

DAILY READINGS FROM
MATTHEW TO REVELATION

LIVING THE
NEW
TESTAMENT

PAUL ENNS

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Publications

Living the New Testament: Daily Readings from Matthew to Revelation

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Dedication

*Since the home going of my beloved Helen,
the people at Idlewild Baptist Church
have demonstrated enormous love,
encouragement, kindness, and help to me
in a profound and overwhelming way.
I am eternally grateful to them.*

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PREFACE

If you look at the coins in your pocket, you will notice they have a date on them: 2009, 1997, 2003—they are different dates but their dates all signify something very important. What is it? Legal documents and ordinary documents are dated when we sign them: August 27, 2010. The yearly dates are significant and some of them specify that by adding A.D., anno Domini, “in the year of our Lord.” The point is we date our time, events, and business transactions in relation to the birth of Jesus Christ. When Christ came, a new era was ushered in: the New Testament era.

What is so special about the New Testament? When Jesus Christ came, He inaugurated a new covenant through His atoning death on the cross (Matt. 26:28). That changed everything—it brought the New Testament era. The Old Testament anticipated Christ, pointed to Christ—now He came to fulfill the promises about Himself and bring the age of the Law to its conclusion (Rom. 6:14). The twenty-seven books of the New Testament introduce this new era and describe the life of Christ (the Gospels), the history of the early church (Acts), and the teaching of the early church and for the church throughout the ages (the Epistles).

Living the New Testament is based on the premise of 2 Timothy 3:16, that all Scripture is “God-breathed” (NIV), and therefore inerrant in everything it says. And since the Scriptures are God-breathed, they are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” In *Living the New Testament*, you will get a clear picture of the meaning of biblical passages from Matthew to Revelation, as well as practical application and inspiration for living the truths of the New Testament. I encourage you to read the Scripture passage listed with the daily reading before you read the devotion, which provides a further explanation of the meaning of the passage and its application to life.

It is my prayer that *Living the New Testament* will stimulate your love of God’s Word and encourage you to faithful, regular meditation in the Scriptures. The end result should be love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a daily trust and confidence in Him, giving you victory in life: “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

January 1

THE ROYAL MESSIAH

MATTHEW 1:1–18; LUKE 3:23–38

*The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,
the son of David. (Matthew 1:1)*

Queen Elizabeth II rules on the throne of England. Since her lineage is of the House of Windsor she has the right and the qualification to rule as Britain's monarch. The one who succeeds her must similarly be of the House of Windsor.

The New Testament opens dramatically, immediately tracing Jesus to David, Israel's greatest king. In fact, both Matthew and Luke identify Jesus as a descendant from David and therefore a rightful claimant to David's throne. Luke additionally traces Jesus to Adam; thus, He is a representative of the entire human race. But the opening statement of the New Testament is important: as a descendant of David, Jesus came to rule—that is His right and His destiny. This is further reflected in the attention given to David; he is "David the king" (Matt. 1:6).

But why are there two genealogies? Matthew gives Jesus' lineage through Solomon, the son of David to Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. Joseph's lineage provides the *legal* right to the throne of David. Luke traces Jesus' lineage through Nathan, also a son of David, and gives the descent through Mary and gives the *physical* descent of Jesus. Matthew shows Jesus has the legal right to David's throne. Because Joseph was Jesus' adoptive father, Jesus had a rightful claim to the throne. If Jesus had been virgin born, but Mary had not been married to Joseph, Jesus could not have been a claimant to the throne of David. Jewish laws of inheritance came through the male (Gen. 49:1–27; Deut. 21:15–17).

Further, if Jesus had been the natural son of Joseph and Mary He could not have ruled because of the Coniah curse, which announced that no descendant of his would ever rule on the throne of David (Jer. 22:30). He would also then have had the sin nature which would have precluded Him from being the Messiah. Jesus *had to be* the adoptive son of Joseph to have a claim to the Davidic throne, but He had to be virgin born to be the Savior.

Matthew's genealogy reminds us that Jesus is the Savior of Israel; Luke's genealogy tells us that Jesus is the Savior of the world. In the incomprehensible wisdom of God, the Lord has provided a pure sinless Savior and King for both Israel and the world.

CONSIDER: There is a great day coming when Jesus will rule on the throne of David and bring peace to a troubled world.

January 2

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS

LUKE 1:26–35; MATTHEW 1:18–25

When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)

A well-known preacher in England preached a series of sermons entitled, “Things I Don’t Believe.” One of the sermons he preached was on the virgin birth—he rejected it. Is the virgin birth of Jesus important? Does the Bible teach it? How is it a vital doctrine?

The testimony of Scripture—both Old and New Testaments—are strong in teaching the virgin birth of Jesus. Matthew develops the genealogy from Abraham to Joseph with active verbs: “Abraham was the father of Isaac” (Matt. 1:2) means that Abraham produced, sired Isaac. The active verbs continue throughout the genealogy until verse 16 where the verbs change to the passive form: “by whom Jesus was born.” This is purposeful, a clear statement reminding us that Joseph was not active in the birth of Jesus. Jesus had no earthly father.

Further, the pronoun “whom” is gender neutral in English but in the Greek text it is feminine (*hes*), again reminding the reader that Jesus was born only of Mary. Joseph had no relationship to Jesus’ birth. The term “virgin” (*parthenos*) indisputably means sexually pure, one who has not known a man. This is also how the word should be understood in Isaiah 7:14 where Jesus’ birth is foretold.

Matthew clarifies Mary’s pregnancy by reminding the reader that she was pregnant before she and Joseph ever lived together as husband and wife. But Matthew also explains the nature of Mary’s pregnancy: “she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (v. 18). Luke provides a similar explanation (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit produced Mary’s conception.

How is this significant? The virgin birth of Jesus was necessary if He would redeem the human race (Matt. 1:21). An ordinary man with a sin nature could not redeem anyone. The Redeemer had to be a sinless person (1 John 3:5). He had to be a man to represent man but He had to be God if His death was to have infinite value. At Bethlehem the eternal Christ took on humanity and became the God-Man: “Immanuel . . . God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Truly, this reveals both the manifold wisdom of God and the grace of God in having mercy on a fallen humanity.

CONSIDER: Jesus came in sinless humanity joined with genuine deity that He might redeem all who call upon Him.

January 3

THE CONFLICT OF GOOD AND EVIL

MATTHEW 2:1-12

*When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)*

When our vacuum cleaner broke, we purchased a new one. As the salesman filled out the paperwork he recorded the date: December 1, 2004. For every business transaction, purchase, or contract, the paperwork records the year from the birth of Christ. Every coin in our pocket, every bill in our wallet states the date from the advent of Christ into this world.

Modern coinage, legal papers, and virtually all significant events have been dated from the birth of Christ. The dating system has been determined by B.C. (“before Christ”) or A.D. (“anno Domini”—“In the year of Our Lord”). (It has now been established that Jesus was probably born in late 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C.)

When Jesus was born, magi from the east came to worship Him. Originally, the magi were a priestly class in Persia and later the term came to denote those involved in magical arts, sorcery, and astrology. In Jesus’ day the magi were probably a mixture of scientist and astronomer.

But what was the star that led the magi? The astronomer Kepler suggested it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, but that occurred in 7 B.C.—too early for the birth of Christ. *Star (astera)* can be translated “light,” “flame,” or “fire.” The star was likely the Shekinah glory of God through which God revealed Himself to the magi and supernaturally led them—not only to Israel, but to the very house where Jesus was. (The term *Shekinah* glory refers to the visible manifestation of God’s presense, such as God’s presense with the Israelites in the wilderness when He appeared as fire and cloud [Exod. 13:21].)

But when the magi came to Jerusalem, inquiring of the King who was born, Herod was upset. Herod was a ruthless murderer who had killed his wife Mariamne, her grandfather, and three of his sons—as well as numerous others. It is no wonder “all Jerusalem” was troubled too (Matt. 2:3).

After worshipping the Savior and bringing Him gifts, the Lord supernaturally led the magi away by a different route, avoiding contact with Herod. The serious conflict between good and evil had begun.

CONSIDER: The birth of Christ intensified the conflict of good and evil—a conflict that persists to this day.

January 4

THE CONTINUING CONFLICT

MATTHEW 2:13–23

*“Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt,
and remain there until I tell you.” (Matthew 2:13)*

A Christian mission established a fledgling church in a north African country. The ministry was difficult and the response to the gospel was slow. But eventually a small church was established with about a dozen members that began to meet regularly for worship. But soon, one by one, the Christians began to disappear. Some were found, murdered. Eventually, the entire congregation was gone. The conflict of the ages, intensified at the birth of Christ, persists to the modern era.

After being warned by God in a dream, Joseph took his family and escaped to Egypt. It was the natural move. Egypt was close, but more important, it had a large Jewish population; Philo, writing in A.D. 40, says there were nearly a million Jews in Egypt.

Matthew immediately reminds us of the important personage: “the Child and His mother” is mentioned in that order four times (vv. 13, 14, 20, 21). The Child was the promised Messiah! But Herod wanted no rival king so he immediately had all the children in the region of Bethlehem killed. The death of the children is dramatically depicted in “Rachel weeping for her children” (v. 18), where Matthew is quoting from the book of Jeremiah. As the wife of Jacob, Rachel is the “mother” of all Jewish people. Rachel was buried in Bethlehem and is pictured weeping over the death of her children.

But God protected the Messiah Child. The family lived in safety in Egypt until the death of Herod and then returned to Israel. But upon arrival in Judea, Joseph discovered that Herod’s evil son Archelaus was ruling. Archelaus began his career by killing 3,000 of the most influential people. God again directed Joseph and he took his family and settled in Nazareth—in further fulfillment of prophecy.

God has supernaturally led Joseph and his family, yet He didn’t give them detailed information about the future. Joseph was called to walk by faith in the conflict between good and evil.

CONSIDER: God watches over His people and directs their steps, and, ultimately, He will prevail in the conflict between good and evil.

January 5

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

MATTHEW 3:13–17; MARK 1:9–11; LUKE 3:21–23

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. . . . And a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9, 11)

Visiting the land of Israel stirs the emotions. To see the sites where our Savior walked and taught is a phenomenal experience. Our son Jeremy was baptized in the Jordan River just south of the Sea of Galilee. The baptism itself was a joyous event, but it was especially significant for Jeremy to be baptized where Jesus ministered.

Jesus Himself was baptized—but why? Baptism is a sign of repentance and faith in Christ. Jesus had nothing to repent of; why was He baptized? There are several reasons. First, Jesus was baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Baptism was what the righteous people would do. Further, people were baptized to identify with the believing remnant in Israel. John was of Levitical descent but he wasn’t ministering in the temple in Jerusalem; John taught in the desert regions east of the city. He was calling out a righteous people to separate themselves from the corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Hence, those who were righteous responded and were baptized by John in the Jordan. Jesus identified Himself with that believing remnant.

But, most importantly, through His baptism Jesus was manifested to the nation as Israel’s Messiah. At Jesus’ baptism John the Baptist announced to the crowds who it was that had come for baptism: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus, empowering His humanity for ministry (v. 32). And John pointed the people to Jesus—that was his ministry as forerunner. John was not the object of attention; he introduced people to the Messiah.

At His baptism Jesus also received divine authentication. A voice out of heaven announced, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). The Father’s voice testified that Jesus—and no other—was the divine Messiah. Jesus is the unique, only, one-of-a-kind Son of God.

CONSIDER: At His baptism Jesus identified with humanity—the sea of people that He came to rescue and redeem.

January 6

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

MATTHEW 4:1–11; MARK 1:12–13; LUKE 4:1–13

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)*

Suppose engineers build a bridge across an enormous chasm. When the bridge is finally completed, the engineers have trains from both sides slowly cross the bridge until they stop in the middle. What would be the purpose of such a test? To see if the bridge will collapse under the weight of the locomotives? Or to demonstrate the strength of the bridge, offering proof that it will not collapse? Obviously, the latter.

The purpose of the temptation of Christ is frequently misunderstood. It was not to see *whether* Christ could sin but to show the nation what a great Savior they have—He *cannot* sin! The temptation reveals that Jesus is the impeccable, sinless Son of God.

Jesus' temptation was in the same areas where all people are tempted: the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16; compare with the first sin recorded in Genesis 3:6). Jesus' first temptation involved the lust of the flesh and was directed toward His humanity. Since Jesus had not eaten for forty days, He became hungry, and so Satan tempted Him to turn the stones into bread. But Jesus was in the wilderness at the will of His Father—part of God's will for Him at this time was to hunger. To submit to Satan and food at this point would have been to abandon the will of God—and Jesus reminded Satan of this fact.

The second temptation was aimed at Jesus' messiahship and related to the pride of life. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. This location overhung the Kidron Valley, a sheer drop of 450 feet to the ground below. Satan tempted Jesus by enticing Him to do something spectacular by throwing Himself down from the temple. Jesus again answered Satan from Scripture, rebuking him. By throwing Himself down from the temple He would not be trusting the Father.

Jesus' third temptation, appealing to the lust of the eyes, was directed at His Kingship. Scholars have suggested that the temptation likely took place from the height of Quarantania, where the highways were visible leading away to Damascus, Egypt, Arabia, and Persia. Satan wanted to be worshiped so he offered Christ the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him. Christ rebuked him with a word of Scripture and summarily dismissed him. Jesus had triumphed over Satan!

CONSIDER: We have an impeccable, strong, sinless Savior—One who is entirely trustworthy!

January 7

CHRIST'S AUTHORITY OVER DISEASES

MATTHEW 8:1–4; MARK 1:40–45; LUKE 5:12–16

Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Matthew 8:4)

AIDS is a terrible disease, both physically and socially. Africa has seen the horrors of AIDS, with multiplied millions contracting the disease and untold numbers dying from it. But AIDS is not restricted to a continent. It is also in the Western world, in America. The disease has dreaded physical manifestations, and—because frequently the disease is spread because of immorality—social stigma.

Leprosy was a terrible disease, both physically and socially, rendering people unclean. Leprosy ostracized people from society and worship (Lev. 13:45–46). They sat in a separate compartment in the synagogue and in the street, when no wind was blowing they had to remain 100 feet distant from others. The man in today's Scripture readings, "full of leprosy," prostrated himself before Jesus, recognizing that Jesus had the power to heal him if He so desired. He knew Jesus had the authority; he did not know if Jesus was willing to heal him.

When Jesus touched him, the dreaded disease disappeared immediately. Jesus warned the man to tell no one, but "go, show yourself to the priest. . . ." What would the priest have said? The priest would have been astonished because he had never seen anyone healed of leprosy before. He would have asked: "How did you get well? Who healed you?" Jesus' command for the leper to show himself to the priest was designed to be a testimony to the religious leaders that the Messiah was in their midst. It would have stirred astonishment and vigorous discussion. But the evidence was apparent because Jesus of Nazareth healed lepers. It was a clear, strong testimony to His messiahship.

The unusual prohibition to "tell no one" was that Jesus did not want His acclaim to come from the masses. He wanted the religious leaders to recognize His messiahship; they in turn should point the masses to Jesus as their Messiah. But the man, overwhelmed by what had happened to him, told many people about his healing. He could not keep from telling others what Jesus had done for him.

CONSIDER: Leprosy pictures the severity of sin, destroying life and soul, but Jesus, the Messiah, resolves our greatest dilemma.