

# four stories of Jesus

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**Matthew**

**Mark**

**Luke**

**John**

# four stories of Jesus

## Matthew

- contemporaneous with Luke-Acts, around 90 C.E.
- anonymous author, attributed to Matthew, one of the twelve apostles named in Mt 9:9, but called “Levi” in Mark and Luke. Matthew is not mentioned by John.
- Romans had destroyed the Second Temple twenty years earlier in 70 AD.
- the *pax romana* made possible travel throughout the empire, leading to engagement with different cultures

20 years have passed since the destruction of the temple,  
and apocalyptic expectations have faded...



# how did Judaism “transition” after the Temple’s destruction?

- consider what was lost...
  - the Temple had been the center of Israel’s religious life
    - it’s where the priesthood served
    - it’s where the sacrifices were made (on the Temple’s altar)
    - it’s where the religious festivals were held
- a new center was needed
  - recapitulating the crisis of 586 BC
  - the Council of Jamnia
  - reinterpreting the Torah for a new era, for a new context (“middle of time”)

# the Council of Jamnia

According to the Talmud, some time before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai relocated to the city of Yavneh (Jamnia) where he received permission from the Romans to found a school of halakha (Jewish religious law).



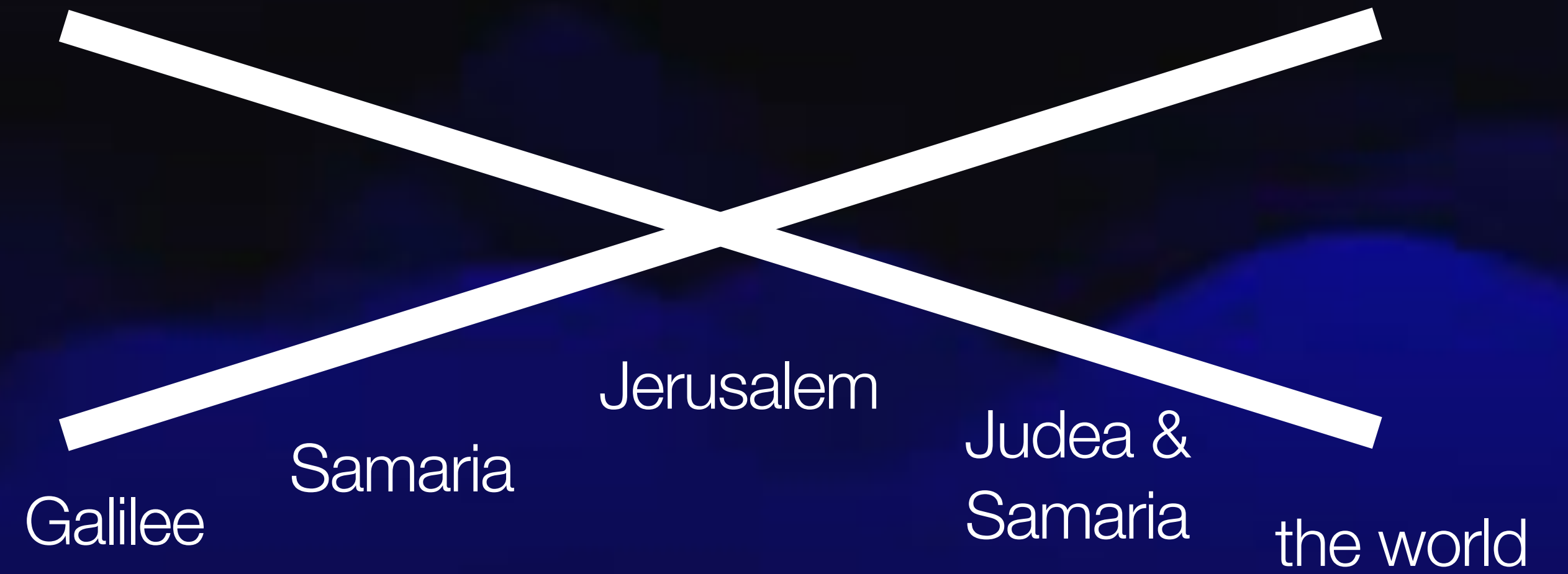
the *pax romana* — its effects on Judaism and the Christian movement

- the *pax romana* made travel possible and led to engagement with different cultures
  - encountering different cultural norms
  - exposure to Hellenistic philosophies and religious expressions
  - a perennial question: to resist or embrace cultural assimilation?
  - a variety of responses within both Judaism and Christianity

# the shape of the gospels



Mark shaped  
like a Greek tragedy



Luke-Acts  
shaped like a chiasm



# the shape of the gospels



## **Mathew**

five books with introduction & conclusion

What does the organization of Matthew bring to mind?

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



five books

each begins with a narrative  
followed by a discourse (teaching)

each discourse ends with a similar formula:  
... when Jesus had finished [saying these things]

Benjamin Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (1930)

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



## Book I

Narrative: Mt 3-4

Discourse: Mt 5-7 — **The Sermon on the Mount**

... when Jesus had finished saying these things (7:28)

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



## Book II

Narrative: Mt 8:1-10:4

Discourse: Mt 10:5-42 — **The Missionary Discourse**

... when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples (11:1)

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



## Book III

Narrative: Mt 11-12

Discourse: Mt 13:1-53 — **The Discourse in Parables**

... when Jesus had finished these parables (13:53)

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



## Book IV

Narrative: Mt 13:54-17:27

Discourse: Mt 18 — **The Community Discourse**

... when Jesus had finished saying these things (19:1)

# the rhetorical shape of Matthew



## Book V

Narrative: Mt 19-22

Discourse: Mt 23-25 — **The Eschatological Discourse**

... when Jesus had finished saying all these things (19:1)



the rhetorical shape of Matthew



the medium is the message

Matthew's gospel is shaped like the Torah

Matthew is characterizing Jesus as the "new Moses"

a little known fact...



Matthew's opening words

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυίδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (Mt 1:1)

the title of Genesis in the Septuagint

Βίβλος γενέσεως

I

where is Matthew going with his telling of the story?

V

Matthew is engaging conflict on two fronts



v

The conflict within Matthew reflects an increasingly conflicted relationship between synagogue and church. Tolerated at first, the Christian movement came to be regarded as a splinter group. Such toleration would change under the leadership of Gamaliel II at Jamnia (c. 80).

The daily prayers were expanded with a new addition against the *minim* (heretics), the Birkat ha Minim (blessing on the heretics), marking the rupture of the relationship.

What were the specific heresies?

insistence on the divinity of Jesus

replacing God with Jesus in the liturgy

reading the Hebrew Bible as containing prophecies of Jesus



**Council  
of Jamnia**



what was Jamnia?

a school of *halakha*. Studying the law meant “debating” the law. The Mishnah recorded those debates, including the differing viewpoints that were expressed — specifically, views representing a minority point-of-view. The Mishnah would never claim that minority viewpoints were illegitimate. In fact, each was deemed necessary.

This has been true of Judaism since the time of the Babylonian exile, at the time of the first century church, and today.

## two schools of interpretation at Jamnia

There were two major schools of interpretation in first century Judaism, those of Shammai and Hillel. Hillel's school had become predominant by the time of Jamnia.

I

“the school of Shammai binds;  
the school of Hillel looses.”

### School of Hillel vs. School of Shammai V

- two pre-eminent rabbinical leaders, each served as president of the Sanhedrin
- Shammai followed a strict interpretation (letter of the law)
- Hillel took a lenient approach to Torah observance (spirit of the law)
- example: what did the Law require if one forgot to say the grace after meals?

## Hillel's approach to Torah

There is a famous Talmudic story (Shabbat 31a) about a gentile who wanted to convert to Judaism. He would challenge the rabbis, "Teach me the Torah while standing on one foot."

The gentile went first to Shammai who, insulted by his ridiculous request, threw him out of the house.

The gentile then went to Hillel who accepted the challenge, saying

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.  
That is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary."



## Jesus mirrors Hillel's approach...

Hillel — "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.  
That is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary."

Jesus — "Do to others as you would have them do to you;  
for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12)

Hillel — "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.  
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Matthew 7:12

Jesus mirrors Hillel's approach...

Conflict Story: is it permissible to heal on the sabbath?

He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and [the Pharisees] asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Matthew 12:9-14

Jesus' argument represents the mainstream of Jewish thought...

*Example* — May it please our master to teach us whether a man is permitted to heal a wound on the Sabbath? Thus did our masters teach us: Whenever life is endangered, the Sabbath is superseded. For example, circumcision and its healing supersede the Sabbath.

Lech Lecha 16:1

- Jesus' words and acts (in the synoptics) are consistent with the warm-hearted school of Hillel interpreted and lived the Torah, including the majority of Pharisees at his time.
- The "Pharisees" in the gospels (esp. Matthew) are caricatures, characterized as members of the stricter interpretation of the school of Shammai.
- Matthew is "projecting" the anger and hostility he feels toward Jamnia (and their accusations of heresy) onto the "scribes and Pharisees" of Jesus' day (30 AD).

... but notice how Matthew characterizes the Pharisees in this story

*after Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath, and the pericope ends with this:*

“... But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.”

Matthew 12:14

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to reemphasize Matthew's point...

I

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

V

This refrain, repeated frequently in Matthew 23, reflects Matthew's hostility toward Jamnia and their accusations of heresy.

**With the center of Israel's religious life gone** (70 AD), rabbinical Judaism has become the new center of Judaism. Jamnia takes Torah observance very seriously.

**Jews and Jewish-Christians are dispersing** throughout the Roman empire, coming into contact with non-Jewish Hellenists. Both groups engage in proselytizing Hellenists who find monotheism an attractive proposition. Jewish-Christians are having the more successful outreach, at least in part because Paul's version of the gospel dispenses with the requirement for male converts to undergo circumcision and keep the Jewish dietary laws.

**Every new immigrant population** faces conflict over resisting or embracing assimilation into their



my heuristic clue for interpreting Matthew

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-20

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Matthew 5:17-20

**Who is teaching others** to break even the least of the commandments?



**my theory...**

Matthew is arguing with those within the Christian movement  
who are relativizing the Torah's commandments  
in order to appeal to Gentiles

my theory...

Matthew is arguing with those within the Christian movement  
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**anyone come to mind?**

## people like ... Paul

Galatians 5:2-6 — Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

Philippians 3:2 — Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!

## people like ... Luke

speaking through Peter — In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said to him again, a second time, **“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”**

Acts 10:12-15

## Who are the folks opposing Paul in Acts?

Then **certain individuals** came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But **some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees** stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:1-5

## Who are the folks opposing Paul in Acts?

Paul (in the 50's) and Luke (in the 90's) document the opposition they face **from within the Christian movement** to their practice of relaxing the commandments about circumcision and diet

There is a conflict within the first century church between those who would accommodate Hellenistic culture and those who resist accommodation.

Paul and Luke-Acts argue one side of that argument.

The Gospel of Matthew argues the other side.

# division in the first century church

## the Pauline wing of the church

Paul: we are no longer “under the law” but “under faith.” Paul instructs gentile converts not to submit to circumcision

Luke: the controversy around circumcision is still quite alive in 90 AD. Luke-Acts explicitly argues that God has declared all foods clean

## the Matthean wing of the church

Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfill the law

not one letter or “iota” will pass from the law

do not break even the least of the commandments or teach others to do the same



## **what is Matthew's argument about the law?**

Matthew (90 AD) takes a distinctly different approach to the law than did Paul (56 AD) or Luke (90 AD). However, it's not accurate to say that Matthew simply takes the opposite position.

Matthew is concerned about the proper interpretation of Torah and its place in the church. He is trying to bridge the gap, insisting on observing the law but offering an attractive interpretation of the law for Christians ... see especially the Sermon on the Mount.

outline of  
the Sermon on the Mount



# the Sermon on the Mount

I — going up the mountain to teach (5:1-2)

II — Beatitudes (5:3-12)  
*values of a disciple*

III — The Torah (5:13-7:12)

IV — True discipleship (7:13-27)  
*two ways*

V — teaching with authority (7:28-29)

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When Jesus **saw the crowds**, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he **began to speak**, and taught them, saying:

Now when Jesus had **finished saying these things**, **the crowds were astounded** at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

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choosing values different from those of the empire and contrary to human inclinations

choosing the narrow gate, the hard road and building one's **house**<sub>1</sub> on **rock**<sub>2</sub> rather than sand

<sub>1</sub> οἰκία    <sub>2</sub> πέτρα


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- 
- A. fulfilling the law
    1. on murder
    2. on adultery
    3. on divorce
    4. on swearing falsely
    5. on retributive justice
    6. on loving your neighbor
  - B. piety
    1. on almsgiving
    2. on praying in public
    3. on wordiness in prayer
    4. on forgiving
    5. on fasting
  - C. wealth
    1. on hoarding
    2. on worshiping money
    3. on trusting providence
  - D. judgmentalism
  - E. ask, seek knock
  - F. summary of the law

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## F. summary of the law

the law goes deeper than external behavior

**Matthew 5:21-26** — “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

## the internal meaning behind external observance

Matthew's Jesus moves beyond the letter of the law to discover a deeper meaning.

Each topic follows a pattern: "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you..."

- You shall not murder → if you are angry, or have an unresolved issue, seek reconciliation (Mt 5:21-26)
- You shall not commit adultery → whoever looks at a woman with lust commits adultery (Mt 5:27-30)
- You shall not swear falsely → let your "yes" be a "yes" and your "no" be a "no" (Mt 5:33-37)
- An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth → moving beyond retributive justice (Mt 5:38-42)
- Love your neighbor and hate your enemy → Love your enemy  
and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:43-48)



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the law calls for more than conspicuous piety

**Matthew 6:1** — “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**Matthew 6:2-4** — “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

# who is your audience?

- Don't practice your piety in front of others to be seen by them; you will be rewarded in secret (Mt 6:1)
- Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet → when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your alms may be done in secret (Mt 6:2-4)
- Whenever you pray, do pray in public, do not heap up empty phrases → go in your room, shut the door, and pray in secret (Mt 6:5-8)
- Whenever you fast, do not look dismal and disfigure your faces so as to show others you are fasting → put oil on your head and wash your face so that your fasting may not be seen by others. (Mt 6:16-18)

## A. fulfilling the law

1. on murder
2. on adultery
3. on divorce
4. on swearing falsely
5. on retributive justice
6. on loving your neighbor

## B. piety

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## C. wealth

1. on hoarding
2. on worshiping money
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## D. judgmentalism

## E. ask, seek knock

## F. summary of the law



**Matthew 5:17** — Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to **fulfill**.

*inclusio*  
begins and ends with  
the fulfillment of the law...

**Matthew 7:12** — In everything **do to others as you would have them do to you**; for this is the law and the prophets.



Jesus the authoritative teacher

- Matthew characterizes Jesus as **the new Moses**, the authoritative teacher of the Law
  - Sermon on the Mount - Jesus' hermeneutic on the Law... **we've discussed**
  - Missionary Discourse - on the challenge of taking the message into the world
  - Parables - explaining the kingdom of heaven in parables
  - Community Discourse - on how to live in community
  - Eschatological Discourse - on the culmination of the kingdom

**Matthew 13:10** Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" **11** He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets<sup>a</sup> of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. **12** For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. **13** The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' **14** With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

"You will indeed listen, but never understand,  
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

**15** For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.'

**Mark 4:10** When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables.

**11** And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret<sup>a</sup> of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; **12** in order that

"they may indeed look, but not perceive,  
and may indeed listen, but not understand;  
so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

**Mark 4:25** For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."



## teaching in parables

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that ... ὅτι  
"because"

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ἵνα  
"in order that"

fulfillment of prophecy

another theme  
in Matthew —  
fulfillment of prophecy

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**Mark 4:25** For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."



Peter

**Matt. 16:13** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,<sup>a</sup> the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter,<sup>a</sup> and on this rock<sup>b</sup> I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” **20** Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was<sup>a</sup> the Messiah.<sup>b</sup>

**Matt. 16:21** From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” **23** But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

**Mark 8:27** Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” **28** And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” **29** He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”<sup>a</sup> **30** And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

**Mark 8:31** Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. **32** He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

**Luke 9:18** Once when Jesus<sup>a</sup> was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” **19** They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” **20** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah<sup>a</sup> of God.”

**Luke 9:21** He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, **22** saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

## Peter's Confession

### Mt. 16:13-23

Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the **Son of the living God.**” And Jesus answered him, “**Blessed are you,** Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not **revealed this to you,** but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, **you are Peter,** and **on this rock** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the **keys of the kingdom** of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew’s characterization of Peter differs from Mark’s in significant ways:

1. the confession is embellished, adding “Son of the living God” to “Messiah”
2. Peter’s confession is explicitly affirmed
3. Peter said to be the recipient of divine revelation
4. a naming ceremony — Simon given the name Peter
5. the “pun” — you are Peter (*petros*) and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build my church
6. Peter is invested with authority — keys of the kingdom, the power to **bind and loose**\*
7. the “triple rebuke” is gone

\* **Shammai binds, Hillel looses**

the final parable of the final discourse

# Moses' final teaching in Deuteronomy

(the fifth book of the Torah)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him

for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.



Deuteronomy 30:19-20

# Jesus' final teaching in the Eschatological Discourse (the fifth discourse of his gospel)

Then the king will say to those at his right hand,  
'Come, **you that are blessed** by my Father,  
**inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world...

Then he will say to those at his left hand,  
'**You that are accursed**, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared  
for the devil and his angels...



Matthew 25:34-41

“Do not think that I have come  
to abolish the law or the prophets;  
I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

## **The Beatitudes**

Blessed are...

- the poor in spirit
- those who mourn
- the meek
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
- the merciful
- the pure in heart
- the peacemakers
- those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake

## **the parable of the sheep and goats**

I was...

- hungry and you gave me food
- thirsty and you gave me something to drink
- a stranger and you welcomed me
- naked and you gave me clothing
- sick and you took care of me
- in prison and you visited me

“Do to others as you would have them do to you;  
for this is the law and the prophets.”

the great commission





In the Missionary Discourse, Jesus taught his disciples about the hard realities of taking his teachings to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”

(Mt. 10:6)

## the great commission

Now, at the story's end, Jesus sends them to take his teaching to all nations (ἔθνη).

And Jesus came and said to them,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations** (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη),

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to **obey everything that I have commanded you.**

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

## the great commission

Does Matthew see the church's ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah's vision that Israel will become a light to the nations?

“I will give you as a **light to the nations**\*  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Is. 49:6)

\*(**φῶς ἐθνῶν, LXX**)

assignment for next week

read and outline  
John 14:15–16:15