactic stage in its history: confessing its sins to prepare for the kingdom (3:2, 6).

If this suggestion is correct, then Jesus' baptism, like his impending death (compare Mk 10:38-39 with Mk 14:23-24, 36), is vicarious, embraced on behalf of others with whom the Father has called him to identify (Lampe 1951:39). This text declares the marvelous love of God for an undeserving world—especially for us who by undeserved grace have become his disciples. Jesus' example also calls us to offer ourselves sacrificially for an undeserving world as he offered himself for us. In a world that regards moral boundaries as impractical, where nothing higher than selfish passion guides many lives around us, Jesus reminds us of a higher mission and purpose for our lives. By submitting to baptism by one of lower rank who was nevertheless fulfilling his calling, Jesus also models humility for us.

God Declares His Approval of Jesus (3:16-17)

After Jesus submits humbly to others in God's plan, God publicly acknowledges Jesus' own rank. First, *heaven was opened*, reflecting biblical language for God's revelation or future deliverance (Is 64:1 [LXX 63:19]; Ezek 1:1; Kingsbury 1983:64; Schweizer 1970:37; compare *Joseph and Asenath* 14:2/3).

Second, Jesus saw *the Spirit descending like a dove and lighting on him*. The background for this sign of God's approval may require further comment. Scholars have often suspected that the dove has symbolic value and have proposed a variety of possible backgrounds for it. Jewish use of the dove to symbolize God's Spirit (Abrahams 1917:48-49; Barrett 1966:38) is both rare and late, as is the rabbinic comparison of the brooding Spirit in Genesis 1 with a dove (Taylor 1952:160-61). More frequently the dove represents Israel (as in Ps-Philo 39:5; *b. Sabbath* 49a; 130a); but while Jesus identifies with Israel in the context (as in Mt 2:11), this passage portrays the Spirit, not Jesus, as a dove. Genesis 8:8-12 probably provides the most suitable

background (see also 4 Baruch 7:8): here the dove appears as the harbinger of the new world after the flood, which other early Christian literature employs as a prototype of the coming age (Mt 24:38; 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 3:6-7). Jesus is the inaugurator of the kingdom era that John has been proclaiming.

Third, God shows his approval of Jesus by a *voice from heaven*, a concept with which Matthew's Jewish audience was undoubtedly familiar. Many Jewish teachers considered this *bat qol* the primary source of revelation apart from Scripture exposition while the Spirit of prophecy was quenched. The Gospels show that three voices—Scripture, a prophetic voice in the wilderness and the heavenly voice—all attest Jesus' identity. The heavenly voice alone would have been inadequate, but here it confirms the witness of Scripture and a prophet. Jesus is not a mere prophet but the subject of other prophets' messages.

The fact of the voice is important, but what the voice says is most important, for this is what officially declares Jesus' identity to Matthew's biblically informed implied audience. The voice rehearses ancient biblical language, probably adapting Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son") into an announcement to the bystanders (*This is my Son*). Psalm 2, originally an enthronement psalm, is here used to announce in advance Jesus' messianic enthronement. The second proposed biblical allusion here, Isaiah 42:1 is more controversial, despite its many proponents. But whether or not Mark saw Isaiah's servant as background here, Matthew surely did, for he reads the wording of this voice's recognition oracle into his own translation of Isaiah (Mt 12:18). Jesus' mission includes suffering opposition as well as reigning, and so does the mission of his followers (5:11-12; 10:22; 16:24-27; 19:27-29; 24:9-13).

The Father's acclamation of the Son may suggest various principles to Matthew's readers. First, it reveals how central Jesus is to the Father's heart and plan; no one can reject Jesus and simultaneously please the Father. Jesus is not one prophet among many, but God's ultimate revelation; that he is God's "beloved" Son underlines the magnitude of God's sacrifice (compare Jn 3:16). Though in many contemporary circles worship properly exhorts and encourages the people of God (Col 3:16), we also need the kind of worship that tells

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Jesus how great he is, praising him for what he has done and for who he is (Ps 150:2).

Second, the Father's acclamation reveals that the meek Jesus is also the ultimate ruler who will usher in justice and peace. The beginning of his story tells his persecuted followers the end of the story in advance, providing us firm hope for the future.

Finally, the voice reveals Jesus as the Son obedient to the point of death, which willingly divests himself of his proper honor by identifying with us in baptism and death. We who often trifle with obedience in the smallest matters—for instance, the discipline of our thoughts or words for God's honor—are shamed by our Lord's obedience. May we worship him so intensely that his desires become our own and we, like our Lord, become obedient servants with whom the Father is *well pleased*.

Chapter 6

Jesus' Galilean Ministry

Jesus, Galilean ministry opens with the narratives of Jesus' temptations. Scholars' interpretations of the temptation narrative broadly fall into three primary categories (Theissen 1991:218-19): (1) Jesus' testing recalls that of Israel in the wilderness; whatever God commanded Israel his child in the wilderness, much more he would require of his Son the Messiah. (2) Jesus provides a model for tested believers. (3) The narrative affirms a correct understanding of Jesus' messiahship as against contemporary political or militaristic interpretations. Clues within the narrative (such as 4:2) and the rest of Matthew (such as 6:13; 26:41; 27:42-43) indicate that the narrative functions in all three ways.

God's Son Passes the Test (4:1-11)

Matthew emphasizes that Jesus, unlike Israel, passed his test in the wilderness. Matthew makes this biblical background clear even in simple ways like saying

the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, reflecting a common biblical motif of God guiding his people in the wilderness (as in Ex 13:18, 21; 15:13, 22; Deut 8:2). We should also note that Jesus quotes three texts from Deuteronomy, all of them commandments that Israel failed to obey but that Jesus is determined to obey.

Like John, Jesus had to exit the confines of society for his supernatural encounter (see comment on 3:1-12). The wilderness (translated *desert* in the NIV because few people lived there) was not a pleasant place: some believed the wilderness to be a special haunt of demons (see comment on 12:43; compare *1 Enoch* 10:4; 4 Macc 18:8). Apart from a few rugged people like John who made the “wilderness” between the Jordan Valley and Judean hills their home, it represented a dangerous and inhospitable setting (E. Sanders 1993:113).

But when we think of applying this passage today, we may meditate at greater length on the other two lessons scholars often draw from the narrative: what Jesus’ victory models for us as his disciples and what the passage tells us about the true character of Jesus’ mission. No less than Matthew’s discourse sections (28:19), this narrative provides a model for us. (Jewish teachers instructed by example as well as by word, and biographers taught moral lessons through their accounts. So narratives about Jesus teach us no less than his direct commandments do.) For instance, if John had been a model of sacrificial obedience for living in the wilderness and subsisting on locusts, Jesus who *fasts* in the wilderness is even more so.

This narrative underlines the biblical principle that God’s calling must be tested. The Spirit, having empowered Jesus for his mission as God’s Son (3:16-17), now is the one who leads him into the wilderness where his call must be tested (4:1, 3, 6). Matthew expressly informs us that the purpose of the Spirit’s first leading of God’s Son was that he might be tested! Like most of his heroic predecessors in biblical history (Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Job), Jesus had to pass a period of testing before beginning his public ministry. Some of his predecessors almost snapped under pressure, restrained only by God’s favor (for example, 1 Sam 25:13-34; 1 Kings 19:4; Jer 20:7-18), but our Lord Jesus provides the perfect model for triumphing in testing.

If God is calling and empowering you to do something for him (3:16-17), you can expect to be tested (compare comment on 6:13), and you can expect testing commensurate with the seriousness of your call. The devil may not show up in person or test you on the same supernatural level that he tested Jesus, but your hardships may seem unbearable apart from the grace of God. Nevertheless, testing is for our good: when biblical heroes had matured through the time of testing, they knew the depth of God’s grace that had sustained them. The truly triumphant boast not in their success in the test but in God’s empowerment, without which they could not have overcome. Jesus went into this testing only after the Father had empowered him in the Spirit (3:16).

This narrative presents Jesus as our vicarious advocate, relinquishing his own power for his mission to save us from our sins. In this narrative Matthew presents Jesus as Israel’s-and our-champion, the One who succeeded in the wilderness where Israel had failed. (A champion was one who fought another on behalf of and as a representative of his people, the way David fought Goliath.) Christians are destined for testing (6:13; 26:41), but Jesus our forerunner has gone before us and shown us how to overcome.

The devil tempts Jesus to abuse his calling and power for selfish ends. The “christological” interpretation of this passage noted above has much to teach us. In 3:16-17 God identifies Jesus as his Son; now the devil tries to redefine the nature of Jesus’ sonship (4:3, 5-6, and 8-9). *If you are the Son of God* can also be translated “*Since you are the Son of God,*” which may be more likely in this context: the devil invites Jesus not so much to deny his sonship as to act according to various worldly expectations for that role. This narrative warns all of us whom God has called not to let the world define the content of our call. For instance, some pulpit ministers ought to be ministering as public school teachers or social workers in addition to or instead of pulpit ministry, and some in other professions should be training to become expounders of God’s Word.

In other words, we must acknowledge God’s right not only to determine what to label our calling but also to determine what that label should mean. A call to evangelism may be a call to bring Christ to people on the streets or in hospitals rather than in a traditional

pulpit-yet such a ministry may bring more people to Christ than most traditional pulpit ministries can. Disregarding the church hierarchy and the “ministerial ethics” of his day, John Wesley went into other ministers’ parishes to reach the people those ministers were not reaching—the poor and alienated. Wesley’s call did not fit traditional categories of ministry, but the revival that ensued turned Britain inside out. We, like Jesus, can begin our mission only once we have demonstrated that our commitment is to God who called us and that we will let him rather than human honor define the nature of our call.

Note *how* the devil seeks to redefine Jesus’ call: he appeals to various culturally prevalent models of power to suggest how Jesus should use his God-given power. God’s empowerment does not guarantee that we are doing his will in all details (compare 1 Cor 13:1-3). One example of exploiting God’s power for selfish ends is the minority of clergy and other professional authority figures who abuse their calling for sexual or other advantages. When we confuse others’ dependence on our office with dependence on us as persons, we endanger our own relationship with God as his humble servants (Mt 23:5-12; 24:45-51; Prov 16:18; 18:12).

The devil tests Jesus with three roles into which other Palestinian charismatic leaders had fallen—from the crassly demonic sorcerer’s role to that of an apparently pious leader. Jesus’ refusal in each case allows Matthew to define Jesus’ call over against the charges of his opponents (12:24; 26:55; 27:11, 40-43).

First, Jesus was not a magician (4:3). Magicians typically sought to transform one substance into another to demonstrate their power over nature (as in *p. Hagiga* 2:2, 5; *Sanhedrin* 6:6, 2). Jesus’ opponents could not deny his power but wished to attribute it to Satan, as if he were a magician (Mt 12:24); many Jews associated demons with the worst kind of sorcery (Ps-Philo 34.2-3; *b. Sanhedrin* 67b). Unlike most of Jesus’ religious contemporaries, however, the reader knows the true story and just how false the charge of Jesus’ association with magic was. Even after a forty-day fast, and though Jesus had power to multiply food for the crowds (Mt 14:13-21; 15:29-38; 16:9-10), he resisted the temptation to turn stones into bread. Where magicians manipulated spiritual power and formulas, Jesus acted from an intimate, obedient personal relationship with his Father (6:7-9).

Like a father disciplining his children, God humbled Israel in the wilderness, teaching his people that he would provide their bread while they were unemployed if they would just look to him (Deut 8:1-5). Jesus accepts his Father’s call in the wilderness and waits for his Father to act for him (Mt 4:11).

Second (pace Albert Schweitzer), Jesus was not a deluded visionary (4:5-6) like Josephus’s “false prophets” who wrongly expected God to back up their miraculous claims (Jos. *Ant.* 20.168; *War* 2.259). By wanting Jesus to jump over an abyss (perhaps on the southeast corner of the temple area overlooking the Kidron Valley) known to invite certain death without God’s intervention (see Jos. *Ant.* 15.412), the devil wants Jesus to presume on his relationship with God, to act as if God were there to serve his Son rather than the reverse. Religious teachers later echo Satan’s theology: if Jesus is God’s Son, let God rescue him from the cross (Mt 27:40-43). When people become as arrogant as to think we have God figured out, we can easily miss God’s true purposes and become Satan’s mouthpieces.

Among contemporary charismatics (of whom I am one) I observe two prominent models for being “charismatic.” One is to “claim” blessings on the basis of spiritual formulas, a method whose success God never guaranteed. Like the first-century false prophets who promised the pious Jerusalemites the deliverance they wanted to hear (as in Jos. *War* 6.285-87), our brothers and sisters who follow this method without the Spirit may encounter some uncomfortable surprises. (Matthew would also have balked at some charismatics’ claim to be able to “send” angels—4:6; 26:53.) The other method is to sensitively follow the Spirit’s leading to do what God has called us to do. When God has genuinely spoken and his servants act in obedience, he will accomplish his purposes—even if those purposes must lead us through the cross. For “who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?” (Lam 3:37).

Jesus did not get himself into testing presumptuously; like Elijah of old, he did what he did at God’s command (1 Kings 18:36). Jesus understood Scripture accurately and alluded not only to the passage he cited but to its context. When he warns against putting *the Lord your God to the test* (Mt 4:7; Deut 6:16), he alludes to Israel’s dissatisfaction in the wilderness (as in Ex 17:2-3). Although God

graciously supplied their needs, they harshly demanded more, forgetting how much God had delivered them from. We, like Israel, serve a living God and must be prepared to do his will whether or not it is to our immediate liking (Mt 26:42).

Finally, Jesus was not a political revolutionary, contrary to the assumptions and charges of the Jewish aristocracy (26:55, 61; 27:11-12; compare P. Ellis 1974:108). As another Gospel puts it, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest” (Jn 18:36). Many citizens of the Roman Empire felt that Rome ruled the earth’s kingdoms (for example, Rev 17:18; Jos. *War* 2.361; 3.473); to rule the earth would include the subjection of the Roman emperor. If Matthew writes after A.D. 70, his audience knows how Roman forces had slaughtered the Jewish revolutionaries and how resounding defeat had dashed their people’s hopes for a worldly kingdom; how would deliverance come?

The devil offered Jesus the kingdom without the cross, a temptation that has never lost its appeal. Corrupted once it achieved political power and popularity, its members’ motives no longer purified by persecution, the medieval church too often was marked by corruption and repression that we today repudiate; but we can face the same temptations. Upon facing this temptation, not Jesus’ opponents but his own star disciple Peter echoes Satan’s theology exactly: the messianic kingdom without the cross (Mt 16:22). Jesus thus pushes away Peter in disgust as he had Satan—even to the point of calling Peter *Satan* (16:23; compare 4:10). Jesus’ mission involved the cross (26:54), and whether we like it or not, so does our mission (16:23-26).

Political and social involvement are important; marketing strategies are not necessarily wrong; but when we substitute any other means of transforming society for dependence on God, we undercut the very purpose for our mission. Where the church flirts with political power to enforce public morality, it must become all the more conscious of its own need for spiritual renewal. Atheists and Christians often use the same methods of social change; but if we genuinely embrace a faith worth defending, can we also have the faith to go beyond those methods and depend on *God* to give us revival? The temptation narrative strikes

at the heart of human religion and worldly conceptions of power—and reminds us of how close that danger can come to believers.

The narrative also emphasizes that we can use Scripture for righteous or unrighteous causes. Jesus and the devil argue Scripture, and both are adept in it (as some later rabbis expected the devil and some demons were; for example, *b. Sanhedrin* 89b), though the devil quotes Scripture out of context and so values its wording over its meaning (4:6). (Psalm 91:3-10 addresses protection from dangers that approach the righteous, not testing God to see whether he will really do what Scripture promises.) That the devil quotes Scripture out of context should not surprise us, since he does it even today in many pulpits every Sunday morning. (I say this only partly tongue in cheek; religious leaders in Mt 27:40 become mouthpieces for the devil’s lie in 4:3, and Jesus’ leading disciple in 16:22 echoes 4:8-9. Piety, whether feigned or genuine, does not necessarily preserve us from communicating false ideologies from our culture or spiritual tradition that we have never taken the time to examine from God’s revealed Word.) Notice too that whereas Jesus uses Scripture to teach him God’s will, the devil presents it merely as promises to be exploited for one’s own purposes—as some of the more extreme radio preachers today have put it, “how to get God to work for you.”

But the devil’s abuse of Scripture should not lead us to neglect Scripture’s real power when rightly interpreted and applied. Our Lord himself submitted his life to its claims (compare 3:15) and calls us to do the same (5:17-20). Jesus’ three responses in this testing narrative share the phrase *it is written* (NIV) or “It has been written” (4:4, 7, 10). It comes as no surprise that Jesus’ first citation declares the primacy of God’s words, on which we his people should feed as on necessary food (4:4; compare Jer 15:16). Not worldly categories but God’s will revealed in Scripture defined the character of Jesus’ call.

Jesus’ specific Spirit-led behavior in this model is significant: he already knew God’s commands and their context, and for him to know was to obey. He adds no reasoning to God’s simple commands. “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:11). We must learn Scripture well and, empowered by the Spirit, choose to obey it rather than flirting with temptation. We can

overcome temptation in any given case; hence no matter how great we feel our temptations are, there is no temptation too great to endure (1 Cor 10:13). As many modern authors emphasize, we need to be honest about temptation and not say, “I can’t help it”; if we are tempted, we must be honest and say, “I won’t.” Jesus’ victory for us has taken away our excuse; he has provided us the power to overcome if we dare to believe him.

Finally, God brings triumph to those who remain faithful in testing (4:11). Without Jesus’ submitting to the devil (compare Mt 4:6: *his angels ... will lift you up*), God’s agents provide Jesus’ needs as soon as he has vanquished his foe. After three high-stake tests the devil leaves, so that Jesus can later say that he is freeing Satan’s possessions because he has already bound the strong man (12:29). Jesus is the new Moses who will provide bread for his people (see commentary on 14:13-21; 16:29-38), whom God will deliver by the resurrection and who will eventually rule the nations (Ps 2:7, cited by God in Mt 3:17). According to Jesus’ call, all these things belonged to him; but the ends of God’s call in the long term do not justify inappropriate means in the short term (such as affirming unjust denominational policies or cheating on seminary exams). Our mission is most of all obedience to our Father’s will, both in our destiny and in the details. God’s vindication does not always come in this life, but in the end he always delivers his own.

The First Disciples (4:18-25)

Once God had commissioned Jesus (3:17), the devil had tested him (4:3-11), the forerunner had completed his mission (4:12) and Jesus had settled in Capernaum (4:12-16), he was ready to begin his public ministry (*from that time on*, 4:17). Matthew opens this section with a summary of Jesus’ message (v. 17). As this message summarizes Jesus’ proclamation of God’s authority, so verses 18-22 demonstrate people’s proper response to God’s rule; verses 23-25 demonstrate God’s rule over sickness and demons; and chapters 5-7 flesh out the nature of the ethic of repentance one must live to be prepared in advance for the kingdom.

For Matthew, the message for both Galilean Jews (10:5-7) and eventually Gentiles (28:18-19) is the same as John the Baptist’s (3:2)

and that of Jesus: Get your lives in order, for God’s kingdom is approaching (4:17). Only those who submit to God’s reign in advance (as in 4:18-22) will be ready when he comes to rule the whole world. Just as Jesus’ message concurred with that of John, so the message of Jesus’ followers must accord with that of Jesus. We must proclaim the imminence of the kingdom (10:7; compare 28:18), demonstrate God’s rule over sickness and demons (10:8), and pass on our Master’s teachings (28:19).

In 4:18-22 the One whom the Father called now calls others who will advance his mission. Jesus’ call to leave profession and family was radical, the sort of demand that only the most radical teacher would make. This text provides us several examples of servant-leadership and radical discipleship.

Jesus Calls a Nucleus of Disciples (4:18-19)

Early Jewish and Greek tradition normally assumes that disciples are responsible for acquiring their own teachers of the law (*m. Abot* 1:6, 16; *ARN* 3, 8A; *Socrates Ep.* 4). The more radical teachers who, like Jesus, sometimes even rejected prospective disciples (see commentary on Mt 19:21-22) probably considered the disciple’s responsibility so weighty that it would be dishonorable for the teacher to seek out the disciple.

Jesus’ seeking out disciples himself may thus represent a serious breach of custom (Malina 1981:78; though compare Jer 1:4-10), “coming down to their level” socially. This would be like itinerant preachers going out to the unchurched instead of expecting them to visit our churches and appreciate our well-prepared sermons. Probably Jesus is choosing as his model the prophetic way of choosing one’s successor found in 1 Kings 19:19-21 (see also Lk 9:61-62).

Jesus Relates to His Hearers in Terms They Can Understand (4:19)

Although most scholars agree that Matthew’s community included Christian scribes (Mt 13:52; 23:34), Jesus did not call professionally trained rabbis (who might have had a lot to *unlearn* first) to be his disciples. He called artisans and encouraged them that the skills they already had were serviceable in the kingdom. If God called shepherds like Moses and David to shepherd his people Israel, Jesus could call

fishermen to be gatherers of people. Some great men and women of God in the Bible never even became public expositors of Scripture; aside from his prophetic gifts, Joseph's witness involved especially public administration, learned in Potiphar's house and a prison and then applied to all Egypt. Social workers, teachers and many others have skills and backgrounds on which we must draw to be an effective church today. It is to our loss that congregations disregard the insights of the various professions among us.

Jesus' Call Involves Downward Mobility (4:20)

Although artisans had far less income than the wealthy (who made up perhaps 1 percent of the ancient population), they were not among the roughly 90 percent of the ancient population we may call peasants either (popular jokes about low-class disciples "mending their nets" aside-the expression can mean *preparing their nets*-v. 21). Family businesses like these were especially profitable. Even if disciples followed Jesus only during certain seasons of the year, they could not easily return to abandoned businesses.

The disciples thus paid a price economically to follow Jesus. Jewish people told stories of pagans' relinquishing their wealth on converting to Judaism (*Sipre Num.* 115.5.7), and Greek philosophers told stories of converts to philosophy who abandoned wealth to become disciples (Diog. Laert. 6.5.87; Diogenes *Ep.* 38). These stories demonstrate not only the relative worthlessness of possessions but also the incomparable value of what the converts gained. The kingdom is like a precious treasure, worth the abandonment of all other treasures (Mt 13:44-46). Many of us today respond defensively, "I would abandon everything if Jesus asked me to, but he has not asked me to." Yet if we value the priorities of the kingdom-people and proclamation more than possessions-I wonder whether Jesus is not speaking to us through the world's need for the gospel and daily bread. Let the one who has ears to hear, hear.

Jesus' Scandalous Call Costs Comfort and Challenges the Priority of Family (4:21-22)

James and John abandoned not only the boat-representing their livelihood-but also their father and the family business (4:22). In a

society where teachers normally stressed no higher responsibility than honor of parents (Jos. *Apion* 2.206; Keener 1991a:98, 197), including economic responsibility for them, some people would view such behavior as scandalous. Jesus elsewhere affirms the importance of marriage (19:9) and filial (15:4-6) relationships; the kingdom is never an excuse to downplay our crucial responsibilities to our families (see Keener 1991a:98-99, 102). They too warrant our attention and our ministry. At the same time God has called his servants, and that means we are not our own. Those of us who are single dare not choose marriage partners who cannot bear our calling, and we must recognize the demands of God's kingdom-announcing its good news-more highly than the shame it brings on our families or the way they feel about that shame (10:35-37; compare 1:24).

Chapter 7

The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus summons those who would be his followers to radical devotion and radical dependence on God. His followers must be meek, must not retaliate, must go beyond the letter's law to its spirit, must do what is right when only God is looking, must depend on God for their needs and pursue his interests rather than their own, and must leave spiritual measurements of others' hearts to God. In short, true people of the kingdom live for God, not for themselves. (My overall approach to the Sermon on the Mount combines some approaches, but still remains one among many. For a more complete summary of various views on this sermon's message, see, for example, Guelich 1982:14-22; Cranford 1992; Allen 1992.)

The five discourses in Matthew

- ❖ The first discourse: The first discourse (Mt 5-7) is called the Sermon on the Mount and is one of the best known and most quoted parts of the New

Testament. It includes the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. To most believers in Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount contains the central tenets of Christian discipleship. The Beatitudes are a key element of this sermon, and are expressed as a set of blessings. The Beatitudes present a new set of Christian ideals that focus on love and humility rather than force and exaction; they echo the highest ideals of the teachings of Jesus on mercy, spirituality and compassion.

- ❖ The second discourse: The second discourse in Matthew 10 provides instructions to the Twelve Apostles and is sometimes called the Mission Discourse or the Missionary Discourse or the Little Commission in contrast to the Great Commission. This discourse is directed to the twelve apostles who are named in Matthew 10:2-3. In the discourse Jesus advises them how to travel from city to city, carry no belongings and to preach only to Israelite communities. He tells them to be wary of opposition, but have no fear for they will be told what to say to defend themselves when needed: "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you", as also stated in Luke 12:12.
- ❖ The third discourse: The third discourse in Matthew 13 (1-53) provides several parables for the Kingdom of Heaven and is often called the Parabolic Discourse. The first part of this discourse, in Matthew 13:1-35 takes place outside when Jesus leaves a house and sits near the Lake to address the disciples as well as the multitudes of people who have gathered to hear him. This part includes the parables of The Sower, The Tares, The Mustard Seed and The Leaven. In the second part Jesus goes back inside the house and addresses the disciples. This part includes the parables of The Hidden Treasure, The Pearl and Drawing in the Net.
- ❖ The fourth discourse: The fourth discourse in Matthew 18 is often called the Discourse on the Church. It includes the parables of The Lost Sheep and The Unforgiving Servant which also refer to the Kingdom of Heaven. The general theme of the discourse is the anticipation of a future community of followers, and the role of his apostles in leading it. Addressing his apostles in 18:18, Jesus states: "what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in

heaven”, see also binding and loosing. This power is first given to Peter in chapter 16 after Peter confesses that Jesus is the “son of the living God”. In addition to the powers of binding and loosing, Peter is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and is sometimes considered the “rock” on which Christ built his Church. The discourse emphasizes the importance of humility and self-sacrifice as the high virtues within the anticipated community. It teaches that in the Kingdom of God, it is childlike humility that matters, not social prominence and clout.

- ❖ The fifth discourse: The final discourse is usually taken to include Matthew 23, 24, and 25. Matthew 24 is usually called the Olivet Discourse because it was given on the Mount of Olives, and is also referred to as the Discourse on the End Times. The discourse corresponds to Mark 13 and Luke 21 and is mostly about judgment and the expected conduct of the followers of Jesus, and the need for vigilance by the followers in view of the coming judgment. The discourse is prompted by a question the disciples ask about the “end of the age” (End times or end of this world and beginning of the world to come) and receives the longest response provided by Jesus in the New Testament. The discourse is generally viewed as referring both to the coming destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the End Times and Second Coming of Christ, but the many scholarly opinions about the overlap of these two issues, and exactly which verses refer to which event remain divided and complex.

Sermon on the Mount

Readers should contemplate the message of this sermon. Having summarized Jesus’ message as repentance in view of the coming kingdom (4:17), Matthew now collects Jesus’ teachings that explain how a repentant person ready for God’s rule should live. Only those submitted to God’s reign now are truly prepared for the time when he will judge the world and reign there unchallenged. This sermon provides examples of the self-sacrificial ethics of the kingdom, which its citizens must learn to exemplify even in the present world before the rest of the world recognizes that kingdom (6:10).

To be faithful to the text, we must let Jesus’ radical demands confront us with all the unnerving force with which they would have

struck their first hearers. At the same time, the rest of the Gospel narrative, where Jesus does not repudiate disciples who miserably fail yet repent (for example, 26:31-32), does season the text with grace. Most Jewish people understood God’s commandments in the context of grace (E. Sanders 1977; though compare also Thielman 1994:48-68); given Jesus’ demands for greater grace in practice (9:13; 12:7; 18:21-35), we must remember that Jesus embraces those who humble themselves, acknowledging God’s right to rule, even if in practice they are not yet perfect (5:48). Jesus preached hard to the religiously and socially arrogant, but his words come as comfort to the meek and brokenhearted.

Of course one also needs to read grace in light of the kingdom demands; grace transforms as well as forgives. Jesus is meek and lowly in heart to the broken and heals and restores the needy who seek him; it is the arrogant, the religiously and socially satisfied, against whom Jesus lays the kingdom demands harshly (compare Mt 23).

Although the sermon’s structure does not fit some modern outlines, it reflects a consistent pattern. Matthew gathers a variety of Jesus’ teachings on related topics that appear in the source he shares with Luke. Ancient writers exercised the freedom to rearrange sayings, often topically; sometimes they also gathered sayings of their teachers into collections. Evidence within the sermon itself suggesting various audiences (5:1; 7:28) may also support the view that the sermon is composite. Scholars debate its precise structure, but 5:17-48, 6:1-18 and 6:19-34 are its largest complete units.

Kingdom Rewards for the Repentant (5:1-9)

If we truly repent in light of the coming kingdom, we will treat our neighbors rightly. No one who has humbled himself or herself before God can act with wanton self-interest in relationships. Those with the faith to await the vindication of the righteous in God’s kingdom can afford to be righteous, to relinquish the pursuit of their own rights (5:38-42; compare 1 Cor 9:3-23), because they know the just judge will vindicate them as they seek his ways of justice.

Jesus employs a standard Jewish literary form to express this point, a beatitude, which runs like this: “It will go well with the one whom... for that one shall receive ...” (“Fortunate” or “it will be well

with” may convey the point better than *blessed* or “happy.”) In this context Jesus’ beatitudes mean that it will ultimately be well with those who seek first God’s kingdom (Mt 6:33).

Because various themes pervade all or many of Matthew’s beatitudes here, the principles are summarized by topic rather than by verse in this section of the commentary. Matthew intends his audience to hear all the beatitudes together (his Gospel would have been read in church assemblies), not for them to be taken piecemeal. What themes emerge from these brief pronouncements of blessing?

Jesus lists promises that pertain to the coming kingdom. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven frames most of this section (5:3, 10). All the blessings listed are blessings of the kingdom time. In the time of the kingdom God will “comfort all who mourn in Zion” (Is 61:2); he will satisfy the hunger and thirst of his people (Mt 8:11; 22:2; 26:29; Is 25:6) as in the first exodus (Deut 6:11; 8:17). God’s ultimate mercy will be revealed on the Day of Judgment (*1 Enoch* 5:5; 12:6; 92:4; *Ps. Sol.* 16:15). At that time he will ultimately declare the righteous to be his children (Rev 21:7; *Jub.* 1:24), as he had to a lesser degree at the first exodus (Ex 4:22). God is technically invisible (1QS 11.20; Jos. *Apion* 2.191), but in the future the righteous will fully see God (*1 Enoch*90:35; *ARN* 1A).

The blessings he promises come only by God’s intervention. Because the future kingdom is in some sense present in Jesus, who provides bread (Mt 14:19-20) and comforts the brokenhearted (14:14; compare Lk 4:18), we participate in the spiritual down payment of these blessings in Christ in the present (see Gal 3:14; Eph 1:3). But such blessings come only to the meek—those who wait on God to fight God’s battles.

The blessings of the beatitudes are for a people ready for the kingdom’s coming. This passage shows what kingdom-ready people should be like; hence it shows us prerequisites for the kingdom as well as kingdom promises.

First, kingdom people do not try to force God’s will on a world unprepared for it. Many first-century Jews had begun to think that revolutionary violence was the only adequate response to the violence of oppression they experienced. Matthew’s first audience

no doubt could recall the bankruptcy of this approach, which led to crushing defeat in the war of A.D. 66-73. But Jesus promises the kingdom not to those who try to force God’s hand in their time but to those who patiently and humbly wait for it—the meek, the poor in spirit, the merciful, and the peacemakers.

Of course Jesus’ demand does not merely challenge the bloodshed of revolution. *Peacemakers* means not only living at peace but bringing harmony among others; this role requires us to work for reconciliation with spouses, neighbors and all people—insofar as the matter is up to us (Rom 12:18).

Second, God favors the humble, which trust in him rather than their own strength (5:3-9). For one thing, the humble are not easily provoked to anger. These are *the poor in spirit . . . the meek*, those who appear in Jewish texts as the lowly and oppressed. Because the oppressed poor become wholly dependent on God (Jas 2:5), some Jewish people used “poor [in spirit]” as a positive religious as well as economic designation. Thus it refers not merely to the materially poor and oppressed but to those “who have taken that condition to their very heart, by not allowing themselves to be deceived by the attraction of wealth” (Freyne 1988:72).

Jesus promises the kingdom to the powerless, the oppressed who embrace the poverty of their condition by trusting in God rather than favors from the powerful for their deliverance. The inequities of this world will not forever taunt the justice of God: he will ultimately vindicate the oppressed. This promise provides us both hope to work for justice and grace to endure the hard path of love.

There are, of course, exceptions, but as a rule it is more common for the poor to be “poor in spirit”; Matthew’s *poor in spirit* does have something to do with Luke’s “poor.” Surveys in the United States, for example, show that religious commitment is generally somewhat higher among people with less income (Barna 1991:178-81; Gallup and Jones 1992), and Christians in less affluent countries like Nepal, Guatemala, Kenya or China often are prepared to pay a higher price for their faith than most Western Christians. In Bible studies among students from different kinds of colleges and backgrounds I have found that students from poor homes, struggling to pay their way

through college, frequently understand this passage better than those students for whom the road is easier. Feeling impressed by the wealth and status of others, the less privileged students are amazed to learn how special they are to God and embrace this message as good news. Those of us who have attained more income or education would do well to imitate their meekness, lest the self-satisfaction and complacency that often accompany such attainments corrupt our faith in Christ (13:22).

Further, these humble people are also those who yearn for God above all else. Luke emphasizes those who hunger physically (Lk 6:21); Matthew emphasizes yearning for God's righteousness more than for food and drink, perhaps also implying that those who hunger physically are in a better position to begin to value God more than food (Mt 5:6; this may include fasting). In this context hungering for *righteousness* probably includes yearning for God's justice, for his vindication of the oppressed (see Gundry 1982:70); the context also implies that it includes yearning to do God's will (5:20; 6:33; 21:32; 23:29). This passage reflects biblical images of passion for God, longing for him more than for daily food or drink (Job 23:12; Ps 42:1-2; 63:1, 5; Jer 15:16; compare Mt 4:4). God and his Word should be the ultimate object of our longing (Ps 119:40, 47, 70, 92, 97, 103).

"Mourners" here (5:4) may thus refer especially to the repentant (Joel 1:13; see also Jas 4:9-10; Lev 23:29; 26:41), those who grieve over their people's sin (Tobit 13:14). Given the promise of comfort, however, the term probably also applies more broadly to those who are broken, who suffer or have sustained personal grief and responded humbly (see Fenton 1977:368). God is near the brokenhearted (Ps 51:17) and will comfort those who mourn (Is 61:1-3); the people of the kingdom are the humble, not the arrogant. *The pure in heart* (Mt 5:8) in Psalm 73 refers to those who recognize that God alone is their hope.

Likewise, this lifestyle of meekness Jesus teaches challenges not only Jewish revolutionaries but all Christians in our daily lives. If we are to walk in love toward our enemies (Mt 5:43), how much more should we walk in love toward those closest us (compare 5:46-47; 22:36-40)? I am always awed by the presence of the truly humble-like three of my friends from Ethiopia, one of whom was imprisoned

by the old Marxist regime for a year and two of whom led about two thousand fellow Ethiopians to Christ in their refugee camp. Not only did these brothers regularly offer me their most gracious hospitality when I visited them, but every time I came they would insist on my teaching them the Bible-though I am sure that I had far more to learn from them!

Encouragement for Those Persecuted for the Gospel (5:10-12)

In his final beatitudes Jesus declares not "Happy are those," but "Happy are *you*." Here Jesus takes his ethic of non retaliation (5:38-47) to its furthest possible length: not only must we refuse to strike back, but we are to rejoice when persecuted. The persecution itself confirms our trust in God's promise of reward, because the prophets suffered likewise (13:57; 23:37; 26:68; 2 Chron 36:15-16; Jer 26:11, 23). The prophetic role of a disciple is analogous to (Mt 10:41-42; 23:34) and greater than (11:9, 11; 13:17) that of an Old Testament prophet. When we represent Jesus and his message faithfully and suffer rejection accordingly, we may identify with ancient prophetic leaders like Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel.

But here Jesus summons us to a greater honor than being prophets; he summons us to bear the name-the honor-of Jesus. The characteristics Jesus lists as belonging to the people of the kingdom are also those Jesus himself exemplifies as the leading servant of the kingdom and Son par excellence of the Father (11:27; 20:28). Jesus is meek and lowly in heart (11:29); he mourns over the unrepentant (11:20-24); he shows mercy (9:13, 27; 12:7; 20:30); he is a peacemaker (5:43-45; 26:52). If he is lowly, how much more must be his disciples, who are to imitate his ways (10:24-25; 23:8-12)-in contrast to worldly paradigms for religious celebrities (23:5-7).

Do Not Covet Others Sexually (5:27-30)

Jesus' warning against lust would have challenged some ancient hearers' values. Many men in the ancient Mediterranean thought lust healthy and normal (for example, Ach. Tat. 1.4-6; Apul. *Metam.* 2.8); some magical spells even describe self-stimulation as a way to secure intercourse with the object of one's desire (*PGM* 36.291-94), even if she was married (*PDM* 61.197-216).

Jewish writers, however, viewed lust far more harshly (for example, Sirach 9:8; 41:21; 1QS 1.6-7; *CD* 2.16); some, in fact, viewed it as visual fornication or adultery (see Keener 1991a:16-17). Yet Jesus is not challenging his hearers' ethics; the scribes and Pharisees may have agreed with his basic premise, but Jesus challenges their hearts, not just their doctrine. Many Christians today similarly profess to agree with Jesus' doctrine here but do not obey it.

Jesus offers an implicit argument from Scripture, not just a cultural critique. The seventh of the Ten Commandments declares, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 20:14), while the tenth commandment declares, "You shall not covet [that is, desire] . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Ex 20:17). In the popular Greek version of Jesus' day the tenth commandment began, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and used the same word for "covet" that Jesus uses here for "lust." In other words, Jesus reads the humanly unenforceable tenth commandment as if it matters as much as the other, more humanly enforceable commandments. If you do not break the letter of the other commandments, but you *want* to do so in your heart, you are guilty. God judges a sinful heart, and hearts that desire what belongs to others are guilty.

Jesus does, however, go beyond his contemporaries' customary views on lust. Jewish men expected married Jewish women to wear head coverings to prevent lust. Jewish writers often warned of women as dangerous because they could invite lust (as in Sirach 25:21; *Ps. Sol.* 16:7-8), but Jesus placed the responsibility for lust on the person doing the lusting (Mt 5:28; Witherington 1984:28). Lust and anger are sins of the heart, and rapists who protest in earthly courts, "She asked for it!" have no defense before God's court. Jesus says that it is better to suffer corporal punishment in the present-amputating one's lustful eye or other offending appendages-than to spend eternity in hell after the resurrection of the damned (5:29-30; 18:8-9).

Of course gouging out one's eye cannot stop lust; people can lust with their eyes closed. (Thus Tertullian warns that Christians need not blind themselves as Democritus did, but must simply guard their minds; he contends that "the Christian is born masculine for his wife and for no other woman"-*Apol.* 46.11-12.) Jesus is declaring in a graphic manner that by whatever means necessary, one should cast

off this sin (compare Col 3:5). One must repent to be ready for the kingdom of heaven (Mt 4:17).

Herod Antipas, driven by lust, ended up murdering a prophet (14:6, 10; compare 5:11-12), illustrating the principle of both this paragraph and the preceding one (5:21-30), as well as the prohibition of oaths (5:33-37; 14:7). Most of us lack Herod's power to indulge our desires, but God knows what our hearts desire, whether we have power to execute that desire or not. How different the model of Joseph and Mary (1:25) and virtuous single persons like John the Baptist and Jesus, who suffered persecution for righteousness!

From this warning we learn the value that God places on marital and premarital fidelity. Even our thoughts should be only for our spouse; our spouse, rather than a given culture's idealization, should redefine our standard of beauty (compare Song 1:15-16). Of course, since the Bible demands faithfulness in advance to our *future* spouse (Deut 22:13-21; see also Mt 1:19), the principle Jesus illustrates with "adultery of the heart" could apply to premarital "fornication of the heart" just as well.

Jesus does not, of course, refer here to passing attraction. The Greek tense probably suggests "the deliberate harboring of desire for an illicit relationship" (France 1985:121). In our culture, where young people generally have to arrange their marriages without their parents' help, we might be in trouble if Jesus meant mere attraction! Jesus refers not to noticing a person's beauty but to imbibing it, meditating on it, seeking to possess it.

Lust is antithetical to true love: it dehumanizes another person into an object of passion, leading us to act as if the other were a visual or emotional prostitute for our use. Fueled by selfish passion, adultery violates the sanctity of another person's being and relationships; love, by contrast, seeks what is best for a person, including strengthening their marriage. Adultery usually involves considerable rationalization, justifying one's behavior as necessary or loving; but lust is the mother of adultery, the demonic force that allows human beings to justify exploiting one another sexually, at the same time betraying the most intimate of commitments where trust ought to abide secure even if it can flourish nowhere else.

Lust demands possession; love values, respects and seeks to serve other persons with what is genuinely good for them. Lust is always incompatible with acknowledging God as the supreme desire of our hearts, because it is contrary to his will.

Legalism cannot change the heart and destroy lust or any other sin; only transformation of the heart to view reality in a new way can. Matthew frames Jesus' commandments in this section with that warning (compare 5:20, 48). Whereas lust distorts relationships, proper relationships in Christ's family can meet the need that lust pretends to fill. Paul and his contemporaries prescribed marriage as a helpful solution (1 Cor 7:2, 5, 9; Keener 1991a:72-74, 79-82), but many godly people today do not find marriage partners for years-and not all have the gift to easily embrace that state (Mt 19:11). How can they best guard against lust?

Once we begin to appreciate our brothers and sisters in Christ as members of our spiritual family, we are less apt to dehumanize them as temptations-whether temptations to be avoided or indulged. Our video culture has cheated us by reducing the meaning of gender to sexual gratification, as if we could relate to members of the other gender best as sleeping partners. God ideally gave people families in part so we could learn how to relate to other people in a variety of ways (motherly, fatherly, brotherly, sisterly-1 Tim 5:1-2); our Christian family is no different (1 Tim 5:1-2; see also Mt 12:49; 23:8; 25:40).

Thus giving and receiving genuine Christian love within the appropriate boundaries-dealing with people as human beings like ourselves rather than objects of our passion (22:39)-is an important defense against lust. Perhaps an even greater defense remains being so wrapped up in Jesus' presence and work that one can wait either for God to send a spouse or for the ultimate unity that transcends the need for marriage altogether (see 22:30). In the meantime, one can pray for God's blessings on and prepare one's own life for the person God may send, or pour one's whole commitment into the work of the kingdom (6:33). I suggest these insights not as a married man paternalistically advising singles, but as one who remains single at the time of writing. The longer we resist a particular temptation, the less power that temptation can exercise in our lives.

Avoid Retribution and Resistance (5:38-42)

Jesus here warns against legal retribution (vv. 38-39) and goes so far as to undercut legal resistance altogether with a verse that, if followed literally, would leave most Christians stark naked (v. 40). He also advocates not only compliance but actual cooperation with a member of an occupying army who might be keeping you from your livelihood (v. 41), as well as with the beggar or others who seek our help (v. 42). (Taking the last verse literally would also break most of us financially. Consider how many requests for money come in the mail each week!) If Jesus is not genuinely advocating nudity and living on the street-that is, if he is speaking the language of rhetorical overstatement (5:18-19, 29-32; 6:3)-this still does not absolve us from taking his demand seriously. Jesus utilized hyperbole precisely to challenge his hearers, to force us to consider what we value.

Jesus' words strike at the very core of human selfishness, summoning us to value others above ourselves in concrete and consistent ways. Some misread this text as if it says not to oppose injustice; what it really says, however, is that we should be so unselfish and trust God so much that we leave our vindication with him. We have no honor or property worth defending compared with the opportunity to show how much we love God and everyone else. By not retaliating, by not coming down to the oppressors' level, we necessarily will appear unrealistic to the world. Jesus' way scorns the world's honor and appears realistic only to those with the eyes of faith. It is the lifestyle of those who anticipate his coming kingdom (4:17).

Jesus Challenges Our Desire for Personal Vindication (5:38) *Eye for eye* never meant that a person could exact vengeance directly for his or her own eye; it meant that one should take the offender to court, where the sentence could be executed legally. People sometimes cite this example as a case of Jesus' disagreeing with the Old Testament. But a society could recognize the legal justice of *eye for eye* while its sages warned against descending to oppressors' moral level by fighting evil with evil (Akkadian wisdom in Pritchard 1955:426). Jesus is not so much revoking a standard for justice as calling his followers not to make use of it; we qualify justice with mercy because we do not need to avenge our honor. Jesus calls for

this humble response of faith in God; God alone is the final arbiter of justice, and we must trust him to fulfill it.

Turning the Other Cheek, Letting God Vindicate Us (5:39)

As in much of Jesus' teaching, pressing his illustration the wrong way may obscure his point. In fact, this would read Scripture the very way he was warning against: if someone hits us in the nose, or has already struck us on both cheeks, are we finally free to hit back? Jesus gives us a radical example so we will avoid retaliation, not so we will explore the limits of his example (see Tannehill 1975:73). A backhanded blow to the right cheek did not imply shattered teeth (tooth for tooth was a separate statement); it was an insult, the severest public affront to a person's dignity (Lam 3:30; Jeremias 1963:28 and 1971:239). God's prophets sometimes suffered such ill-treatment (1 Kings 22:24; Is 50:6). Yet though this was more an affront to honor, a challenge, than a physical injury, ancient societies typically provided legal recourse for this offense within the *lex talionis* regulations (Pritchard 1955:163, 175; see also Gaius *Inst.* 3.220).

In the case of an offense to our personal dignity, Jesus not only warns us not to avenge our honor by retaliating but suggests that we indulge the offender further. By freely offering our other cheek, we show that those who are secure in their status before God do not value human honor. Indeed, in some sense we practice resistance by showing our contempt for the value of our insulter's (and perhaps the onlookers') opinions! Because we value God's honor rather than our own (Mt 5:16; 6:1-18), because our very lives become forfeit to us when we begin to follow Jesus Christ (16:24-27), we have no honor of our own to lose. In this way we testify to those who insult us of a higher allegiance of which they should take notice.

Legal Nonresistance (5:40)

Rather than trying to get an inner garment back by legal recourse, one should relinquish the outer one too! If taken literally, this practice would quickly lead to nudity (see also Stein 1978:10), an intolerable dishonor in Palestinian Jewish society (for example, *Jub.* 7:8-10, 20; 1QS 7.12). Many peasants (at least in poorer areas like Egypt) had only one outer cloak and pursued whatever legal recourse necessary to get it back if it was seized (*CPJ* 1:239-40, 129.5). Because the

outer cloak doubled as a poor man's bedding, biblical law permitted no one to take it, even as a pledge overnight (Ex 22:26-27; Deut 24:12-13). Thus Jesus demands that we surrender the very possession the law explicitly protects from legal seizure (Guelich 1982:222). To force his hearers to think, then, Jesus provides a shockingly graphic, almost humorous illustration of what he means by nonresistance. His hearers value honor and things more than they value the kingdom.

This passage is a graphic image, but if we read it literally, believers should never take anyone to court. How far do we press Jesus' image here or Paul's in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8?

A driver had slammed into (and demolished) the car of one of my students, a new Christian, and the student feared that reporting him to her insurance company would violate the spirit of this passage. In such cases I suspect that insurance is our society's way of providing for the parties involved with a minimum of pain to both. But our very questions regarding how far to press Jesus' words force us to grapple with his principle here. Nothing a person can take from us matters in the end anyway; we must love our enemies and seek to turn them into friends.

Love Your Enemies (5:43-48)

Jesus demands not only that we not resist evil people assaulting our honor or possessions (vv. 38-42) but that we go so far as to actively love our enemies.

Jesus Demands Love Even for Enemies (5:43-44)

When Jesus explains his final quotation from the Bible, *Love your neighbor*, he adds to the quote an implication some of his contemporaries found there: *hate your enemy*. He is probably speaking of all kinds of enemies. Personal enemies were common enough in the setting of Galilean villages (Horsley 1986; Freyne 1988:154), but Jesus' contemporaries may have also thought of corporate threats to Israel or the moral fabric of the community (see Borg 1987:139). Whereas the biblical command to love neighbors (Lev 19:18) extends to foreigners in the land (Lev 19:33-34; compare Lk 10:27-37), other texts hold up a passionate devotion to God's cause that bred hatred of those who opposed it (Ps 139:21-22; see also 137:7-9). Popular piety, exemplified in the Qumran community's oath

to “hate the children of darkness,” may have extended such biblical ideology in Jesus’ day (see Sutcliffe 1960). Jesus may well mean both personal and corporate enemies (Moulder 1978).

Jesus builds a fence around the law of love (Mt 22:39), amplifying it to its ultimate conclusion (compare Ex 23:4-5). In so doing, he makes demands more stringent than the law. He also makes a demand that can require more than merely human resources for forgiveness. Corrie ten Boom, who had lost most of her family in a Nazi concentration camp, often lectured on grace. But one day a man who came to shake her hand after such a talk turned out to be a former prison guard. Only by asking God to love through her did she find the grace to take his hand and offer him Christian forgiveness.

Since Jesus does not say exactly what to pray for our persecutors, some of us have been tempted to pray, “God, kill that person!” Needless to say, the context makes clear that Jesus means to pray good things for our enemies. Old Testament prayers for vindication (such as 2 Chron 24:22; Jer 15:15) still have their place (2 Tim 4:14; Rev 6:10), but our attitude toward individuals who hurt us personally or corporately must be love (Lk 23:34; Acts 7:60). Again, Jesus’ words are graphic pictures that force us to probe our hearts; they do not cancel the Old Testament belief in divine vindication (Mt 23:33, 38; Rev 6:10-11), but summon us to leave our vindication with God and seek others’ best interests in love.

Jesus Appeals to a Positive and Negative Example (5:45-47)

First he provides the ultimate moral example: God (vv. 45, 48). Jewish teachers generally recognized, as Jesus did, that God was gracious to all humanity, including the morally undeserving (for example, *Sipre Deut.* 43.3.6); they also saw rain as one of God’s universal signs of beneficence. But after adducing the ultimate moral example, Jesus adduces an example from the opposite end of his hearers’ moral spectrum (vv. 46-47): he provokes his hearers to shame by comparing their ability to obey the love commandment with that of tax-gatherers and Gentile idolaters, the epitome of moral reprobates (Mt 6:7; 20:25; 18:17; compare, for example, *Sipre Deut.* 43.16.1). One whose righteousness would surpass that of scribes and Pharisees (5:20) must exemplify a higher standard of righteousness than loving those friendly to their interests.

Jesus Demands That We Be Perfect like God (5:48)

What Jesus illustrated with graphic, concrete examples earlier in the sermon (vv. 21-47) he now epitomizes in a summary statement that forces us to go beyond mere examples. We can appeal to no law to tell us that we are righteous enough—that would be legalism. Instead, we must desire God’s will so much that we seek to please him in every area of our lives—that is holiness. Jesus says that God’s law was never about mere rules; instead, God desires a complete righteousness of the heart, a total devotion to God’s purposes in this world.

That God becomes the standard of comparison suggests that Jesus’ instruction here is exhortation, setting a goal, not assuming a state to which the hearers have already come. (The issue of whether any Christian *is* perfect is irrelevant here. All of us can learn to better reflect God’s character; at the same time, God promises us power to overcome any given temptation; and if we can overcome *any* temptation, we should choose to say no to *every* temptation.) And as long as God represents the moral standard, none of us has room to boast; all of us must unite as brothers and sisters in need and seek God’s kingdom and righteousness with all our hearts.

Golden Rule (7:12)

Although Matthew has already offered a longer section on prayer (6:5-15), he emphasizes prayer again here. Because in the context the supreme object of “seeking” is the kingdom (6:33) and the door to be opened is the gate of salvation (7:13; contrast Lk 11:5-13), this prayer may especially represent a prayer for God’s rule (compare 6:9-10 and the prayer for empowerment by the Spirit in Lk 11:2-13). But in any case, the specific application of the saying depends on its more general principle concerning how God hears prayers of faith (21:21-22; compare 14:28-31).

God Can Supply Anything to the Righteous Who Seek His Purposes (7:7-10)

This text indicates some important lessons for us today. First, Jesus promises his disciples extraordinary power from God, like that of Elijah of old. In this case the Gospel narratives (such as 14:28-31) and other “charismatic” sayings (such as 21:21-22) demonstrate that

Jesus was not speaking figuratively, but training disciples to express bold faith. Early Jewish teaching did celebrate God's kindness in answering prayer (Hagner 1993:174), but rarely promised such universal answers to prayer to all of God's people as the language here suggests; only a small number of sages were considered pious enough to have such power with God. But both the Hebrew Bible (for example, Gen 32:26-30; Ex 33:12-34:9; 1 Kings 18:36-37, 41-46; 2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6, 9; 4:14-28) and the Gospel tradition (Mk 5:27-34; 7:24-30; 10:46-52; Mt 8:7-13; Jn 2:3-5) provide examples of such bold faith. The most crucial model for bold holy persons in Jewish tradition is probably Elijah, who despite his human frailty (1 Kings 19:4) could summon fire from heaven against those potentially threatening his life simply by declaring, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven" (2 Kings 1:10, 12-15).

James likewise tells us that Elijah was a person of flesh and blood just like us; if we begin to see ourselves as an act as men and women of God, we will have access to the kind of miracles that Elijah had (Jas 5:16-18). Scripture shows us Elijah's frailties as well as his faith. We are likewise men and women of God by God's grace, and as we dare to believe that and to live according to the relationship our Father has given us with himself in Christ, that confidence will transform our prayer lives.

Second, this empowerment presupposes that we are ready to be as committed to God's purposes as Elijah and like-minded servants of God were. Such a call to believing prayer supposes a heart of piety submitted to God's will; it would not apply to a man praying to obtain another man's wife or to a woman praying for a nicer car as a status symbol of conspicuous consumption. Although Jesus states the promise graphically, he implicitly addresses only men and women of God who will seek the things God would have them to seek for the good of his kingdom and their basic needs (Mt 6:11, 19-34). Jesus' promise is for the righteous-people who share kingdom values-asking basic needs and requests concerning the kingdom. Jesus' disciples were to be prophets (5:12) and holy persons, like Elijah, whose requests God would hear.

Third, this passage's context suggests the kinds of prayers such righteous people offer. They seek first in prayer the purposes of God's

kingdom (6:9-10, 31-33; compare Ps 9:10; 24:6; 27:4, 8; 34:14; 63:1; 69:6, 32; 70:4; 119:45; 122:6-9; and especially Prov 2:4-5; 8:17; Is 55:6; Jer 29:13), and also request that God meet their own basic needs (Mt 6:11). The specific examples Jesus gives that children would request are basic staples in the Palestinian diet-bread and fish; and Jesus has already promised his hearers the basics (6:25-34). Jesus later provided bread and fish for his followers (14:19-20; 15:36-37), encouraging us that he will also hear our requests for provision today. While such basics do not include mere status symbols or other objects of fleshly appetites, they do include whatever is ultimately for God's kingdom-anything necessary for us to fulfill our life and call.

God's Fatherly Care Is Our Assurance That He Will Answer (7:11)

Jesus uses the familiar Jewish method of arguing by a "how much more" analogy. God who gives *good gifts* to children may not give everything every child asks, but he will not withhold his gifts from those who desire and seek what is right (Ps 37:4; 84:11). Our Father will give appropriate consideration to each request his children make, watching out for their true needs (compare Mt 6:8).

Reciprocate Good Deeds in Faith (7:12)

If those who condemn others are condemned (7:1-5), God clearly operates on a principle of reciprocity; we must do good to people in advance of their doing good to us, trusting God to reward us later. The principle in this context is that as we give, it will be given to us by God in the Day of Judgment. If God is the example of giving (vv. 7-11), we should give whatever people need (5:42). How we treat others (7:12) reveals our character (vv. 16-20) and hence reveals our eternal destiny (vv. 13-14, 21-23). At least since a sermon of John Wesley in 1750 this has been called the "Golden Rule" (Guy 1959); over a millennium earlier, a Christian Roman emperor allegedly engraved the saying on his wall in gold (France 1985:145).

This rule was a widespread principle of ancient ethics. The positive form of the rule appears as early as Homer and recurs in Herodotus, Isocrates and Seneca. The negative form ("And what you hate, do not do to anyone") appears in Tobit 4:15, Philo (*Hypothetica* 7.6) and elsewhere; one Jewish work straddles both forms (*Ep. Arist.* 207).

Although some commentators have tried to disparage the negative form by contrast with the positive, both forms mean essentially the same thing; both biblical law (Lev 19:18) and Paul (Rom 13:10) define the positive commandment of love by means of negative commandments (E. Sanders 1992:258-59).

The principle appears in cultures totally isolated from the ancient Mediterranean; it appears, for example, in Confucian teaching from sixth-century B.C. China (see Jochim 1986:125). That others would discover this same principle should not surprise us, because one of the most natural foundations for ethics is for a person to extrapolate from one's own worth to that of others, hence to value others as oneself (compare, for example, Sirach 31:15). Thus every person is morally responsible to recognize how one ought to treat every other person. When we treat others (such as waitresses, store clerks or children) the way people of higher status treated people of lower status in Jesus' day, we invite God's judgment against us. No one so insensitive as to demean another human being on account of social station warrants God's mercy (Mt 5:7; 6:14-15; 7:1-5).

One who observes this basic principle will fulfill all the basic principles of the law the way God intended them (compare 5:21-48; 22:37-39). Later Jewish tradition declares that the sage Hillel, who taught before Jesus did, had already seen this rule as a good summary of the law. As the story goes, a Gentile approached both Hillel and his rival sage, promising each that he would convert to Judaism if the sage could teach him the law concisely. Hillel declared, "Whatever you do not want someone to do to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Law; the rest of it is just explanation" (*b.Sabbat* 31a; compare *ARN* 25, 53B).

This is the law of love, the principle by which Jesus epitomizes the entire human ward aspect of God's law (22:39-40; compare Jn 13:34-35), a principle Jesus' earliest followers never forgot (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; 6:2; Jas 2:8). What is distinctive about the principle as it appears in Matthew is its relation to the Day of Judgment (Mt 7:1-2, 13-14).

Messianic Miracles

Jesus performs many miracles, demonstrating his power over nature and spirits, and thus confirming that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In a physical miracle, such as making the blind see, or walking on water, or calming a storm, the laws of the universe are suspended through divine intervention. In a moral miracle, such as forgiveness of sins or driving out demons, the blessing of Jesus purifies the soul. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus performed a physical miracle, healing the paralytic, to demonstrate a moral miracle, the forgiveness of sins.

Only three miracles appear in all four Gospels - his own Resurrection (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20), the greatest miracle of them all; the feeding of the 5000 through the multiplication of the loaves, found in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-14; and, while different individuals are involved (see chart), Jesus heals the blind (Matthew 9:27-31, Mark 8:22-26, Luke 18:35-43, and John 9).

The miracle stories are an integral part of the Gospel narrative, as in Mark, where nearly half of Mark’s account of the public ministry (Chapters 1-10) describes miracles. The ministry of Jesus is centered on the establishment of God’s imminent Kingdom, which ended the dominion of the evil one over the world, present ever since sin and death entered mankind. The miracles were Jesus’ chief weapon in the struggle with evil (Mark 3:22-27), the most direct being the exorcism of demons, which defeated the power of evil and liberated humanity. That is why a miracle is an act of power in the Synoptic Gospels, the Greek word being *ἄγίασις* (act of power), the origin of our English words dynamic and dynamite. John in his Gospel utilizes the word *σημεῖον* (sign). The word *θαύμασιον* (wonder) is found in the Acts of the Apostles.

What is striking is that Jesus performs those miracles that, referring to Isaiah 35:3-6 and 42:5-9, were signs of the Messiah - *Ἰησοῦς ἡ Νεφέλη*. John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus or *Ἰησοῦς ἡ Νεφέλη* - “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another?” Jesus reassures John and his disciples by naming the miracles of the Messiah: “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:3-5). Jesus not only heals the leper (Matthew 8:1-4, Luke 5:12-16), but also instructs the leper to show himself to the priest, in observance of Leviticus 13-14 in the Torah - *ἡ Ἐθνη*. He heals a man born blind (John 9) and raises Lazarus on the fourth day (John 11).

The symbolic element of the miracle becomes primary in John. For example, in John 9, the interest in giving sight to the man born blind is not just the gift of sight, but in his coming to the spiritual insight of faith, an insight made possible by Jesus, the Light of the world. The Gospel of John enumerates seven signs of Jesus: he turns water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana (2:1-12); the healing of an official’s son in Capernaum (4:43-54); the healing of a paralytic on the sabbath by the pool in Bethesda (5:1-47); the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14); walking on water (6:16-21); the healing of a man born blind (9:1-41); and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-57). John also records three appearances of Christ to his disciples following his Resurrection. The Gospels record twelve miracles in Capernaum, more than anywhere else in the Holy Land.

The third millennium is more receptive to miracles as compared to the skepticism of the post-Enlightenment. Case records of inexplicable cures from cancer, the healings at Tepeyac, Mexico, Lourdes, France, and Fatima, Portugal, and reports of near-death experiences have produced openness to the miraculous.

While Christ Jesus performed innumerable healings and exorcisms (Matthew 8:16-17, Mark 1:32-34, Luke 6:17-19), the following chart lists specific miracles of Jesus Christ during his public ministry, before his Resurrection:

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Miracle	Mathew	Mark	Luke	John
Healing the possessed man in Capernaum		1:23-28	4:33-37	
Healing of Peter’s Mother-in-law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Cleansing of a Leper	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Turning Water to Wine at Cana				2:1-12
The Miraculous Catch of Fish			5:2-11	
Healing of a Paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:18-26	
Cure of the Man with a Withered Hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-10	
Healing of Official’s Son in Capernaum			4:43-54	
Healing of Centurion’s Servant	8:5-13		7:2-10	
Raising of Widow’s Son at Nain			7:11-17	
Calming of the Storm at Sea	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Cure of the Gerasene Demoniac	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Healing of a Paralytic in Bethesda				5:1-17
Cure of Woman afflicted with Hemorrhage	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Raising of Jairus’ daughter	9:23-26	5:35-43	8:49-56	
Healing Two Blind Men in Nazareth	9:27-31			
Healing A Possessed Mute	9:32-34			
Feeding the 5000	14:13-21	6:34-44	9:10-17	6:1-14
Walking on Water	14:22-33	6:44-52		6:16-21
Healings at Gennesaret	14:34-36	6:53-56		
Cure of Syro-Phoenician’s Daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Healing of Deaf-Mute		7:31-37		

Feeding the 4000	15:32-39	8:1-9		
Restores Sight to the Blind Man of Bethsaida		8:22-26		
Healing of a Man Born Blind in Jerusalem				9:1-41
Casting Out of a Dumb Demon	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-43	
Healing a Possessed Crippled Woman			13:11-17	
Healing of A Man with Dropsy			14:1-6	
Cleansing of Ten Lepers			17:11-19	
Healing the Blind at Jericho	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Healing of Servant's Ear during Arrest			22:50-51	
The Raising of Lazarus				11:1-44

The Healing of the Leper (8:1-4)

“And when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 And behold, a leper came to Him, and bowed down to Him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus has come down from the mountain on which He had given the Sermon on the Mount and the people are still following Him. He would be by the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum and from somewhere a leper comes up to Jesus. The Mosaic Law had many regulations concerning those that had leprosy including that a leper had to live away from everyone else (Numbers 5:2, 3). When they did venture out, they had to wear clothes that were torn, cover their heads and mouths and cry, “Unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45). This both prevented the spread of an infectious disease and prevented people from being contaminated by a person who was ceremonially unclean. Leprosy, now known as Hansen’s disease, would often result in gross deformities so that a person with it would look hideous. These things produced a great fear in people so that they would often throw rocks at lepers who came too close. For those reasons, most lepers stayed at a distance (i.e. Luke 17:12). It was a bold move on the part of this leper to approach Jesus. This leper comes to Jesus and humbly bows down to Him and then makes his request, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” The Greek grammar indicates that the man had no doubt that Jesus could cure him from his leprosy. This is quite a statement of faith on his part since the only known case at that time of such a healing was that of Namaan the Aramean at the

time of Elisha. The leper’s only uncertainty is if Jesus would be willing to heal him, and so he humbly makes his request.

That is a good example to all that would come to Jesus. We do not come demanding. We are to come with faith that He is able, and then request that He will do according to His will and not our own, even as this leper did. Jesus answers in verse 3. “And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Note carefully that Jesus’ touched him. The word for touch here is not touch like a tap on the shoulder, but a touch as in a firm grip, and the word tense suggests that as Jesus reached out to this leper, the leper responded are reached out to Jesus. The man of righteousness reached out to touch a person who was the epitome of being unclean. Any other person that would do this would become unclean, but not Jesus, because His righteousness is internally generated. Jesus’ touch cleanses the unclean. The point was proven in that the leper was immediately healed and made clean. Jesus then instructed the leper to fulfill the Mosaic Law, vs. 4, “See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” Jesus’ instructions accomplish two things. First, they demonstrate that He came to fulfill the law, not break it. Second, this man became a living testimony to the religious leaders that something significant was beginning to happen. Jesus wanted positive testimony presented to the religious leaders before his growing public ministry would begin to raise their jealousy against Him.

The Centurions’ Servant (8:5-13)

The next person Matthew presents as coming to Jesus is also someone that would be looked down upon by the self righteous zealots of Judaism. In verse 5 we find that as Jesus enters Capernaum He is met by a Centurion who entreats him concerning his young slave boy. The lad is in such bad shape that he cannot come himself for he is paralyzed, in great pain and near death (Luke 7:2). Luke 7 gives additional detail about this story including the Centurion’s good character and how some Jewish elders even spoke in favor of him and that Jesus should fulfill the Centurion’s request. Jesus’ response in verse 7 is that He would come and heal the lad. However, the Centurion is an extremely humble man. Though as an official in the

Roman occupying force he could have considered himself superior to any of the Jews, he clearly saw his unworthiness before Jesus. His response to Jesus in verses 8 & 9 is truly remarkable for reveals his belief about Jesus. Verse 8: “But the centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. Verse 9: “For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does [it].” This Centurion has both great humility and great faith. He understood the nature of authority and recognized Jesus’ authority to heal without even having to be present. Verse 10: “Now when Jesus heard [this,] He marveled, and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. Verse 11: “And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline [at the table] with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; Verse 12: but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Verse 13: “And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; let it be done to you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed that [very] hour.” Jesus commented about the Centurion’s great faith and that there would be Gentiles in the Kingdom of Heaven while there would be Jews who would be cast out. He then healed the servant from a distance as the Centurion had requested. Only God could heal in such a manner. Hucksters, false prophets and those who are empowered by Satan must be present in order to work their trickery, false miracles and supernatural phenomena. The Centurion understood that God was working through Jesus.

Peter’s Mother-in-Law (Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39)

The next person that Jesus healed was a woman. Women were generally held in low esteem in Jewish culture at that time. Verse 14: “And when Jesus had come to Peter’s home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever.” Verse 15: And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and waited on Him.” Two important things from this passage I want to point out are: First, Jesus does not heal partially. There is no recovery time. She went from being so sick that she was in bed to getting up and serving them as

she would have desired to do because she was the hostess of the house. Second, notice that Peter has a mother-in-law. Contrary to the teaching of Roman Catholicism, Peter was married. Paul comments in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that Peter was traveling with his believing wife. Matthew 18:16, 17 points out that Jesus “healed all who were ill” Verse 17: in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, “He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.” Jesus proved he had authority over disease just as had been prophesied. He healed fully. He could heal from a distance, and if He did touch someone who was unclean from disease, He was not made unclean, but instead he healed and cleansed the unclean person who had a disease.

Calming the Sea (8:18-27)

The next miracle in Matthew 8 demonstrates Jesus’ authority over nature. Man has always wanted to control nature, but all he can still do is report what happens and hazard a guess at what might happen. He can only try to be prepared and then react to nature whether it is a solar flare, earthquake, volcano, tsunami or the weather. Man has attempted to cause it to rain by “seeding” clouds, but even with debatable and minimal results, he can do nothing about stopping the rain or the wind. Jesus can.

Look at Matthew 8:23. “And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. (Verse 24) And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves; but He Himself was asleep. (Verse 25) And they came to [Him,] and awoke Him, saying, “Save [us,] Lord; we are perishing!”

The particular words and grammar used in this story here and in the parallel passages in Mark 4 and Luke 8 indicate that this was a very violent storm, and they were in grave danger of being swamped. In the midst of this Jesus was tired and calmly sleeping in the stern of the boat. The disciples, though several of them were fisherman with great experience in sailing on the Sea of Galilee, had come to the end of their abilities to cope with the storm. They woke Jesus up and cried out to Him to save them for the impending disaster. They show faith in that they believed He could save them, but they were not prepared for how He would do it. (Verse 26) “And He said to them, “Why are you timid, you men of little faith? “Then He arose, and

rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm.” The disciples were frightened because they could no longer handle the situation and their faith was not yet great enough to calmly trust God in the midst of such a storm. They had already seen Jesus perform many miracles, but they were not prepared for Him to exercise His authority over the winds and waves by commanding them to stop. Please note that Jesus rebukes the winds and the sea and not any demonic force. The result is that they immediately stopped. This does not mean the storm passed over or that the winds and waves died down. They stopped immediately which could not happen except by God’s direct intervention for the laws of physics which demand that once the waves have been generated the force in them must be dissipated. No wonder the disciples were amazed and responded in verse 27, saying, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” Only a man who is in fact God could do this, and Jesus is God in human flesh. We should not marvel at Jesus’ authority over nature since He is the one that created it. Colossians 1:16 tells us, For by Him (Jesus) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

The Gadarene Demoniacs (8:28-34)

The next miracle Matthew records demonstrates Jesus’ authority over supernatural beings. (Verse 28) And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; [they were] so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. The country of the Gadarenes (also called “Gerasenes” or “Gergesenes”) is on the North-east shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 6 miles southeast across the sea from Capernaum. Jesus and His disciples travel there and as they come out of the boat and start up the hill they pass by a graveyard where they are met by two demonized men. These men were influenced by demons so that they were mentally deranged and actually living in a graveyard. Their place of residence matched their condition of being defiled and unclean. Mark 5 and Luke 8 describe one of the men in greater detail showing he was deranged, masochistic and had superhuman strength. Previous efforts to capture

them had failed. The people in the area were afraid of using the road that passed by the cemetery where they were living.

These demonized men come out of the tombs and come before Jesus crying out (Verse 29) “What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” It was the demons dwelling within the men that were saying this. The men did not know that Jesus was the Son of God, but the demons did know. Demons are fallen angels and so they recognized Jesus’ spirit thought they had not previously encountered Him in human flesh. Demons know that they will be judged by Jesus, and these demons are wondering what Jesus was going to do with them. Luke 8:31 tells us specifically that they were afraid that Jesus was going to cast them into the abyss as other demons had been (1 Peter 3:19). Did Jesus come to torment them before the time when Satan and his entire host will be cast into the lake of fire after the millennium (Rev. 20:2f)? The demons begin to entreat Jesus not to cast them into the abyss (Luke 8:31) or to send them to another country (Mark 5:10). Matthew 8:30 remarks that “there was at a distance from them a herd of many swine feeding. (Verse 31) And the demons [began] to entreat Him, saying, “If you are [going to] cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.”

There is no indication why the demons wanted to go into the herd of pigs except that they saw this as a better option than being cast into the abyss. It is safe to assume that they knew Jesus would not grant them going into some other person, so possibly they thought Jesus would accept this option since they were unclean and the swine were also considered unclean by Jewish law. We know from both Mark and Luke that there were many demons, even calling themselves by the name, “Legion, for we are many.” We also know from Mark there was about 2,000 pigs in that herd. These men had many demons in them, and now that they were about to be cast out of the men, they request Jesus to let them go into the swine.

In Matthew 8:32 we find that Jesus grants their request simply commanding them, “Begone!” And they came out, and went into the swine, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters.” (The first case of deviled ham). The demons were in rebellion against God, but like captured enemy

soldiers, they had no choice but to obey Jesus when in His presence because He is God. Apparently this was all too much for those keeping the pigs and those in the nearby city. Matthew 8:33-34 records their reaction. (Verse 33) “And the herdsmen ran away, and went to the city, and reported everything, including the [incident] of the demoniacs. (Verse 34) And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they entreated [Him] to depart from their region.” Mark and Luke both tell us that when the people from the city arrived to meet Jesus, they also saw the formerly naked demoniac sitting down, clothed and in his right mind. They already knew about the report concerning the swine and they realized what Jesus had done in casting the multitudes of demons from the man. They understood that Jesus was no ordinary man resulting in them being “gripped with a great fear” (Luke 8:37).

They had the Son of God in their presence, but instead of welcoming Him and seeking to learn from Him, they let their fears control them and they sent Him away. Mark 5 tells us that Jesus instructed the formerly demonized man to “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” And the man did just that throughout the region of Decapolis.

The Paralytic’s Sins (9:1-18)

Jesus returns to Capernum and once again people are flocking to Him. Mark 2 gives us more detail than Matthew’s condensed story here in Matthew 9 about what occurs next. Mark tells us that so many were gathered there that there was no longer room even near the door. To this crowded place come four men carrying a paralytic man lying on a bed. They could not get into the house through the door, so they went up the outside stairs to the roof where they dug an opening in the roof and then lowered their friend into the house. That they would go to all this trouble to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus demonstrated they believed Jesus could help. We pick up the story in Matthew 9:2. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus’ words were carefully spoken for He was well aware that there were some Scribes present and that they believed that physical afflictions were caused by either the individual’s sin, or perhaps the sins of the parents if they

had been born in that condition (See John 9). That premise is not always true, such as in the case of Job, but it may have well been true for this man, for Jesus addressed his problem by telling him, “Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven.”

That caught the attention of the scribes and they said among themselves, “This [fellow] blasphemes.” They did not believe Jesus could do this because they correctly understood that only God could forgive sins (Isaiah 43:25; Micah 7:18,19) and they did not believe that Jesus was God.

Matthew 9:4-8 records Jesus’ response. (Verse 4) “And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? (Verse 5) “For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, and walk’? (Verse 6) “But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— then He said to the paralytic – “Rise, take up your bed, and go home.” (Verse 7) And he rose, and went home. (Verse 8) But when the multitudes saw [this,] they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” Jesus does have the authority to forgive sins and He proved the point by healing the paralyzed man immediately and completely so that the man even had the strength to pick up his bed and take it home with him. The multitudes understood the significance of this and gave praise to God.

We do not find the religious leaders joining in the celebration. As time progressed they would become increasingly hard hearted toward Jesus so that they would deny the miracles or claim they were done by the power of Beelzebul (Satan – Matthew 9:34; 12:14). Their blasphemy against the obvious work of the Holy Spirit was the only sin Jesus would not forgive.

The Synagogue Official’s Daughter (Matthew 9:18-31: Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56)

The final miracle Matthew recounts in this section demonstrates Jesus’ power over man’s great enemy, death. This story is told in Matthew 9:18-31; Mark 5:22-43 and Luke 8:41-56. The story begins with Jairus, the chief official of the synagogue in Capernaum, coming to Jesus and falling down at His feet to entreat him concerning his 12 year old daughter saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death;

[please] come and lay Your hands on her, that she may get well and live” (Mark 5:23). Jesus then started toward Jairus’ house, but the multitudes were pressing against Him and it was difficult to travel.

In the midst of this crowd a woman that had lived with a hemorrhage for 12 years came up and touched the fringe of Jesus’ cloak. Though she had not been able to find a physician that could heal her in all those years, she was healed instantly when she touched the edge of Jesus’ coat. Jesus was immediately aware that someone had done this and asked “Who is the one who touched Me?” When the woman realized that she had not escaped unnoticed, she came and fell down before Jesus and confessed what she had done and why. Jesus then responded “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Luke 8:48).

Once again we find that Jesus does not become unclean when someone unclean touches Him. Instead, they become clean and are healed. While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, someone came from Jairus’ house and told him that his daughter had died and not to trouble the Teacher anymore. Jesus heard this and told him, “Do not be afraid [any longer;] only believe, and she shall be made well” (Luke 8:50).

When they arrived at Jairus’ home the professional mourners were already present, and, as according to Jewish custom of the time, there were flute payers and a crowd in noisy disorder with loud weeping, wailing and lamenting. Their purpose was not to comfort, but to proclaim the agony of the loss. Jesus told them, “Depart; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.” And they [began] laughing at Him” (Matthew 9:24). These professional mourners were shallow people who could wail and lament one moment and turn to laughter the next at a statement they thought to be ludicrous. However, Jesus prevailed and He entered the house with only Peter and John and James, and the girl’s father and mother. Jesus “took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Child, arise!’ And her spirit returned, and she rose immediately; and He gave orders for [something] to be given her to eat” (Luke 8:54, 55). The parents were amazed, and though Jesus told the parents not to tell anyone what had happened, the news of it spread throughout the land.

Jesus could raise people from the dead. This was not an isolated incident either. Luke 17:12-17 record that Jesus had stopped a funeral and raised the young man that had died and given him back to his mother. John 11 records the resurrection of Lazarus after he had already been dead three days. Jesus’ power to raise the dead is one more proof that He is indeed God in human flesh.

What do you believe about Jesus? His authority over disease, demons, nature, sin and death all prove His deity. Sometime later when John the Baptist was in jail and beginning to wonder if Jesus was the Expected One, Jesus sent word to him saying, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: [the] blind receive sight and [the] lame walk, [the] lepers are cleansed and [the] deaf hear, and [the] dead are raised up, and [the] poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matthew 11:3, 4). Jesus’ miracles and preaching proved His identity. Some people believed the obvious while others rejected it for all sorts of reasons including not being able to face the ridicule of those that did not believe. The same is still true today. There are many that come to the very logical conclusion that Jesus demonstrated that He was God, but even so, they refuse to place their faith in Him and become a true Christian because they do not want to face the ridicule of co-workers, friends or family. I guess it then boils down to whether you want live for the present or eternity. How sad that so many still exclude themselves from heaven because they are more concerned about the suffering that may occur in this life at the hands of unbelievers. They will have all of eternity to regret it. Don’t let yourself be one of them.

communities of Galilee into the Greek-speaking world/s of the Mediterranean, where early Christian apostles preached the gospel message they had heard.

Their activities of preaching, studying, worshipping, and learning together radically shaped the ways the parables were heard and told. In turn, the gospel writers we refer to as Mark, Matthew, Luke, and Thomas also reshaped the ways the parables were told and interpreted. In this course, we'll examine the parables as parts of these gospel texts, but we will also consider their life as parabolic stories both before and after the writing of the gospels through which we encounter them. Most important, we shall consider our own contexts as scholars and interpreters of the parables. The parables are listed below in four groups: first, those that are found in the Gospel of Mark and other gospels; second, those that are found in Matthew (and sometimes in Luke and Thomas), but not in Mark; third, those that are found in Luke (and sometimes in Thomas), but not in Mark or Matthew; fourth, those that are found only in Thomas. See also the Table of Parables and their parallels.

Parables of the Gospel of Mark and Their Parallels

1. The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20, Matthew 13:3–23, Luke 8:5–15, Thomas 9)
2. The Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26–29 [Unique To Mark])
3. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–32, Matthew 13:31–32, Luke 13:18–19, Thomas 20)
4. The Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1–11, Matthew 21:33–46, Luke 20:9–18, Thomas 65)
5. The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree (Mark 13:28–32, Matthew 24:32–36, Luke 21:29–33)
6. The Parable of the Faithful Servant (Mark 13:33–37, Matthew 24:42, Luke 12:35–48, Thomas 21, 103)
7. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24–30, Thomas 57)
8. The Parable of the Leaven (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20–21, Thomas 96)
9. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44, Thomas 109)

Chapter 9

Messianic Parables

The parables of Jesus are found in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of Thomas. We will be studying 27 of the parables found in these texts. In our examination of these stories, we'll consider their literary form and placement within each gospel and the ways scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity have analyzed these texts.

New Testament scholars believe that Mark's gospel was used as a source by both Matthew and Luke, so their versions of each parable can be usefully compared to the Markan version to see their editing [or redaction] of the Markan source (though it also possible that they had access to another source in addition to Mark). But New Testament scholars also recognize that all of the parables were shaped prior to Mark by years of oral transmission among followers of Jesus and communities of the earliest church from Aramaic-speaking

10. The Parable of the Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46, Thomas 76)
11. The Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50, Thomas 8)
12. The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:3-7, Thomas 107)
13. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35 [Unique To Matthew])
14. The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16 [Unique To Matthew])
15. The Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-31 [Unique To Matthew])
16. The Parable of the Wedding Feast/Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24, Thomas 64)
17. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-12 [Unique To Matthew])
- 17b. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-25:30) -Parables of Luke Not Found In Mark Or Matthew
18. The Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 10:30-37 [Unique To Luke])
19. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37 [Unique To Luke])
20. The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21, Thomas 63)
21. The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10 [Unique To Luke])
22. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32 [Unique To Luke])
23. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8 [Unique To Luke])
24. The Parable of the Rich Man and the Beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31 [Unique To Luke])

Parables of the Secret Kingdom

Matthew's central discourse section (13:1-52) contains seven or eight parables depicting the present character of the kingdom until the end; his final discourse section contains a roughly equal number of end-time kingdom parables (24:32-25:46). As in Mark, Jesus' parables of the kingdom's present state explain why his kingdom comes first in a hidden way and why Israel's leaders reject him (compare F. Bruce 1972a:69; Ladd 1963). These parables dramatically reinforce that Jesus' first coming was coercive neither militarily nor intellectually

(11:25-27); he came as the meek burden bearer (11:28-30), and only the meek could recognize and follow him (11:25, 28).

That the parables address his people's acceptance or rejection of the kingdom message follows from the context: Jesus speaks parables *that same day* that he has confronted Pharisaic opposition (12:24-45) and offered a culturally offensive statement about his family (12:46-50). The parables section closes immediately with an account of Jesus' rejection by his hometown (13:53-58), so that rejection by his own frames his kingdom parables (compare 10:21, 34-37). This likewise implies that true disciples—those who follow the kingdom message—must be prepared to pay the ultimate price for doing so (13:20-22, 44-46).

Because modern readers often misunderstand parables, it is important to provide some brief comments about their character. Most of Jesus' parables were stories designed to illustrate a particular point or points, something like sermon illustrations today (except sometimes without the accompanying sermon that would clarify the illustration!). We should not read too much into parables; often some details of the parables merely are necessary to make a good story. Nevertheless, parables provide one creative way to explain Jesus' central point or points.

The Sower and the Soils

Jesus tells the "parable of the sower" (v. 18) in verses 3-9; in verses 18-23 he provides the interpretation, in which only one who "hears the word and understands it"! perseveres to eternal life (v. 23). In the intervening section (vv. 10-17) Jesus emphasizes that only his inner circle will understand, because the parables make sense only in the context of Jesus' ministry. Thus prospective disciples have a measure of choice: only those who press into his inner circle, those who persevere to mature discipleship, will prove to be good soil.

Jesus draws from commonplace agricultural conventions to illustrate his kingdom principles, as one might expect from a teacher sensitive to rural Galilean hearers. Whereas the later rabbinic parables often focus on such settings as royal courts (compare 22:2; see comment on Mt 18:23), Jesus most often told stories about agriculture and the daily life of his common hearers (as in 20:1).

Other ancient writers employed the seed image; perhaps most significantly, 4 Ezra declares that just as not all the seeds a farmer sows survive or put down roots, so not all people will persevere to eternal life (4 Ezra 8:41). But whereas the harvest would be completed in the end time (Mt 13:39; 3:12; 21:34; compare 9:37-38), Jesus portrays the present as a time of sowing to prepare for that harvest.

The sower must sow widely to ensure a good harvest. It made more sense, in a field like the one in Jesus' parable, to plow up the ground before sowing; this was a frequent practice in ancient Israel (Is 28:24-25; Jer 4:3; compare Hos 10:11-12; K. White 1964). Later literature, however, repeatedly speaks of plowing after sowing (although some plowed both before and after sowing); farmers who knew their fields apparently felt comfortable sowing first, then plowing the seed into the ground (*Jub.* 11:11; Jeremias 1972:11 and 1966b; see especially P. Payne 1978:128-29, contending that both practices occurred). Because we cannot know the conditions of given hearers' hearts before we preach, Jesus uses the second analogy of sowing before plowing; we must sow as widely as possible and let God bring forth the appropriate fruit (compare the agricultural counsel in Eccl 11:6).

Not all ground will yield good fruit. The path probably represents one of the footpaths running through or around the field (A. Bruce 1979:195). Some of the grain accidentally fell on or beside it, exposing the seed there to hungry birds (compare *Jub.* 11:11). The sower's field in this parable also includes some land where the soil is shallow over rock. Palestine includes much land like this; though seed springs up quickly on such soil, which holds its warmth, the seed readily dies because it cannot put down roots (Argyle 1963:101).

The fruitful soil yields enough to make up for the useless soil. Italy and Sicily averaged fivefold or sixfold return on grain sown; irrigated fields in Egypt averaged around a sevenfold yield for wheat (N. Lewis 1983:121-22). The average Palestinian harvest may have yielded seven and a half to ten times the seed sown. Thus harvests yielding thirty to a hundred times the seed invested are extraordinarily abundant (Gen 26:12; *Jub.* 24:15; *Sib. Or.* 3.264-65), and one rarely exceeded one hundredfold (P. Payne 1980:183-84). The fruit from the good soil more than makes up for any seed wasted on the bad soil.

Secrets for Disciples Only (13:10-17)

Jesus reveals special truth to his disciples through parables. Jewish teachers used parables as sermon illustrations to explain a point they were teaching (for examples, see Johnston 1977:507). To offer an illustration without stating the point, however, was like presenting a riddle instead (compare *Test. Ab.* 12-13A). By articulating his principles only in parables, Jesus offers riddles whose answer can be fathomed only by those who understand them in the context of his own ministry (for example, events like the Pharisees' rejection-12:24-45) or who patiently press into his inner circle to wait for the interpretation (13:12; compare Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 2.27.3).

Jesus spoke in parables because the kingdom involved end-time "mysteries" (NIV *secrets*, v. 11) now being revealed to those with ears to hear. The disciples were more special than the prophets of old only because they lived in a time when they could receive a greater revelation than the prophets, as Jesus' blessing on them makes clear. The disciples' eyes and ears were blessed (v. 16) because of the greater one among them (v. 17). The rest of the hearers, unable to fathom his message, fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah about penal blindness: because of Israel's sin, they would be unable to truly *see*, *hear* and *understand* God's message (vv. 13-15; 15:14; Is 6:9-10; compare Is 29:9-10; Evans 1981). Yet those who did turn to the truth would be "healed" (Mt 13:15); Jesus' physical healings were concrete signs of the spiritual healing of which Isaiah spoke (Mt 8:17; compare Is 6:10; 53:5; Hos 11:3; 14:4).

The Enemy's Weeds (13:24-30)

As in verses 3-9, Jesus tells an agricultural story that is relatively realistic. Although the color is local, the central character of the story is not a peasant like many of Jesus' hearers; he is a wealthy landowner (v. 27), whereas the farmer in the parable of the sower could easily have been a tenant farmer, a peasant like many of Jesus' hearers. The main character's authority makes him a clearer analogy for God, as in other Jewish parables (such as *Sipra Behuq.* pq. 3.263.1.8).

"Tares" (KJV) or *weeds* (NIV) here are darnel (*Lolium temulentum*), a poisonous weed organically related to wheat and difficult to distinguish from wheat in the early stages of its growth

(Jeremias 1972:224). (Calling them “tares” may tempt a preacher given to puns to title a sermon on this passage a “tare-ible parable.”) Given the occasional feuding of rival farmers (Derrett 1973:43), it is not surprising that Roman law would specifically forbid sowing such poisonous plants in another’s field (Hepper et al. 1982:948) or that one who found an abundance of such weeds would suspect an enemy’s hand (v. 28).

Despite the workers’ willingness to try (v. 28)-workers regularly uprooted weeds before their roots were entangled with those of the wheat (Jeremias 1972:225; KGmmel 1957:134-35)-it would be difficult for them to root out the many tares at this stage (Manson 1979:193; Meier 1980:147). The weeds had grown enough that their roots were already intertwined with those of the wheat but not far enough that it would be easy to distinguish them from the wheat; uprooting thus might endanger the wheat (v. 29).

After the wheat and darnel were grown, they were easily distinguished, and reapers could gather the darnel, which did have one use: given the scarcity of fuel, it would be burned (v. 30; Jeremias 1972:225; A. Bruce 1979:200). Wheat was normally gathered and bound in sheaves, then transported, probably on donkeys, to the village (or in this cases the large estate’s own) threshing floor (N. Lewis 1983:123), then stored.

The Hidden Kingdom of the Present

Jesus insists that the glorious anticipated kingdom of God is also present in a hidden way in his ministry and that of his followers. These parables most clearly declare that God’s kingdom has arrived in some sense in Jesus’ ministry, in a hidden and anticipatory way. Far from baptizing the wicked in fire and overthrowing the nations at his first coming, Jesus came as a meek servant (12:18-20), wandering around Galilee with a group of obscure disciples and healing some sick people.

In a world characterized by political turmoil and filled with wandering teachers and magicians, Jesus’ initial arrival as a politically inconspicuous servant had rendered his mission as opaque as his parables, except to people of faith. We Christians sound foolish to those outside Jesus’ circle when we speak of a final judgment and living for a future kingdom; what does that have to do with the troubles

of daily life in the present? But those who have pressed into Jesus’ circle today, like those who did so two thousand years ago, know who Jesus really is. Despite the magnitude of the task before us, we dare not despise the “smallness” of our own works, for God’s entire program long ago came hidden in a small package.

The Kingdom Is like a Mustard Seed (13:31-32)

Despite some dispute today over which plant Jesus intended, the mustard seed had become proverbial for small size (17:20; *m. Niddah* 5:2; *Toharot* 8:8). Although not literally the smallest of seeds, and yielding a shrub rather than a *tree* in the technical botanical sense in English, the mustard plant hyperbolically conveyed Jesus’ point (the inconspicuous becomes mighty) better than any other. (It commonly reaches eight to ten feet around the Lake of Galilee.)

The Power of a Little Bit of Leaven (13:33)

Jewish writers used *yeast* in a variety of symbolic ways, but Jesus stresses here the factor all had in common: its ultimately pervasive character. One leavens unleavened meal until the finished product is thoroughly leavened. The amount of flour involved here represents roughly fifty pounds, providing enough bread for over one hundred people. A housewife would not normally fix so much meal and could not need more than this; the unnatural magnitude of the illustration probably suggests that the kingdom far exceeds daily examples to which it may be compared (so Jeremias 1972:147). That she “hid” (NIV *mixed* obscures this point) the yeast in the dough also exceeds the comparison and reinforces the image of the hiddenness of the kingdom in this age.

Jesus Tells Parables to Reveal God’s Long-Hidden Mysteries (13:34-35)

Although the parables were riddles to outsiders, they conveyed God’s hidden revelation to his followers (compare 13:10-17; 1 Cor 2:7-10; Col 2:2-3). As in the central section of the parable of the sower (Mt 13:10-17), Jesus justifies this principle from Scripture.

(Jn 12:24-36) and with God the Father's voice from heaven affirming the glorification of His name in Jesus' coming "hour" (Jn 12:28), Jesus left the Temple precincts and crossed the Kidron Valley with His Apostles to the Mt. of Olives.

Chapter 10

Eschatological Discourse

Wednesday was Jesus' last teaching day in Jerusalem. The Pharisees had been continually frustrated in their attempts to discredit Jesus with the crowds and unknowingly spoke prophetically when they complained to one another, "*You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him*" (Jn 12:19). Their words were ironically fulfilled when some Gentiles came to Philip and asked to meet with Jesus (Jn 12:20-22; in verse 21 "to see" has the implication of "meet with"). When Philip and Andrew, the two Jewish disciples who had Greek names, told Jesus some Greeks wanted to speak with Him, Jesus declares: "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified ...*" (Jn 12:23. In making this declaration, Jesus links His coming crucifixion to the extending of His Gospel message of salvation to the Gentile nations. It is also Jesus' announcement that the time for Him to personally gather in the "lost sheep" of Israel has come to an end. After a final homily, speaking of His Passion and glorification

Structure of Jesus' Eschatological Sermon (24:1-25:46)

1. Introduction (24:1-2)
 - Destruction of the Temple
2. Signs of the Coming Disaster (24:3-14)
 - False messiahs
 - Wars, famines, earthquakes
 - Persecution of the elect, false prophets and growth of sin
 - Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed throughout the world
3. The Great Tribulation of Jerusalem (24:15-27)
 - Desecration of the Temple
 - False prophets and false messiahs
4. The Parousia of the Son of Man (24:29-25:30)
 - Signs of His coming
 - Parable of the Fig Tree
 - Parable of the Two Stewards
 - Parable of the Ten Virgins
 - Parable of the Talents
 - The Last Judgment (25:31-46)

The Temple's Destruction (24:1-3)

In much of Matthew 24, Jesus is warning followers who, like Peter, want an optimistic promise of the future (16:21-23) that realism is more important. His followers must prepare themselves to die for his honor before the coming of the end (compare 16:24-28). The introduction to this part of the discourse makes some crucial points. Jesus Is Not Impressed with Splendid Monuments (24:1-2) The temple was renowned for its beauty (*ARN* 28A; 48, Section 132B), even throughout the Roman world (2 Macc 2:22; *Ep. Arist.* 84-91; *CIJ* 1:378, Section 515); Israel had traditionally viewed the temple as invincible (*Jer* 7:4; *Ep. Arist.* 100-101; *Philo Spec. Leg.* 1.76). Jesus, however, is not impressed. Swift Judgment to Come Against the

Temple Establishment (24:2) The temple, as the ultimate symbol of the Judean religious establishment, which the people took to be the symbol of God's glory (compare Jer 7:4), would be utterly destroyed.

It is difficult to deny that Jesus accurately predicted the temple's destruction. Even on minimal historical grounds, we have good reason to agree with Matthew that Jesus did so (see, for example, Hill 1979:62-63; Aune 1983:174-75; E. Sanders 1993:257). First, although the later church may have forgotten the significance of some of Jesus' words and deeds against the temple, they preserved them. Thus we learn of a symbolic act of judgment there (Mt 21:12), testimony of witnesses the Christians believed to be false (26:61; compare Mk 15:29; Jn 2:19; Acts 6:14), and a tradition about its destruction that must come from before it was destroyed (Q tradition in Mt 23:38 par. Lk 13:35). Jewish Christians who continued to worship in the temple (Acts 2:46; 21:26-27) nevertheless remained faithful to a saying of Jesus which they would surely not have created (compare Hare 1967:6). Finally, someone making up Jesus' prediction after the event would have fitted it more literally to its fulfillment, whereas Jesus' saying retains its prophetic hyperbole (such as *not one stone... on another*). The End of Both the Temple and the Age (24:3) This chapter will address two issues: (1) the time of the temple's destruction and (2) the *sign* indicating his coming and the close of this *age*. Although biblical prophecy often linked events according to the kind of event rather than their sequence (for example, a near plague of locusts coalesces with eschatological armies in Joel), clarity was essential for Matthew (probably writing after 70) in a way that it was not for Mark (Mk 13:2, probably before 70; compare F. Bruce 1972a:71; S. Brown 1979). Modern prophecy teachers who require a restored temple and another abomination of desolation to precede Christ's return may be missing the point of Matthew's careful division of questions in 24:3. The final prerequisite for Jesus' coming is the evangelization of all nations (v. 14); the most specific prerequisite is the temple's desecration (v. 15), but the only *sign* of his immediate coming mentioned in the passage appears in the heavens when or just before Jesus appears (v. 30; compare J. Wenham 1977:72; pace Walvoord 1971b).

Jesus pronounces woes against religious leaders of his day (23:13-32) and then hints about judgment against the temple, the ultimate symbol of the religious establishment's power (23:38; compare 21:13).

As in many Old Testament prophets, nearer judgments foreshadow the final judgment; Matthew recognizes in the temple's destruction in A.D. 70 a vindication of Jesus' prophecy and an assurance that his other prophecies will also come to pass.

Not yet the End (24:4-14)

Many modern readers have felt uncomfortable with the picture of Jesus as an end-time prophet. Nevertheless, even if one starts with historical skepticism, Jesus clearly taught on the end time. Much of Jesus' final discourse in Matthew comes from Mark and Q, but even where Matthew adds elements (such as the trumpet in 24:31), we often have other evidence that Jesus spoke these words. Our earliest extant Christian document, 1 Thessalonians, alludes to some of the same words of Jesus ("according to the Lord's own word," 1 Thess 4:15): clouds, gathering of the elect, angel(s), lawlessness, apostasy, defilement of God's temple, the parousia, coming as a thief, sudden destruction on the wicked, and so on (4:13 - 5:11; compare 2 Thess 2:1-12; Waterman 1975; D. Wenham 1984). Some of Jesus' other words, for instance about unknown times and seasons (Acts 1:7), also appear there. But this common ground not only helps us defend the reliability of the Gospels; it also reminds us that Paul, unlike some Bible teachers today, saw no difference between Jesus' coming for the saints and his coming at the end of the age to judge the world.

Modern prophecy teachers have traditionally looked to current events for signs of the end, to stir end-time enthusiasm among Christians. While the goal may be worthy, the methodology runs counter to Jesus' own teaching. After listing many of the signs (usually hardships) that characterized the end among contemporary Jewish thinkers and visionaries, Jesus declares that *the end is still to come* (v. 6; compare Rev 6:1-8). Jewish people called such events the "birth-pangs of the Messiah" (Morris 1972:23), but Jesus declares that these are merely *the beginning of birth pains* (Mt 24:8). Besides missing Jesus' point, modern prophecy teachers are also almost always wrong; for one survey of missed prophecies - often reinterpreting the same biblical texts differently from decade to decade, as headlines change - see Wilson 1977.

While catastrophic events do not allow us to predict how soon the Lord is coming - such events have happened throughout history (Ladd

1956:72 n. 1; pace Frost 1924:18-19) - they do remind us that such problems characterize this age, summoning us to long for our Lord's coming all the more fervently. Jesus warns us what kind of sufferings we must face. His teaching presupposes important knowledge about the end time, but its repeated exhortations show that its emphasis is on how to live in light of that reality (see Lane 1974:446; Hill 1979:63). Thus it makes good sermon material if we catch Jesus' point! Christians Must Be Ready for False Messiahs (24:4-5) The danger of being misled is mentioned frequently (vv. 4, 11, 24), and Matthew elsewhere has cause to report Jesus' warnings against signs-working prophets (7:15, 22; on signs prophets, see the introduction), a warning that is clearly part of the Jesus tradition (2 Thess 2:9). Today we might think of Jim Jones, David Koresh and New Age Christ figures (see Groothuis 1990). The death toll under Jones and Koresh, incidentally, serves as a helpful rebuttal to those who claim that all religions are the same and it matters not what one believes. But false messianic figures abounded in the first century as well (for example, Jos. *War* 2.259-63; 6.285-88; *Ant.* 20.97-98). Be Ready for Both Human and Natural Disasters (24:6-8) Jesus borrows traditional biblical language here (compare 2 Chron 15:6; Is 19:2; Jer 51:46; for rumors of wars, compare Dan 11:44). Most of the events of Matthew 24:5-14 occurred between A.D. 30 and 70 (Blomberg 1992:356, following W. G. Thompson 1974). Some even believe *the gospel of the kingdom* was proclaimed among the nations in a representative sense (Rom 10:18; Col 1:6; Blomberg 1992:356-57). The general character of the language prohibits us from limiting it to any such events, however (Beasley-Murray 1957:35, 39). Such events occurred throughout the period of 30-70 and have been occurring ever since. Be Ready for Persecution; Some Professing Christians Will Fall Away (24:9-13) So heart wrenching is this reality that the New Testament writers had to warn Christians about it repeatedly (2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 Jn 2:18-19; Rev 13:12-17). Early Christian exhortation regularly portrayed perseverance and apostasy as the alternatives in times of serious testing (S. Brown 1969:146). Like Mark, Matthew connects the suffering of believers with that of Christ, even prefacing his passion narrative with the promise of believers' suffering (compare Feuillet 1980b; Graham 1986).

Wickedness, or more literally and specifically "lawlessness," could characterize especially the outwardly religious (Mt 23:28; compare

Jude 4) but probably applies to the society as a whole, including wicked rulers (2 Thess 2:3, 7-8). Nevertheless, as a consequence even the hearts of *most* (literally, "the many," perhaps denoting disciples - compare Mt 20:28) will become loveless (compare 22:37-39), hence capable of betrayal. Although the promise that one who *stands firm to the end will be saved* (24:13; compare v. 22) could refer to survival (as in 4 Ezra 6:25), the context of apostasy suggests that enduring to salvation here may refer to the same demand that phrase implies in most New Testament passages: that only those who continue in the faith will receive salvation at the final day (compare 7:13-14; Marshall 1974:73). True Christians Will Spread the Gospel Among All Nations (24:14) Whereas Jesus says that other phenomena do not mark the end (v. 6), here he explicitly declares that the spread of the gospel does mark *the end*. The world controls many other factors, but this is the one factor the church itself determines: we must complete the commission of discipling all nations before this age will come to a close (28:19-20; compare Acts 1:6-11; Rom 11:25-26; 2 Pet 3:9-15). This prerequisite for the end does not imply that all peoples will be converted, but that the kingdom will not come in its fullness until all peoples have had the opportunity to embrace or reject the King who will be their judge (Mt 25:31-32). Jesus' early followers recognized that he would rule a remnant with representatives from all peoples (Rev 5:9; 7:9); just as the world system would (Rev 13:7).

Perhaps just as Israel, because of disobedience, ruled the land promised to Abraham only twice in its history (Gen 15:18; 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chron 34:5-7), so the Lord's return has been delayed and the world's suffering prolonged by the church's disobedience to the Great Commission (see 2 Pet 3:9-15; Ford 1979:76). While some generations have come much closer than others, the Lord will not return until he has found a generation of servants devoted enough to fulfill the worldwide mission's task he has commanded.

Whereas Matthew 28:18-20 is a commission, 24:14 is also a promise that some generation will succeed in finishing the task others have begun. African, Asian and Latin American Christians are in the forefront of world evangelism today; Christ's followers among many people must labor together for the harvest. But this mission cannot be done in human strength. The first generation of the church experienced the most rapid exponential growth while lacking the entire resources

Western Christians think necessary to accomplish the task today, such as money, literature, mass transportation and communication. But they had what much of the Western church today lacks: a faithful dependence on the Holy Spirit (compare 10:20; Mk 13:11; Acts 1:8). With a world population five times what it was a mere century and a half ago, the stakes have never been as high as they are now. Let us pray for laborers for the Lord's harvest (Mt 9:38), that we may become that promised generation.

We should note the context in which this worldwide evangelism occurs: suffering (24:9-13; more explicitly in Mk 13:9-11 earlier applied by Matthew to his fuller discourse on evangelism). Many early Christians recognized suffering as a prerequisite for the end (Col 1:24; Rev 6:10-11; compare 4 Ezra 4:3-37), because Christians' suffering is inseparable from our witness. It is when we are least comfortable with the world that we most dramatically proclaim the kingdom of our Lord. Further, just as most mission fields in history were opened through the blood of martyrs, many people's will not be reached today without Christians who are prepared to lay down their lives for the gospel Jesus has called us to proclaim.

The Division of the Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)

This final parable in Jesus' final sermon in Matthew brings home the reality of judgment. As the missionaries from Matthew's churches spread the good news of the kingdom both among fellow Jews and among Gentiles, they faced hostility as well as welcome. This parable brings together some themes from the rest of the Gospel: Christ, like the kingdom, had been present in a hidden way (compare chap. 13), and one's response to his agents represented one's response to him (chap. 10).

Jesus is the judge on the Day of Judgment. The parable assumes Jesus' deity. Whereas others sometimes fill the role of final judge in Jewish tradition (as in *Test. Ab.* 13A; 11B), the central biblical and Jewish role of final judge that Jesus here assumes normally belongs to God himself (see, for example, *1 Enoch* 9:4; 60:2). As noted earlier, the king in rabbinic parables is nearly always God. Likewise, coming with *all the angels* (Mt 25:31; compare 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 2 Thess 1:7) alludes to various versions of Zechariah 14:5 (see Gundry 1982:511), where God is in view. Further, Jesus' claim that whatever

others have done to his servants they have done to him fits a rabbinic perspective about God (Smith 1951:154). Finally, although shepherds could represent Moses, David and others in biblical and Jewish tradition, the chief *shepherd* remained God himself (as in Ps 23:1-4; 74:1-2; Is 40:11; Ezek 34:11-17; Zech 10:3; Sirach 18:13; *1 Enoch* 89:18; Ps-Philo 28.5; 30.5). Jesus is both judge and the focus of the final judgment, spelling disaster to those who ignored him on this side of that day.

The nations will be judged according to how they respond to the gospel and its messengers. The *nations* or "Gentiles" in Jewish literature would be judged according to how they treated Israel (4 Ezra 7:37; Klausner 1979:200). As in other parables, here they are *gathered* (compare 13:40; Is 2:4; Rev 16:16) and separated (Mt 13:30, 49), in this instance the way a shepherd would separate *sheep* from *goats* (compare Ezek 34:17), to keep the goats warm at night while keeping the sheep in open air as they preferred (Jeremias 1972:206). Sheep cost more than goats (Jeremias 1972:206) and because of their greater utility and value were nearly always more numerous on a farm (N. Lewis 1983:131-32).

The older dispensational scheme viewed this passage as the judgment of the nations based on their treatment of Israel. This suggestion could fit Jewish perceptions of the judgment, as noted above (compare Manson 1979:249-50). But this suggestion does not fit well Jesus' own designation of his *brothers* in the Gospels elsewhere (Mt 12:50; 28:10; see below). Because the passage explicitly declares that this judgment determines people's *eternal* destinies (25:46), it cannot refer to a judgment concerning who will enter the millennium, as in some older dispensational schemes (Ladd 1977:38; compare Ladd 1978b:98-102).

Nor is the popular view that this text refers to treatment of the poor or those in need (as in Gross 1964; Hare 1967:124; Catchpole 1979; Feuillet 1980a) exegetically compelling, although on other grounds it would be entirely consonant with the Jesus tradition (such as Mk 10:21; Lk 16:19-25) and biblical ethics as a whole (for example, Ex 22:22-27; Prov 19:17; 21:13). Jewish lists of loving works include showing hospitality and visiting the sick, though not visiting prisoners; such acts were found praiseworthy in the Day of Judgment (*2 Enoch* 63:1-2; Jeremias 1972:207-8; compare Bonsirven 1964:151-52).

In the context of Jesus' teachings, especially in the context of Matthew (as opposed to Luke), this parable addresses not serving all the poor but receiving the gospel's messengers. Elsewhere in Matthew, disciples are Jesus' *brothers* (12:50; 28:10; compare also *the least* - 5:19; 11:11; 18:3-6, 10-14). Likewise, one treats Jesus as one treats his representatives (10:40-42), who should be received with hospitality, food and drink (10:8-13, 42). Imprisonment could refer to detention until trial before magistrates (10:18-19), and sickness to physical conditions brought on by the hardship of the mission (compare Phil 2:27-30; perhaps Gal 4:13-14; 2 Tim 4:20). Being poorly clothed appears in Pauline lists of sufferings (Rom 8:35), including specifically apostolic sufferings (1 Cor 4:11). The King thus judges the nations based on how they have responded to the gospel of the kingdom already preached to them before the time of his kingdom (Mt 24:14; 28:19-20). The passage thus also implies that true messengers of the gospel will successfully evangelize the world only if they can also embrace poverty and suffering for Christ's name (compare Matthey 1980).

The stakes involved in our witness are eternal. The horrifying conclusion (25:46) is the damnation of people who did not actively embrace messengers of the gospel but nevertheless were oblivious to how they had offended God. The goats thus depart (7:23) into eternal fire (the worst possible conception of hell; see comment on 3:8, 10, 12), but tragically, God had not originally created them for the fire or the fire for them (compare 4 Ezra 8:59-60). Rather, it had been *prepared* (compare Mt 25:34) by God for the devil and his angels (compare 2 Pet 2:4; 1QM 13.11-12).

We too must "receive" one another with grace. In the context of the surrounding parables, welcoming Christ's messengers probably involves more than only initially embracing the message of the kingdom: it means treating one's fellow servants properly (24:45-49). Unless we "receive" one another in God's household, we in some way reject Christ whose representatives our fellow disciples are (18:5-6, 28-29). Paul likewise reminds the Corinthians that to be reconciled to him is to be reconciled to God himself (2 Cor 5:11 - 7:1).

Chapter 11

The Passion Narrative

In Jerusalem Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. He then goes to a garden on the Mount of Olives to pray, where he is betrayed by Judas. After trials before the High Priest Caiaphas and Pilate the Roman Governor, he is condemned to death and handed over to be crucified by the Roman soldiers while many women look on. At evening Joseph of Arimathea receives and buries the body and a guard is set to secure the tomb.

Matthew's Passion Narrative follows his model Mark in basic outline and content. But Matthew's narrative more carefully binds the passion and death of Jesus the Messiah to his role as teacher and Son of Man who comes at the end of the age. In a uniquely Matthean addition, the formulaic conclusion of Jesus' words in his

last teaching discourse is immediately joined to one more prediction of the coming betrayal and crucifixion of the Son of Man (26:1-2). With other added details Matthew heightens the crime and death of Jesus' betrayer (26:14-16; 27:3-10), notes a dream revelation to the wife of Pilate that Jesus is a "righteous man" (*dikaios*; NRSV reads "innocent"), has Pilate "wash his hands" of any responsibility for Jesus' death, accompanies Jesus' death with an earthquake and a resurrection of the saints, and reports a posting of a guard at the tomb by the Jewish leaders to prevent the theft of Jesus' body. Matthew's narrative of Jesus' passion and death is composed of the following sections and themes:

Major Themes and Sections of Passion Narrative

- ❖ Matthew 26:1-5 opens the narrative with the plot to kill Jesus. Jesus announces that the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified. In ironic fulfillment, the leaders of the people conspire to arrest Jesus and put him to death.
- ❖ In Matthew 26:6-13, Jesus' anointing with costly perfume by a nameless woman at Bethany is described by him as a preparation for his burial and as a key part of the preaching of the good news.
- ❖ In Matthew 26:14-16, Matthew alters Mark's narrative by making Judas appear greedy, asking how much the leaders are willing to pay him in order to betray Jesus. They agree to pay him thirty pieces of silver.
- ❖ After sending his disciples to prepare, Jesus gathers with them to eat the Passover meal, (Matthew 26:17-35). Jesus first foretells that one of them will betray him, and then takes a loaf of bread and a cup of wine and, after blessing them, shares them with the disciples as his body and blood of the covenant of the Father's kingdom. Framing the meal and parallel to the announcement of the betrayal, Jesus predicts that Peter along with all of the disciples will deny and desert him.
- ❖ After the meal, Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matthew 26:36-46). While the disciples sleep, three times Jesus prays earnestly to the Father that he might be spared the drinking of the "cup" of his death. Obediently he submits to the Father's

will and the betrayal is at hand. The arrest of Jesus takes place as Judas arrives with a crowd and betrays Jesus with the agreed upon signal, a kiss (Matthew 26:47-56). Twice Jesus emphasizes that all of this is happening in fulfillment of the scriptures. The truth of his assertion is confirmed by the note that, as he has predicted, all the disciples desert him and flee.

- ❖ In Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1-2, Jesus is put on trial before the High Priest. Various charges are brought against Jesus, but he remains silent. To the high priest's question whether he is the Messiah Jesus responds with a somewhat ambiguous, "You have said so," and a scriptural quotation about the Son of Man. Jesus' remarks are seen as blasphemy and worthy of death. Jesus is bound and handed over to Pilate.
- ❖ Ironically, in the midst of Jesus' trial, Peter, too, is interrogated regarding his relationship to Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). As Jesus has predicted, three times Peter denies that he knows Jesus. The cock crows and Peter repents.
- ❖ In a unique motif, Matthew narrates the death of Judas, Matthew 27:3-10. When Judas sees what his betrayal has occasioned, he repents of his sin of having betrayed "innocent blood" and attempts to return the thirty pieces of silver to the leaders. Upon their refusal, in despair he hangs himself, and in fulfillment of scripture the leaders use the money to buy a burial field.
- ❖ Jesus now goes on trial before Pilate (Matthew 27:11-31). To Pilate's question whether he is "King of the Jews," Jesus responds as to the chief priest, "You say so," but otherwise remains silent amid the accusations. Matthew adds unique features to the trial scene before Pilate. Pilate's wife notes that she has been warned in a dream (see Matthew, chapters 1 and 2) to have nothing to do with this "righteous man" (27:19; see 1:19 and throughout). After agreeing to release a prisoner, Barabbas, instead of Jesus, Pilate washes his hands of this "innocent" man's blood, while the people answer "His blood be on us and upon our children!" (27:24-25). Pilate then hands Jesus over to be crucified. The soldiers dress Jesus up in a robe, a crown of thorns, and a reed and mock him as "King of the Jews" and then lead him away to be crucified.

- ❖ On the way to Jesus' crucifixion and death (Matthew 27:32-56), a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, is compelled to carry the cross to Golgotha, where Jesus is placed on the cross with two bandits on either side. Those who pass by mock him as "Son of God" and "King of Israel." Darkness comes over the land from noon until three o'clock, when Jesus cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and then breathes his last. To Mark's note regarding the rending of the temple curtain at Jesus' death, Matthew adds that there is a great earthquake and that many of the dead come out of their tombs (27:51-53). Many women who have followed Jesus from Galilee stand watching from a distance.
- ❖ After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, described as a "disciple" of Jesus, goes to Pilate and asks for the body. Joseph receives the body and lays it in his own new tomb and rolls a large stone in front of the door, while Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sit opposite the tomb, watching (Matthew 27:57-61).
- ❖ The passion narrative concludes with the setting of a guard at the tomb (Matthew 27:62-66). In this unique addition to the narrative, Matthew notes the concern of the leaders that Jesus' disciples will come and steal the body and then claim he has been raised from the dead. Pilate orders them to make the tomb secure by setting a guard.

Emphases in Matthew's Passion:

- **Portrayal of Jesus:**
 - ❖ *Cruelly Mistreated:* suffering, scouring & crucifixion
 - ❖ *Royal Son of David:* the only legitimate "King of the Jews"
 - ❖ *Great Teacher (like Moses):* faithful to God & to his disciples
 - ❖ *Beloved Son of God:* as attested by divine signs
- **Roles of Characters in the Narrative :**
 - ❖ *Caiaphas & Pilate* – political schemers, avoiding responsibility
 - ❖ *Judas & Peter* – betrayer & denier; but both repentant
 - ❖ *Other male disciples* – play fairly minor roles; flee
- *Mary Magdalene & other women* – faithful witnesses
 - ❖ *Joseph of Arimathea* – courageous, charitable disciple

- **Familiar Episodes NOT in Matthew's Passion?**
- **In Luke and John, but not Mark or Matthew :**
 - ❖ Much longer dialogues at the Last Supper (Luke 22:24-38; John 13-16)
 - ❖ Pilate stresses Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4, 13-16, 22; John 18:38b; 19:4, 6, 12)
- **Only in Luke:**
 - ❖ Jesus is tried before the Sanhedrin at dawn (Luke 22:66-71)
 - ❖ Jesus is taken and questioned before Herod (Luke 23:6-12)
 - ❖ Jesus speaks with women on the Way to Calvary (Luke 23:26-33a)
 - ❖ Jesus forgives those who are crucifying him (Luke 23:34a)
 - ❖ Jesus speaks with the "repentant thief" (Luke 23:39-43)
- **Only in John:**
 - ❖ Jesus washes his disciples' feet (John 13:1-20)
 - ❖ Jesus' long prayer to the Father (John 17:1-26)
 - ❖ Jesus has a much longer trial before Pilate (John 18:29-19:16)
 - ❖ Jesus' last words on the cross (see above; John 19:26-27, 28, 30)
 - ❖ After Jesus' death, his side is pierced, but his bones not broken (John 19:31-37)

The passion story of Matthew's account absorbs virtually all of Mark's story; yet here, too, Matthew recasts the narrative to highlight his own distinctive themes. In meeting death Jesus fulfills his God-given destiny foreshadowed in the Scriptures and inaugurates a new age of history charged with resurrection life. Jesus is the obedient Son of God, tenaciously faithful even in the midst of abject suffering. Jesus' trust in God, tested in the savage fury of death itself, is not in vain.

The *Kairos* (= time) of Jesus (26:17-35)

The next set of scenes focus on Jesus' last meal with his disciples. It is the eve of Passover, the beginning of the great pilgrimage feast when Jews from all over Israel and across the Roman world celebrated

the Exodus, God's liberation of the people from slavery and death. With majestic solemnity Jesus begins the preparation for his last Passover. He sends disciples into Jerusalem giving them precise instructions on preparing for the supper. The words of Jesus, unique to Matthew, are filled with meaning: "My appointed time draws near" (26:18). The Greek word *kairos* is used again, signifying the decisive moment of history when an old world would die and a new age would be born. For Matthew the death and resurrection of Jesus are in fact the turning point in all of human destiny.

The disciples obediently follow Jesus' commands and all is ready for the Passover celebration. The mood of this farewell supper is laced with both sadness and exultation. In Semitic culture as in so many others, the meal was a sacred moment, a time in which the common bonds of life and friendship were to be celebrated. Against that backdrop, Jesus predicts that one of the twelve would violate the bond between disciple and master. The other disciples are distressed and ask the question that is to echo in the heart of every Christian who has to face his or her infidelity: "Is it I, Lord?" (26:22).

Judas becomes the antitype of the disciple, a figure that seems to fascinate the evangelist. All of human history is entwined mysteriously with God's providence, even the terrible failure of apostasy and betrayal. But the reality of God's providential love does not rob us of our responsibility. Throughout his gospel Matthew lingers over this theme: we are accountable to God for our choices and our actions. If Judas chooses death, death he will experience. As if sealing his fate, Judas echoes the question of the other disciples: "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" (26:25), an ironic touch found only in Matthew's account. At the conclusion of the meal Jesus would return to the tragic theme of betrayal and failure (26:31-34). Not only Judas but all of the disciples, including Peter whom Jesus had blessed as their leader (16:16) and sustained upon the chaotic sea (14:28-31), would find their loyalty to Jesus break upon the shoals of intense suffering and fear. Even these bleakest of moments do not escape the embrace of God's Word; the failure of the disciples fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed".

These predictions of betrayal and failure form a poignant frame around the key moment of the Passover meal. Using vivid, indelible symbols, Jesus tells the disciples the meaning of his death. The bread broken is his body given for them; the cup poured out is his blood, the "blood of the covenant" offering God's forgiveness and unquenchable love to all. All of Jesus' ministry - every word of liberating truth, every healing touch, every confrontation with injustice - is distilled here in the bread and the cup, in the body and blood of Jesus given totally for the sake of the world. This last supper is not really the final Passover for Jesus and his disciples. He would celebrate it again "new" in the Kingdom of God. Despite their weakness Jesus' fiercely loyal love for the disciples would gather them once again beyond the boundaries of death.

Gethsemane of Jesus (26:36-56)

The pace of the passion story begins to quicken. Jesus and his disciples leave the supper room and go to a secluded grove of olive trees (Luke locates Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives). There Jesus takes three of his disciples and begins a vigil of intense and anguished prayer. His words evoke Psalm 42—"My soul is sorrowful even to death" (26:38). The master who had taught his disciples the importance of direct, honest and trusting prayer (6:5-15) now prays with all his heart as he looks into the face of death. Jesus falls prostrate on the ground and opens his spirit to God: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." (26:39). All of the mystery of Jesus is expressed in this prayer: a human being clinging to life and fearing death; a faithful child of God who places all of his future in the hands of a loving Father.

Three times Jesus' repeats his intense prayer. He had asked his disciples to keep vigil with him but they are overwhelmed with sleep and once more fail their master. Their sleep is symbolic of their spiritual torpor—they are not prepared for the fury of death that is about to sweep through Gethsamene and threaten the life of Jesus. The storm of death arrives when Judas leads a large crowd armed with swords and clubs into the garden to arrest Jesus (26:47). Once again Matthew's Gospel gives special attention to this doomed disciple. With scorching irony a kiss becomes the sign of treachery. As he had at the supper,

Judas masks his betrayal with seemingly innocent words: “Hail, Rabbi!” But Jesus sees deeply into the soul of Judas and even in the very instant of betrayal addresses him as “friend”.

The armed mob takes Jesus captive but in a futile gesture one of the disciples draws a sword and severs the ear of the high priest’s servant. In Matthew’s account this becomes an opportunity for Jesus to teach. He warns the disciple not to return violence for violence—those who live by the sword die by the sword. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had urged his disciples not to turn to violence (5:21-26, 38-42); a child of God must love even the enemy (5:43-48). If it were a simple matter of displays of power, God could overwhelm Jesus’ attackers with legions of angels. But God’s reign revealed in the scriptures would not be imposed by violence. Jesus’ fidelity would take him into the valley of death but, ultimately, the scriptures would be fulfilled and love would defeat violence and death. But for now the forces of evil seem to have the upper hand. Faced with that prospect the disciples succumb to fear and desert Jesus to his captors.

Trial of Jesus (26:57-27:10)

The mob leads its prisoner to Caiaphas the high priest and the assembled scribes and elders. Matthew portrays this as a formal hearing in which the leaders listen to testimony against Jesus, interrogate him and finally condemn him. The gospel’s dramatic sense is evident. The whole scene of Jesus on trial, fearlessly facing his captors, is framed by the story of Peter’s denial. While the other disciples had fled in headlong panic, Peter had trailed the mob at a distance and followed his captive master into the courtyard of the high priest. But here his ebbing courage would fail him. Some of the maidservants recognize him as a companion of Jesus the Galilean; under this scrutiny Peter denies his discipleship, swearing with an oath that “I do not know the man!”. Jesus had warned his disciples to avoid oaths and to tell the plain truth (5:33-37); now Peter compounds his failures. At that moment the cock crows and the broken disciple remembers Jesus’ warning at the supper. The enormity of his failure crashing in on him, Peter leaves the courtyard and weeps bitterly.

Jesus meanwhile stands before the high priest and the Sanhedrin. The parade of witnesses against Jesus is not impressive so finally the

high priest must confront his silent captive: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” (26:63). The reader who has followed Jesus through the gospel knows the answer to this question: Jesus, born in the Spirit; Jesus the revealer of God’s truth and bearer of God’s healing power—this man is, indeed, the longed for messiah and God’s unique Son. The high priest’s own question states the truth he cannot recognize. Jesus goes on to prophesy that he will be exalted as the triumphant Son of Man enthroned at God’s right hand and coming at the end of time on the clouds of heaven (26:64). But for now such triumph is apparent only to the eye of faith; for the leaders this man is no messiah but an impostor and blasphemer worthy of death. Their hostility spills over into violence and mockery as they spit on Jesus and strike him, taunting his claims to messianic power (26:67). At dawn the assembly reconvenes and they formally condemn Jesus to death and lead him away to the Pilate, the Roman governor.

Before Matthew concludes this scene he picks up the thread of Judas’ story (27:3-10). The betrayer is overwhelmed with regret and attempts to return the thirty pieces of silver to the religious leaders, confessing that he had betrayed innocent blood. But they rebuff him and in despair he casts the coins into the temple and takes his own life. Even though the leaders had refused the blood money it still comes back to haunt them. They collect the coins and use them to purchase a burial plot for strangers. This tragic story strangely echoes for Matthew the foreboding story of Jeremiah 19, where the prophet breaks a potter’s flask in a field as a sign of judgment on Jerusalem, a field that would be used to bury strangers. Once again for Matthew’s Gospel even the most abject moments of human existence do not fall outside of God’s encompassing purpose.

The Messiah Condemned (27:11-31)

The passion story shifts to a new scene as Jesus is brought to trial before Pilate, the Roman procurator. Now themes of kingship and allegiance come to the fore. Pilate questions Jesus on his identity as a king but the mysterious prisoner offers no response to the accusations hurled at him by the leaders. The Christian reader knows that Jesus is truly a king but a king unlike any that Pilate could understand. It was apparently a custom to release to the crowd a prisoner of their choice

on the occasion of the Passover. Pilate offers the assembled people a choice of either Barabbas, a “notorious prisoner” (27:16) or Jesus. Ancient manuscripts suggest that Matthew may have dramatically heightened the focus of the choice by having Barabbas actually named “Jesus the one called Barabbas” paralleling “Jesus, the one called the Christ”.

Each time Pilate offers that choice the leaders and the crowds choose to free Barabbas and demand to have Jesus crucified. Matthew builds the drama to the final moment. In a gesture reminiscent of the ritual for declaring innocence in Deuteronomy 21, Pilate washes his hands and tells the crowd: “I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.” In reply, the “entire people” declares: “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” (27:24-25).

For nearly two thousand years this passage has been tragically misinterpreted as an excuse to punish Jews for their supposed guilt for the death of Jesus. There is no question that Matthew intends this as a dramatic and decisive moment. Jesus, Son of Abraham, Son of David, had come to his people and like the prophets before him had experienced rejection. All of the opposition led by the errant leaders now culminates here in the passion story. While the Gentile Pilate declares his innocence, Jesus’ own people accept responsibility for his innocent blood. Matthew sees here a turning point in history which would ultimately lead to the mission to the Gentiles. But did the evangelist intend this text as a perpetual condemnation of his own Jewish people? Certainly not! Matthew surely faulted Jesus’ contemporaries for not being open to the gospel and may even have interpreted the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem during the Jewish revolt of 66-70 A.D. as a sign of God’s punishment on that generation (that is, “us and our children”). But there is no evidence he intended this text to be an excuse for anti-Semitism or believed that Jesus’ own Jewish people should be exempt from being treated with the same compassion, forgiveness and justice the disciples of Jesus should show to every human being and how much more the very flesh and blood to which Jesus belongs.

Jesus the king was now condemned by his own people and by the Roman authorities. The soldiers mock his seeming powerlessness,

using the symbols of imperial power - the crown, the scepter, and the rituals of homage-to deride Jesus. But the reader knows another truth: Jesus is invested with God’s power - not the oppressive power of brute force or domination but the liberating power of love and justice.

The Dawn of a New Age (27:32-66)

The climax of Matthew’s passion narrative is filled with drama. His cross carried by Simon the Cyrenian, Jesus is led to Golgotha for crucifixion. The executioners fix a placard to the cross: “This is Jesus: the King of the Jews”. They obviously intend the words to ridicule this messianic pretender as he is defeated in death. Similarly, a stream of passersby mock Jesus’ claims to authority over the temple and to taunt him by reminding him that he could apparently save others but not save himself. Even the two rebels crucified with him join in the chorus of revulsion.

In describing this terrible moment, Matthew once again reaches back to the Hebrew Scriptures for his inspiration. As in Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ final prayer will be taken from Psalm 22, the great prayer of lament. In that powerful text, a faithful Jew prays in the midst of abject suffering and isolation. He is surrounded by people who ridicule his trust in God. Feeling abandoned even by God, the psalmist utters a prayer of raw faith: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” It is that honest, unadorned prayer that Matthew places on the lips of Jesus as the sky darkens, God’s faithful son encounter death.

But just as the lament psalm turns unexpectedly to a hymn of triumph and praise (see Psalm 22:23-32), the crucifixion scene transforms into an explosion of triumph. It is as if God responds to the lingering sound of Jesus’ death prayer: the veil of the Temple is torn in half, the earth shakes, the rocks split and the tombs are opened. In a triumphant procession the saints who had been trapped in death enter the holy city of Jerusalem. The Roman soldiers who had kept the death watch over Jesus are astounded and acclaim Jesus as the true Son of God.

Matthew’s Gospel anticipates in this triumphant scene the glory of the resurrection. Evoking Ezekiel’s great vision of the dry bones (see Ezekiel 37:1-14), the evangelist proclaims that God has responded to the obedient death of Jesus by raising him and all the saints of Israel

The Gospel of St. Matthew

from death to new life. Earthquakes, the raising of the dead—these were all biblical signs of the end of the world and in a very true sense Jesus' death marked the end of a world without hope and the beginning of a new age of God's Spirit.

Still to come in the gospel story was the reverent burial by Joseph, the futile attempts of Jesus' opponents to contain him even in death, and the visit of the faithful women disciples to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. But in Matthew's Gospel these are almost anti-climactic because resurrection breaks out on Golgotha itself; at the very moment death seems to have the upper hand. The trust of Jesus even in the face of mockery and abandonment is met immediately by God's abundant life and immortal embrace.

Chapter 12

Resurrection of Jesus

Famously (or notoriously!), none of the gospels gives an account of what actually happens at the Resurrection, of how it is that Jesus is raised. Mark (at least in what most scholars now think is the original ending) provides no 'resurrection appearance' at all, while John and Luke both delay Jesus' first appearance to disciples, and even then the Jesus who appears is not initially recognized. That is clearly vexing for some – hence, perhaps, the need for the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (a much later account) to provide a description of 'what happened' [Sic.!).

Matthew gives us what we might call chronologically the closest glimpse of the Resurrection. In Matthew, the women who come to the tomb meet the risen Jesus almost immediately, as soon as they leave the tomb and head to bring the news to the other disciples. Nevertheless, Matthew makes clear that when the

earthquake occurs and the angel appears (Mtt 28:2), it is simply to ‘roll the stone away’, to reveal a tomb that is already empty: ‘how it happened’ remains a mystery, neither visible nor describable.

For visual artists this lack of description is, probably, equally frustrating. Yet it is Matthew’s Resurrection that is depicted in perhaps the most famous of all visual representations of the risen Jesus outside his tomb – that of Piero della Francesca from the Town Hall in Sansepolcro. In that remarkable work, the triumphant Jesus is shown emerging from the tomb, one foot on the edge as he climbs out, the soldiers asleep or ‘like dead men’ (Mtt 28:4).

At issue here is an aspect central to the whole of Matthew’s gospel, a gospel which, as a whole, Rowan Williams writes, is “an appeal to the reader to learn how to look, how to ‘scan’ the ambiguous world so as to read what it is truly saying.”¹ The women look at what goes on – earthquake, angel, and empty tomb – and see the action of God. Convinced of this ‘good news’, they rush to tell others. The soldiers close their eyes, become ‘dead’, and become involved (the narrative makes clear) in a conspiracy of lies, of continual, willful blindness to the work of God.

The artist always allows us to ‘see’ differently, encourages us to look on the familiar or the customary with a renewed sense of interest, concern, fascination. In responding to Matthew’s account of the resurrection, artists may find themselves doing what the writer did all those centuries ago: appealing to us to read anew, to learn, like the women, how to see. Table Comparing the Contents of the Resurrection Narratives in each of the Four Gospels

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The Guard on the Tomb is placed by Pilate at the request of the Chief Priests and Scribes 27:62-66			
Mary Magdalene + other Mary come to the tomb towards dawn. 28:1	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Salome come early, when the sun had risen. 16:1-3	‘They’ come to the tomb at early dawn 24:1	Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb when it is still dark. 20:1a

An earthquake happens. The stone at the entrance of the tomb is rolled away by an angel who sits on it. The angel is glittering. The guards pass out with fear. vs 2-4	The women are just mithering about moving the stone, when they see that it has been rolled away. vs 3-4	They find the stone rolled away. vs 2	She sees that the stone has been rolled away. Mary runs and tells Simon Peter and the beloved disciple that Jesus’ body has gone and she doesn’t know where it is. They run back with her, and Peter enters the tomb, confirming that the body has gone. We are told that the other disciple ‘saw and believed’. The men go home.
The angel reassures the women by explaining that Jesus has risen from the dead. He invites them to look into the tomb. vs 5-6	They go into the tomb and find a young man, who reassures them that Jesus is risen from the dead. vs 5-6	They enter the tomb and meet two men in dazzling clothes, who remind them of Jesus; words when He was in Galilee, that he would be crucified and would be raised on the third day.	Mary stands outside the tomb crying, and decides to go and look in. She sees two angels in white, who ask her why she is crying.
The angel tells them to inform the disciples of the resurrection, and instruct them to proceed to Galilee, where Jesus will meet them. vs 7	The women are told to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone before them to Galilee, where they will see Him. vs 7		
The women run to tell the disciples. vs 8	The women run off, frightened, and tell no one. v 8	They return and tell the eleven and ‘all the rest’. The women are named as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James and others.	

The resurrection accounts in the four gospels have similarities and differences. They are similar in that in each case the event is on a Sunday morning (two days after the crucifixion), Mary Magdalene is present at the tomb, and the tomb was found to be empty.

But there are differences. (1) In the Synoptic Gospels the women arrive at the tomb early in the morning, either at dawn or after the sun had risen. In the Gospel of John it is still dark. (2) There is a difference in the number and names of women present (except that Mary Magdalene is present in all four accounts). In Matthew's account there are only two women (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary); Mark names three; Luke names three and adds that others had accompanied them to the tomb as well; John has Mary Magdalene alone. (3) Finally, there is a difference concerning the placement of the stone at the doorway of the tomb. In three of the gospels the stone had been rolled away prior to the approach of the women. Matthew's account is the exception. There an earthquake takes place, and an angel descends from heaven and rolls the stone away after the women arrive. Clearly, it is impossible to harmonize the details to everyone's satisfaction.

Various proposals have been made to account for the differences. Perhaps the most satisfying one is that each of the four evangelists had a tradition from early times that had developed in different geographical and church contexts. In other words, while Matthew and Luke depended on the Gospel of Mark for the writing of their gospels in general, when they arrived at the Easter narrative they used the stories that they had known from their respective communities. They laid the Gospel of Mark to the side and used their own versions. To be sure, one can notice some identical wording between Matthew 28:5-8 and Mark 16:6-8, and there it is likely that Matthew took some material from Mark (including the speech of the angel and the flight of the women from the tomb), but otherwise Matthew used his own material.

Matthew's account is the most dramatic of the four resurrection narratives. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb; no reason is given. The earthquake takes place, and the angel rolls back the stone. As a story, the stage is now set for a marvelous event. We might expect

Jesus to rise and come out of the tomb (as Lazarus does in John 11:41-44). Yet that does not happen. The resurrection has taken place already, while the tomb was sealed. The tomb is empty (28:6). In this gospel, as in the others, we do not actually have a "resurrection account" in the strict sense, but a "post-resurrection account." The transformation of the physical to spiritual body has taken place (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-57), an act of God that took place apart from human view.

The angel commissions the women to tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection and to let them know that they shall see him in Galilee (28:7). This is anticipated by the promise of Jesus himself in 26:32, and it is fulfilled at 28:16-20.

Galilee has special meaning for Matthew. At Matthew 4:15-16 (quoting from Isaiah 9:1-2) it is called "Galilee of the Gentiles." Galilee is, we might say, the "doorway to the world." In both Isaiah and Matthew the light of divine revelation is to extend to the Gentiles. The gospel is for the nations, not just Israel.

At 28:8-10 the risen Jesus appears to the two women as they are on their way to tell the disciples. This is actually a strange turn of events. The angel has just commissioned them (28:7), and now Jesus blocks their path. They recognize and worship him. The reason that they take hold of his feet might simply be a gesture to assure them that he is not a detached spirit, but the actual Jesus. These women are the first witnesses to his resurrection. The words "Do not be afraid" (28:10) recall the words of the angel (28:5). Then Jesus himself commissions the women to inform the disciples that they will see him in Galilee. That is fulfilled at 28:16-20 where he commissions them to make disciples of all nations.

There are themes that run through this text that can be the basis for a sermon. First, that Christ is risen from the dead is central. It is at the core of our belief as Christians. We may have disagreements about many things, but this is at the heart of our common faith. It is the faith of Christians of every denomination around the globe, whether we are Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestants. Although we cannot prove the resurrection of Jesus, it follows from the nature of who God is. The God we know in the story of Israel and in the

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story of Jesus' earthly ministry is a God who has created us, loves us, and wants to have us for eternity. This life is not sufficient.

Second, the commissioning and promise of the angel in 28:7 and of Jesus in 28:10 that his disciples are to go to Galilee, and that there they will find the risen Christ, is important. It is important in the story; it has been important in the history of the church; and it is important yet today. Since Galilee is the "doorway to the world" in the thinking of Isaiah, Jesus, and the Gospel of Matthew, the light of the gospel is then for the whole world, not just the Jewish people, not just the original disciples, and not just for us. It is to be taken to the world. God seeks to have fellowship with all people, not just us.

Finally, Jesus makes use of flawed people in his mission. He wants the disciples to know that they will meet him in Galilee. What is so amazing about that is that Jesus thereby forgives them for their failures. He even calls them his "brothers" (28:10). They betrayed him and deserted him at the time of his trial and death. But now he restores them as his emissaries and trusts them once again to represent him. And so it is with us. We are like the disciples. We are flawed persons and have failed him often as individuals and as a church. But Jesus continues to call his disciples to follow him into the world and to represent him.