

MATTHEW 1:1–25; HEEEEERE'S JESUS!

The question was once asked, “Who could draw a picture of a man not yet born? Surely God and God alone.” (Canon Dyson Hague)

I believe hid conclusion to be true. Have you ever had to prove your identity? Well, it is in a sense easier for us today. All we have to do is produce a driver's license or maybe a passport. But that hasn't always been the case. Have you ever been in an airport and seen someone standing in the terminal with a cardboard sign with someone's name on it? They are waiting for a specific individual disembarking from among the multitudes of passengers. That is what we have here today.

God drew a picture of the savior of the world 6,000 years ago and now the man that fulfilled EVERY detail of that picture is arriving on the scene. What was the scene?

POLITICAL BACKGROUND - An overview of the Inter-Testamental Period

According to Josephus, there ceased to be any scriptures written after the death of Artaxerxes, who died in 424 BC. This is consistent with the thought of the Jews that believed there would be a dearth of the Word after the writing of Malachi. This dearth was ended with the ministry of John the Baptist.

The 400-year gap that existed between Malachi and John the Baptist has come to be known as the Intertestamental Period. While there was no line drawn in the sand with the death of Artaxerxes; there never is in real history, only the fading of one phase into another, often with significant overlap, things did begin to change for the Jews and the Gentiles of the land known as Israel.

As the Jews were conquered by the Babylonians and subsequently the Persians their separation from the Temple necessitated a new way of worship. This new means of worship had to somehow include the teaching of the Law without the animal sacrifices. The answer to this dilemma was the synagogue. With the birth of the synagogue came the focus on the oral law. These two things combined reading of the Law with prayers of repentance and good works as substitutes for the sacrificial system and the priesthood. Another development that came about

during this time was that of the Aramaic language becoming the language for commerce and international relations. Hebrew became relegated to religious readings and ceremonies. By the time of the New Testament there were far fewer Jews that were fluent in Hebrew. Most would have been tri-lingual in some sense.

In 331 BC Alexander the Great swept across the Middle East adding the former Persian Empire to his list of those conquered. There had been a voluntary dispersion of Jews under Persian rule and this continued under Alexander. In fact the Jews were free to worship as they chose so long as they were loyal citizens of Greece. As they spread throughout the empire they set the stage for the future growth of the church. These Jews would actually be far better off than those that stayed in Palestine upon the death of Alexander.

Upon the death of Alexander, his empire was divided among his four generals. Palestine lay right between the sections taken by the Ptolemies, in Egypt and the Seleucids, in Syria. Israel became a pawn over the years as these two empires fought each other. The Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, took control of the Temple, set up a statue to Zeus and then slaughtered a pig on the altar thus desecrating the Temple. Jewish rebels eventually took back control of the Temple mount and cleansed the Temple, giving us the Jewish holiday known as Hanukah.

Rome had been slowly expanding in a conscious way since about 280 BC. The Roman General Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC after some resistance from Aristobulus II. For much of the early Roman period, Judaism was granted the status of *religio licita* (Latin for legal religion), which would later exempt the Jews from worshipping Caesar as a god. As long as Christianity fell under the umbrella of Judaism as a sub-sect, they would also enjoy this exemption. This would last for the most part until Nero burned Rome to the ground and then used the Christians as a scapegoat. There were seven major factors lending themselves to this particular point in time being the time God chose for the birth of the church. And that is the reason for the emergence of John the Baptist. He would open the door for Jesus who would then ascend to the Father in order that the Holy Spirit could work in and through the Church.

These seven factors were:

1. Greek remained the common language of the Empire, allowing for easier evangelization.
2. Rome was a peaceful, well- governed empire. (The *pax Romana*) This also allowed for easier evangelization as the disciples could travel in relative safety over vast distances.

3. The first factors allowed for the implementation and the growth of the third; the most advanced communication and transportation systems of the ancient world. The Roman postal service covered as much as 100 km/day.
4. A sort of melting pot came from the Roman Empire allowing different cultures to interact with each other. This also helped the spread of the Gospel.
5. The fourth factor allowed for many cross-cultural barriers to be broken.
6. As long as Christianity was considered as another sect of Judaism it enjoyed the status of *religio licita*.
7. Rome had perhaps the most enlightened and advanced judicial process of antiquity. This allowed for the Apostle Paul to use his status as a Roman citizen as a vehicle to continue his ministry. Therefore, he had more protection under the Roman system than he would have had under that of the Jews. We all remember Stephen; as I'm sure Paul did.

These political movements brought the Jewish people from Malachi until the time of Jesus. They paved the way for Jesus and the time of the Gospels.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND – Hellenistic and Jewish Religion

The most striking thing about this chapter to me was how similar the old world is to our modern times when it comes to society and religion. There was a virtual smorgasbord of religions from which to choose. It is as if Christianity filled a niche within the vast framework of the Greco-Roman world. And like today, most of these religious movements were tolerable to most people as long as they did not make any exclusive truth-claims.

We can easily divide the first century religious landscape of the Roman Empire into two groups: the Jewish world and the Greco-Roman world. The Jewish world can be broken into five basic groups. There were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, and the largest group, the "people of the land." The first four groups were people "with a cause." They had their own interests and soap boxes to attend. The Pharisees were legitimately interested in furthering the cause of the Word of God. The Sadducees were somewhat interested in this but were also trying to keep their social status. The Zealots wanted to rid Israel of the Roman yoke and would use any means necessary to accomplish that goal. The Essenes were interested in their piety and trying to live as holy as they thought possible before the impending apocalypse. I believe they were instrumental in bringing about their own end. As for the largest group - the people of the land, they were

just poor farmers trying to get by in life and eek out a living. Many of them loved God and tried to live holy lives. They made their pilgrimage to the Temple, but outside of that they had little time for the debates and wrangling of the more “professional” religious Jews.

As for the Gentiles, the unity that had once abounded in paganism was gone by the time Jesus came on the scene. The Roman Generals had eclipsed the works of many of the Greco-Roman gods and began to be seen as gods themselves, at least in some sense. They weren’t seen as immortal but came to be respected more than their counterparts on Mount Olympus. It was only in the rural backwaters that Zeus and Achilles still held sway.

Mystery religions and magic came back onto the scene and offered a sort of immortality and equality to all, no matter what station they held in life. Anyone that was devoted could eventually get to the meaning of life and the eternal state if they were so inclined. Philosophy once again was in vogue as it attempted to grapple with the weightier matters of life, but remained, for the most part, the lair of the elite.

With the vast expanse of the Roman Empire came a mix of cultures - a melting pot, if you will. This brought many religions together and in many ways they melded to form hybrids of themselves. This was fine in the cosmopolitan mindset of most Romans. They tolerated anyone and anything as long as they didn’t claim to have the “absolute truth.” That was intolerable. Sounds like the world in which we find ourselves today, doesn’t it?

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND – Everyday Life in New Testament Times

Once again, I see, in the New Testament, a time and culture much like our own in some ways, though not in every way. After all, there are always differences in cultures and histories. There are very few things that remain static in this world.

In New Testament times, there was a small elite ruling class with another group running a close second that served as a sort of entourage and a buffer between them and a small middle class. At the bottom of the list was a large majority of people living an agrarian life at a subsistence level. Beneath them there was another 10% of the population that lived at or below starvation level.

While we live in a society with a substantially larger middle class, there are still many similarities with the first century Roman Empire. The elites of society,

especially those that were Roman or Greek, worked shorter hours with a fair amount of leisure time. The merchants tended to work until late afternoon while the farmers and fishermen worked from sun-up until sundown. The latter two groups only had leisure time at weddings and on holidays.

There was a consistent pattern of Jewish culture, being much more conservative than their Gentile counterparts. That is to be expected. However, one thing that spanned across the culture barrier was how people were expected to act and stay in their particular role. Things were pretty much set for you from the time you were born. If you were a woman you were to be married no later than your mid-teens, no matter what your ethnic group or social status. If you were a Jewish male you were to be married by age 18. If you remained single much longer it was thought that something was wrong with you. Roman males normally married by 25 while Grecian men often waited until 30 years of age to marry.

Women were afforded almost no opportunity for education as they were expected to run the household and raise children. Only the daughters of the wealthiest families could expect anything more than a very basic education and even that was a rarity. Jewish males started school in the local synagogue at the age of 5 and were generally there until the age of 12 to 15, at which time they would leave and go to work with their fathers in the family trade or be apprenticed to another tradesman. The Jewish boys studied the Old Testament exclusively while the Greeks studied Homer and rhetoric.

The Roman Empire was the America of its day in that there were shopping malls, gymnasiums and all sorts of industry. There was a postal system and transportation infrastructure matched nowhere else in the world for hundreds of years. Understanding all these factors sheds light on and adds the color commentary to the narrative of the New Testament and especially the Gospels. Without this historical and sociological background to help with the context, we can easily misinterpret scripture and look over many of the fine details, which bring out some of the more subtle truths of scripture.

The word gospel means, "good news." The first Gospel in the canon to be penned was penned by Matthew. The name Matthew means, "Gift of the Lord." When you put these two together you get, "The Good News of the Gift of the Lord." I believe that to be fitting. Please read this short introduction in order to more clearly understand the context in which Jesus lived and ministered. Understanding the milieu in which Jesus and the Gospel authors found themselves is necessary to properly understand what we actually read.

Way back in Genesis 3, God prophesied of Jesus first advent.

Gen. 3:15

*15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."*

Isaiah 7:14

*14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall
conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

Isa. 9:6,7

*6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

And there are many more prophecies of which I can't list. I have a multi-set volume by Henry Lockyer with all the people, prayers, occupations, etc. as well as all the Messianic prophecies of the Bible. The volume of Messianic prophecies is the largest volume in the set, by far. But these few give you a picture of the man whom God painted before He ever came. And He had to fulfill all criteria, not just a cherry-picked few. Keep in mind that there were and would be many who claimed or were proclaimed to be the Messiah. And that is why we open our Bibles to Matthew and begin by reading a genealogy.

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Remember those pesky genealogies we read in Genesis? They had a purpose. And most of that purpose is fulfilled here.

- Matthew's bio: A publican

Matthew's purpose: an apologetic to the Jewish people. A genealogy is/ was a legal document proving one's lineage. Most, if not all of these were destroyed in 70 AD, at the destruction of the Temple. **Jesus got here "just in time."**

- **Gematria of the genealogy:** actually 13 generations, 14 and then 13 again. DVD in Hebrew = 14. This was a common construct during the second temple period and was device, which helped to remember things in an oral culture.
- **Why were women in the genealogy?** This was very, very rare. Especially women, some of whom had a bit of a reputation. I believe Matthew places these ladies in here in order to show there is a new sheriff in town. Things

that were once barriers existed no more. Anyone, no matter their past or background could now be grafted in the family of the Messiah. This is good news for all of us. We can't pick our relatives, but Jesus can.

- **The genealogy is broken up into three different blocks as is stated in verse 17.**
- **Matthew refers to the OT more than any of the other Gospels.** Five times he does this to prove Jesus is the Messiah. We will read of some of these today.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew quotes Isaiah in verse 23. Remember, Matthew is carefully establishing Jesus as the Messiah to the Jewish people in the best way possible: through the scriptures. This is why Matthew is composed a little differently than the other synoptic Gospels. It is written by a Hebrew: (though an outsider/ tax collector) to the Hebrews.

Into this world of Greco-Roman culture Jesus was born. Within this Greco-Roman world, there was what was seen as a sub-culture: Judaism. A short 3 ½ years later there will be what was considered a sub-sect within that sub-culture: Christianity.

And so it was truly as it was supposed to be: "to the Jew first."

Jesus started among His own people. From there grew forth Christianity, which is why most of you are sitting here today.

I challenge you here today. If you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please consider the evidence that convinced His own people of His divinity.

If you are already a believer then I challenge you to dive into the scriptures in order to know Him better. I challenge you to walk and talk with Him daily. If you want to better know how to do that, then **I suggest you be here tonight at 6:45.**