

The Messianic Torah

Facilitator Guide



DATE _____	Session 1	_____	Session 9	_____	Session 17
_____	Session 2	_____	Session 10	_____	Session 18
_____	Session 3	_____	Session 11	_____	Session 19
_____	Session 4	_____	Session 12	_____	Session 20
_____	Session 5	_____	Session 13	_____	Session 21
_____	Session 6	_____	Session 14	_____	Session 22
_____	Session 7	_____	Session 15		
_____	Session 8	_____	Session 16		

About This Guide

The Bible is communal literature, designed to be read and studied by groups of people learning to live within its story. BibleProject Classroom seeks to model this communal approach to Bible study and provide individuals and communities with the opportunity to participate. We designed this guide to support folks leading others through a BibleProject class. So grab a friend or gather with your small group to journey together!

Suggested Formats

To get started, we recommend picking a regular meeting rhythm. While many groups find that weekly meetings work well, every group is different. There's no single "right" way to facilitate this class, so choose what works best for your group. Here are two possible formats.

FORMAT 1 Watch Together	FORMAT 2 Watch Individually
1. Welcome Start by welcoming the group and creating space for connection. This might look like sharing a meal, doing a brief icebreaker, or opening in prayer—whatever helps your group relax and feel united.	1. Watch Before each meeting, everyone watches the assigned session(s) on their own. This can be helpful for groups that would like more time for discussion or for group members who prefer to watch the sessions at their own pace.
2. Watch Most groups choose to watch about an hour of content at a time (1-2 sessions). We've found that connecting to a larger screen (e.g., via cable or AirPlay) is often helpful. Some groups pause for reflection and discussion throughout the session.	2. Welcome Start by welcoming the group and creating space for connection. This might look like sharing a meal, doing a brief icebreaker, or opening in prayer—whatever helps your group relax and feel united.
3. Discuss Reserve some time at the end of your meeting (we recommend 30 minutes to 1 hour) to discuss questions from this guide or from your group. It's also a great time to re-read and meditate on any passages covered during the session.	3. Discuss Discuss questions from this guide or from your group. It's also a great time to re-read and meditate on any passages covered during the session.

Tips for Facilitators

Create space for connection and questions

You don't have to be a Bible nerd to be a facilitator! As a facilitator, your role is to guide the group's discussion rather than to teach the content. We try to model curiosity and humility, inviting questions and encouraging deep meditation on the biblical text, rather than rushing to interpretation and application.

We want to build a community where our unique perspectives help us see the bigger picture together, finding unity in our diversity, and where everyone feels comfortable enough to voice their real questions, even the messy ones. Rather than reaching for quick fixes, we seek to invite the group to practice holding hard truths in tension, consistently going back to the text to discover what God is revealing through the biblical writers.

A little prep goes a long way

Each session includes Teacher Notes that can be a valuable digital or printed resource for notetaking or reference during your meetings. Many past facilitators have recommended watching the session(s) and reviewing the Teacher Notes for each meeting (or even the entire class!) in advance. This guide contains key takeaways to help your group recall core ideas and reflection questions to seed discussion. Some facilitators also find it helpful to prepare their own discussion questions, tailored to their group, before the meeting. If you are planning to watch the sessions together, consider setting up your viewing plan and testing the technology beforehand.

Finally, take a few minutes at the end of each meeting to confirm the date of the next meeting and which session(s) you'll cover.

Bible Study Guide

Some sessions will dive deep into a specific passage. For those sessions, you can reference this guide to help your group meditate on Scripture together. This Bible study method encourages you to allow your curiosity to drive you, and it honors the Bible as both literary art and divine wisdom.

1. **Read the Passage.** Read the selected passage slowly and with the expectation of discovery.
2. **Collect Questions.** Every question is good. Let's get them all out and write them down. The Bible is inviting us to lean in and be curious.
3. **Watch the Session.** The corresponding video shows the literary design of the passage and encourages deeper discussion.
4. **For discussion time:**
 - **Make Observations.** Continue the conversation! What other details can we observe about the passage? What is the point of repeated words or phrases? What can we see by comparing lines or comparing sections?
 - **Choose One Question and Discuss.** Which one of the questions collected during step 2 does the group find most interesting? Which question seems most aligned with what the passage wants us to ask? Choose one and discuss it.
 - **Examine Hyperlinks.** What other passages in the Bible discuss the same question? What other passages have the same key words or themes? Let's find one or two and compare them.
 - **Discern Wisdom.** What is God's invitation to us as a community through this passage?



WATCH

SESSION 1: Philosopher, Teacher, Prophet, Sage

Jesus engages the traditions of both the Hebrew Bible and the Greco-Roman philosophical thinkers. Learn about the context of Jesus' most famous teachings.

Key Takeaways

- Early audiences of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel saw Jesus as participating in the tradition of ancient philosophical thinkers, who taught and embodied the good life.
- In his teachings, Jesus relies especially on the thought categories of the Hebrew Bible: *torah*, prophecy, and wisdom.
- Jesus presents himself and his teachings as a fulfillment of and a step forward in the story of God and Israel.

Reflection Questions

1. How did you first encounter the words of Jesus? How did your expectations and understanding of Jesus' teachings compare to those of Matthew's ancient audience?
2. How do we see Jesus weaving together the different threads of the Hebrew Bible—*torah*, prophecy, and wisdom—into a single, unified tapestry?
3. Jesus came to fulfill the Torah. In what ways do his teachings continue Israel's story, and how does Jesus carry that story forward in new or surprising ways?



SESSION 2: Jesus Announces the Kingdom of Heaven

See how Jesus' Sermon on the Mount fits into Matthew's gospel. Learn about its role in the narrative and its importance to Matthew's message.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 4:17-5:2



WATCH

Key Takeaways

- Matthew organized his gospel around five teaching sections, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount.
- Matthew weaves Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of the skies has come together with his teachings and healings, emphasizing the interconnectedness of people's daily lived experience, community dynamics, and transcendent spiritual truths.
- Jesus calls people to "Change direction!" because "The kingdom of the skies is near!"—in other words, God's rule is breaking into earthly reality.
- Matthew focuses on how Jesus fulfills prophetic expectations for Abraham's descendants.

Reflection Questions

1. How does Matthew's organizational structure contribute to the overall message of his gospel?
2. Matthew intentionally links Jesus' healings with his teachings. What is he trying to show us about the connection between our daily struggles and the spiritual reality of the Kingdom?
3. Jesus calls people to "change direction" (or "repent") because God's rule is breaking in. How do Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of the skies shape our understanding of his call for repentance?
4. What are some specific ways Jesus' ministry fulfills the ancient promises made to the family of Abraham?



SESSION 3: The Good Life

What does it mean to be called “blessed”? Take a deep dive into the first beatitude to discover what Jesus means when he says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:3-12



WATCH

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word makarios, often translated as “blessed,” describes someone who has the good life, as seen from a third-person perspective.
- Being “poor in spirit” means lacking vital life-energy, or being powerless.
- Jesus subverts cultural norms and common wisdom about who is truly blessed. It’s not the powerful and wealthy, but those in need who have the good life.

Reflection Questions

1. We often use the word “blessed” to describe a feeling, but what does the Greek word makarios mean in the cultural and literary context of the Sermon on the Mount?
2. The word translated as “blessed” (makarios) describes someone who possesses the good life from the perspective of an observer. What difference does it make to see these sayings as observations of reality rather than just instructions to follow?
3. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?
4. How does Jesus subvert our standard definitions of success when he describes who has the good life in God’s Kingdom?



SESSION 4: Longing for God's Kingdom

Jesus describes the social status and character of those he calls blessed. Discover what the meek, the thirsty, and the merciful teach us about God's Kingdom.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:3-8



WATCH

Key Takeaways

- Jesus explains that those who mourn have the good life because they will be comforted. This mirrors the words of Isaiah 61:2, where comfort is promised to those mourning over Israel's covenant unfaithfulness.
- The first three beatitudes highlight hope for those who are powerless, who grieve over corruption, and who are often overlooked, having no voice or influence. This emphasizes God's focus on the marginalized.
- The second triad of beatitudes highlights the character of people longing to see their world reflect God's heart through right relationships, mercy, and pure hearts.

Reflection Questions

1. In Isaiah 61:2, God promises comfort for those mourning over Israel's unfaithfulness. How does Jesus echo this specific prophetic promise in his sermon?
2. The first three beatitudes focus on the powerless, the grieving, and the overlooked. What can we learn about God's heart and priorities from these verses?
3. How would you describe the status and character of the people Jesus identifies as having the good life in the first six beatitudes?



SESSION 5: The Peacemakers and the Persecuted

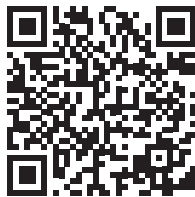
Jesus' vision for the good life continues to confound conventional wisdom. Learn how persecuted peacemakers embody the goodness of God.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:9-16

Key Takeaways

- Peacemakers work toward shalom ("wholeness") by seeking reconciliation between parties in conflict.
- Those who follow Jesus and work toward making peace can expect persecution.
- Jesus likens his followers to salt—preserving, flavoring, and purifying the world around them.
- Jesus casts a vision for a kingdom where those who are normally left outside and those who typically do the excluding come together to live by a new set of values, becoming an example of God's goodness for the world, a city on a hill.



WATCH

Reflection Questions

1. How does the messy work of reconciliation move a community toward that biblical vision of shalom, or "wholeness"?
2. Jesus doesn't shy away from talking about the cost of following his way. What challenges do peacemakers face when they emulate Jesus in a violent and divided world?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to call his followers "the salt of the earth"?
4. How can a community made up of both the excluded and former excluders become an example of God's goodness for the world?



WATCH

SESSION 6: Jesus Fulfills the Torah

Explore the way Jesus engages with the teachings of the Hebrew Bible—not discarding the Torah but, instead, illuminating the heart of the law.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:17-20

Key Takeaways

- Jesus does not reject the laws of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, he follows the tradition of the Hebrew prophets who point to the need for a new covenant and a new heart so that people can follow the laws.
- Jesus teaches that even the smallest commands of the Torah are part of God's will for his people. They point beyond individual behaviors to deeper heart change and a greater vision for what his Kingdom is like.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you describe Jesus' relationship to the Torah?
2. How do Jesus' teachings on the Torah move his followers from a focus on outward, individual behavior to deeper heart change and a greater vision for what his Kingdom is like?



WATCH

SESSION 7: Murder and Contempt

Going deeper than surface-level behavior, Jesus takes us into God's heart for how we value one another.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:21-26

Key Takeaways

- The command, "do not murder," addresses the surface-level behavior. But God's desire isn't simply to keep us from killing others but for us to truly value others.
- The "valley" (Hebrew: gey) of Ben-hinnom, transliterated through Aramaic and Greek into the New Testament's Gehenna, is the place where God returned the fiery horror of Israel's idolatry back upon its leaders. It serves as an analogy for the way God will hold all of humanity accountable at the culmination of history.
- Jesus' followers throughout the centuries have held to a diversity of interpretations about the meaning and nature of the final judgment described in the Bible.

Reflection Questions

1. How does Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:21-26 deepen the commandment to not murder?
2. How does Jesus deploy the image of the "valley" (Hebrew: gey) of Ben-hinnom (New Testament: Gehenna) in his teaching?
3. How can the diversity of interpretations about the meaning and nature of the final judgment described in the Bible shape how we approach talking about this issue?



WATCH

SESSION 8: Adultery and Lust

Jesus takes us deeper into the heart of the commandments as he uncovers the distorted desires that lead us to diminish the worth of our fellow humans.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:27-30

Key Takeaways

- Jesus explains that adultery and lust come from a common source. Just because we don't commit adultery doesn't mean we are free from the root problem.
- Jesus directly confronts the public social dynamic of men staring at women in order to stir up desire, emphasizing that in his Kingdom, women are to be safe.
- The eye and the hand are used together as a common Hebrew Bible idiom to represent both our focus and what we do in response to our ingrained patterns of thinking.
- By identifying the problem as one of the heart, Jesus makes it clear that he's not commanding self-mutilation when he speaks of tearing out your eye or cutting off your hand. Instead, he's using an arresting image to make a clear point: At all costs, don't let a habit of the mind or body prevent you from doing what is clearly best for yourself and others.

Reflection Questions

1. Why does Jesus want us to dig deeper than the destructive outward behavior of adultery?
2. Jesus is addressing the heart issue of lust, but he is also calling out a pervasive public pattern of behavior: men staring at women in order to stir up desire. What does this teach us about the importance of both internal motivation and external actions? What can we learn about the dignity and worth of people in the kingdom of the skies?
3. If Jesus isn't calling for literal self-mutilation, what point is he making in his teaching to tear out your eye or cut off your hand if they cause you to stumble? How can we apply Jesus teaching in our lives today?



SESSION 9: Divorce and Remarriage

Jesus settles an ancient debate about divorce, but how should we apply his words to our lives today? Learn the wisdom Jesus teaches about marriage.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:31-32

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' teaching about marriage and divorce engages a debate, still raging in his 1st-century context, about the interpretation of the command in Deuteronomy 24:1.
- Jesus sides with the interpreters teaching that a man may not divorce his wife for just any reason he chooses. He calls out the harm that is done to women in this scenario by identifying them as the victims of adultery.
- Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce provides wisdom for all, but is limited in scope by the context of the debate he's addressing. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives us some examples of how this wisdom can be applied in circumstances that don't fit the specifics of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5.



WATCH

Reflection Questions

1. What is the broader historical context of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage?
2. When Jesus rejects the interpretation that men can divorce their wives for just "any reason," how does this protect women from social and economic harm?
3. How does Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 7 help us understand Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:31-32?



WATCH

SESSION 10: Oaths and Vows

Jesus addresses how people leverage religious language to manipulate others to get their way. See how ancient oaths relate to our relationships today.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:33-37

Key Takeaways

- Jesus doesn't quote a single command about vows and oaths. Instead, he summarizes and adapts various regulations from the Torah.
- The words translated as "oath" and "vow" have slightly different meanings, but together they encapsulate all the ways people try to add greater weight to a promise made to God or other humans.
- Jesus condemns the way people leverage religious language to manipulate others in order to get their way, calling on his followers to love and honor others through simple truthfulness.

Reflection Questions

1. The words translated as "oath" and "vow" have slightly different meanings. What do they have in common, and how do they differ?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Jesus' teaching about oaths/vows and the teaching of the Hebrew Bible? Is he restating the Torah, explaining its meaning, or overruling it?
3. What is a reason people make oaths and vows that Jesus rejects?



WATCH

SESSION 11: Retaliation and Nonviolence

Jesus presents a creative yet costly path for confronting evil in the world. Explore the beauty of his teaching on non-retaliatory response.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:38-42

Key Takeaways

- Jesus commands his followers to “not resist in the same manner” as one who does evil against us. He calls us instead to a form of active response that overcomes dehumanization by reasserting our humanity, though at great cost.
- In Matthew 5:39, the Greek word *antistēnai*, often translated as “resist,” is a compound of *anti* + *stēnai*. It echoes the use of *anti* (“in place of”) from the previous verse, giving the sense of “resist-in-kind.”
- In Jesus’ context, a backhanded slap on the right cheek was a degrading insult, whereas an openhanded slap on the left cheek was less dishonoring. Turning the left cheek would confront the one slapping by rejecting the dishonor and challenging them to face the humanity of the one they sought to demean.
- The case studies about the coat and the mile refer directly to laws in Jewish and Roman societies, respectively.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the meaning of Jesus’ words, “do not resist-in-kind an evil person,” in Matthew 5:39? How do the examples he gives afterward help clarify his teaching?
2. Understood in its 1st-century context, how would “turning the other cheek” subvert the degradation of the intended insult? What might it look like to follow Jesus’ wisdom today?
3. How do the case studies about the coat and the mile play off of existing laws to reveal the generous heart of God?



WATCH

SESSION 12: Love Your Enemy

Examine one of Jesus' most well-known teachings and discover what we can learn about God when we love our enemies.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 5:43-48

Key Takeaways

- Jesus calls out a misinterpretation of the idea that hating enemies is in line with the Torah. The Torah calls for loving neighbors, yes, but also for loving the immigrant and showing kindness to enemies.
- The Greek word *teleios*, often translated as "perfect," means to be "whole," "complete," and "fulfilling one's purpose."
- Jesus' call to radical enemy love is an invitation to become more truly human, which is the path to becoming more like God.

Reflection Questions

1. How does Jesus' teaching about loving enemies align with what the Torah teaches?
2. What does Jesus mean when he tells his followers to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48)?
3. In what way is Jesus' call to radical enemy love a path to becoming more truly human and more like God?



WATCH

SESSION 13: Generosity, Prayer, and Fasting

How is generosity like prayer or fasting? Learn about the surprising connection between generosity and how humans relate to God.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *hupokrites*, from which we derive the word “hypocrite,” is the word for a “stage actor.”
- In an imagination shaped by the Hebrew Bible, generosity is about how we relate to God just as much as prayer or fasting is.
- Jesus teaches wisdom in evaluating our motives to assess whether or not our good deeds are done so that others can see.

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing that *hupokrites* is the Greek word for a “stage actor” shape our understanding of Jesus’ warning not to be like the hypocrites?
2. How does generosity compare to other spiritual practices like prayer or fasting?
3. How would you describe the difference between Jesus saying “let your light shine before people ... so they can see” in Matthew 5:16 and “don’t do your righteousness in front of people for the purpose of being seen” in Matthew 6:1?



WATCH

SESSION 14: The Lord's Prayer

Examine how the story of Jesus, and even the whole Bible, is woven throughout the prayer he gives us to follow.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 6:9-13

Key Takeaways

- Jesus wants us to see that every day is another trial before the tree in the garden, and he invites us to seek God's deliverance either from the test or from falling prey to the voice of the evil one.
- The closing doxology to the Lord's Prayer (i.e., "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.") is not present in the earliest available manuscripts of the New Testament and is therefore omitted from many modern translations. However, its use in the liturgical practice of the Church is attested as early as the late 1st century.
- The theme of God's name being recognized as holy runs throughout the whole Bible. God's name is profaned by the unfaithfulness of his people, so Jesus instructs us to ask for God's help in upholding the holiness of his name.
- The story of the Bible as a whole and of Jesus' own life is woven throughout the words and themes of the Lord's Prayer.

Reflection Questions

1. When we face our own trials before the tree in the garden, how does Jesus envision us overcoming these tests?
2. In what ways do Jesus' followers "hallow" God's name (or make it recognized as holy)?
3. How does the Lord's Prayer reflect Jesus' own life?



WATCH

SESSION 15: Treasure in Heaven

What does it mean to store up treasure in Heaven? Discover how our attitude towards our possessions shapes our relationship with God.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 6:19-24

Key Takeaways

- The word thesaurus, often translated as “treasure,” means “stored goods” and represents whatever possessions we amass to make ourselves feel safe against an unknown future.
- The good eye and bad eye are metaphors for generosity and stinginess, respectively.
- Jesus does not tell his followers not to store up; instead, he tells them to put their storing-up energy into the things of God’s Kingdom rather than the apparent security of wealth.
- The word mammonas in Matthew 6:24 is rather unique and may be derived from the word ‘amen, giving it the sense of “a thing that secures our trust.”

Reflection Questions

1. Considering Jesus’ teaching about “treasure,” why do people store up wealth? What needs are people trying to meet by holding tight to material possessions?
2. What do the metaphors of the good and bad eyes represent? How does understanding these metaphors help us apply Jesus’ teaching about the “lamp of the body” to our daily lives?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says to “store up for yourselves stored-wealth in the sky”?



SESSION 16: Worry and Wealth

Jesus teaches trust in God as freedom from worry, but does that mean life will be easy? Consider how Jesus' own life deepens the wisdom of his teaching.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 6:25-34

Key Takeaways

- Jesus teaches us to shift our mental focus from excessive concern about wealth and security to trusting God and seeking to do right by him.
- The Greek word *merimnao*, often translated as “worry,” can be positive or negative and deals with what we “have concern for.” It is not equivalent to a modern understanding of clinical anxiety.
- This wisdom is difficult, but Jesus models the lifestyle he teaches. He has no home or possessions, and his path leads to (and through) death, but he faithfully trusts his Father in the skies with his whole life.



WATCH

Reflection Questions

1. What makes it difficult to trust God for our daily needs?
2. When we hear Jesus say, “Do not be anxious” (Matt. 6:25 ESV), our minds may jump to a modern understanding of clinical anxiety. How does the Greek word *merimnao*, defined in its ancient biblical context, give us a more precise picture of what Jesus is targeting in his teaching?
3. How does Jesus' own lifestyle model the trust in God he teaches to his followers?



SESSION 17: Do Not Judge

Jesus gives some seemingly paradoxical wisdom. Don't judge, but also don't cast pearls before pigs? Dive into Matthew 7:1-6 to contemplate what he means.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:1-6



WATCH

Key Takeaways

- The Greek word *krino* ("to judge") ranges in meaning from a positive discernment to a negative condemnation.
- Jesus knows we will face moments when we think we need to make a judgment. He wants us to see these as opportunities to first examine ourselves, then to consider whether the situation we are facing will benefit from our discernment or whether making a determination will only stir up conflict.
- The words "pig" and "dog" were commonly used in Jesus' time to negatively refer to non-Israelites, but Jesus' interactions with non-Israelites (see Matt. 15:21-39) should guard against an overly simplistic reading of how he used those words.

Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding the broad range of meaning in the Greek word *krino* ("to judge") help us find nuance in Jesus' instruction about judging?
2. What is the flow of thought in Matthew 7:1-6, and what is Jesus trying to teach us about judgment?
3. How do Jesus' interactions with non-Israelites (see, for example, Matt. 15:21-39) help us avoid a simplistic reading of his words about "pigs" and "dogs"?



WATCH

SESSION 18: The Golden Rule

Jesus concludes his teaching on prayer with a call to actively and generously love others. Meditate on Jesus' wisdom in the Golden Rule.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:7-12

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' teaching on prayer is linked by literary design to his command to "seek first the Kingdom of God" in Matthew 6:33. Our asking, seeking, and knocking are to be shaped by a pursuit of God's values.
- As many teachers of the Second Temple period sought to summarize the Torah, a negative counterpart to Jesus' teaching, "Do not do unto others what you would not want done to you," was well-known. Jesus' positive "Do unto others" summary opens up a limitless universe of loving and generous acts.
- Studying the Bible along the contours of its native literary design takes hard work, but putting in the effort to understand what God and the biblical authors are trying to communicate is an act of love toward them.

Reflection Questions

1. What implications does the literary design linking Jesus' teaching on prayer to his command to "seek first the Kingdom of God" have for our prayers?
2. Does framing the Golden Rule in the negative ("Do not do unto others ...") or positive ("Do unto others ...") make a difference in how we approach living it out?
3. Jesus' perspective on prayer may seem overly idealistic. How do you reconcile radical claims like, "Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do" (John 14:13 NKJV), with the experience of unmet prayer requests? What wisdom can Jesus' life and teaching offer?



WATCH

SESSION 19: The Wide and Narrow Gates

What is at stake if no one listens to Jesus' warnings? Consider Jesus' words in their original context and discern what they have to say to us today.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:13-14

Key Takeaways

- Jesus' warnings are addressed to the generation of Israelites living during his lifetime. To best understand the importance of Jesus' warnings for us today, we must first consider what his words meant for the people he was speaking to.
- Biblical prophets used cosmic language to describe what was happening in their time and place, showing how those events were participating in a cosmic narrative.
- Jesus echoes the Hebrew Bible theme of the two paths, which stretches all the way back to the exile from the garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

Reflection Questions

1. Whom is Jesus addressing in his warnings in Matthew 7:13-14? How might this shape our understanding of his words and what they mean for us today?
2. What are some ways that the biblical prophets employed cosmic language? What possibilities for interpretation does this open up for us when reading Jesus' warnings in Matthew 7 and elsewhere?
3. Reflect on the theme of the two paths. What examples of this theme come to mind from other places in the Bible? How do these connections help us better understand Jesus' words?



WATCH

SESSION 20: Wolves, Sheep, and Trees

If someone says they speak for God, how do you know if you can trust them? Jesus confronts the sad reality of false prophets and leaders.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:15-23

Key Takeaways

- Jesus takes up common Hebrew Bible criteria for judging the legitimacy of prophets, recasting them in Eden imagery.
- The trajectory and results of a person's life will tell a certain kind of truth that is often more reliable than their words.
- Being a vehicle for divine power in the world isn't the most defining thing about our identity. There are some who do mighty works for God but whose hearts are far from him.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you reconcile the seeming contradiction of Jesus' words in Matthew 7:18, "a diseased [tree] can't produce good fruit," and 7:22, "Many will say to me on that day, '... didn't we ... do many mighty acts in your name?'"
2. How are we to discern the reliability of those who claim to speak for God?
3. Why do you think people are sometimes able to do mighty works for God even when their hearts are far from him? What insight can we gain from this apparent disconnect?



WATCH

SESSION 21: The House on the Rock

Jesus uses the imagery of the Hebrew Bible to prepare his followers for the coming flood. Learn to see the world through a biblical apocalyptic lens.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:24-27

Key Takeaways

- The rain and flood are strongly established biblical themes representing the moment in the cyclical pattern when God's judgment de-creates the status quo in order to bring about new creation.
- The house on the rock is a stock biblical image for the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus links the people of God's Kingdom to a house God is building on a rock, which can withstand the coming flood.
- Biblical apocalyptic literature teaches us to view the world through the lens of a recurring cycle of themes, ultimately pointing to the final purpose toward which God is steering all creation.

Reflection Questions

1. How is Jesus' parable of the house in the rain connected to themes from the Hebrew Bible?
2. How does seeing the house on the rock as an image for the temple in Jerusalem shape our understanding of what it means to be God's people?
3. What does biblical apocalyptic literature teach us about how to view the world and the course of history? What does it show us about where it is all headed?



SESSION 22: Reflecting on Jesus' Teaching

Jesus finishes his teaching, and the crowds are amazed. Stop and reflect as Matthew invites us to respond to the Sermon on the Mount.

Meditate on Scripture

Matthew 7:28-29

Key Takeaways

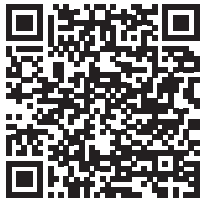
- Matthew highlights the response of the crowd, inviting us to examine our own response and reflect on the words we just heard.
- The astonishing authority of Jesus is a thread that runs throughout the book of Matthew.
- Jesus' teaching is not simplistic, and it invites us into a lifetime of meditation.
- Studying Scripture in community is transformative. Sharing in the perspectives of others builds us up as the Bible invites all of us to be people of God's Kingdom.



WATCH

Reflection Questions

1. Consider your response to Jesus' words. Which part of Jesus' teaching feels most challenging to you?
2. Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class. What themes stand out as you consider the whole of the Sermon on the Mount?
3. Studying Scripture in community is transformative. What are some creative ways to continue to meditate on the Bible with others?



WATCH