

What's unique about Matthew's gospel? (Matthew 1)

I am the second-born of four brothers named Todd, Chadd, Bradd and Jedd. Occasionally the four of us have been asked to give speeches at family weddings, birthdays, anniversaries or funerals. These speeches usually involve quadraphonic recounts of some popular family stories. But they have also been opportunities for each of us to share some of our own personal family memories.

In a similar way, the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life were written by four brothers-in-Christ named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. John's gospel is unique among the four, while Matthew, Mark and Luke's share so much common material that they are sometimes called the synoptic (i.e. related) gospels. But although about 2/3 of Matthew's gospel can be found in either Mark or Luke, the other 1/3 of his content is Matthew's unique contribution to the story of Christ. In this study we will look at three of Matthew's¹ distinct perspectives on Christ's life that come from the early chapters of his gospel.

1. Being the first book in the New Testament, Matthew's gospel forms a vital bridge back into the Old Testament. For example, Matthew commences his gospel with Christ's genealogy², establishing a family tree that links Jesus to some of his key Old Testament relatives.

Read the genealogy in Matthew 1:1 - 17.

- Of all the names in this genealogy, why is it particularly significant that Jesus is the descendent of both David and Abraham? (Matthew 1:1)
- How many other names do you recognise in this genealogy and what roles did these people play in the history of Israel?

2. Some of the great names of history are surrounded by an aura of destiny. But the name of Jesus is utterly unique. Matthew tells us that, from his conception, Jesus was proclaimed to be 'The Saviour' and 'God with Us'.

Read Matthew 1:18 - 23 and explain the significance of these two names.

3. Matthew portrays Jesus as Israel's (and our) perfect human representative
In order for Jesus to become the saviour of his people he needed to physically and spiritually endure the tests and trials of his ancestors. For example, like Moses, Jesus was born under the threat of a murderous ruler (2:13 - 18). And just as Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan for 40 days in the desert (4:1 - 11). But unlike his family before him, Jesus perfectly obeyed his Father's will throughout his life (e.g. 3:16 - 17).

- Reflect upon what it means that Jesus has taken on your flesh, walked in your shoes, and perfectly passed every test and trial on your behalf?
- What might have Matthew's (and your) life looked like without Jesus?

¹ There are 7 Biblical references to Matthew (Levi): Matthew 9:9 - 13 and 10:3; Mark 2:13 - 17 and 3:18; Luke 5:27 - 31 and 6:15 and Acts 1:13. The first of each of these 3 synoptic writer's references record Christ's call to Matthew to leave his tax collector's booth (and his sinful life) and follow him. The other four references are simply lists naming Jesus' disciples (apostles).

² Matthew's genealogy is different to Luke's (3:23 - 38) because: 1. It goes back only as far as Abraham, and not to Adam. 2. It traces Christ's royal lineage rather than his genetic lineage.