

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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encounter with God's Word*

MATTHEW

*Walk through Jesus' most famous teachings,
and learn what it means to live with Him now
so you can live with Him forever.*

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Matthew

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you — a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of Matthew. The key to interpretation is context — what is the whole passage or book *about*? — and the key to context is purpose — what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson one you will lay the foundation for your study of Matthew by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

In lessons 2 through 17, you will analyze successive passages of Matthew in detail. Thinking about how a paragraph fits into the overall goal of the book will help you to see its purpose. Its purpose will help you see its meaning. Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.

In lesson 18, you will review Matthew, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own — without a structured guide — follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray,

“Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 197. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and

mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (pre-formed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Page 200 lists some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

BACKGROUND

Matthew and His Gospel

A gospel

Gospel is an Old English word that means “good news.” It is a translation of the Greek word *euangelion* (*eu-*, “good” and *angelion*, “message”), and gives us words like “evangelist,” and is related to words like “angel.”

When the first Christians wanted to record the “good news” about the Man who was God, none of the familiar forms of literature seemed suitable. The Christians didn’t write the kinds of autobiographies or sacred texts that were common in the current Greek, Roman, or Jewish culture. Instead, they created a new form: the gospel.

The Gospels are composed of scenes and sayings from Jesus’ life remembered by His disciples and passed on, probably word for word. As Leon Morris notes, “Rabbis used to cast their teaching into forms suitable for memorization and insist that their pupils learn it by heart.”¹ The apostles faithfully recalled both individual statements and the overall progress of Jesus’ time with them.

While Matthew’s gospel certainly reflects these general characteristics, it is unique in many ways. It “vividly sets forth the evidence that Jesus of Nazareth, of Davidic descent, is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the expected King of the Jews.”² With its emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, it forms a natural bridge between the Old Testament and the New. The word “kingdom” appears in this gospel some fifty-six times, more than any other; the unique phrase “kingdom of heaven” is used thirty-two times in Matthew but nowhere else. Matthew alone quotes Jesus’ reference to “the throne of his glory” (19:28; 25:31, κλυ) and calls Jerusalem “the holy city” (4:5) and “the city of the Great King” (5:35).³

Yet Matthew never has been a book for Jewish readers alone. From the visit of the Magi reported at the beginning of this gospel to the words of the Great Commission at its conclusion, the larger sphere and interests of the Messiah are clear. Only Matthew includes a parable in which Jesus predicts that unbelieving Israel would be supplanted by others. And only Matthew, of all the Gospels, mentions the church (see 16:18; 18:17).

Four Gospels

Many collections of Jesus' words and deeds were composed in the first century after His death, but God uniquely inspired four men to write the Gospels that would bear His authority. Why four? We can speculate, or we can simply be glad for all four masterful portraits that reveal our Lord in different lights. As J. Sidlow Baxter asks, which of the four could we do without?⁴

It is striking how such a picture of a single man and a single set of events emerges from four such different points of view. Observe the distinct interests and emphases in these examples:

1. To Matthew, who writes for Jewish Christians, Jesus is, above all, the King of David's line promised in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Teacher who brings a new revelation of God's Law. Matthew weaves fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies around five discourses about the Law and the kingdom. Mark pens a short gospel in quick scenes that drive toward the cross, revealing Christ more in works of power and service than in words of wisdom. Luke crafts his account of the Son of Man, the Savior of the world, to be meticulously accurate and also captivating for a cultured Greek audience. And John records a few miraculous signs and several long discourses to spark faith in God the Son.
2. John begins with Jesus' pre-existence as God, and Mark starts with Jesus' baptism as an adult. Neither tells of Jesus' birth or lineage. Matthew opens with a genealogy that traces from Abraham (the father of the Israelite covenant) to David (the head of the Jewish royal line) and finally to Joseph (Jesus' legal father in Jewish eyes, though not His natural one). Matthew's birth account focuses on kingship and prophecy, while Luke narrates the birth with warm, human touches. Luke also traces Jesus back to Adam—the father of Jew and Gentile alike—and then to God. But while Matthew's Jewish-minded nativity focuses on men, Luke delights in pregnant women and widows.
3. John highlights Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Matthew and Mark describe mainly His Galilean ministry and His last week in Jerusalem. Luke includes ten long chapters in which Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, training His disciples. We call Matthew, Mark, and Luke the synoptic (one view) Gospels because they have much more material in common than any of them has with John.

Throughout this study of Matthew's gospel, more features that mark Matthew's unique contribution to Scripture will be noted.

The author of Matthew

Early church tradition unanimously ascribes this book to the apostle Matthew. In fact, all early manuscripts of this gospel feature the superscription "according to Matthew," and there is no evidence that it ever circulated without this heading.⁵

While it is true this title was not originally part of the manuscript, there is good reason to believe it was affixed no later than AD 125—and if so, it is clear the church had settled on Matthew’s authorship well before that date.

The church father Papias (ca. AD 150), bishop of Hierapolis, provides the earliest external testimony that Matthew was the author of the gospel which bears his name. Papias wrote (somewhat enigmatically), “Matthew therefore wrote the oracles in the Hebrew dialect, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”⁶ Irenaeus (ca. AD 185), Origen (ca. AD 185–254), and Eusebius (ca. AD 324) all name Matthew as the author of this gospel.

Many modern critics, however, doubt the early church’s universal belief in Matthean authorship. Citing several difficulties suggested by a few commonly accepted synoptic source hypotheses, they prefer to leave the question of authorship open. Yet noted New Testament authority Donald Guthrie concludes, “It may be said that there is no conclusive reason for rejecting the strong external testimony regarding the authorship of Matthew.”⁷

What do we know of the biblical Matthew? He was also called Levi and was the son of Alphaeus (see Mark 2:14). An employee at the toll house in Capernaum, he either worked directly for Herod Antipas or under someone who had the taxes of the district in tenure. After he responded to Jesus’ call, Matthew “held a great banquet for Jesus at his house” (Luke 5:29). He is listed as one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus (see Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) and is last named in Acts 1:13 as one of the twelve in the upper room after Jesus’ ascension. Beyond that, we know almost nothing of him.

When did Matthew write?

The date of Matthew’s composition is debated and remains largely conjectural. There are few internal indications of its probable date, and even the few that exist can be (and have been) interpreted in various ways.

Hiebert says the two occurrences of “unto this day” (27:8; 28:15, *KJV*) show a considerable lapse of time between the events recorded and the time of writing,” yet writes that “the statement in 27:8, ‘Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day,’ naturally points to a date before AD 70,” since after the destruction of Jerusalem the field would no longer be so identified or used.⁸ He therefore suggests a date for Matthew between AD 66 and 68.

Guthrie prefers to leave the date “undetermined,” suggesting that those who opt for a date between AD 80 and 100 do so primarily because of disbelief in the possibility of predictive prophecy (which Matthew 24 contains).

After a thorough discussion of the dating possibilities, D. A. Carson writes that “while surprisingly little in the gospel conclusively points to a firm date, perhaps the sixties are the most likely decade for its composition.” And R. A. Nixon in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* sums up the main possibilities when he concludes, “It is wiser . . . to say that Matthew should be dated somewhere between AD 65 and 110, with the Jewish nature of the gospel and its many parallels with the Dead Sea Scrolls suggesting a date well within the first half of the period.”⁹

Why did Matthew write?

While every gospel aims at an accurate portrayal of Christ in order to inspire faith in its readers, each gospel features a few unique emphases. Matthew was written primarily for a Jewish audience, both as an apologetic against unbelieving Jews and as a tool to deepen the believer's understanding of and devotion to the Messiah.

More than any other gospel, Matthew has a well-developed underlying structure, alternating five discourse sections with narrative sections. For this reason, it is especially well-suited for teaching. Nixon supplies a very helpful summary:

We may conclude that the Gospel was probably written by a Jewish Christian for Jewish Christians in close contact with unbelieving Jews somewhere near to Palestine in the latter part of the first century A.D. It was intended to instruct them carefully in the way in which Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and had laid the foundations of the Christian church, continuous with the people of God in the old covenant and yet reformed and constituted from among all men on a spiritual basis. This instruction was to enable them to refute the attacks of the non-Christian Jews and to present to them also Jesus as their true King.¹⁰

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 30.
2. D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume One, the Gospels and Acts* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 25.
3. Hiebert, 44.
4. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 117–125, 229.
5. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 33.
6. Hiebert, 49.
7. Guthrie, 44.
8. Hiebert, 66.
9. Hiebert, 66; Guthrie, 46; D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 21; R. A. Nixon, *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 815.
10. Nixon, 816.

Outline of the Gospel of Matthew

- A. Birth and Infancy (1:1–2:23)
 - 1. Genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17)
 - 2. The Birth of Jesus (1:18-25)
 - 3. The Visit of the Magi (2:1-12)
 - 4. Escape to Egypt (2:13-18)
 - 5. Return to Nazareth (2:19-23)
- B. Preparation for Ministry (3:1–4:25)
 - 1. John the Baptist (3:1-12)
 - 2. The Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)
 - 3. The Temptation of Jesus (4:1-11)
 - 4. Jesus Begins to Preach (4:12-17)
 - 5. Jesus Chooses His First Disciples (4:18-22)
 - 6. Jesus Heals Some Sick People (4:23-25)
- C. The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)
 - 1. The Beatitudes (5:1-12)
 - 2. Salt and Light (5:13-16)
 - 3. The Fulfillment of the Law (5:17-20)
 - 4. Jesus on Murder (5:21-26)
 - 5. Jesus on Adultery (5:27-30)
 - 6. Jesus on Divorce (5:31-32)
 - 7. Jesus on Oaths (5:33-37)
 - 8. An Eye for an Eye? (5:38-42)
 - 9. Love Your Enemies (5:43-48)
 - 10. Giving to the Needy (6:1-4)
 - 11. Jesus on Prayer (6:5-15)
 - 12. Jesus on Fasting (6:16-18)
 - 13. Treasure in Heaven (6:19-24)
 - 14. Jesus on Worry (6:25-34)
 - 15. Jesus on Judging (7:1-6)
 - 16. Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7-12)
 - 17. Narrow and Wide Gates (7:13-14)
 - 18. A Tree and Its Fruit (7:15-23)
 - 19. Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24-29)
- D. Jesus at Work (8:1–9:34)
 - 1. A Man with Leprosy (8:1-4)
 - 2. The Faith of a Centurion (8:5-13)
 - 3. Many Sick People Healed (8:14-17)
 - 4. The Cost of Following Jesus (8:18-22)
 - 5. The Calming of the Storm (8:23-27)
 - 6. Two Possessed Men are Healed (8:28-34)
 - 7. A Paralytic Is Healed (9:1-8)
 - 8. The Calling of Matthew (9:9-13)
 - 9. New Wine and Old Wineskins (9:14-17)
 - 10. A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman Healed (9:18-26)
 - 11. A Blind and Mute Man Is Healed (9:27-34)

- E. The Mission of the Twelve (9:35–10:42)
 - 1. The Workers Are Few (9:35-38)
 - 2. The Twelve Are Sent Out (10:1-42)
- F. The Claims of Christ (11:1–12:50)
 - 1. John the Baptist in Prison (11:1-19)
 - 2. Jesus Denounces Unrepentant Cities (11:20-24)
 - 3. Rest for the Weary (11:25-30)
 - 4. Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-14)
 - 5. The Servant of the Lord (12:15-21)
 - 6. Jesus and Beelzebub (12:22-37)
 - 7. The Sign of Jonah (12:38-45)
 - 8. Jesus' Family Confronts Him (12:46-50)
- G. Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52)
 - 1. Parable of the Sower (13:1-23)
 - 2. Parable of the Weeds (13:24-30)
 - 3. Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast (13:31-35)
 - 4. Parable of the Weeds Explained (13:36-43)
 - 5. Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl (13:44-46)
 - 6. Parable of the Net (13:47-52)
- H. The Christ Rejected (13:53–16:12)
 - 1. A Prophet Without Honor (13:53-58)
 - 2. John the Baptist Is Beheaded (14:1-12)
 - 3. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (14:13-21)
 - 4. Jesus Walks on Water (14:22-36)
 - 5. Clean and Unclean (15:1-20)
 - 6. The Faith of the Canaanite Woman (15:21-28)
 - 7. The Feeding of the Four Thousand (15:29-39)
 - 8. The Demand for a Sign (16:1-4)
 - 9. The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)
- I. Life in the Coming Kingdom (16:13–18:35)
 - 1. Peter's Confession of Faith (16:13-20)
 - 2. Jesus Predicts His Death (16:21-28)
 - 3. The Transfiguration (17:1-13)
 - 4. A Demonized Boy Is Healed (17:14-23)
 - 5. Paying the Temple Tax (17:24-27)
 - 6. The Greatest in the Kingdom (18:1-9)
 - 7. Parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10-14)
 - 8. When a Brother Sins Against You (18:15-20)
 - 9. Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (18:21-35)
- J. The Journey to Jerusalem (19:1–22:46)
 - 1. Jesus on Divorce (19:1-12)
 - 2. Jesus and Little Children (19:13-15)
 - 3. The Rich Young Man (19:16-30)
 - 4. Parable of the Vineyard (20:1-16)
 - 5. Jesus Predicts His Death (20:17-19)
 - 6. A Mother's Request (20:20-28)
 - 7. Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)
 - 8. The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)
 - 9. Jesus at the Temple (21:12-17)

10. The Fig Tree Withers (21:18-22)
11. Jesus' Authority Questioned (21:23-27)
12. Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)
13. Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46)
14. Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-14)
15. Who Should Pay Tax to Caesar? (22:15-22)
16. Marriage at the Resurrection (22:23-33)
17. Which is the Greatest Commandment? (22:34-40)
18. Whose Son Is the Christ? (22:41-46)
- K. Warnings of Judgment (23:1-25:46)
 1. Seven Woes (23:1-39)
 2. The End of the Age (24:1-35)
 3. The Day and Hour Unknown (24:36-51)
 4. Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13)
 5. Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)
 6. Separating Sheep from Goats (25:31-46)
- L. Jesus' Arrest, Passion, and Death (26:1-27:66)
 1. The Plot Against Jesus (26:1-5)
 2. Jesus Is Anointed (26:6-13)
 3. The Betrayal Arranged (26:14-16)
 4. The Lord's Supper (26:17-30)
 5. Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial (26:31-35)
 6. The Garden of Gethsemane (26:36-46)
 7. Jesus Is Arrested (26:47-56)
 8. Jesus Before the Sanhedrin (26:57-68)
 9. Peter Disowns Jesus (26:69-75)
 10. Judas Hangs Himself (27:1-10)
 11. Jesus Before Pilate (27:11-26)
 12. Soldiers Mock Jesus (27:27-31)
 13. The Crucifixion (27:32-44)
 14. The Death of Jesus (27:45-56)
 15. The Burial of Jesus (27:57-61)
 16. The Tomb Guarded (27:62-66)
- M. Resurrection (28:1-20)
 1. The Resurrection of Jesus (28:1-10)
 2. The Report of the Guards (28:11-15)
 3. The Great Commission (28:16-20)

Map of Palestine in Jesus' time



MATTHEW 1:1–2:23

Overview, Birth, and Infancy

The best way to introduce yourself to Matthew's gospel is to read it through, in one sitting if possible. It should take you a little under two hours if you read quickly for an overall impression. If your Bible includes subtitles for passages, use them as clues to the story's movement.

As you read, jot down answers to questions 1–6. Questions 7–16 relate to the beginning of Matthew's gospel.

First impressions

1. a. Read through Matthew quickly. After your first reading, what are your first impressions of Matthew's book?

- b. What overall impression does it give you of Jesus?

For Further Study:

As you work your way through Matthew, note the gospel's many quotations of Old Testament passages. Which books are most frequently quoted? What significance do you see in the pattern?

c. If you had to pick a single term to describe this gospel, what would it be?

2. Repetition is a clue to the ideas an author wants to stress. What key words or phrases does Matthew (or Jesus) use over and over?

3. Look for at least one example of each of the following words or phrases found throughout Matthew's gospel:

Fulfill _____

John the Baptist _____

The kingdom of heaven _____

The healing of the sick _____

Parables _____

Gentiles _____

Future events _____

The Son of David _____

Pharisees and Sadducees _____

4. The practice of outlining helps us get a good grasp of the flow and general contents of a book. Fill in the following broad outline. A detailed outline (different from the one below) appears in the background section.

1:1–2:23 The Person of the King

3:1–4:16 The Preparation of the King

4:17–9:34 The Precepts of the King

9:35–16:20 The Program of the King

16:21–27:66 The Passion of the King

28:1-20 The Power of the King

5. Note here any incidents, teachings, topics, or impressions of Jesus in Matthew's gospel that you want to think about this week.

6. In your first reading of Matthew's gospel or in the background section, you may have encountered some concepts you'd like clarified or questions you'd like answered. While your thoughts are still fresh, jot down your questions here. You can look for answers as you study further.

Jesus' genealogy and birth (1:1-25)

Genealogy (1:1). Genealogies in the ancient Near East were used not only to show family relationships, but also economic, tribal, and political ones. Frequently they included only the most important members in the line, thus

For Further Study: Matthew lists four women in his genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “Uriah’s wife” (Bathsheba). You can read about their stories in Genesis 38, Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:17-25, Ruth 1-4, and 2 Samuel 11.

skipping over several links in the chain. Matthew does this, for example, in moving from Boaz to David, listing only two generations between them, when in fact several generations had come and gone. This is not an error; Matthew did this deliberately. Perhaps because the numerical equivalent of David’s name is fourteen in Hebrew (and Jesus is the “Son of David”), Matthew lists fourteen generations between Abraham and David, David and the exile, and the exile and Jesus.¹

7. a. What names do you recognize in the genealogy of 1:1-17?

b. Which names in the list are unfamiliar to you?

c. What do you think Matthew hoped to accomplish by beginning his gospel with a genealogy?

8. a. Of the four women Matthew lists in his genealogy, the first three were Gentiles, and the last was married to a Gentile before he was

killed. Why do you think Matthew makes special mention of these women?

b. What is he trying to convey to his readers?

Expose her to public disgrace . . . divorce her quietly (1:19). “Joseph . . . could not in conscience marry Mary who was now thought to be unfaithful. And because such a marriage would have been a tacit admission of his own guilt, and also because he was unwilling to expose her to the disgrace of public divorce, Joseph therefore chose a quieter way, permitted by the law itself.”²

From the Holy Spirit (1:20). The conception of Jesus was a result of the direct activity of God the Holy Spirit.

The name Jesus (1:21). “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Joshua,” which in Hebrew means either “Yahweh is salvation” or “Yahweh saves.”

9. Why is 1:22-23 so crucial to Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth?

For Thought and Discussion: Compare Matthew’s version of Jesus’ birth in 1:18-25 with Luke’s version in Luke 1:26–2:20. How are they similar? What differs between them?

10. a. Controversy has always surrounded the story of “the virgin birth.” How does Matthew explain the virgin birth?

b. Why is the virgin birth so important to Matthew’s gospel?

The visit of the Magi (2:1-12)

King Herod (2:1). Often called “Herod the Great,” he ruled from 37–4 BC. He was ruthless in both consolidating and keeping power, even executing his wife Marianne in 29 BC, his mother-in-law Alexandra in 28 BC, and his brother-in-law Costobarus in 25 BC. He was married ten times and changed his will six times to try to satisfy the desires of each of his wives regarding royal succession.³

Magi from the east (2:1). Most likely astrologers, perhaps from Persia or southern Arabia, both of which lie east of Israel.⁴

His star (2:2). The nature of this “star” has been debated for centuries. There are several possibilities: (1) a conjunction of planets, some with messianic significance in ancient astrology; (2) a supernova; (3) a comet; (4) a supernatural occurrence. There is no way to answer the

question definitively. Yet its purpose is crystal clear: the “star,” whatever it was, heralded the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. Some scholars believe Matthew uses language deliberately alluding to Numbers 24:17, “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”

Bethlehem in Judea (2:5). The town where David was born and reared; also the place near where Jacob buried Rachel (see Genesis 35:19) and where Ruth met Boaz (see Ruth 1:22–2:6).

Gifts of gold . . . frankincense . . . myrrh (2:11). The “frankincense” was a “glittering, odorous gum obtained by making incisions in the bark of several trees; myrrh exudes from a tree found in Arabia and a few other places and was a much-valued spice and perfume used in embalming.”⁵

11. a. Why did the Magi go to Jerusalem?

b. How did Herod react to their visit? Why?

12. a. Why did Herod call the Magi “secretly” (2:7)?

Optional

Application: When was the last time you spontaneously “bowed down and worshiped him” and “presented him with gifts” (2:11)? Take some time this week — outside of a formal church service — to worship your King in this way.

b. What information did he want from them?

c. How did he intend to use the information they had (see 2:16)?

13. a. How did the Magi react when they found Jesus?

b. Do their actions provide any kind of example for us? Explain.

Egypt and Nazareth (2:13-23)

Two years old and under (2:16). Herod knew from the information given him by the Magi that the boy Jesus must be between six and twenty months old at this time; hence, the order to kill all boys two years old and under was intended to eradicate any possible threat to his throne.

Herod died (2:19). Traditionally thought to have occurred in 4 BC.

14. a. If Jesus was truly God's Son and the chosen Messiah, why would God instruct His Son's family to flee to Egypt rather than confront the enemy?

- b. What does this early incident teach us about what was to come?

Study Skill — Themes and Purposes

Before you study a book in detail, it is helpful to make some tentative conclusions about the book's themes and purposes. A theme is a main topic that recurs through the book, such as "the Messiah." A purpose is a reason the author wrote, such as "to teach Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah."

One reading of Matthew's gospel may not give you a firm sense of his main themes and purposes, but by now you probably are at least beginning to have some ideas about what they may be. Don't be hesitant to express those ideas; remember, they're tentative!

Archelaus (2:22). The son of Herod the Great and Malthace (Herod's fourth wife). He ruled over Judea and Samaria for ten years, 4 BC to AD 6.

Galilee (2:22). A region north of Jerusalem. After Herod the Great's death, it was governed by Herod Antipas who was given the title *tetrarch*.

Nazareth (2:23). An obscure town not mentioned in the Old Testament. It served as Jesus' hometown.

For Thought and Discussion: How do you normally react when you encounter a “Bible difficulty” such as the one in 2:23? How do your unbelieving friends react? How do you respond?

Your response

15. a. Dreams occur frequently in Matthew 1–2 as a means of divine guidance (see 1:20; 2:12–13, 19,22). Why do you think Matthew highlights these incidents?

- b. Note that the only other such incident in this gospel is recorded in 27:19, and in no case were the people involved looking for such guidance. Is this significant? If so, how?

“He shall be called a Nazarene”

Matthew 2:23 seems to be a quotation from the Old Testament: “He would be called a Nazarene.” Yet no such reference in the Old Testament exists.

Scholars have puzzled over this problem for centuries. Today most scholars would probably agree that Matthew’s words “probably refer to several Old Testament . . . predictions that the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:3), for in Jesus’ day ‘Nazarene’ was virtually a synonym for ‘despised’ (see John 1:45–46). Some hold that in speaking of Jesus as a ‘Nazarene,’ Matthew is referring primarily to the word ‘Branch’ (Hebrew *neser*) in Isaiah 11:1.”⁶

16. From what you know of Matthew’s gospel so far, summarize in your own words what you think is the purpose of this book.

Study Skill — Outlining the Purpose

An ordinary outline of Matthew's gospel such as the one in the background section can help you find particular passages, but it tells you little of how the parts fit into Matthew's overall message. One way to recall Matthew's message at a glance is to outline the way each passage unfolds that purpose.

For instance, one of Matthew's purposes is to show that Jesus is the Son of David foretold in the Old Testament. A broad outline of the book that takes account of this purpose might begin like this:

- 1:1-17 Genealogy: Matthew creates a bridge between the Old Testament and his book by showing that Jesus is a direct descendant of both David and Abraham.
- 1:18–2:23 Infancy: The Savior is born miraculously into our world, announced by angels and prophets, worshiped by Gentile rulers, and preserved by divine intervention. The King of Israel has arrived.
- 3:1–4:11 Preparation: The Savior's herald introduces the good news about repentance and forgiveness. The Savior is declared Son of God and undergoes baptism and temptation — all in preparation to begin His mission.

Get a sheet of paper and begin your own outline of Matthew's gospel that reflects his purpose and themes. You can make up your own summaries for 1:1–4:11 or copy these and begin your own outline with 4:12-17. Try to add a new entry as you complete each lesson.

17. a. What issues in your own life have been raised by your quick reading of Matthew?

b. How will you deal with these issues in the coming week?

Study Skill — Summarizing the Passage

A good way to see whether you have understood a passage of Scripture is to try summarizing it in your own words. When the passage tells a story like Matthew 1:18–2:23, it can be helpful to write not just what happened, but also what the events have to do with the main themes and purposes of the book.

For the group

Warm-up. The genealogy of Jesus is crucial to Matthew’s purpose in writing his gospel. Begin this lesson by having group members share something unique or interesting from their own family trees. This will help members get to know each other and begin the discussion of Jesus’ genealogy.

Discussion. As you share your responses from this lesson, compare your answers with each other. Be sure to pay special attention to questions 4, 6, and 13 as you discuss your answers. Remember, you’re not looking for a “right” answer, since many of these questions ask for your opinion. Sharing answers helps give insight into the passage and often will enlighten a troublesome point.

Wrap-up. Close by thanking God for bringing your group together and for the different strengths you each bring. Thank God too for the gift of His Son and the humble way in which He came to earth.

1. D. A. Carson, “Matthew” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 8* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 62; R. E. Nixon, “Matthew” in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 818.
2. Carson, 75.
3. “Herodian Dynasty” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 282.
4. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 1442.
5. Carson, 89.
6. Barker, 1444.