

## **Answers to tough questions in Matthew**

### **1. The first three gospels share many similarities in wording. Who copied from whom?**

It is true that even a cursory reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke reveals many striking similarities. Compare, for example, Matthew 9:2–8; Mark 2:3–12; and Luke 5:18–26. But there are also significant differences in the way each writer views the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus. The question about how to explain these similarities and differences is known as the “synoptic problem” (syn means “together” and optic means “seeing”). For a lengthy discussion of the synoptic problem, see Mark: Interpretive Challenges.

### **2. Why are three similar gospels necessary?**

Careful examination of the gospels, noting the viewpoints of the authors and the details they include, yields two important conclusions: (1) The differences between the gospels highlight their independence and their value as part of a complete picture; (2) The similarities affirm their common subject and message. The accounts are never contradictory, but complementary. When seen together, they present a fuller understanding of Christ.

### **3. How should Jesus’ prophetic statements, many of which are found in Matthew 24 and 25, be interpreted?**

The Olivet discourse (Matthew 24–25) contains some details that suggest images of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus’ words in 24:34 have led some to conclude that all these things were fulfilled—albeit not literally—in the Roman conquest of that era. This view is known as “preterism.” But it is a serious error. The preterist interpreter has to read into these passages allegorical meanings that don’t fit normal exegetical study methods. The approach that honors the language and history behind the biblical texts is called the grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach, which involves examining the grammar used and historical context to derive the intended meaning of the passage. This makes better sense and yields a consistent, futuristic interpretation of crucial prophecies.

### **4. Why is Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew different from the one in Luke?**

The genealogies of Jesus recorded by Matthew and Luke have two significant differences: (1) Matthew’s genealogy traces the line of descent through Joseph, while Luke traces Jesus’ ancestry through Mary; and (2) Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham, since his concern has to do with the Jewish connection with Christ and God’s plan of salvation; and Luke’s genealogy begins with Adam and sees Christ’s role in the salvation of mankind.

### **5. Does Matthew include any material not found in the other gospels?**

Matthew includes nine events in Jesus' life that are unique to his gospel:

1. Joseph's dream (1:20-24)
2. Visit of the wise men (2:1-12)
3. Flight into Egypt (2:13-15)
4. Hero kills the children (2:16-18)
5. Judas repents (27:3-10; but see Acts 1:18, 19)
6. The dream of Pilate's wife (27:19)
7. Other resurrections (27:52)
8. The bribery of the soldiers (28:11-15)
9. The Great Commission (28:19, 20)