



Author: Matthew, also called Levi
Audience: Greek-speaking Jewish Christians
Date: Between AD 50 and 70

Theme: Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to bring salvation to Israel and the nations in fulfillment of OT Scriptures.

PERSPECTIVE

It is probably safe to say that the most often read part of the Gospel of Matthew in our day is the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7). It is easy to imagine why. We live in a moralistic, legalistic, individualistic age. The Sermon on the Mount can be read as a guidebook for ethical living, to be followed regardless of what you think of God, the Jewish community, or the Christian church. Unfortunately, this is the wrong way to read the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.

Why? Because reading it this way assumes that the way we choose to behave determines who we are and determines our identity. And that's not true at all. What the Gospel of Matthew teaches us in general and what the Sermon on the Mount teaches us in particular is that who we are (or more precisely, *whose* we are, i.e., whom we choose to follow or identify with) determines how we behave. If we choose to follow Jesus as Messiah, Matthew tells us, then the Sermon on the Mount is a description of how we will behave.

Three important things happen, all of them bad, when we read the Sermon on the Mount incorrectly.

First, we overestimate our goodness. It is tempting to think of our characters as something we carefully craft, using a brick of honesty here, a two-by-four of generosity there, built on a cement foundation of discipline and energy. In such a scenario we choose the goal, and we choose the building methods and materials we need to achieve the goal. And it is up to us to make the grade. Matthew says we are not that good (e.g., 5:27–28; 12:34, 36; 15:11, 19).

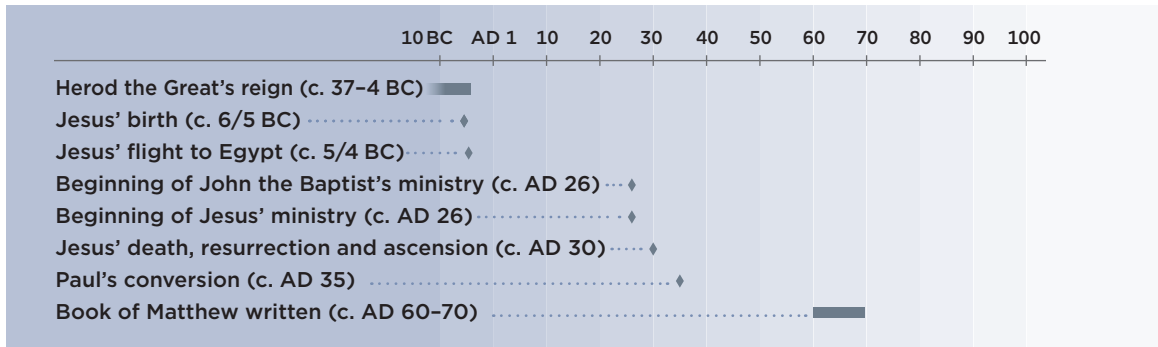
Second, we underestimate our capacity for evil. The reason we cannot let our innate, God-created goodness dominate our personalities



Reading Matthew

This Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus and the story of his birth. Starting with ch. 3, it can be divided into five main sections, each telling first what Jesus did and then what Jesus said; each section closes the same way (see 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The last three chapters tell the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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Key Verses

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth..."

—Matthew 5:1-5

is because we have been infected with a pervasive force that has radically impaired our ability to let our lights of goodness shine. We all feel this force and perhaps wish it weren't true. Matthew says we choose to identify with the Messiah because when it comes right down to it, we have no other choice. "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (18:3).

Third, we rely less on God than we should. Because we are tempted not to choose to identify first with the Messiah, letting our characters emerge as a result of that choice, we instead decide to do a little remedial work to make ourselves a little more acceptable to God before we submit. When we make that choice, however, we make it impossible to rely on God as we should: that is, completely.

The Sermon on the Mount is an impossible ideal if read as an ethical treatise to which we need to measure up. It is a wonderful description of what we can become if we identify ourselves with Christ and allow his love to express itself through us. Read that way, it is a glorious promise of what we are and what we will become: the hope of Christian living that Matthew saw so clearly.

TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

This account of the life of Jesus has been attributed to Matthew, one of the disciples of Jesus. Matthew seemed to have primarily a Jewish audience in mind, for he presented Jesus as the promised Messiah who fulfilled the prophecies, sacrifices, commands, and teachings of the OT. He portrayed Jesus as the Son of God, who showed throughout his life that he had divine authority that was acknowledged by both humans and angels. Matthew carefully outlined for those who professed to be Christ's followers the instructions that Jesus gave on true discipleship and on proper pastoral care in the church. And he reminded his readers that Jesus was the Savior of all nations, who had sent his followers on a worldwide mission with the message of the gospel.

Several important messages stand out in this Gospel. (1) We can be sure that God's Word is true, for the OT prophecies about the coming of the Messiah came true in Jesus. (2) Jesus wants us to acknowledge him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and to follow his instructions for our daily lives. (3) The Sermon on the Mount is one of the best summaries on how to serve God and love our fellow human beings. (4) We learn in the Gospel of Matthew how to relate to and care for

fellow church members, particularly those who are experiencing difficulties. (5) Jesus wants us to tell our friends and neighbors, as well as

people throughout the entire world, the Good News about salvation in his name.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN MATTHEW

- ♦ Jesus' birth and the visit of the Magi (chs. 1-2)
- ♦ The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7)
- ♦ Some miracles of Jesus (chs. 8-9; 14-15)
- ♦ Jesus' sending out his disciples (ch. 10)
- ♦ Some parables of Jesus (chs. 13; 18; 20-21; 25)
- ♦ Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of his own death (ch. 16)
- ♦ Judgment on the Pharisees (ch. 23)
- ♦ Jesus' prediction of the future (ch. 24)
- ♦ Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection (chs. 26-28)



The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

1:1-17pp // Lk 3:23-38

1:3-6pp // Ru 4:18-22

1:7-11pp // 1Ch 3:10-17

1 This is the genealogy^a of Jesus the Messiah^b the son of David,^a the son of Abraham:^b

- ² Abraham was the father of Isaac,^c
Isaac the father of Jacob,^d
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,^e
- ³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,^f
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
- ⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
- ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
- ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.⁹

1:1 ^a2Sa 7:12-16; Isa 9:6, 7; 11:1; Jer 23:5, 6; Mt 9:27; Lk 1:32, 69; Ro 1:3; Rev 22:16
^bGe 22:18; Gal 3:16
1:2 ^cGe 21:3, 12 ^dGe 25:26
^eGe 29:35
1:3 ^fGe 38:27-30
1:6 ^g1Sa 16:1; 17:12

^h2Sa 12:24
1:10 ⁱ2Ki 20:21
1:11 ^j2Ki 24:14-16; Jer 27:20; Da 1:1, 2
1:12 ^k1Ch 3:17

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,^h

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

⁹ Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz,

¹⁰ Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,ⁱ Manasseh the father of Amon,

¹¹ Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^c and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.^j

¹² After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,^k

^a 1 Or is an account of the origin ^b 1 Or Jesus Christ. Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean Anointed One; also in verse 18. ^c 11 That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12

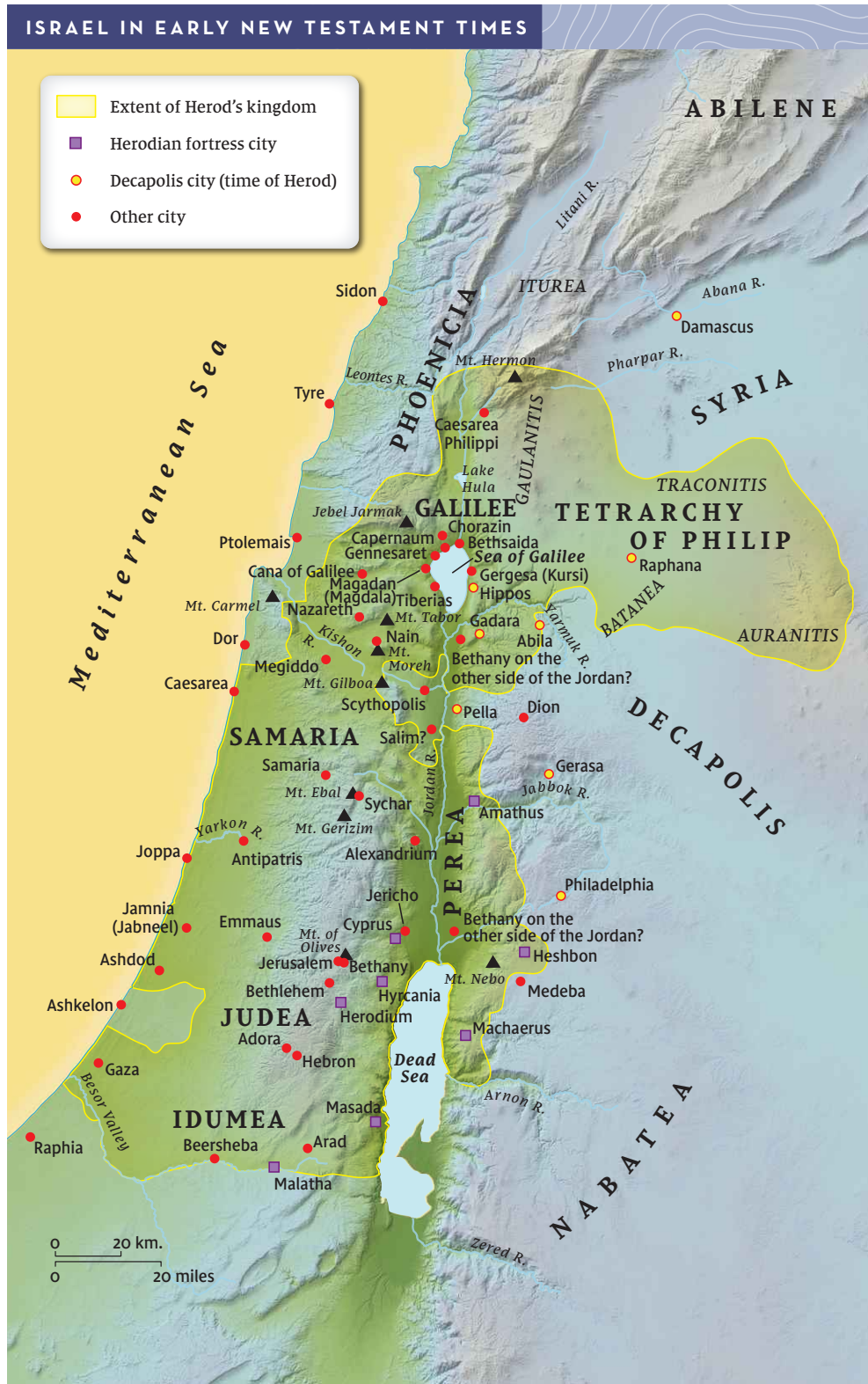
1:1 In tracing the ancestry to Abraham, Matthew holds a light of hope to the entire world. The covenant God made with Abraham was a promise of blessing to all the nations.

1:2-6a "Abraham was the father of Isaac." This expression emphasizes the human background of each generation, which paves the way for a

dramatic change in v. 16, where Matthew points to the divine origin of Jesus.

1:6b-11 The alternating series of godly and wicked kings is striking.

1:12-16 After the return of Israel from the exile, the Davidic line continues through Jeconiah.



Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,^l
¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
 Abihud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,
¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Elihud,
¹⁵Elihud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the
 husband of Mary,^m and Mary
 was the mother of Jesus who
 is called the Messiah.ⁿ

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations
 in all from Abraham to David, fourteen
 from David to the exile to Babylon, and
 fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the
 Messiah came about^a: His mother Mary
 was pledged to be married to Joseph,
 but before they came together, she was
 found to be pregnant through the Holy
 Spirit.^o ¹⁹Because Joseph her husband

^l1:12 ¹Ch 3:19;
 Ezr 3:2
^{1:16} ^mLk 1:27
ⁿMt 27:17
^{1:18} ^oLk 1:35

was faithful to the law, and yet^b did not
 want to expose her to public disgrace,
 he had in mind to divorce^p her quietly.

²⁰But after he had considered this, an
 angel of the Lord appeared to him in a
 dream and said, “Joseph son of David,
 do not be afraid to take Mary home as
 your wife, because what is conceived in
 her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give
 birth to a son, and you are to give him
 the name Jesus,^q because he will save
 his people from their sins.”^r

²²All this took place to fulfill what
 the Lord had said through the prophet:
²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth
 to a son, and they will call him Immanu-
 el”^ds (which means “God with us”).

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what
 the angel of the Lord had commanded
 him and took Mary home as his wife.
²⁵But he did not consummate their mar-
 riage until she gave birth to a son. And
 he gave him the name Jesus.^t

^{1:19} ^pDt 24:1
^{1:21} ^qLk 1:31
¹Lk 2:11; Ac 5:31;
 13:23, 28
^{1:23} ^sIsa 7:14;
 8:8, 10
^{1:25} ^tver 21

^a 18 Or *The origin of Jesus the Messiah was like
 this* ^b 19 Or *was a righteous man and*
^c 21 *Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which
 means the LORD saves.* ^d 23 *Isaiah 7:14*

1:16–17 The original Greek emphasizes that Mary
 is the biological parent, preparing the reader for
 the virgin birth.

APPLICATION ✦ **1:1–17** The covenantal promise
 includes all humanity. Matthew shows us that
 we have another set of roots—roots of faith.
 Once a person becomes a Christian, he or she is
 immediately adopted into a family of faith that
 has a long and well-documented genealogy.

1:18–19 The marriage customs of Jewish culture at
 that time usually included two basic stages of the
 relationship: the betrothal and the wedding. The
 betrothal stage involved a legally binding contract
 and could only be broken by a formal process of
 divorce. In a formal ceremony about a year after
 the betrothal, the wedding took place.

1:20–21 The angel dramatically announces to
 Joseph in a dream that the conception of the child
 is from the Holy Spirit. Here at the beginning of
 the NT age, the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role.
 Jesus Messiah is God incarnate, whose miraculous
 conception and origin are only explained through
 the work of God the Holy Spirit.

The name *Jesus* was popular in first-century
 Judaism and was given to sons as a symbolic
 hope for Yahweh’s anticipated sending of salva-
 tion. Many expected a messiah who would save
 Israel from Roman oppression. The angel draws on
 a less popular theme: salvation from sin.

1:22–23 At the time of Ahaz (734 BC) Isaiah proph-
 esied that a woman who was a virgin would bear a
 son named Immanuel. Since Isaiah’s prophecy was
 first fulfilled in his time (Isa 7:16), this prophecy

is fulfilled in a more incredible way with Jesus. In
 Isaiah the reference is to a woman who had yet
 to bear a child, but Matthew clarifies that not only
 had Mary not yet born a child, she had also never
 had a sexual experience. So Matthew declares that
 Jesus ultimately fulfills the prophecy of Isa 7:14.

1:24–25 When Joseph awakes from his sleep, he is
 obedient to the angel’s directive and carries out the
 second phase of the marital process by engaging in
 the formal wedding ceremony. Matthew empha-
 sizes Joseph’s remarkable character. Not only is
 Mary seen as a godly woman, but Joseph takes
 the lead in carrying out the angel’s instructions.

✦ **1:18–25** The explicit nature of the role of
 the Holy Spirit in this passage enables us to
 begin to see the unfolding revelation of God
 throughout Scripture. This activity of the Spirit
 is more plain in the expansion of the church in
 the book of Acts and in the teaching of later
 NT authors, but we begin to see it come into
 play with the conception and birth of Jesus
 Messiah.

What a privilege and responsibility we now
 have to live at this stage of history. In their
 obedience to the work of the Spirit, young
 Joseph and Mary give us a precursor of how
 godly relationships can be pure and charac-
 terized by serving one another. Today, that
 is the real basis on which we can pursue a
 godly marriage and family and, indeed, see
 the transformation of any of our relationships,
 both within and outside the church, through
 the transforming work of God’s Spirit.

Mt 1:24 ❖ Sometimes God's commands are not easy. How can we better follow God's will when the calling seems difficult?

2:1 ^uLk 2:4-7
^vLk 1:5
2:2 ^wJer 23:5;
Mt 27:11;
Mk 15:2;
Jn 1:49; 18:33-37 ^xNu 24:17

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,^u during the time of King Herod,^v Magi^a from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”^w We saw his star^x when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the

2:5 ^yJn 7:42
2:6 ^z2Sa 5:2;
Mic 5:2

law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵“In Bethlehem^y in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people
Israel.”^{b”z}

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you

^a 1 Traditionally *wise men* ^b 6 Micah 5:2,4

2:1-2 Herod most likely died in March of 4 BC. Since Herod is still alive when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, the dating of Jesus' birth is placed by most scholars somewhere between 6 and 4 BC.

The universal significance of the birth of the child Jesus is announced immediately because Magi from the east arrive in Jerusalem. The term “Magi” originally referred to a priestly caste in ancient Persia. The arrival of Gentile religious leaders from the east implies they had been regularly exposed to Hebrew Scriptures, prophecy, and teachers. The Magi may have become familiar with Balaam's prophecy of a messianic deliverer (Nu 24:17).

2:3-8 The word “Jerusalem” represents the religious and political leadership of Israel. The leadership know the consequences they might suffer if Herod were to fly into a rage at a perceived threat. They have aligned themselves politically with Herod, and if his power base is threatened, so is theirs.

The central leadership of the Jews was lodged in the “chief priests” and the “teachers of the law” (v. 4). The chief priests were members of the Sanhedrin, joining the high priest in giving oversight to the temple activities, treasury, and priestly orders.

PEOPLE TO KNOW // HEROD THE GREAT

MATTHEW 2:1-12: Herod the Great was a tyrannical and vengeful king, yet he was also an architectural genius. Some of his building achievements still stand today.

Herod's story in the Bible shows only his paranoid and vengeful side. When Magi from the east came to his palace asking about a new king born in the area, “he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mt 2:3). As king, his mental state affected his entire community.

Herod hid his wrath from the Magi and disguised it with interest. Learning from the religious leaders that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem nearby, Herod sent the Magi to find baby Jesus and to report back to him when they had done so, that he could also “go and worship him” (Mt 2:8). The Magi, however, were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. They went home by another route.

When Herod realized he had been duped, he flew into a rage. Like Pharaoh killing the baby Hebrew boys (Ex 1:22), Herod demanded that all the boys around Bethlehem under the age of two be put to death (Mt 2:16). He could not abide the thought of a challenger to his authority. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him to flee to Egypt; Joseph, Mary and Jesus escaped.

APPLICATION ❖ Herod's legacy is a warning about the danger of sin in the life of a person in the position of power. Herod was a brilliant man, but his pride, jealousy and anger made him a terrible and terrifying leader. While we may not wield the same power as Herod, our hearts are susceptible to the same danger. In any position of leadership or authority, we need to examine our motivations and calling. Instead of seeking to preserve our own control and authority, we need to humble ourselves to God's authority and allow him to guide us as we acknowledge that he is the true King and Leader of all.

Mt 2:11 ❖ What does it look like to give our best to Jesus?

find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.^a Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts^b of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned^c in a dream^d not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel^e of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.^f “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

^{2:11} ^aIsa 60:3
^bPs 72:10
^{2:12} ^cHeb 11:7
^dver 13, 19, 22;
Mt 27:19
^{2:13} ^eAc 5:19
^fver 12, 19, 22

^{2:15} ^gEx 4:22,
23; Hos 11:1
^{2:18} ^hJer 31:15
^{2:19} ⁱver 12,
13, 22

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^{ag}

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸“A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^{bh}

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dreamⁱ to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of

^a 15 Hosea 11:1 ^b 18 Jer. 31:15

2:9–12 The purpose of the Magi’s pilgrimage to see the child is accomplished as they “bowed down and worshiped him” (v. 11). It is doubtful that at this time these quasi-pagan religious figures understand Jesus’ divine nature. Their worship is far more than even they understand.

“Gold” is the most often mentioned valued metal in Scripture. “Incense” was used in Israel ceremonially as part of a recipe for the only incense permitted on the altar (Ex 30:9, 34–38). A dead body was prepared for burial by washing, dressing it in special garments, and packing it with fragrant “myrrh” and other spices to stifle the smell of a body as it decayed.

Joseph was visited in a dream by an angel (Mt 1:20). It seems plausible that the same angel appears in the Magi’s warning dream (2:12). If so, the warning in a dream is consistent with the view that the star guiding them was an angel.

❖ **2:1–12** The very act of sacrificial giving defines what it means to love each other. The Magi did not know the full identity of Jesus as we are privileged to know, yet they demonstrated worship and gift-giving at the arrival of the king of the Jews. Our sacrificial worship and love of Jesus will produce true, sacrificial love for one another.

At this most fundamental level, Matthew teaches us that Jesus’ arrival in history to initiate the salvation of his people from their sins surely requires that we give ourselves to him. When we do so, his life becomes the pattern for our own lives.

2:13–15 Once the Magi escape safely, the angel of the Lord again appears in a dream to warn Joseph about Herod’s scheme to murder the child. Joseph is again immediately obedient, escaping to Egypt by night.

Matthew points to the flight and later return from Egypt as a fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew has a multifaceted perspective on the way that Jesus “fulfills” the OT Scriptures. (1) In some cases, “fulfill” can indicate the way in which the events of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry enact what the prophets predicted. (2) In other cases, “fulfill” can indicate the way in which Jesus brings the entire OT Scripture to its full intended meaning. (3) In still other cases, Matthew’s use of “fulfill” can indicate the way in which Jesus’ earthly life and ministry mirror certain aspects of the national history of Israel.

2:16–18 No other historical records exist of this incident, which is not surprising since Bethlehem was a somewhat small, rural town at this time. The events of Jesus’ earthly life repeat the pattern of earlier attempts by a foreign power to wipe out God’s chosen people.

2:19a Herod died at the age of 69 in March, 4 BC. Herod divided his kingdom between his sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip. Herod Antipas ruled the region of Jesus’ primary ministry.

2:19b–23 The family probably stayed in Egypt no more than a year. When they discover that Archelaus is ruling over Judea, Joseph detours to Nazareth in the region of Galilee, a region governed by Herod Antipas.

Nazareth was originally settled by people from

HOUSE OF HEROD

1ST GENERATION

Herod the Great King of Judea, Galilee, Iturea, Traconitis (37–4 BC)
 Birth of Jesus (Mt 2:1–19; Lk 1:5)

2ND GENERATION

Herod Philip II (MOTHER: CLEOPATRA) Tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis (4 BC–AD 34) (Lk 3:1)

Archelaus (MOTHER: MALTHACE) Ethnarch of Judea, Idumea and Samaria (4 BC–AD 6); when Mary and Joseph left Egypt, they avoided Judea and settled in Nazareth (Mt 2:19–23)

Aristobulus (MOTHER: MARIAMNE) (died 10 BC)

Herod Antipas (MOTHER: MALTHACE) Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (4 BC–AD 39) (Lk 3:1); second husband of Herodias; he put John the Baptist to death (Mt 14:1–12; Mk 6:14–29); Pilate sent Jesus to him (Lk 23:7–12)

Herod Philip I (MOTHER: MARIAMNE) He did not rule; first husband of Herodias (Mt 14:3; Mk 6:17) (died c. AD 34)

Antipater (MOTHER: DORIS)

KEY:

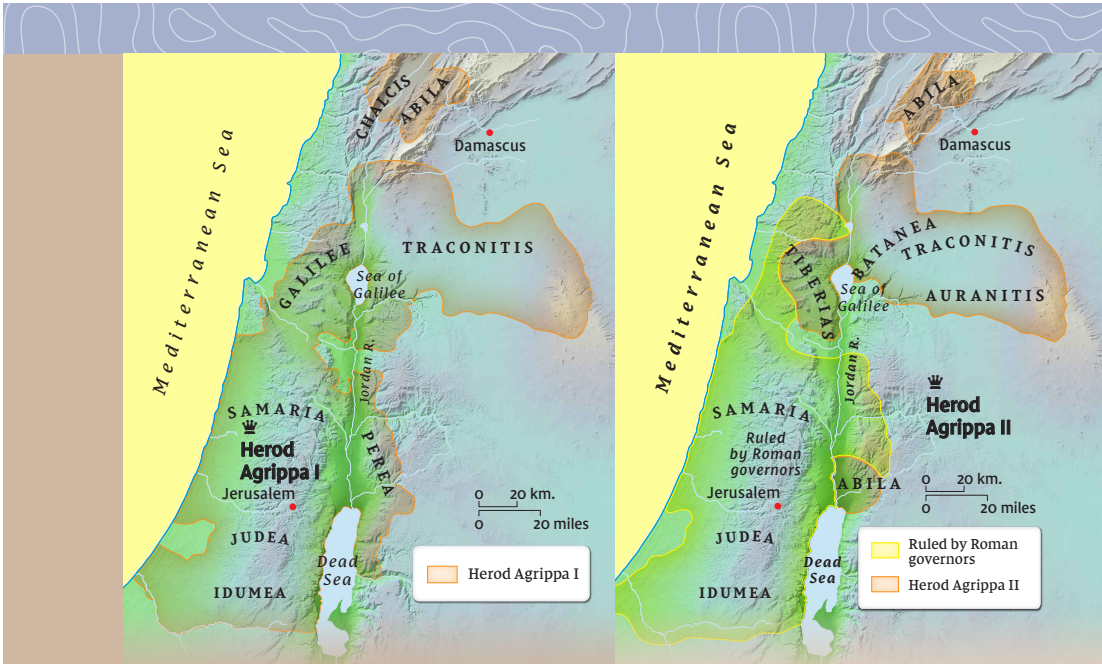
King

Ethnarch/Tetrarch

BERNICE italic capitals denote females

Antipater bold type: bloodline of Herod the Great

Felix light type: non-bloodline



3RD GENERATION

Herod of Chalcis

☞ **Herod Agrippa I** King of Judea (AD 37–44); killed James; put Peter into prison; struck down by an angel (Ac 12:1–24)

HERODIAS Married her uncle Herod Philip I, and then a second uncle, Herod Antipas (Mt 14:3; Mk 6:17)

..... Denotes Herodias's marriage to Herod Antipas

--- Denotes Herodias's marriage to Herod Philip I and daughter of that marriage

4TH GENERATION

Felix (Governor of Judea)

DRUSILLA Married Felix, governor of Judea (AD 52–59); Felix tried Paul (Ac 24:24)

☞ **Herod Agrippa II** King of Judea; Paul makes a legal defense before him (Ac 25:13–26:32)

BERNICE With her brother at the time of Paul's defense (Ac 25:13)

SALOME Daughter of Herodias and Herod Philip I; danced in exchange for the head of John the Baptist (Mt 14:1–12; Mk 6:14–29)

Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream,ⁱ he withdrew to the district of Galilee,^k ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.^l So was fulfilled^m what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.ⁿ

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3:1–12pp // Mk 1:3–8; Lk 3:2–17

3 In those days John the Baptist^o came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven^p has come near." ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him."^{aq}

2:22ⁱ ver 12, 13, 19; Mt 27:19
⁴Lk 2:39
2:23^l Lk 1:26;
Jn 1:45, 46
^mMt 1:22
ⁿMk 1:24
3:1^o Lk 1:13, 57–66; 3:2–19
3:2^p Da 2:44;
Mt 4:17; 6:10;
Lk 11:20; 21:31;
Jn 3:3, 5;
Ac 1:3, 6
3:3^q Isa 40:3;
Mal 3:1; Lk 1:76;
Jn 1:23

3:4^r 2Ki 1:8
^sLev 11:22
3:7^t Mt 12:34;
23:33^u Ro 1:18;
1Th 1:10
3:8^v Ac 26:20
3:10^w Mt 7:19;
Lk 13:6–9;
Jn 15:2, 6

Mt 3:2 ♦ To *repent* means "to change our behavior." What repentance still needs to happen in your life?

⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.^f His food was locusts^g and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers!^h Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.^w

^a 3 Isaiah 40:3

the line of David. Matthew also uses "Nazarene" to refer to an individual from a remote, despised area. To Jesus' followers, the expression "Jesus of Nazareth" marked him as the messianic deliverer (Ac 2:22; 3:6; 10:38). When used by his enemies, it was a title of scorn.

Matthew says nothing about Jesus' early years in Nazareth. Jesus' education would have also included learning the skills of his father—carpentry. Jesus grew up in a multicultural environment in which a number of languages were spoken by the common people—Aramaic, literary Hebrew, and some Latin, which was spoken especially by Roman military personnel.

✦ **2:13–23** As the name "Nazarene" was for Jesus, so the name "Christian" is a badge of honor, but it is also a badge of scorn and a designation for persecution. For many in the world today, wearing the name "Christian" is similar to what it was like for the early church. In places around the world, buildings are burned just because they are known to be "Christian" houses of worship. In many countries, people are placed in jail simply because they possess and distribute "Christian" literature. For Christians in many countries, persecution isn't just a historical fact but a current reality that is close to home.

Our walk with Jesus in this world will involve some kind of suffering for his name. Jesus suffered when doing the right and good thing. Persecution marked the fate of the church from its earliest days, yet it did not

dim its passion for following Jesus, no matter what the cost.

3:1–3 John is the one foretold by Isaiah who would be designated to prepare the way for the Lord's arrival and kingdom (v. 3; cf. Isa 40:3).

3:4 John's appearance stirred up recollections of the prophecies of Elijah's return. John's diet and clothing embody in his lifestyle the message of repentance he preaches.

3:5–6 John's baptism was symbolic of purification. But in contrast to forms of baptism such as those at Qumran and by the Pharisees—both of which were highly structured and had regular, repeated washings—John's was a one-time baptism. His baptism called for a personal commitment to God's new activity within Israel.

3:7–10 The Pharisees were a lay fellowship, or brotherhood, connected with local synagogues and thus were popular with the common people. Their most-pronounced characteristic was their dedication to following oral tradition, which they obeyed rigorously to make the written law relevant to daily life. The Sadducees, by contrast, were a small group with aristocratic and priestly influence who took their authority from the activities of the temple.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are united in coming to where John is baptizing. John sees through their hypocrisy and has harsh words for them. Of all people, they should be the ones who prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Based on their intensive Scripture study, they should have been the first to prepare themselves to receive kingdom life. Instead, they will receive judgment.

The Baptism of Jesus

11“I baptize you with^a water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^a the Holy Spirit^x and fire.^y 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”^z

The Baptism of Jesus

3:13–17pp // Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21,22; Jn 1:31–34

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.^a 14But John

3:11 ^xMk 1:8
^yIsa 4:4;
Ac 2:3,4
3:12 ^zMt 13:30
3:13 ^aMk 1:4

3:16 ^bIsa 11:2;
42:1
3:17 ^cMt 17:5;
Jn 12:28
^dPs 2:7;
2Pe 1:17,18
^eIsa 42:1;
Mt 12:18; 17:5;
Mk 1:11; 9:7;
Lk 9:35

tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

15Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God^b descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17And a voice from heaven^c said, “This is my Son,^d whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”^e

^a 11 Or in

3:11 John points ahead and beyond himself to another person. John especially emphasizes the contrast between himself and the coming One. (1) John himself knows clearly the identity of the One to come. John is the herald; the coming One is the messianic deliverer. (2) John’s baptism was only preparatory. The coming One will baptize with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. But the unrepentant he will baptize with the judgment of eternal fire. **3:12** At the end of a harvest, the farmer took a pitchfork and tossed the wheat into the air, where the wind blew the lighter chaff away. The wheat was then stored in the granary. The chaff was burned. **3:13–17** What does Jesus mean that in his baptism he and John will “fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15)? Jesus fulfills the hope of the Davidic king

and righteous servant. But more important, he is also Immanuel, “God with us,” and Jesus, the One who will “save his people from their sins” (1:21, 23). Jesus experiences a threefold revelation: (1) “Heaven was opened” (3:16). God himself is opening the gates to reveal something momentous. (2) Jesus’ anointing by the Spirit is both the coronation of Israel’s Messiah and the commissioning of God’s righteous servant for the work he will now carry out in the power and presence of the Spirit. (3) Jesus is heralded as the unique Son who is the triumphant messianic King (Ps 2) yet the humble servant (Isa 42).

✚ **3:1–17** We don’t like to offend. But John does warn us, as will Jesus later, of the coming

PEOPLE TO KNOW // JOHN THE BAPTIST

MATTHEW 3:13–17: John was the son of Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, who was a priest. When the angel Gabriel announced Elizabeth would have a child, he said the baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born. Furthermore, he would bring the people back to God, have the spirit of Elijah the prophet and prepare the way for the Lord (Lk 1:15–17).

John became a fiery preacher. He lived in the wilderness, eating honey and locusts. His words of judgment were especially aimed at those who believed that they were God’s chosen and thus didn’t have to be righteous. He called them a “brood of vipers” and said they must change their ways (Lk 3:7–8). John attracted great crowds to the Jordan River where he taught and baptized. He instructed listeners to follow God and repent from their sin.

John said he came to prepare the way for One greater than himself who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:16). John was pointing to Jesus, and he had the honor of baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River. After this, John encouraged his disciples to follow Jesus instead of himself (Jn 1:35–37).

John was arrested by Herod Antipas after John had condemned Herod for marrying Herodias, the former wife of Philip, Herod’s own brother. Though Herod took an interest in John, Herodias plotted John’s death. Herod eventually had John beheaded (Mk 6:17–28).

APPLICATION ✚ John’s prophetic task was to prepare the way for Jesus. Crowds of people, from the most pious to the most sinful, came to hear John speak. Rather than enjoying the fame and trying to amass crowds and honor for himself, John always pointed away from himself and toward Christ. John is an example for how each believer should live and a model and guide for Christian leadership. Our lives should be focused on bringing others to Christ. John spoke God’s message shamelessly, even to the point of his own death. May we also be unashamed of the gospel (Ro 1:16).