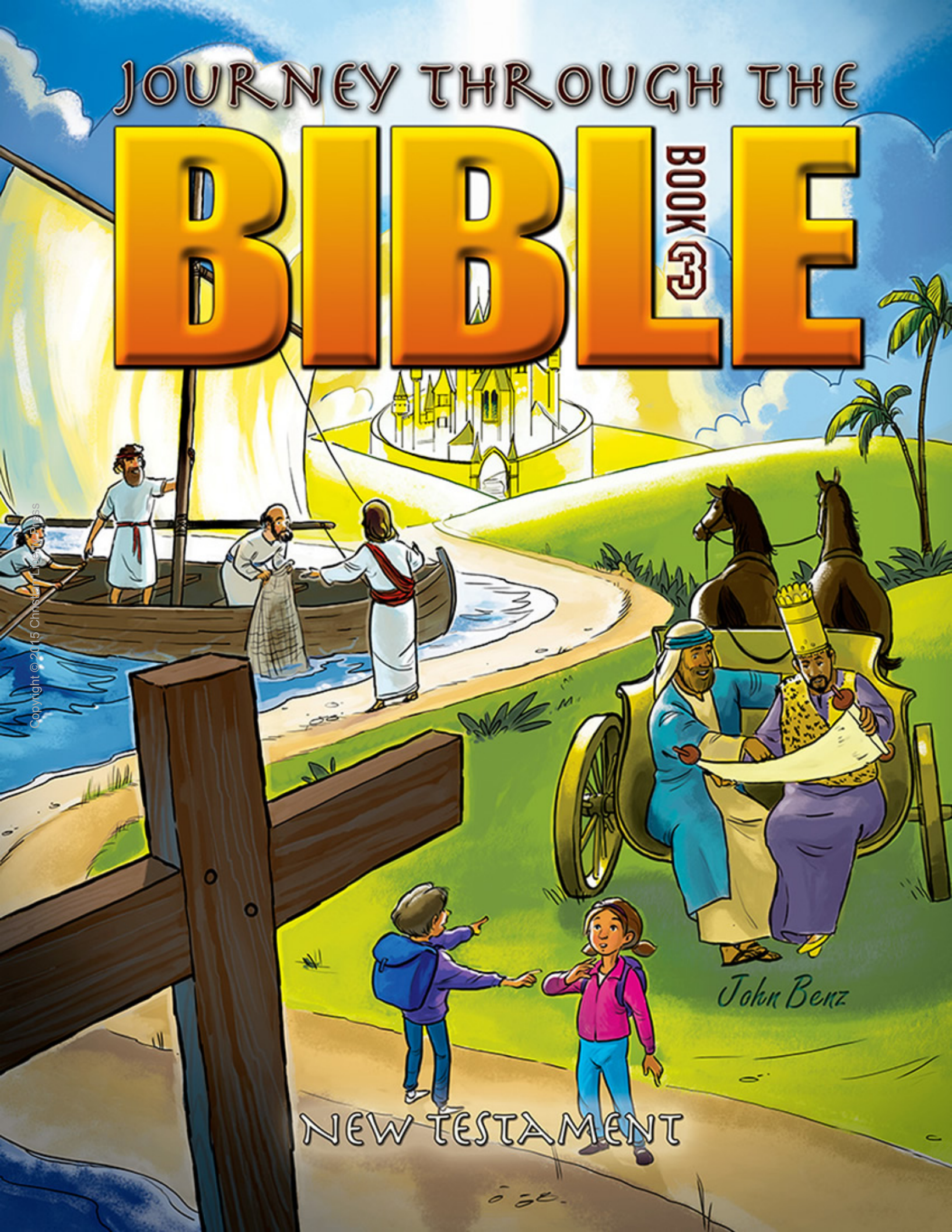
JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

BOOK 3



NEW TESTAMENT

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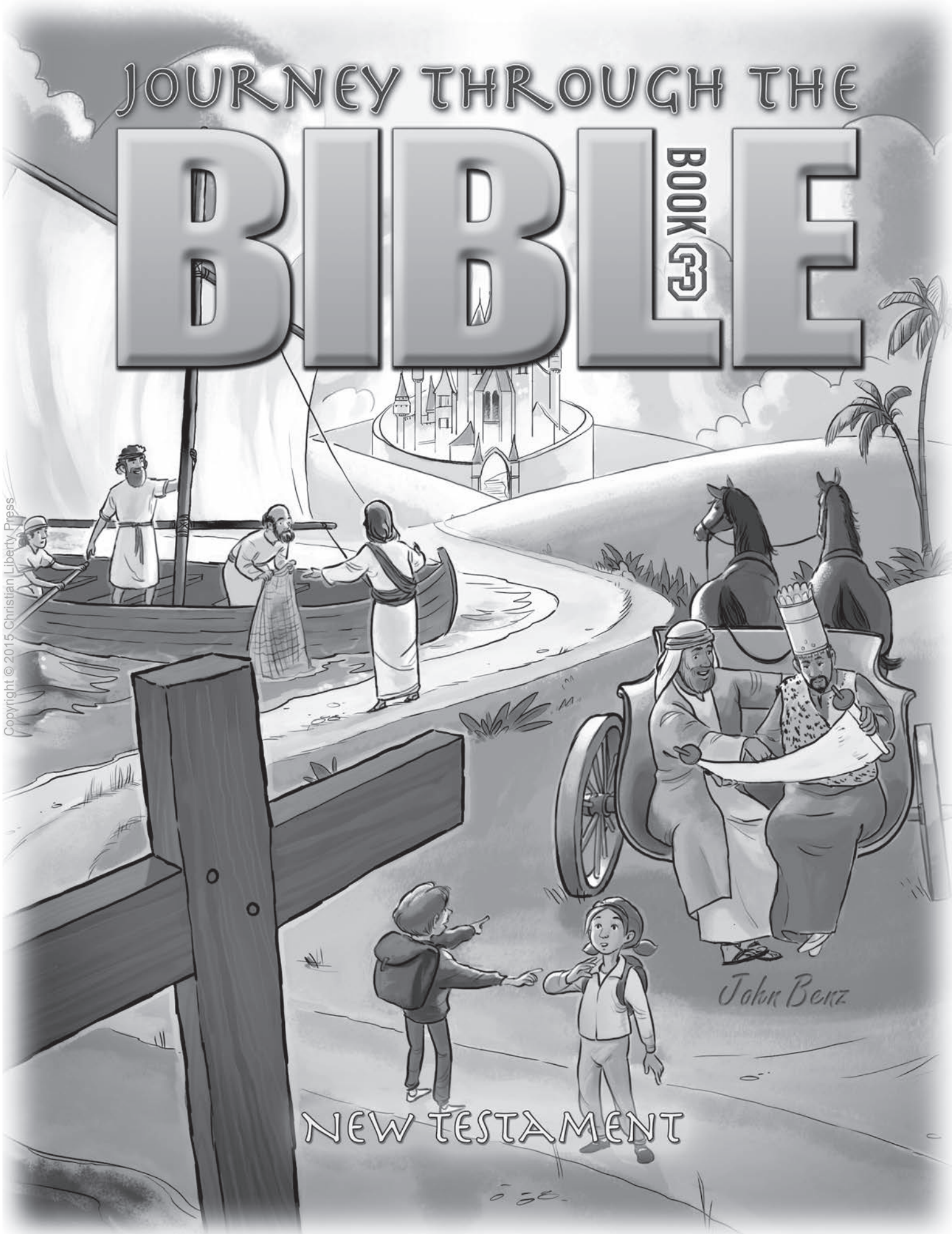

NEW TESTAMENT

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Copyediting by Diane C. Olson
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Introduction

The ***Journey Through the Bible*** curricula is designed to encourage students to encounter the biblical text firsthand. Many students grow up hearing Bible stories in Sunday school or from their parents or even from similar home-schooling curricula. The work that these people and programs do for students is very valuable for their growth and maturity. The goal of this curricula, however, is to go beyond the stories of the Bible and to have students read the Bible itself. In fact, this ninth grade curriculum, along with the seventh and eighth grade curricula in the ***Journey Through the Bible*** series, will take students through the entire Bible. Within these three years, students will have read the entire Bible.

For this year, we will look at the New Testament. The translation that we are going to use for this curriculum is the New King James Version (NKJV). Since the King James Version of the Bible is the most widely used translation out there, we chose the the NKJV version because it is a little easier for students to read. While it is possible to complete this curriculum using other translations of the Bible, the questions in the workbook use the language and phrases of the NKJV. As a result, it may be difficult at times to find the answers to these questions without using an NKJV.

There are three components to this curriculum. The *first component* is the **workbook**. The workbook is divided into four units of forty days of reading per unit. On the top right-hand corner of each workbook page is the Bible reading that the student should do for that day. As he or she reads, there are ten questions from the Bible reading that the student is to answer in the workbook. The vast majority of the questions in the workbook can be answered just using the biblical text itself, but there are a few questions that require using outside sources such as a dictionary. Many of these questions are designed to bring out some of the important points in the text. On average, the student will read about two chapters of the Bible per day. Also included on each workbook page is a set of three questions that come from the lesson book.

The *second component* to this curriculum is the **lesson book**. The lessons in this book are designed to help students understand what they are reading. This is not designed to be a theology book that teaches a particular view of theology; rather, it is a survey of the New Testament, which is designed to bring clarity to the reading that the students are doing. On theological issues for which there is debate, the approach of this book is to examine the various options and allow students to decide for themselves which view is most plausible. As students read their daily lesson, they will need to answer three questions from the lesson book; these questions appear at the bottom of the corresponding page in the workbook. These questions are designed to hold students accountable to read through the lesson book. It is recommended that students read through the daily lesson before doing the Bible reading and answering the questions in the workbook.

There are two features within the lesson book that are worth noting. *First*, periodically there will be some **vocabulary words** that are typed in bold print. These are words that may be significant or may just be words that are not commonly used in everyday speech. Often these words will appear in the questions from the lesson in the workbook. *Second*, it is worth noting the **thought questions** at the end of many of the lessons. These questions are designed to help the student think about the reading in a more critical manner. Some of these questions are designed to bring out the theology of the passage, some are designed to prompt the student to think more deeply about what is actually happening in the passage, and some are designed to help the student think about applying the passage to his or her life.

The *third component* to this curriculum are the **tests**. Each quarter the student will take tests based on the questions in the workbook. There will be one test for every twenty days in the student's workbook, though the tests can be divided in half to cover only ten days at a time.

John Benz

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Note to Parents:

In Deuteronomy 6:5–7, it says: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

Scripture makes it clear that the primary responsibility for teaching children lies with the parents, particularly the fathers. This curriculum will be most effective if parents discuss the reading and lesson with the students after they do the work. The thought questions at the end of most lessons provide an excellent opportunity for discussion between parents and their students. In addition, parents are encouraged to use the daily readings for family devotionals. Although these questions are not included with the curriculum, here are some questions that can be asked after every lesson:

1. What is something that this passage teaches you about God?
2. What is something you can pray for as a result of this passage?
3. What is one question you have from this passage?

When you discuss the passage with your students, they will be far more likely to think about the passage and how to apply it to their lives.

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UNIT 1: *Introduction, Matthew, and Mark*

Old Testament Overview

Lesson 1

While this course is designed to cover the New Testament, it is impossible to fully understand the New Testament without at least a basic understanding of the Old Testament first. Since there are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament, we obviously cannot go into any depth of detail about the history of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, a basic understanding of that history is important, so we will cover that in this lesson. There are many different ways that we can break down the Old Testament, but for the sake of this lesson we will break it down into five sections: Creation–Tower of Babel, the Patriarchs (Abraham–Joseph), the Exodus, Joshua–Solomon, and the Divided Kingdom–Post Exile.

God's story begins where most stories begin, at the beginning. In this *first section*, we see in Genesis 1 that God creates everything in six days and rests on the seventh day. On days 1–3, God separates things, thus creating light, the skies and seas, and the dry land. On days 4–6, God fills what He creates on the first three days by creating the "lights" (sun, moon, and stars), the birds and fish, and the animals. The only creation that is made in the image of God is humanity. After each day of creation, God sees that what He created is good. In Genesis 2, we learn that humanity is placed in paradise, the garden of Eden. The only thing that is not good is that the first human, Adam, is alone and has no helper. So God creates a woman, and the first man and woman are married. Everything is perfect, but this only lasts for a short while until sin enters the world. God gives the man and woman one command, namely that they could not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, in chapter 3, an enemy enters creation. The serpent, which John will later identify as "the great dragon … that serpent of old" (Revelation 12:9), tempts the woman to eat from that tree.

When the woman and her husband eat of the tree, sin enters the world and the consequences are tragic. Men will have to work hard to procure their food, and childbirth will be painful for women. Humanity is kicked out of paradise, and death and decay enter the world. Humanity loses its innocence; and every human is born with a disposition towards sin, known as the sinful nature. And God also predicts that there will be a cosmic struggle between the seed of the serpent (Satan) and the Seed of the woman (whom we find out later in the New Testament is Jesus Christ), which will eventually result in the Seed of the woman defeating Satan. Throughout the entire Old Testament, we are left searching for that Seed of the woman who will defeat Satan.

Yet before things get better, they get much worse. Sin begins to permeate humanity; and within one generation it progresses to murder when Cain kills Abel. It gets so bad by the time of Noah that it is said that humanity is only evil all the time. Noah is the only righteous person left on the earth. So God destroys the earth with a flood, preserving humanity through Noah and his family. However, even after the flood, sin begins to permeate humanity once again as the people of the earth build the Tower of Babel. This tower stands as a symbol of rebellion as humanity basically tells God that they do not need Him. So God slows down the progression of sin by confusing humanity's languages and by spreading people throughout the earth.

The *second section* of God's story begins with a man by the name of Abram. God calls Abram while he is tending his flocks and tells him to go to the land that He will show him. Abram trusts God and believes Him and goes to the land of Canaan. God promises Abram (whose name He changes to Abraham) that He will give the land of Canaan to his descendants. The only problem is that Abraham has no descendants. Yet when Abraham is 100 years old, he has a child, Isaac. God promises to be with Abraham and his family; and as a sign of this covenant, all of Abraham's descendants are to be circumcised. Isaac eventually becomes a father to two sons, Jacob and Esau. God chooses Jacob to be the child of promise and eventually changes Jacob's name to Israel. Israel has twelve sons who become the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. One of Israel's sons, Joseph, is sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers because they are jealous of him. However, God works with Joseph and places him in a position of power and authority in Egypt. Because of a famine in the land of Canaan, Joseph arranges for his father Israel and his family to settle down in the land of Goshen in Egypt. There the descendants of Israel remain for centuries.

The *third section* of God's story takes place centuries later. The Israelites have grown from about seventy people to about two million. Because of the large numbers of the Israelites, the Egyptians are afraid and enslave the Israelites. God eventually raises up Moses and calls him to speak to Pharaoh so that he will let the Israelites go. When Pharaoh refuses to let the people go, God sends plagues upon the Egyptians. God sends ten plagues to devastate the nation of Egypt. For the

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final plague, God prepares to send His angel of death to kill the firstborn sons of all of the Egyptians. In order for the Israelites to survive this plague, God has each household slaughter a lamb and smear its blood on their doorposts. When the angel of death sees this blood covering the people, he passes over that house. This becomes the foundation of the Passover Festival. After the final plague, the Israelites are allowed to leave Egypt; and when the Egyptian army pursues them, Moses parts the Red Sea and the Israelites escape on dry ground. While in the wilderness, God gives the Israelites the Law and establishes the tabernacle and worship for the people of Israel. Sadly, the Israelites rebel in the wilderness; and because of their refusal to listen to God, that generation is cursed to wander in the wilderness.

The *fourth section* of God's story picks up with the next generation of the Israelites. After Moses and the rest of his generation die, Joshua becomes the next leader of Israel. He leads Israel through a series of battles in the Promised Land, and the Israelites are able to establish themselves in the land of Canaan. Yet after the land of Canaan is divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, it is the responsibility of each of the tribes to drive out the inhabitants of the land from their inheritance. Sadly, each of the tribes fails at this, and the people become a snare to the Israelites. The Israelites fall into idolatry. When the Israelites rebel, God strengthens their enemies, and the Israelites are enslaved once again. However, when they cry out to God for help, God raises up a number of judge-heroes who rescue the Israelites from their enemies. The last of these judges is a man named Samuel. Samuel is not only a judge; he is also a priest and a prophet. Yet because Samuel's sons are wicked, the people demand that Samuel give them a king. So, reluctantly, Samuel appoints Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul starts off well and wins some great victories for the Israelites; but he disobeys God on a number of occasions, and God rejects him as king. In his place, God chooses David to be the next king. David establishes Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel and brings the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. He also establishes the Levites as worship leaders in Israel. David also defeats all of Israel's major enemies. David desires to build the temple for God; however, God promises David that his descendants will always be kings in Israel. So rather than David building the temple, David's son Solomon builds it instead. Solomon is known for his wisdom, but even he is disobedient to God, which leads to the last section of Israel's history.

The *fifth section* of God's story begins after Solomon's reign when the nation of Israel is split into two kingdoms. For 200 years, Israel is divided into the Northern Kingdom, called Israel or Ephraim, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. At one point, under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, the worship of God almost disappears in Israel. However, Elijah helps to restore the worship of God. Yet, in the year 723 B.C., the Northern Kingdom is destroyed by the Assyrians. Judah survives for a time; but in the year 586 B.C., Judah is conquered by the Babylonians because of the people's disobedience. It is hard to overstate the significance of this event. Israel is reduced to only a few thousand people, the king is removed from power, Jerusalem is demolished, and the temple is destroyed. Yet God still preserves the Israelites, even while in Babylon; and in the year 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great issues a decree allowing the Israelites to return to their land. Over the next few hundred years, the Israelites begin to reestablish themselves as a nation. In the year 516 B.C., because of the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, and the generosity of the king of Persia, the temple is rebuilt. About fifty years later, Nehemiah leads a group of Israelites to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It takes fifty-two days to rebuild the walls, and Jerusalem is also rebuilt. By the end of the Old Testament, the Israelites are living in the Persian Empire. They have a temple, and Jerusalem is rebuilt; but the Israelites are poor and have no king. The very last words of the Old Testament prophesy that a King will come from the line of David who will rescue Israel; but before He comes, God will send a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah.

When our story picks up in the New Testament, the Israelites are waiting for the "Elijah" that is to come. They long for the Messiah, the King from the line of David who will rescue them from their enemies. Unfortunately, for many of the people of Israel, the Messiah that they expect is not the Messiah that they will get. Jesus will come to conquer a different enemy, but we will see this in due time.

Intertestamental History

Lesson 2

Between the pages of the Old and New Testaments, there are over 400 years of history that take place. When the Old Testament ends, the Israelites are living in the Persian Empire. Jerusalem has been rebuilt; but in a time of poverty, the temple is rebuilt but is a shell of what it once was. Yet in the opening pages of the New Testament, we learn that the Israelites are living in the Roman Empire, and Jerusalem is a thriving city with a beautiful temple. For this lesson, we are going to examine the events that bridge this 400-year gap.

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The Persian Empire will stand as the dominant power in the Middle East for 200 years. However, with the rise of Philip of Macedon in Greece and the conquests of his son, Alexander the Great, the Persian Empire is conquered and replaced with the Greek Empire. Because of advanced military techniques and the leadership of Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire spreads farther than any kingdom before it. In fact, the Greek Empire not only spreads into northern Africa, but even as far east as India. If not for Alexander the Great's early death at the age of thirty-three, the Greek Empire could have expanded even farther.

When Alexander the Great dies, the Greek Empire is divided between his four generals, thus forming four smaller kingdoms. For the sake of this study, we will look at two of these four kingdoms, the Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Empire. The reason that these two empires are relevant to the nation of Israel is that Israel is situated in between these empires; and over the next 150 years, these kingdoms will fight over control of Palestine (present day Israel).

Particularly relevant to this study is the reign of one of the Seleucid kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus IV Epiphanes is known for his strong disdain and hatred for the Jewish people. He does a number of things that are extremely offensive to the Jewish people. Not only does he try to **Hellenize** the Jewish people by forcing them to take on Greek names, participate in Greek games, and wear Greek clothing, but he also directly attacks Jewish worship. He desecrates the temple by sacrificing a pig (an unclean animal) to Zeus (the head of the Greek gods) and makes it illegal to make sacrifices in the temple.

The offenses of Antiochus IV Epiphanes eventually lead to a rebellion by the Jewish people. This rebellion begins when an elderly priest, Mattathias ben Johanan, is told to make a pagan sacrifice. When he refuses, a younger Jewish priest agrees to make the sacrifice instead. However, rather than allowing him to make that sacrifice, Mattathias kills the young priest and the Greek official who commands this sacrifice; and he and his family flee into the mountains of Israel. Under the leadership of Mattathias' son, Judas Maccabeus (nicknamed the "Hammer," possibly derived from the Aramaic term *maqqaba*), this army engages in a form of guerilla warfare against the Seleucid army. Eventually, this Jewish army attacks Jerusalem and reconquers it for Israel. The Festival of Lights, known as "Hanukkah," is celebrated today, which commemorates the rededication of the temple after Jerusalem is reconquered. Through political involvement, the Jewish state gains its independence from the Seleucid Empire for over 100 years. This period of time is known as the Hasmonean Dynasty.

This political strength, however, does not last forever in Israel. As the Roman Empire begins to grow in power, the Roman ruler Pompey conquers Jerusalem for Rome in the year 63 B.C. Because of Israel's political instability, this victory is fairly easy for the Roman army. Shortly before the New Testament, power was consolidated in Rome; and the Roman Empire entered into the ***Pax Romana***, a period of Roman peace. This provides the context for the New Testament.

> **Hellenize:** the spreading of Greek culture and language
>
> ***Pax Romana*:** a period of Roman peace beginning in 27 B.C. with the reign of Augustus

Key Groups in the New Testament

Lesson 3

As you read through the New Testament, there are a number of people groups who do not appear in the Old Testament. Jesus interacts with members from each of these groups, and it is worthwhile to examine their origins and particular beliefs. For this lesson, we will focus on these groups.

The group with which Jesus interacts the most is the **Pharisees**. This group is established during the period of the Hasmonean Dynasty. After the temple is reconsecrated and the worship of God is restored in Israel, many of the Israelites take seriously the call to obey and honor the Law of Moses. The Pharisees are famous for their strong emphasis on personal holiness and strict adherence to the Law. In fact, the Pharisees also hold to something called in the New Testament "the tradition of the elders." Because it is such a grave violation to the Pharisees to break the Law, they develop a whole set of laws designed to protect people from breaking the Law. For example, in the Law it says not to work on the Sabbath, but "work" is not completely defined in the Law. So the Pharisees develop a set of laws to govern more precisely what would be considered work. Because the Law is so important for the Pharisees, many of the Pharisees memorize the entire Old Testament. The Pharisees prove to be Jesus' most consistent opponents throughout His public ministry. Jesus will condemn the Pharisees for neglecting the heart of the Law and for their overemphasis on the letter of the Law.

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The next group with which Jesus interacts also develops during the Hasmonean Dynasty—the **Sadducees**. The Sadducees are a particular class of priests who hold most of the power in the temple. While not every priest is a Sadducee, most of the priesthood is controlled by the Sadducees. Unlike the Pharisees, who are mostly hostile to Rome, the Sadducees work together with the Romans. Because of this, many of the Sadducees hold much political power and personal wealth. In addition, the Sadducees also control the **Sanhedrin**, a group of religious leaders who serve as judges regarding religious matters. The Sadducees are also famous for rejecting the notion of an afterlife or the resurrection. Jesus will clash with the Sadducees over the resurrection, and the Sadducees will play a big role in Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

The next group in the New Testament is the **Herodians**. These are Jewish people who support the Herodian Dynasty in Israel. Most of the Jews are not very fond of this dynasty because Herod and his family are Edomites rather than Israelites. Yet those who do support this king call themselves Herodians. Conversely, another group of Jewish people with which Jesus interacts in Israel are called the **Zealots**. The Zealots are revolutionaries who oppose Rome and seek to gain Israel's independence. One of the twelve disciples, Simon, is a Zealot. This must have made for some interesting conversations between him and Matthew, a tax collector for Rome.

The final group that we will observe is the **Essenes**. While Jesus does not directly interact with the Essenes, this group produces the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are some of the earliest biblical manuscripts we have found. This group splits off from the rest of Israel and forms their own community in order to purify themselves in hope of bringing in the Messiah.

Pharisees: a Jewish sect known for their strict adherence to the Law of Moses

Sadducees: a Jewish sect that controls the priesthood and Sanhedrin; rejects the idea of the afterlife

Sanhedrin: a religious governing body that judges religious cases in Israel

Herodians: Jewish supporters of the Herodian Dynasty in Israel

Zealots: Jewish revolutionaries who oppose Rome and seek Israel's independence

Essenes: a Jewish sect that seeks purification by forming their own community

Setting of the New Testament

Lesson 4

There are several different factors that we can examine when thinking about the setting of the New Testament. However, for the sake of time and space, we are going to look at three types of context: religious, philosophical, and cultural.

There are a number of religious groups that we will encounter in the New Testament. *First*, we will look at the religions within the Roman Empire. The dominant religion throughout the Roman Empire is **polytheism**, the belief in many gods. Within this set of beliefs, there are specific gods for specific parts of life. For example, there is a god of war and a god of wine. It is common within Roman polytheism that humans are able to defeat the gods. In the book of Acts, Paul encounters followers of this belief on at least three separate occasions. In Lystra, the people believe that Paul and Barnabas are gods after a lame man is healed. The people even try to sacrifice to them. The city of Ephesus, where Paul spends much time, is famous for its temple to Artemis. When Paul goes to Athens, he sees the altars to all of the various gods and uses a specific altar to an unknown god as a door to share the gospel with the people there.

Second, another religion develops during the time of the New Testament known as **Gnosticism**. Gnostics believe that there are two forces in the universe that wage war against each other. One of these forces is good, and the other is evil. Gnostics believe that the material world is evil, while the spiritual world is good. In order to achieve salvation, Gnostics argue that one needs to have special knowledge. While this belief is not fully developed until after the New Testament, there are some early forms of this that may have influenced certain books of the New Testament such as Colossians and 1 John.

Third, the various cults that exist in the Roman Empire are also relevant to the New Testament. First, there is the **cult of the emperor**. As with Pharaoh of Egypt, many people believe that the Roman emperors are actually gods, and these cults are devoted to the emperors. The early emperors are not seen as gods until they die, but later emperors demand and receive worship as gods while they are still alive. There are also **mystery cults** throughout the Roman Empire. These cults are similar to the Gnostics in that they offer salvation through initiation into their cults. Often there are secret passwords or codes that a person must know to get into these cults.

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The religion of the Jews is expressed in two main forms. Central to Jewish worship is the temple and the sacrificial system. According to the Law, Jewish men are required to go to Jerusalem three times a year: for the Passover Feast, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. One of the ways that scholars have figured out that Jesus ministers for over three years is the number of Passover Festivals that we see Him going to Jerusalem to celebrate. In addition to these festivals, there are regular Sabbath services every week. For those Jews who do not live near the city of Jerusalem, they regularly meet in **synagogues** ("assemblies"). Synagogues, which emphasize worship and studying the Law, are similar to assemblies of Christians; in fact, the church structure was derived from synagogue worship. When Paul begins to spread the gospel to the Gentile world, he goes first to the Jewish synagogues until he is kicked out; then he turns his attention to the Gentiles.

One of the things for which the Greeks are famous is the development of philosophy. The works that began under the Greek Empire continue on into the Roman Empire. While the scope of this lesson cannot cover all of the various works of philosophy that develop over this time, there are two types of philosophies that appear in the New Testament. **Stoicism** is a philosophy that focuses on how to avoid pain. The phrase that describes Stoicism is "this is not my cup." In order to protect oneself from pain, there is a detachment from the things and people of this world. To this day, to be stoic means to be aloof or cold or unemotional. **Epicureanism**, or hedonism, is practically the opposite of Stoicism. Epicureanism teaches that pleasure is the chief goal in life. This does not mean that people should always pursue immediate pleasure, which satisfies in the moment, because withholding temporary pleasure can mean greater pleasure in the future. Paul will encounter Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in his journeys.

There are also a number of things worth noting about the cultural setting of the New Testament. Because of the Hellenization done by Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire, by the time of the New Testament everyone in the Roman Empire is able to speak Greek. This proves to be incredibly beneficial for the spreading of the gospel. Also, because the Roman Empire is enjoying a time of peace, the Romans are able to draw attention inward and to improve the living conditions of the people. This involves making a number of roads to connect the various parts of the Roman Empire. These will be the very roads that Paul and other Christians will travel upon as they spread the gospel. Also because of this peace, there is less fear of bandits and raiders while traveling on these roads. The Romans also make travel by sea easier, as well.

polytheism: the belief in many gods

Gnosticism: a belief that there are two cosmic forces at war (good and evil) and that salvation is acquired through special knowledge

cult of the emperor: devoted followers of the emperors, who worship the emperor as a god

mystery cults: groups of people who offer salvation through initiation into the group

synagogues: centers of worship for Jews throughout the Roman Empire

Stoicism: a philosophy that focuses on avoiding pain by detaching oneself from everything

Epicureanism: a philosophy that teaches that pleasure is the chief goal in life

Introduction to the Gospels

Lesson 5

According to Jewish law, in order for something to be accepted in a court of law, it must be confirmed by the testimony of two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Because the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in history, God chose to give us four witnesses to attest to the historical reliability of Jesus' life. The first four books of the New Testament are called the **gospels** because all four of them tell us the "good news" that comes through Jesus Christ. While we will examine the specific themes and goals of each gospel in their individual introductions, the overall goal of each gospel is to convert the reader to faith in Jesus Christ.

The first three gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are known as the **synoptic** gospels. The word *synoptic* means "with similar or same eyes." They are called this because the material in these three gospels is very similar. In fact, there are sections of these gospels that are identical in words and in order of events. As we go through the various lessons on the life of Christ through the gospels, we will see many of the same events mentioned in each gospel, although each author will add his own emphasis and organization of these events.

Because of the nature of the Greek language, it is incredibly unlikely that long sections of the gospels would be identical. Yet there are portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that are word-for-word identical. This

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has led scholars to believe that the gospel authors had access to the other gospels and used them as sources for their material. Only two of the authors of the gospels were disciples of Jesus during His earthly ministry (Matthew and John), so we know that at least two of the authors had to get their information from sources. In light of this, there are two main theories as to which authors use the others as sources. The first theory is that Matthew was the first gospel written and that Mark and Luke use his writings as a source. In favor of this is the fact that Matthew appears first in the Bible. But this theory has a difficult time explaining why Mark would leave out so much material from Matthew's gospel if he had access to it. The second theory is called the *Q Theory*. This theory states that Mark must have been the first gospel written and that Matthew and Luke use it as a source. This could explain why Mark has so much less material. However, there is a lot of material that both Matthew and Luke have in common that Mark does not have. For this material, it is suggested that there was another source, called **Q**, that has the material in common between Matthew and Luke. Q was probably a collection of Jesus' sayings. If this theory is correct, Mark would have written his gospel first, and both Matthew and Luke would have used Mark, Q, and their individual sources.

One of the benefits of assuming that the gospel writers had access to the other gospels is that it can reveal the emphasis of that particular author. For example, in the almost identical passages in Matthew 7:7–11 and Luke 11:9–13 about prayer, Matthew finishes by saying that God will give "good things" to those who ask Him; yet Luke says that God will give "the Holy Spirit" to those who ask Him. This gives us a clue as to one of Luke's themes, the role of the Holy Spirit. Luke identifies one of the "good things" that Matthew mentions as the "Holy Spirit." This type of comparative study is called **redaction criticism**.

The gospel of John is very unique compared to the other three gospels. We will examine this gospel in more detail in the lesson on the introduction to John.

gospel: "good news," a theological history of the life of Jesus

synoptic: "with similar eyes," the title given to the first three gospels

Q: a possible document used by Matthew and Luke that contains Jesus' sayings

redaction criticism: a comparative study of similar passages from different books

Introduction to Matthew

Lesson 6

The first book of the New Testament, and the first gospel that we will cover in this class, is the gospel of Matthew. For this lesson, and with all introductory lessons for New Testament books, we will examine the author, the audience, and the major themes in the book.

It is important to note from the beginning that none of the gospel writers identifies who he is within the book that he writes. The only reason we attribute the first gospel to Matthew, the second to Mark, and so forth is because church tradition tells us that these are the authors. However, there is some internal evidence to back up each of these authors as the actual authors of these books. The first piece of evidence that supports Matthew as the author of the first gospel is his relative insignificance as a disciple. If someone were going to choose a disciple to author one of the gospels, he would choose Peter or one of the more popular disciples. The fact that it has been attributed to Matthew, who does not play a prominent role after his initial conversion, suggests that it is authentic. In addition, when referring to Matthew's calling to be a disciple, Mark and Luke refer to him as *Levi*, whereas the first gospel calls him *Matthew*. Matthew undoubtedly went by both names, but the best explanation for why the first gospel calls him by a different name could be that Matthew preferred to call himself by that name.

For the sake of this class, we will assume that Matthew is the author of the first gospel. We do not know much about Matthew, but we do know a few things about him. *First*, we know that he was originally a tax collector. When Jesus encounters Matthew, He calls him to follow Him; Matthew leaves everything to follow Jesus. Immediately, Matthew throws a party in his home and invites Jesus and His disciples. He also agrees to give back money to anyone that he might have cheated. In those days, tax collectors were despised by the Jews as traitors because they work for the Roman government. In addition, many of the tax collectors would charge people extra money and keep it for themselves. *Second*, we know that Jesus chooses Matthew as one of the twelve disciples.

While we do not know a lot about Matthew's audience, we can infer from internal evidence that he writes to a Jewish audience. Unlike Mark and Luke, Jesus does not explain Hebrew sayings. Matthew also uses the more technical phrase "kingdom of heaven" rather than the phrase "kingdom of God" that Mark and Luke use. Jews

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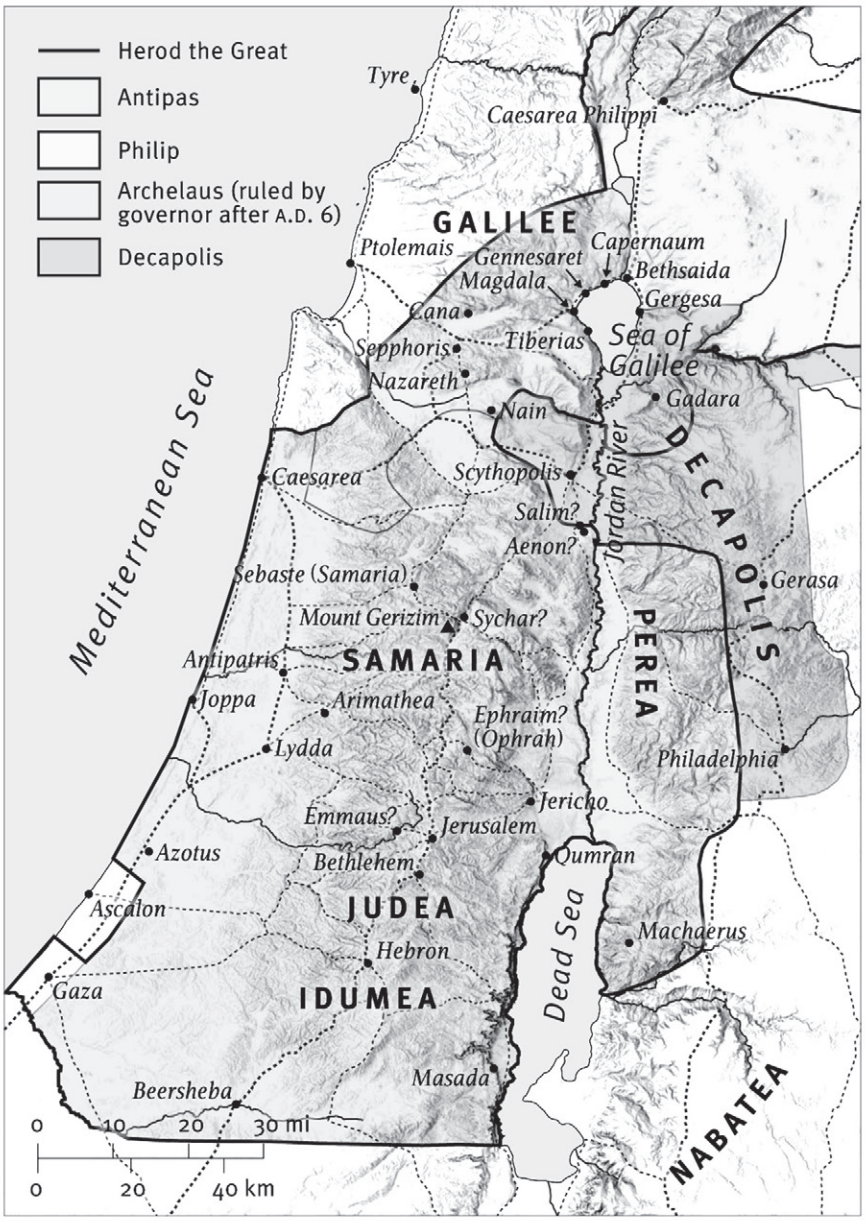

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The Setting of Matthew
The events in the book of Matthew take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe events surrounding Jesus' birth in Judea, where Herod had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip.

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would understand the phrase "kingdom of heaven" as a reference to the Messianic Kingdom of the Old Testament. Matthew's genealogy goes back to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews. Matthew also draws attention to King David in his genealogy of Jesus Christ and refers to Jesus as the "Son of David." Also, Matthew consistently points out Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

This leads us to examine the major themes in the gospel of Matthew. *First*, Matthew, more than any other gospel writer, draws attention to how Jesus fulfills the prophecies in the Old Testament. Regularly Matthew uses the phrase "this took place to fulfill what was written through the prophet…." *Second*, Matthew places a much bigger emphasis on the kingdom of heaven than the other gospel writers. Matthew 13 is filled with parables, all designed to explain the nature of the kingdom of heaven. *Third*, the Sermon on the Mount, from Matthew 5–7, depicts Jesus as the new Moses who fulfills and expands on the Old Testament Law. *Fourth*, Matthew draws attention to Jesus' focus on Israel as His mission ground. In fact, it is not until the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel that Jesus explicitly sends out His disciples to bring the gospel to all the nations. As one reads this book, it is important to remember that Jesus is Jewish and came to offer salvation to His people first.