

Reading through the New Testament: Week 1

In this first week, you'll be moving through Matthew's Gospel—the first of the New Testament's books, and the first in the collection of 4 Gospels. Tradition has it that this book was written by one of Jesus' original twelve disciples—Matthew, who had a front row seat for much of what he writes about.

This Gospel starts with a genealogy. Today's readers find that surprising: this is NOT the way to hold our attention, we'd say... But in Matthew's day, a genealogy was a way of introducing your subject, or placing the person in history, and highlighting notables in a family line. When Matthew names ancestors like Abraham, Judah, and David, his first readers would have been impressed—and rightly so. But then when he goes on to include names like Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah, even they would probably have been shaking their heads: what are you doing, Matthew?

And yet it seems like Matthew is very intentional about including them as he introduces Jesus. In part that's to show the wide range of people with whom He was connected (for example: one of these women, Ruth, was a foreigner—which reminds us that Jesus' ministry was international, and not limited to a particular tribe or zip code).

Keep reading and you'll find Jesus at the Jordan River where He's baptized by John. Then He moves into the wilderness to be hassled by Satan. Following that, Jesus' 'public ministry' begins with what we call the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), and it's a barn burner, full of all sorts of encouragement and instruction.

You'll notice miracles and parables (especially in chapter 13), and will want to ponder both. The miracles? Think of them as illustrations of what God finds important (healing, restoration). And parables? These are stories that use familiar items and situations and to plant ideas about bigger things (like, the kingdom of God).

Finally, a suggestion as you're reading the New Testament: keep a notebook close by and jot down what strikes you, or what raises questions. And if there's something in particular that catches you, or you'd like to know more, drop me an email. I'd be interested to hear what you're seeing and thinking about!

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