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C1412 – April 2, 2014 – Matthew
Introduction & Background

We've been studying the Intertestamental Times in preparation for Matthew. Why do we study the Intertestamental Times? To give us the *sitz en lieben*. What's the *sitz en lieben*? It's the "situation in life." Why do we need to know the situation in life? So we know the historical background, including the culture, the politics, the lifestyle, the people, the customs and manners, the beliefs. If we don't know those things what is our tendency? To bring over our culture, our politics, our situation in life and read it into the text and then we come away with an entirely different outlook on the book. So the principle is that the more we research the historical background, the culture, the people, the lifestyle, the customs, etc...the better we are able to understand the book in the way it was originally intended to be understood and the way the original audience understood it. That's the historical element of interpretation. What's the other element? Grammatical. What's grammatical referring to? The original languages and everything that's part and parcel of a language; the parts of a sentence, nouns, verbs, participles, prepositions, conjunctions and the syntax of a sentence, how the parts are put together or how they relate to one another. Together those two things, the historical and the grammatical go together into what we call grammatical-historical interpretation. It's the approach we all agree to here and it's the approach we'll be using, hopefully consistently, here in our study of Matthew.

So our study in the Intertestamental Times gave us the historical background or situation in life that we find ourselves in in the Gospel according to Matthew. What's the political background? Rome is in power. Rome is a mighty Gentile kingdom and the Jews of Judea as well as the Diaspora are under Roman authority. Herod the Great was "king of the Jews" when Matthew begins narrating the birth of the real king. He dies soon after but his sons come to rule and so the Jews are under the Herod's. They were nasty

and that explains the conflict when a hardcore Jew like John the Baptist stands up against moral corruption in Roman politics. What's the religious background? The Temple is in operation. Herod has expanded it recently. Smaller projects are continuing to elaborate it. The priests are functioning in the Temple. Who's the high priest? He's a Sadducee. Who were the Sadducees? They were a sect of wealthy, aristocratic Jews who only held to the Torah as the inspired word of God. They were terribly strict in their literal interpretation of the Torah. Why did they approach the word of God that way? In order to narrow their set of beliefs down so far that they could easily accommodate to Roman culture. Consequently they rejected the resurrection, they rejected the afterlife, they rejected angels. All this is the background between Jesus' conflicts with the Sadducees. What other religious group was present? The Pharisees. Who were they? They radically collided with Christ. They were a fraternity of Jewish businessmen and lawyers. They held to the entire OT as the inspired word of God but they were quite liberal in their interpretation of it. Why were they liberal in their interpretations? In order to develop oral tradition. What did the oral tradition do? It put a hedge around the Law. What kind of authority did they give to oral tradition? It was more authoritative than the word of God itself. So they had shifted the authority and consequently invalidated the word of God. Who dominated the 1st century landscape? Pharisees or Sadducees? The Pharisees. Even Sadducees in office had to pronounce dictums in line with Pharisaism. They had that much control and power over the Jewish people. What's the linguistic background? Commonly the Jews spoke Aramaic and for most of them that was probably their first language. However, they were probably multilingual and knew Greek as well as some other language. Certainly those in the Diaspora knew other languages. It was a multilingual culture. They had a Greek Bible available known as the Septuagint. It was so popular that when you see a quote from the OT, which Matthew is chock full of, chances are it comes from the Septuagint. What's the dispensational background? What dispensation or rule of life are they living under? The Law. What does Gal 4:4 say? "When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law..." So we might want to interpret the events as if they were living under the law and not read back grace or the Church. When was the law terminated? It was not terminated until the cross, until the veil was rent from top to bottom in the Temple. These are things you have to know or else what are you going to do? You're going to misinterpret what's happening. You're going to come to John's baptizing of Jesus and how are you

going to interpret that? You're going to go straight to Christian baptism and read that back and totally confuse the issue. You have to go back and understand baptism as it was understood by a Jew and not read your concept from the epistles back into the Gospels. You're going to come to John's statement, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" and how are you going to interpret that? You're going to drift off into the clouds of heaven and read that back from your concept. Where are you supposed to get your concept of the kingdom of heaven? Where did a 1st century Jew get it? From the OT covenants. What was his idea? The earthly kingdom promised to Abraham, to David and to be ruled by David's seed. So we don't get our concept of the kingdom from Matthew. We get our concept of the kingdom from the OT covenants and we read Matthew in light of the covenants. Otherwise the whole picture gets muddled.

Matthew is traditionally the first or earliest of the Gospels. That's why it's placed first in the NT. This view has been challenged in recent centuries by those who were skeptical of the claim that Matthew, Mark and Luke were written independently and yet have so many similarities. To account for the similarities they posited literary dependence. Matthew depended upon Mark, Mark depended upon Q, etc... they were thinking in terms of evolution and how in evolution everything moves from the simple to the complex. So they claimed that since Mark was simpler it must have come before Matthew and Matthew depended upon Mark, which explains the similarities. We live several centuries into this debate that continues. One of the more popular theories is Q. Q is a hypothesized document that stands behind and is the supposed source of the Gospels even though the Q that exists is in the minds of the higher critics sitting in ivory towers. So these so-called scholarly theories are out there to explain the similarities of the gospels. But they all share in common a rejection of divine inspiration as the explanation for the similarities so we're not too interested in them. That is not to say that the gospel writers may not have used any sources. Luke we know used sources. He tells us he did in the first four verses of his gospel. But what we are saying is that if they did use sources then the source material they used was used under divine inspiration. But contrary to all these theories I take the traditional view that Matthew was the first and earliest written gospel and that he was not literary dependent on some unknown source but Holy Spirit dependent. He is sufficient to explain the similarities among the Gospels as well as the differences.

Matthew is one of the three synoptic gospels. Which gospels are synoptic? Matthew, Mark and Luke. John is not a synoptic. What do we mean he's not synoptic? We mean he's not looking at the same events through the same eyes. So then what do Matthew, Mark and Luke do that John doesn't do? They look at the same events through the same eyes. That's what we mean by synoptic, "to see with or together." So Matthew, Mark and Luke look at the same events. Now because of this people read Matthew, Mark and Luke and they say, "There are differences, Matthew contradicts Mark, Mark contradicts Luke, you've got contradictions in your Bible." How do we answer that? The synoptics are looking at the same events but from *different angles*. They are not simply narratives of the life of Christ. They contain narrative but each of the synoptic gospels is trying to prove a point and they choose the information that will help them achieve that goal. As Stanley Toussaint says, "they wrote their Gospels with the intention of setting forth an argument. In order to attain this objective the evangelists were very selective in their choice of materials. Those elements were placed in the fore which would assist them in accomplishing their purpose."ⁱ How are the three synoptics traditionally described? What element about Jesus is Matthew presenting? Matthew presents Jesus as the King. What element about Jesus is Mark presenting? Mark presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant. What element is Luke emphasizing? Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man. Then there's John and John is interesting because while he's not a synoptic he rounds things out. What element of Jesus does John bring out? John brings out the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. So there you have the basic points these authors are trying to set forth. So they can each look through at the same event but they can selectively siphon out the information they need in order to make their particular argument.

This book, if there's one word that summarizes the character of this book, what is it? It's Jewish. What's so Jewish about it? Everything. First, the genealogy of the King starting with David and tracing back to Abraham is particularly Jewish. How much more Jewish can you get? What Gentile is interested in the first seventeen verses of Matthew? Second, the style of writing is Hebraistic. What this means is that the word order, the thought and the style are Hebraistic. A. T. Robertson says, "He has the instinct for Hebrew parallelism and the Hebrew elaboration, and his thought and general style are Hebraistic..."ⁱⁱ Matthew uses the Greek adverb then (*tote*) 90 times,

a distinctively Aramaic way of thinking. The same adverb is used only six times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke and ten times in John. So Aramaic is Matthew's style; many have posited from early times that Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Aramaic and it was later translated to Greek. However, we have no Aramaic manuscripts of Matthew, only Greek, and so this phenomena could just as easily be explained by Matthew's first language being Aramaic. Rarely does someone's first language not affect their speaking of a second language. Third, the vocabulary is Hebraistic. Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the expression kingdom of heaven instead of kingdom of God. This phrase is distinctively Jewish since it avoids using the sacred name of God which may offend some Jews who abstained from using His name. However, Matthew does not see a difference between the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God since he uses them in Hebraistic parallelism in Matt 19:23 and 24. Matthew was not against using the term kingdom of God but he usually used the term kingdom of heaven to avoid Jewish sensitivities. Matthew also refers to Jesus as the Son of David, a kingly title, far more than the other Gospels. This has a distinctly Jewish flavor. Fourth, the high proportion of OT quotations relative to the other gospels. Matthew quotes the OT more than 50 times and makes allusion to it more than 75 times. This is far more than Mark or Luke and even John. The quoting of the OT to prove some argument or to cite fulfillment of prophecy would be especially pertinent to Jewish readers. Fifth, the emphasis on Peter in this gospel points to a Jewish readership. Peter was the apostle to the Jews and therefore Jewish believers would be particularly attracted to the Gospel of Matthew. Sixth, the unexplained Jewish customs. The other gospels give explanation when some Jewish custom is mentioned that would otherwise be unknown to Gentiles. The lack of explanation assumes his intended audience were Jews already familiar with the customs. Seventh, the early tradition that Matthew was written to the Jews. "Irenaeus says: "Matthew issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews," and "The Gospel of St. Matthew was written for the Jews." Origen says, "St. Matthew wrote for the Hebrew." Eusebius says: "Matthew...delivered his gospel to his countrymen." The complexion and content of the Gospel abundantly confirm this view."ⁱⁱⁱ The accumulation of evidence confirms abundantly the Jewish character of the book and points us toward the purpose of the book as relating primarily to Jews.

Why did Matthew write his Gospel? We've said it is very Jewish and it focuses on Jesus as the King but books aren't written just to write a book. None of the NT books were written just because. They didn't sit down and say, "Hmm, I'd like to write a book about x." It's my opinion that they all sat down to write books to meet needs. That's why you write a book; because there's a need. What need could Matthew be addressing? If it was the first Gospel written, the earliest, probably around AD50, (the Scofield Reference Bible posited as early as AD37), it was definitely before AD70 because Matthew assumes Jerusalem and the Temple are still standing. My thinking is it was probably around AD50, this is very early. What is going on at that time? The Church has just formed on the Day of Pentecost. Who did the Church begin with in Acts 2? Who formed the nucleus of the Church? Jews. The Church on the day of Pentecost was 100% Jewish. What need are they going to have when they get back to the Jewish ghetto? To explain that Jesus is the King. What are all their Jewish buddies in all the Jewish ghetto's going to be arguing? "Well if Jesus was the king where is His kingdom?" And therein I think we find the key to the purpose of the book. Matthew doesn't tell us explicitly his purpose. Sometimes a NT author tells you his purpose. Luke tells you he set out to write a chronological account. John tells you he wrote to evangelize. Paul tells you he wrote 1 Corinthians to respond to reports about problems and to answer their questions. Matthew doesn't tell you. So how do you know Matthew's purpose? You consider the time it was written and what need there might be and then you read the book to see how it might meet that need. Toussaint says, "The answer can only be found by observing the main emphases of Matthews Gospel and noting the logical development of those emphases."^{iv} He says discerning "the argument provides the key to the comprehension of the Gospel according to Matthew."^v So we're at a key issue here. What is the argument of the book? What would we say is the argument so far? If this gospel was written early and the first believers on the day of Pentecost were all Jews and they would go home to their Jewish ghetto and have confrontations with other Jews, what would they need to show? That *Jesus was the king but due to the national rejection of Jesus as the king the kingdom program needed to be explained*. The book would then serve as both an apologetic against unbelieving Jews as well as a confirmation to believing Jews. I don't think it's one or the other. I think both purposes are in mind. I think Matthew accomplishes both.

Another question needs to be asked before we nail down the purpose of the Gospel. Was it written primarily to believing Jews or unbelieving Jews. Interestingly, Matthew is the only gospel to use the verb “disciple” (*matheteuo*). This verb means “to make a learner” or “to be a learner.” Matthew clearly has an interest in making disciples by teaching. This unique element seems to indicate that Matthew is writing to believing Jews for the purpose of them becoming and making disciples. Of course, the content would confirm their faith and serve as an apologetic to unbelieving Jews at the same time.

So the purpose we are suggesting is that Matthew is two-fold in his purpose as it relates to Jewish believers. Dr Pentecost seems to agree suggesting that Matthew was written to meet the need of the early Jewish believers in Acts. First, to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah and second, to give an explanation to unbelieving Jews of the kingdom program in light of the rejection. The way I’ve laid that out gives you the general flow of thought in the book. In chapters 1-11 Jesus’ Messiahship is confirmed, in chapter 12 Jesus’ Messiahship is rejected, in chapters 13-28 the kingdom program is explained. Why do we need an explanation? Because if someone claims the King came but the kingdom did not come then doesn’t that prove the King did not come? We’re saying, no, but in the meantime what happened was that an interadvent age opened up known as the Church. Once the Church is completed then the King will return and then the kingdom will be established. So there’s a gap of time between when the King came and when the King will come and establish the kingdom. Why didn’t He establish the kingdom at his first advent? Because national Israel, following their leadership, rejected Him as their King. So He was the genuine Messiah, it was a genuine offer, but the offer was rejected and therefore Jesus did not establish the kingdom. We live in an interregnum, so to speak. Think about the pattern because doesn’t it follow the pattern of David’s life? When was David pronounced king? Back when Samuel went to Jesse’s house and anointed him. When did David actually take the throne and rule as king? It wasn’t till several years later. There was a gap of time when David was the appointed king but Saul continued to reign and Saul tried to hunt him down, tried to kill him and David was patient. David could have killed Saul numerous times but David wouldn’t take Saul out on his own initiative. David waited until God took him out in His time and in His way. Then and only then did David actually sit on his throne. Isn’t that the same pattern our

Lord follows? He came, He's the rightful king but He was rejected and so another one continues to reign. Who is reigning now? Satan. Satan would love to hunt down and kill Jesus right up there at the right hand of the Father. But he can't do that. He's already resurrected. And Jesus is being very patient. Jesus could clobber Satan at any moment. But He's patiently waiting for the Father. Eventually, in the Father's timing Satan is going to be cast out. Then Jesus will actually sit on His throne and reign. Jesus follows the pattern of David and that's the pattern Matthew lays out for us. He came to establish His kingdom but He was rejected and so did not establish the kingdom. So He's coming again and He will establish His kingdom. We are not in a kingdom now. Dr Pentecost said, "One of the crucial questions that's being debated today in the theological world is the kingdom, the kingdom concept." He's right! That is a very crucial topic in the theological world today. Where did I say earlier you have to get your kingdom concept from? From the OT covenants. You don't get a kingdom concept from Matthew. The kingdom concept as promised in the OT covenants is already there when you come into Matthew. How does Matthew begin? What's the first verse? "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Why David and Abraham? Because of the covenants. The Davidic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. Who's David? He's the kingly line. Who's Jesus? He's the king. See the kingdom focus? Right from the start. There's no new definition of the kingdom, it's just there.

Now why didn't the kingdom come? Reformed theologians don't like the answer. We say Jesus came and offered the kingdom to Israel, it was a genuine offer and they rejected, that's why the kingdom didn't come. They say that conflicts with God's sovereignty. It can't be a genuine offer if God already knew they wouldn't accept the offer. Besides, they say, Jesus didn't come to restore Israel's kingdom, He came to die on the cross for our sins. We object; we hold that it was a genuine offer and even if Israel did accept the offer, the King still would have had to die on the cross for our sins. We allow for this seeming incongruity because it's the text. The text. I can't understand how it can be a genuine offer contingent on Israel's acceptance and yet all along God sovereignly knowing that it would be rejected in order to bring about the cross. That's beyond my ability to capture. But the text teaches that it was a genuine offer, the kingdom could have come if Israel had received it. But did they? No. So what did Jesus do? Jesus started training men to keep His ministry going in the wake of His death and resurrection.

Why did He train men? What is the word for those who followed Him? Disciples. What are those disciples supposed to do? Make more disciples, that's the Great Commission. So after the kingdom was rejected Jesus explains that the kingdom program is off the table, so to speak, for awhile. And what does He mention He's going to build? The Church, Matt 16:18; 18:17. Do you realize that none of the other Gospels mention a Church? Not one. What's this Church thing? Nobody knew what a Church was. The disciples didn't know what a Church was? I can tell you what it is not? It is not a kingdom. It comes in between the King's two comings but it itself is not a kingdom. The bottom line is I think Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and secondarily to explain God's kingdom program in light of the rejection which is involving this church thing.

Let's talk about Matthew a little bit. We haven't talked about him. Who was Matthew? A tax collector. What were tax collectors called? Publicans. Where were publicans in the social structure of Jewish society? They were at the bottom of the totem pole. They were lumped in with drunks, harlots and all the other scum of society. There is not one verse that looks favorably on tax collectors. Why? Because "they were working for Rome; they had sold themselves out to Rome, for their own personal enrichment."

"Rome practiced what was known as tax-farming. They put the office of tax collector up for bids, and the office went to the highest bidder."^{vi} Then Rome would assess taxes for an area, let's say in the southern Galilee, where Matthew lived. Rome might take a census and on the basis of the census say, "We want a million dollars out of this office." Then that office would be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Matthew, or Levi as he was known then, a Jew, was the high bidder in the southern Galilee and he might bid a million dollars for the office. Rome, at that point, relinquished all control over that office. All they cared about was that at the end of the year they got their million dollars. So that means in order to cover his bid, Matthew would have to collect more than a million dollars. And to make it worth his while he'd have to hike the taxes up pretty high. So he might up the taxes to two or three million dollars. Now you see why the Jews lumped the tax collectors in with all the scum of the earth. They were Jews who had sold themselves out to Rome. Matthew was making a living extorting money from his fellow Jews.

Now he wouldn't be collecting all the taxes himself, but he would get a large number of employees under him who would set up offices and he would be the supervisor over all those who actually collected the taxes. Those employees, of course, wanted to enrich themselves too so they hiked up the taxes. So the whole system was despised. Imagine what people thought when Jesus peered into the supervisor's office, saw Matthew and said, "Follow Me!" We don't have to guess what the Pharisees thought because the text tells us that when they saw this "they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" Well, that response tells you what they thought of Matthew as well as what they thought of themselves. That gives you an idea of who this Matthew was like and it gives you an idea of what our Lord is like; He didn't come looking for those who were righteous, referring to the self-righteous Pharisees, he came looking for sinners.

So we have the Gospel of Matthew and let's summarize the book and then we'll conclude. Jesus was presented to the nation Israel as having the Messianic credentials. Genealogically, He had rights to the throne, by His words in the Sermon on the Mount He had orthodoxy, by His works of mighty miracles He was authenticated as being from God. This presentation of His person authenticated Him as the Messiah. He offered Israel her promised and covenanted kingdom. The nation considered the offer, but because of the opposition of the leadership, rejected it. Jesus announced judgment on the nation and began to explain the kingdom program during the interadvent age. He was training His disciples to continue His ministry after His death and resurrection in the soon coming Church. After the nation finally rejected and crucified Him God raised Him and He ascended to send the Holy Spirit to form the Church. From that day forward He has been building the Church. At the consummation of the age He will return in great glory to establish the long-awaited kingdom.

In conclusion, what have we seen tonight? First, we've seen that you have to approach the Gospel of Matthew with grammatical-historical interpretation. The historical situation, or *sitz en lieben*, is vital to interpreting the clashes, concepts, etc...in this most Jewish of all the Gospels. Second, Matthew is the first or earliest Gospel, being written sometime around AD50. It thus does not have any literary dependence on any of the other Gospels. Its ultimate source is the Holy Spirit. Third, Matthew is one of the three synoptic gospels by which we mean Matthew, Mark and Luke, the three gospels which see the

same events though from a different angle. The differences in emphasis and arrangement amount to Matthew's aim of proving his argument. Fourth, his argument is primarily that Jesus is the Messiah and secondarily, in light of the nation's rejection of Jesus as Messiah, an explanation of the kingdom program as it relates to the interadvent age. Fifth, such a work was needed to confirm the early Jewish believers in their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and as an apologetic to their fellow unbelieving Jews who would ask, "If Jesus is the Messiah then why didn't the kingdom come?" Sixth, Matthew was a tax collector on the very bottom rung of Jewish society. The fact that Jesus chose him most certainly impressed him with the love of his Savior.

How important is this book for you to learn? It's one of the most important books in the NT. J. Vernon McGee said, "This gospel is very much like the Book of Genesis. They are two key books of the Bible, and you really should be familiar enough with these two books so that you can think your way through them."^{vii} J. Dwight Pentecost said, "If I were pressed as to the two most important books of the dispensationalist, it might surprise you to know I would not pick Daniel and Revelation. I would pick Matthew and Acts."^{viii} Even Ernest Renan, the French skeptic, said of this gospel that it "is the most important book in Christendom, the most important that has ever been written."^{ix} So I encourage you to learn to think through this book that centers on Christ as King and His kingdom program.

ⁱ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p. 14.

ⁱⁱ *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 119. Cited by Toussaint, *Behold...*, p. 15.

ⁱⁱⁱ Graham Scroggie, *Guide to Gospels*, p. 248. Cited by Toussaint, *Behold...* p. 18.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 15.

^v *Ibid.*, 15.

^{vi} Dwight Pentecost, *Dispensational Problems in Matthew*, Lecture Notes, DTS, 1989.

^{vii} J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible*, p. 4.

^{viii} Dwight Pentecost, *Dispensational Problems in Matthew*, Lecture Notes, DTS, 1989.

^{ix} Cited by J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible*, p. 3

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