



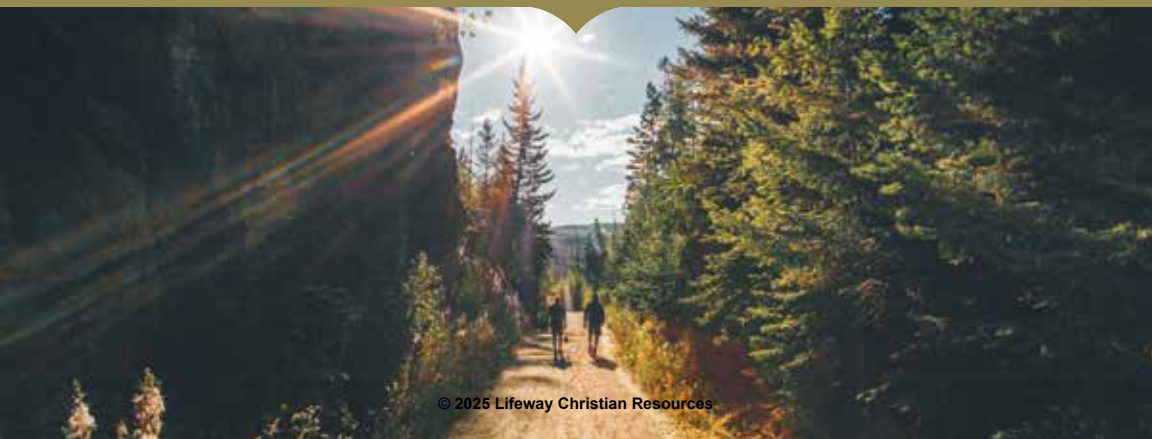
EXPLORE **THE BIBLE.**

*Adults*

# *Matthew 1–13*

Commentary

Winter 2025-26



# THE POWER OF ONE

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The teacher writes the essay prompt on the board, and you stare at it blankly: “Name the person who has made the single greatest impact on your life and why.” You sense various levels of confusion assault you at the same time. One minute, you wonder if anyone has really made that big of a difference in your life. The next minute, you’ve got a list of candidates that seems impossible to whittle down.

And even if you could eliminate every name but one, surely the last person standing deserves more attention than you could ever offer in a few hundred words. Someone like that would make such an indelible impression that you wouldn’t know where to start, what to include, or what to leave out. Such a transformational figure requires the word count of a novel, not a few pages filled with the snatches of collected memories.

Naming the most influential person in your life? On the surface, it might seem like an impossible task for you and me. But, for a former tax collector named Matthew, the choice was easy: Jesus. See, it was Jesus who had found him at his tax booth, and it was Jesus who had called him in a new direction. It was Jesus who had seen past the social and spiritual stigma that hung on first-century tax collectors like barnacles on a boat. And it was Jesus who taught him what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Matthew, the cultural outcast, had met Jesus, and Jesus had made all the difference. That’s why Matthew wrote an entire book of the Bible dedicated to the words and actions of Jesus. Thankfully, Jesus is still in the business of transforming lives today. He still accepts outcasts and social pariahs. He still makes room for them in His kingdom. And He still teaches us what it really means to have a personal relationship with God.

Honestly, Jesus has the single greatest impact on the lives of all who come to Him. If you’ve never met Him, now is the time. Like Matthew, all you have to do is hear His call and respond by following Him in faith. If you’re ready to take that step, here’s what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

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# FROM THE TEAM LEADER



## Our King Has Come

“Delivery delayed. Now arriving November 9.” How well do you wait? When a package you’ve been anxiously awaiting is delayed, for example, do you respond with patient anticipation or irritated frustration? Personally, one-day shipping, DoorDash®, and streaming TV shows have spoiled me. When unexpected circumstances require me to wait, it’s a needed exercise for me to practice patience.

Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem was a long-awaited event. For centuries, God’s people waited for the promised One. Old Testament prophets spoke of a Deliverer. This news of a coming Messiah was especially meaningful to those who persevered year after year with no deliverance in sight. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Matthew’s Gospel recounts the story of Jesus’s life. This quarter, we will study Jesus’s teachings, witness His miraculous power, and examine His earthly ministry.

May this study stir anew within you a deep appreciation for our Savior, the One who delivers us from our sins. We no longer have to wait; those days are over. Our King has come!

In Him,

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# BIBLICAL **BACKGROUND**

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The Gospel of Matthew was probably not the first Gospel account to be written. Likely Matthew's Gospel account is placed first in our New Testament because one of its primary themes and purposes is to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, and it bridges the gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

## **WRITER**

All Old Testament and New Testament books have two authors: God and a human writer (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). All four of our New Testament Gospel accounts are anonymous, but most conservative Christian scholars agree that the books of Matthew and John were written by the apostles Matthew and John and that Mark and Luke were connected to the apostles Peter and Paul. Early church historians such as Papias of Hierapolis (AD 60–130) and Eusebius (AD 260–340) identified Matthew as the human writer of the first Gospel account.

## **PLACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

There is only one Gospel according to four witnesses—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Irenaeus, a second-century Christian leader in Lyon (modern-day central France) offered the quintessential defense of the four-fold Gospel about AD 185. He wrote that it was not possible that there should be fewer or more Gospels than the four, basing his logic on the analogy of the four corners of the earth and the four principle winds.<sup>1</sup>

The first list of twenty-seven books that agrees with our New Testament today was written in AD 367 by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria (Egypt). However, we have many second and third century AD Christian leaders referring to Matthew's Gospel account. One of the earliest and most important of these is the Muratorian Canon, a list of books that the church at Rome was using about AD 180–200. Although the first two sections are lost, the third section begins “the third gospel book, that according to Luke.” Nearly all scholars believe the first two Gospel accounts were Matthew and Mark.

## **THEME/PURPOSE**

Like the other three Gospel accounts, The Gospel According to Matthew is first and foremost gospel, a biographical and theological telling of the story of Jesus and the salvation He brings to all who believe. Specifically, Matthew's Gospel is centered around fulfillment and has the primary theme of the kingdom of God. Jesus's longest recorded sermon we call “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5–7), and it elaborates on the



kingdom of God. A brief definition of “the kingdom of God” is God’s rule in our hearts individually, and it is made up of all the redeemed of all ages corporately.

How did Jesus fulfill God’s written Word, the Old Testament? He faithfully did the works of His Father (John 14:10), fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Jesus is the messianic King, the zenith of David’s dynasty, the Servant of the Lord from Isaiah, the Son of Man from Daniel, the culmination of Old Testament prophets from Moses onward, the fulfillment of the priesthood prefigured by Melchizedek, the paschal lamb symbolized by His redemptive death, the rock-like source of living water, and the tabernacle-temple abode of God on earth.

## SOURCES

That the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of each book of the Bible is without question. “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.”<sup>2</sup>

Many (perhaps most) New Testament scholars believe that Mark’s Gospel was written first and served as one source for both Matthew and Luke. These three Gospels are usually called the “Synoptic Gospels.” The Greek word for *Synoptic* means “able to be seen together.” These three Gospels take a similar biographical or chronological approach to telling the story of Jesus. John used a completely different approach. He organized his Gospel into two major sections: (1) around seven signs in the book of signs (John 1–12) and (2) the book of glory (chaps. 13–21) describing Jesus’s final days. John also added an introduction and an epilogue.

Additionally, many New Testament scholars believe that Matthew used several sources (written or oral) to which he alone had access. Further, scholars believe that Matthew and Luke shared some sources. Again, this is not in the Bible, so we cannot confirm its truthfulness. But it may provide some insight on the sources and technical details of how the Gospel writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit and what sources they may have used.

## DATE OF WRITING

Jesus was born before Herod the Great died in 4 BC, so Jesus was likely born in either 5 BC or 4 BC. Luke 3:23 records that Jesus was about thirty when He began His public ministry. Jesus had a three-year ministry

concluding with His crucifixion, resurrection, and several post-resurrection appearances in about AD 30. Therefore, Matthew could not have been written earlier than AD 30.

The church leader Papias, who wrote in the late first century–early second century AD, mentioned Matthew. So, Matthew must have been written prior to AD 110–120 at the latest and likely as much as forty to fifty years earlier.

However, since Matthew appears to have used Mark’s Gospel (probably written in the early-mid 50s–60s AD), a likely date-range of writing for Matthew’s Gospel account is in the mid-60s–70s AD. This date is by no means certain but is perhaps the best estimate.

## **MATTHEW’S JEWISHNESS**

Most Jews felt that after Malachi, the last Old Testament book, was finished (about 435 BC), God was silent until Jesus’s day. Some Jews still listened for God, attended synagogue, and awaited the Messiah, but many did not. To them it seemed that God was not speaking any more. Matthew, a Jew, wrote into this culture. Yet Matthew cooperated with the Roman government in collecting taxes. In the minds of many Jews, that made him a worse person than a Gentile.

Matthew opened his Gospel by connecting Jesus to “the Father of the Faithful,” Abraham (lived about 2000 BC), and to David, “the Military King of a United Israel” (lived about 1000 BC). This illustrated Matthew’s connection with his Jewish audience. Matthew’s emphasis on Jewish customs and religion throughout his Gospel strengthened that connection even more with his emphasis on God’s kingdom and Jesus’s fulfillment of God’s purpose as stated in the Old Testament. Matthew seems to have quoted from both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (called “the Septuagint” or LXX). Most other New Testament writers quoted much more from the LXX than from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

“Matthew introduced Jesus as ‘the son of David, the son of Abraham’ . . . Only Jesus, the God-Man, of all David’s descendants, and of all people on earth, had the authority of God Almighty to bring the kingdom program to its proper order and perfection . . . Only Jesus, the God-Man, of all Abraham’s descendants, and of all people on earth, could live a sinless life, incurring no debt of his own, to offer himself as the object of God’s righteous wrath, substituting himself in our place, paying the debt we owe. Only he could redeem God’s fallen people.”<sup>3</sup>

1. *Adversus Haereses* 3.11.8.

2. *Baptist Faith and Message 2000: I. The Scriptures*. <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#i>.

3. Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary series (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 11.



## Gospel of Matthew

- **I. Birth and Infancy of Jesus**  
(Matt. 1:1-2:23)
- **II. Beginning of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee**  
(Matt. 3:1-4:25)
- **III. Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount**  
(Matt. 5:1-7:29)
- **IV. Jesus's First Miracles**  
(Matt. 8:1-9:38)
- **V. Discourse Two: Ministry of Jesus's Disciples**  
(Matt. 10:1-42)
- **VI. Responses to Jesus's Ministry**  
(Matt. 11:1-12:50)
- **VII. Discourse Three: Parables about the Kingdom**  
(Matt. 13:1-58)
- **VIII. Close of Jesus's Ministry in Galilee**  
(Matt. 14:1-17:27)
- **IX. Discourse Four: Character of Jesus's Disciples**  
(Matt. 18:1-35)
- **X. Jesus's Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem**  
(Matt. 19:1-20:34)
- **XI. Jesus's Ministry in Jerusalem**  
(Matt. 21:1-23:39)
- **XII. Discourse Five: Olivet Discourse**  
(Matt. 24:1-25:46)
- **XIII. Betrayal, Crucifixion, and Burial**  
(Matt. 26:1-27:66)
- **XIV. Resurrection and Commission**  
(Matt. 28:1-20)

# Affirmation

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE FATHER’S PLAN OF SALVATION.

When I get a cup of coffee, I don’t want it completely filled. I prefer to leave some room for my cream and sugar. In fact, my late mother-in-law who drank her coffee black told me that I didn’t like coffee as much as I liked the cream and sugar (as usual, she was probably correct). Refilling my coffee cup means more cream and sugar—I like the idea of fulfillment (coffee and otherwise).

One of the reasons that the Gospel According to Matthew is placed first in our New Testament is its often-repeated theme of fulfillment. Over and over throughout his Gospel, Matthew revealed how Jesus Christ fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. Matthew noted many instances in which Jesus or the events related to Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (1:22-23; 2:15,17-18,23; 3:3,15; 4:14-16; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15,35; 21:4-5; 26:54,56; 27:9-10), more than in any other New Testament Gospel. However, this does not include the writings of the apostle Paul, who quoted the Old Testament 131 times—including Isaiah 36 times and Psalms 23 times.

The Greek word translated *fulfillment* carries the ideas of completion, perfection, bringing to pass a prediction, and meeting the requirements. Fulfillment suggests the unity of events and time in history directed by God—according to His timetable. However, seeing the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament as merely prophecy and fulfillment ignores the fact that God’s message is always relevant for the present and has implications for the future. The idea behind prophecy is “speaking God’s word” for the present situation (one of the tasks of our pastors today). In some situations, a prophet “predicted” the future so that when people saw the fulfillment, they would have recognized the authenticity of the prophet’s message as God’s word for them in their current situation. When you read Matthew, think of “fulfillment” and “the kingdom of God.”

## Matthew 3:1–4:11

Matthew opened his Gospel by providing a genealogy of Jesus that spans three great periods of Jewish history (1:1-17): the time of Abraham to the time of David (vv. 2-6a), from David to the time of the Babylonian exile (vv. 6b-11), and from the exile to the birth of the promised Messiah (vv. 12-16). The eight remaining verses of the first chapter describe Jesus's birth as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "'See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel,' which is translated 'God is with us'" (Matt. 1:23; see Isa. 7:14). Matthew used the Greek word for "virgin" (meaning sexually pure) so that his readers would understand that Mary had no sexual relations prior to Jesus's birth (Matt. 1:24-25).

Matthew 2 details the visit of the wise men and their interaction with Herod the Great (2:1-8), king of Judea from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC. He is called Herod the Great likely because of his many building projects including the renovation of the temple in Jerusalem. Matthew 2 also reports that after the wise men worshiped the baby Jesus (vv. 9-12); Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt at an angel's directions due to Herod's searching for Jesus to kill him (vv. 13-15). Matthew details Herod's order to kill all the boy babies in Bethlehem who were two years old and under (vv. 16-18). This chapter ends with the return of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee after Herod's death (vv. 19-23). Nazareth was the village in which Jesus grew up.

Matthew 3 opens with the ministry of John the Baptist, who preached repentance and baptized people in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (3:1-12). According to Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist's message was "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" Matthew, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, described the reaction to John's preaching: "Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (vv. 5-6). To repent, God requires people to (1) stop doing the wrong things, (2) make a 180-degree turn away from sin and toward God, and (3) start doing the right things. John insisted that repentance should result in a changed life (3:8).

God gave John the Baptist insight into the spiritual condition of the Pharisees and the Sadducees in verses 7-12 when he called them a "Brood of vipers" (v. 7) and told them God was ready to chop them down unless they produced "fruit consistent with repentance" (vv. 8-10).

John continued by stating that the One who would come after him would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (vv. 11-12).

Matthew 3:13-17, the beginning of this session’s focal passage, describes Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan River. Parallel passages of Jesus’s baptism are found in Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22. While John does not describe Jesus’s baptism, in John 1:26-36 John the Baptist testified to Jesus being both “the Son of God” and “the Lamb of God.”

Matthew 4:1-11 records Jesus’s temptations by the devil and His response to them. Using Jesus’s response as a guide, we can learn a lot about how we should respond to the temptations we face.



## Obeying God (Matt. 3:13-17)

Jesus came to John the Baptist at the Jordan River to be baptized. Initially, John resisted Jesus’s request, but he relented once Jesus assured him it was part of God’s plan. When Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the Father affirmed Him from heaven.

### VERSE 13

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**Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.**

The location of **John** the Baptist’s preaching about repentance was “the wilderness of Judea” (v. 1). That geographical reference doesn’t tell us exactly where Jesus was baptized. John 3:23 states that John the Baptist “also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there.” Perhaps this is the same location where Jesus was baptized. The exact location of Aenon is debated

The **Jordan** was the largest and most important river in the Roman province of Judea. The word translated *Jordan* means “descender.” The Jordan River is over 200 miles long and about 17 feet deep at its deepest. From its origins at the foot of Mount Hermon, it empties into the Sea of Galilee. The Jordan River then descends from over 1,000 feet above sea level and empties into the Dead Sea at 1,300 feet below sea level.

Verse 13 reveals Jesus had been in the region of **Galilee**; He had been in His hometown of Nazareth (according to Mark 1:9) which was

located about twenty miles east of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. This verse also reveals God's purpose for this event in Jesus' life: He came to John the Baptist **to be baptized by him**. New Testament scholars have expressed quite a few possibilities for Jesus's motive for being baptized. Certainly, Jesus was following God the Father's plan for His life. Likely Jesus wanted to identify with John the Baptist's ministry and focus on repentance. Jesus had no need to repent, because He was sinless. Baptism revealed Jesus's identification with human beings who need to repent of their sins to begin a relationship with God. His favorite title was the Son of Man (used eighty-two times in the Gospel accounts).

### VERSES 14-15

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**But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.**

Matthew 3:14-15 reveals the dialogue between Jesus and John the Baptist immediately prior to Jesus's baptism (vv. 16-17). These verses also illustrate both John's humility and Jesus's submission to His Father's will. Based on God's gift of prophecy (and possibly their family relationship—likely they were cousins on their mother's side), John knew that he was unworthy to baptize Jesus. The Greek verb translated **tried to stop** indicates John's made several attempts to deter Jesus from being baptized by John. John's reason was **“I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”** Since John the Baptist's focus was on repentance and Jesus never sinned and thus had no need for repentance, we can understand John's reluctance to baptize Jesus. Correctly, John felt that Jesus was superior to him and that Jesus should baptize him. In fact, John had previously said that he was unworthy even to remove Jesus's sandals (v. 11).

With Jesus's words, **“Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness,”** Matthew recorded Jesus's first spoken words in his Gospel account. Notice especially that Jesus used the words *us*, *fulfill*, and *righteousness*. In John the Baptist's baptizing Jesus, both of them would be fulfilling God's plan. “Both John's baptism of Jesus and Jesus' submission to baptism at the hands of John (note the use of ‘for us’) are identified as having their part to play in the unfolding of God's purpose.”<sup>1</sup> The Greek words translated *for now* indicate Jesus's baptism (and subsequent temptations) were God's will to inaugurate Jesus's

public ministry. Jesus's words convinced John of the necessity of his baptizing Jesus.

While Matthew used the word translated *righteousness* only seven times in his Gospel, it serves as the basis for all of Jesus's ethical decisions. Jesus's baptism also fulfills *all righteousness*. Baptism is the first outward evidence of our following God's plan of salvation after we repent and place our faith in Jesus. Through Jesus's righteousness—and only through His righteousness—can we enter a relationship with God (Rom. 3:21-26). Righteousness comes when we die in Adam and become alive in Christ (5:12–6:14). God permanently removes our sins and gives us the perfect righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:22; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The phrase to *fulfill all righteousness* may also refer to several Old Testament passages such as Psalm 2:7 (a coronation song for a Davidic king) and one or two passages of Isaiah's four Suffering Servant songs (Isa. 42:1 and perhaps Isa. 53:11). Jesus fulfilled all the elements of Isaiah's four songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12).

Matthew 3:15 concludes with John's action: **Then John allowed him to be baptized.** Jesus's words had convinced John of the appropriateness of John's baptizing Jesus. Jews practiced a ritual similar to baptism called a *mikvah*. It involved being totally immersed in water to restore ritual purity to that person. In secular Greek and Roman literature, baptism was always by immersion. The Didache (translated as “the Teaching,” a Christian church manual describing the practices of the early church written in the late first century or early second century AD) details various rules surrounding baptisms. The preferred mode of baptism was first in living (running) water, second in a pool of water, and third in pouring or sprinkling if enough water was unavailable. The other modes of baptism were allowed as a concession only if complete immersion in water was not able to be performed. Baptists have always viewed baptism by immersion as the only proper mode of baptism, rejecting sprinkling and pouring as valid modes of baptism.

## VERSES 16-17

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**When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”**

In verses 16-17, the Holy Spirit led Matthew to record responses to Jesus's baptism rather than to describe the baptism itself. Whereas in

Luke's account of Jesus's baptism (Luke 3:21-22) the phrase "the Holy Spirit" is used, Matthew used the term **Spirit of God**. Both refer to the same Person of the Trinity. However, Matthew may have used *Spirit of God* because that's how the Holy Spirit is referred to in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) most early Christians used.

The Greek New Testament uses the word *idou*, frequently translated "behold," to point the reader to noteworthy events that are very important. This word is usually not translated in many modern translations of the Bible because no single English word conveys the entirety of its meaning. However, the Greek term occurs twice in these verses. In verse 16 it points to the heavens being opened **suddenly** (*idou*) in reference to **the Spirit of God descending like a dove**. Matthew's inclusion of the *dove* representing the Holy Spirit at Jesus's baptism is one of the many times he refers to the Spirit in Jesus's ministry. Here at Jesus's baptism, it refers to the role the Holy Spirit played in giving Jesus His "marching orders" at the beginning of His public ministry. In verse 17 *idou* (not translated in the CSB) refers to **a voice speaking from heaven**, pointing to the authority of God the Father.

Although the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible, a Latin lawyer named Tertullian (from Carthage in northern Africa) first used the term about AD 200 in reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The baptism of Jesus is one of the places in the Bible where the three Persons of the Trinity are mentioned, though the term "Trinity" is not used (see also Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13). In relation to Jesus's baptism, first, God the Son (Jesus Himself) is the one who initiated the action of baptism. Next, the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of God") is present in verse 16 descending on Jesus. Finally, God the Father (indicated by **a voice from heaven said**) speaks, saying: **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."** These words reveal the relationship of the Father and the Son. This is also the first of three times the Father speaks from heaven. The other times are at Jesus's transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) and after Jesus's prayer that God's name be glorified (John 12:28).

Those final words in verse 17 also reveal the Father's evaluation of the Son—the Father is *well-pleased* with the Son. The Greek term translated *well-pleased* means to take pleasure or find satisfaction in.

This was the first recorded instance of God speaking since the prophet Malachi some 400 years earlier. The Jews believed that God would only speak when the Messiah appeared. New Testament scholars vary in their opinions on who heard the voice. Was it Jesus, John the Baptist, the crowd, or some combination of these? No consensus exists.



## Explore Further

Read the article “Trinity” on pages 1605–1607 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the article’s definition of “the Trinity”? How does the work of the Trinity involve all three members of the Godhead at the same time? How are they separate?

## Hearing God (Matt. 4:1-4)

Immediately following His baptism, Jesus followed the Spirit’s leadership into the wilderness. After forty days of fasting, He experienced Satan’s temptations. Knowing Jesus’s hunger, Satan challenged Him to prove He was the Son of God by turning stones into bread. Jesus rejected the temptation by quoting Scripture (Deut. 8:3) that affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction.

### VERSE 1

**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**

The temptation of Jesus is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Mark’s temptation account is brief (Mark 1:12-13). Matthew and Luke give extended accounts of the same three temptations, but in a slightly different order (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The location of these temptations is **the wilderness**, the deserted places on both sides of the Jordan River. Jews believed this wilderness was home to demons.

The opening word **Then** indicates a strong connection between Jesus’s baptism and His temptations. All three Gospel accounts link Jesus’s temptations with His baptism. The linking is significant in Jesus following God’s will in all aspects of His life.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness was so that Jesus could **be tempted by the devil**. The Greek word translated *tempted* is also translated as “test” (Matt. 19:3; 22:35). To be tempted is not a sin (Jesus was tempted). It depends on if we allow the temptation to lead us toward God or away from Him. Since Jesus had no evil desires, He could not be tempted by them. Rather, He was tempted by the devil. Satan tempts; God tests. “No one undergoing a trial should say, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself

doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (Jas. 1:13-15). While Jesus's temptations were different than ours in this instance, He understands what it is like to be tempted and sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14-16).

The word *devil* is a transliteration of a Greek term meaning "false accuser," and "slanderer." "Satan" (Matt. 4:10), a synonym for *devil*, is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "adversary." These terms and others, such as Beelzebul (12:24,27; CSB, ESV, NIV)/Beelzebub (KJV), all describe the same being, who is the leader over the demonic forces.

## VERSE 2

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**After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**

Fasting was a Jewish practice in which a person substituted the need to expend the time preparing food and eating it with devotion to prayer. In essence it substituted the physical desire to eat with the spiritual desire to communicate with God (to pray). Growing out of that Jewish background, fasting was commonplace for Christians, especially in the first few centuries AD.

Jesus **had fasted forty days and forty nights**. His forty-day fast mirrors Israel's wilderness wanderings for forty years after their failure to follow God's will for their entering the land God promised to them (Num. 14:26-35). Jesus's fast may also reflect the fasts of Moses (Deut. 9:9) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). That Jesus was **hungry** after these forty days reveals His humanity.

## VERSE 3

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**Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."**

Knowing Jesus's hunger, Satan challenged Him to prove He was **the Son of God** by turning stones into bread. Indeed, the small round rocks in this area would have reminded most people of the small round baked loaves so common at this time. Rather than the words "devil" (vv. 1,5,8) and "Satan" (v. 10), Matthew described this evil being by his function, **the tempter**.

Scholars have interpreted the phrase "**If you are the Son of God**" in two distinct ways. (1) Some scholars believe that the devil's words are meant to *remind* Jesus that indeed He was God's Son, a fact emphasized

by His recent baptism, and therefore He should demonstrate the unlimited power available to Him by turning stones to bread. Yet Jesus never used His power for His own interests; His miracles accomplished God's will. Indeed, the Greek particle translated *if* often is translated "since."

(2) Other scholars argue that the devil was encouraging Jesus to question His relationship with God and the power that He gave the Son. Had Jesus followed the devil's suggested course instead of God's will, the Son would have held the enemy/tempter in higher regard than His Father. In that way, Jesus would have become a sinner.

#### VERSE 4

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**He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

Jesus rejected the devil's temptation by quoting Scripture that affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction (Deut. 8:3). In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminded Israel of God's provision for the nation; just as the devil may have been reminding Jesus of the Father's provision for Him. The phrase **it is written** refers to what God had written in the Old Testament. Notice Jesus's reverence for Scripture—"every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Jesus used Scripture as a weapon to defeat the devil. Paul equated Scripture with "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), while the writer of Hebrews described Scripture as "living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12, NASB). Later Paul reminded Timothy that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (a literal translation of the Greek; "inspired," 2 Tim. 3:16). We also should remember Peter's words in 2 Peter 1:21: "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (NASB)

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#### Explore Further

Read the articles "Temptation" on pages 1545–1546 and "Temptation of Jesus" on pages 1546–1547 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the difference between temptation and sin. What steps can you take to avoid letting your temptations lead you into sin and away from God?

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## Trusting God (Matt. 4:5-7)

The devil urged Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple. By twisting Scripture (Ps. 91:11-12), Satan was encouraging Jesus to prove He was the Son of God by forcing the Father to perform a miracle. This diversion from God's plan would use His promises for the Messiah to reveal Jesus to the public in a dramatic way and avoid the cross. Again, Jesus used Scripture (Deut. 6:16) to reject the temptation.

### VERSE 5

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**Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,**

This temptation involved the devil transporting Jesus to **the pinnacle of the temple** in Jerusalem. A literal reading of this verse assumes the devil had supernatural powers to transport Jesus. From *the pinnacle of the temple* in Jerusalem to the floor of the Kidron Valley below during Jesus's time was about 450 feet. The devil's thought may have been that Jesus would attract people's attention and cause people to follow Him without His having to endure the cross.

### VERSE 6

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**and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."**

Again, the devil pointed out that Jesus was **the Son of God** and had the ability to avoid death. By citing Psalm 91:11-12, the devil indicated that he knew Jesus had the power to call God's **angels** for help. The verses from Psalm 91 focus on God's protection for the godly. But the verses were not written with the intent of putting God to the test.

### VERSE 7

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**Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."**

Jesus again used Scripture (Deut. 6:16) to reject this temptation, emphasizing the sin of putting God to the test. In the original context of Deuteronomy 6, Moses encouraged Israel to not repeat their rebellion at Massah, where they failed to trust God to meet their need for

water (Ex. 17:1-7). Since God cared for the sons of Israel, would He not much more express His care for His only Son? But where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded in trusting and obeying His Father.

We can learn from Jesus's response how to correctly use Scripture. As Christians we must not fall into the temptation of using "proof-texts" to give support to our own ideas, thereby ignoring the original context of Scripture in its historical setting. Understanding the original context is so important for properly understanding and interpreting God's Word. Jesus applied the truth of never putting God to the test. So too we do well when we do the same as we apply Scripture to our lives.



### Explore Further

Jesus again refused to put God to the test. What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? How can you trust in God yet not unnecessarily put Him to the test?

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## Worshipping God (Matt. 4:8-11)

The devil's final temptation dealt with who Jesus would worship: God or the devil. This temptation was meant to deter Jesus from following His mission of the cross. The devil's offer: worship him and he would give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world.

### VERSES 8-9

**Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me."**

This temptation may have been a vision. No mountain is tall enough to allow seeing **all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor**. The word *kingdoms* refers to countries and governments. The New Testament pictures the devil's domain as the world (John 14:30). By offering Jesus *all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor* if Jesus would **fall down and worship** him, the devil was promising Jesus "instant power, authority, and wealth apart from the way of the cross."<sup>2</sup>

## VERSE 10

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**Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”**

But Jesus chose to obey His Father’s will and take the path to the cross. Matthew concluded his Gospel account with Jesus saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (28:18).

In this climactic moment, Jesus revealed His authority by commanding **Satan** to go away. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 to defeat Satan’s temptations. The first two of the Ten Commandments deal with who or what we worship (Ex. 20:2-6; Deut. 5:6-10). We are commanded to worship and serve only God. Likely Jesus had these commands in mind as He responded to the devil.

## VERSE 11

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**Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.**

**The devil left** Jesus for a time, only to reappear at other times in Jesus’s ministry. By performing exorcisms throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was defeating the devil and his demons.

As the devil left, **angels came and began to serve him**. *Angels* are spiritual beings who serve as God’s servants, warriors, and messengers. The tense of the Greek verb translated *began to serve* indicates a repeated action (as in preparing and serving food).



### **Explore Further**

As Christians we face the temptation of who or what to worship each day. How we deal with this temptation reveals who is on the throne of our lives. Do we follow God’s will and plan for us or do we succumb to the devil’s easier way? Would you say that God is on the throne of your life? Why or why not? If He is not, what would it take to make Him the center of your life?

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1. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 153.

2. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 85.