



CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S  
LIVING  
INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

**MATTHEW 16–28**



CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S  
LIVING  
INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

**MATTHEW 16-28**



*Tyndale House Publishers  
Carol Stream, Illinois*

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 1B

Visit Tyndale online at [tyndale.com](http://tyndale.com).

*Insights on Matthew 16–28* copyright © 2020 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc.

Cover photograph of crown of thorns copyright © Ricardo Reitmeyer/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

All images are the property of their respective copyright holders and all rights are reserved.

Maps copyright © 2020 by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Photograph of notebook copyright © jcsmilly/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

Designed by Nicole Grimes

Published in association with Yates & Yates, LLP ([www.yates2.com](http://www.yates2.com)).

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,<sup>®</sup> copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, Calif. Used by permission. All rights reserved. For permission to quote information, visit <http://www.lockman.org>.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*TYNDALE*, Tyndale's quill logo, *New Living Translation*, and *NLT* are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers.

**The Library of Congress has catalogued the first volume as follows:**

Names: Swindoll, Charles R., author.

Title: *Insights on Matthew* / Charles R. Swindoll.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2020.

| Series: Swindoll's living insights New Testament commentary | Includes bibliographical references. | Contents: Part 1: 1-15

Identifiers: LCCN 2019034800 (print) | LCCN 2019034801 (ebook) | ISBN 9781414393827 (vol. 1 ; hardcover) | ISBN 9781414393971 (kindle edition) | ISBN 9781496410689 (epub) | ISBN 9781496410672 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Matthew—Commentaries.

Classification: LCC BS2575.53 .S95 2020 (print) | LCC BS2575.53 (ebook) | DDC 226.2/077—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019034800>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019034801>

ISBN 978-1-4964-3615-3 Hardcover

Printed in China

26 25 24 23 22 21 20

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

<b>Author's Preface</b> .....	v
<b>The Strong's Numbering System</b> .....	vii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>Opposition and Rejection of the King (Matthew 16:1–25:46)</b> .....	10
Testy Critics and Dull Disciples (Matthew 16:1-12) .....	11
Answering Life's Ultimate Question (Matthew 16:13-20) .....	19
Three "Nevers" to Never Forget (Matthew 16:21-28) .....	32
A Terrifying Glimpse of Glory (Matthew 17:1-13) .....	40
Micro-Faith and Mega-Obstacles (Matthew 17:14-21) .....	53
Death and Taxes (Matthew 17:22-27) .....	60
Life Lessons Learned from Children (Matthew 18:1-14) .....	68
Caring Enough to Confront (Matthew 18:15-20) .....	76
How Often Should We Forgive? (Matthew 18:21-35) .....	85
Debate over Divorce (Matthew 19:1-12) .....	94
Who Is Closest to the Kingdom of Heaven? (Matthew 19:13-30) .....	108
Letting God Be God (Matthew 20:1-16) .....	120
Roadside Reminders and Reproofs (Matthew 20:17-34) .....	128
Who's Riding What and Why? (Matthew 21:1-11) .....	137
When Jesus Lowered the Boom (Matthew 21:12-22) .....	147
Slugging It Out with Caustic Critics (Matthew 21:23-46) .....	156
A Dialogue with Deceivers (Matthew 22:1-22) .....	163
Will We Be Married in the Resurrection? (Matthew 22:23-33) .....	172
The Two Ultimate Questions (Matthew 22:34-46) .....	180
Woes for Religious Phonies (Matthew 23:1-39) .....	187
First Glimpses of the Last Days (Matthew 24:1-28) .....	200
Ready or Not, Here He Comes (Matthew 24:29-25:46) .....	213
<b>Passion and Triumph of the King (Matthew 26:1–28:20)</b> .....	228
Countdown to Betrayal (Matthew 26:1-16) .....	230
Soul Searching during Supper (Matthew 26:17-30) .....	237
Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion (Matthew 26:31-56) .....	247
Who's Really on Trial? (Matthew 26:57-75) .....	260
Thoroughly Guilty . . . Totally Innocent (Matthew 27:1-26) .....	268
Those Final, Dreadful Hours (Matthew 27:27-50) .....	281
What Happened Next? (Matthew 27:51-66) .....	294
Resurrection: What Happened . . . What Didn't? (Matthew 28:1-15) .....	307
What Now? (Matthew 28:16-20) .....	318
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	327
<b>List of Features and Images</b>	
Timeline of Matthew .....	2
Map of Jesus' Life and Ministry .....	2
The Gospel of Matthew at a Glance .....	4

Quick Facts on Matthew . . . . .	6
Map: The Sea of Galilee and Magadan . . . . .	16
Map: The Region of Galilee and Caesarea Philippi . . . . .	21
Caesarea Philippi . . . . .	22
Was Peter the First Pope? . . . . .	26
When Did the Church Begin? . . . . .	30
Coming(s) of the Kingdom? . . . . .	43
Map: The Transfiguration Site . . . . .	45
Mustard Seeds and Mount Hermon . . . . .	58
Jesus' Predictions of His Passion in Matthew . . . . .	63
The Temple Tax . . . . .	65
Ancient Millstone . . . . .	72
Satisfying an Impossible Debt . . . . .	89
Map: Israel after Herod the Great . . . . .	97
Irreconcilable Differences: Two Schools of Thought on Divorce . . . . .	100
Excursus: The Bigger Picture—Paul on Divorce in 1 Corinthians 7 . . . . .	103
Excursus: A Future for Israel? . . . . .	117
Map: The Traditional Route from Galilee to Jerusalem . . . . .	131
Map: Jesus' Approach to Jerusalem . . . . .	138
Excursus: The "Tale" Wagging the Donkey? . . . . .	139
Map: Route of the Triumphal Entry . . . . .	141
Court of the Gentiles . . . . .	150
Fig Tree . . . . .	153
Roman Coin . . . . .	170
Our Resurrection Bodies . . . . .	176
Phylacteries and Tassels . . . . .	192
The Temple Mount . . . . .	203
Timeline of Future Events . . . . .	209
The Two Advents of Christ Contrasted . . . . .	223
Nobody Knows the Day or the Hour . . . . .	224
"Behold, the Bridegroom!" . . . . .	226
The Gangsters of Jerusalem . . . . .	233
Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread . . . . .	240
Excursus: "This Is My Body; This Is My Blood" . . . . .	245
Map: Jerusalem and Gethsemane . . . . .	250
Gethsemane . . . . .	252
The Three Witnesses . . . . .	256
The Trials of Jesus . . . . .	263
Chronology from Gethsemane to Golgotha . . . . .	271
Pontius Pilate . . . . .	273
Matthew's Use of <i>Gezerah Shawah</i> . . . . .	276
<i>Flagrum</i> . . . . .	280
The Fortress of Antonia . . . . .	285
Map: The Via Dolorosa . . . . .	287
Excursus: Crucifixion . . . . .	289
Map: The Third Wall of Jerusalem . . . . .	301
Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 1—From Thursday to Saturday . . . . .	303
Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 2—From Saturday Night to Sunday Morning . . . . .	311
Map: Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection . . . . .	311
Excursus: Resurrection Accounts Harmonized, Part 3—Sunday and Beyond . . . . .	319
Mount Arbel . . . . .	321

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—and *how I love it!* I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have “run dry” decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, “Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?”

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider

becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to Mike Svigel for his tireless and devoted efforts, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editor. He has done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how he has taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading *Insight for Living* for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, *Swindoll's Living Insights* would never have been undertaken.

I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8, NASB)

*Chuck Swindoll*  
Frisco, Texas

# THE STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary uses the Strong's word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). The Strong's numbering system, made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is used with the majority of biblical Greek and Hebrew reference works. Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

When a Greek word is mentioned in the text, the Strong's number is included in square brackets after the Greek word. So in the example of the Greek word *agapē* [26], "love," the number is used with Greek tools keyed to the Strong's system.

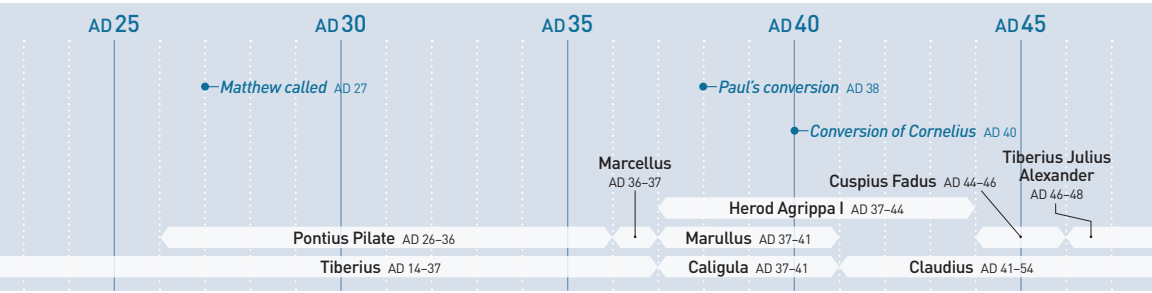
On occasion, a Hebrew word is mentioned in the text. The Strong's Hebrew numbers are completely separate from the Greek numbers, so Hebrew numbers are prefixed with a letter "H." So, for example, the Hebrew word *kapporet* [H3727], "mercy seat," comes from *kopher* [H3722], "to ransom," "to secure favor through a gift."



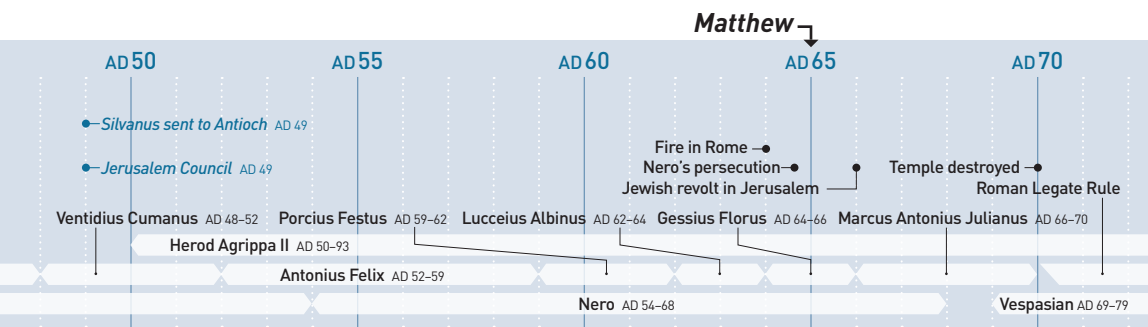


## INSIGHTS ON MATTHEW 16–28

*As we step into the intensity of the second half of Matthew's Gospel, we see how Jesus fulfills—in an unexpected way—His destiny as the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah. And by the end, we see how Jesus' mission turns into our mission, as we join with His initial followers in sharing the good news far and wide.*



**Map of Jesus' Life and Ministry.** Matthew's story begins with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It then traces Jesus' ministry throughout Galilee. After Jesus continued His ministry en route from Galilee to Judea, He was met with rejection in Jerusalem, ultimately resulting in His death.



# MATTHEW

## INTRODUCTION

**F**rom his remarkable perspective as one of the original twelve disciples, Matthew wrote his account of Jesus’ birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection to demonstrate to his intended Jewish readers that Jesus is the King, their long-awaited Messiah. Much of what that hated-tax-collector-turned-faithful-follower wrote came from his own eyewitness experiences. The rest was likely written on the basis of personal interactions with trustworthy sources: the other disciples, the mother and brothers of Jesus, and, of course, Jesus Himself. No doubt, Matthew knew the true story of Jesus’ person and work as well as anybody in the first century.

But Matthew also knew the hardness of his readers’ hearts. He knew that already during Jesus’ ministry the Jewish leaders had rejected their Messiah with vehemence and violence. So, for the sake of his fellow Jewish believers, Matthew dealt with a question nagging many who had already become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah: “If Jesus really is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, why don’t we see the kingdom restored to Israel according to God’s promises?”

One of Matthew’s motivations in writing his Gospel was to report how Jesus had offered the kingdom to Israel and how the hard-hearted religious and political leaders of the nation had rejected Him (4:17; 16:13-28; 21:33-46). Yet in his Gospel—especially the second half—Matthew wanted to show that the fulfillment of a literal, earthly kingdom hasn’t been set aside permanently; rather, it has been delayed until the future coming of the Son of Man in glory (19:28). In the meantime, the rejection of Jesus by Israel was allowing for the establishment of the church of baptized believers from all nations (16:18; 28:19-20).

Before we preview the course of this narrative of Israel’s increasing

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AT A GLANCE

SECTION	ANNOUNCEMENT AND ARRIVAL OF THE KING	PROCLAMATION AND RECEPTION OF THE KING
PASSAGE	1:1–4:25	5:1–15:39
THEMES	Jesus' Credentials	Jesus' Message
	Birth Baptism Temptation	Miracles Discourses Parables
KEY TERMS	Baptize Christ Proclaim	Righteousness Authority Blessed Parable

OPPOSITION AND REJECTION OF THE KING	PASSION AND TRIUMPH OF THE KING
16:1–25:46	26:1–28:20
Jesus' Suffering	Jesus' Victory
Opposition Rejection Second Coming	Passover and Arrest Suffering and Death Resurrection Ascension
Tribulation Woe Stumble	Hand Over Suffer

## QUICK FACTS ON MATTHEW

**When was it written?** Around AD 65

**Where was it written?** Possibly Antioch

**Who wrote it?** Matthew (also called Levi), son of Alphaeus

**Why was it written?** To demonstrate to Jewish readers that Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah

rejection of their Messiah, let's briefly review the overall shape of the Gospel and where we are in the plotline leading up to Matthew 16 through 28.

## THE STORY THUS FAR

Matthew develops his plot in two distinct parts: Chapters 1 through 15 address the *identity of the King*, while chapters 16 through 28 address the *destiny and victory of the King*. Between these two sections we observe a shift from Jesus teaching the vast multitudes (Matt. 1–15) to Jesus nar-

rowing His focus to be on teaching His closest disciples (Matt. 16–28). In the first half, Jesus' popularity among the people increases because of astonishing miracles and provocative teaching; in the second half, the hostility against Jesus rises to a feverish pitch. Geographically, the first fifteen chapters emphasize Jesus' ministry in the regions around the Sea of Galilee, while the second half increasingly focuses on His ministry in Judea and especially in Jerusalem—the center of religious and political power in Israel.

In the previous half volume, covering Matthew 1 through 15, we first explored the *Announcement and Arrival of the King* (1:1–4:25). These opening chapters developed Jesus' credentials as the long-awaited Messiah. Not only did He have the right genealogy to qualify as the messianic Son of David (1:1–17), but He also fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies and types that foretold or foreshadowed His birth and childhood (1:18–2:23). His baptism exhibited His consecration and commissioning, marking the point when He took the baton from John the Baptizer, who had been sent to announce the coming of the Messiah (3:1–17). Furthermore, as the Messiah-King, Jesus passed Satan's tests, demonstrating not only His identity as a perfect man with an impeccable nature but also His divine power (4:1–11). And prior to an official public launch of His ministry, Jesus began calling disciples to accompany Him, learn from Him, and assist Him in His work (4:12–25).

Next, we witnessed the *Proclamation and Reception of the King* (5:1–15:39). In these eleven chapters, Matthew recounted Jesus' teaching, preaching, and miracles, all in anticipation of His messianic kingdom. This section includes the famous "Sermon on the Mount" (5:1–7:29), accounts of numerous miracles that demonstrated Jesus' divine power

and authority (8:1–9:38), and discourses on practical, moral, and spiritual themes amid growing controversy (10:1–12:50). We saw that not everyone was thrilled, however, about the advent of this Messiah, and Jesus switched from clear teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God to the use of parables for the purpose of veiling the mysteries of the kingdom to those who rejected His authority (13:1-58). As astonishing as it seems, the clear demonstration of His miraculous power was met with increasing resistance to His masterful preaching (14:1–15:39).

## THE PLOT THICKENS

There's an old saying: "Politics makes strange bedfellows." Find the right cause, and two otherwise warring factions will set their differences aside and fight side by side against a common enemy instead of face to face against each other. For example, regardless of their differences on other matters, opposing political parties often join together in times of war to defeat a foreign enemy.

In Matthew 16 through 28, this aphorism proves true. We see startling, unexpected alliances forming against a shared enemy. Warring factions of Pharisees and Sadducees temporarily set aside their differences to eliminate a common threat. Generally, the Pharisees and Sadducees were on different ends of the theological spectrum. While the Pharisees believed in the sovereignty of God and in predestination regarding many matters, the Sadducees rejected the notion of predestination altogether in favor of a strong view of human free will.<sup>1</sup> While the Pharisees had adopted a complex system of oral traditions in addition to the written Law of Moses, the Sadducees accepted no teaching or tradition beyond what could be found in the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Additionally, the Pharisees believed in angels, spirits, and life after death, while the Sadducees tended to reject such elements of the spiritual realm.

Despite these stark differences, the Pharisees and Sadducees banded together in their opposition to Jesus of Nazareth. That unprecedented alliance between sworn theological adversaries, between the right and the left, between the conservatives and the liberals, between the populists and the elitists, demonstrates the shared depth of their utter hatred for Jesus. While doctrinally Jesus stood much closer to the basic theology of the Pharisees, practically He rejected their hyper-legalistic applications of the Law to every aspect of life, which stemmed from the misguided interpretations of the rabbis. The Sadducees, on the other hand, would have felt their political and social power threatened by



the growing belief among the masses in Jesus as none other than their King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah. So, for different reasons, the Pharisees and Sadducees saw Jesus and His disciples as a common enemy. Thus, they found themselves on the same team in opposition to Him, forging an alliance in hatred and hardness of heart.

As the curtain opens on the second half of the Gospel of Matthew, this sudden, unexpected alliance takes center stage. In the end, this coalition between Pharisees and Sadducees would lead not to the preservation of their ideologies but ultimately to their destruction.

## PREVIEW OF THINGS TO COME

The second half of the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 16 through 28, chronicles the *destiny and victory of the King*. It can be divided into two parts.

*Opposition and Rejection of the King* (16:1–25:46). The beginning of Matthew 16 sets the tone of the chapters that follow: “The Pharisees and Sadducees came . . . testing Jesus” (16:1). From this point on, the religious leaders hound His every move while Jesus continues to prepare His disciples for the events that will transpire in the final days of His earthly ministry (16:1-28). A handful of Jesus' disciples witness His glorious Transfiguration, a brief but powerful glimpse of His glory and coming kingdom (17:1-13). Determined to carry out His ministry, Jesus continues to heal and to teach vital lessons about discipleship (17:14–18:35).

Slowly, His ministry takes Him closer to Jerusalem, further drawing the attention of the religious leaders bent on cornering Him with a basis for arrest. Meanwhile, Jesus continues to preach undeterred (19:1–20:34). Eventually Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, welcomed with praises from the masses but with increasing resistance from the leaders, which He answers with increased condemnation (21:1–23:36). This culminates in a lament over Jerusalem itself for its rejection of the Messiah (23:37-39), followed by a lengthy teaching concerning the end of the age, when the kingdom of the Messiah will be set up on the earth (24:1–25:46).

*Passion and Triumph of the King* (26:1–28:20). The last three chapters of Matthew's Gospel recount how the plot of the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus comes to fruition (26:1-16). After celebrating His last Passover with His disciples and instituting the Lord's Supper (26:17-35), Jesus is betrayed and arrested (26:36-56). He is unjustly tried by the leaders in Jerusalem, while His own disciples abandon Him (26:57–27:26). Then,

in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies—as Jesus foretold—the Roman government, with the urging of the Jewish leaders, crucifies the rightful King of Israel, the long-awaited Messiah (27:27-56). Following His death, He is buried (27:57-66).

But, just as Jesus and the prophets of old had prophesied, He is raised on the third day, stepping out of the tomb in a miraculous, bodily resurrection, victorious over death (28:1-10). At the same time, those who had plotted against Him continue to conspire against the good news of His resurrection (28:11-15). Having risen victorious, the Lord Jesus meets with His disciples in Galilee to give them a new mission—one He has been preparing them for over the last three years: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:19-20).

As we step into the intensity of the second half of Matthew’s Gospel, we see how Jesus fulfills—in an unexpected way—His destiny as the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. And by the end, we see how Jesus’ mission turns into our mission, as we join with His initial followers in sharing the good news far and wide.

# OPPOSITION AND REJECTION OF THE KING (MATTHEW 16:1–25:46)

Convinced by His miraculous signs and His powerful preaching, Jesus' closest disciples had no doubts about who He was: the King, their long-awaited Messiah. And more than that, the Spirit had opened their eyes to a deeper truth: Jesus was not just a great teacher, a gifted prophet, and the rightful king; He was also “the Son of the living God” (16:16). While this profound truth would be further illuminated by Jesus' glorious transformation (17:1-13), it would appear to be contradicted by His disturbing predictions of His own betrayal, suffering, and death (16:21-23).

This section, which I'm calling *Opposition and Rejection of the King* (16:1–25:46), is characterized by these two contrasting themes in the life and ministry of Jesus—increased proof of His identity as the long-awaited Messiah and increased hostility against Him by those who had everything to lose at the coming of the King. The religious leaders' hypocrisy and false teachings would be exposed by the incarnation of Truth itself. The corrupt priesthood would be toppled and replaced by the eternal High Priest. The illegitimate king over Judea and the Gentile rulers would be dethroned by the rightful Heir of the house of David and Ruler of heaven and earth.

As such, the opposition builds to a climax as the scribes and Pharisees, priests and Sadducees, governors and rulers band together to do away with public enemy number one—Jesus, a mere “carpenter's son” from Nazareth (13:55).

## KEY TERMS IN MATTHEW 16:1–25:46

***thlipsis* (θλίψις) [2347]** “affliction,” “tribulation”

The Greek word *thlipsis* can refer to the coming Great Tribulation of the end times, leading up to Christ's physical return as King (24:21, 29-31), but more commonly it refers to the general trials and persecutions

experienced by Christians of every age (13:21; 24:9; John 16:33; Rom. 5:3). It could be that the ambiguity in how this term was used caused confusion among the Thessalonian believers, who may have believed the normal afflictions they were experiencing (1 Thes. 3:3-4; 2 Thes. 1:4-8) indicated that they were in the middle of the end-times Tribulation (Mark 13:19; Rev. 7:13-14).

### ***ouai* (οὐαί) [3759] “alas,” “woe”**

Loud wailing during times of deep sorrow was common in the ancient world. In fact, funerals of the rich were sometimes accompanied by professional mourners, often to increase the perception of grief at the loss of a person who may have had more enemies than allies. The exclamation *ouai!* intends to mimic a cry of anguish. As opposition to Jesus intensified, Jesus’ words of lament for His critics also increased, finding their climax in His repeated “woes” against the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy (23:13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). These were not just cries of anguish for their stubborn, wicked hearts, but also of sorrow for the judgments they and their followers would suffer because of their rejection of the Messiah.

### ***skandalizō* (σκανδαλίζω) [4624] “to cause to stumble”**

#### ***skandalon* (σκάνδαλον) [4625] “cause of stumbling”**

In English, the noun “scandal” and the related verb “scandalize” refer to the effect of an action of questionable morality that leads to a bad reputation, public anger or shame, or shock. However, in the New Testament, the Greek term from which we get “scandal” refers to “an action or circumstance that leads one to act contrary to a proper course of action or set of beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> In Matthew’s Gospel, Peter is famously called a *skandalon* for suggesting that Jesus should shirk His mission to suffer and die for sin (16:23). Jesus also warns against those people or things that cause us to stumble into temptation and sin (18:7-9).

## Testy Critics and Dull Disciples MATTHEW 16:1-12

NASB

<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a <sup>2</sup>sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup>But He replied to them, “<sup>3</sup>When it is evening, you say, ‘*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.*’  
<sup>3</sup>And in the morning, ‘*There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.*’ Do you know how to discern the <sup>4</sup>appearance of the sky,

NLT

<sup>1</sup>One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.

<sup>2</sup>He replied, “You know the saying, ‘Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; <sup>3</sup>red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don’t know

NASB

but cannot discern the signs of the times? <sup>4</sup>An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a <sup>a</sup>sign; and a <sup>a</sup>sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away.

<sup>5</sup>And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the <sup>a</sup>leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>7</sup>They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, “He said that because we did not bring any bread.” <sup>8</sup>But Jesus, aware of this, said, “You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup>Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? <sup>10</sup>Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? <sup>11</sup>How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the <sup>a</sup>leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>12</sup>Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

16:1 <sup>a</sup>Or attesting miracle 16:2 <sup>a</sup>Early mss do not contain the rest of v 2 and v 3 16:3 <sup>a</sup>Lit face 16:4 <sup>a</sup>Or attesting miracle 16:6 <sup>a</sup>Or yeast 16:11 <sup>a</sup>Or yeast

LIT

how to interpret the signs of the times!<sup>a</sup> <sup>4</sup>Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.<sup>a</sup>” Then Jesus left them and went away.

<sup>5</sup>Later, after they crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup>“Watch out!” Jesus warned them. “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

<sup>7</sup>At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn’t brought any bread. <sup>8</sup>Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, “You have so little faith! Why are you arguing with each other about having no bread? <sup>9</sup>Don’t you understand even yet? Don’t you remember the 5,000 I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of leftovers you picked up? <sup>10</sup>Or the 4,000 I fed with seven loaves, and the large baskets of leftovers you picked up? <sup>11</sup>Why can’t you understand that I’m not talking about bread? So again I say, ‘Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”

<sup>12</sup>Then at last they understood that he wasn’t speaking about the yeast in bread, but about the deceptive teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

16:2-3 Several manuscripts do not include any of the words in 16:2-3 after He replied. 16:4 Greek the sign of Jonah.

I’ve witnessed a lot of arguments over my lifetime of ministry. At times, it seems that the favorite indoor sport of some Christians is arguing. I’m convinced that some Christians aren’t happy unless they have a theological question to bicker about or some church issue to debate. I’ve seen examples from the tragic to the ridiculous. Rarely do I see believers argue over essential doctrines of the Christian faith or clear matters of morality. Most often it’s the same old discussions that Christians have debated for centuries—predestination or free will; who, when, and how to baptize; what style of worship a church should have; what the right order of end-times events is.

When you analyze these arguments, you find that most often everybody is talking and nobody is listening. Or, if they are listening, either they won't hear what's being said because their attitude is argumentative or they don't hear what's being said because they're self-absorbed. The result in these situations is not a conclusion to "agree to disagree" and to live in peace but an unceasing continuation of the argument with no progress being made by either side.

In the first century, Jesus had to deal with both categories of bad listeners. His critics were in the first category. They wouldn't hear because of their argumentative nature. They were testy. But His disciples were in the second category. They didn't hear because they were preoccupied with themselves. They were dull.

As we enter the story of Matthew 16:1-12, we find ourselves with the disciples in the village Matthew calls Magadan (15:39), probably another name for Magdala, the hometown of Mary Magdalene. Here we see how Jesus dealt with those testy critics and dull disciples . . . and how we can glean important, practical truths from those encounters.

### — 16:1-4 —

Most twenty-first-century readers probably wouldn't think twice about the opening words of Matthew 16: "The Pharisees and Sadducees came" (16:1). But to first-century Jewish readers, linking the Pharisees and Sadducees together would have been like saying "the liberals and conservatives" or "the Calvinists and Arminians" or "the Catholics and Protestants." Under normal circumstances, the Pharisees and Sadducees were on opposite sides of most issues.

The term "Pharisee" most likely means "separated one."<sup>2</sup> Pharisees strove for a strict, traditional, orthodox approach to faith and practice within Judaism. While they tended to preserve theological positions that were in line with Scripture, their methods for maintaining purity had deteriorated into legalism and hypocrisy. They also believed that the traditional teachings they developed in the course of their study of the Scriptures were as authoritative as those Scriptures themselves. This led many to argue that these teachings had actually been passed down to the rabbis from Moses through oral tradition.<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees maintained a strong belief in the sovereignty of God and in predestination and also embraced beliefs in angelic beings, a spiritual dimension of humanity, the afterlife—and the rewards or punishments therein—and the resurrection of the body.

By contrast, the faction of the Sadducees rejected the doctrine of

predestination and strongly emphasized human free will.<sup>4</sup> They also rejected the Pharisees' views of oral tradition and instead embraced doctrines and practices that could be established only on the basis of the Pentateuch—the five books of Moses. The Sadducees also denied the existence of angels, the continuation of the soul after death, and the resurrection of the body. Instead, they emphasized the blessings in *this* life for faithfulness to the covenant of Moses and stressed that the Law was vital for Israel to maintain its prosperity in the Promised Land and a place among the nations.<sup>5</sup>

Given the fact that the Pharisees and Sadducees usually stood toe to toe against each other, seeing them stand shoulder to shoulder in their cooperation against Jesus would have surprised Matthew's original, Jewish readers. Yet when it came to the growing popularity of that pesky preacher from Nazareth and the persuasive power of His miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees were willing to set aside their differences and work together against Jesus.

Both groups wanted to get rid of Jesus, so they were continually putting Him to the test. I find the kind of demand they made in this scene quite revealing. They asked Jesus for "a sign from heaven" (16:1). Note that they didn't seem to question His power. He had been performing astonishing miracles for some time, and His reputation as a healer had spread far and wide. However, His critics constantly questioned the *source* of His power. Was it really from God? Or from Satan? Was it legitimately from heaven? Or from the lower parts of the earth?

The new alliance of critics pressed Jesus for some blazing, ear-shattering event similar to the splitting of the Red Sea or the appearance of the pillar of fire and smoke in the Exodus narrative. Without such a miraculous sign with clear heavenly origins, they would not believe and would refuse to accept His divine authority. However, based on their track record of unreasonable skepticism, I think that even if Jesus had performed some amazing sign on demand, their hardness of heart was such that they still would have rejected Him and refused to believe.

Jesus knew their hearts. He wasn't about to succumb to their cynical demands for miraculous signs. There was simply no way to win at their game, played by their rules, because the rules constantly changed. Jesus' answer reveals His great wisdom. His critics were weather-wise but spiritually foolish. He quoted a famous proverbial rule of thumb used to predict the weather (16:2-3). We have a similar saying today, which goes something like this:

A red sky at night is a sailor's delight,  
 But a red sky in the morning is a sailor's warning.

Jesus wasn't revealing the key to all meteorological predictions. His purpose was not to give them (or us) an infallible guide to make accurate weather forecasts. Rather, He was pointing out the inconsistency of His critics by applying rules of logic to the evidence. Generally speaking, the rhyme is true. Having observed the pattern of red skies in the evening or morning and having correlated such patterns with the likelihood of stormy weather, people had inductively concluded that a red sky at night meant fair weather was probable, while a red sky in the morning meant that stormy weather was likely.

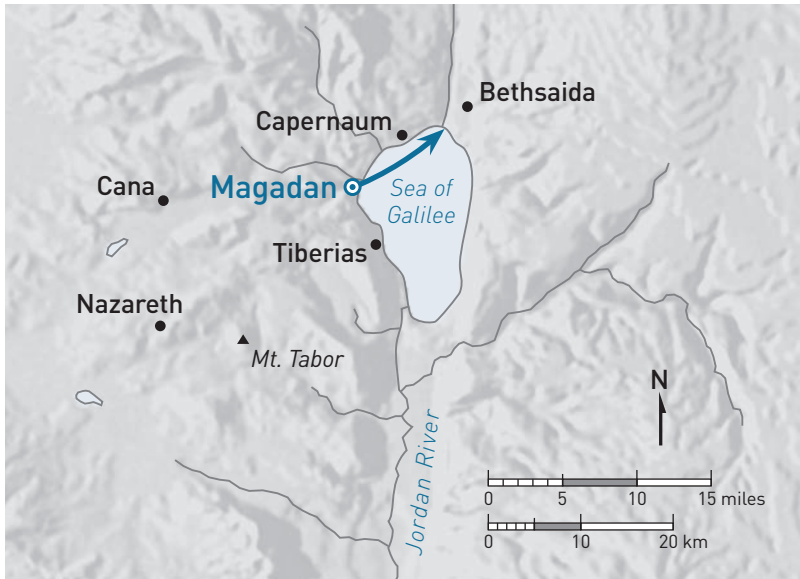
By the same rules of induction, they should have also discerned "the signs of the times" (16:3). By "signs of the times," Jesus was probably referring to the many miraculous signs that had already repeatedly and clearly pointed to the fact that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Recall that when John the Baptizer had questioned whether Jesus was the "Expected One," Jesus had replied, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (11:3-5). Based on these clear signs of the coming of the messianic kingdom, anybody with a believing heart and a discerning mind should have been able to conclude that the Messiah was present. But even in light of these clear signs of the Messiah, the Pharisees and Sadducees had closed the eyes of their hearts and blocked their ears to discernment. Instead, they wallowed in hard-hearted unbelief.

Jesus then repeated the same stinging rebuke He had leveled against the scribes and Pharisees earlier (see 12:38-40). This time, He lashed out at the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were "an evil and adulterous generation" whom He would not indulge with a made-to-order sign. Rather, the only thing they would get to confirm Jesus' identity as the Messiah was "the sign of Jonah" (16:4). That is, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, the Son of Man would be buried in the earth for three days (12:40). The Resurrection itself was the only sign they would be given, and even then, most would not believe.

Jesus' answer suggests that He was fed up with His critics. He had said enough and done enough to convince anyone who was open to the evidence and honest enough to accept it. All they wanted to do was nitpick and argue over what actually constituted a sign from heaven vs.



a sign from earth. But enough was enough. Instead of wasting His time with immovable critics, Jesus “left them and went away” (16:4).



Magadan (also called Magdala) was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee about 3 miles northwest of Tiberias. After refusing to give the Pharisees and Sadducees a “sign from heaven,” Jesus boarded a boat and sailed to the northern end of the sea near Bethsaida.

### — 16:5-12 —

Leaving behind the testy critics who had come down from Jerusalem to Magadan, Jesus and His disciples headed across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, to the northern shore where the Jordan River flows into the lake. Later, He and His disciples would take the road that ran from the city of Bethsaida far north to the city of Caesarea Philippi (16:13; cf. Mark 8:22-27).

Presumably after learning that they were about to head on a long journey northward, the disciples commented that they had forgotten to bring bread for the journey (Matt. 16:5). Earlier, they had departed to Magadan hauling “seven large baskets full” of bread from the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand (15:37). Somewhere along the way, they had unloaded the bread, perhaps giving it to some of the followers in Magadan. In any case, they had failed to load enough for the trip.

While the disciples fretted over the bread, Jesus’ mind was elsewhere. He had just dealt with testy critics who were stubborn of heart, unwilling to accept the evidence that had been placed before them.

Their impenetrable unbelief caused Him deep anguish, which He carried with Him across the lake. While Jesus was still stewing over the heated confrontation with the frowning critics, His dull disciples were worried about bread. Maybe they started pointing fingers, playing the blame game, fretting over what to do about the problem. Maybe some suggested rushing back across the lake or finding a place to grab some fresh supplies. But Jesus was preoccupied with something else. He was instead thinking about the wicked leaders, their diabolical plot to capture and kill Him, and their dangerous false teaching, which poisoned the people's minds. All the while, He was just hearing "bread, bread, bread, bread, bread" from His disciples.

Finally, Jesus cut in: "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:6). I picture the disciples suddenly silent, only half listening. They were still thinking about bread as Jesus mentioned leaven, or yeast. Something about Pharisees and Sadducees. Did that have something to do with bread? They began arguing with themselves again about the lack of bread and how they apparently needed to avoid the kind of leavened bread that Pharisees and Sadducees ate . . . or something like that.

Clearly, the disciples were clueless. They were thinking with their stomachs while Jesus was concerned about spiritual things. So He intruded on their misguided conversation again, scolding them for their "little faith" (16:8). Had they totally forgotten that Jesus didn't need baskets full of bread to provide for their needs on the journey? Didn't they remember the miracles of the five loaves that fed the five thousand men and the seven loaves that fed the four thousand (16:8-10)? Hadn't He provided an overabundance of food for them and for everybody else? Why in the world were they concerned about food? Jesus could have said the word and filled their boat with bread until it sunk!

Jesus was perturbed that the dull disciples could only think of the emptiness of stomachs while He was concerned about the emptiness of souls. Their conversation should have been about the Pharisees and Sadducees, the growing opposition to the preaching of Jesus, the stubbornness of the critics' hearts, and the danger that they posed to the easily swayed masses. The disciples' preoccupation with earthly things had desensitized them regarding spiritual things.

Jesus finally spelled it out for His disciples. He wasn't speaking about literal bread and literal yeast, but about the poisonous corruption of the Pharisees and the Sadducees—that is, their teaching (16:11-12). So devoted were Jesus' critics to taking Him down and crushing His

following that they were willing to explain away even the most obvious proof of who He was. This kind of skepticism and cynicism was contagious, and it was going to become widespread (see Mark 8:15).

I can imagine that the disciples felt a little stupid, not because they had failed to catch Jesus' figure of speech but because they had been so worried about finding physical bread while Jesus was concerned about those who rejected the Bread of Life. Slowly but surely, though, the disciples were coming around.

## APPLICATION: MATTHEW 16:1-12

### Dull or Deep?

I'm sorry to say that far too many of us fit quite comfortably in the garb of the skeptical Pharisees and Sadducees or in the sandals of the worldly-minded disciples.

For a moment, put on the garb of the testy critics. You're wearing those robes and looking all important with your questions, searching for more evidence, demanding more proof. You're determined that you'll only believe after God meets the burden of proof and your own personal standard of evidence. But then, just as God shows Himself to be real, the bar for passing your standard of "a sign from heaven" is raised. This is a typical pattern of the hard-hearted, unbelieving skeptic. Honestly, in such a case, there's not much that can be done.

Jesus walked away from people like that, which can be a lesson for us. There are times when we've said and done all we can do with people who are hardened to the gospel. We've spoken to them about Jesus, answered their questions, responded to their objections, and given them a defense of our faith, only to hear more arguments. When we realize that we're dealing with people who won't accept the truth, we're wasting our time pushing harder or talking louder. Instead, we may simply need to walk away and leave them in God's hands. Continue to pray, to be a friend to them, and to be open if God does a work in their lives, having a sincere desire to really listen and being ready to lead them back if the opportunity presents itself. But until then, there's not much that can be done.

Now walk in the sandals of the dull disciples. You're supersaturated with spiritual things—a study Bible, a great church family, Christian books and music. But as you listen to the sermons or sing the messages

or read the words or pray the prayers, they pass right through you. You've heard the gospel so much that it no longer makes an impact on your life. As the pastor preaches, you're thinking about what's for lunch or dinner. As you pray, your mind wanders to the next thing on the calendar. Though your eyes are wide open and your ears unstopped, you need to wake up and listen, to see spiritual things and hear spiritual words, the stuff beyond the everyday busyness of life.

I love these lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.<sup>6</sup>

Are you sitting around plucking blackberries, preoccupied with your next meal? Your next slice of bread? Your next career move? Your next car? All your creature comforts? Then you're probably missing the spiritual lessons of life that God is trying to teach you in order to deepen you.

I like to think the disciples were ashamed at their small-mindedness, their shallow thinking, their failure to grasp the simple analogy Jesus had used to redirect their thoughts and words to vital spiritual things. Let's not be that way. Let's not be dull disciples, but deep disciples.

## Answering Life's Ultimate Question MATTHEW 16:13-20

NASB

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

<sup>14</sup>And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, <sup>a</sup>Elijah; but still others, <sup>b</sup>Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are <sup>a</sup>the Christ,

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"\*

<sup>14</sup>"Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

<sup>15</sup>Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah,\* the Son of the living God."

LIT