



# GENESIS

## INTRODUCTION

### *Author*

**T**HOUGH THE BOOK OF GENESIS IS anonymous (no author is listed), ancient Jewish and Christian traditions held that Moses authored the first five books of the Bible—referred to as the *Pentateuch* (“five vessels”) or the *Torah* (a Hebrew word for “law” or “instruction”). That Moses stood behind these five books is attested to in both the Old and the New Testaments (see Neh 8:1; Mark 12:26).

Assuming Mosaic authorship does not prevent us from accepting that others would have provided some editorial additions later—for example, the details of Moses’s death in Deuteronomy 34:5-12 and the mention of the city Dan in Genesis 14:14, which would not have been named until the time of the judges (see Judg 18:29). Thus, though many critical scholars today reject Mosaic authorship, we have good reason to accept the biblical tradition that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. For Genesis in particular, Moses probably used written sources and put them together to form this book.

### *Historical Background*

Genesis covers the lengthy period from the creation of the heavens and the earth (1:1) to the death of Joseph, the son of Jacob, in Egypt (50:26). It includes an account of the origin of humankind and another of the origin of the nation of Israel. The rest of the Bible is dependent on the history and

theology of Genesis. It is foundational for all that follows. Here we have the creation of the universe, man and woman made in the image of God, the mandate for humans to rule the earth, the first marriage, Satan’s opposition to humanity, the fall of humanity into sin, God’s promise to defeat Satan through the seed of the woman, Noah and the flood, the tower of Babylon, God’s covenant with Abraham, the faith of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, the introduction to the twelve sons of Jacob (that is, Israel), the story of Joseph, and more.

### *Message and Purpose*

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It is critical because it sets the stage for the rest of Scripture. The best way to understand Genesis is through its personalities, beginning with the first couple: Adam and Eve. God gave his dominion covenant to humankind, to rule on God’s behalf on earth as a reflection of his dominion over all. This set the stage for the fall, when Adam and Eve sinned against God, bringing earth under the temporary control of Satan. But the episode recording the entrance of sin is also embedded with the prophecy of a Redeemer (3:15)—Jesus Christ who will defeat Satan and restore God’s kingdom rule over all.

In the meantime Genesis records the angelic conflict being waged on earth to such an extent that God destroyed the earth with a flood and began again with Noah

to establish his kingdom rule—for Genesis introduces us to a kingdom concept. The world after the flood also rebelled against God at Babylon, and God judged the people for trying to establish unity without him.

Then God called one man, Abraham, through whom he would reestablish his kingdom regime. Beginning with chapter 12, Genesis traces the history of Abraham and his family as God lays the foundation of his kingdom through the nation of Israel.



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### *Outline*

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  - D. The Blessings of Jacob and the Promises of God (48:1–50:26)



# GENESIS

## I. FROM ADAM TO ABRAHAM (1:1–11:9)

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### ➤ A. Creation, Marriage, and the Fall into Sin (1:1–5:32) ◀

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**1:1** The Bible is not the only religious book that talks about the origins of the universe. It is, however, the most audacious. Most ancient creation accounts chronicle a struggle between good and evil forces, with the earth popping up as a sort of accidental by-product of struggle. In these other accounts, the gods who created the world did so out of some prior material. The gods crafted, but they could not truly create.

The creation story in Scripture is altogether different: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** What we see here is creation *ex nihilo*—that is, out of nothing. God did not need raw material to make his universe. He creates by divine decree. With a mere word he made everything—both spiritual and physical. This establishes that God existed before time and space and, therefore, exists in the realm outside of both.

**1:2** The Hebrew phrase translated **formless and empty** connotes a desolate, uninhabitable place. Why would the author describe God's new universe like this? Some believe God intended to show us his progressive approach through creation. The following verses certainly do show God using a process.

But it seems that something else has happened between verses 1 and 2, because disorder and darkness do not reflect the character of God. Someone else arrived on the scene, and his name is Satan. We get few details

of Satan's fall in this chapter (Ezek 28 and Isa 14 provide more), but it appears that his rebellion plunged the earth into darkness (see Luke 10:18). Fortunately for humanity, even when Satan is active, God has a plan to save. **The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters**, ready to bring order out of chaos.

**1:3-5** The creation story is arranged according to seven days, although God takes the seventh day off. (If anyone deserved the break, he did.) On day one, God began by creating light, then separating that light from the darkness. Based on the apostle John's testimony (see John 1:1-2), we know that the word that God spoke here is actually Jesus Christ. Even as early as Genesis 1, the eternal Son of God was seeking to re-create and restore his planet. His illuminating light dispels the darkness and reveals the plan of God to blinded eyes.

God also established, from the very beginning, his authority over the created world. He made the light, but he also *named* it: **God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night"** (1:5). By naming the parts of his creation, God expressed sovereign rule over them. Even the concept of light, which is fundamental to our created world, only exists because God, the King, daily sustains it.

**1:6-8** On day two, God began to separate the sky from the earth. He placed some **water above the expanse** (1:7), which will later be the basis of rain and our earthly water cycle. God created the atmosphere of our planet so that life here is possible.

**1:9-13** On the third day, God **gathered into one place** (1:9) all of the water, essentially pulling the land up to create the continents. He then created vegetation, **according to . . . kinds** (1:12), showing that God has an order and plan to everything. As with the previous days, God gave names to these new creations, establishing his rule and reign over them. He also recognized that these things were **good** (1:10, 12)—a common refrain throughout this first chapter. Even though humanity wasn't even on the scene of this story yet, and the world was still in need of restoration, God's word boldly declared, "What I am doing in this world is both powerful and *good*."

**1:14-19** Day four confuses many: here God created the **lights in the expanse of the sky** (1:14)—the sun and moon and stars—but just a few verses earlier, on day one, God had created light and darkness. So what was emanating light for the first three days? God himself was (see Rev 22:5). On day four, God handed over that responsibility to a group of celestial representatives, so that they would **provide light on the earth** (1:17) and **serve as signs for seasons and for days and years** (1:14). This too he declared **good** (1:18).

**1:20-23** God filled the sky and the seas on day five. Just as he populated the ground with plants (1:11-13), he also made birds and fish **according to their kinds** (1:21). What is unique here is that he blessed them with a commission to **be fruitful, multiply, and fill the . . . earth** (1:22). God created a built-in desire and capacity for his creation to reproduce.

**1:24-25** Day six is the last day of God's creative week, and he made land animals after the same pattern of the plants, birds, and fish. The creatures were made **according to their kinds** (1:24), and their very existence was **good** (1:25). The threefold taxonomy of animals here reflects the Jewish way of categorizing animals. You find **livestock** (1:24), domesticated animals like cows, sheep, and goats. Then there are **creatures that crawl** (1:24), or the tiny things we would generally call insects, rodents, and lizards. All the rest are **wildlife of the earth** (1:24). Those wildlife, by the way, would include the creatures we call dinosaurs.

**1:26-30** The end of day six breaks the pattern. Until this point, God had simply spoken and the created world sprang into being. But here God demonstrated his creative genius with his crowning achievement: **Let us make man in our image**, visibly mirroring God's spiritual nature, **according to our likeness**, visibly mirroring God's functional actions (1:26). "Let us" is a hint at the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit agreed together to make the first human family, and that family was supposed to reflect truths about God. Like the Trinity, humanity has unity in diversity. **God . . . created him** [that is, humans] **in the image of God** (1:27), so every human reflects the unity of God. But he also **created them male and female** (1:27), so our differences reflect the diversity of the Trinity too, since we were designed to mirror the Creator. This also lays the groundwork for upholding the importance of heterosexual marriage as the foundation of the family in fulfilling God's kingdom agenda in history.

We humans are to rule the world on God's behalf, and we are to reproduce for his glory (1:28). The more we image-bearers reproduce and fill the earth, the more his image goes out. Just as God handed over responsibility to the sun, so that it would shine *for God*, God handed over responsibility to us, so that we would govern and rule and steward his world *for him*. This is God's world, but he's put it in our hands and said, "Let them rule."

Notably, God's promise of blessing followed man's fulfillment of this dominion mandate. Thus, failure to do so robs mankind of the experience of God's favor. We must also note that while man was given the authority to rule over creation, that didn't include ruling over other people.

**1:31** For the first time in this chapter, God declared his world not merely good, but **very good indeed**. Humanity reflected the beauty and complexity of God like no other part of creation could.

**2:1-3** Most take days off because we get tired and need a break. Not God. He **rested on the seventh day** (2:2), not because he was weary, but because he wanted to provide us a model. If even God, who "does not slumber or sleep" (Ps 121:4), took an entire day off to enjoy the

fruit of his work, we too should take time to stop our labors and focus on him.

**2:4-7** Chapter 1 of Genesis describes creation in broad strokes. In chapter 2, the author decides to zoom in, focusing not on the human race but a specific person—Adam. The word *Adam*, in Hebrew, refers to that which comes from the ground, because **the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground** (2:7). With the introduction of the name “LORD” (Yahweh) with “God” (Elohim) in these verses, God introduced himself relationally to his creation. God made Adam from the same ground that he was to oversee. God also breathed into Adam **the breath of life** (2:7).

This combination is astounding: Adam was, at one and the same time, a piece of dirt and the bearer of God’s own breath. This should keep us from thinking of ourselves either too highly or too lowly. God made us out of the most mundane material imaginable, so we shouldn’t be conceited. But God also infused us with his Spirit, which gives us tremendous value. Like Adam, we are all a fusion of the divine and the dusty.

**2:8-15** God placed Adam in a **garden in Eden** (2:8) and gave him a job. Adam was to **work the garden and watch over it** (2:15). Before Adam had a wife, he had a place to live, a job, and a relationship with the living God. (Real men are defined by God’s calling.)

Adam’s calling was unique, but we can all learn about our calling through Adam’s, because he was not just our shared ancestor; he was also the prototype for all humanity. God asked Adam to work a specific garden, cultivating it, working the ground, and bringing out the hidden potential of all that God had made.

He was also to guard and protect that which was under his responsibility. Since the only threat in existence was Satan, this reinforces the view that Satan’s fall had already occurred. This introduces the angelic conflict and the fact that man was created to demonstrate God’s greater glory to the angelic realm as he managed God’s creation on his behalf (see Ps 8:4-6; Eph 3:10; 6:10-12).

It is the same with us. Each of us has a “garden,” a God-given sphere of responsibility that God has placed within our care. Whether we are working in business, staying at home

caring for children, or serving the Lord professionally in ministry, God wants us to make his global purpose apparent in our local situations. God won’t do the work for you; he wants to do the work with and through you.

**2:16-17** Eve hadn’t made her grand entrance yet, because God had something else to give Adam first—his word. **The LORD God commanded the man** and expected him to obey (2:16). Many men today hate the idea of others telling them what to do. That kind of independence may make someone *feel* like a man, but God measures manhood by a person’s ability to submit to the rule of God. A man hasn’t arrived at biblical manhood if he won’t let God tell him what to do.

The commandment was simple, though it may have struck Adam as odd: **You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil** (2:16-17). Freedom, then, is a divinely ordained right—not a humanly determined one. Biblical freedom is the responsibility and opportunity to choose to maximize one’s calling under God. God gave Adam a tremendous amount of freedom, allowing him to enjoy whatever God provided. But biblical freedom, as opposed to our culture’s ideas of freedom, has healthy limits. The fundamental issue at work in this passage is this: Would man live by divine revelation or human reason? To eat the forbidden fruit meant man would seek right and wrong independently of God. In creating the man first, God was highlighting that he holds men ultimately responsible and accountable for the expansion of his kingdom program (see Gen 3:9; Exod 34:23-24; Rom 5:14-19; 1 Cor 15:21).

Just as the rules in a football game help the players and fans enjoy the game, boundaries in our spiritual walk help us live the way God intended. When we misuse that freedom, the consequences are severe. Just one bite, God warned, and **you will certainly die** (2:17). Ignoring God’s boundaries can feel liberating, but it always ends in death. This is true for individuals, families, and nations.

**2:18** Throughout chapter 1, God kept saying of his creation, “It is good.” Yet when God saw Adam by himself, he responded this way: **It is not good for the man to be alone**. So he

promised to make a **helper corresponding to him**. The Hebrew phrase *ezer kenegdo* means an essential collaborator not a maid. As strong as a man is, no man has it all; he needs someone to make up for his deficiencies, especially since he was minus ribcage. A wife is there to be a man's counterpart, equal to him and adding what he lacks, as she fulfills her biblical role. The moment a man says he doesn't need her, he contradicts God.

**2:19-20** The solution to Adam's isolation was preceded by a parade. After promising to make him a wife, God brought by the animals. Adam, exercising the authority God gave him, **gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal** (2:20). "Bear . . . gorilla . . . elephant . . . anteater," he said. But then he noticed something. For every Mr. Elephant, there was a Mrs. Elephant. Mr. Gorilla had his Mrs. Gorilla. But for Adam, **no helper was found corresponding to him** (2:20). There was a Mr. Adam, but no other half.

**2:21-22** God lovingly addressed Adam's need, putting Adam to sleep and creating a woman out of one of Adam's ribs. The English translations don't usually make it clear, but the word used for God creating the woman is much different than the one used for making Adam (2:7). God formed Adam, but he *fashioned* Eve. When God made man, he took some dirt and threw it together; when he made woman, he took his time.

Not only did God fashion the woman, but he also brought Adam and Eve together. He **brought her to the man** (2:22), as if playing matchmaker. Just like Adam, Eve had a relationship with God before she had a relationship with her husband. (Women who place their hands in God's hand can trust him to place them in the hands of the right men.)

**2:23-25** When their marriage took place, Adam broke out into a little song. The Hebrew poem here, **This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh** (2:23) is—I think—Adam's way of saying, "That's what I'm talking about!" And Adam—*ish* in Hebrew—gives his wife his name. **This one will be called "woman"** (2:23), he says, the Hebrew word for "woman" being *isha*. Together, **they become one flesh** (2:24), which is to say they share a unity of

purpose while retaining their uniqueness as individuals. This is a pattern for all married couples. As Jesus would later say about this passage, "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:9). In a culture characterized by abandoned mothers, easy divorce, and broken homes, God offers a better way. And the man is to lead in accepting the responsibility for leaving and cleaving.

**3:1** The text doesn't say it here directly, but **the serpent** that showed up to tempt Adam and Eve was the devil, Satan, in disguise. He approached **the woman** on purpose, because he knew that Eve did not hear the command of God firsthand; only Adam did. Adam was supposed to lead his family by making sure that both he and Eve knew God's commands and walked in them. The serpent sought to reverse the divinely ordained roles in the family by bypassing the man and appealing to the woman. This is a reminder that role reversal leads to chaos.

Importantly, Satan omitted God's relational name *LORD* (Yahweh) when speaking with Eve. This indicates that he doesn't mind religion as long as there's no relationship with the Lord God driving it. Notice Satan's tactics. There was only one restriction that God gave, but that's the only restriction the devil wanted to discuss. Not only that, but he also intentionally misrepresented God, implying that God had commanded, **You can't eat from any tree in the garden**. One of Satan's oldest lies, as alluring today as it was then, is this: *God is holding out on you*. Thus, Satan questioned the goodness of God.

**3:2-3** Eve answered the initial attack well enough, pointing out that God allowed them to **eat the fruit from the trees in the garden** (3:2), but that they should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would die (3:3). Adam had emphasized to Eve that she was not even to touch it (3:3).

**3:4-5** Satan became bolder here, revealing two more of his classic lies. The first is that sin carries no consequences. **You will not die**, he told Eve (3:4). Every one of us has felt that lie, since it's at the heartbeat of every act of sin. God tells us not to cross a line—because the consequences are disastrous—and we pretend like he's all talk. The second lie



# MATTHEW

## INTRODUCTION

### *Author*

**A**LTHOUGH THE AUTHOR DIDN'T identify himself by name in the text, the title of this Gospel includes the name "Matthew" in the earliest existing manuscripts. In addition, several early church fathers (including Papias, Irenaeus, and Origen) attributed authorship to Matthew. Papias also said that Matthew originally wrote the Gospel in Hebrew (what we have today is in Greek).

Many critical scholars today deny that Matthew is the author. They claim that the Greek Matthew that we have does not look like it was translated from Hebrew. If Papias was wrong about that, they argue, he was probably wrong about who wrote it. But there are other scholars who think Matthew could be a Greek translation from Hebrew. Regardless, it wouldn't necessarily mean Papias was wrong about authorship. The early church unanimously claimed that the apostle Matthew penned the Gospel that bears his name.

There is also internal evidence to support this—that is, evidence within the Gospel itself. Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 call the tax collector who became a disciple "Levi." In Matthew 9:9-13, this man is named "Matthew." Also, in 10:3, the apostle Matthew is identified as a tax collector, and it may be that he had two names like Simon / Peter.

Though we can't be absolutely certain, it is best to trust the testimony of the early church and affirm that Matthew wrote this Gospel.

### *Background*

Most—though not all—scholars today think that Matthew used Mark's Gospel as one of his sources when composing his own Gospel. If this is true, Matthew must have been written after Mark. It is likely that Mark's Gospel was written sometime in the 50s (see Background discussion on Mark's Gospel). Matthew, then, could have been written any time beginning in the mid to late 50s. The church father Irenaeus, who wrote in the late second century, claimed that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Paul and Peter were preaching in Rome. This would have been in the early 60s.

### *Message and Purpose*

Matthew was a tax collector, which means he was unpopular. He left everything to follow Jesus after he concluded that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew was authorized to write the Gospel that bears his name, and its subject is very simple: it's about the King and his kingdom. Matthew was introducing, especially to Jews, the message that God has sent his King, his Messiah, who would rule as his regent on earth by offering the kingdom to his people. In this sense Matthew is the culmination of all the Old Testament's anticipation of the Messiah who would come.

The apostle's concern was giving convincing proof that Jesus was the messianic King whom the Jews were anticipating and whom the world needs so desperately. That's why

he began with Jesus's genealogy to establish his lineage through David. Matthew also presented Jesus's kingdom discourses, teaching, and miracles as proof of his messianic claim.

The book winds to a disquieting moment, the crucifixion. If Jesus is the Messiah, how could he be put to death? Thankfully, the scene is followed by the resurrection and the announcement that the King is alive and coming back, and that his kingdom is in this world today. Jesus's Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel (28:18-20) means that the book of Matthew is relevant for us as believers today.



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### *Outline*

- I.** Genealogy, Birth, and Childhood (1:1–2:23)
- II.** Baptism, Temptation, and the Start of Ministry (3:1–4:25)
- III.** The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)
- IV.** Healings and Miracles (8:1–9:38)
- V.** Sending Out the Twelve (10:1–42)
- VI.** Confusion and Opposition (11:1–12:50)
- VII.** Parables about the Kingdom (13:1–58)
- VIII.** Spreading Ministry and Growing Opposition (14:1–17:27)
- IX.** Greatness, Restoration, and Forgiveness (18:1–35)
- X.** Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem (19:1–20:34)
- XI.** Ministry in Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)
- XII.** The Olivet Discourse (24:1–25:46)
- XIII.** Suffering, Crucifixion, and Death (26:1–27:66)
- XIV.** Resurrection and Great Commission (28:1–20)



# MATTHEW

## I. GENEALOGY, BIRTH, AND CHILDHOOD (1:1–2:23)

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**1:1** The apostle Matthew opens his Gospel account with a **genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham**. Many people tend to skip over this record and the one in Luke, but that's a mistake. These genealogies demonstrate that Jesus had a legitimate legal claim to be the Messiah—the Son of David and heir to the throne (see 2 Sam 7:12-16; Isa 11:1-10). Though Jewish genealogical records would be destroyed in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, Jesus's genealogy was supernaturally preserved in the Gospels.

**1:2-17** Matthew's genealogy reaches back to **Abraham** (1:2) and proceeds through **King David** (1:6) to reach Jesus's assumed father, **Joseph** (1:16). There's a problem, though, with **Jeconiah** (1:11)—also known as Jehoiah-chin and Coniah (see 1 Chr 3:16; 2 Chr 36:8-9; and Jer 22:24). According to Jeremiah, Jeconiah would not have a biological descendent sitting on David's throne because of his own sins (Jer 22:30).

So, although Joseph had a legal right to the throne, because of Jeremiah's prophecy, it would never happen biologically. Thus, Matthew makes it clear that Joseph is not Jesus's *biological* father but his *adoptive* father, who was **the husband of Mary** (1:16). Interestingly, Luke provides Jesus's genealogy through her (Luke 3:23-38). This shows that Jesus is related to David biologically through David's son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Therefore, he's related to David on both sides of the family tree. And because his biological relationship is through Nathan

and not through Jeconiah, he can sit on the throne.

Notice that Jesus's genealogy is filled with imperfect people. **Jacob** (1:2) was a deceiver. **David** (1:6) committed adultery and murder. **Solomon** (1:7) took an abundance of wives and concubines. **Manasseh** (1:10) was one of Judah's most wicked kings. Moreover, and while women do not normally show up in genealogies, the women in Jesus's line were particularly questionable. **Tamar** (1:3) was a Canaanite who posed as a prostitute. **Rahab** was a prostitute; **Ruth** was from Moab, a non-Israelite people that worshiped false gods (1:5). Another observation about Jesus's genealogy is that it is mixed racially, including both Jews and Gentiles and indicating that Jesus's kingdom identity and rule includes all races of people.

All of this points to God's sovereign grace. He accomplishes his glorious purposes in spite of difficult circumstances and the character of the people involved. If he can use the people listed in 1:2-16 to bring the Christ into the world, God can surely use you too.

Notice also that of the five women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy, four are of Hamitic descent: Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth. That doesn't mean that Jesus was black. To assert such, as some black theologians and religious leaders do, is to fall into the exclusionist perspective of many whites, who would make Jesus an Anglo-European, blue-eyed blond with little relevance to people of color. It would also fail to respect the distinct Jewish heritage of Christ. Jesus was a person of mixed ancestry.

It blesses me to know that Jesus had black in his blood because this destroys any perception of black inferiority once and for all. In Christ we find perfect man and sinless Savior. This knowledge frees blacks from an inferiority complex, and at the same time it frees whites from the superiority myth. In Christ, we all have our heritage.

Black people, as all other people, can find a place of historical, cultural, and racial identity in him. As Savior of all mankind, he can relate to all people, in every situation. In him, any person from any background can find comfort, understanding, direction, and affinity—as long as Christ is revered as the Son of God, a designation that transcends every culture and race and one to which all nations of people must pay homage.

**1:18-19** In biblical times, a marriage in the Orient included several stages. The betrothal or engagement period was not like our modern engagements. The engagement of **Joseph and Mary** was a legal contract, as binding as marriage. So when Joseph **discovered** that **Mary was pregnant**, he **decided to divorce her secretly**. He was a **righteous man** and thought she had committed adultery, but he didn't want to **disgrace her publicly** (1:19).

**1:20** Before Joseph could carry out his plans, though, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**. Angels are divine messengers, and one of the ways they carry out their role in Scripture is by faithfully delivering God's message to humans. This angel told Joseph to take Mary for his **wife** because the child **conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit**.

God has created laws (such as the law of gravity) that govern the universe. When he intervenes in the regular course of events, interrupts those laws, and demonstrates his power over creation, a *miracle* takes place. This would be the most unique birth in history because Mary had never been touched by a man. A virgin would miraculously give birth because of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Even so, this miracle involved more, for hers wasn't just any baby. The greatest miracle in human history occurred when God became man. The eternal Son of God took on

human flesh, combining full deity and full humanity in one person. Jesus Christ is the God-man.

**1:21-23** They were to call their son **Jesus**, a Greek name corresponding to the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "the Lord saves." Thus, according to the angel, the child's name was to indicate the reason he had come into the world—that is, **he will save his people from their sins** (1:21).

Matthew doesn't want his readers to think these are unexpected events; instead, they are a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (1:22). Mary was part of a plan that God had been orchestrating for centuries. Long before, Isaiah had prophesied, **The virgin will . . . give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel**. And Immanuel, Matthew tells us, means, **God is with us** (1:23). That is the essence of Christmas. The baby in the manger was God himself in the person of his Son. He was deity in a diaper. Heaven was coming down to earth; eternity was invading time. The King of the universe had come to be with us (see John 1:14) and save sinners (Matt 1:21).

All the problems in this world can be traced back to sin, and the Son of God came to save you from your sins because you couldn't save yourself. Jesus Christ entered the world to identify our sins, forgive us for our sins, give us victory over our sins, and give us an eternal home free from sin. That truth is what Christmas is all about. If you miss that, you've missed the point.

**1:24-25** When Joseph awoke, he did as the **angel had commanded him** (1:24). Again, he was a righteous man (1:19). So, when he understood what God was doing, he complied in full obedience. He **did not have sexual relations with Mary until she gave birth**: Jesus was to be born of a virgin (1:25).

**2:1-2** After **Jesus was born in Bethlehem . . . wise men** arrived. There are two common misconceptions to clear up about these visitors. First, according to legend, there were three wise men. However, we only know that they brought three specific gifts (2:11). We don't know how many men there were.

Second, contrary to how the scene is often portrayed, the wise men weren't present at the nativity. They weren't there for Jesus's birth. By the time they arrived, Joseph and Mary were living in a house (2:11). In addition, as we'll see, Herod sought to kill all the male children two years old and younger (2:16); therefore, Jesus was a toddler when the wise men saw him, not a baby.

Matthew tells us their origin was from the east (2:1)—perhaps Babylonia or Persia. They were looking for the **king of the Jews**, had seen **his star**, and had come to **worship him** (2:2). The Greek term for these men is *magi*. They were astrologers—students of the heavenly bodies. Whatever religious practices they'd engaged in previously, when they saw the manifestation of God's glory in the heavens, they responded and traveled to worship the true King.

**2:3-8** They entered **Jerusalem** (the obvious place to find a king) and went to the palace of **King Herod**, also known as Herod the Great. Herod wasn't a Jew. He was an Idumean whom the Romans had made a ruler of the Jews. So when he heard what the wise men had to say, **he was deeply disturbed** (2:3). As far as he was concerned, there was no room for any king but him.

Herod asked the **chief priests and scribes** to tell him **where the Christ would be born** (2:4). And while these leaders clearly knew the Scriptures, they never pursued the Savior (see John 5:39-40). They didn't act on what they studied. Nevertheless, when Herod learned that Scripture foretold that the Messiah would be born in **Bethlehem** (2:5-6; see Mic 5:2), he **secretly summoned the wise men** (2:7). He told them he also desired to **worship** and asked them to **search carefully for the child and report back** (2:8). But Herod had ulterior motives. He wasn't about to let anyone take away his kingdom.

**2:9-11** The wise men continued their search, following the **star** until it **stopped above the place where the child was** (2:9). Whereas Herod was deeply distressed over the news of a new king, the wise men **were overwhelmed with joy** to see him (2:10). They fell on **their knees** before the child

and gave him gifts of **gold, frankincense, and myrrh** (2:11).

True worship can't be contained. These men had traveled an incredible distance for perhaps as long as two years to worship this King, but they knew he was worth the journey. How much are you willing to be inconvenienced to worship the King of kings? How badly do you want him?

**2:12-13** Since they had faithfully sought the Savior, the wise men received inside information. They were **warned in a dream** about **Herod** and **returned home by another route** (2:12). Joseph also—since he had obeyed the Lord's word (1:24-25)—received further information and understanding. **An angel** warned him to **flee to Egypt** with Mary and Jesus for safety from **Herod** (2:13). When you obey God's revelation you get further divine illumination for your destination.

**2:14-15** Joseph **took the child and his mother** and **escaped to Egypt** where they'd be safe until Herod died (2:14). Matthew tells his readers that this was to fulfill **what was spoken by the Lord** through the prophet Hosea: **Out of Egypt I called my Son** (2:15).

In his prophecy, Hosea was talking about Israel, whom God called his son and delivered from Egypt (see Hos 11:1), but Matthew understood that Israel was a type of God's Son who was yet to come. A *type* is a historical person, institution, or event that pre-figures a future corresponding reality. Thus, as God called his son Israel out of Egypt, so he would call his true Son out of Egypt. Matthew knew that many Old Testament texts point forward to Jesus.

**2:16-18** **When he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men**, Herod displayed his true, murderous colors. He ordered the massacre of **all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under**. He used the information **learned from the wise men**—which they had learned by divine illumination—to slaughter innocent children (2:16). Matthew recognized this as another fulfillment of prophecy—this time from **Jeremiah** (2:17). Here too there is a connection between Israel and their Messiah. As Israel wept in

Jeremiah's day for their children in exile (see Jer 31:15-16), so they wept again in Matthew's day for their children who were persecuted in connection to Jesus.

**2:19-22** After Herod's death, God once again communicated to **Joseph** in a **dream** to **take the child and his mother** back to **Israel** (2:19-21). When Joseph heard that **Archelaus**, Herod's son, **was ruling over Judea** in his father's place, **he was afraid to go to there**. But God addressed his fears and sent him to **Galilee** (2:22).

**2:23** There the family settled in the town of **Nazareth** and thus it was fulfilled that Jesus **would be called a Nazarene**. Actually, though, such a statement is not found in any of the Old Testament prophets. So likely Matthew was thinking of statements like Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised and rejected by men" (see also Ps 22:6; Isa 49:7), because Nazareth was viewed as a despised community from which no good thing could come (see John 1:46). God sovereignly wove his plan in history to bring the Messiah into the world.

## II. BAPTISM, TEMPTATION, AND THE START OF MINISTRY (3:1-4:25)

**3:1-3** All four Gospels testify to the ministry of **John the Baptist** (3:1). He was the front man for Jesus, the one who came to prepare his way. John came **preaching in the wilderness of Judea** and calling people to **repent** (3:1-2). Here Matthew quotes Isaiah who prophesied that this **voice . . . in the wilderness** would come to **prepare the way for the Lord** (3:3).

The wilderness (then and now) is not a place of comfort and excitement. It's a barren place of preparation and development for what God is planning to do. John preached a revival in the wilderness, essentially telling the people, "The Messiah is coming, so you'd better get ready!" *Repentance* is essential for experiencing the presence and grace of God. It involves changing the mind in order to reverse direction. It is the inner resolve and determination to turn from sin and turn to God. So what's the motivation for repenting? **The kingdom of heaven has come near** (3:2). John wanted people to know that the King had arrived, and his promised earthly kingdom was ready to burst on the scene. Heaven had come to visit earth.

**3:4-6** John's austere lifestyle, odd wardrobe, and confrontational preaching were reminiscent of another of God's messengers: Elijah (see, for example, 2 Kgs 1:3-17). As the **people from Jerusalem and Judea** heard John's message, they **were baptized by him** and confessed **their sins** (3:5-6). To

confess means to agree with. So by confessing their sins and being baptized, the people were making a public declaration that they had changed their minds and agreed with what God said about their sins. If you want to experience heaven's visitation in your history, true repentance can get you there.

**3:7-10** The Jewish religious leaders, **the Pharisees and Sadducees**, also came to hear John. But they got an earful when he called them a bunch of venomous snakes (3:7)! Why did John accept other people but not this group? Because, although they were OK with listening to his message, they wanted their lives left alone. Like some people today, they didn't mind attending a church service as long as it didn't affect how they were running their own affairs. They wanted information, but not transformation. That's why John challenged them to **produce fruit consistent with repentance** (3:8).

Genuine repentance is confirmed by actions. When I travel, I tell the airline agent, "I'm Tony Evans, and I have a reservation." The agent then asks, "Can I see your proof of identification?" They don't want mere communication that I am who I claim to be; they want authentication. Therefore, they want to see something that verifies what I affirm. Similarly, shouting, "Hallelujah! Amen! Praise the Lord!" is fine but insufficient. Repentance shows up in your hands and feet,