

R.C. SPROUL

AND BEHOLD,

I AM WITH

YOU ALWAYS,

TO THE END

OF THE AGE

MATTHEW

MATTHEW: AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

“R.C. Sproul, someone said to me in the 1970s, ‘is the finest communicator in the Reformed world.’ Now, four decades later, his skills honed by long practice, his understanding deepened by years of prayer, meditation, and testing (as Martin Luther counseled), R.C. shares the fruit of what became perhaps his greatest love: feeding and nourishing his own congregation at St. Andrew’s from the Word of God and building them up in faith and fellowship and in Christian living and serving. Dr. Sproul’s expositional commentaries have all R.C.’s hallmarks: clarity and liveliness, humor and pathos, always expressed in application to the mind, will, and affections. R.C.’s ability to focus on ‘the big picture,’ his genius of never saying too much, leaving his hearers satisfied yet wanting more, never making the Word dull, are all present in these expositions. They are his gift to the wider church. May they nourish God’s people well and serve as models of the kind of ministry for which we continue to hunger.”

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—Dr. Steven J. Lawson
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—Dr. Joel R. Beeke
President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

MATTHEW

AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

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R.C. SPROUL



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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SERIES PREFACE

When God called me into full-time Christian ministry, He called me to the academy. I was trained and ordained to a ministry of teaching, and the majority of my adult life has been devoted to preparing young men for the Christian ministry and to trying to bridge the gap between seminary and Sunday school through various means under the aegis of Ligonier Ministries.

Then, in 1997, God did something I never anticipated: He placed me in the position of preaching weekly as a leader of a congregation of His people—St. Andrew’s in Sanford, Florida. Over the past twelve years, as I have opened the Word of God on a weekly basis for these dear saints, I have come to love the task of the local minister. Though my role as a teacher continues, I am eternally grateful to God that He saw fit to place me in this new ministry, the ministry of a preacher.

Very early in my tenure with St. Andrew’s, I determined that I should adopt the ancient Christian practice of *lectio continua*, “continuous expositions,” in my preaching. This method of preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible (rather than choosing a new topic each week) has been attested throughout church history as the one approach that ensures believers hear the full counsel of God. Therefore, I began preaching lengthy series of messages at St. Andrew’s, eventually working my way through several biblical books in a practice that continues to the present day.

Previously, I had taught through books of the Bible in various settings, including Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and audio and video teaching series for Ligonier Ministries. But now I found myself appealing not so much to the minds of my hearers but to both their minds and their hearts. I knew that I was responsible as a preacher to clearly explain God’s Word *and* to show how we ought to live in light of it. I sought to fulfill both tasks as I ascended the St. Andrew’s pulpit each week.

What you hold in your hand, then, is a written record of my preaching

labors amidst my beloved Sanford congregation. The dear saints who sit under my preaching encouraged me to give my sermons a broader hearing. To that end, the chapters that follow were adapted from a sermon series I preached at St. Andrew's.

Please be aware that this book is part of a broader series of books containing adaptations of my St. Andrew's sermons. This book, like all the others in the series, will *not* give you the fullest possible insight into each and every verse in this biblical book. Though I sought to at least touch on each verse, I focused on the key themes and ideas that comprised the "big picture" of each passage I covered. Therefore, I urge you to use this book as an overview and introduction.

I pray that you will be as blessed in reading this material as I was in preaching it.

—R.C. Sproul
Lake Mary, Florida
April 2009

1

A JEWISH LOOK AT JESUS

Matthew 1:1–17



The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

We do not definitively know who wrote the Gospel of Matthew, but the universal testimony of the early church is that it was penned by Matthew, one of the twelve disciples. Matthew was called from his

labor as a tax collector, which was one of the most despised vocations any Jew could hold, yet because of his training as a tax collector, Matthew was acquainted with lists and genealogies from the public registry, so he would know the family history of the people being taxed. He was also, obviously, literate and probably spoke two or three languages. Therefore, his work as a tax collector, under the providence of God, was the Lord's preparation for Matthew to begin his most important and celebrated task. This book has been called, even by critics of historic Christianity, the greatest book ever written.

The Genealogy

Matthew begins his Gospel with these words: **The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ** (v. 1). Here is a Jew writing principally for Jews, and his first assertion is that he is writing about Jesus Messiah. *Christ* is not the name of Jesus. His name is Jesus bar Joseph or Jesus of Nazareth. The term *Christ* is His title, and it means "Jesus the Anointed One" or "Jesus the promised Messiah." Matthew mentions another important title that would resonate with his Jewish audience: **the Son of David** (v. 1). This title for Jesus, Son of David, is used more by Matthew than by any other Gospel writer, because the Messiah was to come from the loins of the greatest king of the Old Testament; He would be of the seed and lineage of David. So from the very beginning of his Gospel Matthew calls Jesus "Christ, the Son of David."

Matthew then adds, **the Son of Abraham** (v. 1). One of the great difficulties of harmonization in sacred Scripture is the relationship between the genealogy presented by Matthew and that presented by Luke in his Gospel. There are many places where these two genealogies do not agree. The first point of difference is that Luke traces the genealogy of Christ back to Adam, indicating that this Christ is not simply the Savior of the Jews but that the scope of Jesus' redemptive activity is universal. He is the new Adam, who recovers the promise that God made originally to Adam and Eve in the garden. Matthew, on the other hand, goes only as far back as Abraham because he is writing to a Jewish audience, to people who would want to know about the ancestry of Jesus as well as that of Matthew. It is important that His ancestry can be taken back to Abraham.

Ancestry was important to Jewish people, as it has been to people of all cultures throughout history. Probably the culture that is least concerned about ancestry is our own, which is why we often fail to understand the import of lists such as this.

When I enrolled as a student at the Free University of Amsterdam, I had to fill out a form with personal information. One of the questions on the form asked, "What was your father's station in life?" The university wanted to know my cultural class standing. That was also important for the Jew, which is why Matthew begins by giving us Jesus' ancestry. Additionally, the ancestry was

important to demonstrate that Matthew's Gospel did not pertain to a mythical character or hero. To the Jew, the ancestry testified to historical reality.

Several years ago a friend of mine, a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators, worked among a people who had never heard the gospel in their language. The people could not write or read, so all their communication was oral. The missionary's first task was to learn the language of the tribe. Then she had to change that oral language into written form and teach the people to read and write it. It was a laborious task that took many years. Only after all that was accomplished could she undertake the task of translating the Bible into this language. She began with the Gospel of Matthew. To expedite the project she skipped the genealogy to get to the meat and substance of the story of Christ, and then she sent her translation work off to be printed by a publisher in a distant city. She waited months for the first copies of Matthew to arrive at the compound, and when the trucks came in with the Bibles, or, at least, the Gospel of Matthew, the people were much more interested in the trucks than they were in the translation. After having spent ten years on the project, she was crushed when she saw that the people didn't care at all. Nevertheless, she persevered in her task, and in the second edition of Matthew she included the genealogy. When that arrived the missionary explained the genealogy to the tribal chief, and he said, "Are you trying to say that this Jesus you've been telling us about for ten years was a real person?"

She replied, "Yes, of course."

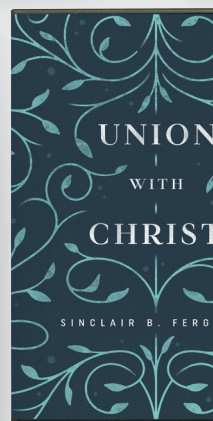
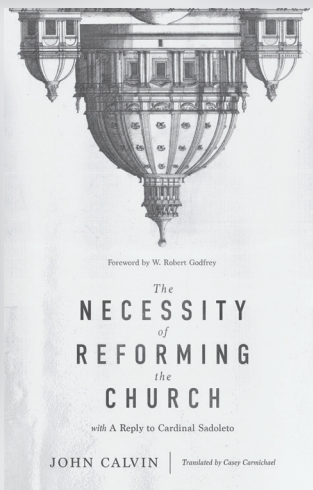
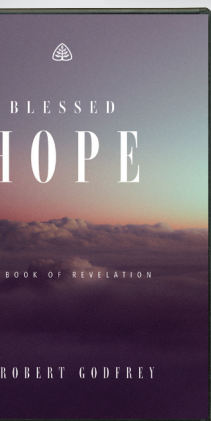
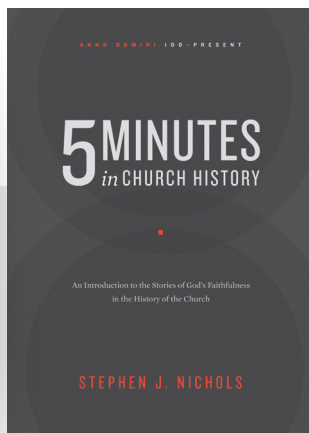
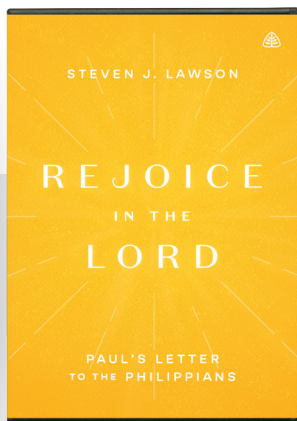
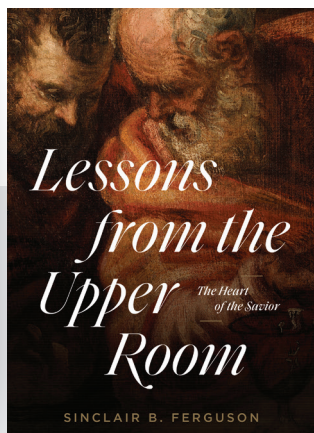
He said, "I thought you were telling us a story about some mythical character."

Once he understood that this Christ was real in space and time, the chief came to Christ, and shortly thereafter the whole tribe came to Christ.

There are three sections in the genealogy, and Matthew divides these three sections into three groups, each of which has fourteen names. The significance of that has puzzled New Testament scholars. The Hebrew language uses a *gematria*, which is a kind of numerological symbolism. We find an example of this in the book of Revelation, where we read that the number of the beast is 666 (Rev. 13:18). Those numbers can be applied to real persons to identify the beast. If you look at this same kind of structure in the genealogical table, you will see that the number fourteen is the number of David. David is the central character of the ancestry, and Matthew is taking great pains to show that Jesus is from the line and lineage of David and that He has come to restore the fallen booth of the great king of the Old Testament.

Another difference between the genealogy in Matthew and the genealogy in Luke is that Matthew lists the father of Joseph as Jacob; in Luke's Gospel it is Eli. However, Luke does not use the term *begat*; he uses simply *of* someone. If you look through the genealogies, you will see that both the lists are selective, and that Matthew and Luke do not select the same people. The most notable difference is that in Matthew, the list moves from David to Solomon, whereas

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