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Matthew

one king to rule them all



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Matthew

one king to rule them all



by Marilyn A. McGinnis
and Faith Alive staff



Grand Rapids, Michigan

*“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?
We saw his star when it rose and
have come to worship him.”*

—Matthew 2:2

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .
And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

—Matthew 28:18-20

We are grateful for the many comments and helpful suggestions of interested small groups and leaders who contributed to the development of this study.

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Cover photo: Daniel Johnson

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Printed in the United States of America.

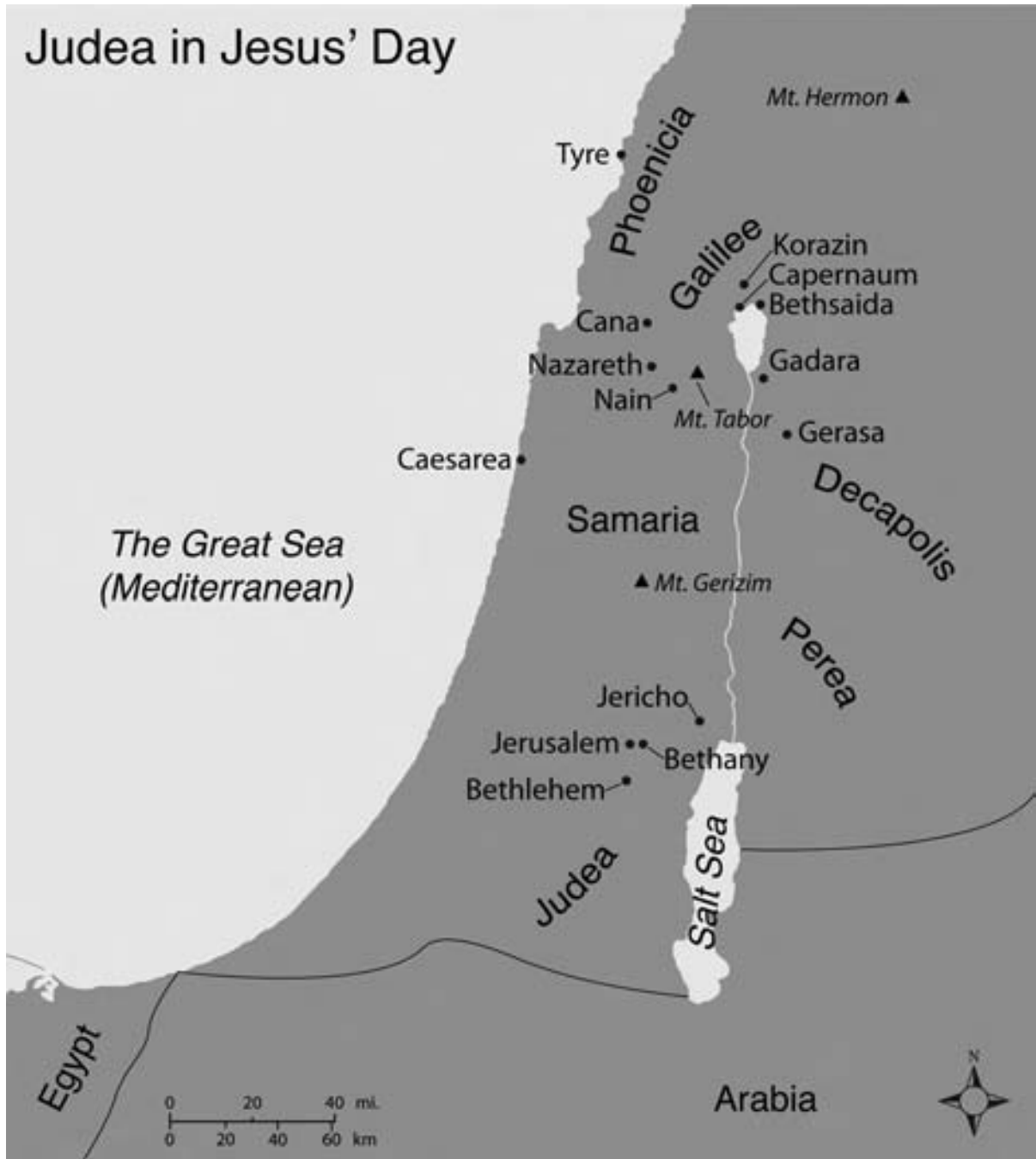
ISBN 978-1-59255-517-8

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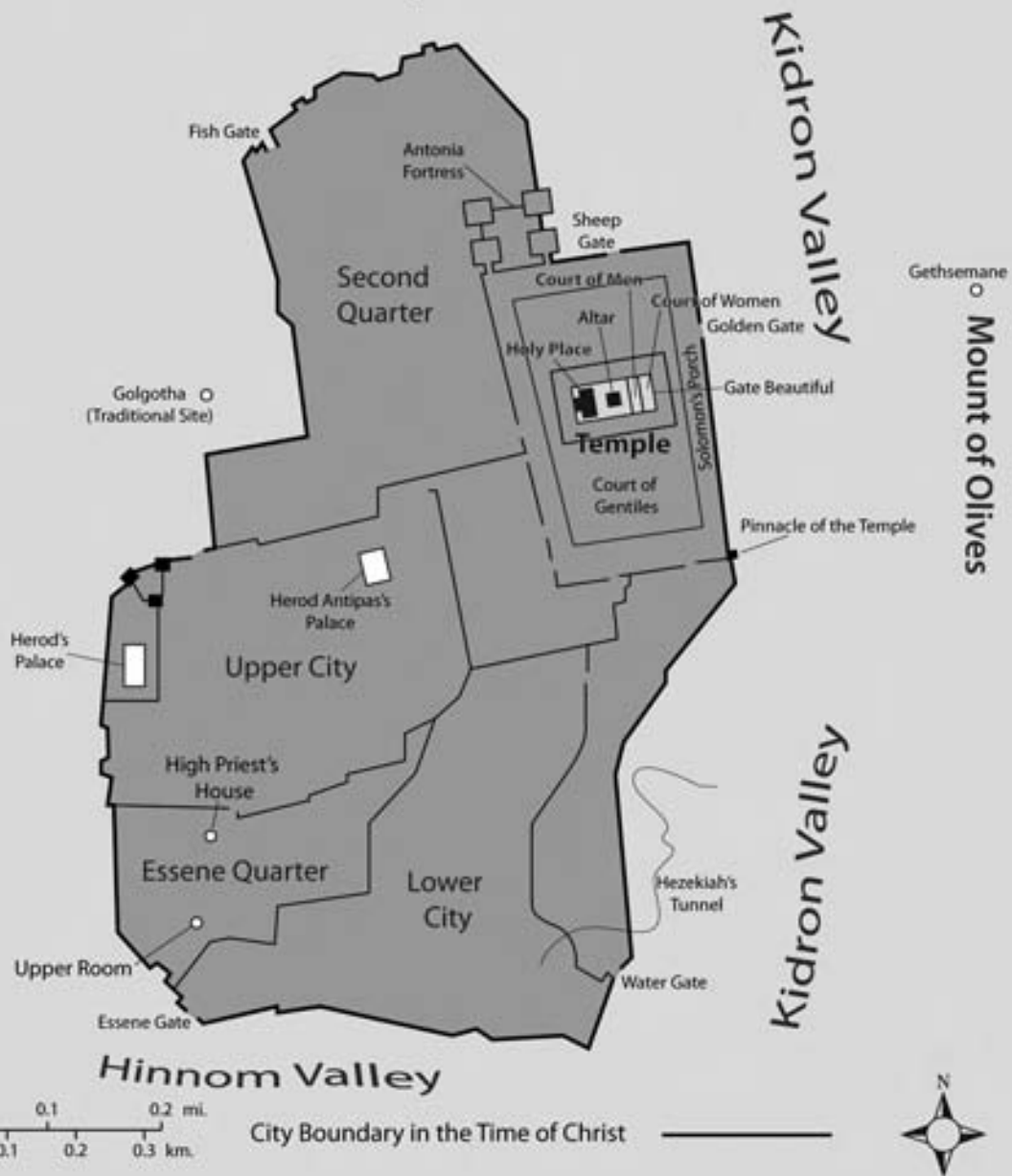
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Judea in Jesus' Day



Jerusalem in Jesus' Day



Glossary

Abraham—father of the Jewish people (Israel), renowned for his faith in God’s promises (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:6; Heb. 11:8-16). Also called “the father of all who believe” in Christ (Rom. 4:11).

angel of the Lord—a special agent from God who represents, brings a message from, and is sometimes identified with God.

apostle—means “one sent forth.” The apostles were the twelve closest disciples of Jesus during his teaching ministry (Matt. 10).

baptism—the act of sprinkling with or immersion in water as a sign of God’s claim on a person’s life to be part of the covenant family of God. Baptism is an outward sign that Christ’s blood washes the believer clean of the guilt of sin.

beatitude—a declaration of blessedness or happiness.

Bethlehem—a town a few miles south of Jerusalem. Known as the town of David, it became the birthplace of Jesus.

blasphemy—scoffing at or misusing the name of God. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed to be God, and they refused to believe him (Matt. 27:65).

Capernaum—a city on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

David—Israel’s greatest king in the Old Testament. The Lord promised that one of David’s descendants would rule faithfully on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). As Matthew 1 shows, Jesus Christ is that “Son of David.”

disciple—a follower; one who is taught. This term refers commonly to followers of Jesus.

fast (fasting)—ancient religious practice in which people would go without food and/or water for set periods; in the Jewish tradition fasting was often accompanied by prayer to God for help in a time of great need (see 2 Chron. 20:2-4). In the regular practice of many religions today, people abstain from food during the day and drink only water; then at sundown they eat certain foods according to tradition to maintain their health.

Feast of Unleavened Bread—see **Passover**.

genealogy—a record or table of ancestry.

gospel—This term literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This word can also refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tell the good news story about Jesus.

Herod—Herod the Great was a ruthless king who governed Judea for Rome from 37-4 B.C. Herod is best known for his building projects and his fierce protection of his throne. The Jews benefited from his rebuilding of their temple but hated him for his cruelty. His son Herod Antipas ruled in Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39; he killed John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12) and questioned Jesus during his trial (Luke 23:7-12).

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being.

Isaiah—a Hebrew prophet from around 700 B.C. who foretold the coming of Christ (Messiah) and described his service and suffering.

Jonah—a prophet of God from around 800-750 B.C. Jesus referred to Jonah's story about being in the belly of a great fish as a sign of Jesus' burial in the earth (see Jon. 1:17; Matt. 12:39-40; 16:4).

kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God—terms Jesus used to describe God's reign over all things, reasserted in the coming of Jesus Christ. The two terms can be used interchangeably, but Matthew tends to prefer "kingdom of heaven." Heaven does not mean God's reign is limited to "spiritual things" but that God rules all things from heaven.

John the Baptist—a cousin of Jesus who was set apart before birth to prepare the way for Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 1).

Magi—astrologers from "the east," possibly from Persia or southern Arabia, who came to worship Jesus as a child king (Matt. 2:1-12).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God's people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean "Anointed One." Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah, a Savior-King, to deliver his people from evil oppressors and to rule in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood those promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all physical enemies. But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God's people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. He rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time, he will fully establish God's everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

moneychangers—officials who exchanged Roman currency into the currency acceptable to temple authorities for the payment of offerings and temple taxes.

Naphtali—a tribe of Israel whose land was to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee.

Nazareth—a town in the region of Galilee. Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth (Luke 2:4), and Jesus grew up there (Matt. 2:19-23).

parable—a brief story that uses word pictures and surprising twists to get a point across. Jesus often taught in parables to challenge people with striking, memorable truths about life in the kingdom of God.

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God's protection of Israelite households during a final plague sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. God promised that upon seeing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorframes of a house, God would *pass over* that house and not allow the plague of death to take the life of the firstborn there (see Ex. 12). The feast pointed to our ultimate deliverance from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5).

Pharisees—one of three main religious sects at the time of Christ. Sadducees and Essenes were the other two. Pharisees emphasized precise obedience to scriptural and traditional law. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

Pilate—Roman governor of Judea to whom the Jews brought Jesus for sentencing.

prophet—someone who speaks God's message (see Deut. 18:17-19); generally a person who preached God's Word and (in some cases) foretold the future as revealed by the Lord.

repentance—The Greek word for "repent," *metanoeo*, means "turn around." When we

repent of our sins, we turn back to God and ask for his help to live rightly, putting God first in our lives and showing God's love to all the people in our lives (see Matt. 22:37-40).

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week (Saturday), set aside as a day of rest and restoration according to the law given to Moses (Ex. 20). Jewish religious leaders developed a stringent code of rules for keeping the Sabbath, and Jesus often criticized them for being too legalistic in this regard (see Matt. 12:1-14).

Sadducees—one of three main Jewish religious sects in Jesus' day. They recognized only the five books of Moses as the law of God and did not believe in spirits, angels, resurrection, or life after death.

sin—an act against God's will; disobedience.

sacrifice—an offering to God, a gift of special value brought to God as an expression of worship. In Old Testament times, various livestock (the best of a flock of sheep, goats, cattle, or birds) and grains (firstfruits of harvest) were offered as sacrifices of guilt, sin, and gratitude for God's goodness (see Lev. 1-7; 16).

temple—the religious center of Judaism in the Old Testament and in Jesus' day. Located in Jerusalem, it was the place of worship and sacrifice, the site of major Jewish festivals, and the gathering place of religious thinkers, teachers, and leaders.

twelve tribes of Israel—tribes descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, who was renamed Israel (see Gen. 49:1-28).

How to Use This Study

This Bible study aims to help people engage in lively discussion and learning without having studied the text before doing each lesson together.

Maps, Glossary

Near the front of this booklet are maps and a glossary that can be useful for locating places and the meanings of terms used in the book of Matthew.

Questions for Discussion

The main questions for discussion are numbered and are in bold print. Along with these questions you'll find points "to think about as you discuss" to help spark ideas for responding to each main question. In addition, you'll often see questions that help us connect the story to everyday life under the subheading "What does this mean to me?"

Please do not feel you have to answer every question in the lesson material. Our goal is to help make Bible study a creative, flexible, exploratory exercise in which you engage with your group and grow to know God and each other better.

Episodes for Flexible Meeting Time

The lesson materials are divided into Episodes. Together with your group you should feel free to decide whether you want to do all the episodes of a lesson in one meeting, or perhaps do one or two episodes and then wait till your next meeting to pick up where you left off. **Note:** This survey study of Matthew includes 25 episodes in all, so, depending on the length of your usual discussion time, you might use as many as 12 to 18 meetings to complete the study.

Follow-up Ideas

At the end of each lesson are ideas that you might like to use for follow-up. These include Explore! activities that can help you learn more about items of interest related to the lesson and apply your learning to everyday life. There are also movie and video suggestions.

Break Away (at-home readings)

After the study material for each lesson you'll find readings for use at home. Take a break with God and do some thinking about the lesson material and how the Lord can use it to shape your life. If you like, clip these pages out and set them in places around your home or at work where they can remind you to spend time with God. You might also like to memorize some of the Scriptures used in these pieces.

An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment

If you're searching for a relationship with God, or studying with a friend who is searching, see An Invitation (to believe and commit to God) and a Prayer of Commitment provided at the back of this booklet. These can be helpful in talking one-to-one with God or with someone who is ready to make a faith commitment to God.

Leader's Notes

At the Faith Alive website page featuring this Bible study—see www.FaithAliveResources.org, search for “Matthew,” and click on the link to “Leader's Notes”—you'll find tips for leading this small group study.

We wish you God's blessing as you participate in Bible study together. Have fun as you learn and grow closer to God and one another!

Introduction

When he met Jesus, Matthew was a despised tax collector for the Roman government. But after following and working with Jesus for a few years, Matthew was profoundly changed. Some years later, probably near the end of his life, Matthew wrote an account of Jesus' teaching and ministry so that later generations could see that Jesus was (and always will be) the promised deliverer of God's people everywhere. (*Note: While there are some disagreements about whether Matthew was the main or only writer of this account, in this study we'll refer to the writer as Matthew.*)

The Holy Spirit of God guided Matthew as he recalled events he had seen and heard, and Matthew also drew from accounts by other eyewitnesses. For example, Matthew used most of the material that is also found in Mark, the book that follows Matthew in our Bibles. (Most scholars think Mark was written before Matthew.) It's clear, though, that Matthew also included many elements not found in other accounts of Jesus' life and teaching (see Mark, Luke, and John)—and we'll be noting those throughout this study.

Matthew shows that he wrote mainly for Greek-speaking Jews who knew the ancient Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament part of our Bible today). Beginning with a genealogy (family tree) to show Jesus' ties to the throne of David (as well as to Abraham, father of the Jewish people), Matthew describes the amazing life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah who was both God and man. This was the Savior-King whom God had promised through his prophets for centuries. Many people had the idea that this great King would come to restore the kingdom of Israel (the Jews) by uprooting the Roman Empire and forcing the Romans out of the old promised land of Israel (see Josh. 1:1-11).

But God had far greater plans (see Gen. 12:1-3). Jesus' mission was to break the stranglehold of sin and death that dominated all peoples, all nations, all kingdoms and empires on earth. Though people were blinded to it at the time, Jesus was the one King whose rule would be established forever (see 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89:3-4, 26-29). And he is the one King, Son of God and Son of Man, who rules over all things today (Eph. 1:22; Rev. 5).

Let's discover who Jesus was and is and what that means for us today.

Lesson 1

What's In a Name?

Matthew 1-2

As we begin the story of Jesus in Matthew, we find a long list of names—a genealogy. How often don't we tend to skip over lists like this because they look boring—unless, of course, the genealogy is our own?

But the genealogy of Jesus Christ is not like any other. I know of two people who have come to believe in Christ through reading the list of his ancestors. And those two people are probably not alone. Maybe Jesus' genealogy isn't boring after all!

Let's find out more about Jesus in these opening chapters of Matthew.

Opener (optional)

Have you ever traced your genealogy? How far back does it go? What did you find out about your ancestors?

EPISODE 1

Matthew 1:1-17

1. Why might Matthew begin his account of Jesus with a genealogy?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- what a genealogy shows
- Matthew's target audience and why they might want to know Christ's genealogy first (see boxes)

FLASHBACK

It had long been established that the Messiah (deliverer) would come through the line of Abraham (Gen. 18:18-19), his heir Isaac (Gen. 17:19; 21:12), the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and King David (1 Chron. 17:11-14), whose throne would last forever. So any contender for the throne of David had to be able to prove his bloodline through these key ancestors.

FLASHBACK

A person's genealogy was utterly important to Matthew's mostly Jewish audience. Nehemiah 7:61-64 tells us that some of the people who returned to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile in Babylon were not allowed to be priests because they could not find their family records proving their lineage. (All priests in Israel had to be descended from Aaron of the tribe of Levi—see Num. 3-4.) A Jew would want to know right up front whether someone claiming to be the Messiah could trace his lineage back to David and Abraham (see Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89:3-4, 26-29; Jer. 23:5-6).

2. Women's names were rarely included in Jewish genealogies.

Why do you think Matthew included women in this list?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the names of the women and their stories (see box below)
- what they contribute to the story

What does this mean to me?

- When we are “in Christ” (see John 15:5), we are adopted into the family line of Abraham, the “father of all who believe” (Rom. 4:11). This means we are also “children of God” (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26-29). What do you think of that?

Five Women You Need to Know

- **Tamar**, a Gentile (non-Jew), had to pose as a prostitute to get her father-in-law Judah to perform his marital duties as prescribed by God's law in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. See Genesis 38.
- **Rahab**, a Gentile and a prostitute, helped two spies sent by Joshua to spy out the land promised to Abraham's descendants (Josh. 2).
- **Ruth**, a Gentile, followed her mother-in-law to live in Bethlehem, where she met and married Boaz (book of Ruth).
- **Bathsheba** was the mother of Solomon. King David made her pregnant while her husband served in the king's army. David had the man killed to cover up this affair. The child, however, died, and David confessed his sin (see Ps. 51). Later Bathsheba gave birth to another son, Solomon, who inherited the throne from his father, David (2 Sam. 11-12).
- **Mary**, the wife of Joseph and the mother of Jesus. Mary's own pregnancy was scandalous (see Matt. 1:18-23).

Matthew 1:18-21

3. What do we learn about Mary?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- her physical condition
- her spiritual condition
- her God-appointed role

4. What do we learn about Joseph?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- his relationship with God
- his relationship with Mary
- his God-appointed role

5. What does Joseph find out in a dream?

Why is this important?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- who speaks to Joseph (see glossary for some background on the “angel of the Lord”)
- what this explains about Mary
- what this tells about Jesus

FLASHBACK

In New Testament times, engagement was as binding as marriage. With the blessing of their parents, a couple would become engaged. A year later they would participate in a wedding ceremony that would make them officially man and wife. To break the engagement would require a divorce.

FLASHBACK

The Old Testament punishment for adultery was execution by stoning, but that was rarely done in New Testament times. Numbers 5:11-31 said that if a man suspected his wife of adultery, he should take her to the priest, who would make her drink some dusty water. If she did not show certain physical symptoms from drinking the water, she would be declared innocent. The *Protevangelium of James*, a non-canonical book (not part of the Bible) says that both Joseph and Mary went to the priest and drank the water with no ill effects. We have no way of knowing if that actually took place, but we can understand their desire to establish their innocence.

Do angels exist today? Stories abound about events in people's lives that can seemingly only be explained by the presence of an angel. Noted organist Mark Thallander lost his left arm in a traffic accident on a rainy night. A woman appeared at his car window, telling him to turn off the engine to prevent a fire. She insisted he keep talking so he wouldn't lose consciousness. Because of that, he was able to use his right hand to help stop the flow of blood. By the time paramedics arrived, the woman was gone and no one had seen her. An angel? Possibly. **Have you ever experienced the presence of an angel? Do you know anyone who has?**

Matthew 1:22-25

6. Matthew pauses for a moment in the story to comment on what has taken place. Why do you think Matthew quotes an Old Testament verse here?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the verse in its original context (see Isa. 7:14)
- its meaning as applied to Jesus
- why this would be important to Jewish readers

Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than 60 times, much more often than other New Testament writers. His mainly (but not exclusively) Jewish audience would be well acquainted with Old Testament Scriptures about the Messiah. It's as if he was calling out, "He's the One you've been waiting for! Jesus is the Messiah!"

7. How does Joseph respond to the dream?

FLASHBACK

When enemies were threatening Judah in about 735 B.C., God told Isaiah to encourage the people not to lose heart. Isaiah told King Ahaz that he should ask the Lord for a sign, but Ahaz refused. Despite that defiant response, the Lord himself gave Ahaz a sign—the virgin birth of a son whose name would be Immanuel (Isa. 7:1-17). Like many prophecies, there appears to have been an immediate fulfillment as well as a future fulfillment. Isaiah 8:3-4 tells us that a young woman (virgin) betrothed to Isaiah soon became pregnant through him and gave birth to a son. Immanuel seems to be one of the names given to this child (see Isa. 8:8, 10). The future fulfillment was in the birth of Jesus, whose mother, Mary, a virgin, became pregnant through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18).

What does this mean to me?

- It appears that Joseph obeys everything the angel said, though he had considered divorce before the angel appeared. When we are facing an important decision, what might be the benefits of “considering” before “doing”?

EPISODE 2

Matthew 2:1-2

8. Matthew skips ahead now (possibly as much as two years) to the arrival of the Magi. Who were they, and whom were they looking for? Why?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- how they knew whom to look for and where he was
- their purpose in coming (see box on next page)

9. Who was the reigning king at this time, and why do we need to know that?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the relationship between the current king of the Jews (appointed by the Roman Empire) and Jesus, the real king of the Jews

Matthew 2:3-12

10. Why might “all Jerusalem” be disturbed along with Herod?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the relationship between a tyrannical king and his subjects

FLASHBACK

The story of Jesus’ birth is full of appearances of “an angel of the Lord” delivering important messages. In Luke’s account, we discover an angel named Gabriel who appears to Mary (Luke 1:19). Gabriel appears also to a priest named Zechariah (father of John the Baptist—Luke 1:5-25) and is apparently the same angel who appeared to Daniel about 550 years earlier, telling him the “Anointed One” (Messiah) would come (Dan. 9:21, 25-27). This may also be the same angel who appeared to Joseph (Matt. 1:20; 2:13, 19).



11. How does Herod learn about where the Messiah (Christ) would be born?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- the prophecy and its meaning (see Mic. 5:2, 4)
- the effect this prophecy would have on Herod
- how this prophecy could back up Jesus' credentials as Messiah

Who were the Magi? The Magi were probably astrologers, who studied the stars. They were non-Jewish people (Gentiles) from the east (perhaps Persia or Arabia), and their presence indicates that the good news of Jesus is for all people—both Jews and Gentiles. In those ancient cultures a special alignment of stars (or constellations) in the heavens—or the appearance of a new star (possibly a supernova)—was often believed to be the sign of a new, great king. Perhaps the Magi were familiar with Numbers 24:17 of the Hebrew Scriptures, which says, in reference to the Messiah, “A star will come out of Jacob.” But they probably did *not* know much about the paranoid Herod, or they would have known the danger of asking him about a supposedly rival king.

12. How do the Magi treat Jesus in comparison with Herod? What does that tell us about them?



How many Magi were there? Okay—trick question. People are so used to singing about and seeing pictures of *three* wise men that many of us think there must have been three. A tradition of the early church (as late as the sixth century) names the Magi as Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, but there is no evidence tying these names to the biblical account. Syrian Christians give them other, more Persian names. While there are three gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—there is no indication how many Magi came from the east. There may even have been a large number of them, as well as an entourage. (See also Ps. 72:10-11; Isa. 60:1-9.)

EPISODE 3

Matthew 2:13-18

13. What does this part of the story reveal about God's power and the power of rulers in this world?

To think about as you discuss . . .

- how Herod used his power—does he act like a shepherd? (See 2:6.) Explain.
- how God uses his power (creation, redemption, forgiveness, restoration)—does God simply destroy things he doesn't like? Explain.

Sin Wrecks, Pollutes, Destroys

Taking a cue from St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) (see Augustine's *Confessions*, 3.7.12), Bible scholars note that sin has power only to destroy, wreck, pollute, pervert, or distort what is good. Only God has power to create, making good things from nothing, and restoring and transforming damaged things to their original state—or better. **What do you think of these ideas? How do they help us grapple with the events of this passage?**

Matthew 2:19-23

14. Describe how God leads Joseph and his family to settle safely in the land of Israel again.

To think about as you discuss . . .

- how God guides them
- how they avoid danger

What does this mean to me?

- What are some ways in which God has guided you and provided a place for you to grow?

Compare Herod's killing of baby boys with Moses' escape from death at the hands of Pharaoh (Ex. 2). How are the situations alike? How are they different? Why might Matthew include this story? Deeper and closer to the heart, How could God allow all these babies to be killed? Couldn't God have prevented this slaughter of innocent children? While there are no easy answers, we know that it was not God who killed them, but sinful people living out the results of turning their backs on God. The whole purpose of Christ's coming was to save us from our sins (see John 3:16). Ultimately, God is in control, and one day justice will "roll on like . . . a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24). One day we will see God's will done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)—forever (Rev. 21-22).

About Nazareth

“He will be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23) is found nowhere else in Scripture. Maybe Matthew believed it to be a sort of compilation of the thoughts of the prophets, or maybe it relates to Psalm 22:6, which refers to the Messiah being “despised.” (Psalm 22, written a thousand years before Christ, includes many amazing details that occur at Jesus’ crucifixion; see Matt. 27.) In the first century A.D., Nazareth was a backwater town in Galilee, an area generally despised by Jewish people from around Jerusalem. When Philip called his friend Nathanael to follow Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael replied, “Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46). Luke fills in some details about Nazareth as Joseph’s hometown (Luke 2:1-4), giving us a helpful second point of view.

Some interpreters have also suggested a connection between Nazareth and being a Nazirite, a person dedicated to the Lord from birth who would drink no alcohol and whose hair would never be cut (see Num. 6). In the Old Testament, Samson was dedicated from birth to live as a Nazirite (Judg. 13). Samuel may have been dedicated as a Nazirite too (1 Sam. 1:28). In the New Testament, John the Baptist also fits that description (Luke 1:11-17). The practice of the Nazirite vow probably pointed ultimately to the purity of Jesus, who was always wholly dedicated to God. (See also Acts 21:23-26.)

More to Think About

- Have you followed God’s leading into a situation even though you were fearful? What were the results?
- Have you ever ignored God’s leading because you were afraid of what might happen? If so, what did happen?
- What are some of the destructive powers in our culture or in the world around us today? What can we do to guard against them or dismantle them? (Remember that in our day we have the power of Jesus and his Spirit with us. Reflect on the name Immanuel—“God with us”—and what that can mean for us today.)
- Note how many prophecies Matthew has quoted in just these two chapters. What impact would this make on his Jewish readers? His Gentile readers?



Explore!

- Look online for a copy of Jesus Christ's genealogical chart that could be helpful in your personal Bible study. Some examples include both the genealogy in Matthew and the one in Luke, which may be through Mary's lineage (see Luke 3:23-38). (For example, see www.lifeofchrist.com/life/genealogy.) The *TNIV Study Bible* offers some helpful notes on these two genealogies: "There are several differences between Luke's genealogy and Matthew's (1:2-16). Matthew begins with Abraham (the father of the Jewish people), while Luke traces the line in the reverse order and goes back to Adam, showing Jesus' relationship to the whole human race. . . . From Abraham to David, the genealogies of Matthew and Luke are almost the same, but from David on they are different. . . . [A logical explanation] is that Matthew follows the line of Joseph (Jesus' legal father), while Luke emphasizes that of Mary (Jesus' blood relative). Although tracing a genealogy through the mother's side was unusual, so was the virgin birth."
- For more information about Herod, his family, and his reign, look up *Herod the Great* by Michael Grant (New York: American Heritage, 1971) or *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder* by Ehud Netzer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008).
- If you have access to music by Michael Card, listen to him sing "Joseph's Song," "Celebrate the Child," and "Immanuel." All are available for listening via Internet download. (Just Google "Michael Card [song name]," and begin listening.)
- Borrow or rent a copy of the movie *Jesus of Nazareth*, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1977). (Take care to follow viewing guidelines prescribed by the production company.) Compare the film's portrayal of Jesus and others with what you read in Matthew.
- For a free online video comparing Jesus and Herod, visit www.dod.org and search "The Story of Two Kings: Jesus and Herod." Run time: 26 minutes.





Break Away (at-home readings)

On your own, take some time to relax with the Bible and with God in the coming week. Find a comfortable, quiet place, and have a favorite snack handy. Ask the Lord to help you know him better and to give you insight and understanding through his Word, the Bible, our guide to live by. Use some devotional readings like these to help you focus, reflect, and see how God calls us to live. (If you like, use one reading for each of five days, or read a few of them in one sitting. You might also like to clip out these readings and put them in places at home or at work where they'll remind you to spend time with God.)

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. —James 1:12

Joseph was in a tight spot. He could marry Mary and live for the rest of his life with people thinking they fooled around during their courtship. There were no witnesses to say they didn't. Or he could drop Mary and lose the love of his life. Though it seemed he had every right to divorce her (by breaking off the engagement), neither choice seemed good. Being "a righteous man," he wanted to do the right thing. But when you're between a rock and a hard place, it can be tough to determine what the right thing is.

All of us face situations in which we honestly don't know what we should do. Life is not always clear and simple. Some decisions require a great deal of thought, wisdom, consulting with others—and prayer. It's interesting that James, the brother of our Lord (see Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:12), writes about this very thing. Maybe the whispered comments of neighbors about his parents while James was growing up is one reason it took him so long to become a believer (see Matt. 13:53-58; John 7:5).

Are you going through tough times right now? While you may not receive a direct word from an angel, God often sends just the right person who can help. God does not mean for us to bear our burdens alone.

Don't Be Afraid

The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. —2 Timothy 1:7

The angel's opening words spoke straight to Joseph's heart: "Do not be afraid . . ." (Matt. 1:20). What kinds of fear do you think Joseph was experiencing? Fear of losing Mary? Fear of the stigma of divorce if he decided to drop her? Fear of being confronted by an angel? But the angel said it was okay to marry his beloved, for she had become pregnant through the Holy Spirit. With the "power, love and self-discipline" of a heart that is not afraid but is strengthened and encouraged by the Spirit of God, Joseph was able to do what had to be done to care for Mary and the child.

What kinds of situations make you afraid? Are there certain issues or people that really push your fear buttons? Do you sometimes feel like there's a big disconnect in your life between trusting God and not being afraid? The Spirit gives us "power, love and self-discipline." In what ways are those three interconnected? Which one needs strengthening in your life?

Endless Genealogies

Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. —Titus 3:9

Matthew's genealogy of Christ (along with Luke's—see Luke 3:23-37) is one of the most important documents in the Bible. It shows that Jesus is a bloodline descendant of David, whose throne God promised to establish forever (2 Sam. 7). In fact, Jesus is the deliverer promised as far back as Genesis 3:15, the one who would crush the serpent's head.

But if this genealogy is so important, why does the apostle Paul tell Titus to avoid foolish genealogies? That's because some people were spending too much time not on Christ's genealogy but on their own.

Tracing our ancestors can be enjoyable and interesting. But some people do it for the wrong reasons. A main point of disagreement between many Christian churches and Mormons, for example, is the Mormon church's absorption with genealogies—for the purpose of baptism for the dead, in the belief that they may still be saved. (Hebrews 9:27 tell us that "people





are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” We have only one life in which to become Christ followers. There is no benefit to the dead when someone is baptized for them.)

Paul had a similar warning for Timothy. He urged Timothy to “command certain persons not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work—which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:3-4).

It’s important to note that Jesus’ genealogy came to an end. Despite false claims that Mary Magdalene and Jesus produced the bloodline of the Merovingian dynasty of early France (recently popularized in the fictional *Da Vinci Code*; see www.wikipedia.com), Jesus did not marry or have biological children. As the complete fulfillment of everything that had been promised to God’s people, there was no need for Jesus’ genealogy to continue.

Is there anything so important in your life that it crowds out God and other people? It could be a hobby or a sport or your work—or anything else that you get passionate about. Ask the Lord to help you develop balance in your life so that God is always in first place.

God with Us

“The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” —Isaiah 7:14

When I was a child, our church had a minister whose name was Immanuel Samuel Nazareus. Talk about having a biblical name! Although he was a building contractor by trade, he took a few years off to become the pastor of our small church in Silverdale, Washington. I wonder if his parents had a glimpse of his future when they named him.

Even before Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph got a glimpse into the future of this child as he received two names—*Jesus*, the Greek word for *Joshua*, meaning “the LORD saves,” and *Immanuel*, which means “God with us.” How comforting are both of those names! Our God is the true, personal God who cares about his whole creation—including us—and saves us from our sins. If he weren’t, there would be no reason or benefit to have “God

with us.” The same God who created us also loves us, laid down his life for us, and calls us his friends (John 15:13-14).

In our small church it was common for people to give their “testimony.” I would often describe Jesus as my “friend.” In later years I wondered why I always used that word. Was it just a cliché? I concluded that Jesus really was (and is) my friend. He is my Savior, and he is always with me, even when the going gets rough. (See Matt. 28:20; John 14:16-17.)

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? What words come to mind? Do you have a personal relationship with him? Can you call him your friend? Can he call you his friend? Rejoice today that God is with us!

Losing a King—Gaining a Kingdom

“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

—Luke 1:32-33

King Herod, who was seriously paranoid, was greatly distressed when he learned that Jesus had been born. He was in no frame of mind to tolerate competition and would stop at nothing—including murder—to eliminate this perceived threat. But Herod was no match for the Son of God.

Frederick Dale Bruner, in his commentary on Matthew, observes that the gospel writer consistently refers to Herod as *King Herod*—until the Magi have found and worshiped Christ. After that, says Bruner, “Herod is dethroned and is never again called ‘king’! The Magi’s worship is Jesus’ coronation.”

Who are the Herods of today? Who are the Magi of today? In the coming chapters of Matthew, Jesus’ teachings will center on the kingdom of heaven. Through parables (stories that surprise us with metaphors and unexpected results) he will teach his disciples—and us—what it means to be a part of God’s kingdom that will never end.



What's Distinctive About Matthew?

If you've studied from the Bible before, or even if you haven't, you may know there are four books in the Bible that tell us the story of Jesus' life and ministry: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of these books was compiled by careful writers inspired by the Spirit of God. And each one contributes to the whole story about Jesus so that we can hear enough about him to have faith and be saved. These four gospel books bind together with the rest of Scripture to complete God's Word to us. And God himself says about his Word, "It will not return to me empty" (Isa. 55:11).

So, what does Matthew bring to the mix? People have noticed that the gospel ("good news") book of Matthew uses lots of quotes from the Old Testament to show that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, the promised deliverer of God's people, the Jews (Israel). So it seems Matthew wanted to show his Jewish readers that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. In addition, Matthew includes many references to Gentiles (non-Jews) and all nations, showing that the blessing of salvation in Jesus is not just for the Jews but for all peoples, as God promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:3)—and Abraham is the father of the Jews as well as "the father of all who believe" (Rom. 4:11).

What's more, Matthew includes unique pieces of Jesus' story that are not found in the other gospel books. For example, all the material in Matthew 1-2 (the Scripture for our first lesson) is found only in Matthew. The gospel of Luke also includes a birth story about Jesus and a genealogy, but Luke's account has other features that help us see Jesus' story mainly from Mary's perspective. Only in Matthew 1-2, though, can we find

- Joseph's perspective, as well as the account of his dreams (Matt. 1:19-23; 2:13, 19, 22).
- the meaning of the names *Jesus* and *Immanuel* (1:21-23).
- the Magi (2:1-12).
- King Herod's massacre of children in Bethlehem (2:16-18).
- the escape to and return from Egypt (2:13-23).

So Matthew gives us a lot of unique material to help us understand Jesus' story, and we'll be noting Matthew's unique contributions as we go along through this study.