

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY
MATTHEW 1-7

John MacArthur

MOODY PUBLISHERS/CHICAGO

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The Gracious King

(Matthew 1:1-17)

1

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

To Abraham was born Isaac; and to Isaac, Jacob; and to Jacob, Judah and his brothers; and to Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar; and to Perez was born Hezron; and to Hezron, Ram; and to Ram was born Amminadab; and to Amminadab, Nahshon; and to Nahshon, Salmon; and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed, Jesse; and to Jesse was born David the king. And to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah; and to Solomon was born Rehoboam; and to Rehoboam, Abijah; and to Abijah, Asa; and to Asa was born Jehoshaphat; and to Jehoshaphat, Joram; and to Joram, Uzziah; and to Uzziah was born Jotham; and to Jotham, Ahaz; and to Ahaz, Hezekiah; and to Hezekiah was born Manasseh; and to Manasseh, Amon; and to Amon, Josiah; and to Josiah were born Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon, to Jeconiah was born Shealtiel; and to Shealtiel, Zerubbabel; and to Zerubbabel was born Abiud; and to Abiud, Eliakim; and to Eliakim, Azor; and to Azor was born Zadok; and to Zadok, Achim; and to Achim, Eliud; and to Eliud was born Eleazar; and to Eleazar, Matthan; and to Matthan, Jacob; and to Jacob was born Joseph the

husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Therefore all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations. (1:1-17)

As discussed in the introduction, one of Matthew's major purposes in his gospel, and the primary purpose of chapters 1 and 2, is to establish Jesus' right to Israel's kingship. To any honest observer, and certainly to Jews who knew and believed their own Scriptures, these two chapters vindicate Jesus' claim before Pilate: "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world" (John 18:37).

Consistent with that purpose of revealing Jesus to be the Christ (Messiah) and the King of the Jews, Matthew begins his gospel by showing Jesus' lineage from the royal line of Israel. If Jesus is to be heralded and proclaimed king there must be proof that He comes from the recognized royal family.

Messiah's royal line began with David. Through the prophet Nathan, God promised that it would be David's descendants through whom He would bring the great King who would ultimately reign over Israel and establish His eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-16). The promise was not fulfilled in Solomon, David's son who succeeded him, or in any other king who ruled in Israel or Judah; and the people waited for another one to be born of David's line to fulfill the prophecy. At the time Jesus was born the Jews were still anticipating the arrival of the promised monarch and the restored glory of the kingdom.

The Jews' concern for pedigrees, however, existed long before they had a king. After they entered Canaan under Joshua and conquered the region God had promised to them, the land was carefully and precisely divided into territories for each tribe—except the priestly tribe of Levi, for whom special cities were designated. In order to know where to live, each Israelite family had to determine accurately the tribe to which it belonged (see Num. 26; 34-35). And in order to qualify for priestly function, a Levite had to prove his descent from Levi. After the return from exile in Babylon, certain "sons of the priests" were not allowed to serve in the priesthood because "their ancestral registration . . . could not be located" (Ezra 2:61-62).

The transfer of property also required accurate knowledge of the family tree (see, e.g., Ruth 3-4). Even under Roman rule, the census of Jews in Palestine was based on tribe—as can be seen from the fact that Joseph and Mary were required to register in "Bethlehem, because he [Joseph] was of the house and family of David" (Luke 2:4). We learn from the Jewish historian Josephus that in New Testament times many Jewish families maintained detailed and highly valued ancestral files. Before his conversion, the apostle Paul had been greatly concerned about his lineage from "the tribe of Benjamin" (see Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5). For Jews, tribal identification and line of descent were all-important.

It is both interesting and significant that since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 no genealogies exist that can trace the ancestry of any Jew now living. The primary significance of that fact is that, for those Jews who still look for the Messiah, his lineage to David could never be established. Jesus Christ is the last verifiable claimant to the throne of David, and therefore to the messianic line.

Matthew's genealogy presents a descending line, from **Abraham** through **David**, through **Joseph**, to **Jesus, who is called Christ**. Luke's genealogy presents an ascending line, starting from Jesus and going back through David, Abraham, and even to "Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:23-38). Luke's record is apparently traced from Mary's side, the Eli of Luke 3:23 probably being Joseph's father-in-law (often referred to as a father) and therefore Mary's natural father. Matthew's intent is to validate Jesus' royal claim by showing His legal descent from David through Joseph, who was Jesus' legal, though not natural, father. Luke's intent is to trace Jesus' actual royal blood ancestry through his mother, thereby establishing His racial lineage from David. Matthew follows the royal line through David and Solomon, David's son and successor to the throne. Luke follows the royal line through Nathan, another son of David. Jesus was therefore the blood descendant of David through Mary and the legal descendant of David through Joseph. Genealogically, Jesus was perfectly qualified to take the throne of David.

It is essential to note that in His virgin birth Jesus not only was divinely conceived but through that miracle was protected from regal disqualification because of Joseph's being a descendant of **Jeconiah** (v. 12). Because of that king's wickedness, God had declared of Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin or Coniah) that, though he was in David's line, "no man of his descendants will prosper, sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah" (Jer. 22:30). That curse would have precluded Jesus' right to kingship had He been the natural son of Joseph, who was in Jeconiah's line. Jesus' legal descent from David, which was always traced through the father, came through Jeconiah to Joseph. But His blood descent, *and His human right to rule*, came through Mary, who was not in Jeconiah's lineage. Thus the curse on Jeconiah's offspring was circumvented, while still maintaining the royal privilege.

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

Biblos (**book**) can also refer to a record or account, as is the case here. Matthew is giving a brief record of the **genealogy** (*genesis*, "beginning, origin") of **Jesus** Christ. **Jesus** is from the Greek equivalent of Jeshua, or Jehoshua, which means "Jehovah (Yahweh) saves." It was the name the angel told Joseph to give to the Son who had been miraculously conceived in his betrothed, Mary, because this One who would soon be born would indeed "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Christos(Christ) is the Greek form of the Hebrew *māshīah* (Eng., messiah), which means "anointed one." Israel's prophets, priests, and kings were anointed,

and Jesus was anointed as all three. He was *the* Anointed One, *the* Messiah, whom the Jews had long expected to come as their great deliverer and monarch.

Yet because of their unbelief and misunderstanding of Scripture, many Jews refused to recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. Some rejected Him for the very reason that His parents *were* known to them. When He went back to His hometown of Nazareth He “began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?’ ” (Matt. 13:54-56). On another occasion, others in Jerusalem said of Jesus, “The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from” (John 7:26-27). A short while later, “Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, ‘This certainly is the Prophet.’ Others were saying, ‘This is the Christ.’ Still others were saying, ‘Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?’ ” (John 7:40-41). Still others, better taught in the Scriptures but unaware of Jesus’ lineage and birthplace, said, “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” (v. 42).

The genealogy establishes the Messiah’s royal lineage. Matthew’s intent is not to have the reader digress into a study of each person listed, but is to show that all of these persons point to the royalty of Christ.

THE GRACIOUS KING

Even so, from Matthew’s genealogy we learn more than Jesus’ lineage. We also see beautiful reflections of God’s grace. Jesus was sent by a God of grace to be a King of grace. He would not be a King of law and of iron force, but a King of grace. His royal credentials testify of royal grace. And the people He chose to be His ancestors reveal the wonder of grace, and give hope to all sinners.

The graciousness of this King and of the God who sent Him can be seen in the genealogy in four places and ways. We will look at these in logical, rather than chronological, order.

THE GRACE OF GOD SEEN IN THE CHOICE OF ONE WOMAN

And to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (1:16)

God showed His grace to Mary by choosing her to be the mother of Jesus. Although descended from the royal line of David, Mary was an ordinary, unknown young woman. Contrary to claims of her own immaculate conception (her being conceived miraculously in her own mother’s womb), Mary was just as much a sinner as all other human beings ever born. She was likely much better, morally and

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ACTS 13-28

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The Character of an Effective Church (Acts 13:1–13)

1

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the

devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem. (13:1–13)

There is much truth in the humorous adage that some people make things happen, others watch things happen, while still others are left wondering what happened. What is true of individuals is also true of churches. Some churches are dynamic, aggressively reaching out with the gospel to make an impact on the world. Some know God is moving in other churches and wonder why they aren't experiencing that power. Still others just barely exist, languishing while the spiritual (and maybe even physical) weeds grow. They make an impact only on their members' social lives.

Acts 11 introduced a leadership and a congregation that God used to make things happen—the Antioch church, the first beachhead of Christianity in the pagan world. That church had an impressive beginning. Acts 11:21 records that “a large number who believed turned to the Lord” under the ministry of Hellenistic Jews who fled Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom (11:19–20). The Antioch church grew dramatically under the capable leadership of Barnabas and Saul (11:26). It was in Antioch that the name *Christians* was first given to the followers of Jesus Christ (11:26). Although it was intended as a derisive term, the believers wore it as a badge of honor. Members of this largely Gentile church showed their love for their Jewish brethren by sending them famine relief (11:27–30).

But of all the factors that made the Antioch church strong, the most significant was its submission to the Holy Spirit. Both the leaders (cf. 11:24; 13:9) and the congregation (cf. 13:2, 4) of the Antioch church were Spirit-filled. They were utterly dependent on the Spirit, who energized every phase of their ministry.

What marks a Spirit-filled church? A Spirit-filled church may be defined simply as one whose members walk in obedience to the will of God. Since God reveals His will in Scripture, a Spirit-filled church must be deeply committed to the Word of God. Indeed, a comparison of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 reveals that being filled with the Spirit and letting the Word richly dwell in one's life produce the same effects. Therefore they are the two sides of the same spiritual reality.

Chapter 13 marks a turning point in Acts. The first twelve chapters have focused on the ministry of Peter; the remaining chapters focus on Paul. Until now the emphasis has been on the Jewish church in Jerusalem and Judea; chapters 13–28 describe the spread of the Gentile church throughout the Roman world. And it was from the dynamic, doctrinally sound, growing, Spirit-controlled church at Antioch that the flag of Gentile missions was unfurled. It had spiritual leaders, with a spiritual ministry, who went on a spiritual mission, faced spiritual opposition, and experienced spiritual victory.

SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (13:1)

Effective, strong churches inevitably have godly leaders, and the church **at Antioch** was no exception. God has always put a premium on spiritual leadership (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; cf. Hos. 4:9; Matt. 9:36). These five men were the heart of the ministry at Antioch.

Luke describes them as **prophets and teachers**, two important New Testament terms. **Prophets** played a significant role in the apostolic church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). Like the apostles, they were preachers of God's Word and were responsible in the early years of the church to instruct the local congregations. Sometimes they received new revelation from God, as in Acts 11:28 and 21:10–11. Both of those incidents record that the prophets, in contrast to the apostles, received practical, not doctrinal revelation. The prophets' function as receivers of divine revelation ended with the cessation of the temporary sign gifts. Even their office, like that of the apostles, was replaced by pastor-teachers and evangelists (cf. Eph. 4:11–12), who were the elders and overseers (1 Tim. 3:1ff.; Titus 1:5–9). (For a discussion of the cessation of the sign gifts, see John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] and *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1984].)

The prophets edified the saints by preaching expositions of existing revelation (cf. 1 Thess. 5:20). Although prophets of that unique kind no longer exist, the similar gift for preaching the Word of God remains. It is given to pastors and evangelists, who proclaim what Peter called "the prophetic word" (2 Pet. 1:19) and is still vital to the spiritual health of the church (cf. Rom. 10:14–18). All the way to the return of the Lord, the "spirit of prophecy" continues to be "the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10).

Teachers are critical in today's church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; James 3:1). Theirs is the ministry of giving others a clear understanding of biblical truth. The distinctive of the ministry of teachers is its emphasis on pedagogy rather than on proclamation. That they are somewhat different from preachers seems apparent in texts that discuss both, though the same gifted man can sometimes perform both functions, as Acts 15:35 indicates.

Antioch had five men who were both preachers and teachers of God's Word. It was through their ministry that the church was built up in the faith.

Barnabas has already appeared several times in Acts. From 4:36 we learn he was a Levite from the island of Cyprus. His birth name was Joseph, but the apostles named him **Barnabas**, which means "Son of Encouragement"—an apt description of this gentle, loving man. It was Barnabas who convinced the skeptical and suspicious believers at Jerusalem that Saul's conversion was genuine (9:27). The Jerusalem fellowship sent him to investigate the rumors that Gentiles had been saved in Antioch (11:22)—a sign of the high esteem in which the Jerusalem church held him. He brought Saul from Tarsus and got him involved in the ministry in Antioch (11:25–26). Barnabas, along with Saul, carried the Antioch church's contributions for the relief of the Judean church to Jerusalem (11:30).

Little is known about **Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen**. Luke's note that **Simeon was called Niger** (which means "black") may suggest that he was a dark-skinned man, an African, or both. While some identify him with Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21), there is no direct evidence for that identification. **Lucius**, but not Simeon, is identified with the city of **Cyrene** in North Africa. There is nothing to link him with the Lucius whom Paul greets in Romans 16:21 and certainly no evidence to identify him (as some have argued) as Luke the physician. **Manaen** was notable, Luke records, because he **had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch** (Herod Antipas, the Herod of the gospels). *Suntrophos* (**had been brought up with**) can be translated "foster-brother." He had been reared in Herod the Great's household along with Herod Antipas. **Saul**, or Paul, needs no introduction. Through his tireless efforts the gospel spread throughout the Gentile world. These were the shepherds who led the flock to effectiveness and impact.

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, (13:2a)

The responsibility of spiritual shepherds is spiritual ministry.

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PHILIPPIANS

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The Epistle of Joy (Philippians 1:1–2)

1

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1:1–2)

We live in a generally sad world, a fallen world well acquainted with despair, depression, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and a longing for lasting happiness that often never comes to pass. Moments of pleasure and satisfaction are scattered through the general pain and sorrow of life. Many people have little hope that their situation in life will ever change much, if any, for the better. Hopelessness tends to increase with age. Long years of life often become long years of sorrow, unfulfillment, loss of loved ones and friends, and often physical limitations and pain. Such decreasing times of happiness tend to produce a morbid sadness and lessening satisfaction with life.

Most people define happiness as an attitude of satisfaction or delight based on positive circumstances largely beyond their control. Happiness, therefore, cannot be planned or programmed, much less guaranteed. It is experienced only if and when circumstances are favorable. It is therefore elusive and uncertain.

Spiritual joy, on the other hand, is not an attitude dependent on chance or circumstances. It is the deep and abiding confidence that, regardless of one's circumstances in life, all is well between the believer and the Lord. No matter what difficulty, pain, disappointment, failure, rejection, or other challenge one is facing, genuine joy remains because of that eternal well-being established by God's grace in salvation. Thus, Scripture makes it clear that the fullest, most lasting and satisfying joy is derived from a true relationship with God. It is not based on circumstances or chance, but is the gracious and permanent possession of every child of God. Therefore it is not surprising that joy is an important New Testament theme. The verb *rejoice* (*chairō*) appears ninety-six times in the New Testament (including those times when it is used as a greeting) and the noun *joy* (*chara*) another fifty-nine times. The two words appear thirteen times in Philippians.

A biblical theology of joy includes many features. First, joy is a gift from God. David declared, "You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and new wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:7–8); "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps. 16:11).

Second, God grants joy to those who believe the gospel. Announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds, the angel said, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11). Jesus told His disciples, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). Christ came to proclaim a gospel that would give true supernatural joy to those who receive Him as Savior and Lord.

Third, joy is produced by God the Holy Spirit. "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking," Paul said, "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). In his letter to the Galatian churches, the apostle wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22–23).

Fourth, joy is experienced most fully as believers receive and obey God's Word. The prophet Jeremiah exulted, "Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). The apostle John wrote his first letter so that, among other things, his and his readers' "joy may be made complete" (1 John 1:4).

Fifth, believers' joy is deepened through trials. The full reality of joy is experienced when it is contrasted with sadness, sorrow, and diffi-

culties. “You also became imitators of us and of the Lord,” Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6). In his second letter to the believers at Corinth, Paul spoke of being “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). James counseled believers to “consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2), and Peter encouraged them with these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials. (1 Peter 1:3-6)

Sixth, believers’ joy is made complete when they set their hope on the glory of heaven. They are always to be “rejoicing in hope” (Rom. 12:12). Peter reminded them that, “though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Later in that letter he exhorted, “To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:13). Jude concluded his brief letter with the beautiful benediction: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

The love bond between Paul and the Philippian believers may have been stronger than the one he had with any other church. It was in large measure because of the joy that their love brought to him that the theme of Paul’s letter to the Philippians is joy. The depth of their relationship with him encouraged the apostle during his imprisonment and added to his joy. He was concerned about their unity, their faithfulness, and many other important spiritual and practical matters. But his overriding concern was that their sorrow over his afflictions would be tempered by their joy over his faithfulness to the Lord and the great reward that awaited him in heaven. Paul wanted them not to be sad, but to share in the fullest measure his deep, abiding joy in Jesus Christ. It is a noteworthy testimony to the maturity of the Philippian believers that, although Paul warned and encouraged them, he made no mention of any theolog-

ical or moral problem in the church at Philippi. That also brought the apostle joy.

In the first two verses the apostle described himself and Timothy as servants of Jesus Christ, the Philippian believers as saints in Jesus Christ, and offered his salutation to them in the name of their Lord.

THE SERVANTS

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus (1:1a)

Paul is the beloved apostle who wrote thirteen New Testament epistles and is arguably the most noble and privileged servant of Jesus Christ the world has ever known. Yet, he referred to himself and **Timothy** simply as **bond-servants of Christ Jesus**. He made no mention of his apostolic authority or his being chosen to record part of God's written Word. He viewed himself and every believer primarily as a slave of the Lord.

Perhaps the most concise and clear look at Paul anywhere in the New Testament comes from the apostle himself later in this letter. Speaking of his life in Judaism, he wrote,

I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. [But] if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:4-11)

Paul's human credentials were remarkable. He was the epitome of Jewish manhood, an exemplary, traditional, zealous, and legalistic "Hebrew of Hebrews." In the eyes of his peers, he was blameless and righteous. But after his conversion he saw those things for what they were in God's eyes: mere rubbish. What he had considered to be positives before God he came to realize were actually destructive negatives. His former imagined

righteousness was really unrighteousness, which he gladly forsook to gain the true righteousness that comes only “through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (3:9).

Timothy shared that righteousness, as a fellow bond-servant of **Christ Jesus**. He was Paul’s son in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2), not only a protégé, but also a cherished companion, to whom the apostle would bequeath an extraordinary spiritual legacy and ministry. His two inspired letters to Timothy were written several years later, the first after the apostle had been released from his first imprisonment in Rome and the second during his second imprisonment there.

Bond-servants translates the plural of the oft-used Greek word *doulos*, which describes a person owned by someone else and thus subservient to and dependent on that person. Paul used it of himself at the beginning of three of his epistles (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1), and in each case it precedes the mention of his apostleship. James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1), and Jude (Jude 1) use it in the same way.

When used in the New Testament of a believer’s relationship to Jesus Christ, *doulos* describes willing, determined, and devoted service. It reflects the attitude of an Old Testament slave who refused the opportunity for freedom and voluntarily resubmitted himself to his master for life. The Mosaic Law provided that “if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently” (Ex. 21:5–6). Speaking of all faithful believers, Paul declared, “Now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). To the Corinthians he explained, “For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave” (1 Cor. 7:22).

In that spirit **Paul** and **Timothy** did not think of being **bond-servants of Christ Jesus** in anything but positive terms. Nor did they think of themselves as **bond-servants** of the church, of Rome, or of any other person or institution, but exclusively of **Christ Jesus**. Paul reminded the elders from the Ephesian church of that single-minded devotion when he met them near Miletus: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). That devotion is required of every believer, but especially of those called to the ministry. Even if a pastor’s or teacher’s primary devotion is to the church, it will inevitably bring some measure of compromise, disappointment, and spiritual failure. But devotion to **Christ**

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY
HEBREWS

John MacArthur

MOODY PUBLISHERS/CHICAGO

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The Superiority Of Christ

(Hebrews 1:1-2)

1

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (1:1-2)

The writer does not delay in getting to his point. He makes it in the first three verses. These verses are very simple. They tell us Christ is superior to everyone and everything. The three primary features of His superiority are: preparation, presentation, and preeminence. Keep in mind that all through the book Christ is presented as being better than the best of everyone and everything that was before Him—absolutely better than anything the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, provided.

THE PREPARATION FOR CHRIST

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. (1:1)

Here is an indication of how God wrote the Old Testament. Its

purpose was to prepare for the coming of Christ. Whether by prophecy or type or principle or commandment or whatever, it made preparation for Christ.

The senses of man, marvelous as they are, are incapable of reaching beyond the natural world. For us to know anything about God, He must tell us. We could never know God if He did not speak to us. Thus, in the Old Testament, the writer reminds us, “God . . . spoke.”

MAN’S WAYS TO GOD

Man lives in a natural “box,” which encloses him within its walls of time and space. Outside of this box is the supernatural, and somewhere deep inside himself man knows it is out there. But in himself he does not know anything certain about it. So someone comes along and says, “We must find out about the supernatural, the world ‘out there.’” And a new religion is born. Those who become interested run over to the edge of the box, get out their imaginative mental chisels and start trying to chip a hole in the edge of the box—through which they can crawl, or at least peer, out and discover the secrets of the other world.

That, figuratively, is what always happens. The Buddhist says that when you have worked and thought yourself into Nirvana, all of a sudden you are out of the box. You have transcended the natural and have found your way into the supernatural. The Muslim says basically the same thing, though in different words. So do all the other religions—Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Confucianism, or whatever it may be. These are all attempts by man to escape from the natural to the supernatural, to get out of the box. But the problem is, he cannot get himself out.

GOD’S WAY TO MAN

By definition, natural man cannot escape into the supernatural. We cannot go into a religious phone booth and change into a superman. We cannot in ourselves or by ourselves transcend our natural existence. If we are to know anything about God, it will not be by escaping, or climbing, or thinking, or working our way to Him; it will only be by His coming to us, His speaking to us. We cannot, by ourselves, understand God any more than an insect we may hold in our hand can understand us. Nor can we condescend to its level, or communicate with it if we could. But God can condescend to our level and He can communicate with us. And He has.

God became a man Himself and entered our box to tell us about Himself, more fully and completely than He was able to do even through His prophets. This not only was divine revelation, but personal divine revelation of the most literal and perfect and wonderful sort. All of man’s

religions reflect his attempts to make his way out of the box. The message of Christianity, however, is that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

When God burst into the box, He did it in human form, and the name of that human form is Jesus Christ. That is the difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. That is why it is so foolish for people to say, “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe or what religion you follow.” It makes every difference. Every religion is but man’s attempt to discover God. Christianity is God bursting into man’s world and showing and telling man what He is like. Because man by himself is incapable of identifying, comprehending, or understanding God at all, God had to invade the world of man and speak to him about Himself. Initially, He told us He would be coming.

BY THE PROPHETS: MANY WAYS

This He did through the words of the Old Testament. He used men as instruments, but was Himself behind them, enlightening and energizing them. The deists teach that God started the world going and then went away, leaving it to run by itself. But God is not detached from His creation; He is not uninvolved in our world. The true and living God, unlike the false gods of man’s making, is not dumb or indifferent. The God of Scripture, unlike the impersonal “First Cause” of some philosophers, is not silent. He speaks. He first spoke in the Old Testament, which is not a collection of the wisdom of ancient men but is the voice of God.

Now notice how God spoke: **in many portions and in many ways**. The writer uses a play on words in the original language: “God, *polumerōs* and *polutropōs* . . .” These two Greek words are interesting. They mean, respectively, “in many portions” (as of books) and “in many different manners.” There are many books in the Old Testament—thirty-nine of them. In all those **many portions** (*polumerōs*) and in **many ways** (*polutropōs*) God spoke to men. Sometimes it was in a vision, sometimes by a parable, sometimes through a type or a symbol. There were many different ways in which God spoke in the Old Testament. But it is always God speaking. Even the words spoken by men and angels are included because He wants us to know them.

Men were used—their minds were used and their personalities were used—but they were totally controlled by the Spirit of God. Every word they wrote was the word that God decided they should write and delighted in their writing.

Many ways includes many literary ways. Some of the Old Testament is narrative. Some of it is poetry, in beautiful Hebrew meter. The “many ways” also includes many types of content. Some is law; some is

THE MACARTHUR
NEW TESTAMENT
COMMENTARY

REVELATION 1-11

John MacArthur

MOODY PUBLISHERS/CHICAGO

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Back to the Future (Revelation 1:1–6)

1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1:1–6)

Many people are fascinated, even obsessed with the future. They faithfully read their horoscopes, seek out Tarot card readers, have their palms read, feed on futuristic science fiction material, or call one of the many “psychic hot lines” advertised on TV. Some people delve more

deeply into the occult, seeking out mediums (as did King Saul), futilely and sinfully attempting to obtain information about what is to come by “consult[ing] the dead on behalf of the living” (Isa. 8:19). The dead cannot, of course, respond to such efforts at contact, but demons do, masquerading as the dead and propagating lies.

All such attempts to discern the future, however, are in vain. There is only One who knows and declares the future: God (Isa. 44:7; 45:21; 46:9–10). Only in Scripture can truth about the future be found. The Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, provide glimpses of the future. So did our Lord in His Olivet Discourse, along with Peter and Paul in their inspired writings. But the book of Revelation provides the most detailed look into the future in all of Scripture. The fitting capstone of God’s revelation to man in the Bible, the book of Revelation unveils the future history of the world, all the way to history’s climax in the return of Christ and the setting up of His glorious earthly and eternal kingdom.

By way of introduction, John lists eleven characteristics of this marvelous book: its essential nature, central theme, divine source, human recipients, prophetic character, supernatural delivery, human author, promised blessing, compelling urgency, Trinitarian benediction, and exalted doxology.

ITS ESSENTIAL NATURE

The Revelation (1:1a)

These two words are essential to understanding this book. Many people are confused by the book of Revelation, viewing it as a mysterious, bizarre, indecipherable mystery. But nothing could be further from the truth. Far from *hiding* the truth, the book of Revelation *reveals* it. This is the last chapter in God’s story of redemption. It tells how it all ends. As the account of the Creation in the beginning was not vague or obscure, but clear, so God has given a detailed and lucid record of the ending. It is unthinkable to believe that God would speak with precision and clarity from Genesis to Jude, and then when it comes to the end abandon all precision and clarity. Yet, many theologians today think Revelation is not the precise record of the end in spite of what it says. They also are convinced that its mysteries are so vague that the end is left in confusion. As we shall see in this commentary, this is a serious error that strips the saga of redemption of its climax as given by God.

Apokalupsis (**Revelation**) appears eighteen times in the New Testament, always, when used of a person, with the meaning “to become

visible.” In Luke 2:32, Simeon praised God for the infant Jesus, describing Him as “a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” Simeon exulted that the Messiah had been made visible to men. Paul spoke in Romans 8:19 of the manifest transformation of believers in glory as “the revealing of the sons of God.” Both Paul (1 Cor. 1:7) and Peter (1 Pet. 1:7) used *apokalupsis* to refer to the revelation of Christ at His second coming.

The book of Revelation contains truths that had been concealed, but have now been revealed. Though it nowhere directly quotes the Old Testament, 278 of its 404 verses refer or allude to Old Testament prophetic truth, and it amplifies what was only initially suggested in the Old Testament.

The Apocalypse reveals a great many divine truths. It warns the church of the danger of sin and instructs it about the need for holiness. It reveals the strength Christ and believers have to overcome Satan. It reveals the glory and majesty of God and depicts the reverent worship that constantly attends His throne. The book of Revelation reveals the end of human history, including the final political setup of the world, the career of Antichrist, and the climactic Battle of Armageddon. It reveals the coming glory of Christ’s earthly reign during the millennial kingdom, the Great White Throne judgment, and depicts the eternal bliss of the new heaven and the new earth. It reveals the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over all human and demonic opposition. The book of Revelation describes the ultimate defeat of Satan and sin, and the final state of the wicked (eternal torment in hell) and the righteous (eternal joy in heaven). In short, it is a front-page story of the future of the world written by someone who has seen it all.

But supremely, overarching all those features, the book of Revelation reveals the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It describes in detail the events associated with His second coming, revealing His glory that will one day blaze forth as strikingly and unmistakably as lightning flashing in a darkened sky (Matt. 24:27).

ITS CENTRAL THEME

of Jesus Christ, (1:1b)

While all Scripture is revelation from God (2 Tim. 3:16), in a unique way the book of Revelation is *the* revelation—the revelation of Jesus Christ. While this book is certainly revelation *from* Jesus Christ (cf. 22:16), it is also the revelation *about* Him. The other New Testament uses of the phrase *apokalupsis Iēsou Christou* (**Revelation of Jesus Christ**)

suggest that John's statement in this verse is best understood in the sense of revelation about Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 1:12; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7). The Gospels are also about Jesus Christ, but present Him in His first coming in humiliation; the book of Revelation presents Him in His second coming in exaltation. Every vision and description of Him in Revelation is one of majesty, power, and glory.

Christ's unveiling begins in 1:5–20, where He is revealed in His ascended majesty. Those verses also provide a preview of His second coming glory. In chapters 2 and 3, as exalted Lord of the church, He reproves and encourages His church. Finally, chapters 4–22 provide a detailed look at His second coming; the establishing of His millennial kingdom, during which He will personally reign on earth; and the ushering in of the eternal state.

W. A. Criswell, long-time pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, gave the following explanation as to why Christ must yet be revealed in glory:

The first time our Lord came into this world, He came in the veil of our flesh. His deity was covered over with His manhood. His Godhead was hidden by His humanity. Just once in a while did His deity shine through, as on the Mount of Transfiguration, or as in His miraculous works. But most of the time the glory, the majesty, the deity, the wonder and the marvel of the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, were veiled. These attributes were covered over in flesh, in our humanity. He was born in a stable. He grew up in poverty. He knew what it was to hunger and to thirst. He was buffeted and beaten and bruised. He was crucified and raised up as a felon before the scoffing gaze of the whole earth. The last time that this world saw Jesus was when it saw Him hanging in shame, misery and anguish upon the cross. He later appeared to a few of His believing disciples, but the last time that this unbelieving world ever saw Jesus was when it saw Him die as a malefactor, as a criminal, crucified on a Roman cross. That was a part of the plan of God, a part of the immeasurable, illimitable grace and love of our Lord. "By His stripes we are healed."

But then is that all the world is ever to see of our Saviour—dying in shame on a cross? No! It is also a part of the plan of God that some day this unbelieving, this blaspheming, this godless world shall see the Son of God in His full character, in glory, in majesty, in the full-orbed wonder and marvel of His Godhead. Then all men shall look upon Him as He really is. They shall see Him holding in His hands the title-deed to the Universe, holding in His hands the authority of all creation in the universe above us, in the universe around us, and in the universe beneath us; holding this world and its destiny in His pierced and loving hands. (*Expository Sermons on Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 1:16–17)

Even a cursory glance through the book of Revelation reveals that Jesus Christ is its main theme. He is “the faithful witness” (1:5); “the firstborn of the dead” (1:5); “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5); “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8; 21:6); the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:8); “the Almighty” (1:8); “the first and the last” (1:17); “the living One” (1:18); “the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (2:1); “the One who has the sharp two-edged sword” (2:12); “the Son of God” (2:18); the One “who has eyes like a flame of fire, and . . . feet . . . like burnished bronze” (2:18); the One “who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars” (3:1); the One “who is holy, who is true” (3:7); the holder of “the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens” (3:7); “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness” (3:14); “the Beginning of the creation of God” (3:14); “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah” (5:5); “the Root of David” (5:5); the Lamb of God (e.g., 5:6; 6:1; 7:9–10; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7; 21:9; 22:1); the “Lord, holy and true” (6:10); the One who “is called Faithful and True” (19:11); “The Word of God” (19:13); the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (19:16); Christ (Messiah), ruling on earth with His glorified saints (20:6); and “Jesus . . . the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (22:16). The book of Revelation reveals the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in song, poetry, symbolism, and prophecy. In it the heavens are opened and its readers see, as did Stephen (Acts 7:56), visions of the risen, glorified Son of God.

ITS DIVINE SOURCE

which God gave Him (1:1c)

In what sense is the book of Revelation a gift from the Father to Jesus Christ? Some interpret the phrase **which God gave Him** in connection with Jesus’ words in Mark 13:32: “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” In the humiliation of His incarnation, when He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant” (Phil. 2:7), Jesus restricted the independent use of His divine attributes. In the book of Revelation, those holding this view argue, the Father finally gave Jesus the information He lacked in His incarnation and humiliation.

There are two insurmountable difficulties with that view, however. The most obvious one is that the book of Revelation nowhere gives the day or hour of Christ’s return. Thus, it does not contain the very information the Father was supposedly revealing to the Son. Further, the glorified,