

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – PART ONE

To whom would God give the honour of writing the first book of the New Testament? Typically the answer is the totally unexpected, a Jew who would have been regarded by the people of his time as a greedy, cheating traitor. Tax collectors in the Roman provinces sold themselves to the Emperor to extract as much money as they could from the local population for the benefit of the government and themselves. Matthew was just such a slimy character until one day a man called Jesus walked into his office and invited him to follow Him. (9:9) Without hesitation he left his job, his office and all the advantages that went with it to become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. One day he wrote a book describing the life, work and teaching of the one who changed his life.

Matthew left the service of one master, the Emperor, to follow another whom he, more than all the other gospel writers, presented as the King, the true King of the Jews. As such his gospel began by establishing the right of Jesus to claim to be the rightful king, anticipated throughout the Old Testament. He seamlessly linked his story to the 39 books that had gone before it. Thus the gospel of Matthew has the privilege of drawing the Old Testament to its climax, and introducing the New.

People often ask, ‘Why four gospels which seem at times to contradict each other? Would it not have been easier to edit them into one super gospel that no-one would argue with?’ The answer seems to be two-fold. Firstly in a legal sense, four witnesses each telling his own unique story of a series of events of world importance are better than one. Secondly the four writers were given four distinct, complementary messages each of which needed to be clearly heard. Matthew showed Jesus to be a King, Mark a Servant, Luke a Man, and John the Son of God. Ezekiel (Ezek.1:5-10) had seen four heavenly beings, each having four faces, a lion, a bull, a man and an eagle. All four gospel writers presented all four views of Jesus but each chose to major on one of those views. We too need to know Jesus as our King who came to earth to serve us, the Son of God who became man like us.

Matthew’s gospel is also the account which drew most heavily on the Old Testament prophecies, characters, images and law, although none of the gospels can be adequately understood without the Old Testament. The audience for this gospel appears to be Jewish people, whereas Mark was probably for Romans, Luke for Greeks and John for Christians of all cultures.

So four gospels rather than one make good sense. The four witnesses to the story of Jesus are different but they weave beautifully in together. Occasionally there seem to be minor discrepancies but most of these disappear when one looks closely. The four accounts of the resurrection with their seeming inconsistencies are a brilliant example of how compellingly the legal evidence for the truth of the story emerges from four independent sources. See the differences as a strength not a weakness.

As we begin to explore this wonderful book be prepared to look back into the Old Testament frequently and at the same time from time to time compare Matthew’s story with the other three gospels for a different perspective on the same event. As always remember that the most important discoveries will be taught to you by God as

you read and re-read with a prayerful open heart. As we make discoveries in Matthew's gospel keep constantly in mind the need for application, how God wants to put the message into life in us daily. The first application is obvious. Jesus Christ wants to be the King in us. Let Him. Our hearts are to be part of His kingdom.

1:1 Q.1 In tracing the ancestry of Jesus Christ, who are the most important characters? What special place did each one have in the Old Testament story?

1:2-5 Q.2 What promise did God make to Abraham that was finally fulfilled in Matt.1?(Gen,12:2,3; 13:15; 15:5,6; 17:16; 18:10) How did God's miraculous intervention in the birth of both Isaac and Jacob foreshadow what would happen in this chapter? Three women are referred to in this section. What was remarkable about each of them and what is surprising about their inclusion in the list of Jesus' ancestors?

1:6-11 Q.3 One more woman is referred to in this passage. Why is she too a surprise in the line to Jesus? Of the kings who followed David how many were faithful to God and how many were not? Again consider why were both kinds of kings among Jesus' ancestors? If you compare the list of Judah's kings in Matthew with the lists in I and II Kings or in II Chronicles you will find that three names are missing. Why might this be? Did Matthew make a mistake?

1:12-16 Q.4 What was the role of Zerubbabel in the books of Haggai and Zechariah? What significance does this take on when we realise he was an ancestor of Jesus? Why did Matthew trace the ancestors of Joseph when he was not the natural father of Jesus?

1:17 Q.5 What third key event in Israel's history divides Jesus' genealogy? Why was it also so significant in what Matthew was about to describe?

1:18-25 Q.6 What clear statement was made about who was the Father of Jesus? What Old Testament prophecy did this fulfil? Who therefore was He? What was Joseph told about how to name his future adopted son and why this name was to be given? Why was His conception so important if Jesus was to carry out the work His Father planned for Him?

1:18-25 Q.7 Mary was betrothed to Joseph. What was Joseph's initial intention when he discovered Mary was pregnant? What according to the Old Testament were his options at this stage? How did God intervene right at the start of this story to save His Son? What does this tell us about God's protection when we are following His plan for us?

Now read on through the gospel to gain an overall sense of Matthew's message of the Kingship of Jesus Christ and the other themes which spring from this. Divide the book into sections and title each one to give yourself a way of remembering the flow of ideas.