

TIM CHESTER
MATTHEW
FOR YOU

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COMPANY

Matthew For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centred
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Matthew For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **grey** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary toward the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

Bible translations used:

- NIV: New International Version, 2011 edition (this is the version being quoted unless otherwise stated)
- ESV: English Standard Version

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW

Matthew's **Gospel** tells the story of Jesus—Immanuel, God with us, Israel's **Messiah** and the hope of all nations. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, this is the story of your Saviour-King. Matthew's Gospel is something of a training manual to show you how you can and should live within this wonderful story.

Jesus Is the Fulfilment of the Scriptures

"Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the **kingdom of heaven** is like the owner of a house who brings out of his store-room new treasures as well as old." So says Jesus in Matthew 13:52. It's a saying only Matthew includes, and it's likely that he saw it as a description of himself. Matthew is a teacher of the law who has become a disciple of Jesus (or a disciple who has become a teacher of the law). And his Gospel brings new treasures out from the store-house of Scripture. In other words, Matthew shows how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament. In one sense, then, his message is old: the story he tells has been centuries in the making. But in another sense his message is new, for the story has now reached its denouement. Of course the other Gospel-writers also see Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, but Matthew goes out of his way to spotlight these links. For example, seven times in the opening chapters, he says something along the lines of "This took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet" before citing a passage from the Old Testament (1:22; 2:5, 15, 17-18, 23; 3:3; 4:13-16).

Matthew's concern to be a teacher of the law is also reflected in the amount of the teaching of Jesus that he includes. Matthew often trims down stories by leaving out details that Mark and Luke cover and instead includes teaching that Mark and Luke leave out.

This focus on teaching is also reflected in the structure of the

* Words in **grey** are defined in the Glossary (page 227).

Gospel. Matthew has a phrase which he uses five times to divide up his Gospel into sections:

- "When Jesus had finished saying these things..." (7:28-29)
- "After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples..." (11:1)
- "When Jesus had finished these parables..." (13:53)
- "When Jesus had finished saying these things..." (19:1)
- "When Jesus had finished saying all these things..." (26:1-2)

These phrases create five blocks of teaching which weave in and out of the story:

Matthew 1 – 2 Beginnings

Matthew 3 – 4 Narrative

Matthew 5 – 7 Teaching #1

"When Jesus had finished saying these things" (7:28-29)

Matthew 8 – 9 Narrative

Matthew 10 Teaching #2

"After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples" (11:1)

Matthew 11 – 12 Narrative

Matthew 13 Teaching #3

"When Jesus had finished these parables" (13:53)

Matthew 14 – 17 Narrative

Matthew 18 Teaching #4

"When Jesus had finished saying these things" (19:1)

Matthew 19 – 23 Narrative

Matthew 24 – 25 Teaching #5

"When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (26:1-2)

Matthew 26 – 28 Climax

The word “law” in the phrase “teacher of the law” was used by Jews to represent the Scriptures as a whole, but it particularly referred to the Torah: the first five books of the Bible (what we sometimes call “the Pentateuch”). So it’s been suggested that Matthew designed his Gospel to be a new Torah made up of five “books”. We can’t be sure of this. Yes, chapter 1 presents the birth of Jesus as a new **Genesis** while chapters 2 – 4 echo the story of the **Exodus**. But it’s not possible convincingly to then link each teaching section to the five books in the Pentateuch.

What is clear is that Matthew has a particular concern for the teaching of Jesus and therefore for the training of disciples. It is fitting that the climax of his Gospel is Christ’s call to “make disciples of all nations” by “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (28:19-20).

This leads us to a second distinctive feature of Matthew’s Gospel...

Jesus Is the Hope of the Nations

It’s widely thought that in the first instance Matthew wrote for Jewish believers or maybe Jewish seekers—that maybe one reason for his concern to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Yet despite this, Matthew is concerned throughout his Gospel to portray Jesus as the Saviour of all nations. Early in the Gospel the **Gentile** Magi come to worship the infant Jesus, and at the end of the Gospel the **apostles** are sent to disciple the nations (2:1-12; 28:18-20). In between there are stories of Gentiles coming to Jesus; indeed, twice Jesus specifically commends the faith of Gentiles (8:10; 15:28). Jesus fulfils both the promise to **Abraham** that God will bless all nations and the promise to **Isaiah** that a Servant will come in whose name the nations will put their hope (Matthew 1:1; 12:17-21).

Ironically, Mark and Luke may have felt less need to present Jesus as the Saviour of Gentiles because their readers were Gentiles, and so knew this truth first-hand! But Matthew encourages his perhaps

hesitant **Judean** believers to support the church's global mission. He may even have been countering people like the **Judaizers**, who tried to undermine Paul's **evangelism** among Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2). "Because of this Gospel's familiarity with the Jewish world of its day," concludes Reggie Kidd, "the scholarly consensus is that Matthew is written to a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian community, one that is grappling with Israel's mission to the nations through Jesus the Messiah" (*A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 31).

Jesus Is Immanuel, God with Us

At the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew calls Jesus "Immanuel", "God with us" (1:23). Mark and Luke let the evidence for the divinity of Jesus gradually build. But Matthew is explicit about this claim throughout his Gospel. When Jesus walks on water, for example, only Matthew describes the disciples declaring, "Truly you are the Son of God" (14:33).

Alongside this focus on the divinity of Jesus is a focus on the response of humanity. So Matthew repeatedly describes people worshipping Jesus (2:2, 11; 8:2-3; 9:18, 25; 14:32-33; 15:22, 25, 28; 18:26; 20:20; 28:8-10, 17, which is sometimes translated "knelt before"). The gospel begins and ends with worship (2:2, 11; 28:17).

So Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. That was true during his life on the earth; and it continues to be true, for in the final words of the Gospel, Jesus says, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:20).

Jesus Is the Head of the Church

Matthew includes more teaching on the church than the other Gospels, including...

- Christ's promise to build his church (16:18).
- the giving of "the keys" to the disciples (v 19; 18:18).
- the need for mercy within his new community (v 12-35).

Only Matthew describes the church as "the light of the world", a community whose distinctive life reveals God to the lost (5:14-16). Indeed, the famous Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 – 7 can be seen (as we'll see) as a renewed law of God for a renewed people of God. Matthew portrays the embryonic church as a community of "little ones". We only enter the kingdom of heaven if we come like little children, and we're not to despise the lowly and least among us (18:1-10). Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, and sometimes he is with us in "the least of these" (10:40-42; 18:5; 25:45).

Jesus Is Our Saviour and King

I've spotlighted some of the distinctive features of Matthew's presentation of Jesus, by pointing out how his version of the story differs from those of Mark and Luke. But the similarities are far more significant. In common with the other Gospel writers, Matthew presents Jesus as our Saviour and King. His miracles show him to be God's King with the authority to establish God's kingdom and to be God's Saviour with the power to save God's people. Yet, ultimately, Jesus proves to be the King who saves by dying in our place and rising again to give us life.

1. IMMANUEL FULFILLS GOD'S WORD

Imagine turning on your television at random to find you're watching the end of a crime drama. The detective has caught the culprit. This is the key point in the story—the moment when everything is revealed. The problem is that you don't really understand what you're seeing because you've only just tuned in. It's like this if you tune in to Jesus with the account of his birth. This is the key moment in the Bible story—the moment that makes everything clear. But if you start at this point, then you're going to struggle to understand what's going on. So Matthew packs his account of the Nativity with references to the Old Testament, to help us catch up with the story so far.

This is why Matthew begins with a **genealogy (1:1*)**. Books are supposed to begin with a bang—something to grab the reader's attention. This does not seem like much of a bang! But Matthew knows what he's doing. This list of names is like the contents page of the Old Testament. For Matthew's Jewish readers, it would have evoked a succession of stories, all of which are about to converge on Mary's child.

Matthew orders this list in a particular way. In case you didn't spot it, he highlights it in **verse 17**: "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah". Indeed Matthew only makes the numbers work by leaving a few people out.

* All Matthew verse references being looked at in each chapter part are in **bold**.

Seven represents perfection or completion, and three fourteens are six sevens, so perhaps Matthew is wanting to portray Jesus as the seventh seven—the climax and pinnacle of God’s purposes. What’s clear is that Matthew’s groups of fourteen focus on three key moments:

1. Abraham: the father of the nation (v 2)
2. David: Israel’s greatest king (v 6)
3. Babylon: the time when the Jews went into exile (v 12)

As we look at Mary’s child the question is: who is he? These three moments answer that question.

1. Abraham: from Curse to Blessing

God had promised Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2-3). Blessing here doesn’t simply mean good things. It has a specific meaning in the context of Genesis: the reversal of the curse. When humanity rejected God, we became enemies of God, our relationships with one another became strained, and we were exiled from **Eden** (Genesis 3). Even the land was cursed, becoming prone to famine and disasters. But in Genesis 12 God promised that through Abraham’s offspring, the curse would be reversed. Our relationship with God would be restored, human relationships would be mended, and the earth would be made new.

The message of Matthew’s genealogy is that this promise has passed down the generations until we meet Mary and her child. Jesus is the true son of Abraham: the one who reverses the curse, bringing blessing to all nations. How is Jesus going to bring this blessing? By bearing the curse: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ... He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:13-14).

2. David: from Slavery to Freedom

The curse came because we rebelled against God's rule. God's rule was one of peace, provision and protection. But Satan portrayed God as a tyrant, and humanity believed that lie. Yet, instead of finding freedom, they became enslaved to sin and self. Scale that up to neighbourhoods and nations, and you find conflict and prejudice. Our world is in chaos.

God had every reason to write us off. But instead he made a promise to David, Israel's greatest king, that one of his descendants would set God's people free—free to enjoy life under God's rule (2 Samuel 7:11-16). There was a glimpse of this in the reigns of David and his son Solomon. But, by the time Matthew wrote, things had gone horribly wrong. Instead of restoring God's reign, successive kings led people further from God. So the Davidic dynasty no longer reigned over Israel, which instead suffered under Roman occupation. But the prophets had promised a new King David, who would restore God's life-giving rule.

The message of Matthew's genealogy is that this promised descendant of David is Mary's child. Israelite kings were anointed with oil, so the promised king was known as "the anointed One". The Greek word for this is "Christ", and the **Hebrew** word is "Messiah". So Matthew begins, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David" (Matthew **1:1**) and he ends his genealogy with "Jesus who is called the Messiah" (**v 16**). Jesus is God's promised King, coming to set not only Israel but humanity free.

3. Babylon: from Exile to Home

The history of ancient Israel ended in disaster: exile in Babylon. The prophets made it clear that God himself had exiled his people in judgment against their sin. In time, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people back to the land, but they still weren't free (Nehemiah 9:36-37). The underlying issues of human sin and divine judgment had not been addressed.

This is why Matthew's genealogy bypasses the Exodus, even though the Exodus was one of the key moments in Israel's history. The Exodus rescued God's people from slavery, but the Exile had taken them back into slavery. The Exodus provided the pattern for liberation, but the story has left us needing another exodus—a bigger exodus that will free God's people not simply from slavery in Egypt but from slavery to sin. The Exile in Babylon was a picture of humanity's plight. We're all exiles from Eden, and we're all estranged from God. That's why we're so restless. Our hearts are hardwired for God, and yet it's as if we'll head in any direction except back to God, looking for fulfilment in our careers, homes, families or entertainment.

The message of Matthew's genealogy is that the end of exile is lying in the manger. Jesus is the one who will lead us home. He not only shows us the way back to God; he himself is "the way" (John 14:6).

A Way Home for Sinners from All Nations

Jesus is the way home not just for Jews but for people from all nations. Interspersed among the fathers who populate Matthew's genealogy are four Gentile mothers (Matthew **1:3, 5, 6**). Tamar and Rahab were **Canaanites**, Ruth was a Moabite and Bathsheba is called "Uriah's wife" to spotlight her connection to a Hittite (see Genesis 38; Joshua 2; Ruth 1 – 4; 2 Samuel 11). Woven into a genealogy designed to establish Jesus' Jewish credentials are four Gentile women—a picture of the way Jesus will weave all nations into the story of God's people.

Moreover, three of these women come with question marks hanging over their morality. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to sleep with her father-in-law, forcing him to do right by her deceased husband (Genesis 38). Rahab was the Canaanite prostitute who hid two Israelite spies (Joshua 2). Bathsheba was involved in an act of adultery, though her culpability is unclear (2 Samuel 11). Perhaps we're meant to see Mary as a fifth woman whose morals were questioned, but who proves integral to God's purposes (Matthew **1:16**). These names break Matthew's pattern of "[was] the father of" to spotlight the fact that

Jesus came to save Jews and Gentiles, men and women, sinners and sinned-against. “If the Lord Jesus was not ashamed to be born of a woman whose pedigree contained such names as those we have read today,” said the 19th-century bishop J.C. Ryle, “we need not think that he will be ashamed to call us **brethren**, and to give us eternal life” (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 4). It’s a truth Matthew is about to reinforce as he explains the naming of Jesus.

They Will Call Him Immanuel

The story is familiar. Mary conceives a child “through the Holy Spirit”, even though she’s still a virgin (**v 18**). Through the Holy Spirit, the eternal Son of God took on a human nature as that human nature was formed in the womb of Mary. Though Mary is unmarried, she is betrothed—in a binding commitment to marriage. Joseph, her husband-to-be, initially assumes she’s been unfaithful. Matthew presents Joseph as a model of someone who takes the law seriously but applies it with compassion—in this case, by planning to divorce Mary quietly rather than publicly shaming her (**v 19**). But Joseph lacks the full facts, and so an angel appears to reassure him that this baby has been conceived by the Spirit of God (**v 20**). As a result, Joseph takes Mary as his wife (**v 24-25**). The word “birth” in **verse 18** is literally “genesis”. The same word is used in **verse 1** (translated “genealogy” in the NIV), so the Gospel literally begins “[the] book of genesis”. The Old Testament is about to be fulfilled and replayed. Just as the first Adam was given life through the Spirit of God (Genesis 2:7), so Jesus, the second Adam, is given human existence through the Spirit in the genesis of a new humanity.

To spotlight the meaning of these events, Matthew includes two acts of naming. First, the angel says, “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew **1:21**). “Jesus” is the Greek equivalent of “Joshua”, which means “The LORD saves”. This baby is going to deal with the problem of human sin and divine judgment.

Second, Matthew comments, “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’)” (v 22-23). God himself is coming to save his people from sin.

Matthew follows his genealogy with four stories surrounding the birth of Jesus, each of which contains a quote from the Old Testament. The birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of the Scriptures (1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; see also 2:5-6; 3:3; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:13-15, 35; 21:4-5; 26:56; and Blomberg in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 3-11). 1:23 is a quote from Isaiah 7. In Isaiah’s day, Ahaz was the king of **Judah**. He was the descendant of David on the throne of David, just as God had promised. But he wasn’t like his father David. He led the people into **idolatry**, even sacrificing his children. So the kings of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel formed an alliance against him, and Ahaz was terrified (Isaiah 7:1-2). The house of David—the means through which God had promised to restore his reign—was in mortal danger. Isaiah promised divine deliverance if Ahaz would entrust himself to God (v 3-9). God even offered to give Ahaz a sign (v 10). But Ahaz refused (v 11), opting instead for an alliance with Assyria (the rising superpower of the day).


So God gave Ahaz a sign that Ahaz was not looking for: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (v 14). Ahaz thought he could do without God; but it was God who didn’t need Ahaz. For God could bring the reign of David’s sons to an end (as he did when Judah was exiled in Babylon) and then start afresh by raising up a new king from a virgin. In the meantime, Assyria would turn on Judah with devastating consequences (v 15-25).

The first fulfilment of the promised child may have been Isaiah’s own son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, whose name means “quick to the plunder, swift to the **spoil**” (Isaiah 8:1-3). Immanuel would be in this judgment (v 8). But Immanuel also offered hope-beyond-judgment for his people (v 10). When Isaiah spoke with King Ahaz, he took his

son Shear-Jashub, whose name means “a **remnant** will return” (7:3). God’s king would be deposed and his people would be lost, but a new king would arise and a remnant would return (9:6; 10:20-23).

The word “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14 means “a sexually inexperienced woman”. It was usually used to describe a virgin, but not always. R.T. France concludes, “It does not explicitly mean ‘virgin’, but it suggests something other than a normal childbirth within marriage” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 55). So, it could describe Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’s mother, but Matthew recognises that its ultimate fulfilment is in the virgin Mary (Matthew **1:18**).

This is why Matthew draws together two lines of promise from Isaiah 7. First, God will raise up a new king from a virgin: a king who will trust God and restore God’s rule. Second, God himself will come as Immanuel to save his people from their sins. These two trajectories converge on Mary’s child. God himself has come in the person of his Son. In his humanity Jesus is the descendant of David; in his divinity he is Immanuel, God with us.



We should find confidence in the promises of God.

Notice that for Matthew, “fulfilment” can involve any of the following:

- a prediction coming true
- a pattern being repeated in a bigger or better way (“filled full”)
- an event, person or ritual from ancient Israel being seen as a picture of Jesus (what theologians call “typology”)

God has written into Israel’s history numerous pointers to Jesus.

How should we respond? By doing what Ahaz should have done: “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid” (Isaiah 7:4). Ahaz should have found confidence in the promises of God. He should have trusted the promise of a Saviour. And so should we.

- We live in a cursed world with broken relationships. We need to trust God's promise of blessing. Otherwise we may despair and live for the fleeting treasures of this world.
- We live in a rebellious world in which people mock God and disregard his reign. We need to trust God's promise that Christ will be triumphant and his people will be vindicated. Otherwise we may despair and start to align ourselves with the rebellious majority.
- We live in a restless world in which people are exiled from God. We need to trust God's promise that Christ will lead us away from the slavery of sin to home in glory. Otherwise we may despair and give up the struggle against sin in our lives.

Think about the struggles you're facing and pray, "My Jesus, Saviour, save me from sin and self today. My Immanuel, God with us, be with me today."

Questions for reflection

1. How does thinking of Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham and David, and as the end of the exile, cause you to appreciate him more?
2. Jesus' family line includes four women who were either outsiders or had "question marks hanging over their morality". What difference does that make to the way you reflect on your own past or to your view of yourself?
3. How would you sum up what it means for Jesus to be the promised "Immanuel" sign?