

Why Four Gospels

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A. W. PINK



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	7
Introduction	11
1. The Gospel of Matthew.....	27
2. The Gospel of Mark	59
3. The Gospel of Luke.....	85
4. The Gospel of John.....	127
Conclusion.....	163
About the Author.....	175

PREFACE

It is now upwards of twelve years since the writer first read Mr. Andrew Jukes' book on the Gospels, wherein he so ably outlined the various characters, in which the four evangelists, severally, present the Lord Jesus Christ. Since then we have continued, with ever increasing delight, to trace out for ourselves, the various features which are peculiar to each gospel.

It has been our privilege to give a series of Bible readings on the design and scope of the Gospels, to various companies, both in England and in this country; and many have been the requests for us to publish them in book form. We have hesitated to do

this, because Mr. Jukes, fifty years ago, had already dealt with this subject with better success than we could hope to achieve. Since his day, a number of others have written upon the same theme, though not with the same perspicuity and helpfulness. Really, Mr. Jukes covered the ground so thoroughly (at least in its broad outlines) that for any later writer who would present anything approaching a bird's-eye view of the four Gospels, it was well-nigh impossible to avoid going over much of the ground covered by the original pioneer, and repeating much of what he first, under God, set forth to such good effect. It is only because Mr. Jukes' work is unknown to many whom we hope to reach, that we now present these studies to the Christian public. We have worked diligently on the subject for ourselves, and have sought to thoroughly assimilate that which we received first from the writing of the above mentioned, while adding, also, our own findings.

In sending forth this little book, much of which has been gathered up from the labors of another, we are reminded of the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy, his son in the faith: "*And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit you to faithful men*" (2 Timothy 2:2). And again: "*But continue you in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them*" (2 Timothy 3:14).

We are fully assured that there is very much in the four Gospels that manifests the divine perfections and distinctive beauties of each one, which has not yet been brought forth by those who have sought to explore their inexhaustible depths; that there is here a wide field for diligent research, and that those who will pursue this study, prayerfully, for themselves, will be richly rewarded for their pains. May it please God to stir up an increasing number of His people to "search" this portion of

His holy Word, which reveals, as nowhere else, the excellencies of His blessed Son, which were so signally displayed by Him during the years that He tabernacled among men.

—*Arthur W. Pink,*
Swengel, PA, 1921

INTRODUCTION

Why four Gospels? It seems strange that such a question needs to be asked at this late date. The New Testament has now been in the hands of the Lord's people for almost two thousand years, and yet, comparatively few seem to grasp the character and scope of its first four books. No part of the Scriptures has been studied more widely than have the four Gospels: innumerable sermons have been preached from them, and every two or three years sections from one of the gospels are assigned as the course for study in our Sunday schools. Yet, the fact remains, that the peculiar design and

character of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is rarely perceived even by those most familiar with their contents.

Why four Gospels? It does not seem to have occurred to the minds of many to ask such a question. That we have four Gospels that treat of the earthly ministry of Christ is universally accepted, but as to why we have them, as to what they are severally designed to teach, as to their peculiar characteristics, as to their distinctive beauties—these are little discerned and even less appreciated. It is true that each of the four Gospels has much in common to all: each of them deals with the same period of history, each sets forth the teaching and miracles of the Savior, and each describes His death and resurrection. But while the four Evangelists have much in common, each has much that is peculiar to himself, and it is in noting their variations that we are brought to see their true meaning and scope and to appreciate their perfections. Just as a course in architecture enables the student to discern the subtle distinctions between the Ionic, the Gothic, and the Corinthian styles—distinctions which are lost upon the uninstructed; or, just as a musical training fits one to appreciate the grandeur of a master production, the loftiness of its theme, the beauty of its chords, the variety of its parts, or its rendition—all lost upon uninitiated; so the exquisite perfections of the four Gospels are unnoticed and unknown by those who see in them nothing more than four biographies of Christ.

In carefully reading through the four Gospels it soon becomes apparent to any reflecting mind that in none of them, nor in the four together, do we have anything approaching a complete biography of our Savior's earthly ministry. There are great gaps in His life that none of the Evangelists profess to fill in. After the record of His infancy, nothing whatever is told us about Him till He had reached the age of twelve, and after the brief record that Luke gives of Christ as a boy in the temple at

Jerusalem, followed by the statement that His parents went to Nazareth and that there He was “*subject to them*” (Luke 2:51), nothing further is told us about Him until He had reached the age of thirty. Even when we come to the accounts of His public ministry it is clear that the records are but fragmentary; the Evangelists select only portions of His teachings and describe in detail but a few of His miracles. Concerning the full scope of all that was crowded into His wonderful life, John gives us some idea when he says, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*” (John 21:25).

If then the Gospels are not complete biographies of Christ, what are they? The first answer must be, four books inspired, fully inspired, of God; four books written by men moved by the Holy Spirit; books that are true, flawless, perfect. The second answer is that, the four Gospels are so many books, each complete in itself, each of which is written with a distinctive design, and that which is included in its pages, and all that is left out, is strictly subordinated to that design, according to a principle of selection. In other words, nothing whatever is brought into any one of the Gospels save that which was strictly relevant and pertinent to its peculiar theme and subject, and all that was irrelevant and failed to illustrate and exemplify its theme was excluded. The same plan of selection is noticeable in every section of the Holy Scriptures.

Take Genesis as an example. Why is it that the first two thousand years of history are briefly outlined in its first eleven chapters, and that the next three hundred years is spread out over thirty-nine chapters? Why is it that so very little is said about the men who lived before the flood, whereas the lives of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are described in such

fullness of detail? Why is it that the Holy Spirit has seen well to depict at greater length the experiences of Joseph in Egypt than He devoted to the account of creation? Take, again, the later historical books. A great deal is given us concerning the varied experiences of Abraham's descendants, but little notice is taken of the mighty nations that were contemporaneous with them. Why is it that Israel's history is described at such length, and that of the Egyptians, the Hittites, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Greeks, is almost entirely ignored? The answer to all of these questions is that, the Holy Spirit selected only that which served the purpose before Him. The purpose of Genesis is to explain to us the origin of that nation that occupies so prominent a place in the Old Testament Scriptures, hence, the Holy Spirit hurries over, as it were, the centuries before Abraham was born, and then proceeds to describe in detail the lives of the fathers from which the chosen nation sprang. The same principle obtains in the other books of the Old Testament. Because the Holy Spirit is there setting forth the dealings of God with Israel, the other great nations of antiquity are largely ignored, and only come into view at all as they directly concerned the twelve-tribed people. So it is in the four Gospels: each of the evangelists was guided by the Spirit to record only that which served to set forth Christ in the particular character in which He was there to be viewed, and that which was not in keeping with that particular character was left out. Our meaning will become clearer as the reader proceeds.

Why four Gospels? Because one or two was not sufficient to give a perfect presentation of the varied glories of our blessed Lord. Just as no one of the Old Testament typical personages (such as Isaac, Joseph, Moses, or David) give an exhaustive foreshadowing of our Lord, so, no one of the four Gospels presents a complete portrayal of Christ's manifold excellencies. Just as no

one or two of the five great offerings appointed by God for Israel (see Leviticus 1–6) could, by itself, represent the many-sided sacrifice of Christ, so no one, or two, of the Gospels could, by itself, display fully the varied relationships that the Lord Jesus sustained when He was here upon earth. In a word, the four Gospels set Christ before us as filling four distinct offices. We might illustrate it thus. Suppose I was to visit a strange town in which there was an imposing city hall, and that I was anxious to convey to my friends at home the best possible idea of it. What would I do? I would use my camera to take four different pictures of it, one from each side, and thus my friends would be able to obtain a complete conception of its structure and beauty. Now that is exactly what we have in the four Gospels. Speaking reverently, we may say that the Holy Spirit has photographed the Lord Jesus from four different angles, viewing Him in four different relationships, displaying Him as perfectly discharging the responsibilities of four different offices. And it is impossible to read the Gospels intelligently, to understand their variations, to appreciate their details, to get out of them what we ought, until the reader learns exactly from which angle each separate gospel is viewing Christ, which particular relationship Matthew or Mark shows Him to be discharging, which office Luke or John shows Him to be filling.

The four Gospels alike present to us the person and work of our blessed Savior, but each one views Him in a distinct relationship, and only that which served to illustrate the separate design that each Evangelist had before him found a place in his gospel; everything else which was not strictly germane to his immediate purpose was omitted. To make this still simpler we will use another illustration. Suppose that today four men should undertake to write a “life” of ex-president Roosevelt, and that each one designed to present him in a different character.

Suppose that the first should treat of his private and domestic life, the second deal with him as a sportsman and hunter of big game, the third depict his military prowess, and the fourth traced his political and presidential career. Now it will be seen at once that these four biographers while writing of the life of the same man would, nevertheless, view him in four entirely different relationships. Moreover, it will be evident that these biographers would be governed in the selection of their material by the particular purpose each one had before him: each would include only that which was germane to his own specific viewpoint, and for the same reason each would omit that which was irrelevant. For instance: suppose it was known that Mr. Roosevelt, as a boy, had excelled in gymnastics and athletics which of his biographers would mention this fact? Clearly, the second one, who was depicting him as a sportsman. Suppose that as a boy Mr. Roosevelt had frequently engaged in fistic encounters, which one would make mention of it? Evidently, the one who was depicting his military career, for it would serve to illustrate his fighting qualities. Again, suppose that when a college student Mr. R. had displayed an aptitude for debating, which biographer would refer to it? The fourth, who was treating of his political and presidential life. Finally, suppose that from youth upwards, Mr. R. had manifested a marked fondness for children, which of his biographers would refer to it? The first, for he is treating of the ex-president's private and domestic life.

The above example may serve to illustrate what we have in the four Gospels. In Matthew, Christ is presented as the Son of David, the King of the Jews, and everything in his narrative centers around this truth. This explains why the first gospel opens with a setting forth of Christ's royal genealogy, and why in the second chapter mention is made of the journey of the wise men from the East, who came to Jerusalem inquiring "*Where is He*

that is born King of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2), and why in chapters five to seven we have what is known as “The Sermon on the Mount” but which, in reality, is the Manifesto of the King, containing an enunciation of the laws of His kingdom.

In Mark, Christ is depicted as the Servant of Jehovah, as the One who through equal with God made Himself of no reputation and “took upon Him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). Everything in this second gospel contributes to this central theme, and everything foreign to it is rigidly excluded. This explains why there is no genealogy recorded in Mark, why Christ is introduced at the beginning of His public ministry (nothing whatever being told us here of His earlier life), and why there are more miracles (deeds of service) detailed here than in any of the other gospels.

In Luke, Christ is set forth as the Son of Man, as connected with but contrasted from the sons of men, and everything in the narrative serves to bring this out. This explains why the third gospel traces His genealogy back to Adam, the first man, (instead of to Abraham only, as in Matthew), why as the perfect Man He is seen here so frequently in prayer, and why the angels are seen ministering to Him, instead of commanded by Him as they are in Matthew.

In John, Christ is revealed as the Son of God, and everything in this fourth gospel is made to illustrate and demonstrate this divine relationship. This explains why in the opening verse we are carried back to a point before time began, and we are shown Christ as the Word “in the beginning,” with God, and Himself expressly declared to be God; why we get here so many of His divine titles, as “*the only begotten of the Father*” (John 1:14), the “*Lamb of God*” (verse 29), the “*light of the world*” (John 8:12) etc.; why we are told here that prayer should be made in His name,

and why the Holy Spirit is here said to be sent from the Son as well as from the Father.

It is a remarkable fact that this fourfold presentation of Christ in the Gospels was specifically indicated through the Old Testament seers. Conspicuous among the many prophecies of the Old Testament are those that spoke of the coming Messiah under the title of “the branch.” From these we may select four that correspond exactly with the manner in which the Lord Jesus is looked at, respectively, in each of the four Gospels: In Jeremiah 23:5 we read, “*Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*” These words fit the first gospel as glove fits hand.

In Zechariah 3:8 we read, “*Behold, I will bring forth My servant the BRANCH.*” These words might well be taken as a title for the second gospel.

In Zechariah 6:12 we read, “*Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH.*” How accurately this corresponds with Luke’s delineation of Christ needs not to be pointed out.

In Isaiah 4:2 we read, “*In that day shall the Branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious.*” Thus, this last quoted of these Messianic predictions, which spoke of the Coming One under the figure of “the branch,” tallies exactly with the fourth gospel, which portrays our Savior as the Son of God.

But, not only did Old Testament prophecy anticipate the four chief relationships that Christ sustained on earth, the Old Testament types also foreshadowed this fourfold division. In Genesis 2:10 we read “*And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became into four heads.*” Note carefully the words “*from there.*” In Eden itself the “*river*” was one, but “*from there*” it “*was parted*” and became into four

heads. There must be some deeply hidden meaning to this, for why tell us how many “heads” this river had? The mere historical fact is without interest or value for us, and that the Holy Spirit has condescended to record this detail prepares us to look beneath the surface and seek for some mystical meaning. And surely that is not far to seek. “Eden” suggests to us the Paradise above: the “river” that “watered” it, tells of Christ who is the Light and Joy of heaven. Interpreting this mystic figure, then, we learn that in heaven Christ was seen in one character only—“*The Lord of glory*” (1 Corinthians 2:8)—but just as when the “river” left Eden it was parted and became “*four heads*” and as such thus watered the earth, so, too, the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus has been, by the Holy Spirit, “*parted...into four heads*” in the four Gospels.

Another Old Testament type that anticipated the fourfold division of Christ’s ministry as recorded in the four Gospels may be seen in Exodus 26:31–32:

And you shall make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: and you shall hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver.

From Hebrews 10:19–20, we learn that the “veil” foreshadowed the incarnation, God manifest in flesh—“*through the veil, that is to say, His flesh*” (Hebrews 10:20). It is surely significant that this “veil” was hung upon “*four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold:*” the wood, again, speaking of His humanity, and the gold of His deity. Just as these “four pillars” served to display the beautiful veil, so in the four Gospels we have made manifest the perfections of the only begotten of the Father tabernacling among men.

In connection with the Scripture last quoted, we may observe one other feature—“*with cherubims shall it be made*” (Exodus 26:31). The veil was ornamented, apparently, with the “cherubims” embroidered upon it in colors of blue, purple, and scarlet. In Ezekiel 10:15, 17, etc. the cherubim are termed “*the living creature*”; this enables us to identify the “*four beasts*” of Revelation 4:6 for rendered literally the Greek reads “four living creatures.” These “living creatures” or “cherubim” are also four in number, and from the description that is furnished of them in Revelation 4:7 it will be found that they correspond, most remarkably with the various characters in which the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

“*And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle*” (Revelation 4:7). The first cherubim, then, was “*like a lion*,” which reminds us at once of the titles that are used of Christ in Revelation 5:5—“*The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*.” The lion, which is the king among the beasts, is an apt symbol for portraying Christ as He is presented in Matthew’s gospel. Note also that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is here termed “*the Root of David*.” Thus the description given in Revelation 4:7 of the first “cherubim” corresponds exactly with the character in which Christ is set forth in the first gospel, viz., as “the Son of David,” the “King of the Jews.” The second cherubim was “*like a calf*” or “young ox.” The young ox aptly symbolizes Christ as He is presented in Mark’s gospel, for just as the ox was the chief animal of service in Israel, so in the second gospel we have Christ presented in lowliness as the perfect “Servant of Jehovah.” The third cherubim “*had a face as a man*,” which corresponds with the third gospel where our Lord’s humanity is in view. The fourth cherubim was “*like a flying eagle*”; how significant! The first three—the lion, young ox, and man,—all

belong to the earth, just as each of the first three gospels each set forth Christ in an earthly relationship; but this fourth cherubim lifts us up above the earth, and brings the heavens into view! The eagle is the bird that soars the highest and symbolizes the character in which Christ is seen in John's gospel, viz., as the Son of God. Incidentally we may observe how this description of the four cherubim in Revelation 4:7 authenticates the arrangement of the four Gospels as we have them in our Bibles, evidencing the fact that their present order is of divine arrangement as Revelation 4:7 confirms!

We would call attention to one other feature before closing this introduction and turning to the Gospels themselves. Behold the wisdom of God displayed in the selection of the four men whom He employed to write the Gospels. In each one we may discern a peculiar suitability and fitness for his task.

The instrumental selection by God to write this first gospel was singularly fitted for the task before him. Matthew is the only one of the four evangelists who presents Christ in an official relationship, namely, as the Messiah and King of Israel, and Matthew himself was the only one of the four who filled an official position; for, unlike Luke, who was by profession a physician, or John who was a fisherman, Matthew was a tax gatherer in the employ of the Romans. Again; Matthew presents Christ in kingdom connections, as the One who possessed the title to reign over Israel; how fitting, then, that Matthew, who was an officer of and accustomed to look out over a vast empire, should be the one selected for this task. Again; Matthew was a publican. The Romans appointed officials whose duty it was to collect the Jewish taxes. The tax gatherers were hated by the Jews more bitterly than the Romans themselves. Such a man was Matthew. How feelingly, then, could he write of the One who was "hated without a cause"! and set forth the Messiah-Savior, as "*despised*

and rejected” (Isaiah 53:3) by His own nation. Finally, in God appointing this man, who by calling was connected with the Romans, we have a striking anticipation of the grace of God reaching out to the despised Gentiles.

Mark’s gospel sets before us the Servant of Jehovah, God’s perfect Workman. And the instrument chosen to write this second gospel seems to have held a unique position that fitted him well for his task. He was not himself one of the apostles, but was rather a servant of an apostle. In 2 Timothy 4:11 we have a scripture that brings this out in a striking manner—“*Take Mark, and bring him with you: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*” Thus the one who wrote of our Lord as the Servant of God was himself one who ministered to others!

Luke’s gospel deals with our Lord’s humanity, and presents Him as the Son of man related to but contrasted from the sons of men. Luke’s gospel is the one that gives us the fullest account of the virgin birth. Luke’s gospel also reveals more fully than any of the others the fallen and depraved state of human nature. Again; Luke’s gospel is far more international in its scope than the other three, and is more Gentilish than Jewish—evidences of this will be presented when we come to examine his gospel in detail. Now observe the appropriateness of the selection of Luke to write this gospel. Who was he? He was neither a fisherman nor a tax gatherer, but a “physician” (see Colossians 4:14), and as such, a student of human nature and a diagnostician of the human frame. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that Luke himself was not a Jew but a Gentile, and hence it was peculiarly fitting that he should present Christ not as “*the Son of David*” (Matthew 1:1, Luke 18:38) but as “*The Son of man*” (Luke 19:10).

John’s gospel presents Christ in the loftiest character of all, setting Him forth in divine relationship, showing that He was

the Son of God. This was a task that called for a man of high spirituality, one who was intimate with our Lord in a special manner, one who was gifted with unusual spiritual discernment. And surely John, who was nearer to the savior than any of the twelve, surely John *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 21:20) was well chosen. How fitting that the one who leaned on the Master’s bosom should be the instrument to portray Christ as *“The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father”* (John 1:18)! Thus may we discern and admire the manifold wisdom of God in equipping the four “evangelists” for their honorable work.

Before closing this introduction we would return once more to our opening query—Why four Gospels? This time we shall give the question a different emphasis. Thus far, we have considered, “Why four Gospels? And we have seen that the answer is, In order to present the person of Christ in four different characters. But we would now ask, Why four Gospels? Why not have reduced them to two or three? Or, why not have added a fifth? Why four? God has a wise reason for everything, and we may be assured there is a divine fitness in the number of the Gospels.

In seeking to answer the question—Why four Gospels?—we are not left to the uncertainties of speculation or imagination. Scripture is its own interpreter. A study of God’s Word reveals the fact (as pointed out by others before us), that in it the numerals are used with definite precision and meaning. “Four” is the number of the earth. It is, therefore, also, the world number. We subjoin a few illustrations of this. There are four points to earth’s compass—north, east, south, and west. There are four seasons to earth’s year—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. There are four elements connected with our world—earth, air, fire, and water. There have been four, and only four, great world empires—the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the

Grecian, and the Roman. Scripture divides earth's inhabitants into four classes—*“kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Revelation 5:9 etc.). In the Parable of the Sower, our Lord divided the field into four kinds of soil, and later He said, *“the field is the world”* (Matthew 13:38). The fourth commandment has to do with rest from all earth's labors. The fourth clause in what is known as the Lord's Prayer is *“Your will be done in earth”* (Matthew 6:10). And so we might go on. Four is thus the earth number. How fitting, then, that the Holy Spirit should have given us four Gospels in which to set forth the earthly ministry of the heavenly One.

MATTHEW

1

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew's gospel breaks the long silence that followed the ministry of Malachi the last of the Old Testament prophets. This silence extended for four hundred years, and during that time God was hidden from Israel's view. Throughout this period there were no angelic manifestations, no prophet spoke for Jehovah, and, though the chosen people were sorely pressed, yet were there no divine interpositions on their behalf. For four centuries God shut His people up to His written Word. Again and again had God promised to send the Messiah, and from Malachi's time and onwards the saints of the Lord anxiously

awaited the appearing of the predicted One. It is at this point Matthew's gospel is to present Christ as the Fulfiller of the promises made to Israel and the prophecies that related to their Messiah. This is why the word "*fulfilled*" occurs in Matthew fifteen times, and why there are more quotations from the Old Testament in this first gospel than in the remaining three put together.

The position that Matthew's gospel occupies in the sacred canon indicates its scope: it follows immediately after the Old Testament, and stands at the beginning of the New. It is therefore a connecting link between them. Hence it is transitional in its character, and more Jewish than any other book in the New Testament. Matthew reveals God appealing to and dealing with His Old Testament people; presents the Lord Jesus as occupying a distinctively Jewish relationship; and, is the only one of the four Evangelists that records Messiah's express declaration, "*I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matthew 15:24). The numerical position given to Matthew's gospel in the divine library confirms what has been said, for, being the fortieth book it shows us Israel in the place of probation, tested by the presence of Messiah in their midst.

Matthew presents the Lord Jesus as Israel's Messiah and King, as well as the One who shall save His people from their sins. The opening sentence gives the key to the book—"*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1). Seven times the Lord Jesus is addressed as "*Son of David*" in the gospel, and ten times, altogether, is this title found there. "*Son of David*" connects the Savior with Israel's throne, "*Son of Abraham*" linking Him with Israel's land—Abraham being the one to whom Jehovah first gave the land. But nowhere after the opening verse is this title "*Son of Abraham*" applied to Christ, for the restoration of the

land to Israel is consequent upon their acceptance of Him as their Savior-King, and that which is made prominent in this first gospel is the presentation of Christ as King—twelve times over is this title here applied to Christ.

Matthew is essentially the dispensational gospel and it is impossible to overestimate its importance and value. Matthew shows us Christ offered to the Jews, and the consequences of their rejection of Him, namely, the setting aside of Israel, and God turning in grace to the Gentiles. Romans 15:8–9, summarizes the scope of Matthew’s gospel—“*Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.*” Christ was not only born of the Jews, but He was born, first, to the Jews, so that in the language of their prophet they could exclaim, “*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given*” (Isaiah 9:6). Matthew’s gospel explains why Israel, in their later books of the New Testament, is seen temporally cast off by God, and why He is now taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name; in other words, it makes known why, in the present dispensation, the church has superseded the Jewish theocracy. It supplies the key to God’s dealings with the earth in this age: without a workable knowledge of this first gospel it is well-nigh impossible to understand the remaining portions of the New Testament. We turn now to consider some of the outstanding features and peculiar characteristics of Matthew’s gospel.

GENERATIONAL TIES TO DAVID AND ABRAHAM

The first thing that arrests our attention is the opening verse. God, in His tender grace, has hung the key right over the entrance. The opening verse is that which unlocks the contents of this gospel: “*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). The first five English

words here are but two in the Greek—*biblos geneseos*. These two words indicate the peculiarly Jewish character of the earlier portions of this gospel, for it is an Old Testament expression. It is noteworthy that this expression that commences the New Testament is found almost at the beginning of the first book in the Old Testament, for in Genesis 5:1 we read, “*This is the book of the generations of Adam.*” We need hardly say that this word *generation* signifies “the history of...” These two “books”—the book of the generations of Adam and the book of the generation of Jesus Christ—might well be termed the Book of Death and the Book of Life. Not only does the whole Bible center around these two books, but the sum of human destiny also. How strikingly this expression, found at the beginning of Genesis and the beginning of Matthew, brings out the unity of the two Testaments!

In the book of Genesis we have eleven different “generations” or histories enumerated, beginning with the “*generations of the heavens and of the earth*” (Genesis 2:4) and closing with the “*generations of Jacob*” (Genesis 37:2)—thus dividing the first book of the Bible into twelve sections, twelve being the number of divine government, which is what is before us in Genesis—God in sovereign government. From Exodus to Daniel we find government entrusted, instrumentally, to Israel, and from Daniel onwards it is in the hands of the Gentiles; but in Genesis we antedate the Jewish theocracy, and there government is found directly in the hands of God, hence its twelfold division. Twice more, namely, in Numbers 3:1 and Ruth 4:18, do we get this expression “*the generations of,*” making in the Old Testament thirteen in all, which is the number of apostasy, for that is all the Law revealed! But, as we have seen, this expression occurs once more (and there for the last time in Holy Writ) in the opening verse of the New Testament, thus making

fourteen in all, and the fourteenth is “*the book of the generation of Jesus Christ.*” How profoundly significant and suggestive this is! Fourteen is 2×7 , and two signifies (among its other meanings) contrast or difference, and seven is the number of perfection and completeness—and what a complete difference the coming of Jesus Christ made!

“*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). These titles of our Savior have, at least, a threefold significance. In the first place, both of them connect Him with Israel: “*son of David*” linking Him with Israel’s throne, and “*son of Abraham*” with Israel’s land. In the second place, “*son of David*” limits Him to Israel, whereas “*son of Abraham*” is wider in its scope, reaching forth to the Gentiles, for God’s original promise was that in Abraham “*shall all the families of the earth be blessed*” (Genesis 12:3).

In the third place, as Dr. W. L. Tucker has pointed out, these titles correspond exactly with the twofold (structural) division of Matthew’s gospel.¹ Up to Matthew 4:16 all is introductory, and verse 17 opens the first division of the book, reading, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” This section treats of the official ministry of Christ and presents Him as “*the Son of David.*” The second section commences at Matthew 16:21, and reads, “*From that time forth began Jesus to show to His disciples, how that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*” This section treats, primarily, of the sacrificial work of Christ, and views Him as “*the son of Abraham,*” typified, of old, by Isaac—laid on the altar.

1. Dr. Tucker calls attention to the literary divisions of Matthew’s gospel: the dispensational break occurring at the close of chapter 12.

A ROYAL GENEALOGY

Having dwelt at some length on the opening verse of our gospel, we may next notice that the remainder of the chapter down to the end of verse 17 is occupied with the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The prime significance of this is worthy of our closest attention, for it fixes with certainty the character and dominant theme of this gospel. The very first book of the New Testament opens a long list of names! What a proof that no uninspired man composed it! But God's thoughts and ways are ever different from ours, and ever perfect too. The reason for this genealogy is not far to seek. As we have seen, the opening sentence of Matthew contains the key to the book, intimating plainly that Christ is here viewed, first, in a Jewish relationship, fully entitled to sit on David's throne. How then is His title established? By showing that, according to the flesh, He belonged to the royal tribe: by setting forth His kingly line of descent. A King's title to occupy the throne depends not on the public ballot, but lies in his blood rights.

Therefore, the first thing that the Holy Spirit does in this gospel is to give us the royal genealogy of the Messiah, showing that as a lineal descendant of David He was fully entitled to Israel's throne.

The genealogy recorded in Matthew 1 gives us not merely the human ancestry of Christ, but, particularly, His royal line of descent, this being one of the essential features that differentiates it from the genealogy recorded in Luke 3. The fundamental design of Matthew 1:1-17 is to prove Christ's right to reign as King of the Jews. This is why the genealogy is traced no further back than Abraham, he being the father of the Hebrew people. This is why, in the opening verse, the order is "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,*" instead of "the Son

of Abraham, the Son of David” as might be expected from the order that immediately follows, for there we start with Abraham and work up to David. Why, then, is this order reversed in the opening verse? The answer must be that David comes first because it is the kingly line which is here being emphasized! This also explains why, in verse 2 we read “*Abraham fathered Isaac; and Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Judas and his brethren.*” Why should Judas alone be here singled out for mention from the twelve sons of Jacob? Why not have said “Jacob begat Reuben and his brethren,” for he was Jacob’s firstborn. If it be objected that the birthright was transferred from Reuben to Joseph, then we ask, why not have said “Jacob begat Joseph,” especially as Joseph was his favorite son. The answer is, because Judas was the royal tribe, and it is the kingly line which is here before us. Again: in verse 6 we read, “*And Jesse fathered David the king; and David the king fathered Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.*” Of all those who reigned over Israel whose names are here recorded in Matthew 1, David is the only one that is denominated “king,” and he, twice over in the same verse! Why is this, except to bring David into special prominence, and thus show us the significance of the title given to our Lord in the opening verse—“*the son of David.*”

There are many interesting features of this genealogy that we must now pass over, but its numerical arrangement calls for a few brief comments. The genealogy is divided into three parts: the first section, running from Abraham to David, may be termed the period of preparation; the second section running from Solomon to the Babylonian captivity, may be called the period of degeneration; while the third period, running from the Babylonian captivity till the birth of Christ, may be named the period of expectation. The numeral three signifies, in Scripture, manifestation, and how appropriate this arrangement

was here, for not until Christ appears is God's purpose concerning Abraham and his seed fully manifested. Each of these three sections in the royal genealogy contains fourteen generations, which is 2×7 , two signifying (among its slightly varied meanings) testimony or competent witness, and seven standing for perfection. Again we may admire the consonance of these numerals in this genealogy of Christ, for only in Him do we get perfect testimony—the “*faithful and true witness*” (Revelation 3:14).

Finally, be it observed, that 14×3 gives us forty-two generations in all from Abraham to Christ, or 7×6 , seven signifying perfection, and six being the number of man, so that Christ—the forty-second from Abraham—brings us to the perfect Man! How microscopically perfect is the Word of God!

“*And Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*” (Matthew 1:16). Matthew does not connect Joseph and Jesus as father and son, but departs from the usual phraseology of the genealogy so as to indicate the peculiarity, the uniqueness, of the Savior's birth. Abraham might beget Isaac, and Isaac beget Jacob, but Joseph the husband of Mary did not beget Jesus, instead, we read, “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost*” (Matthew 1:18). As Isaiah had foretold (see Isaiah 7:14) seven hundred years before, Messiah was to be born of “*the virgin.*” But a virgin had no right to Israel's throne, but Joseph had this right, being a direct descendant of David, and so through Joseph, His legal father (for be it remembered that betrothal was as binding with the Jews as marriage is with us) the Lord Jesus secured His rights, according to the flesh, to be King of the Jews.

KING OF THE JEWS

Coming now to Matthew 2 we may observe that we have in this chapter an incident recorded that is entirely passed over by the other evangelists, but that is peculiarly appropriate in this first gospel. This incident is the visit of the wise men who came from the East to honor and worship the Christ Child. The details that the Holy Spirit gives us of this visit strikingly illustrate the distinctive character and scope of Matthew's gospel. This chapter opens as follows,

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. (Matthew 2:1–2)

Notice, these wise men came not inquiring, "Where is He that is born the Savior of the world?", nor, "Where is the Word now incarnate?", but instead, "*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*" The fact that Mark, Luke, and John are entirely silent about this, and the fact that Matthew's gospel does record it, is surely proof positive that this first gospel presents Christ in a distinctively Jewish relationship. The evidence for this is cumulative: there is first the peculiar expression with which Matthew opens—"the book of the generation of," which is an Old Testament expression, and met with nowhere else in the New Testament; there is the first title that is given to Christ in this gospel—"son of David;" there is the royal genealogy that immediately follows; and now there is the record of the visit of the wise men, saying, "*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*" Thus has the Spirit of God made so plain and prominent the peculiarly Jewish character of the opening chapters of Matthew's gospel that none save those who are blinded by prejudice can fail to see its true

dispensational place. Thus, too, has He rendered excuseless the foolish agitation which is now, in certain quarters, being raised, and that tends only to confuse and confound.

But there is far more in Matthew 2 than the recognition of Christ as the rightful King of the Jews. The incident therein narrated contains a foreshadowing of the reception that Christ was to meet with here in the world, anticipating the end from the beginning. What we find here in Matthew 2 is really a prophetic outline of the whole course of Matthew's gospel. First, we have the affirmation that the Lord Jesus was born "*King of the Jews*;" then we have the fact that Christ is found not in Jerusalem, the royal city, but outside of it; then we have the blindness and indifference of the Jews to the presence of David's Son in their midst—seen in the fact that, first, His own people were unaware that the Messiah was now there among them, and second, in their failure to accompany the wise men as they left Jerusalem seeking the young Child; then we are shown strangers from a far-distant land with a heart for the Savior, seeking Him out and worshipping Him; finally, we learn of the civil ruler filled with hatred and seeking His life. Thus, the incident as a whole marvelously foreshadowed Christ's rejection by the Jews and His acceptance by the Gentiles. Thus do we find epitomized here the whole burden of Matthew's gospel, the special purpose of which is to show Christ presenting Himself to Israel, Israel's rejection of Him, with the consequent result of God setting Israel aside for a season, and reaching out in grace to the despised Gentiles.

Next we read,

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young Child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be

you there until I bring you word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. (Matthew 2:13)

Observe that it is Joseph and not Mary that figures so prominently in the first two chapters of Matthew, for it was not through His mother, but through His legal father that the Lord Jesus acquired His title to David's throne—compare Matthew 1:20, where Joseph is termed “*son of David*”! It should also be pointed out that Matthew is, again, the only one of the four evangelists to record this journey into Egypt, and the subsequent return to Palestine. This is profoundly suggestive, and strikingly in accord with the special design of this first gospel, for it shows how Israel's Messiah took the very same place as where Israel's history as a nation began!

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he arose, and took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

(Matthew 2:19–21)

Once more we discover another line that brings out the peculiarly Jewish character of Matthew's delineation of Christ. This is the only place in the New Testament where Palestine is termed “the land of Israel,” and it is significantly proclaimed as such here in connection with Israel's King, for it is not until He shall set up His throne in Jerusalem that Palestine shall become in fact, as it has so long been in promise, “*the land of Israel*.” Yet how tragically suggestive is the statement that immediately follows here, and which closes Matthew 2. No sooner do we read of “*the land of Israel*” than we find “but” as the very next word,

and in Scripture, “but” almost always points a contrast. Here we read,

But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelled in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

(Matthew 2:22–23)

Nazareth was the most despised place in that despised province of Galilee, and thus we see how early the Messiah took the place of the despised One, again foreshadowing His rejection by the Jews—but mention of “Nazareth” follows, be it observed, mention of “*the land of Israel.*”

MESSIANIC MESSENGER

Matthew 3 opens by bringing before us a most striking character: “*In those days*”—that is, while the Lord Jesus still dwelt in despised Nazareth of Galilee—“*came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea*” (Matthew 3:1). He was the predicted forerunner of Israel’s Messiah. He was the one of whom Isaiah had said should prepare the way for the Lord, and this by preparing a people to receive Him by such time as He should appear to the public view. He came “*in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1:17), to do a work similar in character to that of the yet future mission of the Tisbite. (See Matthew 4:5–6.)

John addressed himself to the covenant people, and restricted himself to the land of Judea. He preached not in Jerusalem but in the wilderness. The reason for this is obvious: God would not own the degenerate system of Judaism, but stationed His messenger outside all the religious circles of that day.

The “wilderness” but symbolized the barrenness and desolation of Israel’s spiritual condition.

The message of John was simple and to the point—“*Repent you.*” It was a call for Israel to judge themselves. It was a word that demanded that the Jews take their proper place before God, confessing their sins. Only thus could a people be made ready for the Lord, the Messiah. The call to repentance was enforced by a timely warning—“*Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2). Observe, “*Repent you*” not because “the Savior is at hand,” not because God incarnate is now in your midst, and not because a new dispensation has dawned; but because “*the kingdom of heaven*” was “*at hand.*” What would John’s hearers understand by this expression? What meaning could those Jews attach to his words? Surely the Baptist did not employ language which, in the nature of the case, it was impossible for them to grasp. And yet we are asked to believe that John was here introducing Christianity! A wilder and more ridiculous theory it would be hard to imagine. If by the “*kingdom of heaven*” John signified the Christian dispensation, then he addressed those Jewish hearers in an unknown tongue. We say it with calm deliberation, that if John bade his auditors repent because the Christian dispensation was then being inaugurated, he mocked them, by employing a term that not only must have been entirely unintelligible to them, but utterly misleading. To charge God’s messenger with doing that is perilously near committing a sin that we shrink from naming.

What then, we ask again, would John’s hearers understand him to mean when he said, “*Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*”? Addressing, as he was, a people who were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, they could place but one meaning upon his words, namely, that he was referring to the kingdom spoken of again and again by their prophets—the

messianic kingdom. That which should distinguish Messiah's kingdom from all the kingdoms that have preceded it is this: all the kingdoms of this world have been ruled over by Satan and his hosts, whereas, when Messiah's kingdom is established, it shall be a rule of the heavens over the earth.

The question has been raised as to why Israel refused the kingdom on which their hearts were set. Did not the establishing of Messiah's kingdom mean an end of the Roman dominion? And was not that the one thing they desired above all others? In reply to such questions several things must be insisted upon. In the first place, it is a mistake to say that Israel "refused" the kingdom, for, in strict accuracy of language, the kingdom was never "offered" to them—rather was the kingdom heralded or proclaimed. The kingdom was "*at hand*" because the Heir to David's throne was about to present Himself to them. In the second place, before the kingdom could be set up, Israel must first "*repent*," but this, as is well known, is just what they, as a nation, steadily refused to do. As we are expressly told in Luke 7:29–30: "*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*" In the third place, the reader will, perhaps, see our meaning clearer if we illustrate by an analogy: the world today is eagerly longing for the Golden Age. A millennium of peace and rest is the great desideratum among diplomats and politicians. But they want it on their own terms. They desire to bring it about by their own efforts. They have no desire for a millennium brought about by the personal return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Exactly so was it with Israel in the days of John the Baptist. True, they desired to be delivered from the Roman dominion. True, they wished to be freed forever from the Gentile yoke. True, they longed for a millennium

of undisturbed prosperity in a restored Palestine, but they did not want it in *God's* terms.

The ministry of John the Baptist is referred to in greater or shorter length in each of the four Gospels, but Matthew is the only one who records this utterance "*Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" To ignore this fact is to fail in "*rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). It is to lose sight of the characteristic distinctions which the Holy Spirit has been pleased to make in the four Gospels. It is to reduce those four independent delineations of Christ's person and ministry to a meaningless jumble. It is to lay bare the incompetency of a would-be-teacher of Scripture as one who is not a "*scribe which is instructed to the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 13:52).

John's baptism confirmed his preaching. He baptized "unto repentance," and in Jordan, the river of death. Those who were baptized "*confessed their sins*" (Mark 1:5), of which death was the just due, the "wages" earned. But Christian baptism is entirely different from this: there, we take not the place of those who deserve death, but of those who show forth the fact that they have, already, died with Christ.

GRACE, NOT JUDGMENT

It is beyond our present purpose to attempt a detailed exposition of this entire gospel, rather shall we single out those features that are characteristic of and peculiar to this first gospel. Accordingly, we may notice an expression found in 3:11, and which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament outside of the four Gospels, and this is the more remarkable because a portion of this very verse is quoted in the Acts. Speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees who had "*come to his baptism*" (Matthew 3:7), but whom the Lord's forerunner quickly discerned were not in any

condition to be baptized; who had been warned to flee from the wrath to come, and therefore were in urgent need of bringing forth “*fruits meet for repentance*” (Matthew 3:8) (in their case, humbling themselves before God, abandoning their lofty pretensions and self-righteousness, and taking their place as genuine self-confessed sinners), and to whom John had said, “*Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to [not God, be it noted, but] Abraham*” (verse 9); to them John announced: “*but He that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire*” (verse 11).

In Acts 1, where we behold the risen Lord in the midst of His disciples, we read,

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, says He, you have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days from now.

(Acts 1:4–5)

His forerunner had declared that Christ should baptize Israel with “*the Holy Ghost and fire,*” yet, here, the Lord speaks only of the disciples being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Why is this? Why did the Lord Jesus omit the words “*and fire*”? The simple answer is that in Scripture “*fire*” is, invariably, connected with divine judgment. Thus, the reason is obvious why the Lord omits “*and fire*” from His utterance recorded in Acts 1: He was about to deal, not in judgment but, in grace! It is equally evident why the words “*and fire*” are recorded by Matthew, for his gospel, deals, essentially with dispensational relationships, and makes known much concerning end-time conditions. God is

yet to “baptize” recreate Israel “with fire,” the reference being to the tribulation judgments, during the time of “Jacob’s trouble.” Then will the winnowing fan be held by the hand of the rejected Messiah, and then *“He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner: but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”* (Matthew 3:12). How manifestly do the words last quoted define for us the baptism of “fire”!

The silence of the risen Lord as to the “fire” when speaking to the disciples about “the baptism of the Spirit,” has added force and significance when we find that Mark’s gospel gives the substance of what Matthew records of the Baptist’s utterance, while omitting the words “and fire”—*“There comes One mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost”* (Mark 1:7–8). Why is this? Because, as we have pointed out, “fire” is the well-known symbol of God’s judgment (often displayed in literal fire), and Mark, who is presenting Christ as the Servant of Jehovah, was most obviously led of the Spirit to leave out the words “and fire,” for as Servant He does not execute judgment. The words “and with fire” are found, though, in Luke, and this, again, is most significant. For, Luke is presenting Christ as “*The Son of Man,*” and in John 5 we read, “*And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man*” (John 5:27). How strikingly, then, does the inclusion of the words “and fire” in Matthew and Luke, and their omission in Mark, bring out the verbal inspiration of Scripture over the instruments He employed in the writing of God’s Word!

The closing verses of Matthew 3 show us the Lord Jesus, in marvelous grace, taking His place with the believing remnant of Israel: “*Then comes Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John, to be baptized of him*” (Matthew 3:13). John was so startled that, at

first, he refused to baptize Him—so little do the best of men enter into the meaning of the things of God—“*But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized by You, and come You to me?*” (Matthew 3:14). Observe once more, that Matthew is the only one of the evangelists that mentions this shrinking of the Baptist from baptizing the Lord Jesus. Appropriately does it find a place here, for it brings out the royal dignity and majesty of Israel’s Messiah. As to the meaning and significance of the Savior’s baptism we do not now enter at length, suffice it here to say that it revealed Christ as the One who had come down from heaven to act as the Substitute of His people, to die in their stead, and thus at the beginning of His public ministry He identifies Himself with those whom He represented, taking His place alongside of them in that which spoke of death. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him attested Him, indeed, as the true Messiah, the Anointed One (see Acts 10:38), and the audible testimony of the Father witnessed to His perfections, and fitness for the Work He was to do.

PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM

The first half of Matthew 4 records our Lord’s temptation, into which we do not now enter. The next thing we are told is, “*Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali*” (Matthew 4:12–13), and this in order that a prophecy of Isaiah’s might be fulfilled. And then we read, “*From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (verse 17). It would seem that the words “*from that time*” refer to the casting of the Baptist into prison. John’s message had been, “*Repent you, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2), and now that His forerunner had been incarcerated, the Messiah

Himself takes up identically the same message—the proclamation of the kingdom. In keeping with this, we read, “*And Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel [not, be it noted, “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) nor “the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15) but “the gospel”] of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*” (Matthew 4:23)

Our Lord’s miracles of healing were not simply exhibitions of power, or manifestations of mercy, they were also a supplement of His preaching and teaching, and their prime value was evidential. These miracles, which are frequently termed “signs,” formed an essential part of the Messiah’s credentials. This is established, unequivocally, by what we read in Matthew 11. When John the Baptist was cast into prison, his faith as to the Messiahship of Jesus wavered, and so he sent two of His disciples unto Him, asking, “*Are You He that should come, or do we look for another?*” (Matthew 11:3). Notice, carefully, the Lord’s reply: “*Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*” (verses 4–5). Appeal was made to two things: His teaching and His miracles of healing. The two are linked together, again, in Matthew 9:35: “*And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease among the people.*” And, again, when the Lord sent forth the Twelve: “*But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons; freely you have received, freely give*” (Matthew 10:6–8). Miracles of healing, then, were inseparably connected with the kingdom testimony. They were among the most important of “*the signs of the times*”

concerning which the Messiah reproached the Pharisees and Sadducees for their failure to discern. (See Matthew 16:1–3.) Similar miracles of healing shall be repeated when the Messiah returns to the earth, for we read in Isaiah 35:4–6:

Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you [i.e., the godly Jewish remnant of the tribulation period]. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

It should be diligently observed that Matthew, once more, is the only one of the four evangelists that makes mention of the Lord Jesus going forth and preaching “*The gospel of the kingdom*,” as he is the only one that informs us of the Twelve being sent out with the message to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*.” How significant this is! And how it indicates, again, the peculiarly Jewish character of these opening chapters of the New Testament!

MANIFESTO OF THE KING

As the result of these miracles of healing Messiah’s fame went abroad throughout the length and breadth of the land, and great multitudes followed Him. It is at this stage, we read, “*And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came to Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them*” (Matthew 5:1–2). We are tempted to pause here, and enter into a detailed examination of this important, but much misunderstood portion of Scripture—the Sermon on the Mount. But we must not depart from the central design of this book, hence a few words by way of summary is all we shall now attempt.

The first thing to be remarked is that the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5–7 is peculiar to this first gospel, no mention of it being made in the other three. This, together with the fact that in Matthew the Sermon on the Mount is found in the first section of the book, is sufficient to indicate its dispensational bearings. Second, the place from whence this sermon was delivered affords another key to its scope. It was delivered from a mountain. When the Savior ascended the mount He was elevated above the common level, and did, in symbolic action, take His place upon the throne. With Matthew 5:1 should be compared 17:1—it was upon a mountain that the Messiah was “transfigured,” and in that wondrous scene we behold a miniature and spectacular setting forth of “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (See Matthew 16:28.) Again, in Matthew 24:3, we find that it was upon a mountain that Christ gave that wondrous prophecy that describes the conditions that are to prevail just before the kingdom of Christ is set up, and which goes on to tell of what shall transpire when He sits upon the throne of His glory. With these passages should be compared two others in the Old Testament that clinch what we have just said. In Zechariah 14:4 we read, “*And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives,*” the reference being to the return of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom. Again, in Psalm 2:6, we read that God shall yet say, in reply to the concerted attempt of earth’s rulers to prevent it, “*Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.*”²

The Sermon on the Mount sets forth the manifesto of the King. It contains the “constitution” of His kingdom. It defines

2. In marked contrast from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount is Luke’s Sermon in the Plain—6:17 etc. How significant and appropriate! Luke presents the Lord Jesus as “Son of Man,” born in a manger, and entering into the sorrows and sufferings of men. How fitting, then, that here He should be heard speaking from the Plain—the common level, rather than from the Mount, the place of eminence!

the character of those who shall enter into it. It tells of the experiences through which they pass while being fitted for that kingdom. It enunciates the laws that are to govern their conduct. The authority of the King is evidenced by His “*I say unto you,*” repeated no less than fourteen times in this sermon. The effect this had upon those who heard Him is apparent from the closing verses, “*And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matthew 7:28–29).

Another line of evidence that brings out Christ’s authority (ever the most prominent characteristic in connection with a King), which is very pronounced in this gospel, is seen in His command over the angels. One thing found in connection with kings is the many servants they have to wait upon them and do their bidding. So we find here in connection with “*the Son of David.*” In Matthew 13:41 we read, “*The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.*” Observe that here these celestial servants are termed not “*the angels,*” but, specifically, “*His angels,*” that is, Messiah’s angels, and that they are sent forth in connection with “*His kingdom.*” Again, in Matthew 24:30–31, we read,

And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory [this, at His return to earth to establish His kingdom]. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

And, again in Matthew 26:53: “*Think you that I cannot now pray to [better, “ask”] My Father, and He shall*

presently [immediately] *give Me more than twelve legions of angels?*” Matthew, be it particularly noted, is the only one that brings out this feature.

Still another line of evidence of the kingly majesty of Christ should be pointed out. As it is well known, kings are honored by the homage paid them by their subjects. We need not be surprised, then, to find in this gospel, which depicts the Savior as “*the Son of David*,” that Christ is frequently seen as the One before whom men prostrated themselves. Only once each in Mark, Luke, and John, do we read of Him receiving worship, but here in Matthew no less than ten times! (See Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17.)

UNIQUE FEATURES OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Coming now to Matthew 10 (in 8 and 9 we have the authentication of the King by the special miracles that He wrought), in the opening verses we have an incident that is recorded in each of the first three gospels, namely, the selection and sending forth of the Twelve. But in Matthew's account there are several characteristic lines found nowhere else. For instance, only here do we learn that when the Lord sent them forth, He commanded them, saying, “*Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter you not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matthew 10:5–6). Perfectly appropriate is this here, but it would have been altogether out of place in any of the others. Notice, also, that the Lord added, “*And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (verse 7). How the connection in which this expression is found defines for us its dispensational scope! It was only to “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” they were to say “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*”!

In Matthew 12 we have recorded the most remarkable miracle the Messiah performed before His break with Israel. It was the healing of a man possessed of a demon, and who, in addition, was both dumb and blind. Luke, also, records the same miracle, but in describing the effects this wonder had upon the people who witnessed it, Matthew mentions something that Luke omits, something that strikingly illustrates the special design of his gospel. In the parallel passage in Luke 11:14 we read, "*And He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the demon was gone out, the dumb spoke; and the people wondered,*" and there the beloved physician stops. But Matthew says, "*And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?*" (Matthew 12:23). Thus we see, again, how that the bringing out of the kingship of Christ is the particular object that Matthew, under the Holy Spirit, had before him.

In Matthew 13, we find the seven parables of the kingdom (in its "mystery" form), the first of which is the well-known parable of the Sower, the Seed, and the Soils. Both Mark and Luke also record it, but with characteristic differences of detail. We call attention to one point in Christ's interpretation of it. Mark reads, "*The sower sows the word*" (Mark 4:14). Luke says, "*Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God*" (Luke 8:11). But Matthew, in harmony with his theme says, "*Hear you therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom*" etc. (Matthew 13:18–19). This is but a minor point, but how it brings out the perfections of the Holy Writ, down to the minutest detail! How evident it is that no mere man, or number of men, composed this Book of books! Well may we sing, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word" (Keen 1787).

In Matthew 15 we have the well-known incident of the Canaanite woman coming to Christ on the behalf of her demon-distressed daughter. Mark also mentions the same, but omits several of the distinguishing features noted by Matthew. We quote first Mark's account, and then Matthew's, placing in italics the expressions that show forth the special design of his gospel.

A certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said to her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto Him, Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And He said unto her, For this saying go your way: the devil is gone out of your daughter. (Mark 7:25–29)

Behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried to Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, You Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word [for, as a Gentile, she had no claim upon Him as the "Son of David"]. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she cries after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is your faith: be it to you even as you will.

(Matthew 15:22–28)

In the opening verse of Matthew 16, we read of how the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Christ tempting Him, and desiring that He would show them a sign from heaven. Mark and Luke both refer to this, but neither of them record that part of our Lord's reply which is found here in verses 2 and 3:

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky; but can you not discern the signs of the times?

The "signs of the times" were the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions concerning the Messiah. Every proof had been given to Israel that He was, indeed, the promised One. He had been born of a "virgin," in Bethlehem, the appointed place; a forerunner had prepared His way, exactly as Isaiah had foretold; and, in addition, there had been His mighty works, just as prophecy had fore-announced. But the Jews were blinded by their pride and self-righteousness. That Matthew alone makes mention of the Messiah's reference to these "signs of the Times" is still another evidence of the distinctively Jewish character of his gospel.

In Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 the "church" is twice referred to, and Matthew is the only one of the four evangelists that makes any direct mention of it. This has puzzled many, but the explanation is quite simple. As previously pointed out, the great purpose of this first gospel is to show how Christ presented Himself to the Jews, how they rejected Him as their Messiah, and what were the consequences of this, namely, the setting aside of Israel by God for a season, and His visiting the Gentiles in sovereign grace to take out of them a people for His name.

Thus, are we here shown how that, and why, the church has, in this dispensation, superseded the Jewish theocracy.

In Matthew 20 we have recorded the parable of the householder, who went out and hired laborers for his vineyard, agreeing to pay them one penny for the day. Matthew is the only of the evangelists that refers to this parable, and the pertinence of its place in his gospel is clear on the surface. It brings out a characteristic of the kingdom of Christ. The parable tells of how, at the end of the day, when the workers came to receive their wages, there was complaining among them, because those hired at the eleventh hour received the same as those who had toiled all through the day—verily, there is nothing new under the sun, the dissatisfaction of labor being seen here in the first century! The owner of the vineyard vindicated himself by reminding the discontented workers that he paid to each what they had agreed to accept, and then inquired, “*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?*” (Matthew 20:15). Thus did he, as Sovereign, insist on his rights to pay what he pleased, no one being wronged thereby.

In Matthew 22 we have the parable of the wedding feast of the king’s son. A parable that is very similar to this one is found in Luke’s gospel, and while there are many points of resemblance between them, yet are there some striking variations. In Luke 14:16 we read, “*Then said He to him, A certain man made a great supper, and bid many.*” Whereas, in Matthew 22:2, we are told, “*The kingdom of heaven is like to a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.*” At the close of this parable in Matthew there is something that finds no parallel whatsoever in Luke. Here we read,

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a guest which had not on a wedding garment: and he says to

him, Friend, how came you in here not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to his servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 22:11–13)

How this brings out the authority of the king needs scarcely to be pointed out.

The whole of Matthew 25 is peculiar to this first gospel. We cannot now dwell upon the contents of this interesting chapter, but would call attention to what is recorded in verses 31 to 46. That the contents of these verses is found nowhere else in the four Gospels, and its presence here is another proof of the design and scope of Matthew's. These verses portray the Son of man seated upon the throne of His glory, and before Him are gathered all nations, these being divided into two classes, and stationed on His right and left hand, respectively. In addressing each class we read, "*Then shall the King say...*" (Matthew 25:34), etc.

There are a number of items concerning the passion of the Lord Jesus recorded only by Matthew. In 26:59–60 we read, "*Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death. But found none.... At the last came two false witnesses*"—two, because that was the minimum number required by the law, in order that the truth might be established. It is interesting to note how frequently the two witnesses are found in Matthew. In Matthew 8:28, we read, "*And when He was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two possessed with demons*"—compare Mark 5:1–2, where only one of these men is referred to. Again, in Matthew 9:27, we read, "*And when Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him,*"—compare Mark 10:46. In Matthew

11:2, we are told, “When John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples.” Finally, in Matthew 27:24, we find Pilate’s testimony to the fact that Christ was a “just person,” but in 27:19 we also read, “His wife sent to him, saying, Have you nothing to do with that just man.” And this, as well as the others cited above, is found only in Matthew. Again, in Matthew 26:63–64, we find a characteristic word omitted:

And said to Him, I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus says to him, You have said: nevertheless I say to you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Here only are we told that the guilty Jews cried, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matthew 27:25). And again, Matthew is the only one that informs us of the enmity of Israel pursuing their Messiah even after His death. (See Matthew 27:62–64.)

The closing chapter of this gospel is equally striking. No mention is made by Matthew of the ascension of Christ. This, too, is in perfect accord with the theme and scope of this gospel. The curtain falls here with the Messiah still on earth, for it is on earth, and not in heaven, that the Son of David shall yet reign in glory. Here only is recorded the Lord’s word, “All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18)—for “power” is the outstanding mark of a king. Finally, the closing verses form a fitting conclusion, for they view Christ, on a “mountain,” commanding and commissioning His servants to go forth and disciple the nations, ending with the comforting assurance, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (verse 20).