

MATTHEW

MAKING DISCIPLES
FOR THE NATIONS
Volume 1 (Chapters 1–13)
A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON
and DANIEL M. DORIANI

MATTHEW

REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

A Companion Series to the Reformed Expository Commentaries

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING MATTHEW

The four gospels are equally inspired and equally essential for the church. Yet Matthew can be described as the first gospel of the church. For centuries, church leaders believed it to be the first that was written. It also contains the greatest portion of teaching on the Christian life out of any of the gospels and offers the most guidance regarding the use of the Old Testament. It became the best known and most used gospel. Once that happened, scholars note, its status became self-perpetuating.

We often study Matthew a verse or chapter at a time—but Matthew is a complete historical narrative that has a grand purpose. Like the other gospels, Matthew is both a factual account of Jesus’s life and a faith-inviting testimony to the person and work of Jesus. The authors of all four gospels marshaled evidence that Jesus is Son of God and Savior in order that people might believe in him, receive his salvation, and follow him.

In its early chapters, Matthew establishes Jesus’s identity: He is Jesus—which means “God saves”—for he will save his people from their sins (1:1, 21). He is the Christ—the one who was anointed by God for a given task (1:1, 18). He is the son of David—the king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the son of Abraham; he will bring blessing to the nations (1:1, 17; see also Gen. 12:2–3). He is born of a virgin—born of the Holy Spirit (1:18–20). He is Immanuel—God with us (1:23). He is the king of the Jews (2:2), the sinless son of Adam, and the heir of Israel¹ (4:1–11). Eventually, the disciples know that he is “the Christ, the Son of living God” (16:16).

Most Jewish leaders, motivated in part by envy (27:18), thought that

1. For more on Jesus as the new Adam and the one true Israelite, see the accompanying Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Chapters 1–13* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 76–80.

he was dangerous—a lawbreaker who deluded the people—but both the crowds and the disciples accepted Jesus as a prophet, teacher, and healer. Yet he insisted that he is more: the Suffering Servant, the Son of Man who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28; see also vv. 26–27). Thus Jesus foretold his substitutionary death repeatedly (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19), even if the disciples understood and believed only after his resurrection.

After the reader meets him in chapters 1–4 of Matthew, Jesus establishes in chapters 5–7 what it means to be a disciple. He then, in chapters 8–9, verifies the authority of his words through authoritative deeds—his miraculous healings. In chapter 10, after he calls the twelve disciples (or apostles), he sends them out to proclaim the kingdom. The response, as we see in chapters 11–12, is mixed; and Jesus explains in chapter 13 that the kingdom comes in a weak and hidden form, like seed scattered—not like armies marching. After a season when he is largely alone and is training the disciples, in chapters 14–18, Jesus returns to the public eye in chapters 19–20 and, in chapter 21, enters Jerusalem, where he judges the temple. After several days when he teaches in public and in private, in chapters 22–25, the leaders of Israel in chapters 26–27 make use of Judas’s betrayal to arrest, torment, try, and finally kill Jesus, with the cowardly complicity of Rome. This is history’s greatest tragedy and greatest injustice—yet it became God’s greatest victory when Jesus rose from death, in the flesh, on Easter morning, as we see in chapter 28. By his suffering he bore our sins, and by his life we live.

In contrast to the New Testament epistles, no gospel names its **author**. Still, from the first, the church universally testified that Matthew—one of the twelve, an eye- and earwitness of Jesus’s ministry, and a tax collector—wrote the first gospel. Its order and precision fit the idea that it was written by a man who kept orderly records. It is difficult to date Matthew, but evangelical scholars agree that chapter 24 of the book describes the fall of Jerusalem as a future event, meaning that Matthew had to be written before A.D. 70.

The question of the book’s **audience** is weightier than that of its date. While the gospels tell a single story, they differ regarding many of the details they highlight and the secondary goals that each one presents, and these differences offer hints about each author’s purpose. There is a consensus that

in some sense Matthew wrote for Jews. Clearly the readers who would most easily understand Matthew are Jewish readers. Of the four gospels, Matthew makes the most references to Jewish customs and regulations, touching on Sabbath regulations, divorce, ceremonial washing, fasting, taxes, phylacteries, tombs, and more. He also quotes the Old Testament six times in the first few chapters, to induce readers to see Jesus's life in terms of Israel's history and prophecies. Matthew even phrases Jesus's language for Jewish readers. For example, he generally says "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God," since observant Jews tried to avoid using God's name. Matthew also presents Jesus's life in ways that would appeal to Israelites. So Jesus is the Messiah, and his genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jews, and to David, the king of the Jews. The account of magi coming to worship Jesus fulfills Jewish expectations that the nations would come to Jerusalem. And Jesus often speaks of the law, rightly interpreted, as a means of promoting righteousness (Matt. 5–6, 23)—something that surely appealed to Jews.

Yet Matthew has great interest in Gentiles too. While his genealogy of Jesus (1:1–17) traces back to Abraham, the father of the Jews, it also mentions Gentile women: Rahab and Ruth (v. 5). In the birth narratives that he presents, only Gentiles worship Jesus; while Herod, the scribes, and the people of Jerusalem are hostile or indifferent (2:1–15). Jesus's ministry begins in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15), and he heals people from the Gentile lands (4:17–25). Even within Israel's borders, an early miracle of Jesus benefits a Gentile—a centurion—whom he praises for showing faith that exceeds that which he has found in Israel (8:5–13). Jesus focuses on the lost sheep of Israel (10:5–6), but he also ministers to Gentiles whom he meets (15:21–28).

So it is best to say that Matthew wrote to move Jews to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and to equip believing Jews to take the message of Jesus, the Savior and Lord, to the Gentiles. In his call for Israel to believe, Jesus also warned them of the consequences of unbelief. If they rejected his message, they would be "thrown into the outer darkness" (8:12). If they failed to bear fruit for God, Jesus told them that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (21:43). So the gospel of Matthew urges Israel to receive its Messiah, to bear appropriate fruit, and to share its faith with the nations.

Matthew states his great **purpose** as he concludes. When Jesus

commissioned the disciples to “make disciples of all nations” and to “observe all that [he had] commanded” (28:19–20), he was speaking both to them and to all church generations that were to follow (2 Tim. 2:2). Of the four gospels, Matthew dedicates the most of its space to Jesus’s teaching. That teaching addresses most of the issues that faced his disciples in that age and would go on to face them in every age.

All gospels present two truths: it is hard to be a disciple, and yet anyone can be a disciple. Matthew encourages his reader to identify with the Twelve as they grow in discipleship. Throughout his gospel, he shows Jesus describing the Twelve with the distinct term *oligopistos*, which means “of little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8—see also Luke 12:28). This suggests that they have *some* faith. They may be weak, they may err, but they also grow until the end and become apostles—ones who are ready to hear and implement the Great Commission. When Jesus describes them this way, we read it as a direct address: “*you* of little faith.” Thus Jesus wants *us* to share the experience of the first apostles. *We* should grow from having a little faith to having a strong faith, so that we can make disciples in our generation among both Jews and Gentiles and inspire other generations to come.

Matthew’s orderly mind and zeal for Jesus’s teachings give his gospel a unique double **structure**. It describes Jesus’s life in a series of narrative phases and also intersperses five key discourses throughout the action.

The Origin, Birth, and Identity of Jesus (1:1–2:23)

The Preparation and Early Ministry in Galilee (3:1–4:25)

The First Discourse: Discipleship in Jesus’s Kingdom (5:1–7:29)

The Kingdom’s Growth under Jesus’s Authority (8:1–10:42)

The Second Discourse: The Disciples Follow Jesus into Mission
(10:1–11:1)

The Kingdom’s Growth in the Face of Resistance (11:2–13:58)

The Third Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1–52)

Training the Disciples among Crowds and Leaders

(14:1–20:34)

The Fourth Discourse: Community Life in the Kingdom
(18:1–35)

Conflict and Teaching in Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)

The Fifth Discourse: Trouble, Perseverance, and the Eschaton
 (24:1–25:46)

Death, and Resurrection (26:1–28:20)

Each discourse begins by mentioning an audience for Jesus’s teaching. Each ends with a variation of the phrase “when Jesus had finished saying these things . . .” And each block of teaching fits perfectly within the rest of the gospel story. As crowds flock to Jesus in Matthew 4, he offers the Sermon on the Mount (First Discourse), which describes the thoughts and deeds of a disciple. After he ministers widely and calls the Twelve to join him, he describes their mission and the mindset they must bring to it (Second Discourse). When Jewish society largely rejects Jesus, he explains how his kingdom comes (Third Discourse). After he instructs the disciples, he teaches them how to live in community (Fourth Discourse). As he prepares to die, he describes the future of Israel, the disciples, and mankind (Fifth Discourse). Thus Jesus delivers five discourses, which echo the five books of Moses and guide his disciples who live in Israel, throughout the empire, and beyond—which includes us in the present day. So Matthew both wrote and organized his gospel in order that we may believe, become disciples, and make disciples in turn.

Daniel M. Doriani

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Bible Study series

Author of *Matthew* (REC)

LESSON 1

THE ENTRANCE OF THE KING

Matthew 1:1–2:23

THE BIG PICTURE

In the opening two chapters of his gospel, Matthew introduces us, in his own particular fashion, to Jesus Christ. While Luke’s gospel begins with an introduction, John’s with a theological explanation, and Mark’s with a breathless rush to begin the story, Matthew chooses to begin with a genealogy, as he traces the human lineage of Jesus all the way back to Abraham. Far from merely being a literary convention, this genealogy serves to establish the royal line of the one who truly comes as the Christ, the Messiah, the son of David—the king of the Jews. The opening titles that Matthew gives to Jesus—“Christ”; “son of David”; “son of Abraham”—have massive biblical significance; they point to Jesus as being the Anointed One, the promised ruler, and the blessed descendant of the Jewish patriarchs. His reign will not be a purely political one, however—Matthew’s intentional inclusion of Gentile women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth) in this genealogy points us to the global salvation that King Jesus will bring.

Matthew follows his genealogy with the well-known record of the birth of Jesus Christ—although the only angelic visit he includes is the one that is made to Joseph, when he is assured that he should take Mary as his wife. Matthew’s focus turns quickly to the visit of the “wise men from the east,” who come to Jerusalem following a star and seeking to worship the King of the Jews (2:1; see also vv. 2–12). Their worship of another “king” pushes King Herod into a murderous rage, as he commands that all male children

in the region surrounding Bethlehem be put to death. Joseph and Mary protect Jesus by sojourning in Egypt until the death of Herod, after which they return and settle in the city of Nazareth. Here, in this small town, the true King and Messiah will be raised—the son of a humble carpenter, and yet the one who will bring God’s saving promises to his people.

Read Matthew 1:1–2:23.

GETTING STARTED

1. Why is understanding someone’s “backstory” so important? How do a person’s history, background, and beginnings enable you to better grasp that person’s identity?

2. What would you consider to be the most well-known details and aspects of the story of Jesus’s birth? Why might not all of the gospel writers have included the same parts of the story?

The Hero of Matthew’s Gospel, pg. 5

Matthew tells us who Jesus is. Yet his nature is never separated from his work, for he is the Savior for the nations. Matthew 1:1 introduces us to the hero by stating his name and his origin. He is Jesus the Savior, Christ the anointed, the son of Abraham, hence of both pagan and Jewish lineage, and he is the Son of David, the great king.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. How do the opening titles that Matthew gives to Jesus begin to teach us about his identity (1:1)? Why are these such important titles, with regard to Old Testament history and the expectations of God's Old Testament people?

7. Why might Matthew have chosen to tell the birth story of Jesus by focusing largely on Joseph's experience (1:18–25)? How does the angel identify Joseph, and why is that significant to an understanding of Jesus's human origin (1:20)? What does the angel explain to Joseph about the Holy Spirit, in that same verse, and why is that significant to an understanding of Jesus's divine origin as well?

The Promise of Something Different, pg. 15

Matthew reveals that Jesus is from the *line* of David, but not from the *flesh* of David. The promises to David's line showed that Israel needed a mighty deliverer, a great and fearless king, a warrior to battle foes, and a man who loved God and his people more than life itself. Yet . . . human flesh could not deliver God's people. They needed something different.

8. What is the significance of the name “Immanuel,” which Matthew attaches to Jesus after recording the angel’s words? From where does the prophecy in verse 23 come? What was its original context, and how is Matthew now applying it to Jesus and his birth?

9. How does Matthew intentionally contrast the earnest seeking of the wise men with the murderous envy of King Herod throughout the opening verses of Matthew 2 (vv. 1–12)? What role do the “chief priests and scribes” play in the story, and how would you describe their response to the birth of Jesus (2:4–6)? What is the wise men’s response to seeing Jesus (2:10–11)?

10. What Old Testament prophecy does Matthew intentionally connect to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus’s flight to Egypt (2:15)? What does this suggest about Matthew’s audience—and about what he expects them to know and value?

11. How does Herod’s murderous rage echo the actions of Pharaoh from the opening chapter of Exodus? What do we learn from King Herod about the response of a sinful world to the coming of the Son of God?

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7 when the angel appears to Joseph. Now read Isaiah 9:6–7, which is further Old Testament prophecy about the coming “child” from God. What promises are attached to the coming of this Son of God? How is it evident that Isaiah looks forward to someone who is far greater than any merely human king?
13. Read Revelation 12:1–6. How does this passage describe Satan’s ongoing war against God’s Son and God’s people? In what ways do these early years of Jesus Christ shine a light on the rage, hatred, and murderous malice of the enemies of God?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. In 451, the Council of Chalcedon was convened, with the purpose of clarifying Jesus Christ’s unified nature as the God-man. Central to its purpose was clearly articulating the biblical and orthodox truth that Jesus is, and was, fully God and fully human—without confusion, division, separation, or change. How is this doctrine explained to us, at least in part, through the account of the visit of the angel of the Lord to Joseph? Why is this doctrine so crucial to the Christian faith?

18. How ought the murderous violence that was directed toward Jesus, even from his earliest days, shape our understanding of sin, evil, and Satan? How should we make sense of the ongoing conflict in our world, even as we trust that Jesus Christ will have the ultimate victory over Satan?

PRAYER PROMPT

While you certainly cannot plumb the depths of the mysteries of the virgin birth, the incarnation, and the Satanic opposition to and prophetic fulfillment of the coming of Jesus Christ, your study of these first two chapters of the gospel of Matthew should give you a richer understanding of these cosmic events. Today, as you close your study with prayer, praise God for fulfilling his promises, as well as the expectations that his people held for centuries, by sending his Son to be the great son of David, son of Abraham, Christ, and “Immanuel”—God with us. Thank him for preserving Jesus from early assaults on his life, as well as preserving the church of Jesus amidst the constant Satanic assaults of those who oppose his rule to this day. And ask him for strength, and for faith in his Son, as you live for him in the week ahead.

A Peek behind the Curtain, pg. 46

Matthew 2 shows us what Herod tried to do to the Christ child and how he and his parents escaped. Revelation 12 lets us peek behind the curtain and see the author of history at work. . . . A dragon crouches to devour the child at the moment of his birth. He snaps but misses, for God will preserve him. The Lord is master of history. He will save his people through this child.