**The Gospel of Matthew**

**“The gospel was a message before it became a book.”**

– Eugene M. Boring (New Interpreters Bible Commentary)

This Bible study will explore the message of the Gospel of Matthew with the goal that each participant will be able to articulate the message as they hear it by the end of the six week study.

Commentaries used: [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org) -James Boyce – Professor of New Testament and Greek (Luther Seminary),

New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Eugene M. Boring, Volume VIII, “Matthew: A Commentary”, F.D. Bruener

**Introduction:**

**Who wrote the Gospel of Matthew?** Traditionally it was assumed that the author was Matthew the Tax Collector, one of Jesus’ Disciples. Matthew is the 1st Gospel in the New Testament and is the most commonly referenced in early Christian writings because of this relationship. Matthew the tax collector may have contributed but knowing the real author of the book is more complex.

(Matthew the tax collector as author) This very late sketchy tradition preserved by Eusebius, writing in the fourth century C.E., cannot fit with a text that is clearly Greek and with a later dating necessary to fit an awareness of the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. From the way in which Matthew adapts and supplements the Gospel of Mark, he would seem to have been a Greek-speaking Christian, a "teacher" steeped in Jewish Scriptures and tradition, living in an urban center like Antioch of Syria, who seeks to interpret the message of Jesus the Messiah for a new community in conflict with its neighbors over its relation to a Judaism in transition.

**Source Criticism**

There may be a lost "sayings of Jesus" document known as Q, from the German *Quelle*, "source". (There were likely several source documents present in various communities).

An analysis of each of the synoptic gospels shows that there are stories and phrases so similar that the writers must have had source documents to borrow from as they created their gospel messages.

Why does this matter? Knowing that there were various sources is a good reminder that Matthew is being intentional about telling a story or conveying a particular message. This is different than the typical assumption that gospel writers were unbiased historical scribes charged with exactly recording the entire ministry of Jesus.

**When was the Gospel of Matthew written?** Probably between 80 and 100 C.E. (after Mark which was around 70 C.E)

**SO WHAT? (from EntertheBible.org)**

Matthew's Gospel is important for its distinctive and grand conception of the God who comes to claim and call a people in Jesus the Messiah. The promise of God's presence frames and interprets the whole story of Jesus the Messiah. It thus calls to discipleship and faithful and confident following, shaping a new community that is constituted and lives by the forgiveness of God. The Sermon on the Mount proclaims to Jesus' disciples the blessing of God for a people who are salt and light for the world. This is a people who experience the surprising message of the kingdom as being like treasure hidden in a field and who in the joy of discovery go and sell everything to acquire such a treasure. Such a people are surprised to find a God who desires mercy and not sacrifice, and so calls them to live responsibly here and now in the meantime as a new community empowered by the living presence of God's Messiah, to live in the promise of mutual forgiveness. Matthew adds numerous parables of Jesus that help the disciple reader to imagine this new life; to see what it means to live as ones who are often "weary and are carrying heavy burdens," but who are called to experience the promise of rest from a savior who is "gentle and humble in heart" (11:28-30); and then to live as ones who trust in that mercy and lavish it just as freely on those they are called to serve (see 25:31-46; 28:18-20).

**Themes in Matthew:**

**Discipleship.** Discipleship is a key theme of Matthew's Gospel (the Greek root occurs seventy-five times in the Gospel). At the beginning of his ministry Jesus calls disciples who "follow" him immediately. Jesus' five major discourses in Matthew are addressed to and define true discipleship (5:1-7:29; 10:1-42; 13:1-53; 18:1-35; 24:1-25:46). In contrast to Mark's narrative, Matthew's disciples "understand" the teaching of Jesus (compare for example Matthew's adaption of Mark 8:21 in Matthew 16:12; see also 13:51). At the end of the Gospel Jesus commissions these disciples to go in his name and make disciples of all nations (28:18-20; see also 13:52).

**Faith.** Faith, along with righteousness, is a key mark of discipleship in the kingdom. In 17:20 Jesus criticizes the "little faith" of the disciples and promises that if they have faith even as small as a mustard seed "nothing will be impossible" for them. Twice, in stories symbolic of his disciple community, the stilling of the storm (8:23-27) and Peter's walking on water (14:22-33), Matthew modifies stories to make them explicitly focus on the issue of faith. In both instances and elsewhere he uniquely speaks not of the disciples' lack of faith, but of their "little faith" (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). In the story of the Canaanite woman's faith, Matthew has completely reworked the story to focus on the faith of the woman in contrast to the disciples. Only here-in fact, only here in the whole New Testament-Jesus remarks upon the "great faith" of this foreigner in response to which her daughter is immediately healed (15:28).

**"God with us" (Emmanuel).**The promise of God's abiding presence with God's people frames the whole Gospel and so is in many ways its central message. The promise of the angel at Jesus' birth is that in Jesus, Messiah and Savior, God is Emmanuel, a promise that the author is careful to emphasize by asserting it as a fulfillment of scripture and by translating it for the hearers of the gospel (1:23). At the end of the Gospel, Jesus claims all authority, and sends his disciples out in mission with the promise that he will be "with them" until the end of the age (28:18-20). The abiding presence of Jesus is suggested in his call to the weary to come to him and find rest (11:28-30). In his treatment of the stories of the stilling of the storm and Jesus' walking on the water (8:23-27; 14:22-33) we see a kind of parable of the disciple community with its promise of Jesus' saving presence even amid the storms of life.

**The kingdom of heaven.**The understanding of the "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew regularly avoids the name of God) is central to Matthew's story. John the Baptist comes preaching, calling for repentance, "for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (3:2). Jesus' preaching imitates that call (4:17). In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus interprets discipleship and God's blessings in terms of kingdom talk (5:3, 10, 19, 20). The disciples in turn are sent out in mission with the same message of the kingdom (10:7). In his parable chapter (chapter 13) Matthew offers his distinctive picture of the kingdom including his unique images of the treasure hidden in a field or the precious pearl. Finally, Matthew adds a number of other unique parables, alike in their presentation of images of the nature of the kingdom, for example, the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23-35), the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16), or the three parables of waiting before the end time in chapter 25.

**Righteousness.**Jesus tells the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount that righteousness (or justice; the same Greek word underlies both) and the kingdom of God belong together as the goal of faithful discipleship (6:33). In Matthew's opening story, the only thing we hear about Joseph is that he is "righteous" (1:19). Then we get a glimpse of what that righteousness looks like in one who risks disobedience to the law and the tradition in order to be obedient to the leading and promise of God. Such obedient righteousness is the central theme of Jesus' Sermon (5:6, 10). It comes as a sign of God's blessing and is marked by a congruence of hearing and doing that exceeds the example of the scribes and Pharisees (5:17-20; 6:1; 7:24-27). The new righteous ones of Matthew's community have been blessed to see the surprising treasure of the kingdom (13:17, 43) and now live in the meantime in an unselfconscious exercise of love on behalf of the neighbor (25:37, 46).

Other themes described at enterthebible.org are: Angels, Authority, Baptism, Bearing Fruit, Blessing, Church, Creation, Dreams, End Times, First and Last, Forgiveness, Fulfillment, Judgment, Law, Mercy, Messiah, Mission, Obedience, Offense, Peter, Repentance, Salt & Light, Savior, Star, Teaching, & Wisdom. (find notes on these at enterthebible.org)

**Bible Study: The Gospel of Matthew – Chapters 1 & 2**

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy. **Read 1:1-17 to yourself.**

What do you notice? Who is Matthew intentionally connecting to Jesus? What do you know about the women mentioned? What is God’s role in this story?

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Note the differences from Luke’s Genealogy

**Luke 3:23-38**  23  Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, … 38 son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

What story does Matthew want to tell?

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**Read Matthew 1:18-25**

What should Joseph do, follow the law or do what is right (righteous)? How can this be a struggle today?

How does Jesus enter the royal lineage? See verse 20 and verse 25

The name Jesus (Iesous) which is Greek for the Hebrew name Yeshua which is short for Yehosua (Joshua). Think back to the Old Testament, Joshua was the successor to Moses’ leadership. What implications could this mean for Jesus?

* **Matthew 5:17-18**  17 ¶ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Joshua means “Yahweh helps/saves”.

Emmanuel bookends the Gospel of Matthew: Emmanuel means God is with us. Jesus final words of the book are: **Matthew 28:20**  And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Read Matthew 2: 1-12**

Where are Mary and Joseph from, according to Matthew?

What are your conceptions of the visitors?

How does Matthew demonstrate Jesus’ Royalty in this story?

**Read Matthew 2: 13-23**

 What does this story tell us of the character of Herod? What does the story reveal about God?

 Where did Joseph and Mary go? Where did they ultimately settle?

What story is Matthew trying to tell in these initial chapters? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_