



Ministry of the Word
Sunday 01st December 2019
by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 1:1

Subject: Part 1 – An Introduction to The Gospel of Matthew

We are going to begin a new study in the Gospel of Matthew. It's going to take us a while, as it's got 28 chapters but it will be a great blessing to us. Before we sink our teeth into any of the verses, I think that it is very important to look at the background of this book so that when we go through it, things will make a lot more sense, in fact, it will hopefully make it a far richer book for us. So that's exactly what we are going to do this morning.

Israel has had a very turbulent history, and we see this from the time of its conception. Israel, after the rule of King Solomon (King David's son) began to go downhill to put it simply. The nation became divided, North and South, both having different Kings. Such was the rebellion of the people, that God had to judge them and while Persian power was on the rise, in 596BC the Jews were exiled to Babylon. Then in 539BC Babylon itself was conquered by Persia. Around 520BC The Jews returned from exile to Jerusalem, but not all returned. Ezra and Nehemiah wrote about this and the restoration of the Temple. Malachi was in fact the last inspired book in the old Testament written around 420BC. There were about 400 years between Malachi and John the Baptist. This means that no inspired books were produced but a lot of other books were produced during that time. They were political, cultural and social observations as well as historical, ethical, and religious writings. These influenced a lot of Jewish people in the 1st century, around the time of Jesus. Those books were diverse but they were non-inspired writings.

Some of these books which we now use as historical references include Books by Josephus. Josephus was a social, political and cultural observer of his day and was paid by the Romans. He lived around the time of Jesus. He referred to Jesus but rejected him as Messiah. He also wrote about the total destruction of the Temple in 70AD. It is because of

his writings we know many things like how James, Jesus' brother was killed which isn't recorded in the New Testament. There were also the Maccabees, again these books recorded the social and political changes and revolutions against the occupying forces in Israel around that period of time.

During that 400 year gap of non-inspired writings, ***There were religious commentaries*** written such as the Talmud and from that, the Mishnah was written. These were Rabbinical teachings, not inspired. They were commentaries about the Torah and the law. In these books, many man-made regulations were written into practice, which corrupted the actual law given by God. Remember this, because this point we will see Jesus bring up time and again in this gospel. ***Other books written included*** the Apocrypha (which mean Hidden) such as the History of Suzanah, Wisdom of Solomon, I & II Esdras, and Additions to Esther. Also the pseudepigrapha writings (which mean false). In these books, they used the names of Old Testament people who were long dead by then, but well known, to sell their books and ideas, an example of this is Revelation of Moses, but of course Moses didn't write it because he was well dead by then.

Because of all these different types of books, the people had a very different picture about the coming Messiah. They were expecting the Messiah alright but just a very different one because they were basing their expectation of who he was on these commentaries and not the Torah, and not on what the prophets of God said. Hence when Jesus appeared, they were either confused or insulted that Jesus could say that he was the Messiah.

The Political Landscape Prior to Jesus birth:

After the Persian Rule, the Grecian Empire came into full power from around 333 to 167 BC, Alexander and His 4 Generals. Israel had been governed by regional powers and there was unrest due to the nations on either side wanting power over it so as to use it as a piece of buffer land from their enemies. 320 to 198BC Egypt governed Palestine, but Egypt at that point was under Greek rule. Then 198-167BC Syria gained control over the Northern part of Israel. Remember the cruel ruler Antiochus Epiphanes? He closed the temple in Jerusalem after desecrating it by offering a pig in it, and he banned circumcision. He tried to totally destroy the Jewish people and the identity of Israel. The Greeks culturally dominated not just their Empire but the known world. Therefore, Hebrew began to be lost as an every-day language due to the Greek cultural assimilation into their lives. Hebrew was becoming a lost

language which was dangerous for the religion as they needed it to read the Scriptures. This is when the Septuagint (the 70 scholars) were assigned to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This was an amazing thing to do, because while Hebrew is very descriptive, the Greek is very accurate due to the grammar rules that each word has to follow. We can also see the hand of God in this as if it were left in just the Hebrew, modern scholars could be allowed away with some interpretations, but not so with the Greek. Most of the old testament that is quoted in the New Testament actually comes from the Septuagint. After the Maccabee Revolution, in which they revolted against Syrian Control, the revolt caused a push back and a vacuum for new power arose.

So who were **the players for this new power and the new roles?**

This is when the *Pharisees arose*. Originally they were just scribes, but they lead the revolt and the people of that time regarded them as the saviours and protectors of the law. They were seen as Heroes and yet 100 or so years later, they did not get on with Jesus who was the fulfilment of the law. Another group of people that arose were the Sadducees who began to wheel the political power. These had previously been Aristocratic priests, who should have been teaching but instead moved into political power and hence the Pharisees moved into their place as teachers and keepers of the law.

Things were indeed volatile, and the Essenes thought that everyone was corrupt, in fact they thought Jerusalem itself was corrupt. So they became monastic type monks outside of Jerusalem, and they were terrified of a war-type situation breaking out again, hence they scribed and copied the scriptures, and buried them, wanting to ensure that the word of God would be kept safe – hence why we have the dead sea scrolls today. Two more groups of people that are of interest, especially in the book of Matthew are the Zealots; They wanted to continue the revolution [we see later on Barabbas and even Simon belonged to this group] and the Herodians. These people were very sympathetic to Herod, some seen him as the Messiah and you could almost understand that view as he was a King and restored the temple. Israel was a hot bed of political turmoil but there was a great expectancy for the Messiah.

What will be interesting to us as we go through Matthew is to see ***the class divisions that were present.***

Firstly, there was the Aristocracy. People who were included in this group were the very rich, but even the High Priests. The Sadducees were very conservative, they only believed in the Torah, not the prophets, they didn't believe in angels, or resurrection, but they were liberal socially. Then next in the class line were the Pharisees. These were mostly Rabbis, who believed in the Torah, Talmud, and other writings within the 400 year gap we looked at earlier. They also believed the prophets, and in resurrection. Then we have the common people next in the class division. Just the ordinary people, getting by. After them on the class structure were publicans which were the tax collectors. Then after them were people they considered sinners, people of ill-repute. Finally on the end of the class ladder were slaves, who had no rights. In fact most people who faced crucifixion were slaves for that reason, and one of the reasons the cross was so deplorable.

The ***Social Situation*** and set up at the time was, religion was central in their lives, they were educated in as much as they could read which was a skill they needed at the synagogue. It was mainly agricultural in the region, but fishery, spices, and textiles were also important industries. There were social problems which included slavery, that was widespread, also prostitution including temple prostitution amongst the gentile population, infanticide and child abuse.

The Religious Life was centred on Temple Worship (even for the gentiles), Feasts were of great importance. Every town had their own Synagogue, all they needed were 6 men. There was also Emperor Worship. During the time of Jesus, the Roman Calendar was used but the feasts were according to the Jewish Calendar.

Time of Jesus' Birth

At the time of Christ, Israel was under Rule of the Roman Empire. This was in the sovereign purposes of God, though the Jews did not see it like that at the time. The Roman Empire was oppressive, and could be very cruel. One of the most rigorous features of Roman domination, both in Israel and elsewhere, was the Roman tax system. The expanding empire needed all the money it could lay hold of. It had huge building programs in Rome and all over the empire,

a mighty army needed to be paid and kept, as well as the emperor's expensive and lavish life style. There were a number of taxes that had to be paid in order to fund and sustain the Roman Empire's financial demands. One was a toll tax which was like our income tax, and the other was a ground tax, a propriety or land tax. Come to think of it nothing has really changed, it's just got more expensive!

The collection of these revenues by the Empire was quite unique in that, the central government could get the money up front by auctioning off the rights to collect the taxes in given countries and regions to Roman senators, magistrates and various other high ranking officials for a fixed rate of five years. *Why would they be interested in doing something like that?* Well, whatever was collected above that amount was kept for profit. Those who held such taxing rights were called "Publicani" (pub-li-can-ne). The Publicani hired others, usually locals from the country to collect the tax. These collectors had the same kind of arrangements that the Publicani had with the central government. This of course led to all kinds of abuses especially when taxes were risen due to extra requirements from Rome. These tax collectors, by the way, were backed by the full authority including the military authority of the Roman empire. Hence, why the tax collectors were quite naturally hated by their own people, not only as extortioners but also as traitors. In Israel they were ranked with the lowest of human society as already mentioned (Matthew 9:10-11; 18:17; 21:31-32; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:30).

Pontius Pilate was the Military Power and Rome's Representative to ensure taxes were paid, and things were going as they should. Herod was the political appointed ruler, a Roman Client King of Judea, which was referred to as the Herodian Kingdom. He too was big into building. While the Romans were cruel and oppressive, they did have their good points in relation to helping the evangelism of the empire. They supplied peace for a number of years – Pax Romana, They introduce good road systems, while it was primarily for their military uses they did serve a good purpose, also they kept Greek as the universal language while Latin they used for their law.

The Author - Matthew

Matthew who wrote this book, was also known as Matthew Levi or just Levi. He was a tax collector. We are first introduced to him in Matthew chapter 9 verse 9 when Jesus called him

to be one of the twelve disciples (cross reference Mark 2:14). We have little idea as to what sort of person Matthew was before Jesus called him. It is doubtful that he was very religious, because tax-collectors were generally ostracized, practically if not officially, from many synagogues and sometimes even from the Temple. *Was he a good man in a bad job? Was he fair with people in his dealing?* We don't know as we never heard of Jesus telling him to put things right like he did with another Tax collector we hear of later on, Zacchaeus. Maybe he did, and we are just not told. We don't know if Matthew had heard Jesus speak before, which is why he responded so quickly, or maybe it was just the work of the Holy Spirit. It was really amazing that Jesus called someone like Matthew, as most people wouldn't want to associate with his type. No doubt, Matthew quickly responded to Jesus' invitation and we know that many other tax-collectors were attracted to Jesus (Matthew 9:9-10; 11:19; Luke 15:1). It was rare that tax collectors were accepted and befriended by a fellow Jew, especially by a rabbi, or teacher, such as Jesus. Jesus called him and he left the table where he was at and followed him. The fact that he moved so instantly I think is indicative of where his heart was.

No doubt he had a lot of wealth and power, like most of the tax collectors of that day, but he walked away from it willingly, it shows his character. Also another thing we know about Matthew is that he had a deep commitment. He threw a party in his house so that his old friends could meet his new master. We also know that Matthew was modest and particularly so in writing his gospel account. He always refers to himself in the third person and nowhere speaks of himself as the author. We know of his authorship because his name is attached to all early copies of the manuscripts and because the early church Fathers unanimously attest him to be the book's author. It is obvious from the text itself that Matthew wrote this gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70A.D.

The Validity of the Book of Matthew

The Book is an account of the life of Jesus which Matthew was witness to. It's not a story nor is it a legend. When the old testament was written, it was over hundreds of years by many authors. However the new testament differs in the fact that the whole testament was written within a lifetime. That means that people who knew Jesus, who were in the crowd looking on, who came into contact with Jesus and witnessed his ministry were still alive and able to attest any such falsehoods if they existed. Luke and Paul both refer to eye witnesses who

could vouch for the things they wrote about Jesus. If anything they had written was false, there would have been plenty of people to stop the accounts taken root.

Modern scholars confirm that from the very get go, the message of Jesus contained a high Christology and what was written and taught was a reality because there is no other reason why the Christian message spread so fast and so wide and took real root, for if it was just another cult it would have been long fizzled out. There have been copies of the original book which have been dated back prior to 66 AD, such as Codex Vaticanus and even Textus receptus which was three fragments found that had a segment of the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel on both sides, a total of 24 lines, of Matthew 26:23, 31. Precisely what we have today.

So now we come to **The Theme of the Matthew**

The first four books of the New Testament report the same gospel, but from four distinct perspectives. They give the same message with differing but perfectly harmonious emphases. Matthew presents Jesus as the King, whereas Mark presents Him in the extreme opposite role as servant. Luke presents Him as the Son of Man, whereas John presents Him as the Son of God. The same Jesus is shown to be both sovereign God and servant Man. The Theme of Matthew could be summarised as Jesus - The King who was revealed, the King who was rejected and the King who will return.

The King who is Revealed

Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, and demonstrated this by firstly recording Jesus' Royal ancestry, showing his rightful inheritance. His birth was dreaded by a rival, jealous earthly King, the Magi brought Jesus their royal gifts from the east, His herald – John the Baptist, declared his Kingdom was at hand, even in his temptation, when Jesus was in the wilderness, Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world. The Sermon on the mount was the Manifesto of the Kingdom, The parables were said to portray the mysteries of the Kingdom. Jesus identifies Himself with the king's son in a parable and made a royal entry into Jerusalem. While facing the cross, he predicted his future reign. He claimed dominion over the angels and all, His last words was a legal claim and royal demand as he declared that all authority has been given to Him in both heaven and earth (28:18).

The King who was rejected

Matthew also focuses most uniquely on the rejection of Jesus as King. No other gospel says so much about his rejection as King, then Matthew. In no other gospel are the attacks against Jesus' character and Jesus' claims so bitter and vile as those reported in Matthew. Before he was born, Joseph was going to reject him and even reject his mother, at his birth the rival king wanted to kill him so his parents were warned by God to flee to Egypt which fulfilled the prophesy but also kept them alive, sadly the other male children were not so fortunate and the crying of mothers could be heard. Afterwards he spend most of his life in Nazareth until the time of his ministry. His herald, John the Baptist, was put in a dungeon and eventually beheaded. During his earthly ministry, Jesus had no place to lay his head, his Kingdom was rejected and not accepted in that age. In Matthew's gospel we see only at the foot of the cross the mockers and scorners. Even the women are pictured at a distance (27:55-56), and in His death Jesus cries out, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" (27:46). It was only a Gentile centurion who spoke a favourable word about the crucified One:

"Truly this was the Son of God!" (27:54).

Even some of the soldiers who had stood guard over the tomb reported it being empty, the Jewish authorities paid them to say that Jesus' body was stolen by His disciples (28:11-15), they rejected his resurrection.

The King who will return

Matthew also represents Jesus as the King who ultimately will return to judge, to rule and reign. All the earth one day "*will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory*" (Matthew 24:30)

His coming will be "*at an hour when you do not think He will*" (Matthew 24:44) and He will come in glory and in judgment (Matthew 25:31-33).

In fact Matthew speaks more about Jesus' return as King than any of the other gospels.

No reader can fully immerse himself in this gospel without emerging with a compelling sense of both the eternal majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ and the strong power that sin and Satan held over the apostate Israel that rejected Christ. No gospel is more instructive to those who are the Lord's disciples and who are called to represent Him in the world. The lessons on discipleship are life-changing for the committed reader, as they were for the eleven who were

Jesus' first followers. So, with all its great themes of majesty and glory, rejection and apostasy, return and triumph, the book of Matthew lacks no practicality. Woven through all of the Gospel is the constant thread of revealed instruction for those who are His representatives among men, that is you and I, who are believers in Christ.

So **Why did Matthew start with the Genealogy?**

In presenting the sovereignty of Jesus, Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of the Lord going back to Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, through to King David, Israel's model king. In presenting Jesus' servanthood, Mark gives no genealogy at all, because a servant's lineage is irrelevant. In presenting Jesus as the Son of Man, Luke traces His genealogy back to the first man, Adam. In presenting Jesus as the divine Son of God, John gives no human genealogy, birth or childhood narratives. He opens his gospel by giving, as it were, Jesus' divine genealogy in John 1:1:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

What was the reason do you suppose that Matthew begins with what to most, is a boring genealogy? Why not just get straight into the accounts of Christ's life? Why is it so important?

If any Jew were to believe that he was the rightful King, then they would need proof of his pedigree. This was very important in Jewish society. Remember Joshua splitting up the lands to the rightful people so everyone would get their inheritance? This was very important through Israel's history. Remember we seen this in Ruth Chapter 3&4, when Naomi returned to Bethlehem? Another example is in Ezra 2 when the people were returning to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, there were those claiming to be from Levi tribe so as to be priests, but many were not accepted because they had no proof, no legal proof of their lineage. Do you know that no Jew today has proof of which tribe they belong to? They have no genealogy so to speak. For the orthodox Jews who believe in the coming of the Messiah, have a real big problem, because how could they prove who the rightful Messiah is without their genealogy? Jesus Christ is the last credible person to be able to have claim to David's throne which is vitally important. There are also a few things that the genealogy of Jesus proves, which are as follows:

1. It proves His Messiahship

If you are going to trust your soul to someone, you better know the credentials of that person, right? Biblical prophecies tell us that the Messiah should come from the line of David and the seed of Abraham. Studying the genealogy of Christ shows us that Jesus can, and that He indeed originates from the kingly line and house of David, back to Abraham.

2. It points to the sovereignty of God.

Next week we are really going to see this when we examine the genealogy in more detail but let me just quickly point this out now. Some Bible sceptics would point to the discrepancies of Matthew's and Luke's genealogy account as a proof that the Bible contains error and thus, not the infallible word of God. While it is true that there are differences in both accounts, there is a reason. Matthew traces the genealogy through Joseph while Luke traces the genealogy through Mary. Matthew traces the legal Royal line while Luke traces the Bloodline. Matthew traces the legal Royal line through David's son, King Solomon and Luke traces the Bloodline through David's son Nathan.

Why was this? Well this is when we really see the sovereignty of God. When you go back to Jeremiah 22v28-30 God cursed Jeconiah that his line would not have a successor to the throne. If Jesus was the biological son of Joseph, then Jesus could not be the successor to David's throne, but he was adopted by Joseph, therefore he had legal rights to Joseph's line. Hence why Luke uses Mary's bloodline by his rightful heritage to King David as no son of Nathan was given this curse. God in his sovereignty protected Jesus right line and heritage to King David.

Genealogies can span many years and generations. God has already determined the future events before they even come to pass (Isaiah 46:8-11). Anything can happen to disrupt the genealogy of Christ, and through this particular line there was plenty of disruptions to try to put an end to it but this did not occur. God makes sure that His purpose will be fulfilled. Since we have the genealogy of Christ perfectly recorded according to the will of God, we can conclude that God truly is all-powerful and is able fulfil His purpose and complete His plan.

3. God's timing is perfect.

Why does God have to wait for hundreds of years to reveal the Messiah? Why not earlier or later? In God's infinite wisdom and knowledge, He knows the best time for everything, even in your life. The genealogy of Christ tells us that God's timing is perfect – never early, never late. It means that we can always rely on God. He will meet our needs according to His perfect time and will. We should always wait on God and have the confidence that His answer to our prayer is always for our best interest.

4. God always keep His word.

God foreordained to send a Saviour to redeem the whole of humanity. Thousands of years passed from the time of that decree, but He promised and kept His word. We too, can be confident that God will keep His word to us.

5. God uses both righteous and unrighteous people to fulfil His purpose.

If you notice, the names mentioned in the genealogy of Christ, are not all righteous people. Some are wicked kings and sinful personalities in the Bible. This shows us that God can use all circumstances, including human weaknesses, to fulfil His purpose.

6. The genealogy shows us the tremendous humility of Christ.

Jesus did not come as a conquering King but a baby in the manger. He was willing to strip himself of all the divine power of a God and live a simple life as a human being (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus is God, who left Heaven, and put on flesh, identified with our humanity and willingly saved us from the penalty of sin.

7. The genealogy proves the authenticity and historicity of the Bible.

The genealogy of Christ is not just a mere list of people. They are actually a list of individuals who have existed in history. This is a bold challenge to all sceptics. The Bible is truly the Word of God and is not afraid to list names that could have easily refuted if false. Only people who say the truth will put up a list like this. Because of the strong confidence of Matthew and Luke to the genealogies of Christ, they have included it in their writings.

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The Book of Matthew was written primarily to rehearse the story of salvation, to demonstrated that Jesus is the Christ, the prophesied and predicted Messiah, The king of the Jews, rejected by his own people but excepted by the gentiles and that he will return, not as a baby again in a manger, but He will come back to reign and rule as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. This is the Gospel. This is the story of the King who was revealed, the King who was rejected and the King who one day will triumphantly return. Next week we will look verses at 1 to 17, the actual genealogy.

Amen.