

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



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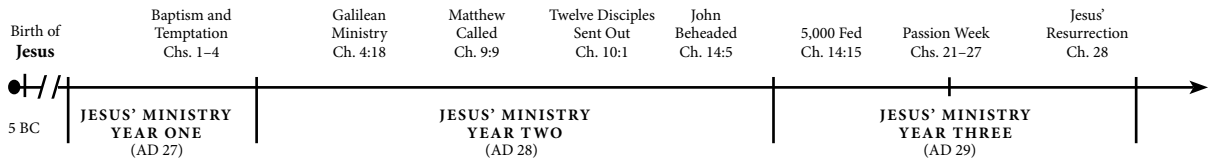
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Behold Your King!



Nearly a century ago, an Englishman named Greene was walking through the woods when he came upon a stranger. He was startled when the stranger smiled and waved at him. “Oh, hello, Mr. Greene!” the man said. Obviously this “stranger” wasn’t a stranger at all—but for the life of him, Mr. Greene couldn’t place him.

Embarrassed, but unwilling to admit to a poor memory for names and faces, Mr. Greene said, “Hello! Good to see you, old boy! How long has it been?”

“Well,” said the other man, “it was at Lady Asquith’s reception last October, wasn’t it? Nearly a year, then.”

Mr. Greene remembered Lady Asquith’s reception, and thought that the gentleman’s face looked familiar, but he just couldn’t place it. Still groping for clues, Greene asked, “And how is your wife?”

“Quite well,” said the other man.

Mr. Greene then added, “And you? Still in the same business, I presume?”

“Oh, yes,” said the other man—George V of the House of Windsor. “I’m still the king of England.”

Mr. Greene, behold your king!

LEFT: Jordan River

That is the message of the gospel of Matthew to you and me: *Behold your King!* Until we have closely examined Jesus’ credentials as the King of creation and Lord of our lives, we will not fully recognize Him in all His glory.

Stamped with the Fingerprints of God

The first book of the New Testament is Matthew. I find that most Christians begin reading at the beginning of the New Testament rather than starting with the Old Testament. Matthew, then, is probably the most widely read book of the Bible. Ernest Renan, the French skeptic, called this book “the most important book of all Christendom.”

The gospel of Matthew, however, has its critics. There are those who claim the book contains nothing but early legends of the church that grew up around Jesus. Some

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

The goal of this chapter is to reveal the unique dimensions of the gospel of Matthew that distinguish it from the other three gospels. Matthew’s gospel is the story of Jesus the King. This chapter shows how the kingly dimension of the Lord’s life and message has a special relevance and application to our lives today.



Wikimedia Commons

Manuscript from New Testament period

claim the book of Matthew was not written until the fourth century AD. Therefore, it is uncertain how much of the book is really true. Other critics claim that Matthew is only one of many gospels that were propagated in the early Christian era.

It is true that other “gospels” were circulated, besides the four in the New Testament. Some were supposedly written by Barnabas, Peter, Thomas, and even Pontius Pilate! In fact, you can find more than a hundred documents known as “the New Testament Apocrypha,” consisting of fanciful gospels, epistles, and prophecies (the word apocryphal originally meant “hidden,” but it has also come to mean “of doubtful authenticity”). When you read these texts, you can almost always sense that they are absurd, far-fetched, and do not belong in the accepted canon of Scripture. Many of them were written by adherents of the Gnostic heresy that was rampant in the early Christian era.

Some critics say it is by mere chance that

our four gospels survived and were chosen as part of the New Testament. One legend began with a German theologian named Pappas in about the sixteenth century; he claimed that the Gospels were selected at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 by gathering together all the gospels in circulation at that time, throwing them under a table, then reaching in and pulling out Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John!

The foolishness of this claim is evident to anyone who reads the Gospels with thoughtfulness and care, as these four books bear the fingerprints of God. The very pattern of these books reflects the divine imprint, and you cannot read them or compare them with the Old Testament without seeing that they come from an inspired source.

The Author and Date of Matthew

Matthew, otherwise known as Levi, wrote the gospel of Matthew and was a tax collector before becoming a follower of Christ. His name means “the gift of God,” and was probably given to him after his conversion. Perhaps it was a name given him by our Lord Himself, just as Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter. Scholars believe that Matthew lived and taught in Palestine for fifteen years after the crucifixion, then began to travel as a missionary, first to Ethiopia and then to Macedonia, Syria, and Persia. Some historians believe that he died a natural death in either Ethiopia or Macedonia, but this is not certain.

Matthew was obviously written at a very early date—almost certainly from the early half of the first century. It is quoted, for instance, in the well-known *Didache*, the teaching of the twelve apostles that dates from early in the second century. Papias, a

disciple of the apostle John, says, “Matthew composed his gospel in the Hebrew tongue, and each one interprets it as he is able.” Irenaeus and Origen, two early church fathers well acquainted with the gospel of Matthew, confirm Papias’ statement.

Even in the first century we have Jewish voices that prove the early existence of Matthew. Gamaliel the Second, a prominent rabbi, and his sister, Immashalom (which, incidentally, means “woman of peace,” though she wasn’t) pronounced a curse upon Christians as “readers of the evangelistic scriptures.” Since the only evangelistic Scriptures extant in their day (about AD 45 or 50) were the gospel of Matthew and perhaps the gospel of Mark, the date of writing of this gospel would have to be about AD 45 or 50.

The Structure of Matthew

The Holy Spirit Himself has given the outline of the gospel of Matthew, as He does in several other books of Scripture. The major divisions of Matthew are marked by the repetition of a particular phrase that appears twice and divides the book into three sections. First, there is an introductory section, the coming of the king, chapters 1 to 4. Then, in chapter 4, the phrase “from that time on” marks the beginning of the second section:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (4:17).

When we get to chapter 16, we’ll see the same phrase, “from that time on,” introducing the third section of the book:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (16:21).

That is the first mention of the crucifixion in Matthew. From this point forward, the cross becomes (literally) the crux of the book.

There are also subdivisions in Matthew, which are marked off by the phrase “when [or, “after”] Jesus had finished.” The first is found in 7:28–29, at the close of the Sermon on the Mount: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

In 11:1, another subdivision is indicated: “After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.”

Then, in 13:53–54, another subdivision is indicated: “When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked.”

Finally, in 19:1–2, another subdivision is indicated: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.”

Notice that each of these subsections introduces a complete change of direction in the Lord’s ministry and in the direction of

the book. These mark the divisions of the gospel of Matthew.

The Genealogy of the King

Because Matthew is the gospel of the King, the first division of the book (Matt. 1:1–4:16) concerns the King's preparation for ministry and His genealogy.

The ancestry of a king is very important given that his right of kingship is based on his royal lineage. So Matthew opens with an exhaustive genealogy, tracing the ancestry of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph, His stepfather or adoptive father, who was the husband of Mary. Our Lord gets His royal right to the throne from Joseph and His hereditary right through Mary, his genetic mother, who was also of the royal line of David.

The first two chapters of Matthew establish Jesus' earthly connection—His royal lineage and human birth. These chapters anchor Him in human history, in time and space. In the third chapter, His baptism establishes His heavenly credentials and authority. Here we read about the heavens opening and God the Father declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son. At that moment, the royal line of Jesus is established not according to a human bloodline but according to a heavenly standard. Jesus is King by right of being the Son of the Creator-King of the universe.

The Testing of Jesus in His Humanity

In Matthew 4, we witness the testing of the King in the wilderness, where He was tempted by the powers of darkness. Hungry, weary, and alone, Jesus was led by the Spirit to a place where hell is loosed upon Him, and where Satan himself is permitted to take his best shot. The testing of our Lord is the

key to the gospel of Matthew. He is tested as a representative of the human race. He goes into the wilderness as the Son of Man and is tested as to whether or not He can fulfill God's intention for humanity. Humans are made up of body, soul, and spirit, and Jesus is tested in the wilderness on each of these three levels.

First, Jesus was tested on the level of the body's demands. The dominant passion of the body is self-preservation. Our Lord's first temptation came on that most basic level. Would He continue to be God's person, even when faced by an extreme challenge to His very life? For forty days and nights He had not eaten, and then: "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread' " (4:3). But He steadfastly remained in the Father's will despite His great hunger and need.

Next, Jesus was tested on the level of the soul—that is, through the dominant passion of the soul, which is self-expression. On this level, we all desire to reveal our egos, to show what we can do, to express ourselves. This is the primary drive of the human soul. It was during this testing that our Lord was taken up to the top of the temple and given the opportunity to cast Himself down and be rescued by the angels, thus capturing the acclaim of Israel. Such temptation plays upon the urge for status, for manifesting the pride of life. But Jesus proved Himself true to God despite the pressure that came to Him in that way.

Finally, Jesus was tested in the deepest, most essential part of His humanity—the spirit. The dominant passion of the human spirit is to worship. The spirit is always looking for something to worship. That's why

human beings are essentially religious beings; the spirit in them is craving, is crying out for an idol, a hero, something or someone to worship:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him (4:8–11).

So Jesus passed the threefold test. He revealed Himself to be fully human as God intended humanity to be.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins to put this same test to the people of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God had chosen Israel to be His channel of communication with humanity. In return, the people of Israel regarded themselves as God’s favored people. Now the nation is put to the test that Jesus Himself had passed.

This is the essence of Matthew’s gospel. He traces for us the way God’s Son came into the world, offered Himself as King of Israel—first on the level of the physical, then on the level of the soul. When He was rejected on both these levels, He passed into the realm of the mystery of the human spirit. In the darkness and mystery of the cross, He accomplished the redeeming work that would restore human beings to their Creator—body, soul, and spirit.

Redemption, therefore, begins with the spirit. The work of Christ in our own lives does not really change us until it has reached the

level of our spirits, the source of our worship. We may be attracted to Christ on the level of the body, because He supplies our physical need for safety, shelter, and daily sustenance. Or we may be attracted to Him on the level of the soul, because He satisfies our need for affirmation, self-esteem, and self-expression.

But if our relationship with Christ does not penetrate to the deep recesses of the spirit, we have not truly been changed by His life. We must be wholly committed to Him—body, soul, and spirit.

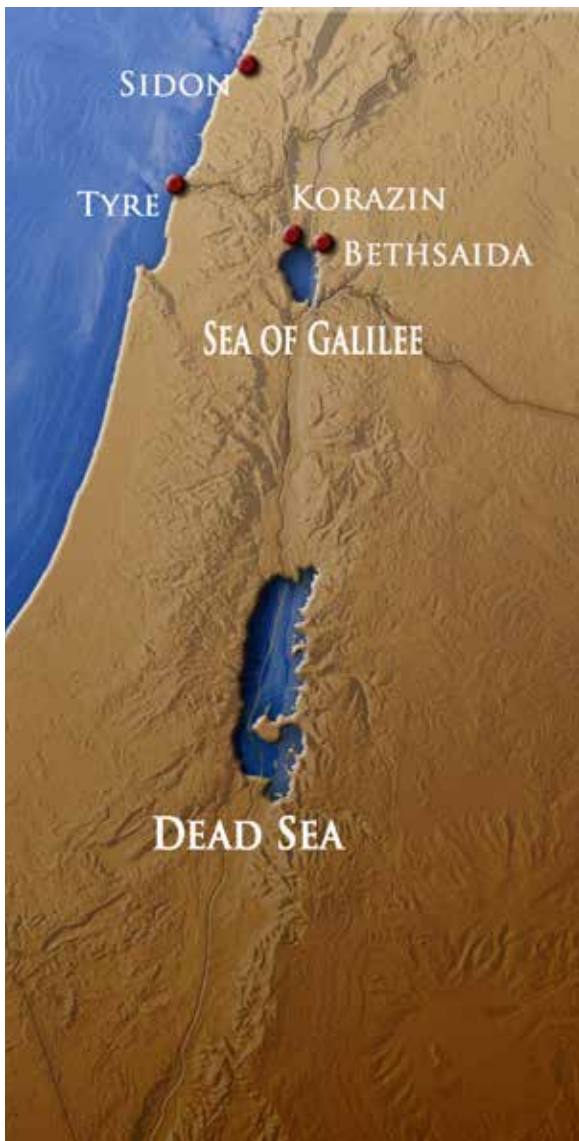
Jesus Is Tested in the Physical Realm

Jesus’ ministry begins, as we saw in Matthew 4:17, with the words, “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’” Then follows the Sermon on the Mount, where we have the presentation of the King and the laws of the kingdom. This covers the rest of chapter 4 through chapter 7.

The rules for kingdom living, laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, is one of the most penetrating messages ever delivered, and confronts us at the level of our ordinary, physical lives. Two physical sins are dealt with: murder and adultery. The life of God is illustrated for us in the realm of giving alms and of fasting: physical acts. We see God as One who cares for us in such a way that we do not need to think of tomorrow—how to be fed or how to be clothed, the worries that come to us on the physical level. Instead of worrying about food or drink, Jesus says, “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [physical] things will be given to you as well” (6:33). Our Lord is saying, in effect, “I am the answer to all your physical

needs.” He first offers Himself to the nation—and to us—on this level.

The Sermon on the Mount is followed by a section on miracles, and in chapters 8 through 12, we witness the physical miracles of the kingdom. These miracles are illustrations of the benefits our Lord bestows on the level of the physical life. This is not just



a demonstration of Hollywood-style special effects. In fact, it’s amazing how unspectacular these miracles are. There is no display of lights, fire, or sound effects—just a simple, dignified demonstration of our Lord’s power over all forces that affect the body: demons, disease, and death. His authority in this realm is kingly, sovereign, and supreme.

Following the miracles comes a section containing several parables of the kingdom, where the rejection of the kingdom is declared in mystery form. It’s clear that the nation is going to reject our Lord’s offer of Himself as King on this physical level, so a new word appears: woe. In chapter 11, Jesus declares, “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” Woe to those who have not believed. Judgment is pronounced upon the nation on the physical level.

The mysteries of the kingdom are found in chapter 13, where the parables are given with truth embedded within symbols—the parable of the sower and the seeds, the parable of the wheat and the weeds (or “tares”), the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast, and the parable of the great catch of fish. This entire section—Matthew 13:54 through 16:20—has to do with bread. There is the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 14; the questions about what defiles a person in chapter 15; the incident of the Canaanite woman who came and asked Jesus to heal her daughter, comparing her request to begging for crumbs from His table; the feeding of the four thousand in chapter 15; and the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees in chapter 16.

Finally, in 16:13–20, we encounter the revelation of our Lord’s person to Peter at that wonderful moment when Peter is given the

first insight into the true nature of his Friend, Jesus:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (16:16-17).

At this point, our Lord's message takes a significant turn. Here is the transition point where Jesus moves beyond the physical level of our humanity and begins to penetrate to the depths of the human soul.

Israel Is Tested in the Realm of the Soul

Israel's testing in the physical realm was composed of a narrative passage detailing Jesus' ministry, followed by several parables. The next section is structured the same way—a narrative of the Lord's ministry followed by His parables.

Beginning with 16:21, we see the second ministry of our Lord to the nation, this time offering Himself to Israel on the level of the soul. His first revelation (16:21-18:35) was to the disciples only, for they were to be the nucleus of the coming church. Here we encounter the transfiguration and the first intimation of His death.

Next come the parables of the King, which are first addressed to the disciples and then to the nation. Each parable presents Jesus as the King who has the right to not only command, but judge the character of others. Were the disciples willing to follow Him? Were they willing to obey Him? Were they willing to let Him mold and shape their character?

In Matthew 18, the Lord gives instruction on how to get along with others, how to love each other, forgive each other, and reconcile

with each other. It's a masterpiece of practical instruction for everyday living and healthy relationships. If we would faithfully practice the principles of Matthew 18 in the church, the world would be transformed by our example.

In Matthew 19, Jesus teaches about marriage, divorce, sexual ethics and morality, promise keeping, and truthfulness. Again, His instruction is aimed at our souls—and if we would keep His teaching, we would change the world.

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!" wrote the prophet Zechariah. "Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). The prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled in the triumphal entry when our Lord entered the city of Jerusalem in exactly the manner described by the prophet. Matthew 21 presents the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Triumph soon gives way to judgment, however, as the Lord enters the city and pronounces His judgment on the sins of the nation. He strides into the temple, halts the offerings, and drives out the corrupt money changers.

In Matthew 23 you hear the word woe pronounced with a rhythm like the lash of a whip: Verse 13—"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Verse 15—"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Verse 16—"Woe to you, blind guides!" Verse 23—"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" The same phrase continues to ring out in verses 25, 27 and 29.

Chapters 24 and 25 contain a famous section of instruction known as the Olivet Discourse. This discourse contains the Lord's instructions to the believing remnant on what to do until He returns. It reveals how world history is going to shape up, what will happen in the intervening years, what forces will be loosed upon the earth, and how the trial of those days will shake and test God's own people. The Lord declares that God's people can stand only in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in chapters 26 through 28, we see the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Willingly, Jesus steps into the valley of the shadow of death. There, alone and forsaken by His friends, He enters into a struggle with the powers of darkness. In the mystery of the cross, He lays hold of the forces that have mastered the human spirit and shatters them. Though Matthew presents Jesus as King, the only crown He ever wears in His earthly life is a crown of thorns; His only throne is a bloody cross; His only scepter is a broken reed.

Israel Is Tested in the Realm of the Spirit

Following the crucifixion is an event so astounding that it represents a complete historical break from everything that has gone before: The resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus rose from the dead, He transcended the realm of the physical and the realm of the soul. He broke through into the realm of the human spirit. The spirit is the key to the mastery of life.

By means of the cross and the resurrection, our Lord made it possible to pass into the very Holy of Holies of our humanity—the spirit—so that God could make His dwelling place

within us. The great message of the gospel, then, is that God is not out there, but in us. He is ready and waiting to make His dwelling place in the center of a hungry, thirsty person's heart, and pour out His blessing, character, and being into that life. When the King is enthroned in a human life, the kingdom of God is present on earth.

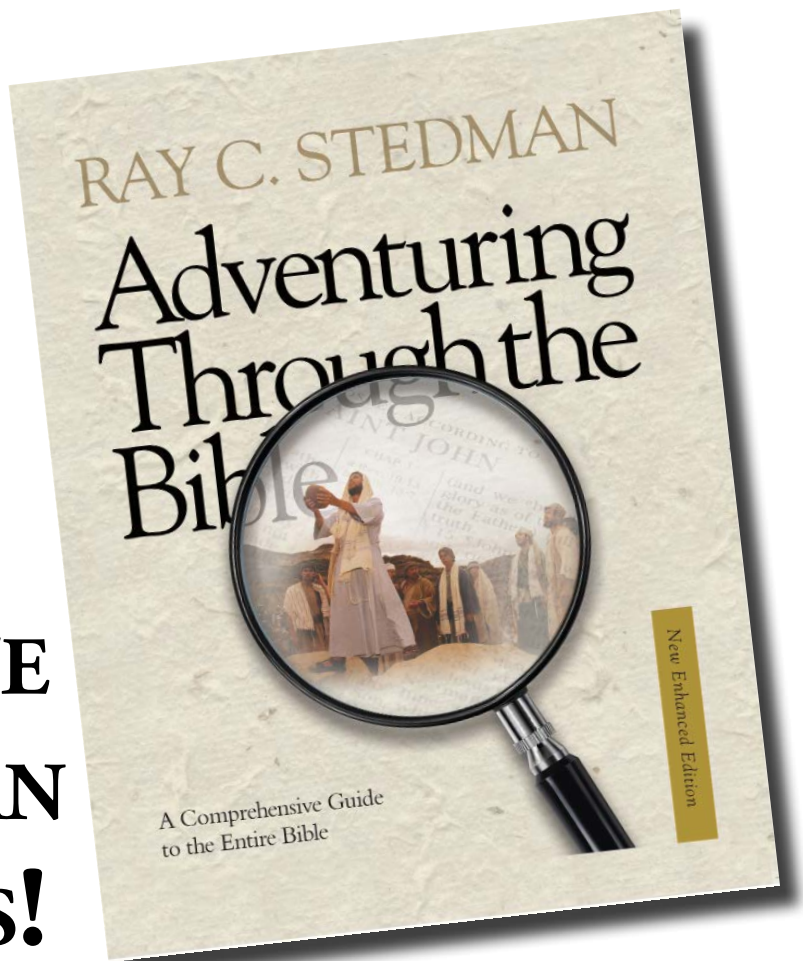
This is the central message of the book of Matthew: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heaven is not someplace out in space; it is here among us, invisible yet real in the lives of those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior. Where the King is, there is the kingdom. If King Jesus is enthroned in the heart, then the kingdom of God has come.

The gospel of Matthew challenges us with the most crucial and personal question facing every human being: "Is Jesus Christ king of your life?" A king is more than a savior; a king is a sovereign. King Jesus demands every corner of our lives. If we have only received Jesus as the Savior of our physical beings or the Savior of our souls, then we have not yet made Him king. He must invade and conquer every square inch of our lives, even the deep places of the spirit.

Has Jesus penetrated your spirit and mastered your heart? Until you meet Him and receive Him as King, you have not truly met Jesus.

May we respond in obedience to the message of Matthew. May we behold our King and let Him reign in our lives. May we cast out the throne of our own ego, self-will, and pride, and replace it with the glorious throne of Jesus, the cross of Calvary. Then His rule in our lives will be complete—body, soul, and spirit.

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