



THE
FOUR FACES
of
CHRIST

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CHAPTER 1

Matthew, What Do You See?

“I See a Wonderful, Marvelous Savior, Redeemer and Friend”

For centuries, archeologists grappled with the mysteries of ancient hieroglyphics, often left to mere speculation regarding their meaning. One day, they uncovered a dark “Rosetta Stone” that rendered the same text in Greek and Egyptian script and previously undecipherable hieroglyphics. By comparing the translations side by side, they mastered hieroglyphics and could now see clearly into a world they had known only in a fog.

More than any other book in Scripture, Matthew’s Gospel is a type of “Rosetta Stone” when making sense of the Old Testament. It’s as if the oracles of ancient saints and sages past (i.e., the Torah), who had plenty of strange and foreign concepts akin to hieroglyphics of their own, become ever discernable under Matthew’s guidance. When the book of Matthew is placed next to Isaiah, for example, one dispels darkness in the other. Hues of hazy grey in Isaiah, Matthew casts in brisk color. Clarity, in essence, gets cast on confusion.

What could centuries of Hebrew students and rabbis make of a young virgin birthing a Child? Such has never occurred in the history of man. And not just any Child, we're told, but an Infant who Himself was very God of very God. Jews, remember, were emphatically monotheistic. Isaiah 7:14, written 700 hundred years in advance of Christ's birth, predicted, "Behold, a virgin will be with Child and bear a Son, and she will call His name Immanuel." That is to say the baby would be Elohim, which is the designation reserved for Israel's God!

Even had Israel's educated elite dismissed Isaiah 7:14 out of hand, equally perplexing texts followed closely on its heels. A few chapters later, Isaiah continues by saying, "A Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His Name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty **God**, Eternal **Father**, Prince of Peace."³ It's hard to fathom how terribly confusing it must have been for monotheistic Jews to conceive of calling a little Child "Mighty God" or "Eternal Father." The statement, "Ten thousand times in history a baby has become a King. But only once in history has a King become a baby" may be evident now but not back then.

It wasn't as if this peculiar Child King would grow up to enjoy a trouble-free, blissful life, far from it. As bizarre as it sounded, God's predetermined plan appeared to have Him travel down a pathway marked by striking irony. As Supreme Leader over all creation, He would be tried, judged, and declared guilty by a lesser tribunal, one Pontius Pilate. And for some troublesome reason, this same Godlike figure would find Himself on the bitter, brutal receiving end of beatings, leaving scars and stripes across His back, hairs on His beard ripped off, naked, alone, and afraid.⁴

Please be aware that we, as followers of Christ, have the express benefit of *looking back* at the Old Testament through the lens of the cross. Not so for millennia of individuals who stood on the opposite

³ Isaiah 9:6

⁴ Not "fear" in the sense we as humans fear, but more of a holy dread of what would transpire soon.

side of Christ's cross. We cannot minimize the fog that clouded their perception of difficult-to-understand passages like those that follow.

- a) When Christians read, "He was pierced through for our transgressions...by His stripes, we are healed" (Is. 53:5), we see a depiction of Jesus' hands pierced to the cross and scourge marks striped across His back. But the Jews in Isaiah's day didn't; the earliest record of crucifixion dates to 519 BC, when King Darius I of Persia crucified 30,000 of his political enemies.
- b) When we meditate on "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, Yet *He did not open His mouth*; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so *He did not open His mouth*" (Is. 53:7), it's easy to make the connection to John the Baptist's declaration from the Jordan's riverbanks—"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"⁵ In addition, there's "the sudden withdrawal of red letters" for every step Christ takes closer to the hill He would die on—Calvary. If you can access a Bible with Christ's words in red, open it to see for yourself.⁶ Chapter 25 is entirely red; 100% of the content has Jesus talking. Then, in Chapter 26, the red begins fading off the page. By Chapter 27, there are less than a dozen red words—a direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so *He did not open His mouth*." This is just one of 47 prophecies in Isaiah fulfilled by Christ.⁷
- c) Or what about the time Isaiah predicted, "His appearance was marred more than any man. And His form more than the sons of men" and "like one from whom men hide their faces,"⁸ It's not hard for us to envision the aftereffects of

⁵ John 1:29

⁶ NIV, ESV, NKJV, NLT

⁷ <https://www.gotquestions.org/prophecies-of-Jesus.html>

⁸ Isaiah 52:14; 53:3

Christ's beating by a cat of nine tails. In respect to the jeering crowds who turned away their heads in disgust? Christians are fully aware of how horrid crucifixion was, so how could the citizenry not? As for pockets of Hebrew scholars who studied the exact same text above? *They conjectured the Messiah would be leprous!* It's a plausible deduction if you go back and reread it.

How on earth could any of God's chosen people possibly understand any of these predictions, more akin to undecipherable Egyptian hieroglyphics? Enter on the scene a tax-collecting traitor turned disciple named Matthew.

JESUS' DNA

If Messianic fingerprints were traced throughout the Old Testament from Matthew's vantage point, no verse would be free of Jesus' DNA. His imprint is everywhere; it's inescapable. Like an investigator at a crime scene, Matthew lifts Jesus' fingerprints, comings and goings, footprints, timelines, time stamps, and dates as clear as day. He quoted the Old Testament more than any other writer (61 times). Look for yourself to see how prevalent the word "fulfilled" is.

Right out of the chute, beginning in chapter one, verse one, could any more extraordinary and iconic heroes from the Old Testament be tied to Jesus than Abraham and David: "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1) By immediately tying Christ to father Abraham, there's no mistaking how Matthew interpreted the declaration given to Abraham by God in Genesis 12:3, "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Abraham smiled at the Lord's promise of blessing all nations (goyim in Hebrew) through one of his offspring. As for the tie to King David and the final occupant of his throne, that seat was exclusively reserved for King Jesus. "Are you

the King of the Jews?” Pilate asked, to which Jesus confirmed, “It is as you say.”⁹

We must acknowledge two additional giants of the faith who later emerge in Matthew. While on the Mount of Transfiguration we overhear Moses, symbolizing the Law, and Elijah, representing the Prophets, deliberate with Christ about the forthcoming events in Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, Jesus said earlier, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” How fascinating to learn only in the person of Christ can one individual simultaneously hold the three highest offices in Judaism: Prophet, Priest, and King. Matthew covered two of those offices here, Law and Prophet, and was just getting started.¹⁰

The easiest way to summarize his 28 remaining chapters is that Matthew, in essence, was a Jew writing to Jews about a Jew, meaning he locked down on the Jewishness of Jesus, or what one professor deemed “a distinctly Jewish flavor” throughout. This allowed him to realize the long-awaited “Anointed One” or “Messiah” had finally come. As opposed to Mark, who usually refers to Jesus as the Son of God, which connects more to his Gentile audience. Or Luke, who refers to Jesus primarily as the Son of Man for his purposes. Or John, who saw Jesus as God.

By the way, you’ve got a head start going into this next section, because, you’ll be surprised to learn, you’re already familiar with the Hebrew word for *Anointed One* and the Greek word for *Anointed One*. I guarantee it, although you might not have put two and two together. Give it your best guess before looking up the answer in the footnotes.¹¹

⁹ Matthew 17:11

¹⁰ Hebrews 6:20 describes Jesus as High Priest this way: “Where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

¹¹ The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and the Hebrew word for *Anointed One* is Messiah. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. The Greek word for *Anointed One* is Christ. We refer to Jesus as the Messiah or Jesus Christ. Neither is His last Name but designates He’s the One.

AFTERIMAGE

What about the Torah's interconnection with Jesus? What was Matthew to make of that? Time had been on his side, meaning he had decades to flesh out what that interconnection looked like.¹² I can envision Matthew staring at Jesus stacked up against the Torah until he stared his eyes away. Until, in the final analysis, he bursts out, "I see it!" The best way to illustrate that is by using the optical illusion below.



Focus on the 4 dots in the middle for 30 seconds. Then take a look at smooth single color wall (preferably white) and you should see a circle of light. Blink your eyes a few times and you will see Jesus.

The rabbis saw what you saw at first glance...bits and pieces in anticipation of the Coming One. But after locking in on the image for 30 seconds, then turning to a solid surface, "I see it!", you saw Jesus. That's precisely what happened with Matthew.

When arranging his material, one overarching theme between the Old and New Testaments was perceived: Jesus = Torah and Torah = Jesus.

¹² It's estimated an interval of 30-40 years transpired between Jesus' ascension (c. 29 AD) and the publication of Matthew's Gospel.

How do we know this? I can only think of one thing all sects of Jews could reach a consensus on—they all agreed the *Five Books* of Moses were authoritative (the TORAH). Differences arose over the authority of other books like the Prophets, Writings, Talmud, Mishnah, etc., In light of that insight (i.e., all Jews agreeing on the Torah's validity), Matthew intentionally broke up his account into *five teaching blocks* (each block ends with “when Jesus had finished teaching...”).¹³ By design, Matthew was reinforcing how our Lord fulfilled “every jot and tittle” of the Law. I assure you that his fivefold division did not go unnoticed by his Hebrew readership. Not to mention a blatant reference in chapter 5: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

Furthermore, when deciding on how many sermons and discourses to recount, Matthew could have picked any number he wanted, correct? Yes, he intentionally chose five, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount. Once again, Jesus = Torah and Torah = Jesus.

THE DOOR YOU REACH

*The long and winding road
That leads to your door
Will never disappear
I've seen that road before
It always leads me here
Lead me to your door*

– The Beatles

Whenever I read the Gospel according to Matthew, I'm reminded of the Beatles' hit song, “The Long and Winding Road.” In 1968, Paul McCartney said about its release: “It's a sad song because it's all

¹³ Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1

about the unattainable, the door you never quite reach. This is the road you never get to the end of.”¹⁴

It's as if McCartney's sentiments about *the unattainable, the door you never quite reach, the road you never get to the end of*, all speak for what the ancient saints and sages past must have experienced collectively, which was a sense of hopelessness trying to figure out how all the pieces of a 1,500-year-old puzzle fit together.¹⁵ Not so for Matthew.

I'll never forget a memorable lesson I learned from my son Miller in the backyard of our house in Pensacola. He insisted, all 30 inches tall of his three-year-old frame, that my missing gardening hand shovel was lying in the middle of a path in the woods. Taking him at his word, I paced back and forth all over the area he designated, seeking to find the entrance without any luck. “There!” he motioned, flinging his arm while standing on the back deck. I walked a little to my right. “Not there. There!” he pointed again, his slight kid lisp revving with agitation, causing me to chuckle. A grin, by the way, I shielded with my shoulder, not wanting to exasperate what he interpreted as a dire situation. (If only adult life were that simple.)

Nevertheless, I obliged by taking a few steps to the left. “There!” again and again we went. Finally, that little tyke came bee-bopping down the patio stairs, like a grumpy, grouchy old-timer, to point out what I could not see. “There!” he squatted down with the front of his head practically touching the ground, his pointer finger extended within inches of the two-and-a-half-foot tall “entrance” to the path where my missing hand shovel lay. And he was right; the opening had been there the entire time, all thirty inches high of it; I just kept missing it.

In answer to the question, “Matthew, what did you see?”, I'm reminded of that life lesson I learned from a child twenty-some years ago.

¹⁴ Miles, Barry. *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*.

¹⁵ The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by more than 40 authors over a period of about 1,500 years.

Matthew beheld what the whole world had missed, what they had walked past, and what they had known for centuries only in a fog: Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Christ. That’s what he saw.

Discussion Questions for “Matthew, What Do You See?”

Look Back:

Share your three questions from last week and why you chose each.

Understanding the Rosetta Stone Analogy:

1. How does the analogy of the Rosetta Stone help us understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
2. Using the stem and leaf plot, classify in the Old Testament where prophecies or themes are clarified or fulfilled in the Gospel of Matthew. An example has been provided for you.

OLD TESTAMENT	MATTHEW
Is. 53:7	Chap. 17

Matthew's Unique Perspective:

3. Explore Matthew's background as a tax-collecting disciple and his role in presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. How does Matthew's perspective contribute to our understanding of Jesus' mission?
4. When reading Matthew's genealogy in the opening verses of his Gospel, what significance does linking Jesus to Abraham and David hold for Jewish readers? What about for Christians?

Jesus as Torah:

5. Reflect on the concept that Jesus equals Torah and Torah equals Jesus, as presented in the chapter. How does this perspective deepen our understanding of Jesus' role in fulfilling the Law and the Prophets?
6. Matthew divided his Gospel into five teaching blocks. What is the significance of this division? How does this connect Jesus to the Torah?

Personal Reflection:

7. Have there been times when you encountered a scripture passage or prophecy that was difficult to understand. How did your perspective change over time, particularly in light of Jesus' life and teachings?
8. Consider the analogy of the "long and winding road" and the simplicity of a child pointing out what was previously unseen.

How does this relate to our journey of understanding Jesus as the Messiah?

9. Discuss ways in which we can share the significance of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy with others, particularly those who may not be familiar with scripture.

Action Step for Next Week:

In your quiet time, church service, or other study time look for places where you can clearly see Jesus fulfilling the law or prophets. Write them down here:

Thanks for reading Chapter 1

That was Matthew's face of Christ. Mark, Luke, and John each saw something the others didn't — and the book walks through all four, then asks what Jesus wants us to see and what He wants us to do about it. Each chapter ends with discussion questions and one action step, so it works for small groups as well as your own reading.

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