

Matthew *A New Perspective*

1. A New Saviour *Matthew 1-2*

Aim of the Study: To look at the historical context of Jesus, explore why Matthew chose to start his gospel like this, with reference to Jesus' background and his fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. It also reflects on what we lose by knowing so little of our history, and how knowing that Jesus is the fulfilment of a long term plan on God's part might encourage us to continue following that plan into the future.

As we are going to think about the beginning of Matthew's gospel in this study and it's the beginning of the year, let's think about beginnings in general.

To start with: (Five Minutes max)

- What do you think are the best known opening credits or theme song to a film or TV programme? What makes them so memorable - what do they communicate?

OR

- What is your favourite opening to a book, film or show? Why?
- What difference does the beginning of something make?

Engaging with the Text:

1. Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to draw their family tree, going as far back as they can. (People don't have to go through their tree with the group due to time constraints, but you might like them to discuss how far back they can go, why that is, and how they respond to the exercise.)

This study divides into **three** sections with a concluding section. If time is tight you might do 1 and 2 and then Question 6.

Section 1

Give everybody a copy of the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew 1 on A4 paper (enclosed in your pack). Before you read it ask people the following:

2. How do you react to lists like this in the Bible? Why do you think that is? What does it tell you about our culture and society?

Now read through the whole passage and get people to underline anyone whose story they know or they have heard of, and anything that strikes them in particular.

Spend five minutes discussing what people noticed (you could do this in threes if your group is large, to save time) and then ask them:

3. Why do you think Matthew included this list at the start of his gospel?
 - How do you think the original readers would have responded to it?
 - What does it demonstrate or teach us as readers? How might that be a helpful perspective for us?

Section 2

Now divide into three groups (or six groups if you have a large cell) Give each group one of these passages:

- *Matthew 1.18-25*
- *Matthew 2.1-12*
- *Matthew 2.13-18*

4. Ask them to do the following and then feedback:

- Summarise the passage in three sentences
- Why do you think Matthew included it in his introduction to the gospel? (What was he trying to show/communicate?)



Section 3 (if you have time)

5. a) Matthew 2.13-18 is reminiscent of the story of another baby - this time in the Old Testament. Who is that? NB. The answer is Moses!)
- b) What did that figure stand for in Israel's History (ie. What was he associated with and what did he symbolise to Israel?)

(NB. Moses was a central figure in Old Testament history, the man who led them from slavery in Egypt. He was also symbolic of the covenant and law and he also 'talked face to face with God as a man does with his friend.')

- c) What do you think Matthew is trying to say by including this description of Jesus infancy? (Which none of the other gospels do!)

(NB. Matthew is setting Jesus up as 'the new Moses' bringing in a 'new covenant'. He includes Five Discourses or blocks of Jesus' teaching which scholars think are intended to parallel the Five books of Moses - the Torah. Matthew is trying to paint Jesus in a way Jewish readers would be able to comprehend.)

Application:

6. These chapters put Jesus, the New Messiah into historical and cultural context, as part of an eternal plan. Given how short term our memories tend to be how might this sort of perspective be helpful in our day to day lives as followers of Jesus?

Spend some time praying for those who feel that they need a bigger perspective in general or on something specific in their life. (Twos or threes might be a good way to pray)