

Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew: The Arrival of the King

We stand at the threshold of the New Testament as we begin our exploration of the Gospel of Matthew. It is the first of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—which are seamlessly followed by the Book of Acts. Together, these five books form the structural foundation of the New Testament, mirroring the five books of the Torah (Moses) that open the Old Testament.

To truly understand Matthew, we must first ask a foundational question: *Is the Old Testament complete?*

When we speak of the biblical "canon," we refer to the collection of writings recognized as the inspired Word of God—our standard for truth. In a very real sense, the Old Testament closes with a profound sense of incompleteness. It leaves the reader with four unresolved dilemmas:

- **Unexplained Ceremonies:** The complex sacrificial system and the annual feasts are commanded in meticulous detail, yet their ultimate purpose remains cloaked in shadow. They point beyond themselves to a future reality.
- **Unachieved Purposes:** God established massive, unconditional covenants with Abraham and David regarding a land, a seed, and an everlasting kingdom that were never fully realized in the Old Testament era.
- **Unappeased Longings:** The poetic and wisdom literature—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes—cries out with a deep, existential ache. The human heart is left waiting for something, or Someone, more.
- **Unfulfilled Prophecies:** Hundreds of specific promises made by God through the prophets remained entirely unaccomplished when the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures closed.

The key to resolving all four dilemmas is not a philosophical system or a religious code. The key is a Person: Jesus Christ.

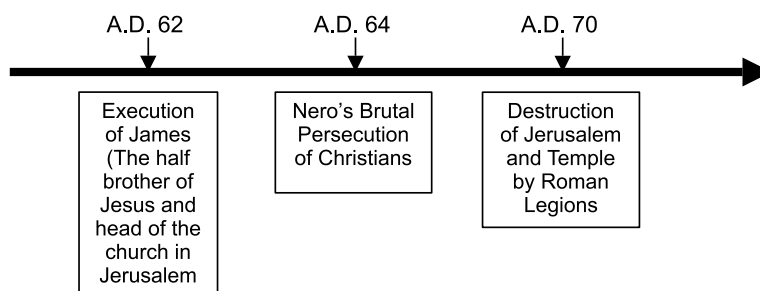
Every page of the Old Testament points toward Him. Following His resurrection, the very first thing Jesus did to comfort His dejected disciples was conduct a seven-mile Bible study on the road to Emmaus. Luke records that *"beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Luke 24:27).

Because most readers naturally begin their New Testament reading here, Matthew is arguably the most widely read book in human history. Even the 19th-century French skeptic Ernest Renan conceded that this Gospel is *"the most important book of all Christendom."*

The Eyewitness Generation

While the Old Testament was compiled over thousands of years, the New Testament was written entirely within a single generation. The original manuscripts (*autographs*) were produced and circulated while eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were still actively alive. This acted as a massive historical safeguard against myth or distortion; these documents were written under the critical eyes of people who knew exactly what had happened.

Furthermore, internal clues suggest the New Testament was completed remarkably early. The text is entirely silent regarding three titanic historical events of the first century:



Although Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem decades in advance, no New Testament writer reports these cataclysms as accomplished history. This profound silence strongly supports the reality that the bulk of the New Testament—including Matthew—was penned in the early half of the first century.

The Magdalen Papyrus

This early dating is powerfully backed by physical evidence. In 1901, three small papyrus fragments of Matthew 26 were acquired in Luxor, Egypt, and donated to Magdalen College in Oxford, England, where they sat largely ignored in a display case.

Decades later, using advanced laser scanning microscopes to analyze the ink strokes and handwriting styles, the prominent papyrologist Carsten Peter Thiede identified the fragments as dating to approximately A.D. 60. The Magdalen Papyrus (*P64*) represents a first-generation copy of the Gospel, written well within the lifetime of the apostles, confirming that the accounts we read today are the exact historical testimonies recorded by the eyewitnesses.

Matthew the Tax Collector

The author of this Gospel is Matthew, also known in Scripture as Levi. Before he dropped everything to follow Christ, Matthew was a Jewish tax collector (*publican*) working for the occupying Roman government. In the ancient world, tax collectors were despised as traitorous extortionists.

His name means "The Gift of God"—a name likely given to him by Jesus after his conversion, much like Simon was renamed Peter. After the resurrection, church history records that Matthew taught in the region of Judea for fifteen years before embarking on missionary journeys to Ethiopia, Macedonia, Syria, and Persia.

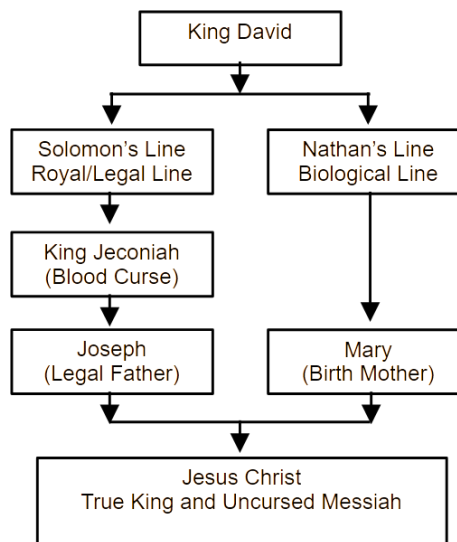
Matthew writes primarily as a Jew to Jews, with the singular objective of proving that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of David. This is why Matthew features around sixty explicit quotations from the Old Testament. He is the only Gospel writer who systematically deploys the formula:

This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet...

The Royal Lineage and the Blood Curse

Matthew opens his book with a genealogy. While modern readers often skip genealogies, Matthew's opening chapter contains brilliant legal and historical masterstrokes.

Matthew traces the royal line from Abraham down through King Solomon to Joseph, the legal (but not biological) father of Jesus. Conversely, Luke (writing to a Gentile audience) traces Jesus' biological lineage backward from Mary through David's other son, Nathan, all the way to Adam.



This dual genealogy solves a massive prophetic dilemma found in Jeremiah 22:30. There, God pronounced a terrifying blood curse on the wicked Judean King Jeconiah (Coniah), declaring that *no physical descendant of his line would ever prosper sitting on the throne of David*.

This created an apparent paradox: The Messiah *must* inherit the legal right to David's throne through the royal Solomon line, yet if He was a biological descendant of that line, He would be barred from reigning by God's own decree.

God solved this elegantly through the Virgin Birth:

1. Jesus was adopted by Joseph, granting Him full legal rights to the throne of David through Solomon's line.
2. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, He carried no biological DNA from Joseph or Jeconiah.
3. His physical bloodline came through Mary, a direct descendant of David via Nathan, a line completely untouched by the curse of Jeconiah.

The virgin birth is not merely a heartwarming Christmas sentiment; it is a strict legal and prophetic necessity to qualify Jesus as the King of Israel. To underscore this, Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 from the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Old Testament compiled by Jewish scholars three centuries before Christ), which explicitly uses the unambiguous Greek word for "virgin" (*parthenos*), proving how ancient Jewish scholars themselves understood the prophecy.

The Hidden Masterpiece: Divine Autographs

The Bible boasts an incredibly intricate, integrated design. One of the most astonishing signatures of divine authorship embedded within the text is its heptadic (sevenfold) structure.

In the original Greek text of Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:1–11), the vocabulary is arranged in highly complex mathematical patterns based on the number seven. This phenomenon was uncovered by the Russian-born scholar Dr. Ivan Panin, who dedicated fifty years of his life to meticulously analyzing the numerical structure of Scripture before the advent of computers.

Consider the mathematical rules operating beneath the surface of Matthew 1:1-11:

- The number of words in the passage is exactly divisible by **7**.
- The number of letters in those words is exactly divisible by **7**.
- The number of vowels and the number of consonants are each exactly divisible by **7**.
- The number of words beginning with a vowel is divisible by **7**.
- The number of words that appear more than once is divisible by **7**.
- The number of nouns, the number of proper names, and the number of generations are each independently divisible by **7**.

In highly inflected languages like Greek, where changing a single letter alters the numerical value of the word, crafting a meaningful historical narrative that adheres to dozens of overlapping mathematical conditions is humanly impossible. Yet, this "fingerprint" is found not only here, but across the entire New Testament. It is a supernatural authentication code indicating that while human hands held the pens, a single Mind outside our time domain directed the text.

The Divine Architecture of Matthew

The Holy Spirit has neatly outlined the Gospel of Matthew using specific structural markers. The entire book is divided into three major movements, separated by the exact repetition of the transition phrase: *"From that time on Jesus began to..."*

MOVEMENT I: THE ADVENT OF THE KING (Chapters 1:1 - 4:16)
<i>"From that time on Jesus began to preach..."</i> (4:17)
MOVEMENT II: THE MINISTRY OF THE KING (Chapters 4:17 - 16:20)
<i>"From that time on Jesus began to explain..."</i> (16:21)
<i>MOVEMENT III: THE SACRIFICE OF THE KING (Chapters 16:21 - 28:20)</i>

Within these three grand movements are five distinct teaching discourses, each concluding with the phrase, *"When Jesus had finished saying these things..."* (found in 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, and 26:1).

Every time this phrase appears, the narrative pivots, shifting the direction of Christ's earthly ministry toward its ultimate goal: the cross of Calvary.

The Ultimate Challenge

The programmatic message of Matthew is clear: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

The Kingdom of Heaven is not a distant locality out in deep space; it is an active reality that is present wherever the Sovereign rules. Where the King is, there the Kingdom is also. If King Jesus is genuinely enthroned in your heart, then the Kingdom of God has arrived in your life.

This leaves us with the single most vital question of human existence: Is Jesus Christ the King of your life?

The king is far more than a savior; the king is an absolute sovereign. Jesus does not seek to merely be the Savior of your soul while leaving you in control of your daily choices. He demands every corner of your life—your ambitions, your finances, your relationships, and the deep, hidden spaces of your heart. Until you submit to Him as Sovereign, you have not fully encountered the Jesus of Matthew.

May we cast out the throne of our own ego, self-will, and pride, and yield entirely to Jesus, our coming King.