

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 41: Matthew, *Jesus the Messiah*

Welcome to Week 41 of the Bible Reading Coach Podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This is a big week.

Yes, I know I've said that before. But this is yeah, this is the biggest week we've had so far. And here's why. This week, we leave the Old Testament, we come into the New Testament. This week, we start four amazing weeks in the books that are called the Gospels, which means we get to meet Jesus for the first time. Yes, that's why it's so big. We've been waiting 40 weeks. And we are finally at the point where we're meeting Jesus, the hero of the entire story for the first time. We're also starting three weeks on what are called the Synoptic Gospels, which we'll talk about in future weeks. So here's how we're going to break this down. Because this week starts so many things, Old to New Testament, the Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, meeting Jesus for the first time.

Here's how we're going to break it down over the next few weeks as we get into these kinds of big pictures so that we don't overwhelm you with all of it in the first week. Today, we're going to talk about the shift from Old Testament to New Testament. And we're going to walk you through the story that we read in the book of Matthew. Next week, we're going to talk about the differences between the four Gospels. And we're going to walk you through the Gospel of Mark. Then we're going to talk about when, why and how the gospels were written. And we're going to walk you through the book of Luke, that's two weeks from now. And then in week four, we'll see a very different picture of Jesus. And we're going to talk about why the Gospel of John is so different from the other three. So that's a breakdown of, kind of, the big picture stuff we'll be doing over the next four weeks.

But first, before we get into the details of the book of Matthew, which is what we'll be reading together this week, let's take a look at some of the differences between the Old Testament which we've just spent 40 weeks in, and the New Testament where we'll spend the rest of our time in reading the Bible together the next 12 weeks together. First of all, the Old Testament and New Testament are called Old Testament and New Testament by Christians, simply because one of them is older and one of them is newer. That's the reason for those names. Obviously, our Hebrew friends don't call it Old or New Testament, they simply call what we call the Old Testament, their scriptures. Secondly, the Old Testament was written in Hebrews here in the Hebrew language, the New Testament is written in the Greek language, with a little bit of Aramaic sprinkled in in both of them. And we'll talk about why that is, in a little bit. We've already talked about it a little bit before, but we'll get into it again soon, in the next couple of weeks.

Secondly, the Old Testament was written for the Jewish people, they didn't care if it was read by people outside the Jewish group. They didn't write it for people who were not Jews. But the New Testament was written mostly by Jews, but for people everywhere, including non Jews, and it was written in the Greek language, which was the language that all learned people wrote in and read in at that time and period. Okay. Now, the Old Testament is what we just read 40 weeks worth. And they are the writings of the Jewish people and their relationship with God and the message that were given to them, from God to the people, and sometimes as in the Psalms,

the messages that were cries from the people to God, but it was the writings of the Jewish people. The events ended last week with the book of Malakai, which was written somewhere around 430 to 400 BCE.

By the time the book of Malakai was written, the Old Testament had not yet been assembled into a cohesive unit. Why? Because it was still being written. So when did the Old Testament become what the Hebrews noted as the Scriptures. And what we as Christians today know is the Old Testament. Well, that happened between the Testaments in that 400 year gap between testaments, all of what we know today of as the Old Testament was put together into a cohesive unit and it has been accepted as that group of scriptures by the Jewish people and by Christians ever since then. Now, what happened between the Testaments and the reason that it was assembled during that period of time, is because during this 400 years, what were sometimes referred to as 400 years of silence a whole lot happens. Let me walk you through what happened between the Testaments, because it helps us understand the difference between the Old and New Testament and it helps us get ready for what we're about to read in the next 12 weeks, and especially some of the shifts in tone and language and teaching that we're about to have in the next 12 weeks.

The first thing that happened between the New Testaments was that the exile ended. We actually saw that happen at the end of the Old Testament. At the end of the exile, not all Jews came back into Israel. In fact, most of them didn't stay in Israel. And then we had some political and military disruptions that caused something called the diaspora, or what we in English would call the dispersion. That is that not only did you have Jews now in Babylon and Jews in Israel, but because of persecution, because of war, because of political changes, the Jews started scattering all over the known face of the earth. From that time on until today, the Jewish people by ethnicity have been and remain today, the most widely distributed people on the face of the earth. Most other ethnic groups are found like 90%, or more within a very particular local region. There are still a lot of Jews, of course today in Israel, but the Jewish people are more scattered more broadly around the face of the earth, from the dispersion between the Old and New Testaments up until today than any other ethnic group. Because of that, their identity was something that they wanted to maintain. So the exile and the diaspora or the dispersion were the first biggest group, the second biggest change between the Old and New Testaments.

Then the second biggest change was the implementation of what's called the synagogue system. The synagogues are meeting places that they would put together in any city where there were at least 10, or more adult male Jews. So if you only had a couple of Jews, they couldn't set up a synagogue. But if you had 10, or more adult male Jews, they would set up a synagogue in a synagogue was not like a temple is not a place where you can offer sacrifices that can only happen at the temple in Jerusalem, which is why Jews don't sacrifice today because they don't have a temple in Jerusalem. Today, the synagogues were set up instead as a place to read scripture, to learn from Scripture and to teach scripture to others, and to pass along their Jewish heritage and their culture to the next generation. So in the Old Testament, there's not a single mention of synagogue, they didn't have it. But between the New Testament, the Old and New Testaments, they set up the system of synagogues in cities all over the place. And as you come into the New Testament, all of a sudden, they're talking about synagogues.

So if you've ever read through the Bible before, you may not have even noticed, all of a sudden, there's this shift. That's one of the reasons why all of a sudden, you know, Jesus goes

in, he preaches in the synagogue, Paul goes to a new town, the first place he preaches is in the synagogue. But there's not a single synagogue in the Old Testament, Where'd they come from? That's where they came from. Now, if you're going to have a synagogue, you gotta have people in the synagogues, we're going to teach. And this is the third big thing that happened during the time between the Old and New Testament is the rabbinical system. That is the appearance of rabbis, just like there were no synagogues in the Old Testament, and all of a sudden, they're everywhere in the new. There were no rabbis in the Old Testament. And all of a sudden, in the New Testament, there's rabbis everywhere. It's one of the titles that Jesus has called, he's called rabbi or teacher. Where did rabbis come from? Well, because they built synagogues, in order to give themselves a cultural identity, while they're scattered across the face of the earth, they needed teachers and these teachers are called rabbis.

So this is another term that we have in the New Testament different from the old. And not only do we have rabbis, but we have different types of rabbis, different segments of rabbis, different schools of rabbis, some of the most well known ones that we'll read about in the New Testament of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There are others as well. These are the people who taught in the synagogues, and kept the Jewish culture alive. The other really big event that happened between the Testaments was that this was when, as I mentioned, already, the Old Testament was assembled. So in the synagogues, the rabbi's get together, they start pulling together all of their sacred scripture, the Psalms, and, and the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the prophets and the poetry and that the hymns that they sing in the the wisdom that was written down in places like physiologies, and Proverbs, they start pulling all of this together, and they start assembling and agreeing upon these are sacred scriptures, let's keep them together in a cohesive unit, as much as you're able to writing them on massive scrolls, of course.

And so by the time we get to the New Testament, what we now call the Old Testament today, the 39 books of what we call the Old Testament have been accepted as Jewish scripture for a long period of time, there is really no debate among the primary Jewish teachers. By the time Jesus shows up that the Old Testament is scripture. And in fact, Jesus and Paul and all of the early church fathers acknowledged this as well. The Old Testament was set in place as it is today, by the time Jesus comes onto the scene in the book of Matthew. So these are the key elements that are put in place between the Testaments that we now have in place when we show up into the New Testament.

They are things that help the Jewish culture stay alive, they help them to observe the law, and to a large degree, these ideas are really working. In the Old Testament, they kept falling into idolatry in the New Testament, worshiping idols is never a problem for the Jews really ever again. In the Old Testament, polygamy; guys are constantly marrying multiple wives. New Testament, polygamy is gone, it's one wife per husband. And that is it. The Jews never fall back into polygamy again, they never fall back into paganism. Again, it's really an amazing thing, how setting these barriers by setting up synagogues, putting all the scriptures into one place, assigning people who would teach those scriptures and keeping their culture alive, to make sure they don't go back to the sins of the Old Testament.

To a large degree, it really works. However, by the time Jesus shows up, they've swung the pendulum too far. In the Old Testament, the pendulum was way over on the side of paganism and idolatry, and multiple wives. They swing it so far to the other end, that not only

are they denying the things that they shouldn't have been doing anyway. But now they're saying yes to legalism, and they become far too strict and far too legalistic. And they're putting laws on the books that simply are impossible for people to keep. So by the time Jesus shows up, he starts having arguments with rabbis, especially the harder schools of rabbis called the Sadducees. And the Pharisees, his biggest enemies were the Pharisees, because they were so legalistic and swung the pendulum so far over that not only would they not welcome non Jews into the fold, which is what the kingdom of God was about, as we'll see Jesus talking about this week. But they also made it so heavy, that even Jewish people who were trying to remain faithful couldn't keep all the laws, there were simply too many of them.

Now, this is the setting that we get to when we come to the New Testament. But even in this setting, there's still one big thing missing. And that's this, they are still under a dictatorship. They've gone from being under the thumb of the Assyrians to the Babylonians, they have a short break where they're self ruling under the Maccabees for just a few decades. And then the Greeks come along, and then the Romans come along, and by the time Jesus is there, they have been under domination except for a short period of time for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. And they're looking forward to the Deliverer whom they call the Messiah. Jesus comes along, and he is Messiah.

In fact, whenever we hear the term Jesus Christ or Jesus the Christ, Christ is not Jesus last name. Christ is a Latinized version of the word Messiah. So anytime you read Jesus Christ, or Christ Jesus, or Jesus Christ, in your head, translate Christ as Messiah. This is Jesus the Messiah or Messiah, Jesus. In fact, most of our Jewish Christian friends won't use the word Christ, they prefer to use the word Messiah, because it reminds them of what that really really means. This is Jesus being declared as the Messiah, the Savior of the Jewish people, and of course of us who are Gentiles, as well. Okay, and that's where the book of Matthew comes in.

So that's some of the setup for the New Testament. We'll get into more of the setup of the Gospels and the differences between them next week. But now let's take a look at the passage you'll actually be reading this week, the book of Matthew, it starts, of course, with the birth of Jesus in Matthew chapters one through two. What's interesting, though, is that Matthew is one of only two of the gospels that mentions the birth of Jesus at all. The other one is the book of Luke, you will read the differences between Matthew and Luke as we go through them, several differences, but the main ones you're going to recognize as you go through them are that Matthew is where you get the wise men and Luke is where you get the shepherds. They're not in both of them. Did they both happen? Yes. Do they match up on the timeline? Yes. But Matthew mentioned certain things that Luke doesn't mention. And that's the key one, you'll get, you're going to notice, for those of us who have even passing familiarity with the Christmas story, then we'll go in Matthew, chapters three through four, and we'll see a man named John the Baptist. Actually, we'll see him earlier than that when we read the book of Luke, he'll come into the story much earlier. But the first appearances of him in Matthew is in Matthew 3 and 4.

Now, John the Baptist makes his appearance here and he's an important figure in the gospels, because one of the Old Testament signs by which we would know who the Messiah is, is that he would have someone prepare the way for him like the prophet Elijah, someone like the prophet Elijah, who would prepare the way for the Messiah that is very specifically mentioned and quoted in Isaiah chapter 40, verse three that's mentioned in the New Testament as well. In fact, one of the reasons that Matthew was the first of the Gospels, is because

Matthew was written in a way that intentionally links it to what we've just read in the Old Testament.

Matthew was written specifically for Jewish people to prove that Jesus was Messiah. Basically what Matthew keeps saying is, remember all the stuff in our scriptures and what Christians call the Old Testament. Here's how it was fulfilled in Jesus And we see it over and over again. In fact, in just these first four chapters of Matthew, we are going to have, first of all, a long genealogy from Abraham all the way to Joseph and Mary and Jesus. So we see how he ties into the prophecy that way. And then in the first four chapters alone of Matthew, there are 10 direct Old Testament quotes, three from Isaiah, one from Micah, from Hosea from Jeremiah, three from Deuteronomy, and one from the Psalms. That's direct quotes, plus a whole bunch of allusions to the Old Testament in just the first four chapters. And then after chapter four we come to and drumroll, please, we come to the Sermon on the Mount in chapters five through seven of Matthew, this is the first and by far the greatest section, and the biggest, the longest section of Jesus teaching in the entire Bible.

I gotta pause here, because I gotta say this, it is impossible to oversell how beautiful this passage is, how wise the teaching of it is, and how important these three chapters are to our understanding of who Jesus was, what Jesus teaching was about what Jesus came to do, what it is that we're supposed to believe as Christians, and how we're supposed to behave as Christians. It's all here, aside from the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the entire understanding and structure of the kingdom of God on earth. And what it looks like as lived through Jesus and as it should be lived through us is here in the Sermon on the Mount.

What's fascinating, however, is, at least to me, and hopefully, it'll help you as well, is the Sermon on the Mount was almost certainly not a single sermon delivered at one time. And that's fine. It's probably all a whole bunch of pieces pulled together by Matthew. And the reason that is probably the case is because almost all of the teachings that we read in the Sermon on the Mount, keep in mind, you'll see them again, almost all of them later in Matthew, Mark, and Mark, Luke, and John, especially in Mark and Luke, you'll see them in bits and pieces, and you'll see them and offered in different places, different times and in a different order.

So Matthew probably took all of this. And as a way of introducing the Jewish people to what Jesus' entire teaching was all about, he took all of these pieces and put them together in a cohesive whole, to help us understand them in one place. And then one time is simply a matter that people write in sometimes, and probably the way Matthew wrote as well, if you believe it was all spoken at the same time and in the same place, God bless you, I got no argument with that. But I think the evidence points to a different direction. And either way, it doesn't change the importance of the teaching to us. This is where in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus sets up the central theme of his teaching, which is the kingdom of God. If you were to ask a simple question, in one short phrase, what is the teaching and the life of Jesus all about? It is about the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not come to pick a side theologically, to pick a side politically or to pick a side philosophically.

And there were tons of philosophies running around, and tons of theological opinions running around, and a whole bunch of political ideas running around in their day just like they are in our day. So today, we might ask, we know which side of politics is Jesus, on which theological debate does Jesus think about which philosophy do you think Jesus would adhere to? And the answer is absolutely none of them. Because Jesus came to promote, to live and to

show us how to live according to the rules of a completely different kingdom and a completely different place, a place that he called the kingdom of God or sometimes the kingdom of heaven. So look for the times that Jesus referenced his kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. He is telling us we are not to be following the rules or the ideas of this world. But we are called to be citizens of a completely different world and a completely different kingdom, under the authority of God Himself. And the sermon on the mount is where that is laid out in glorious detail.

We then move along through a whole bunch of chapters, Matthew. Matthew, chapter 8, through most of chapter 14, Jesus has his ministry in Galilee. Now, this is another region or another word like rabbi and synagogue that we haven't heard before. And all of a sudden we'll hear a whole bunch about it in the New Testament. So what is Galilee? Well, remember, when we left the Old Testament, for the last several 100 years of the Old Testament, Israel wasn't a single nation, it was two nations than a than the region of Israel to the north, the 10 tribes to the north, that remains to retain the name Israel, and the two tribes to the south called the region of Judah. So you had Israel and Judah. When we come to the New Testament, we don't have two divisions anymore in the nation, we now have three segments to the nation. Most of the northern part, the extreme northern part of what used to be called Israel is now called Galilee, named after the Sea of Galilee, which was its most, most prominent geological feature.

The southern part is called Judea which is the Greek and Roman way of saying Judah. And it's pretty much the same as Judah in the Old Testament. But in between the two, the section that used to be the southern part of the northern section of Israel, I know that's his confusing way of phrasing it is called Samaria. We've heard a little bit about Samaria, I teased you a little bit about it in some of our teachings from the Old Testament, but the middle part of Samaria. And in Samaria was where there were tribes of Israelites who had intermarried with pagans, and they now practice a blended religion of paganism and Judaism.

And this is sinful to God and was hated by the Jews. And in fact, the Samaritan people were hated by the Jews. This you will see as we go through the Gospels, several times the Samaritans work will come up, where Jesus intentionally goes through Samaria and surprises people, he intentionally talks to a Samaritan woman and shocks His disciples, He chooses a Samaritan as the hero of his one, one of his most well known parables, and completely blows their mind, because he's picking as a hero, someone who had taken Jewish religion and pagan religion and combined the combined them and this was sinful, it's not they didn't think it was a sin, it actually wasn't sin. But what Jesus is saying is the kingdom of God is open to everyone. And even those that you hate and want to distance yourself from God wants them to draw them into his truth as well. He's not accepting their hybrid religion, but he accepts them as people and wants them to be brought into the truth of the kingdom of God, as well. So that's how the land is divided.

So Galilee is the region to the north, and he spends the first couple of years of his ministry almost exclusively in that region in the north. It's also important to understand that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, which is in Judea in the south. But Mary and Joseph were from Nazareth, and he was raised in Nazareth, which is in the north in Galilee. So he spends a lot of his early years around his hometown, around Capernaum, and Nazareth, all in that northern region called Galilee. During this season, he trained he gathers His disciples and He trains his disciples, Matthew, the author of this particular gospel, was one of the 12 of

His disciples, He heals people, he teaches them you performs miracles, He tells parables about the Kingdom of God, you see so much of the life of Christ being lived in these chapters.

Then there are a handful of chapters, Matthew 14:13, through 17:20. So, the back half of 14, all of 15, all of 16, and most of chapter 17. He goes away from Galilee, to three other regions around Galilee that technically are not a part of Israel. He goes to Phoenicia to the north, he goes to the capitalist, which is across the Sea of Galilee, to the southeast, and he goes to Bethsaida, which is also across the Sea of Galilee into the Northeast. So how does he get across the Sea of Galilee? Well, he walks across the lake, right? That amazing, that amazing story of Jesus walking on the water, right? Why is he walking across the water? Because he needed to get across the lake. And that's where he begins to spend his time and regions outside of Israel, to the north and to the northeast of the area of Galilee.

During this time, you're going to read about several things that happen that confirm he's the Messiah, most distinctly what's called the Mount of Transfiguration. It's the last story that happens during this little season, during at the beginning of chapter 17, and where Moses and Elijah, yes, the Moses and Elijah have the Old Testament, where they show up and talk with Jesus. And it's one of the great confirmations that he is, in fact, Messiah. Then for the next couple of chapters, the rest of chapter 17, all the way through 18. He comes back into Galilee for a short period of time. And by this time, things are heating up. The Rabbi's who had swung the pendulum too far over to legalism are now really upset at Jesus for a handful of things. One that he's bringing the message to those outside of Israel, and to that he's telling those who are inside of Israel that the Pharisees are too legalistic, and there's a better way called the kingdom of God. And they are not happy with that.

It gets to a certain point of heat where Jesus says, Okay, now we're going to throw down and he heads down in Matthew chapters 19 and 22. Judea, the southern part of the nation are at and for the for those two chapters. He spends his time teaching around Jerusalem, as he really starts to teach in ways that make the Pharisees even angrier, and that culminates in Matthew chapter 21, the beginning of Jesus last week and so the last segment of the book in Matthew 21 through 28 is where we get Jesus last week and I want you to pay note to this. Matthew has a total Look 28 chapters, the first 20 of them, talk about his birth, his entire lifetime, and his entire three years of ministry 20 chapters to cover three, three years.

And then in the last seven chapters, it covers only one week. And you're going to see that repeat in the next two gospels, and even more so in the book of John, where he gives even more time to the last week of Jesus' life. Why do we get just 20 chapters on his entire life and three years of ministry and seven full chapters on a single week? Why? Because it is without question, the most consequential week, not just in Jesus life, and not just in the Bible, but in all of human history. Without question, the final week of Jesus' life is without question, the most consequential week in human history. And as you read it, remember that and see how important it is the things that he does.

It begins with what we call the triumphal entry. That is when he comes into Jerusalem, we celebrate it today on what we call Palm Sunday. And what he's doing there is he's really, for the first time ever, making a bold, direct public declaration in front of crowds that he is Messiah. On the day of on the day, where he comes in with a triumphal entry on Palm Sunday is where Jesus passes the point of no return before Palm Sunday, if Jesus wanted to wish you wouldn't have but before Palm Sunday, if Jesus wanted to, he could have said, Oh, no, I never said that

Messiah didn't really mean that I didn't really mean that. And he could have backed away; he could have chosen not to continue down this path. After the triumphal entry after Palm Sunday, point of no return. Even if he wants to back out he can't. He's made his declaration far too public, it cannot be ignored anymore. And he does this on purpose.

Okay, then he spends the rest of the week teaching the kingdom of God in ways that make the legalistic religious leaders even angrier and angrier and angrier, he's turning up the heat as he faces towards the cross. He talks about the second coming in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew more thoroughly than he does anywhere else, outside of Revelation. So note that when we get to Matthew 24, and 25, it's Jesus' most thorough teaching about what his next coming is going to look like. And it's really different than his first, okay, then we get to chapter 26, where the betrayal plot comes into play where the Last Supper happens, which is a Passover dinner, where he's arrested and he's put on trial.

Then in chapter 27, we relive his crucifixion, and the horror of that. But all of it, thankfully, leads to chapter 28, which is the resurrection of Jesus, which is what changes everything for everybody for all time. So there is no way for me to fully prepare you for what you're about to read this week. If you've never read the story of Jesus out of the Bible for yourself before, I envy you the chance to read it this week, for the first time. If you are starting your Bible reading through here instead of in the Old Testament, because you thought, hey, let's begin with the New Testament. God bless you Great choice. Welcome to this, you are about to be blown away by this person known as Jesus, who was God in flesh and who now is God and has always been God. Of course, you're about to read about this amazing story this week and I welcome you to that as we do that, this week.

I encourage you, as you read this week, go slow. Give yourself time to read it slowly to think about it, as you read it, to pray about it, as you read it, to reread it if you have the time to do so, if there was ever a time not to rush, these next four or five weeks, or a time not to rush, but to really slow down and to take it in as much as you possibly can note the references to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Note how Jesus says, we are to live it out and how we are to be different than the people who are living by rules of a different kingdom that we run into every single day of our lives.

And then as you get towards the end of it, sit slowly through his crucifixion through the suffering, recognize that he did that for us. What he actually sacrificed for us is so extraordinary, I have a hard time even saying it now without choking up and just trying to get through it to say it to you. And then of course the glorious resurrection, which is literally the event that makes us Christians. It's an extraordinary week of reading. I hope you slow down, enjoy it and get a whole lot out of it. And I hope by the end of this week, you will see and know Jesus clearer than you've ever seen it and known before. Thanks, have a great week with it. We'll see you next week.

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