



Class 2 - Gospels and Acts Introduction, Matthew

New Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Introduction to the Gospels and Acts

Great figures make for great stories. And they require great stories. Political or religious, real or mythical—great figures have great stories. So we assign biographers to follow our Presidents for the years they are in office. Hollywood is fueled by heroes and the stories that surround them, stories that embody our aspirations and sharpen our dreams. There is the perfect hero who represents all we hope to be, there is the hero with a fatal flaw, and then of course, the hero of today: a person just like ourselves, facing circumstances like our own, yearning for the same future we imagine for ourselves.

When you read the Gospels, do you expect the same kind of hero? The kind you'd find in a book you'd get off Amazon, or in the next movie you watch?

Well in some ways that is what we find. Jesus is a typical hero in so many ways. A great person, overcoming great odds, facing difficulty, dying tragically, rising from the grave. But if we only view him that way, as hero, if we dive into these merely for the stories, and the teaching, and the examples to follow, we will miss the point of them entirely—and do ourselves great harm in the process. That's why we're pausing before we get into the gospels to talk for a little bit about what the gospels are, so that we won't miss their primary message. This morning, our goal is threefold:

1. To discuss what the gospels are—because they are not your typical heroic biography.
2. To run through the chronology of Jesus' life, so that in the next few weeks we can get beyond the chronological facts of Jesus' life and focus instead on the significance of those facts.
3. And then, finally, we'll touch on how we should use the gospels as Christians.

Once we've accomplished these goals, we'll jump into Matthew.

What is a gospel?

So... what is a gospel? Unlike modern biographies, the gospels have no intention of being ‘balanced’ accounts of Jesus’ life. They focus primarily on the 3 years of Jesus’ public ministry, and particularly on the events leading up to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are all very similar while John is quite different. The first 3 are commonly referred to as the Synoptic Gospels, which comes from the Greek word *synopsis* meaning ‘seeing together’. The Synoptics are similar in language, material included, and ordering of events and sayings of Christ that are recorded.

And from looking at how much of each gospel is devoted to the passion narrative (8 of 28 chapters in Matthew, 6 of 16 in Mark, 6 of 23 in Luke, and nearly half the book of John), you can see how significant that one week was in the eyes of these authors. Generally, the first half of each book is designed to show who Jesus is—the divine son of God, the Messiah. And once that point is made, it’s all about his death on the cross and his resurrection.

So in that sense, the gospels are not like modern journalism. And we should not mistakenly read them that way.

But **the gospels are not just like ancient biography either**. Ancient biographies weren’t very concerned with historicity. They were more interested in the character of the subject being conveyed accurately than reporting events that really happened. They’d fit somewhere between a modern biography and a Shakespeare history play.

But the gospels and Acts make explicit and implicit claims to be deeply concerned about historical accuracy. In fact, the very nature of the gospel is such that it is of vital importance as to whether these things happened. The gospels were some of the last parts of the New Testament to be written; if all that mattered was the teaching about Jesus, and not the historicity of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, then the New Testament would just have been letters. But it was critical that the apostolic witness to the historical Jesus be preserved so that we might know that this really happened. If there was no incarnation, perfect life of Christ, sacrificial death and resurrection, there is no gospel.

If you have further questions about the historicity of the gospels, then FF Bruce: “*The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable*” is a good brief read. Craig Blomberg’s “*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*” interacts at greater length with some of the objections of liberal scholarship.

So the gospels are not like modern biography, and not like ancient biography. But there is a third category that we must interact with as well: **the gospels are not like Gnostic Gospels either**. In recent years there has been some press attention given to “new Gospels,” including the gospel of Thomas, of Judas, of Mary Magdalene, and so forth. The striking thing about these books is that none of them are the same kind of literature as the gospels. They are not gospels, but merely collections of sayings. They make no effort to embed the so-called sayings of Jesus within a historical framework—and they were written far too late (sometimes hundreds of years too late) for the authors to have any access to eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life. They aren’t concerned with historicity, because Gnostic theology cared about spiritual experience far more than this physical world.

So the gospels are a type of literature that ¹claims historical accuracy, ²that focuses on a theological agenda, ³that reads like eye-witness account. So as we read the gospels, we are in fact encountering Jesus himself. John’s Gospel says, “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (20:30-31) That’s the point of the gospels.

The Life of Christ according to the 4 Gospels

(see pages 1346-1351 in the MacArthur Study Bible)

So that is a brief introduction to this type of literature. And ~~we~~ ^{we've} made it clear that the focus is not on the story of Jesus’ life, but on who he is and how his life ended. But ^{now} ~~to enable a sharper focus in the weeks to come on the message and distinctive of each gospel~~, we’re going to spend the next few minutes walking through that story—so that you can have a single timeline into which to plug everything else we’ll see in the gospels.

Viewed together the chronological progression of the Gospels can be broken down into eleven sections:

1. Preview of Who Jesus is

Each gospel opens with its conclusion: Jesus is the Messiah, the divine son of Man. That would be the purpose statement of Luke’s writing to Theophilus, John’s dramatic opening statement

BLUF

that establishes Christ as both pre-incarnate God and now God in the flesh, and the lineages of Matthew and Luke.

2. John the Baptist's Birth

And then the story begins, with John the Baptist. Luke records the account of John the Baptist's birth, and we read of the meeting between pregnant Mary and Elizabeth, and pre-birth John the Baptist jumping for joy. And Luke is the only Gospel that records the song of Mary, which parallels the song of Hannah in I Samuel 2.

3. Early Years of Christ

Luke and Matthew provide accounts of Jesus' birth and early years, with very little overlap. An angel visits Mary to foretell Christ's birth, and Joseph receives a similar visit with a similar message. Matthew records the visit of the Magi and the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Luke adds details regarding the Roman census and the events that led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; he tells us about the angels visiting the shepherds; and he records Christ's circumcision and presentation at the temple in Jerusalem.

4. Ministry of John the Baptist

And then the story shifts back to John. All four Gospels tell us about John the Baptist; the Synoptic Gospels give us details about the start of John the Baptist's ministry, who he was, the message he preached, and the baptism he offered.

5. Conclusion of John the Baptist's ministry and Beginning of Christ's

What we see next is, in essence, a handoff from John to Jesus. The synoptics record Jesus' baptism and His temptation in the wilderness; John chooses instead to focus on the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist at the beginning of Christ's public ministry. It is also in John that we learn about Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine, and of Jesus' cleansing the Temple early in His ministry (the synoptics record a cleansing of the temple much later, during the Passion week).

And John records the interaction between Christ and Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees” who comes to Jesus late at night, presumably to explore Jesus’ actions at the temple, and especially his seemingly bizarre explanation: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Later in John we read of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. In both accounts Jesus claims divinity: He is both the way to being “born again” and the “water” that will end all thirst.

6. Christ’s Ministry in Galilee

With these early chapters behind us, Jesus returns to Galilee where he begins to encounter opposition in Nazareth, leading him to settle in Capernaum. It is at this juncture in His ministry that Christ calls the disciples, heals Peter’s mother-in-law, and cleanses the leper (who can’t keep quiet). During this phase, Christ is re-framing the contemporary understanding of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, he heals a lame man, allows the disciples to pick grain, and heals a man’s hand. The result? An attempt to kill him, as he equates himself to the God who never ceases his work. The Sabbath was meant to point ahead to the rest we have with God in Christ, but it had become an oppression to the people. This Sabbath controversy is our introduction to the reality of Christ’s kingdom.

*Sabbath
nemihisus
we are
human &
need rest*

In response to this persecution, Jesus withdraws to the Sea of Galilee where he teaches on the true nature of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. This is no earthly kingdom; it is entered through Faith and Repentance, it is occupied by the poor in spirit, the meek, and the pure in heart. Christ uses the sermon on the mount to answer a simple question: “who can enter the kingdom of heaven?” And the startling answer? No one. What we need is not better actions, but new hearts.

Jesus continues teaching about the kingdom, focusing on repentance. A delegation of teachers from Jerusalem come up to investigate his teaching but ultimately reject him, suggesting his authority is from Satan. And so Jesus shifts his teaching to the form of parables, continuing to explain the mysteries of his kingdom. A few of note:

The parable of the soils, that God’s word will fall on different soils with different results, flies in the face of common knowledge that whether or not you’re in the kingdom or not will be clear. Quite the contrary: apparent responses can be deceptive.

The wheat and the tares show us that the Kingdom will not be immediately victorious over its enemies. Rather, the kingdom will continue to exist amongst its enemies until the Lord returns.

The Messiah has not come to set his kingdom on earth, but is calling people to live as lights in a dark world. Similarly, the parable of the mustard seed explains that while the kingdom of heaven today is as ridiculously unimpressive as a mustard seed, it will one day fill the whole earth — growing into a tree that recalls Daniel’s vision in Daniel 4 — except this kingdom will stand forever.

The parable of the yeast suggests a kingdom that will grow to affect the whole world rather than being geographically centered in Jerusalem. And lest we have doubts, the parable of the hidden treasure assures us that this kingdom is worth whatever the cost.

The Kingdom has arrived and it is not what anyone was expecting! It is also during this time that Christ healing ministry goes into full force. He heals the paralytic man, the woman who touches His garment, raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead, the blind men and the mute. There had been healings in the Old Testament; this is on a completely different scale. Not one or two, but everyone who came to him, from whole towns. Jesus sending out the twelve shows that the authority of the king is with the members of the kingdom when they go out in his name.

7. Christ’s Ministry around Galilee

After withdrawing from Galilee, Christ feeds the 5,000 with the loaves and fishes of a boy. After feeding the crowd, Christ crosses a lake and walks on water during a storm. On the other side, he continues to teach based on the miracle He had just performed, presenting Himself as the Bread of Life, and he warns the crowds against the religious and political leaders of the day.

It is here, outside Galilee, that a significant turning point appears in all three synoptic. Peter recognizes Jesus as the Christ. Having taught so much about his kingdom, Jesus immediately begins teaching about his coming death and resurrection, much to the confusion of his disciples. After Peter’s confession, Jesus leads Peter, James and John to a mountain where He is transfigured and shown beyond a shadow of a doubt to be the very son of God. And then, Luke records, “When the days were coming to a close for him to be taken up, he determined to journey to Jerusalem.” (9:51)

8. Later Judean Ministry

Once again, Jesus’ ministry shifts geography — this time to Judea. John presents the mixed response to Jesus as He teaches at the Feast of Tabernacles, including the attempts by the Pharisees

to have Him arrested as He continues to teach that He is the light of the World.

Luke records the commissioning of the 72, much like the sending of the 12 Apostles, to go and spread the message of the Kingdom. Luke also expounds on the greatest command, by providing Jesus' example of the good Samaritan.

As Jesus approaches the end of His earthly ministry, tensions continue to mount with the religious leaders. After casting out a demon, Jesus is accused of acting in the spirit of Satan. A debate ensues with the Scribes and Pharisees about the nature of His power, with Jesus pointing out that such power constitutes undeniable evidence that the kingdom of God has come (Luke 11:20). The section concludes with Christ proclaiming woes on the Pharisees, and then proceeding to warn about the dangers of hypocrisy, greed, and trust in wealth, and the need to be prepared for Christ's Second Coming.

9. Ministry around Perea

Jesus enters the region of Perea, East of the Jordan, as the purpose of Christ's life and ministry is reaching its climax.

During this final stage before going into Jerusalem a final time, Christ continues to teach what it means to be disciple, how to enter the Kingdom, the cost of following, and again about the danger of trusting wealth in this world.

While teaching about what is to come, Jesus continues to do miracles. He raises Lazarus from the dead, bringing him back to the vicinity of Jerusalem, and foreshadowing His own resurrection.

10. Passion Week

As we have noticed already, the Gospel writers devote the preponderance of their accounts to Jesus' final week. Which makes sense when we remember the point of these accounts. It's almost as though, they fast forward through the movie, and when they arrive at this moment, they pause and look at these final moments with the thoroughness they deserve. The events of Christ's final week are the foundation of the Kingdom and the source of our salvation.

The week begins with Christ entering Jerusalem like the King that His disciples had been expecting. He arrives to crowds recognizing Him for who He is; what would be next? The overthrow

of the ruling Romans? But things would quickly turn to utter terror for Jesus' followers as Jesus provokes the religious authorities by once again clearing the temple.

At the Olivet discourse Jesus continues to teach that He will return again, but next time in judgment — no longer in mercy.

As He prepares to be handed over to the authorities through the betrayal of Judas, Christ meets with His disciples for the Passover meal. He washes their feet, and He predicts that He will be denied by Peter. Moving to the Garden of Gethsemane, the agony of the Cross is growing heavier, Christ knows that this is the time and the task He came to earth for, and yet the weight of bearing the sins of the world, and separation from the Father, is extremely heavy.

From the Garden, the remaining steps to the Cross are quick. Christ is betrayed, the Roman authorities arrest Him, He is tried by the Jewish leaders, and then endures the worst miscarriage of justice in history before Pilate. There is no waiting, no holding cell, no appeal, He is led away immediately to be crucified. King Jesus endures beatings, mockery by the crowds and the Roman soldiers, and then makes his way up Golgotha where nails are driven through His hands and feet and he is executed. The sky goes dark, the dead are raised, and the curtain in the temple is torn from top to bottom: this is no ordinary death. And Jesus' body is placed in a tomb under guard.

And fortunately, the account of the gospels continues. On Sunday morning, some of the women who followed Jesus went to the tomb, only to find that Jesus was no longer there, He had conquered the grave, He had walked through the agony of the Cross to the other side. His claim to be the divine king is vindicated; the mustard seed he had described is beginning to grow.

11. Post-Resurrection and Ascension

After his resurrection, Jesus appears to many of His followers. Imagine what it must have been like to live in Jerusalem at this time! That guy who claimed to be God, actually got up from the grave; He is alive. Everything He said about Himself, everything the prophets said about a suffering servant and a risen lamb have come true.

Well, as we have not seen Christ with our eyes, it is in this post-resurrection time that we now live, and we'll see more of how we are to live in this time as we look at Acts and the Epistles.

And that's the chronology of Jesus' life in eleven parts out of which the four gospels are assembled.

before we
d. j into Matthew → 1

Four Portraits, One Jesus

It's interesting, though — what God inspired was not that chronology I just walked through, but four different gospels: four different lenses onto who Jesus was and what he did. In the coming weeks, we'll get into each one individually, but let me lay out all four side-by-side so that you can see the differences, and then we'll finish with how to use these gospels in your life as a Christian.

1. Matthew: Jesus the Promised King

Theme: Jesus, as the suffering Messiah, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Matthew focuses on fulfillment, showing through extensive quotation of Scripture how Jesus fulfilled all the promises and types in the Old Testament. Of particular significance is Jesus' fulfillment of the Messianic promises — and so Matthew has a special focus on Jesus as the Son of David. The Messiah has been crucified by his people and for his people, and raised again to have authority over all peoples.

2. Mark: Jesus the Servant King

Mark is the merest of the gospels, with 16 chapters focusing on two basic questions:

Ch 1-8: "Who is Jesus?"	Answer: Jesus is the Christ!
Ch 9-16: What kind of Christ	Answer: The Son of man who came to give his life as a ransom for many. (10:45)

So Mark draws together the ideas from 2 different Messianic Prophecies: the divine Son of Man in Daniel 7, and the suffering servant from Isaiah 53.

3. Luke: Jesus, the Savior King

Though Luke shares much material with Mark, and puts forth the same gospel, he does so with a slightly different emphasis. He is concerned with the portrayal of Jesus not only as the king of Israel, but as the Savior of the whole world. Thus there is a focus on the fact that Jesus came even for those who are regarded as outcasts in this world.

4. John: Jesus, the Divine King

And last we reach John. Nowhere else is the Deity of Jesus more clearly explicit than in John's gospel. Yet it is in this gospel with such an exalted picture of Jesus that we also get the incredibly intimate picture of Jesus as the Christ who converses with his mother, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the paralytic at the pool, the man born blind, Mary and Martha after the death of their brother, The disciples in the upper room, and His Father in his High priestly prayer.

Why? Because it is written by the disciple whom Jesus loved, so that we might have life in his name, becoming the disciples whom Jesus loves.

Why Four Gospels?

So those are the four gospels. But why four? And why do they exist at all? Think about that question for a moment; it is immensely important as we approach these books. Several decades after Jesus' death, as trouble and confusion were threatening the church, the Holy Spirit didn't respond with catechism or theological treatise, but by inspiring biographies of Jesus' life on earth. And not one, but four. Why? I think that the answer to that question will help you understand how to use the gospels as a Christian.

Why do the gospels exist? Let me offer three potential answers:

1. **First, because what Jesus did is so crucial to our faith.** Those who contend that Christianity is basically the same as other great religions because of the similarity of moral code miss this point entirely. The gospels were written because what Jesus did—in his death and resurrection—was far more significant than what he taught. And, in fact, most of what he taught was either to convince us of the need for his sacrifice on our behalf, to explain the true nature of his kingdom as being inaugurated in his suffering and death, or to help us understand how to live as his redeemed people. It all centers on his sacrifice for us.
2. **Second. The Holy Spirit inspired gospels because historicity is critical to the Christian faith.** We believe fundamentally in an event-based faith, not an idea-based faith. As Paul says, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, these ideas are foolish—or worse. So use the gospels (and Acts) to bolster your confidence in the fact that these events really did happen. Read critically, like an historian. Admire how real these accounts feel as you read them. ~~When storms come in your faith, my guess is that it will be the gospels that you flee to—because it is the gospels that help us believe that these events were real, and so our faith is real.~~

3. **Third, our faith is in a person and not in a concept.** So read the gospels to get to know Jesus. As John Piper put it, *“I really believe that the ultimate reason God gave us four portraits of Jesus in the four Gospels is so that we would more fully and accurately see and savor the glories of the Savior that we meet personally in the gospel, and that we would enjoy fellowship with him in this life, as we know him personally from what he did and said in his days on earth.”* (2010 T4G address) As wonderful as the epistles are for teaching us about what God has done and why, our faith is ultimately in Jesus—and it is by watching what he does, listening to what he says (and chooses not to say)—that we can learn to know him and to love him. Take time to meditate on the gospels—to understand their structure and their message—and ultimately, to be introduced, and re-introduced, to Jesus. Learn to use the four gospels as four different camera angles on that singularly pivotal life. Enjoy seeing the difference of emphasis, the different subplots, that each gospel writer draws out of Jesus’ life. Remember—the point isn’t to interpolate between these four authors to discover the “real” Jesus—but to use each of these perfect, inspired portraits of our Lord to understand him, and to worship him.

Transition

Having provided description and overview of the gospels, we are now going to turn to the first - Matthew and dive in a bit.

Matthew

Mohammad, the Buddha, Confucius, Abraham, Moses... when people think of religious founders these are some names that come to mind. Another name that comes to mind is Jesus. Do you lump Jesus into that category of religious inventors? Is that what He was?

~~Interesting question.~~ So many in our world today think the answer is without question “yes.” Whether you believe in him or not, he certainly did found one of the world’s great religions. But one of the stunning things we see in the gospel of Matthew, ~~our subject for this morning,~~ is that while Jesus certainly said some things that no one had said previously, he was not the author of a new religion. Quoting Mark Dever: *“Jesus was not an innovator, but the answer. He was not an inventor, but the fulfillment. In Matthew, Jesus presents himself as the key to understanding the Old Testament Scriptures... He is the authoritative interpreter of Israel’s religious writings and traditions.*

He explains them. From Genesis to Malachi, from the teaching on marriage and divorce to the Ten Commandments and love, Jesus quotes the Old Testament and tells us what it means."

That is what Matthew is about. As we enter into the first book of the New Testament, we must understand continuity with the Old. Israel had been waiting for her king for over 400 years. They were under the yoke of Roman occupation and oppression. Many false Christs and prophets were cropping up and claiming to be the Messiah who would deliver political freedom to the people. But all failed. Who would the king be? How would they know Him? When would he arrive?

~~To examine these questions and the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the King, we turn next to the gospel of Matthew.~~ Matthew presents Christ through the lens of the Old Testament. He traces the lineage of Christ from Abraham. The Messiah had come to fulfill what had been anticipated for so long.

Background

There is very little dispute that the apostle Matthew (also called Levi in the ~~accounts~~ ^{books of} Mark and Luke) is the author of the gospel bearing his name. We know that he was Jewish, a tax collector, and one of the 12 disciples/apostles of the Lord. That makes his experience as eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus ~~a~~ a major source of information for the gospel. After all, some 42 percent of Matthew's gospel contains information, completely unique ~~to this gospel~~. And 60 percent of the book is comprised of quotations of Jesus; something that Matthew (as a tax collector or "scribe") would have been ~~able~~ ^{trained} to record faithfully.

Matthew wrote his Gospel in the decades immediately following Christ's time on earth. Given his writing style, Matthew appears to be writing to a largely Jewish audience. He assumes the reader's familiarity with many Jewish customs, customs that other gospel writers take care to explain. Also, he makes extensive use of Old Testament material, particularly prophetic passages, and seems to make the most direct address to the errors of the Pharisees and Sadducees. These qualities make Matthew a great book to recommend to any sincere Jewish friends willing to explore the claims of Christ. And it's an incredible source to understand ~~how we understand~~ ^{the relationship of the} ~~and use the~~ ^{to us} Old Testament today as Christians.

reference the ~~the~~ Gospel Coalition article.

Outline of Matthew

One thing that we must recognize as we get into the book of Matthew is how highly structured it is. You'll find this is more true for some New Testament books than others, but when it is true, understanding that structure is crucial to understanding context within the book. So, what is the structure of Matthew? Take a look at 7:28, at the close to the Sermon on the Mount. "*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.*" Turn ahead to 11:1. "*When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.*" And ahead again to 13:53: "*When Jesus had finished these parables, he left there.*" Do you see the pattern? When he had finished... when he had finished... when he had finished. Five times we see that formula repeat in Matthew. Each time it is at the end of a lengthy section of teaching, which in turn follows a section of narrative. And those distinct sections in the book — there are seven in all, including the introduction that precedes the Sermon on the Mount, construct the story Matthew is telling, so to speak. I'll briefly summarize these seven sections, and then we'll drop in and follow Matthew's account from beginning to end.

① The first ~~four~~^{few} chapters cover introductory matters: the genealogy of Christ, His birth, baptism, and preparation for ministry. ② The final 3 chapters of the book, the seventh section, recount his final hours, the crucifixion, and the resurrection.

In the middle are five sections of narrative and teaching that roughly parallel the five books of the law in the Old Testament. ③ Chapters 5-7 consist almost entirely of the Sermon on the Mount.

④ And then chapters 8-10 showcase Jesus' miracles, followed by teaching about persecution as he sends out the 12 disciples. ⑤ Chapters 11-13 chronicle rising opposition to Jesus' ministry, set alongside parables about the true nature of God's kingdom. The third set of these narrative-teaching pairs, ⑥ chapters 14-18, serves as the turning point of the book. The narrative shows increasing polarization between Jesus in the world, punctuated by Peter's confession of Jesus as Christ and the transfiguration. And then Jesus turns to teaching on the church. The last set of ⑦ five, chapters 19-25, focuses on Jesus' week in Jerusalem leading up to the cross and his teaching on the end times.

Well, with that structure in place, let's walk through each of these pieces so I can show you how they build like a crescendo to the cross.

Sections 1 and 2: Birth and Early Teaching

We'll start by taking the first two sections of Matthew together: from the genealogy in chapter one through the end of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7. Because they are both aimed fundamentally at showing that Jesus is the one who brings all the strands of Old Testament prophecy and typology together — and pose the question of what that means for us.

Let me show you what I mean. Again, the question: who is Jesus? And the answer? He is the fulfillment of everything in the Old Testament. He is both a Jew, and yet something new.

The very beginning of this gospel focuses on Jesus' Jewishness, and his position in the royal line of David. "*An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*" There is no mistaking that Jesus was the One the Jewish people had been waiting for, whether they saw this or not. Matthew's gospel was written at a significant time for the Jews. After the destruction of the temple, only two streams of Judaism would survive: Rabbinic Judaism and Jewish Christianity. What to do with Jewish heritage was an important consideration for those Jews who became Christians, as we will see in later books as well. So the fact that Matthew shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that is Jewish is critical; it pointed to what to do with this heritage.

And we see this not only in the genealogy but in the birth narrative as well. Jesus is the fulfillment of ancient prophesy regarding the Messiah. We see that in Isaiah's prophesy of a virgin conceiving in chapter 1, and Micah's prophesy of the Christ child ~~being~~^{being} from Bethlehem in chapter 2. But Jesus doesn't just fulfill Old Testament prophecy; he in fact fulfills God's vision for the people themselves. He is the new Israel. And he obeys perfectly where the first Israel failed.

Matthew takes great pains to show us that as we get to the end of the birth narrative. Take a look at 2:15. "*so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.***" The context here is Mary, Joseph, and Jesus being forced to flee to Egypt to escape King Herod's murderous rage. Interesting, though: it is as Jesus is going to Egypt that Matthew says he is fulfilling the prophecy, "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" Were you to flip back to that prophecy, in Hosea 11, you would understand what is happening. The "son" of this prophecy is the nation of Israel. They had been saved out of the land of Egypt. But now what is happening? This new Israel is being saved again, but this time the land of idolatry and oppression is in fact the land of Israel. And so out of that spiritual Egypt God is calling his new son.

And what happens as this new Israel, this son begins his ministry? Well, just as the nation of

Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years of disobedience, Jesus fasts for 40 days in the wilderness, and yet continues his obedience amidst severe temptation. Rather than grumbling about bread, he lives by every word that comes from the mouth of his God. All the potential that the nation of Israel pointed to, Jesus fulfilled.

I could keep going, showing how each Old Testament quotation in Matthew brings together yet another strand of the Old Testament in Jesus — but you get the point. All of this — the prophecies, even the people themselves, find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

And that brings us on into the Sermon on the Mount. Near the beginning of his sermon, Jesus states, quite amazingly, “*Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill*” (5:17). So he fulfills not just prophecy, not just typology, but the very law of God.

Jesus didn’t come to destroy Judaism, but to bring it to its ultimate purpose. He taught why the Law, Prophets, the temple and the sacrificial system, and customs all existed. It all pointed to Him. And where Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David all fell short, Jesus was the Obedient Son, the Perfection of the Law, and the Eternal King.

So was Jesus a Jew? Most certainly. As consummately Jewish as there ever was. And yet even here in the Sermon on the Mount, we see that he is also pointing ahead to something new. This sermon is intended to illustrate what he says in 5:20, that “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.” And then proceeds with an absolutely withering exposition of God’s law — showing that even lustful looks are adultery, and hatred is murder. The point? *No one* has a righteousness sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven. And so even as Matthew showcases how perfectly Jesus fulfills all of the Old Testament, he points ahead to what is new. That he would be the final sacrifice needed for sin.

His work on the Cross, with the implications for the Temple and Priesthood would mean “the kingdom of God will be taken away from [ethnic Israel] and given to people producing its fruit.” (21:43) And so Matthew’s Gospel concludes with Jesus’ admonition to preach the Gospel to “all nations”.

After the Fall, why do you think God chose to provide the entire Old Testament and allow several thousand years of history to unfold before Christ’s arrival? Your response to this question should not be... “*good point, why didn’t Eve just give birth to Christ?*” Well, it is God’s intention to reveal Himself to His people. To teach His people about themselves, their need for Him, and their need for a Savior to provide reconciliation. He used the entire Old Testament to prepare His people for the coming Messiah, establishing their need for a Savior over thousands of years of sin.

The great
Commission
As an end-cap
sent Matthew's
message that
the Gospel is
no longer tied
to the Jewish
Nation

Section 3: Miracles and Persecution

At the end of the sermon on the Mount, we hit in 7:28 the first of those transitional markers that I mentioned before — and as we get into chapters 8-10, we see these stupendous claims of the first seven chapters being confirmed.

Jesus performs miracle after miracle, healing a leper, raising the dead, making a lame man walk, healing the blind, even calming a storm. And so when John the Baptist asks at the beginning of chapter 11 (v.4b-5) who Jesus is, Jesus is able to reply “*Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news*” [Pause] All those things have happened already in these short chapters. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament points to — and he is confirming it with his ministry. So the teaching that ends this section centers on Jesus sending his disciples out into the world to preach the kingdom of God. Yes, they will encounter persecution and opposition, but the power of God is behind them.

Now, up until this point in the gospel, everything is going great. Matthew has shown masterfully how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament, he has confirmed that in Jesus’ miracles, and has even shown how Jesus is pointing ahead to greater things — that he is one with authority to forgive sin. All is looking up. But any hope that things will just crescendo to the consummation of the kingdom are sadly upset as we pass another transition verse and enter into our next section, chapters 11-13.

Section 4: Rising opposition

Jesus begins pronouncing woe on the cities where he has been working, and gets into trouble with the religious leaders when he insists on correcting their flawed and oppressive understanding of the Sabbath.

Matthew draws comparisons of Jesus to Jonah as he writes, “*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.’ He answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at Jonah’s preaching; and look—something greater than Jonah is here.’*” (12:38-41). The people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of God’s

prophet, and now the men of Nineveh serve as an indictment to those who are rejecting Jesus, the greatest prophet.

In fact, Jesus saw Himself as greater than any of these in the Old Testament. Matthew writes, *“At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.’ He said to them, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? Or haven’t you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.”* (12:1-6).

Is there anyone you think is greater than Christ? Maybe you’re not comparing Jesus to Old Testament figures as Matthew’s Jewish audience would have likely done. What individuals or things or accomplishments are we tempted to elevate above Christ? No one and nothing is above Him, just as these Old Testament figures pointed to Jesus, so all the events of our world and individual lives are meant to point to Him. He must be followed because He followed the law perfectly and gave Himself so that all those who hadn’t followed the Law could be reconciled to God!

Jesus is getting into trouble with his insistence on using the authority he has claimed — and our rosy picture of the Messianic kingdom coming to earth is being upended. And so Jesus ends this section with a series of parables, in chapter 13, that show the true nature of his kingdom. Not all will respond well — or even clearly, as the parable of the sower teaches. And he will not judge his enemies yet — but let them grow side by side with his church, as we see in the parable of the weeds. Indeed, rather than a kingdom inaugurated with a great battle or a world takeover, Jesus says his kingdom will begin like the tiniest of seeds.

Jesus frustrates everyone. He gets in trouble with the religious leaders for claiming divine authority — and yet disappoints his followers with his insistence on a ministry of suffering and opposition. When all these strands of the Old Testament come together, Matthew is showing us, the result is not what we had anticipated.

Section 5: Jesus is the Son of David

And that brings us to the central turning point of the book in chapters 14-18. As Jesus’ ministry continues, opposition grows stronger — and Jesus shows that his kingdom will extend beyond the

Jews, as he commends a Canaanite woman for her faith and feeds the four thousand in chapter 15.

Now. Up to this point in the book, Matthew has been showing plainly that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one who fulfills the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 (v. 11b-12)

“The LORD declares to you: The LORD himself will make a house for you. When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom”

That’s the claim that’s been made — but so far, few have recognized it. And so we get to Matthew 16, where Peter provides the statement that will be the turning point of Matthew. Jesus asks, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But you,’ he asked them, ‘who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus responded, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven.’” (16:13-17).*

How do you determine who Jesus is? Whose authority do you listen to? Do you ascribe to the way the media portrays Jesus — good teacher, religious leader, martyr, legend? Do you look to various religious traditions? Islam says He is a prophet, Mormonism ~~says~~ He is a god just like we can be, some in so-called Christian churches say He is primarily a social justice man.

Well, if you are going to understand Jesus for who He is, you’re going to need to go to those who encountered Him personally, men like Matthew. And it is around this verse which Matthew has structured his entire gospel.

Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, and, we read in verse 21, *“From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”* The transfiguration later in this chapter confirms what Peter said, but this new strand of teaching will dominate the rest of the book, because the Messiah who has come is not yet a triumphant king. For this time he will be a suffering servant.

So isn’t it interesting that the teaching portion of this section, which consists of chapter 18, is focused on church life. We learn about church discipline, about forgiving each other, about divorce, and living together in love. It is at this point in Matthew that Jesus makes clear he is not ready to begin his final reign, though his kingdom has begun. The disciples are stuck between Jesus’ two comings — and so are we. So in his kindness and mercy, at the very point when he

signals that the kingdom will not yet be ultimately consummated, that we will be stuck between these two comings, he teaches on the church. Teaching that at that point in time would have made almost no sense at all, but in time would become so critical. His body manifest on earth until he comes again. And it makes sense that he started this section, that ends with the church, showing that his kingdom would be not just for the Jews but for the nations.

Section 6: The Last Days

And so following that logic, the last section before Jesus' passion centers on teaching on the second coming. The narrative preceding that teaching is full of activity, including the triumphal entry. And more than anywhere else in Matthew, it definitively answers the question of Jesus' kingship. He is in fact the Son of David as his genealogy had claimed — he is the king. And so he will come again as king to judge.

We've already seen evidence of his being the Son of David in each of the previous three sections. The blind men say, "have mercy on us, Son of David" in chapter 9. And in chapter 12 after he heals a blind and mute man the people ask, "could this be the Son of David?" The Canaanite mother of a demon-possessed daughter calls on the "Son of David" in chapter 15. And finally at the triumphal entry to Jerusalem the crowds hail him as the coming king: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (21:9)

Well, in these days leading up to Christ's crucifixion, with tensions mounting with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, the Pharisees debate with Jesus over this very title. Matthew records, "While the Pharisees were together, Jesus questioned them, 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They replied, 'David's.' He asked them, 'How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord': The Lord declared to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet'? 'If David calls him **Lord**, how then can he be his son?' No one was able to answer him at all, and from that day no one dared to question him anymore." (22:41-46).

And with this exchange Jesus silences the Pharisees. They knew their Old Testament, they knew Jesus was quoting Psalm 110:1, a Psalm of David. They knew that the Christ would be called the Son of David, they knew that Jesus was being called the Son of David. What they did not want to admit was that by David's own words the Christ was actually God, and by implication that's who Jesus was. No matter what they said, they would have indicted themselves — and yet Jesus' claim to be king is ever clearer.

And with that kingship clear, Christ spends chapters 24 and 25 preparing us for his next coming — when he will return not as the suffering servant but as the king coming to claim what is rightfully his, with authority to judge.

Section 7: The Passion narrative

And that is the end of Jesus' teaching ministry. Chapter 26 introduces us to the plot to kill Jesus, and by chapter 27 he is dead and buried. Chapter 28 records the magnificence of his resurrection, and then bringing together his kingly authority and the clear call of this gospel to the nations, Matthew brings us to a close with the great commission. *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (28:19-20)

How did People Respond to Jesus?

Of course, not everyone has followed Jesus to the very end of the book. From the turning point of Peter's confession, the responses of the people have come into sharper view. Some accept the message and the King in faith (The lame, women, the disabled, even non-Jews: the outsiders).

Others accepted the message and the King, but with some confusion. This was true of the disciples; Peter, for one, contradicts Christ immediately after calling him the Christ. On his way to the cross the disciples actually argue about which of them was the most important. This should give us confidence in the credibility of the Gospel accounts, why would someone include these messy details if they were making this up? This should also encourage us as we disciple others and are disciples ourselves, Christian growth doesn't necessarily happen immediately and certainly not completely in this life.

Others flat out rejected the message and the King (Pharisees and Sadducees, Pilate). For them, the arrival of the King was neither welcomed nor “good” news. And isn't this why men and women rejected Christ today? Not because they can't trust the Gospel accounts, but primarily because they don't want to submit to the One these accounts present.

How will you respond to Jesus?

Men and women throughout the ages have either accepted or rejected Jesus Christ; there has never been a middle option. The book of Matthew shows with immaculate precision that Jesus is in fact the Christ, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament — and our rightful king. I pray that his kingship becomes increasingly evident in your own life, as you take to heart the message of this account of Jesus Christ.

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/new-testament-overview/>.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.