

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW
AN OLD PLAN TO SHAPE NEW LIVES
(1) CONCEIVING A NEW LIFE

Matthew 1:1-7:29

Jeffrey S. Carlson

March 5, 2017

SCRIPTURE

¹An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. . . ¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us” (Matthew 1:1, 17-23 NRSV).

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’” (Matthew 3:1-3 NRSV).

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented (Matthew 3:13-15 NRSV).

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the

devil. ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’” (Matthew 4:1,10 NRSV).

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. . .

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people (Matthew 4:18-20, 23 NRSV).

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . ¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. . . ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:1-3, 13-16, 43, 44 NRSV).

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. . . ⁹“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. . . ¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . ²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:5, 9-13, 19-21, 25 NRSV).

⁷“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹²“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. . . ²⁸Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes (Matthew 7:7-12, 28, 29 NRSV).

MESSAGE

There was a man named Levi who was a tax collector at Capernaum on the northwest shore of Galilee. Tax collectors collected taxes for the Roman Empire. Chief tax collectors would bid for the right to collect taxes from a certain region. The amount was never reported to the general population and the chief tax collector could pocket as profit any amount he collected over and above what he owed to Rome. This system lent itself to abuse.

Chief tax collectors would hire others to do the actual labor. These were often poor Jews desperate for work. But even these tax collectors were regarded as outcasts and traitors by their fellow Jews. It seems to have been Levi’s responsibility to collect tolls from caravans that were using the great road from Syria to Egypt as well as duties on transported goods.

One day Jesus invited Levi to give up tax collecting and become his disciple (Matt 9:9). He gladly accepted the invitation. Perhaps out of gratitude he changed his name to Matthew, which means, “Gift of the Lord.” He later became one of the twelve apostles of Jesus.

Many of the disciples were fishermen. They would have little skill and little practice in putting words together in written form; but Matthew would be an expert in that. When Jesus called Matthew, as he sat at the receipt of custom, Matthew rose up and followed him and left everything behind him except one thing – his pen. Matthew used his skill to compile an orderly account of the teachings of Jesus.

The question is whether what Matthew wrote and the Gospel that bears his name are one and the same. The Gospel itself is anonymous, that is, it contains no explicit reference as to its author. The title you see in your English translation of the Bible was put there by the publisher and was not part of the original document.

So who wrote the Gospel of Matthew? The short answer is we don't know for sure. On the one hand, the early church unanimously attributed this gospel to Matthew – the tax collector who became one of the twelve apostles. Among those cited include Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (usually dated about AD 140):

“Matthew compiled the oracles in Aramaic and everyone translated them as best they could.”

On the other hand, most scholars today think it unlikely that Matthew is the author. Rather, Matthew compiled the teachings of Jesus in written form using Aramaic (the everyday language Jesus and his disciples would have used). Then someone else translated them into Greek and incorporated them into this gospel. At the very least this means that Matthew's work is a significant part of the Gospel of Matthew. This is consistent with the other synoptic gospels. Just as Simon Peter was the major influencer for the Gospel of Mark and Paul was the major influencer for the Gospel of Luke (and Acts), so too Matthew, if he was not the author, was at least the major influencer for the Gospel of Matthew. In any case, this book has been called, even by critics of historic Christianity, the greatest book ever written.

Over the next several weeks we will be looking at key points in Matthew as part of an overview of the entire book. You are also encouraged to read through the entire book on your own (by April 23). Some of you may have started but you already got bogged down in chapter one. You are saying to yourself, “How can this be the greatest book ever written? Has Jeff even looked at chapter one? It's a long list of dead people! Boring!”

The Jews in Matthew's day were exceedingly interested in genealogies. No biography would be complete without a listing of the family lineage. This established the importance of the individual. It also verified that the individual was a real historical person rather than myth or legend.

Matthew also wants to make clear that Jesus is the “Son of David”, that is, the Messiah, in fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew writes as a Jew who has found in Jesus the fulfilment of all that is precious in his heritage. Fulfilment is a central theme.

Matthew seeks to answer the question, “What does the Gospel have to do with the Old Testament?” One of the great objects of Matthew is to demonstrate that all the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, and that, therefore, he must be the Messiah. Again and again we have the repeated assertion that, “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture.

Women were not usually recorded in ancient genealogies, but Matthew includes five women (1:3, 5-6), two of them Gentiles (Josh 2:1; Ruth 1:4) and one other also a Gentile or at least the wife of a Gentile (2 Sam 11:3). Thus he implies from the Old Testament that God has always planned a mission to all peoples (Matt 28:19). It is an old plan to shape new lives.

In keeping with his Jewish perspective, the Gospel is modeled after the Hexateuch. If you followed the series we had last year on the Torah, you may recall the meaning of Hexateuch. The Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books describe the organization of the people of God under the covenant of Moses. Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are traditionally referred to as the 'Former Prophets.' These books describe the unfolding of the history of Israel in terms of this same covenant. The link between these two sections is the Book of Joshua. There is such an obvious connection between Deuteronomy and Joshua that the latter is sometimes said to be part of the Hexateuch. Hexateuch is a Greek term meaning "six books." The Hexateuch consists of the Pentateuch plus Joshua.

Also in that series I pointed out that Eugene Peterson has suggested that the first five books of the Bible reflect five life stages: Genesis represents conception, the conception of a new community of God's people. Exodus represents birth, the birth of the new community. Leviticus represents childhood, the childhood of the new community. Numbers represents adolescence, the adolescence of the new community. And Deuteronomy represents adulthood or the maturity of the new community. If we connect Joshua to this then Joshua becomes the vocation of this new community. Joshua is a book of action. Its theme is, "Let's go!"

The six sections of Matthew correspond to the six books of the Hexateuch. Matthew 1:1-7:29 is like Genesis. In fact, the opening words in Greek can be literally translated as "The Book of Genesis." Genesis here is rendered "genealogy" but it is the same word used to name the first book of the Bible. Matthew 8:1-11:1 is like Exodus. Matthew 11:2-13:53 is like Leviticus. Matthew 13:54-19:2 is like Numbers. Matthew 19:3-26:2 is like Deuteronomy. Matthew 26:3-28:20 is like Joshua. Each section ends with the phrase, "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things." The similarity is even more striking in Greek. Technically the last section does not have these exact words but it does end with Jesus finishing what he is telling his disciples.

Each section has a collection of Jesus' teachings except for the last section which is really more of a collection of actions and events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. The collection of teachings in the first section are found in chapters five, six, and seven. It is often called the Sermon on the Mount.

Many people think that the Sermon on the Mount embodies the heart of Christ's teaching (Matthew 5-7). Apart from the prayer Jesus taught disciples, commonly called the Lord's Prayer, and the Golden Rule – "do to others as you would have them do to you" (7:12), the Beatitudes are probably the most familiar verses of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes both introduce and summarize the essence of the Sermon on the Mount and show us the way in which the Kingdom of God makes its impact on the lives of those who respond to it.

Kids in Sunday School are often asked to memorize the Beatitudes. A little girl from Eagle, Wisconsin proudly recited it like this for her family and guests: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall. . .they shall. . .they shall come home, dragging their tails behind them."

Matthew tells us that Jesus withdrew from the crowds and sat down and then his disciples came to him. Sitting down was the typical position from which a rabbi taught weightier matters (cf. 13:1- 2; 15:29; 24:3-4; 26:55). The KJV uses a more literal rendering of Matthew's words, "[Jesus] opened his mouth, and taught them" (5:2 KJV). This sounds funny. Of course you have to open your mouth to talk. It sounds redundant to us but it is from a figure of speech meaning that what follows is not only important but it is also a summary of what has been taught on more than one occasion. Luke, for example, records a similar message often called the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17- 49).

The Sermon on the Mount is about discipleship. What does it mean to enter into a new kind of relationship with God? Jesus calls his first disciples and then he sets out for them an overview of the privileges and the demands of their new situation. He is looking for people who acknowledge God as their King and who subsequently look forward to the fulfilment of God's purpose in their lives. This is what Matthew means by Kingdom of Heaven – another key phrase in this gospel. Jesus is looking for people who acknowledge God as their King.

Charles Allen tells the story of Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, who once visited a school and asked the children some questions. Pointing to the stone in his ring, a flower in his buttonhole, and a bird that flew past the window, he asked to what kingdom each of them belonged. The children gave him the right answers: the mineral, the vegetable, and the animal kingdoms. Then he asked, "To what kingdom do I belong?" They did not know how to answer. Yet this is really the supreme question each of us faces: "To what kingdom do I belong?"