

GENESIS

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Author: Moses

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Background

Genesis is the first book of the OT and serves as an introduction to the entire Bible. The first Hebrew word used in the book, *bereshith*, is also used as the title, since *bereshith* means "in the beginning." But the English Bible uses the word "Genesis," which is the Greek translation of the original Hebrew word. Genesis is a title that reflects what we find in the entire book, for it means "the origin, source, creation or beginning of something." Therefore, Genesis is "the book of beginnings."

The author of Genesis is not mentioned in the book itself. However, other parts of the Bible (e.g., 1Ki 2:3; 2Ki 14:6; Ezr 6:18; Ne 13:1; Da 9:11-13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:26; Lk 16:29, 31; Jn 7:19-23; Ac 26:22; 1Co 9:9; 2Co 3:15) indicate that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch, which consists of the first five books of the OT. Also, ancient Jewish writers and leaders of the early church all testify that Moses was the author of Genesis. Since the entire history of Genesis took place before Moses lived, his role in writing Genesis mainly was (under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to carefully fit together all the available written and oral accounts that we now find preserved in Genesis. In this way, Moses was much like an editor. These are accounts of humankind from Adam to Joseph. Eleven times Moses uses the phrase "this is the account of" (Heb *'elleh toledoth*). Perhaps he is referring to some of these historical records. The Hebrew phrase can also be translated "these are the histories by" (see 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

Genesis accurately records creation, the beginning of human history and the origin of the Hebrew people who lived in a covenant relationship with God. This relationship was based on God's laws and promises and the people's faithfulness to God (see article on GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB, p. 77). The historical reliability of Genesis as part of God's inspired Word is confirmed in the NT by the Lord Jesus (Mt 19:4-6; 24:37-39; Lk 11:51; 17:26-32; Jn 7:21-23; 8:56-58) and by the apostles, i.e., Jesus' disciples, church leaders and pioneers as the church was starting out (Ro 4; 1Co 15:21-22, 45-47; 2Co 11:3; Gal 3:8; 4:22-24, 28; 1Ti 2:13-14; Heb 11:4-22; 2Pe 3:4-6; Jude 1:7, 11). Discoveries through modern archaeology also confirm the

accuracy of historical information found in Genesis. Moses was extremely qualified to write this unique first book of the Bible, as he was highly educated in Egypt (Ac 7:22) and, more importantly, chosen and prepared by God.

Purpose

Genesis provides a necessary foundation for the rest of the Pentateuch (the first five OT books), as well as for the entire Bible. It also preserves the only trustworthy record about the beginnings of the universe, humankind, marriage, sin, cities, languages, nations, Israel and God's plan to restore his personal relationship with people. Through Genesis, God gives his covenant people in both the OT and NT a basic understanding of himself, creation, the human race, the fall into sin (see below), death, judgment, covenant and the promise of salvation to those who put their faith in him.

Survey

Genesis divides naturally into two major parts. (A) Chs. 1–11 provide an overview of the beginning history of humankind from Adam to Abraham. The theme of this first part is expressed in the record of five history-defining events. (1) Creation: God created all things, including Adam and Eve whom he placed in the Garden of Eden (chs. 1–2). (2) The "Fall" (i.e., humankind's original disobedience toward God which disrupted his special favor toward them and destroyed their perfect relationship with him): Adam and Eve defied God's instruction, bringing the curse of sin and death into human history (ch. 3). (3) Cain and Abel: The tragedy that occurred between these two lives set in motion the two basic streams of history: humanistic (i.e., ungodly) civilization and the smaller portion of humanity that would follow God and show others the way to him (chs. 4–5). (4) The Great Flood: The ancient world had become so evil by Noah's time that God destroyed it by a flood that covered the earth. Only righteous Noah and his family were saved (chs. 6–10). (5) Tower of Babel: All that were born after the flood once again joined together in rebellion against God. Their actions showed God their intention to follow their own prideful plans. So God confused their plans by changing the language that they once all understood. This effected change to the future cultures and scattered the human race throughout the earth (ch. 11).

(B) Chs. 12–50 reveal the origin of the Hebrew people. We learn how God worked through Israel's four patriarchs (i.e., "founding fathers" or original ancestors). These patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. God's goal was to lay out his plans to bring people of all nations back into a relationship with him. God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants forms the foundation of his ultimate or final purpose to send a Redeemer—his Son, Jesus—who would provide a way for humankind's relationship with God to be restored. Genesis concludes with Joseph's death and Israel's soon coming slavery in Egypt.

Special Features

Seven major features characterize Genesis. (1) It was the first book of the Bible written (with the possible exception of Job). It records the beginning of human history, sin, the Hebrew people and God's plan to repair and restore his relationship with humankind, which was destroyed by sin. (2) The history in Genesis covers a larger period of time than the rest of the Bible combined. It begins with the first human couple. It describes world history before the flood. And it focuses on Hebrew history as the basis of God's plan traced through the rest of the OT. (3) Genesis reveals that the physical universe and life on earth are distinctly God's work and not an independent process of nature. Fifty times in chs. 1–2 it describes God's actions as Creator. (4) Genesis is a book of firsts. It records the first marriage, first family, first birth, first sin, first murder, first polygamist (i.e., one who married more than one spouse), first musical instruments, first promise

The Beginning

1 In the beginning^a God created the heavens and the earth.^b **2** Now the earth was^a formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said,^c “Let there be light,” and there was light.^d **4** God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the

1:1 ^a 1Jn 1:1-2
^b Isa 42:5; 44:24;
45:12,18
1:3 ^c Ps 33:6,9
^d 2Co 4:6*

1:5 ^e Ps 74:16
1:6 ^f Jer 10:12
1:7 ^g Ps 148:4

darkness. **5** God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”^e And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse^f between the waters to separate water from water.”

7 So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it.^g And it was so. **8** God called

^a2 Or possibly *became*

1:1 IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED. The writer uses the phrase, “in the beginning,” with the definite purpose of drawing attention to the fact that all things had a real beginning. Other ancient religions refer to things being created from something else that was already existing. But the Bible reveals God as the One who created everything out of nothing. God is the one and only true and eternal, self-existent God (having forever existed in himself) who reveals himself in the first verse of the Bible as the Creator of heaven and earth. As one continues through the Bible, the full nature of God is explained. The Scriptures reveal the primary concepts (i.e., understandable ideas) that help us know the nature of God. They reveal that he is all-powerful (Isa 40:15; Da 4:34-35). He is everywhere present (Ps 139:7-10; Mt 6:25-29). He is all-knowing (Eph 1:3-12; Ro 8:27-29). In addition to his full nature, God communicates his moral qualities. He is good (Ps 89:49; 1Jn 4:8), holy (Lev 11:44; Isa 6:1-5) and righteous (Dt 32:4; Ps 71:19). For additional explanation of who God is and God as the Creator, see articles on CREATION, p. 30, and THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, p. 1034. Other religions view history as an endless series of cycles. But the Bible presents history in a linear way, or with a definite beginning and a God-given goal. God had a plan in creation, and he will carry it out.

The first verse of the Bible contains several important truths. (1) Since God is the source of all that exists, human beings and nature are not self-existent, but rather owe their ability to live and exist to him. (2) Everything that exists is good if it is in right relationship to God and dependent on him (for its highest purpose). (3) All life and creation can have eternal meaning and purpose. (4) As the Creator, God has sovereign (i.e., supreme) rights, such as complete authority and control over all creation. That is, he can do whatever he desires in relation to all he has made. In

a fallen, or damaged world, one in which people have chosen to defy God and go their own way, God exercises his rights by offering redemption. Redemption refers to God’s plan to “reclaim” or “restore” individuals from a state of rebellion against him and bring them back into right relationship with him (Ex 6:6; 15:13; Dt 21:8; Lk 1:68; Ro 3:24; Gal 3:13; 1Pe 1:18).

1:2 EARTH WAS FORMLESS AND EMPTY. This verse begins to describe the process of God’s creation and introduces the Holy Spirit’s role in creation (see article on CREATION, p. 30).

1:3 LET THERE BE LIGHT. The Hebrew word for “light” is *or* which refers to the first waves of light energy that came on the earth. Later, God placed “lights” (Heb *ma’or*, literally, light-bearers, v. 14) in the heavens. Some were to produce light, and others were to reflect light. The primary purpose of these light-bearers was to mark seasons, days and years (vv. 5, 14). For comments about the role of God’s word or speech in creation, see article on CREATION, p. 30.

1:5 THERE WAS EVENING, AND THERE WAS MORNING—THE FIRST DAY. This phrase is repeated six times in this chapter (vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The Hebrew word for day is *yom*, which normally means a twenty-four hour period (cf. 7:17; Mt 17:1), or the daylight portion of the twenty-four hours (“day” as distinct from “night”). But it also can refer to a time period of undetermined length (e.g., “harvest time,” Pr 25:13). Many believe the creation days were twenty-four hour days because each had an “evening” and a “morning” (v. 5; cf. Ex 20:11). Others believe that “evening” and “morning” simply mean that each evening marked an end to that stage of creation and the next morning indicated a new beginning.

1:7 THE EXPANSE. The “expanse” refers to the atmosphere between the water on earth and the clouds above.

Creation

Ge 1:1 *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*

THE GOD OF CREATION. (1) God is revealed in the Bible as an infinite, eternal, self-existent Being—without beginning or ending—who is the First Cause (i.e., the original Source, Initiator and Creator) of all that is. A more simple way to think of this reality is that there has never been a moment when God did not exist. As Moses testifies, "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from

everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps 90:2). Moses is saying that God existed eternally (i.e., forever) and infinitely (i.e., without beginning or end). He is independent of and existed before all that was created in heaven and on earth (see 1Ti 6:16, note; cf. Col 1:16).

(2) God is revealed as a personal Being who created Adam and Eve "in his own image" (Ge 1:27; see 1:26, note). God created man and woman like himself so that they could respond to and have a relationship with God that reflected his love and other character traits (see Ge 1:26, note). This is a picture of how God and humans can walk together in godly unity.

(3) God is also revealed as a moral Being who created everything good and without sin. After God had finished creating, he looked at what he had made and saw that it was "very good" (Ge 1:31). Since Adam and Eve were created in God's likeness, they were also without sin (see Ge 1:26, note). Sin entered human existence when Eve chose to respond to temptation. Satan used the serpent to entice (i.e., tempt) Eve to do what would not please God. That is temptation. Therefore, she and Adam both made a choice to defy, or stand against, God's command (Ge 3; cf. Ro 5:12; Rev 12:9).

THE ACTIVITY OF CREATION. (1) God created all things in "the heavens and the earth" (Ge 1:1; cf. Isa 40:28; 42:5; 45:18; Mk 13:19; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; Rev 10:6). The word "created" (Heb *bara'*) is used to describe activity that only God can do. It means that at one point in time each thing was not, then God spoke and it was (see Ge 1:3, note).

(2) The Bible describes God's creation as being without any form or shape, empty and covered with darkness (Ge 1:2). At that time, the universe and the world did not have the order we see now. The earth was empty, lifeless and completely dark. But then God created light (Ge 1:3-5). He gave orderly form to the universe (Ge 1:6-13). Then he filled the earth with living things (Ge 1:20-28).

(3) The method God used in creation was the power of his word. Over and over the Bible states, "And God said ... " (Ge 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). That is to say, until God spoke the heavens and the earth into being, they did not exist in any form (cf. Ps 33:6, 9; 148:5; Isa 48:13; Ro 4:17; Heb 11:3).

(4) The term "Trinity" (see Mt 3:17, note; Mk 1:11, note, and the article on THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, p. 1034) refers to the Three-in-Oneness of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. All that is the Oneness of God had a role in creation. (a) The Son is the powerful Word through whom God created all things. The beginning of John's Gospel reveals Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God (Jn 1:1). "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn 1:3). The apostle Paul writes that by Christ "all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible [what can be seen] and invisible [what cannot be seen] ... all things were created by him and for him" (Col 1:16). The author of the letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that by his Son, God made the universe (Heb 1:2).

(b) The Holy Spirit also had an active role in creation. He is pictured as "hovering," or resting his presence over, creation, preserving and preparing it for when God would speak things into

existence. The Hebrew word for “Spirit” (*ruah*) may also be translated “wind” and “breath.” This is how the writer of one of the psalms describes the Holy Spirit’s part in creation: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath [*ruah*] of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). The Holy Spirit continues to be involved in keeping creation as God spoke it to be (Job 33:4; Ps 104:30).

THE PURPOSE AND GOAL OF CREATION. God had specific reasons for creating the world. (1) God created the heavens and the earth as a visible expression of his glory, beauty, majesty and power. David says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19:1; cf. Ps 8:1). By looking at the entire created cosmos (from the very great size and various parts of the universe to the beauty and order of nature), we cannot deny the sense of awe or wonder for God, our Creator.

(2) God created the heavens and the earth in order to receive the glory and honor he deserves. All the elements of nature show God’s creative presence. The sun and moon, rocks and trees, rain and snow, rivers and streams, hills and mountains, animals and birds are all an expression of praise to his honor—to the God who made them (Ps 98:7-8; 148:1-10; Isa 55:12). But God desires and expects to receive glory and praise from human beings even more!

(3) God created the earth to provide a place where his purpose and goals for humankind could be fulfilled. (a) God created Adam and Eve in his own image (see Ge 1:26, note) so that he could have a loving, personal relationship with people for all eternity. God designed people as triune, i.e., three-faceted beings (body, soul, spirit). Some have described the soul as the part of humankind that includes the mind, emotions and free will. With this part we can choose to worship and serve God out of faith, love, loyalty and gratitude. The spirit is a person’s true God-given part of us that exists beyond death. This part of us will live forever either in heaven or hell. Sometimes we will find one of these words used in place of the other. (For more details, see the article on HUMAN PERSONHOOD: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN, p. 1129.) (b) God desired this intimate relationship with humankind to continue. So he promised to send a Savior to redeem (i.e., restore or buy back) humankind from sin’s consequences (i.e., results of our own sinful choices) (see Ge 3:15, note). In this way, God would have people who would enjoy and honor him by living righteous and holy lives as he planned from the beginning (Isa 60:21; 61:1-3; Eph 1:11-12; 1Pe 2:9). (c) The book of Revelation records the culmination, or ultimate fulfillment, of God’s purpose in creation. In it, the apostle John describes the end of history with these words: “He will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev 21:3).

CREATION AND EVOLUTION. In much of the scientific and educational community today, evolution is the main view given for the origin of life and the universe. Bible-believing Christians should consider these four observations about evolution.

(1) Evolution is a *naturalistic* effort (i.e., without any supernatural activity or element) to explain the origin and development of the universe. This view assumes that there is no personal, divine Creator who designed the world. Evolutionists believe that everything came into existence by a series of chance happenings, or random events, that occurred over billions of years. Proponents, those who believe the idea of evolution, claim to have scientific evidence that support their hypothesis.

(2) The teaching of evolution is *not truly scientific*. According to the scientific method, all conclusions must be based on indisputable (i.e., unquestionable) evidence. That is evidence that cannot be denied by personal ideas or argument. The evidence must come from experiments that can be duplicated, or repeated over and over, with the same end results. However, no

experiments could test and prove assumptions like the “big bang” theory about how the present universe started. Nor can it be proven that living beings developed gradually from the simplest to the most complex forms. (This last point defies the second law of thermodynamics that describes how physical matter tends toward disorder—not higher order—as it changes.) Evolution is a hypothesis without scientific “evidence.” Any hypothesis is a well-stated idea that can lead to more study in the search for proven, testable fact. But in science, a hypothesis is not evidence for offering something as fact. Accepting evolution requires faith in a human theory. In contrast, God’s people put their faith in God’s inspired and time-tested Word. God’s Word reveals that he is the One who made all things out of nothing (Heb 11:3).

(3) Change and development will occur within various species (i.e., a related group distinct from other groups of living things). For example, some species are becoming extinct. In fact, some species no longer exist at all. On the other hand, we occasionally see new developments or mutations within species. But there is no evidence, not even in earth history or fossil records, which supports the theory that one kind of living thing ever evolved from another kind. Existing evidence supports the Bible, which says that God created each living creature “according to its kind” (Ge 1:21, 24-25).

(4) Bible-believing Christians must also reject the theory called *theistic evolution*. This belief accepts most of the conclusions of naturalistic evolution, which is a belief in the development of the species from the first living cell to the present diversity of plant and animal species without intervention from God. Theistic evolution only adds that God actually started the evolutionary process. The problem for the Christian is that this theory contradicts the Biblical revelation of God’s active role in *all* aspects of creation, not just that he started the process. For example, God is the subject of every action verb in Ge 1, except Ge 1:12 (which fulfills God’s command from v. 11), and the repeated phrase “there was evening, and there was morning.” Therefore, the Bible teaches that God is not an uninvolved or passive supervisor of an evolutionary process. He is the active Creator of all things (cf. Col 1:16).

the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place,^h and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lightsⁱ in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to

^{1:9} ^hPs 104:6-9;
Jer 5:22; 2Pe 3:5
^{1:14} ⁱPs 74:16

^{1:14} ⁱPs 104:19
^{1:16} ^kPs 136:8
ⁱPs 136:9 ^mPs 8:3;
Isa 40:26

mark seasons^j and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern^k the day and the lesser light to govern^l the night. He also made the stars.^m ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and

1:10 IT WAS GOOD. Seven times God states that what he created was “good” (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Each part of God’s creation was exactly as he intended. God created the world to reflect his glory (i.e., beauty, splendor, wonder) and greatness. It was also his plan for the world to be a place where humankind could experience life and joy. Notice how God created according to a specific plan and order:

Day 1	Light	Bringing order to creation
Day 2	Expanse	
Day 3	Dry Ground	
Day 4	Light bearers	
Day 5	Fish and birds	Bringing life to creation
Day 6	Animals and humans	
Day 7	Rest	Creation is complete and good

1:14 SERVE AS SIGNS. God intended for the sun, moon and stars to serve as signs drawing humankind’s attention to him. They also marked days, seasons and years. Astrology, the study of stars and things in heaven and their influence on human activity, has twisted these intended purposes with the false theory that the stars and planets guide individuals’ lives.

1:22 GOD BLESSED THEM. God blessed all living creatures and declared nature and animals to be good (vv. 12, 21-22). (1) God took great pleasure in his work and viewed it as very precious. In the same way, those who follow God should look at nature and all creation as beautiful and extremely valuable—something to be enjoyed. (2) Although the perfection of nature is now spoiled by sin (i.e., the acts and results of humanity’s rebellion against God), it still expresses God’s wonder, greatness and love for all people (cf. Ps 19:1). In God’s time, creation will be completely set free from the effects of sin and decay. God’s people should continue to pray for this (Ro 8:21; Rev 21:1).

said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

1:27 ^aGe 5:2;
Mt 19:4*; Mk 10:6*

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,^a and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and femaleⁿ he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the

^a26 Hebrew; Syriac *all the wild animals*

1:26 GOD SAID, LET US. The use of the word "us" (plural) suggests that God has a certain plurality, or multi-faceted nature (cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 48:16). This seems to be an early reference to the trinity, or the existence of God in three distinct but interrelated and unified Persons. The tri-unity (i.e., "three-in-One" nature) of God does not become clear, however, until the NT (see Mt 3:17, note; Mk 1:11, note; see article on THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, p. 1034).

1:26 LET US MAKE MAN. In vv. 26-28 we read about the creation of human beings. More specific details about their creation and environment are found in 2:4-25. These two accounts work together to teach several things: (1) Both man and woman are God's special creation, not products of evolution (v. 27; Mt 19:4; Mk 10:6; see articles on CREATION, p. 30, and HUMAN PERSONHOOD: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN, p. 1129).

(2) Man and woman were both created in God's "image" and "likeness," which means they could respond to a unique personal relationship with God that reflected his love and character. Each person was created to know and obey God willingly (2:15-17). (a) They possessed a moral likeness to God as sinless and holy creations, with wise minds, loving hearts and the desire to do right (cf. Eph 4:24). Their personal relationship with God involved moral obedience (2:16-17) and intimate spiritual union. When Adam and Eve sinned, that moral likeness to God was corrupted, or made impure (6:5). God renews that original moral likeness in those who turn from their own sinful ways and trust him to lead their lives (cf. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:10).

God provided this opportunity through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus willingly gave his perfect life through death to pay the penalty for our rebellion against God (cf. 1Pe 3:18). (b) Adam and Eve possessed a natural likeness to God. They were created as personal beings with spirit, mind, emotions, self-awareness and power of choice (2:19-20; 3:6-7; 9:6). (c) Man and woman's physical characteristics also reflect God's image in a way that is not true of animals. God gave humans the same form in which he would visibly appear to them (18:1-2). This is the form in which his Son, Jesus, came to earth (Lk 1:35; Php 2:7; Heb 10:5).

(3) Being made in God's image does not mean that humans are divine beings (i.e., like "gods"). They have been created on a lower level than God and are dependent on him (Ps 8:5).

(4) All human life has continued through God's first created man (Adam) and woman (Eve) (Ge 3:20; Ro 5:12).

1:28 BE FRUITFUL AND INCREASE. God commanded man and woman to reproduce and to rule over the earth and the animal kingdom. (1) The union of a man and a woman was to form family relationships. God stated this specific purpose and gave priority to the role of a godly family and the nurturing, or bringing up, of godly children in a world that turns from him (see Eph 5:21, note; Tit 2:4-5, note; see article on PARENTS AND CHILDREN, p. 2298).

(2) God expected them to consecrate (i.e., set apart, commit or reserve) everything on earth to him. He expected Adam and Eve to take care of it in a way that honored him (cf. Ps 8:6-8; Heb 2:7-9).

MATTHEW

Outline

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Author: Matthew

Theme: Jesus Christ—the Promised Messiah

Date of Writing: A.D. 60s

Background

The book of Matthew is one of the Bible's four Gospels (along with Mark, Luke and John)—the narrative accounts of the “good news” (i.e., gospel). The Gospels are called narratives because they are four separate reports or accounts of the same true story of what happened in, to and through the life of Jesus Christ. The Gospel according to Matthew is quite fitting as an introduction to the NT and to “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Although the author is not identified by name in the Biblical text, the testimony of all early church leaders (beginning around A.D. 130) is that Matthew, one of Jesus' original twelve disciples, wrote this Gospel.

While Mark's Gospel was written for the Romans (see the introduction to Mark) and Luke's Gospel for Theophilus and other Gentiles (i.e., people other than Jews, see the introduction to Luke), Matthew's Gospel was written specifically for Jewish believers. The Jewish background of this Gospel is clearly present in many ways: (1) It uses OT revelation, promises and prophecy to prove that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah (i.e., “Anointed One,” Savior, Christ). (2) It traces Jesus' family line starting from Abraham, the “father” of the Jews (1:1-17). (3) It repeatedly declares that Jesus is the “Son of David,” the godly king who was the promised ancestor of the Messiah-King (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:41-45). (4) It uses phrases and terms commonly used by the Jews, such as “kingdom of heaven” (a synonym for “kingdom of God”) because the Jews avoided saying the name of God directly as a sign of respect. (5) It refers to Jewish customs without any explanation (unlike the other Gospels, which explain such things for those of other cultures).

Though this Gospel is written with the Jewish audience in mind, it is not for Jews alone. Like the message of Jesus himself, Matthew's Gospel was written for the whole church (i.e., for all who would follow Christ). In this way, it faithfully reveals the cross-cultural and worldwide scope of the good news about Jesus (e.g., 2:1-12; 8:11-12; 13:38; 21:43; 28:18-20).

The date and location of Matthew's message are uncertain. However, there are good reasons

to believe that Matthew wrote prior to A.D. 70 while he was in the region of Palestine or Syrian Antioch. Some Bible scholars believe that Matthew was the first of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) to be written; others believe that Mark's Gospel was written first.

Purpose

Matthew wrote this Gospel (1) to provide his readers with an eyewitness account (i.e., a story written by someone who was present at the time the events took place) of Jesus' life, (2) to assure his readers that Jesus was God's Son and the long-awaited Messiah foretold by the OT prophets and (3) to show that God's kingdom (i.e., his ultimate power, authority, purposes and way of life both on earth and into eternity) was revealed and lived out through Jesus in a way never before known to humankind. For an overview of issues relating to the kingdom, see chart of THE KINGDOM OF GOD VERSUS THE KINGDOM OF SATAN, p. 1763.

Matthew wants his audience to understand two important issues: (1) Israel, for the most part, rejected Jesus and his kingdom. They refused to believe that he was their promised Messiah (i.e., Savior, Christ) because he came as a spiritual leader rather than as a political leader, as they expected. (2) Only at the end of this age—in the last days following God's end-time judgment on earth—will Jesus come in glory as the King of kings to judge and rule the nations (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Survey

Matthew presents Jesus as the One who fulfilled all of the God-inspired OT prophecies about Israel's hope. He fulfills OT prophecy in a variety of ways, including: his birth (1:22-23), his birthplace (2:5-6), his return from Egypt (2:15) and his residence in Nazareth (2:23); his prophetic predecessor, or the one who was to come before him to announce his coming (John the Baptist, 3:1-3), his primary location for public ministry (4:14-16), his healing ministry (8:17), his role as God's servant (12:17-21), his teaching in parables (13:34-35), his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:4-5) and his arrest (26:50). For an overview of more prophecies relating to Jesus, see the chart of OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN CHRIST, p. 1046.

Chs. 5—25 record five of Jesus' major discourses (i.e., talks, addresses, discussions, teachings on specific subjects to particular people or groups). They also contain five major narratives (i.e., accounts or stories of real events) describing his mighty acts as the Messiah. Many of these are miracles revealing his limitless power, authority and compassion (see chart of the MIRACLES OF JESUS, p. 1979). Jesus' five major discourses are: (1) his Sermon on the Mount, which describes the characteristics, behaviors and lifestyles of those who desire to follow Christ (chs. 5—7); (2) his instructions and encouragement for his followers before he sends them out to preach about the kingdom of heaven and do miracles for his honor (ch. 10); (3) his parables, or stories told by using word-pictures, that teach lessons about the kingdom of heaven (ch. 13); (4) his teaching on the character of true disciples (ch. 18); and (5) the teaching from the Mount of Olives about end-time events (chs. 24—25).

The five major narratives in this Gospel describe: (1) Jesus performing powerful acts and miracles, which show the reality of his kingdom (chs. 8—9); (2) Jesus dealing with several challenging ministry issues that further explain the principles of his kingdom (chs. 11—12); (3) how preaching about the kingdom of heaven provokes a variety of responses and reactions, including faith and resistance (chs. 14—17); (4) Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and his last week there (19:1—26:46); and (5) Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection from the dead (26:47—28:20; see chart of PASSION WEEK, p. 1888). The last three verses of the Gospel record Jesus' "Great Commission" to his followers, commanding them to take his message to all the world and establish followers for him in all nations.

The Genealogy of Jesus

1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,^a the son of Abraham:^b

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,^c

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,^d

3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,^e

Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

4 Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

1:1 ^aIsa 11:1; Ro 1:3

^bGe 22:18

1:2 ^cGe 25:26

^dGe 29:35

1:3 ^eGe 38:27-30

1:6 ^f1Sa 16:1

^g2Sa 12:24

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

6 and Jesse the father of King David.^f

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,^g

7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

1:1-16 GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST.

Matthew's Gospel—his account of the “good news” and true story about Jesus Christ—opens with this list of Jesus' Jewish ancestors. This Gospel traces Jesus' family history through the paternal line (i.e., his earthly father's side), as was Jewish custom (v. 16). Although Joseph was not Jesus' biological father (Jesus was conceived by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, v. 20), he was his legal father. God had promised that the Messiah—the promised Savior who would be a blessing to the whole world—would be a descendant of Abraham (Ge 12:3; 22:18; Gal 3:16) and King David (2Sa 7:12-19; Jer 23:5). By tracing Jesus' legal ancestry back to these two men, Matthew shows the Jews that Jesus had the proper genealogy (i.e., family history) to qualify as the Messiah (see next note). Look closely at some of the people in Jesus' family line (refer to the cross-references in the center column of this Bible to trace other verses about these individuals). Several in the list experienced some major failures in their lives (e.g., Judah, Rahab, Manasseh), yet they represent the broad range of people who put their faith in God and became part of his family. They also serve as examples of how God can work his highest purposes through anyone who totally submits to him, no matter how ungodly their background or failures have been.

1:1 CHRIST. The word “Christ” (Gk *christos*) means “anointed” (which suggests being chosen, commissioned, empowered, set part for special service). It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term “Messiah,” which refers to the Savior the Jews had long expected

(Da 9:25-26). (1) From the beginning of his message, Matthew affirms that Jesus is God's “Anointed One”—filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 61:1; Lk 4:18; Jn 3:34; Ac 10:38). (2) He was anointed to fill three specific roles: (a) a Prophet, to challenge people to maintain or renew their relationship with God and to help them understand the truth (Dt 18:15); (b) a Priest, to be the mediator of a renewed relationship between God and people by offering the sacrifice (i.e., his own life) that would pay the full penalty for humanity's offenses against God (Ps 110:4; Heb 10:10-14); and (c) a King, to establish the purposes of God's kingdom on earth and to guide and rule his people with perfect justice (Ps 9:8; Isa 32:1; Zec 9:9).

1:1 SON OF DAVID. (1) Matthew provides the clear record that Jesus was a legal descendant of David by tracing the family history of his earthly father, Joseph, who was from the family line of King David (see article on GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID, p. 514). Although Jesus was conceived by a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit, in earthly terms he was still formally registered as Joseph's son, which meant that he was legally a “son of David.” (2) The family history outlined in Luke's Gospel (Lk 3:23ff) traces Jesus' ancestry through the males on his mother Mary's side (she was also from David's family line). Luke stresses that Jesus is the flesh-and-blood child (i.e., physical “offspring”) of Mary, which focuses on his humanity and the fact that he was one of us (cf. Ro 1:3). In this way, the Gospel writers show how Jesus had both a legal and biological claim as the true Messiah, the Christ.

- Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
 Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
 9 Uzziah the father of Jotham,
 Jotham the father of Ahaz,
 Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
 10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,^h
 Manasseh the father of Amon,
 Amon the father of Josiah,
 11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah^a and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.ⁱ
- 12 After the exile to Babylon:
 Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,^j
 Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
 Abiud the father of Eliakim,
 Eliakim the father of Azor,
 14 Azor the father of Zadok,
 Zadok the father of Akim,
 Akim the father of Eliud,
 15 Eliud the father of Eleazar,
 Eleazar the father of Matthan,
 Matthan the father of Jacob,
 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

1:10 ^h2Ki 20:21
 1:11 ⁱ2Ki 24:14-16;
 Jer 27:20; Da 1:1,2
 1:12 ^j1Ch 3:17

1:18 ^kLk 1:35
 1:19 ^lDt 24:1
 1:21 ^mLk 1:31
ⁿLk 2:11;
 Ac 13:23,28

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 Christ.^b

The Birth of Jesus Christ

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.^k 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce^l her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^m because he will save his people from their sins."ⁿ

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and

^a11 That is, Jehoiachin; also in verse 12

^b17 Or *Messiah*. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One." ^c21 *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves*.

Lk 1:76-79

1:16 MARY ... JESUS. The virgin birth of Jesus (the fact that he was conceived by a miracle of God, without a human sexual union) is affirmed in this genealogy (i.e., family history). Notice how the words "the father of" are used with all the names down to Joseph, then comes a change. It does not say that Joseph "was the father of" Jesus, but rather that Joseph was the "husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (see Mt 1:23, note).

1:21 JESUS. The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word "Yeshua" (Joshua), meaning "the LORD saves" (see Jos 1:1, note). This describes the future mission of Mary's son and is the early promise of the gospel—the "good news" of spiritual salvation through Jesus. As the Savior, Jesus "will save his people from their sins"—their spiritual rebellion and offenses against God. Sin is the greatest enemy of the human race because it

separates humankind from God and is present to destroy every eternal soul and every life. However, Jesus broke the power of sin by sacrificing his own sinless life to pay the full penalty for our offenses against God. Those who accept God's forgiveness and yield their lives to Jesus are spiritually transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit (the same Spirit by which Jesus was conceived and born into the human race). Such people are spiritually "saved"—rescued and set free from the guilt and slavery of sin (see Jn 8:31-36; Ac 26:18; Ro 6; 8:1-16).

1:23 VIRGIN ... GIVE BIRTH TO A SON. Both Matthew's and Luke's Gospel narratives agree that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit (v. 18; Lk 1:34-35) and born of a virgin mother—that is, without the participation of a human father. Those who doubt that the Bible is the true and accurate historical account of

they will call him Immanuel"^a— which means, "God with us."

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he had no union with her until she gave birth

1:23 ^oIsa 7:14

2:1 PLk 2:4-7

to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The Visit of the Magi

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,^p during the time

^a23 Isaiah 7:14

God's plan and involvement with humankind have long argued against the doctrine (i.e., teaching or principle that forms the basis of a belief) of Jesus' virgin birth. Yet, the prophet Isaiah also promised a virgin-born child who would be called "Immanuel," a Hebrew term meaning "God with us" (Isa 7:14). Isaiah's prediction was made 700 years before the birth of Christ (see chart of OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN CHRIST, p. 1046).

(1) The word "virgin" in Mt 1:23 is the correct translation of the Greek *parthenos* found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) in Isa 7:14. The Hebrew word used by Isaiah for virgin (*almah*) means a young woman who is old enough to be married but who has not yet had any sexual relations. The term is never used in the OT for any state other than literal virginity (cf. Ge 24:43; SS 1:3; 6:8). This means that Isaiah in the OT and Matthew and Luke in the NT all attest to (i.e., agree and declare the certainty of) the fact that Jesus' mother was a virgin from the time of Jesus' conception to the time of his birth (see Mt 1:25; see Isa 7:14, note).

(2) The importance of the virgin birth cannot be stressed enough. In order for Jesus to qualify as the only One who could pay the price for our sins and restore our broken relationship with God, he must be fully human, totally sinless and yet fully God (Heb 7:25-26). In order for Christ's sacrifice to be able to cover sin once and for all, his life had to be perfect—undeserving of death—and only God himself could provide such a perfect sacrifice. The virgin birth satisfies all three requirements. (a) The only way Jesus truly could become a human being in every sense was to be born of a woman. (b) The only way he could be totally sinless—not only throughout his life but from birth—was to be conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:20; cf. Heb 4:15). (c) The only way he could be divine (i.e., fully God) was to have God as his Father. Jesus was conceived not by natural but by supernatural means: "the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). As a result, Jesus Christ is revealed to us as one Person with two natures—divine God and sinless human.

(3) By living and suffering as a human per-

son, Jesus understands and identifies with the feelings of our weaknesses (Heb 4:15-16). As the Son of God, he has the power to free us from sin's destruction and Satan's power and to restore our relationship with God (Ac 26:18; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 7:25). As both God and human, he qualifies to serve as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of every person who ever lives. He also qualifies as the ultimate high priest who serves as mediator between God and all who come to him for mercy and forgiveness (Heb 2:9-18; 5:1-9; 7:24-28; 10:4-12). Being fully God and fully man, Jesus was able to bridge the gap that sin had created between God and all humankind.

1:25 NO UNION WITH HER UNTIL. The word "until" draws attention to the fact that Mary remained a virgin until after Jesus was born. Following that time, we know that Joseph and Mary entered into the full physical union commonly associated with marriage because we are told that Jesus had brothers and sisters (12:46-47; Mk 3:31-32; 6:3; Lk 8:19-20).

2:1 HEROD, MAGI. Herod the Great (set apart from other Herods in the Bible) was a non-Jew who was appointed king over the region of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and ruled from 37—4 B.C. He was a cruel and hard-hearted man who murdered many members of his family, including a wife and three sons. He was also remembered for the building or repairing and restoring of many buildings and monuments during his reign. For instance, he was responsible for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, which he started in 19 B.C. (The sanctuary was finished in just 18 months, but the entire project was not completed until 68 years after his death.)

The Magi were probably members of a highly educated religious class from the region of Persia or southern Arabia, now called Iran. They likely specialized in natural science, medicine and astrology (the study of the positions of objects in the heavens with the belief that their motions influence and affect people). Since they were looking for "the king of the Jews" (v. 2), they naturally came to the Jewish capital city of Jerusalem first. Their visit occurred when Jesus was between 40 days (cf. Lk 2:22) and 2 years old

of King Herod, Magi^a from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?^q We saw his star^r in the east^b and have come to worship him.”

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ^c was to be born. ⁵“In Bethlehem^s in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.^d”

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find

2:2 ^qJer 23:5;
Jn 1:49
2:2 ^rNu 24:17
2:5 ^sJn 7:42

2:11 ^tIsa 60:3
^uPs 72:10
2:12 ^vHeb 11:7

him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east^e went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.^f Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts^u of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹²And having been warned^v in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you,

^{a1} Traditionally *Wise Men* ^{b2} Or *star when it rose*
^{c4} Or *Messiah* ^{d6} Micah 5:2 ^{e9} Or *seen when it rose*

(cf. v. 16). The importance of the birth story is that it shows that (1) Jesus is worthy of royal honor from all of humankind and (2) Gentiles (i.e., people of all nations who are not Jews) as well as Jews are included in God’s plan to bring people back into a right relationship with God (cf. 8:11; 28:19; Ro 10:12).

2:4 CHIEF PRIESTS AND TEACHERS OF THE LAW. Chief priests were the temple ministers in charge of worship. The teachers of the law were the Jewish scholars of the day who were professionally trained in the history of OT law and experts in how to apply it to their individual lives (22:35). They often served as scribes (i.e., people who copied manuscripts of Scripture). The teachers of the law and the chief priests worked together as members of the Sanhedrin, or the Jewish Senate and Supreme Court. This governing body included around 70 men who were responsible for the Jewish civil (i.e., public, social) and religious activities and other concerns of the Jews. Under Roman rule, these individuals were given great authority among their people.

2:13 ESCAPE TO EGYPT. Herod’s attempt to kill Jesus and God’s method of protecting the child reveal several truths about how

God guides and protects his people. (1) God did not protect Joseph, Mary and their child without their cooperation (vv. 13, 19-20, 22). Protection required obedience to God’s directions, which in this case involved fleeing the country (v. 14).

(2) God may allow situations to come into our lives that are hard to understand. His purpose is that we can learn valuable lessons as he accomplishes his purposes—though he may work in ways we often do not expect (see article on THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS, p. 839). For example, Christ began life as a refugee and stranger in another country (vv. 14-15). To our limited understanding, it would have been easier if God had removed Herod immediately. Then this family could have avoided the escape to Egypt and all the difficulty that went along with it. But that was not how God planned it.

(3) Just as one difficult situation in life is settled, there may be other problems to face (vv. 19-23). God’s protection, guidance and care are always necessary because our spiritual enemy (i.e., Satan and his demonic forces) is always on the attack against God’s followers (Eph 6:10-18; 1Pe 5:8; see article on THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, p. 112).

for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^{aw}

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”^{bx}

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹After Herod died, an angel of

^{2:15} ^wEx 4:22,23;

Hos 11:1

^{2:18} ^xJer 31:15

^{2:22} ^yver 12,13,19

^zLk 2:39

^{2:23} ^aLk 1:26

^bMk 1:24

^{3:1} ^cLk 3:2-19

^{3:2} ^dDa 2:44;

Mt 4:17

the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream,^y he withdrew to the district of Galilee,^z ²³and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.^a So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”^b

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist^c came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ²and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven^d is near.”

^{a15} Hosea 11:1 ^{b18} Jer. 31:15

2:16 KILL ALL THE BOYS. Bethlehem (a village about five miles south of Jerusalem) and the surrounding area were small. It most likely had a population of between one and two thousand. Based on this estimate, the number of male children slain would have been around twenty.

2:22 WARNED IN A DREAM. God’s warnings to the Magi (v. 12) and to Joseph (v. 22) teach us that God watches over those he loves. This situation also shows that God knows how to defeat the plans of the wicked and how to rescue his faithful followers from those who would harm them.

3:2 KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. This phrase refers to God’s unlimited power and authority over all things and that his purposes are being fulfilled presently on earth, as they will continue to be throughout eternity. This particular phrase is found only in Matthew (33 times). The other Gospels (Mark, Luke and John) use the expression “kingdom of God” (see article on THE KINGDOM OF GOD, p. 1710). Most Jews avoided using the name of God, so Matthew chose to use this phrase for his Jewish audience (primarily Jewish Christians to show them how OT prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus). Jesus probably used both phrases, one in place of the other.

3:2 REPENT. The basic meaning of repentance (Gk *metanoëō*) is “to turn around”—to make a complete change. It is turning away from evil and turning toward God through faith in Christ (Jn 14:1, 6; Ac 8:22; 26:18; 1Pe 2:25). True repentance leads to spiritual salvation and a personal relationship with God. Such repentance involves changing our attitude toward God, admitting our sin, turning from our own way, submitting to Christ’s leadership and beginning to follow God’s plans for our lives.

(1) The decision to turn from sin, which is rebellion against God, in order to receive spiritual salvation involves accepting Christ as both Savior (who rescues us from the penalty of sin) and as Lord—the highest authority over our lives. Therefore, repentance involves a change of leaders (lords) in one’s life: from the lordship of Satan and self (Eph 2:2) to the lordship of Christ and his Word (Ac 26:18).

(2) Repentance is an opportunity for all sinners to make the choice to turn from sin and turn to God. It is made possible by the grace (i.e., undeserved favor and love) God has shown us through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. The lives of those who hear and accept his message will be spiritually renewed (made alive) and changed (Ac 11:21; see article on REGENERATION: SPIRITUAL BIRTH AND

3This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”^{ae}

4John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.^f His food was locusts^g and wild honey. 5People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jor-

3:3 ^eIsa 40:3;
Lk 1:76; Jn 1:23
3:4 ^f2Ki 1:8
^gLev 11:22

3:7 ^hMt 12:34;
23:33 ⁱRo 1:18;
1Th 1:10
3:8 ^jAc 26:20

dan. 6Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers!^h Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?ⁱ 8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.^j 9And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I

^{a3} Isaiah 40:3

RENEWAL, p. 1915). But we all must take advantage of the opportunity and make the decision to follow Christ for ourselves.

(3) True saving faith—the kind that brings us back into a personal and eternal relationship with God—involves more than simply believing and agreeing in your mind that Christ is the Savior. Just as genuine repentance requires a change of direction and behavior, real faith in God also requires action. A person puts faith into action by breaking away from sin and deciding in his or her heart to live in such a way that his or her character and lifestyle please God. Any other teaching of Christian faith is a misrepresentation of the Biblical message about believing in and following Christ. Faith that includes repentance is always a condition for spiritual salvation (cf. Mk 1:15; Lk 13:3, 5; Ac 2:38; 3:19; 11:21; see article on FAITH AND GRACE, p. 2100).

(4) Repentance was a basic message of OT prophets (Jer 7:3; Eze 18:30; Joel 2:12-14; Mal 3:7), John the Baptist (Mt 3:2), Jesus Christ (Mt 4:17; 18:3; Lk 5:32) and NT Christians (Ac 2:38; 8:22; 11:18; 2Pe 3:9). The challenge and opportunity to repent must always be included whenever one is preaching the gospel message—the “good news” about forgiveness and new life available through Christ (Lk 24:47).

3:7 PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES. The Pharisees and Sadducees were two of the most important religious groups in Judaism (the faith and religious culture of the Jews, based primarily on OT laws, customs and standards; see chart of JEWISH SECTS, p. 1709).

(1) The Pharisees were a Jewish religious group that was faithful to the teachings and practices of the entire OT, which they accepted according to their own human interpretations. Their personal interpretation often changed or overlooked the real purpose and principles behind God’s laws. They especially focused on the teaching that salvation came by strict obedience to every standard

of God’s law (and, of course, their interpretations of that law). They taught that the coming Messiah would be an earthly ruler who would help Israel overcome and rule over the nations, forcing all people to obey God’s law. However, their religion was only an outward display; there was no true inward godliness of heart (23:25). They refused to acknowledge the corruption of their own human nature (which greatly affected their interpretation of God’s law and view of salvation). The Pharisees opposed Jesus and his message that true religion is a matter of the heart and spirit and not simply a matter of obeying laws and rules—even the commands of Scripture (cf. 9:14; 23:2-4; Lk 18:9-14). God does require obedience, but it must be a heartfelt response that rises up out of true love for him (see Ro 1:5; 6:16; 2Co 9:13; 2Jn 1:6).

(2) The Sadducees were more of a political group who were non-traditional in their religious views. They did not accept the reality of the supernatural. While appearing to follow God’s law, they really denied many of its teachings. For example, they rejected the doctrines (i.e., teachings) of the resurrection, angels and eternal spirits (Ac 23:8), as well as miracles and the judgment to come. Living godly lives was not very important to them. They also persecuted Jesus and his followers (16:1-4).

3:8 FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE.

In spiritual terms, to “produce fruit” means to show outward evidence (what can be seen) of true inward faith (what God is doing inside) through visible growth in character, compassion and godly behavior. Genuine repentance will always lead to an active faith and godly behavior (cf. 23:23; Lk 3:10-14; Ac 26:20; see 3:2, note; see Jn 15:16, note). Those who say they believe in Christ and are God’s children, and yet do not live in a way that produces and shows good fruit, are like trees that, in the end, will be cut down and thrown into the fire (vv. 8-10, 12).