
The Gospel According to Matthew

Part Two

Matthew 17–28

Barbara E. Reid
with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



*A ministry of the Diocese of Little Rock
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DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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Dear Friends,

The Bible is a gift of God to the church, the people gathered around the world throughout the ages in the name of Christ. God uses this sacred writing to continue to speak to us in all times and places.

I encourage you to make it your own by dedicated prayer and study with others and on your own. Little Rock Scripture Study is a ministry of the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock. It provides the tools you need to faithfully understand what you are reading, to appreciate its meaning for you and for our world, and to guide you in a way that will deepen your own ability to respond to God's call.

It is my hope that the Word of God will empower you as Christians to live a life worthy of your call as a child of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock



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Wrap-up lectures are available for each lesson at no charge. The link to these free lectures is LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/MatthewPartTwo.

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

The Gospel According to Matthew, Part Two Matthew 17–28


The resource you hold in your hands is divided into four lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book *and* the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet four times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- The text of the Gospel According to Matthew, chapters 17–28, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.

- Commentary by Barbara E. Reid (which has also been published separately as part of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary series).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the chapters of Matthew being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/MatthewPartTwo. Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.
- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–21) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 21–23.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 23 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

The Gospel According to Matthew

Part Two

LESSON ONE

Introduction and Matthew 17–19

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

Loving God, as we read and study your living word, send us the Spirit of Christ, that we may faithfully heed his words and imitate his life.

Read the Introduction on page 12 and the Bible text of Matthew 17–19 found in the outside columns of pages 13–19, highlighting what stands out to you.

Read the accompanying commentary to add to your understanding.

Respond to the questions on pages 21–23, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 23 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

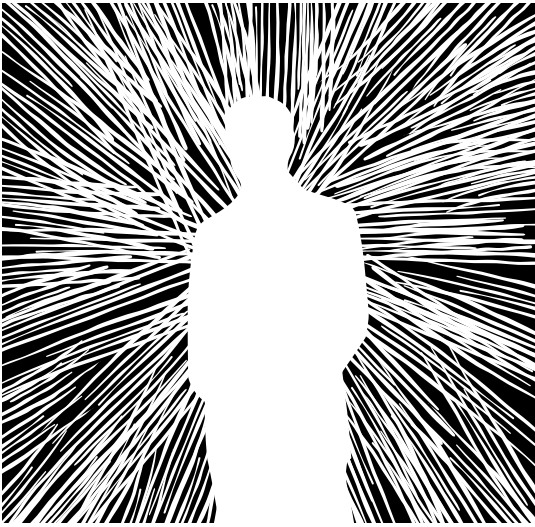
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the study of *The Gospel According to Matthew, Part Two* from Little Rock Scripture Study. This volume will explore in depth Matthew 17:1–28:20, using the associated sections of Barbara E. Reid’s New Collegeville Bible Commentary, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The first half of this study covered Matthew 1:1–16:28 and included the appropriate sections of the same commentary by Reid.

In the first half of Matthew’s Gospel, we became familiar with Matthew’s unique presentation of Jesus as an authoritative teacher whose life and ministry fulfill the Scriptures. Jesus is Emmanuel, “God-with-us” (1:23; 28:20). We also learned that Matthew’s Gospel reflects the situation of the evangelist’s community. It seems that this primarily Jewish-Christian community was experiencing a painful separation from their Jewish counterparts in the synagogues, who likely felt that these Christians were dishonoring the covenant and unnecessarily fraternizing with Gentiles. Matthew wishes to be clear that faith in Jesus is compatible with faithfulness to the Jewish Law while simultaneously affirming the Church’s mission to the Gentile community.

Matthew’s Gospel begins with infancy narratives (Matt 1–2), which are followed by many teachings and miracles of Jesus. Five major discourses in Matthew’s Gospel allow for organized, thematic collections of Jesus’ teachings (Matt 5–7, 10, 13, 18, and 23–25).

As we move into the second half of the Gospel in this study, we will travel with Jesus to Jerusalem where he will teach with authority, be increasingly challenged by the religious leaders, suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Finally, the risen Jesus will commission his followers to “make disciples of all nations” and will promise to be with them always, “until the end of the age” (28:19–20).



JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

Matthew 17:1–20:34

17:1-13 The transfiguration of Jesus and the coming of Elijah

The question of Jesus' identity and what that means continues to loom large in this episode. On the heels of Jesus' teaching that he must suffer and die and then be raised up (16:21), the reader is given utter assurance that Jesus' execution does not mean that he is accursed (Deut 21:23) or in any way rejected by God. The brilliance of his face and clothing (v. 2) indicates his righteousness (see 13:43). The voice from heaven (v. 5) reaffirms the message heard at Jesus' baptism (3:17): he is God's beloved one. The instruction "listen to him" (v. 5) echoes Deuteronomy 18:15 and insists that Jesus is the correct interpreter of the Law and the Prophets, signified by the figures of Moses and Elijah (v. 3).

Matthew further highlights the portrait of Jesus as the new Moses with the details of the high mountain (v. 1; see also 5:1; 15:29; 28:16), Jesus' shining face (v. 2, like that of Moses after his encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Exod 34:29), and the overshadowing cloud (v. 5, like that which signaled God's presence with Israel in their sojourn to freedom, Exod 16:10; 19:9, etc.). Matthew specifically labels this experience a vision (v. 9), and the disciples react in

CHAPTER 17

The Transfiguration of Jesus

¹After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. ³And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." ⁸And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

The Coming of Elijah

⁹As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." ¹⁰Then the disciples asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹¹He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; ¹²but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands." ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

The Healing of a Boy with a Demon

¹⁴When they came to the crowd a man approached, knelt down before him, ¹⁵and said, "Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffers severely; often he falls into fire, and often into water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." ¹⁷Jesus said in reply, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I

continue