

Introducing the New Testament

Worksheet for Week 2

Matthew

Our study topic for this week is the book of Matthew. During this course, we will use these Weekly Worksheets to guide our reading of seven New Testament books: Matthew, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, James, 1 Peter, Revelation, and the gospel of John. Read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. If you feel ambitious, you could even read the entire book. You might want to read the passages in an easier translation like the New Living Translation, and then read the passages in the NRSV or NIV.

Good News for the Jews!

William Barclay rightly notes that Matthew is the most appropriate gospel to bind together the Old and New Testaments. Matthew's gospel is written for the Jewish community and seeks to convince them that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish messiah, the "anointed one," the fulfillment of God's covenant with David (2 Sam 7:4-17) and with Israel. Thus, Matthew begins his story with a Jewish genealogy, letting the reader know right up front that Jesus is from the house of David and that just as there were 14 generations from Abraham to David and 14 generations from David to the Babylonian exile, there were 14 generations from the exile to Jesus. Then, as the gospel unfolds, Matthew repeatedly shows the reader how Jesus and the events in his life fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies and promises. This message of Good News for the Jews is brought in the context of a harsh indictment of the Jewish leaders. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is especially harsh in (1) his condemnation of the leaders and (2) his prophecies as to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. As a result, Matthew's gospel is sometimes mistakenly tagged as being anti-Jewish. Rather, the gospel's portrayal of Jesus stands in the long-standing tradition of Jewish "critique from within." Jesus called Israel to a redefinition of what it means to be God's people and condemned those who refused to repent, i.e., give up their own agenda and follow Jesus' agenda.

A few keys for reading Matthew

- Because of this book's "Jewishness," when you are reading Matthew, always bear in mind Israel's story – the creation, the fall, the calling out of Abraham and the promise of a great nation through whom the world would be blessed, the deliverance from Egypt, Moses and the Law, the idealized King David, and the continual inability of Israel to live up to her end of the covenant with God. Matthew proclaims that Israel's story reached its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- In all likelihood, Matthew had the gospel of Mark available to him when writing his own account of Jesus. Using Mark's action-oriented narrative as the basic structure for his own gospel, Matthew added a beginning (the genealogy and birth story), an ending (the resurrection account), and inserted five blocks of Jesus' teachings. By inserting so much of Jesus' teaching, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' authority as a teacher and the training of his new community in what it means to live in the kingdom of God. Thus, Jesus not only teaches his disciples how they are to live in relationship with one another, but even how the community is to discipline itself! Matthew's focus on Jesus' authority is borne out in the great commission (Matt 28:16-20). Here, Jesus instructs his own disciples to go and make "make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I commanded you."
- Despite Matthew's attention to Jesus' authority and teachings, too often, when reading the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), we tend to see Jesus' teachings as presenting us with an impossible-to-achieve ideal. This is simply too easy a way out. Just as Moses' instructed Israel on how they were to live in covenant with God, Jesus teaches his disciples how they (we!) are to live as the renewed people of God. The Sermon on the Mount is profoundly counter-cultural. All the "real world" notions of power and success are turned on their head. Jesus speaks directly to our character, our influence, our righteousness, our devotion, our ambitions, our relationships, and our commitment to Jesus' authority. Jesus instructs his disciples not merely as a wise teacher, but as the Lord of all creation!!

Bible Readings for Week 2

This week's readings consist of the five blocks of Jesus' teachings in the book of Matthew. Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these teachings?

Day 1 Matthew 5:1 – 7:27 The Sermon on the Mount: the higher righteousness of the new community	Day 2 Matthew 10 The mission of the new community
Day 3 Matthew 13:1-53 Jesus' teaching in parables	Day 4 Matthew 18 Forgiveness and discipline in the new community
Day 5 Matthew 24 & 25 The coming judgment of Israel	Weekly Prayer Concerns