



BIBLE-SMART™



Matthew

Q&A for the Curious Soul

MIKE NAPPA

Mike Nappa is my competition. We both write easy-reading books about the Bible. So, I'd like to say *Bible-Smart: Matthew* stinks. And that Mike uses big words when he should use small words. And that he skips the hard questions in this book. And the writing makes us all fall asleep. But all of that would be a lie. So, doggone, I'll confess. Truth: Mike is an excellent and engaging writer who knows the Bible and knows how to tell its story. The guy is gifted, and *Bible-Smart: Matthew* is a shred of the evidence.

STEPHEN M. MILLER, Mike's competitor and bestselling and award-winning author of *The Complete Guide to the Bible* and *Casual English Bible*

Finally! A book that helps the non-academic dig deep, wrestle with questions, and grow closer to God when reading the Bible. I will be recommending *Bible-Smart: Matthew* to my family and friends—this is the series we've all been waiting for.

MARLO SCHALESKY, Executive Director of Wonder Wood Ranch and award-winning author of *Beyond the Night* and *Women of the Bible Speak Out*

Do you want to talk? If so, *Bible-Smart: Matthew* is for you. Some Bible commentaries are meant to be read. This one invites you into a conversation. It is built around honest questions every reader of Matthew faces. Mike Nappa offers bite-sized answers that are clear, thoughtful, and engaging—yet, they are not the final word. They are the first words designed to stimulate a conversation with Matthew that will linger long after you set this commentary aside.

DR. JOHN A. BECK, faculty at Jerusalem University College in Israel and bestselling author of *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers* and *The Baker Illustrated Guide to Everyday Life in Bible Times*

Bible-Smart: Matthew is both wonderfully accessible and beautifully deep. Mike Nappa offers his readers surprising insights into well-known texts through historical explanation and contemporary application. It is a wonderful resource for preachers, Bible teachers, and anyone who wants to learn more about the story of Jesus as recorded in Matthew.

DR. MARY L. VANDEN BERG, Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary

Author Mike Nappa's idea of "just hanging out, looking at Scripture together" is a worthy one, and well accomplished. *Bible-Smart: Matthew* addresses the kind of questions we all have about God's Word with interesting and easy-to-understand answers. Mike has done a great service to those of us who want to better know the Bible and the loving God behind it.

PAUL KENT, bestselling author of *Know Your Bible* (over 3 million copies sold)



BIBLE-SMART™

Matthew

Q&A for the Curious Soul

MIKE NAPPA

**ROSE**
PUBLISHING

Bible-Smart™: Matthew: Q&A for the Curious Soul
© 2023 Nappaland Communications Inc.
Published by Rose Publishing
An imprint of Tyndale House Ministries
Carol Stream, Illinois
www.hendricksonrose.com

ISBN: 978-1-64938-033-3

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Bible-Smart™ is a trademark of Nappaland Communications Inc. All rights reserved. Find Bible-Smart online at: www.Bible-Smart.com

This book is published in association with Nappaland Literary Agency, an independent agency dedicated to publishing works that are: Authentic. Relevant. Eternal. Visit us on the web at NappalandLiterary.com.

The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily express the views of the publisher. The publisher is in no way liable for any context, change of content, or activity for the works listed. Citation of a work does not mean endorsement of all its contents or of other works by the same author.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from The Holy Bible, King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language.

Book design by Cristalle Kishi; edited by Jessica Curiel.

Cover images by AWelshLad/iStock.com and Mrs. Opossum/Shutterstock.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022035675

Printed in the United States of America
011022VP

*For Dr. Zaheer H. Nappa
who gave to me my very first Bible*

Contents

Preface: Shout-Out to Pastor Chuck.....	11
Introduction: Welcome to Bible-Smart™	13
About Source Citations.....	17
Matthew: A Brief Overview.....	19

Jesus' Birth and Childhood

The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah	MATTHEW 1:1-17	23
The Birth of Jesus the Messiah	MATTHEW 1:18-24	25
Visitors from the East	MATTHEW 2:1-12	26
The Escape to Egypt	MATTHEW 2:13-18	27
The Return to Nazareth	MATTHEW 2:19-23	29

Jesus' Early Ministry

John the Baptist Prepares the Way	MATTHEW 3:1-12	31
The Baptism of Jesus	MATTHEW 3:13-17	33
The Temptation of Jesus	MATTHEW 4:1-11	34
The Ministry of Jesus Begins	MATTHEW 4:12-17	35
The First Disciples	MATTHEW 4:18-22	36
Crowds Follow Jesus	MATTHEW 4:23-25	38
The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes	MATTHEW 5:1-12	39
Teaching about Salt and Light	MATTHEW 5:13-16	42
Teaching about the Law	MATTHEW 5:17-20	43
Teaching about Anger	MATTHEW 5:21-26	44
Teaching about Adultery	MATTHEW 5:27-30	46
Teaching about Divorce	MATTHEW 5:31-32	47
Teaching about Vows	MATTHEW 5:33-37	48
Teaching about Revenge	MATTHEW 5:38-42	50
Teaching about Love for Enemies	MATTHEW 5:43-48	52
Teaching about Giving to the Needy	MATTHEW 6:1-4	54
Teaching about Prayer and Fasting	MATTHEW 6:5-18	56
Teaching about Money and Possessions	MATTHEW 6:19-34	58
Do Not Judge Others	MATTHEW 7:1-6	61
Effective Prayer	MATTHEW 7:7-11	62
The Golden Rule	MATTHEW 7:12	63

The Narrow Gate	MATTHEW 7:13-14	64
The Tree and Its Fruit	MATTHEW 7:15-20	66
True Disciples	MATTHEW 7:21-23	68
Building on a Solid Foundation	MATTHEW 7:24-29	69
Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy	MATTHEW 8:1-4	71
The Faith of a Roman Officer	MATTHEW 8:5-13	72
Jesus Heals Many People	MATTHEW 8:14-17	73
The Cost of Following Jesus	MATTHEW 8:18-22	74
Jesus Calms the Storm	MATTHEW 8:23-27	75
Jesus Heals Two Demon-Possessed Men	MATTHEW 8:28-34	77

Miracles, Parables, and Teachings

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man	MATTHEW 9:1-8	81
Jesus Calls Matthew	MATTHEW 9:9-13	83
A Discussion about Fasting	MATTHEW 9:14-17	85
Jesus Heals in Response to Faith	MATTHEW 9:18-26	86
Jesus Heals the Blind	MATTHEW 9:27-34	88
The Need for Workers	MATTHEW 9:35-38	90
Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Apostles	MATTHEW 10:1-42	92
Jesus and John the Baptist	MATTHEW 11:1-19	95
Judgment for the Unbelievers	MATTHEW 11:20-24	97
Jesus' Prayer of Thanksgiving	MATTHEW 11:25-30	100
A Discussion about the Sabbath	MATTHEW 12:1-8	102
Jesus Heals on the Sabbath	MATTHEW 12:9-14	103
Jesus, God's Chosen Servant	MATTHEW 12:15-21	105
Jesus and the Prince of Demons	MATTHEW 12:22-37	105
The Sign of Jonah	MATTHEW 12:38-45	108
The True Family of Jesus	MATTHEW 12:46-50	110
Parable of the Farmer Scattering Seed	MATTHEW 13:1-23	111
Parable of the Wheat and Weeds	MATTHEW 13:24-30	113
Parable of the Mustard Seed	MATTHEW 13:31-32	114
Parable of the Yeast	MATTHEW 13:33-35	116
Parable of the Wheat and Weeds Explained	MATTHEW 13:36-43	117
Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl	MATTHEW 13:44-46	118
Parable of the Fishing Net	MATTHEW 13:47-52	119
Jesus Rejected at Nazareth	MATTHEW 13:53-58	120
The Death of John the Baptist	MATTHEW 14:1-12	122

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand	MATTHEW 14:13-21	124
Jesus Walks on the Water	MATTHEW 14:22-36	125

Jesus' Later Ministry

Jesus Teaches about Inner Purity	MATTHEW 15:1-20	129
The Faith of a Gentile Woman	MATTHEW 15:21-28	131
Jesus Heals Many People	MATTHEW 15:29-31	133
Jesus Feeds Four Thousand	MATTHEW 15:32-39	135
Leaders Demand a Miraculous Sign	MATTHEW 16:1-4	136
Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees	MATTHEW 16:5-12	139
Peter's Declaration about Jesus	MATTHEW 16:13-20	140
Jesus Predicts His Death	MATTHEW 16:21-28	143
The Transfiguration	MATTHEW 17:1-13	145
Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy	MATTHEW 17:14-21	147
Jesus Again Predicts His Death	MATTHEW 17:22-23	150
Payment of the Temple Tax	MATTHEW 17:24-27	151
The Greatest in the Kingdom	MATTHEW 18:1-9	152
Parable of the Lost Sheep	MATTHEW 18:10-14	154
Correcting Another Believer	MATTHEW 18:15-20	157
Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor	MATTHEW 18:21-35	159
Discussion about Divorce and Marriage	MATTHEW 19:1-12	160
Jesus Blesses the Children	MATTHEW 19:13-15	162
The Rich Man	MATTHEW 19:16-30	164
Parable of the Vineyard Workers	MATTHEW 20:1-16	168
Jesus Again Predicts His Death	MATTHEW 20:17-19	170
Jesus Teaches about Serving Others	MATTHEW 20:20-28	171
Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	MATTHEW 20:29-34	173

Jesus' Last Week

Jesus' Triumphal Entry	MATTHEW 21:1-11	177
Jesus Clears the Temple	MATTHEW 21:12-17	180
Jesus Curses the Fig Tree	MATTHEW 21:18-22	183
The Authority of Jesus Challenged	MATTHEW 21:23-27	185
Parable of the Two Sons	MATTHEW 21:28-32	187
Parable of the Evil Farmers	MATTHEW 21:33-46	189
Parable of the Great Feast	MATTHEW 22:1-14	192
Taxes for Caesar	MATTHEW 22:15-22	195

Discussion about Resurrection	MATTHEW 22:23-33	196
The Most Important Commandment	MATTHEW 22:34-40	198
Whose Son Is the Messiah?	MATTHEW 22:41-46	202
Jesus Criticizes the Religious Leaders	MATTHEW 23:1-36	203
Jesus Grieves Over Jerusalem	MATTHEW 23:37-39	208
Jesus Speaks about the Future	MATTHEW 24:1-51	209
Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids	MATTHEW 25:1-13	214
Parable of the Three Servants	MATTHEW 25:14-30	216
The Final Judgment	MATTHEW 25:31-46	221
The Plot to Kill Jesus	MATTHEW 26:1-5	224
Jesus Anointed at Bethany	MATTHEW 26:6-13	225
Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus	MATTHEW 26:14-16	227
The Last Supper	MATTHEW 26:17-30	229
Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial	MATTHEW 26:31-35	231
Jesus Prays in Gethsemane	MATTHEW 26:36-46	232
Jesus Is Betrayed and Arrested	MATTHEW 26:47-56	234
Jesus before the Council	MATTHEW 26:57-68	236
Peter Denies Jesus	MATTHEW 26:69-75	239
Judas Hangs Himself	MATTHEW 27:1-10	240
Jesus' Trial before Pilate	MATTHEW 27:11-26	241
The Soldiers Mock Jesus	MATTHEW 27:27-31	245
The Crucifixion	MATTHEW 27:32-44	246
The Death of Jesus	MATTHEW 27:45-56	250
The Burial of Jesus	MATTHEW 27:57-61	256
The Guard at the Tomb	MATTHEW 27:62-66	258

The Resurrection!

The Empty Tomb	MATTHEW 28:1-10	261
The Report of the Guard	MATTHEW 28:11-15	265
The Great Commission	MATTHEW 28:16-20	266

Acknowledgments	271
Maps	273
Bibliography	275
Subject Index	284
Scripture Index	290
About the Author	296



Preface

Shout-Out to Pastor Chuck

The first time I met Pastor Chuck—excuse me, “Reverend Charles R. Swindoll”—I was making copies in the break room at First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California.

I’d been hired while he was on vacation, joining the church as one of several youth pastors working in his ministry. It was my second week on the job and I was very aware that I was, well, dressed like a youth pastor and the absolute lowest-ranked person on the entire church staff. He walked into the room to get a cup of coffee and I suddenly felt very much out of place.

There’s Chuck Swindoll, I thought. World-famous radio personality, author of a zillion bestselling books, pastor of one of the largest megachurches in the nation.

I swallowed hard and tried not to be noticed. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him glance toward me. *Don’t make eye contact, Mikey*, I told myself. *Important people hate it when the little people do that.*

I hit the button to make more copies, even though I was already done. Next thing I knew, the man was standing next to me, his hand outstretched.

“You must be the new youth guy,” he said, smiling. “I’m so glad you’re here. My name is Chuck.”

Inside I was screaming, *Of course your name is Chuck! Everybody knows who you are!* Outside I said, “Um, thank you. Yes. Uh. My name is Mike.”

My starstruck brain didn’t capture everything that happened next, but I do remember that he stood and chatted with me for a few minutes, told me his office door was always open, and to stop in and say hi sometimes if I felt like it.

Then it was just me and that copier making flyers no one needed. I told my boss about it later and he just laughed. “Yeah,” he said. “Chuck isn’t too impressed with himself. Get used to it.”

Over the next few years, I found out that Pastor Chuck really was the same humble, friendly guy I’d met in the break room. In the pulpit, out of the pulpit, down the long hallway at the church, he was always just “Chuck.”

To be honest, I didn't work with him directly very much (did I mention I was w-a-a-y down the org chart?), but I learned to trust him. In fact, I learned a lot from that man, including things like ...

- The Bible isn't just a record of God's inspiration; it's an invitation to know and love Jesus more intimately.
- Studying the Bible doesn't have to be a chore, or something you do because a theology professor made an assignment, or because you're obligated to teach from it next Sunday. There is honest joy in discovering "insight for living" from God's Word.
- Curiosity is the first step toward understanding. When we pursue that which makes us curious about Christ, we naturally draw closer to Jesus—and his truth.
- It's OK to ask questions about the Bible, about truth. In fact, if you're not asking questions, you're missing out on one of God's great gifts to his children.
- Knowledge of Scripture isn't simply a matter of education or academia; it comes from the activity of Christ's Holy Spirit within and around you. Learning to listen to his Spirit is essential for growth and understanding.

I think it's no exaggeration to say that watching Pastor Chuck every day, listening to his teaching, witnessing his passion for God's Word, discovering a kindred spirit, and experiencing his encouragement—all of that shaped the Christian man I am. Chuck Swindoll inspired in me a lifetime of biblical curiosity that continues even more strongly today.

It's been a few decades since that random meeting in the church break room. I don't wear surf pants and mismatched Converse All-Stars anymore. In time, I've managed to publish a few Christian books of my own, sell a few copies here and there, speak to audiences far and wide—and never forget the pastor who modeled authentic Christianity to me. So now I figure it's time to say publicly what's been in my heart for years:

Pastor Chuck, thank you.

Your shadow looms large over my life, and I am forever grateful.

Mike Nappa, 2023



Introduction

Welcome to Bible-Smart™

There was a time when only clergy and the educated elite were able to read and understand the Bible. Today, however, we have dozens of English Bible translations and an astonishing *wealth* of biblical knowledge—available to anyone!

We truly do live in an unprecedented time in history, when it's easier than ever before to read and understand God's Word.

So why do so many of us struggle?

And why is it so hard for us to talk about the Bible without “making it weird”?

Well, despite its modern accessibility, the vast majority of biblical knowledge is still held in the ivory towers of educational institutions and pastoral study rooms. It's obscured by Greek-English Lexicons, awkwardly unfamiliar theological terms, absurd, hair-splitting arguments (“seminal transmission of sin” anyone?), overly intellectual writing styles, and academically imposed restrictions in communication.

There's truth to be found, yes. But few of us have the time or desire to wade through all that “extra stuff” just to glean the straightforward answers we're looking for when we read God's Word.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm all for teaching the Bible, and preaching and scholarship and theological commentaries, and research, and doctrinal accuracy, and being a person “who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV). In fact, I have a seminary degree myself, and can never seem to resist adding a new Scripture reference book to the hundreds already littering my shelves. But most of that stuff is written for somebody else—still intended just for “clergy and the educated elite.”

Somebody should do something about that, I told myself from time to time. Then one day I thought, *Maybe I should do something about that*.

So I created *Bible-Smart*.

First, I asked a group of Facebook friends to read chapters from the gospel of Matthew and send me any questions that came to mind. Next,

I did the same myself, compiling and curating questions into a long list of chapter-by-chapter, passage-by-passage sections. Then came the fun part. I spent more than a year immersed in Bible study, digging for answers to the questions on my list, writing “coffee-shop theology” segments about them, and creating a new kind of Q&A commentary for today’s generation.

In other words, *Bible-Smart: Matthew* ain’t your grandpappy’s stuffy, old commentary book. This is a twenty-first-century spiritual-growth experience created just for you and me—a relaxed conversation for everyday pew-sitters who just want to discover more of Jesus as revealed in God’s Word. No seminary degree necessary.

If your spirit is hungry, then *here’s where you get fed*. When you read through this book, this is what I promise:

- You’ll explore deep Bible knowledge from a nondenominational perspective—written for normal Christian people. (Seminary NOT required.)
- You’ll find reliable, trustworthy answers to questions that you—and people like you—have asked about specific passages of Scripture.
- You’ll gain everyday access to more than a dozen Bible-exposition styles, including archaeological insights, Bible difficulties, cross-reference comparisons, cultural commentary, factual info, geographical backgrounds, historical context, inductive studies, literary influences, personality and character studies, rhetorical influences, symbolic meanings, theological commentary, and word studies.
- You’ll build a new breadth of knowledge and practical understanding of your Bible.
- You’ll discover a safe space to meditate on, and discuss with others, timeless issues of the Christian faith.
- You’ll draw closer to Jesus as you develop a greater understanding of God’s Word—and awaken to the difference that makes in your day-to-day life.

So relax.

Imagine each entry in this book as a conversation taking place over hot beverages, with give-and-take, mutual respect, and ambient coffee-house

Introduction

noise in the background. You and I just hanging out, looking at Scripture together, discussing it as a real-life activity and not a theological term paper or long-winded sermon. (Yeah, it's pretty cool.)

Some like to start this book at the beginning and read consecutively to the end. Others like to pick and choose, moving around from passage to passage in no particular order—and that works too. Some use this book as a reference when preparing a small group study or a short talk on Scripture. Parents often like to read aloud a Bible passage to the family, then follow up with the appropriate sections in this book as a family devotion. And, believe it or not, many, many people like to meet a friend at a coffee shop, open a Bible and this book, and just ... talk about it (without making it weird).

As for you? Do whatever works best within the parameters of your current life, interests, and opportunities. I feel confident that no matter how or where you use this book, you'll find yourself engaged, inspired—and changed for the better when you're done.

When you're ready, you can just set your Bible beside this book and dive on in.

Now ... welcome to *Bible-Smart*. May you discover Christ in new and exciting ways through the pages that follow. See you inside.



About Source Citations

Grateful acknowledgment goes out to the authors and publishers of 170+ works that were consulted in the research for *Bible-Smart: Matthew*. In consideration of the reader's experience, I chose not to use traditional, often interruptive, academic-style citation methods like footnotes or in-text notes. Instead, this book employs a non-intrusive, "adapted MLA" style for source citations. Here's how it works:

- First, there's a full bibliography of sources at the back of this book.
- Each title in the bibliography is assigned a short abbreviation. For instance, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* is abbreviated as "ABC."
- At the end of each commentary segment within *Bible-Smart: Matthew*, I've provided a list of source abbreviations that were used for that particular segment, along with the specific page numbers referenced from each source.

So, for instance, after one of the Matthew 17 commentary segments there's a source listing that looks like this:

Sources: IMT 201-202; BTC 216; REC2 119

Those of you who don't care about checking citations can just skip over that because it's short and unobtrusive. At the same time, readers who do want to check my sources can flip to the bibliography and see that I utilized the following in my research for that segment:

- IMT *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Matthew*, by Douglas R. A. Hare (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993).
- BTC *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, Matthew*, by Anna Case-Winters (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).
- REC2 *Reformed Exposition Commentary: Matthew, Vol. 2*, by Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008).

Again, grateful thanks to all the very helpful people who created these resources and made them available for me to use in the research for this book!



Matthew

A Brief Overview

“All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s
message through his prophet ...”
Matthew 1:22

The gospel of Matthew is an eyewitness account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, written by one of the twelve disciples in Christ’s inner circle. Matthew (also called Levi) was a despised tax collector and “sinner” before Jesus found him. When Christ came calling, he literally left it all behind, making an instant decision to follow Jesus (see Luke 5:27–28).

Obviously, Matthew wasn’t present at Jesus’ birth or during his childhood, but he did have access to Jesus’ mother, Mary, and to Jesus himself to learn about those times. And from early on in Jesus’ ministry, the former tax collector was not only a witness to, but also an active participant in God’s redemptive story on Earth. That gave him a unique perspective to be able to tell the world what happened when Christ first came.

Matthew’s biblical account is also uniquely Hebrew in the historical sense. He emphasizes Jesus as Messiah and King for a primarily Jewish audience. As a result, Bible scholar L. M. Peterson reports, “The [Old Testament] casts a long shadow over Matthew’s gospel. No other evangelist or [New Testament] writer, including Paul or the author of Hebrews, drew upon the Old Testament writings as Matthew did.” In fact, Matthew included over fifty clear quotations from Old Testament texts in his book (plus numerous allusions and echoed phrasings). He couched nearly every moment of Jesus’ life in terms of Old Testament prophecies and promises about the coming Messiah. The first time this occurs is in Matthew 1:22–23, where the gospel writer points out that Jesus’ birth was a glorious fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, the Messianic prophecy that promised:

The virgin will conceive a child...

Regardless of our own heritage, we all can gain much from Matthew's distinctly Jewish perspective in this gospel. In here we discover anew that Jesus is *our* Messiah—for both Jews and non-Jews—and the redeeming King for us all. He is indeed the One who has come, at last, to save his people from their sins.

The “When and Where” Questions

It's generally accepted that Matthew wrote his gospel about twenty-five or so years after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension—with best guesses landing somewhere between AD 55 and AD 85. It's thought that the gospel of Matthew as a distinct book was the second gospel written, with Mark's being the first.

As for where events in Matthew's book take place, my friend Dave Branon sums it up well. “You almost need a GPS to keep track of the locations in Matthew,” he says.

You can start in the Sea of Galilee area, where Mary and Joseph lived before they traveled south to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth. Then it was off to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. The family returned to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. He was baptized in the Jordan River, faced temptation in the wilderness, and then moved to Capernaum where much of His ministry took place. He and His disciples journeyed north to Caesarea-Philippi, and then it was south to Jerusalem to face His crucifixion.

Matthew at a Glance

And finally, here's a quick outline of what happens in the gospel of Matthew:

- **Chapters 1–2** Jesus' Birth and Childhood: *Genealogy, Visit of the Magi, and Escape to Egypt*
- **Chapters 3–8** Jesus' Early Ministry: *Baptism, Temptation, and Sermon on the Mount*
- **Chapters 9–14** Miracles, Parables, and Teachings: *Calling of Matthew (Levi), Disciples Sent Out, John the Baptist Beheaded, and Feeding of the Five Thousand*

Matthew: A Brief Overview

- **Chapters 15–20** Jesus' Later Ministry: *Transfiguration, Parables of the Unforgiving Debtor, Lost Sheep, and Vineyard; and Jesus Predicts His Death*
- **Chapter 21–27** Jesus' Last Week (Passion Week): *Triumphal Entry, Arrest, Crucifixion, and Burial*
- **Chapter 28** The Resurrection: *Empty Tomb and Great Commission*

Now ... let's dive in!

Sources: CGB 300–301; WBH 520–521; ZP4 132–133; BSB 173; ADV 35



Jesus' Birth and Childhood

The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah

Matthew 1:1-17

Why in the world would Matthew begin the story of Jesus with a tedious recitation of family genealogies?

It seems that Matthew had one main purpose in mind with his tracing of Jesus' earthly family line: To show proof that Jesus, as the adopted son of Joseph, could legally be considered a descendant of King David. This was important in light of the messianic prophecy recorded in Isaiah 16:5 in the Old Testament:

In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.

God guaranteed that the Jewish Messiah would be “from the house of David”—from the lineage of Israel's greatest king. Any would-be Messiah (a.k.a. “Christ”) simply had to fulfill that prophecy. A man who wasn't a “Son of David” just wasn't qualified to be the Messiah.

Since Matthew was writing to Jewish readers, he got this issue out of the way right from the start. He pointed immediately to Christ's ancestry as the first proof of many that Jesus is indeed God's promised Messiah and King.

Source: BKN 18

Wait a minute. Both Matthew and Luke claim to give a “genealogy” of Jesus, but their lists of ancestors don’t match. So who was wrong?

Yes, you are correct. Read Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38 side by side and you’ll notice a problem: The two genealogies aren’t identical. Some have decided that this means the biblical accounts of Jesus are untrustworthy, but many Bible scholars, including Dr. Larry Richards, finds that to be a shortsighted view. He points to other possible explanations. For instance, some believe that Matthew’s genealogy focuses primarily on the family tree of Jesus’ adopted father, Joseph, while Luke’s highlights the lineage of his mother, Mary. Another theory suggests that Matthew’s history focuses on King David’s “throne-succession” line which then jumps to Joseph’s physical family line because the descendants of David’s son, Solomon, died out.

Though we can’t be sure which theories are correct, the fact is there *are* various theories that could legitimately explain the discrepancies between the Matthew and Luke genealogies. This means that some people may be too quick to assume that these non-identical genealogies necessarily discredit each other. It’s both possible and likely that there’s more to this supposed “problem” than we fully understand today.

Source: BAH 263–264

Why are so few women included in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus?

In the intensely patriarchal Jewish society of Jesus’ time, it was unusual for *any* woman to be heralded in this way, let alone five of them. The deliberate identification of four Old Testament women plus Mary in Jesus’ family tree is actually one of the unexpected—and culturally controversial—aspects of Matthew’s genealogy.

What’s more, the Old Testament women Matthew chose all had questionable reputations in Hebrew history. Tamar acted as a prostitute and engaged in illicit sex with Judah to trick him into fathering a child. Rahab was also a prostitute. Ruth was a foreigner of Moabite heritage. Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, was also likely a foreigner, of Hittite heritage, who committed adultery with King David. Why include these women right at the start of your supposedly evangelistic gospel of Christ?

One obvious explanation is that God values women just as he values men, and their inclusion in this genealogy is Matthew’s way of emphasizing

that truth. In addition, theologian Craig Evans suggests a possible second line of reasoning:

In all four cases, God acted in an extraordinary and unexpected way—just as he did with Mary.... [Matthew] is suggesting that Mary is the fifth woman in the messianic line that for one reason or another was vulnerable to accusation but was vindicated.

Sources: SBW 1235; MAT 35–36

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

Matthew 1:18–24

No one seems to know much about Mary’s husband, Joseph—why is that?

Well, the Bible actually says very little about Jesus’ adoptive father. Much of the traditional history of Joseph is also vague at best. Here’s what we do know:

- › Joseph was a carpenter by trade (Matthew 13:55), which meant working in wood, stone, or metal.
- › He had a reputation as “a just man” (Matthew 1:19 ESV), likely referring to his devout, religious character.
- › He was compassionate, as seen by his unwillingness to subject Mary to public shame when he found out she was pregnant before they were married (Matthew 1:19).
- › He was able to recognize when God spoke to him in dreams (Matthew 1:20–23; 2:13, 19–20)
- › He was immediately obedient to God’s instructions (Matthew 1:24; 2:14, 21).
- › He followed Jewish religious customs such as having his son circumcised on the eighth day, consecrating baby Jesus at the temple, and traveling to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover each year (Luke 2:21–41).

➤ He had other children besides Jesus (Matthew 13:55-56).

Beyond that, some have guessed that he may have been an older man and a widower when he married Mary, and that he died not long after Jesus visited the temple as a twelve-year-old. That theory could explain why he's never mentioned in the Bible after Jesus' twelfth year (even though Mary and his other children are) and why he wasn't present at Jesus' crucifixion. It could also account for why Jesus commanded his disciple, John, to care for Mary. Still, there's nothing in the Bible that indicates what happened to Joseph, so it's probably wise to consider this theory as speculation at best.

Source: WWB 244-246

Visitors from the East

Matthew 2:1-12

Exactly who were those mysterious Magi that visited Jesus?

No one knows for sure who the Magi (or “wise men”) were who brought gifts to the baby Jesus, or exactly what their country of origin was, or how many there were. Matthew simply says they came “from the east,” first going to Jerusalem and then on to Bethlehem, probably arriving sometime before Jesus' second birthday. Still, generally speaking, the consensus is that these “wise men” came from one of three places in the ancient world: Persia, Babylon, or the desert areas east of the land of ancient Israel.

Interestingly, Magi at that time weren't followers of the Hebrew God. They were disciples of Zoroaster, a Persian spiritual leader who taught that there was only one supreme god. Magi were known as studied in the “science” of astrology, and as experts in magic.

Given Old Testament prohibitions against sorcery, it's surprising that Matthew included these wise men as part of the history of Christ; they could be viewed negatively in the eyes of his Jewish readers. The only real reason for Matthew to include them in his account, it seems, is simply because they were actually there, regardless of what people would think of that fact.

Source: JHT 27, 29

Why did the Magi bring such unusual gifts to Jesus?

The Magi gave to baby Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Those gifts fulfilled a prophecy of the Messiah found in Isaiah 60:6 which promised, “All from Sheba will come bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.”

Additionally, the gifts of the Magi communicated symbolic meaning. Gold in the ancient Middle East was associated with “noble purposes,” as well as “immense worth and indestructibility.” Incense was an element of worship, and “from the revelations of both Isaiah and John, we understand that incense signals the everlasting worship of Yahweh [God].” Frankincense specifically was used in an altar sacrifice at the temple. Finally, myrrh was a rare, aromatic substance used to perfume clothing and dead bodies during the embalming process.

Taken together, these three gifts can symbolize Jesus’ place as the eternal King, the divine Messiah, and our suffering Savior.

Sources: DBI 341, 419; HBD 322, 672

The Escape to Egypt Matthew 2:13–18

How could any king get away with ordering the mass murder of toddlers without sparking a revolt? Was this detail maybe an exaggeration on Matthew’s part?

Matthew reports that Herod was the bloodthirsty king who ordered the mass murder of all boys aged two and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. History knows this king as “Herod the Great,” though “great” seems a stretch for this man.

He reigned as a Roman appointee over the conquered Jewish people from roughly 37 BC until his death in 4 BC. As a politician, he was very astute, avoiding assassination, imposing peace, creating alliances, and overseeing magnificent construction projects that included palaces, the fortress Masada, the harbor at Caesarea, and even the temple in Jerusalem. As a person, Herod the Great was a murderous, emotionally disturbed, maniacally paranoid, possibly insane man.

So yes, it seems realistic to assume that Matthew told the truth about Herod's order to murder all boys under the age of two in the region of Bethlehem.

Roman emperor Caesar Augustus once said, it was “better to be Herod's pig than his son,” and he was right. Because the Jewish king didn't eat pork, pigs in his household were never butchered. The same couldn't be said for Herod's family members. Herod “the Great” executed two of his sons for suspected treason, along with his wife and many others in his court and extended family. He brutally tortured and often killed anyone who even hinted at being a threat to him. Worried that people would rejoice at his death, he gave instructions (thankfully unfulfilled) for Jewish leaders in every town to be killed when he died, so people would have reason to mourn. Herod the Great died in 4 BC, after long illness and in excruciating pain, suffering from internal ulceration and decay.

Sources: WOB 136–138; HER 18–19; WEC 21

Was “Rachel, weeping for her children” a real person?

When Matthew quotes the phrase about “Rachel weeping for her children,” it's a reference to Jeremiah 31:15. He points to this as a prophecy fulfilled by Herod's slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem. While it's certainly *possible* that Rachel was a real mother who suffered the devastating loss of a child during Herod's cruel purge, the Bible gives no indication of that.

That Old Testament passage from Jeremiah originally prophesied about mourning that would accompany the conquering of the Jewish kingdom of Judah by the ancient Babylonian armies. After that conquest, Babylon would eliminate from history any remnants of an independent Jewish nation and disperse the Jewish people as slaves in exile. In this context, “Rachel” was a collective personification of all the mothers in Israel, grieving for their lost nation and exiled children.

Matthew, however, showed a dual meaning to this Jeremiah prophecy. One was in reference to the ancient exile, and the other was a collective reference to the mothers of Bethlehem weeping for the children murdered by Herod. That collective symbolism is the more accepted understanding of Matthew's reference here.

Source: ESB 1823

The Return to Nazareth

Matthew 2:19–23

Why choose Egypt and Nazareth as hiding places?

At the time when Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled from King Herod, Egypt had become a kind of safe haven for Jews forced to leave their home country. Egypt (like Herod’s Judea) was under Roman control but was outside of King Herod’s authority. A Jewish philosopher named Philo (15 BC–AD 50) lived during that time. He reported that, within the Egyptian city of Alexandria alone, about one million Jews lived in relative safety.

Although Egypt wasn’t exactly close for Joseph and Mary, it wasn’t too far either. The border between Judea and Egypt was about eighty miles away from their home in Bethlehem—a distance that could be covered within several days. Because of its heavy Jewish population, accessible walking distance, and its peaceful coexistence with Judea as part of the Roman Empire, Egypt was an ideal place for Joseph to hide his family from Herod’s murderous intent.

As for Nazareth, when it came time to return to Israel after Herod’s death, that place was a tiny, backwater village situated in foothills on the southern edge of what was known as “Lower Galilee.” It was dwarfed by larger towns nearby. With a population estimated by some to be as low as one hundred people, Nazareth was insignificant—and thus also a great place for a Messiah to be overlooked while growing into manhood. It was there that Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, settled his family and set up his carpenter’s shop.

Nazareth was also only about four miles (roughly a fifty-minute walk) from Sepphoris (or Sepphora), a large city that had recently been razed by Roman armies to put down a Jewish uprising. In spite of the ruins, Herod Antipas (one of Herod the Great’s sons) insisted on immediately rebuilding Sepphoris, making it the capital city of rule over Galilee.

“This means,” Bible historian Peter Walker has theorized, “that throughout Jesus’ young life and into his teenage years, Sepphora would’ve been a major building site—the perfect place of employment for someone like Joseph.” He adds, “The family’s move north to Nazareth may also have been inspired by some other considerations—good employment prospects.”

Sources: ZB1 17; ISJ 31-33

Why did learning that Archelaus was in charge in Judea make Joseph afraid to go there?

Matthew reports that Joseph was afraid to live in Judea under the rule of Herod's son, Archelaus—and apparently with good reason.

After Herod the Great died, there was a power struggle among his sons over who would inherit his kingdom. Archelaus had first assumed kingship over the objections of his brothers. Meanwhile, revolutionaries stirred up opposition and threatened to derail Archelaus's bid to rule. He responded as his father would have, sending in the Roman army and massacring roughly three thousand people during the Passover holiday. That's just about the same number who were killed in America on 9/11, so you can imagine the horrifying effect that had on Archelaus's ancient subjects.

Fresh off that gruesome "victory," he went with his brother to Rome to make a case for his kingship to the emperor. After much deliberation, Caesar Augustus made a compromise. He appointed Archelaus as "ethnarch" over Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, with a promise that he would be made king if he proved worthy. His brother Antipas was installed as "tetrarch" over Galilee and Perea, while Philip was also named tetrarch over other territories in the area.

When Archelaus returned to Judea, he ruled both the Jews in the south and the Samaritans in the north with great brutality. It was so bad, in fact, that Augustus deposed and banished Archelaus only two years later, around AD 6.

So Joseph obviously knew something of Archelaus's reputation—and that caused him enough concern that he opted to go north of Samaria to Nazareth. There Joseph, Mary, and their precious family would avoid even the chance of being yet another victim to that viciously cruel king.

Source: ZP3 138



Jesus' Early Ministry

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Matthew 3:1-12

Was there anyone in the history of the Bible that was like John the Baptist?

John the Baptist was an extraordinary figure. He shows up in both Bible history and Roman historical records from the time of Jesus. Here's what we know about him:

His father Zechariah was a temple priest, and his mother Elizabeth was a relative of Jesus' mother, Mary. In that sense, John and Jesus may have been cousins of some sort. He was miraculously born to elderly parents who had been previously unable to have kids, linking him symbolically to Old Testament heroes like Isaac, Samson, and Samuel. His impending birth was announced to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel, the same angel who announced Jesus' coming to Mary. He lived like a monk in the Judean desert along the Dead Sea, dressed in rough, camel-hair clothing, and ate mostly bugs (locusts similar to grasshoppers) and honey from wild bees.

So, was there anyone in the history of the Bible that was like John the Baptist? Yes.

In addition to his symbolic association with Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, John also conducted himself in the mold of Old Testament prophets, preaching for people to repent of their sins. Like prophets such as Jonah, Elijah, Elisha, and others, he spoke to large crowds and also called individuals to account. He angered political and religious leaders, who eventually conspired to kill him.

Most importantly, John served as the prophesied “forerunner” who announced the coming of the Messiah to the world (see Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3). In this way, Jesus linked John to the prophet Elijah as well.

John the Baptist was eventually executed by Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee during the time of Jesus.

Source: WWA 216–218

Why did John the Baptist rebuke religious leaders who were seeking baptism? Weren’t they doing the right thing?

John the Baptist apparently preached the same message over and over: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As a symbol of repentance, he urged people to be baptized—a ritual he adapted from the Jewish religious practice of a purifying bath before worship. In spite of that, “when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing,” he castigated them harshly.

It’s noteworthy that John insulted the Pharisees and Sadducees by calling them a “brood of vipers,” which basically meant he viewed them as poisonous children of snakes. In the ancient world this was an especially contemptuous insult because of a folk belief about viper births. Many thought that some breeds of viper babies ate their way out of the stomach of their mother, killing the mother in the process. In that context, John’s insult is a horrifying characterization of the religious elite.

The situation here suggests that those religious leaders weren’t there to be baptized, but to assess an enemy, because John’s preaching threatened their place as the spiritual authorities in Israel. Additionally, “The Jew who accepted baptism from John,” explains Dr. Larry Richards, “confessed his sins and expressed determination to live a righteous life.” Pharisees and Sadducees wouldn’t have seen themselves in need of that repentance—or John’s baptism—because they pridefully assumed they were blameless regarding God’s Old Testament laws.

Sources: WWA 216–218; IBB 52; BAH 267–268

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13–17

If John’s baptism was for repentance, did that mean Jesus needed to repent?

Both Christ and his disciples taught that Jesus never sinned (John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Therefore, Jesus would have no need of repentance. You won’t be surprised to learn, then, that Jesus’ request to be baptized caused unique intellectual problems, both for John the Baptist and for Christians who came later.

Dr. Craig Evans reports that “There is evidence that some early Christians found Jesus’ baptism somewhat embarrassing, either because it implied that Jesus, like his fellow Israelites, needed to repent, or because it implied that Jesus was in some sense subordinate to John.” The Baptist himself seems to have had a similar intellectual conflict when Jesus showed up at the Jordan River—to the point where John actually tried to talk Jesus out of the baptismal request.

In spite of all that, Jesus shrugged off John’s objection—and any embarrassing implications associated with it—and insisted on being baptized. Although we can’t know for sure his full motivation, most assume the baptismal act was a demonstration of Christ’s ritual obedience to God’s will, setting an example for others to follow.

Source: BKB 79, 81

What was significant about the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus?

The baptism of Jesus was a defining moment, one that “marks both His inauguration as the servant Messiah and the dawning of a new age of the Spirit.” In that context, it’s significant that Matthew records the physical manifestation of all three Persons of the Trinity as being present:

- God the Father speaks from the heavens.
- God the Son stands, dripping wet, beside the Jordan River.
- God the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and rests on the Son.

This triune appearance of divinity is never again repeated in the gospel accounts. As such, theologian H. Wayne House theorizes that this inaugural moment of baptism carried immense significance for three reasons. It symbolized that: “1) Jesus joined with the believing remnant of Israel who had been baptized by John; 2) He confirmed the ministry of John; and 3) He fulfilled the Father’s will.”

Source: NNI 1143-1145

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11

Is the temptation of Jesus a comparison to Adam being tempted in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3)?

It’s possible—and that view would be consistent with the apostle Paul’s symbolic comparison of Adam and Christ. Notably, Paul makes this connection twice: Once in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:12–21) and also in his letter to the Roman church (Romans 5:21–24). Romans 5:19 sums up this view particularly well:

Because one person [Adam] disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person [Jesus Christ] obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

Sources: Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–24

Why did the devil say, “If you are the Son of God”? Was this meant as a challenge?

It’s impossible to fully intuit why Satan says or does anything, but if I were to guess, I’d say that yes, the statement, “If you are the Son of God, then...” could be interpreted as a challenge. And if it was, then it’s interesting to see that Christ was unwilling to take the bait.

Have you ever noticed that only Satan worked miracles during this temptation of Christ?

The devil first appeared out of nowhere. Then he miraculously transported Jesus to the highest point of the Jerusalem temple. Lastly, he