**Matthew 1-15 Study**

NOTE: This document is intended to function as a working **framework** to help seekers (specifically in, though not limited to, a Muslim context) understand Christianity and how to study the Bible; it is *not* a lesson plan. It is highly encouraged that you internalize not only the message but also the methodology of seeking to study and obey the Scriptures. The goal is that the disciple understands and applies the key idea and underlying premise of this article through his/her study with you. A couple key questions that you can use to help solidify these concepts are:

* **What did Jesus do?**
* **Where does Jesus talk about this?**

For example, a disciple may ask, "How am I supposed to survive when they start persecuting me?" Your response should be, "Well, what did Jesus do?" And then walk him/her through Matthew 4—how Jesus responds to Satan with the Word and how angels come and minister to him or take him/her to another relevant passage. Another example of a common question you may run into is, "When we pray, do we do the sign of the cross or pray to the Virgin Mary?" You will reply, "Where does Jesus talk about this?" Acknowledge that this isn't found in Scriptures, and take them to Matthew 6 where Jesus speaks about how to pray.

**Key Idea:**

Jesus is the model. We follow His example. We obey what he says.

**Underlying Premise:**

Jesus addresses all the major topics needed for a believer to grow and multiply. Scripture throughout has a natural prioritization of topics that need to be emphasized the most. Our audience already has a preconceived notion of what “Christianity” looks like. It will be valuable to emphasize that we are not Catholic or Orthodox but rather just Christians who follow the Book. Jesus is our model. We follow His example. We obey what he says. All the other ideas about Christianity just toss aside and let’s follow what is written.

The book of Matthew historically has been called the Gospel to the Jews. It quotes Old Testament Prophets extensively, refers to Mosaic Law and Jewish traditions surrounding the Law, and begins to present the Messiah as the Son of God to an audience that was opposed to the idea that God (Jehovah) could be represented in any physical form. In fact this audience had been taught from a young age that to put God into any kind of physical form was blasphemy (see Golden Calf story, rules about idolatry, etc.). Jesus has to carefully navigate this tension by revealing his divinity while simultaneously avoiding the misperception that the Kingdom of God was a political structure that would conquer the world and impose God’s will on earth.

Part of the reason for walking a Muslim through the book of Matthew is that they have many of the same barriers that a Jew in Jesus’ time would have had. They are under the law (often a carbon copy of the Mosaic Law). They are ruled by their traditions that are supposed to draw them closer to God. They are opposed to the idea that God could ever take on physical form. They believe that the Kingdom of God will be imposed through political means.

**Matthew 1**

* **The Genealogy**v.1-17: Jesus is not just a random person/prophet. He has been a part of the plan of God from the beginning.
	+ Discuss the Old Testament, but push the person toward focusing on the New Testament. Inform him/her that the Old Testament will be revisited and studied in the future.
	+ This genealogy is powerful for a Muslim to read. It will create a bridge between the OT and NT. They will not recognize most of the names in the genealogy but they should know at least Abraham, David, and Solomon. This helps build credibility for the Bible and Jesus being the Messiah. This also allows you to defer the reading the OT (people often want to start at the beginning) while still recognizing that it is important. Often this is a good opportunity to give an oral Creation to the Birth of Jesus account and then lead into the next part of Matthew, the birth of Jesus.
* **The Birth of Jesus** v.18-25: Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by a relationship between God and Mary.
	+ His name is "Emmanuel," which means "God with us."
	+ God speaks to Joseph through a dream, which is the 1st of 4 dreams that you will point out.
	+ v.23 - Point out how there are prophesies cited from various prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) throughout the entire book. This is a good opportunity to reemphasize how God has had a plan from the beginning and how Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophesies in His time on earth. If relevant, take them to the corresponding OT passage.
	+ Don’t get hung up on the “Son of God” terminology. This passage is a “subtle apologetic.” They have heard their whole lives that Christians believe God had sexual relations with Mary and that is why Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God. They have probably also heard that Christians pray to Mary (or have seen that portrayed in movies). By having them read this passage you can point out that we in fact do NOT believe that God had sexual relations with Mary and that we actually believe what is written, that it was a miracle. Acting offended and making a big deal out of this helps. One illustration we use is “son of the neighborhood” or “son of the nation” (literal translation of Arabic phrase) that essentially means: you are from this neighborhood, grew up here, we know you. We ask them if when we call them “son of the neighborhood” or “son of the nation” if it means their mother had sexual relations with the whole neighborhood to conceive you. They, of course, think this is preposterous. We tell them that we believe exactly what is written, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit through a miracle and that is why He is called the Son of God in this passage and then we move on. This subtle apologetic helps them to begin questioning other things they have heard (from their imam or other Muslims) about Christians and the Bible. They clearly just read that Jesus was conceived by a miracle.

**Matthew 2**

* **Main Idea:** God miraculously delivers Jesus from Herod, who is trying to kill him.
	+ There are 4 more dreams that occur during which God directs people.
	+ You may need to explain who Herod is (a tyrannical dictator who only cares about power).
	+ The topic of dreams and miracles is widely covered at the end of chapter 1 and all through chapter 2. If they have been having spiritual dreams or signs of any kind this gives you ample opportunity to bring it out. See how God guides people through dreams? Away from danger? Away from a path that would lead to death? See how God directs people and guides people through dreams? What would have happened if the wise men (or Joseph) would have ignored God’s warnings through dreams? Has God ever sent you a spiritual dream or a sign? Even if they haven’t had a spiritual dream or a sign it will be important to talk about this topic as often people will have dreams/visions or miraculous signs happen later on and they will know what to do with them. I often introduce the concept of the “Path” at this point, the idea that we are all on a path, some lead to death and danger, others lead to life and safety. I also introduce the concept of the “Path of the Messiah”—the idea that the Messiah laid out a path for us to follow. He modeled the way and we are to follow his example and obey what he says. I then tell him we will look at the first step in the “Path of the Messiah,” the step of **repentance**.

**Matthew 3**

* **The Baptism of Jesus**: John preaches, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."
	+ You may need to explain that John the Baptist was the last prophet to come before Jesus.
	+ You may need to explain that the Pharisees/Sadducees were comparable to modern-day ultra-conservative religious leaders (i.e. Salafists).
	+ The theme of repentance is important to discuss. Point out John the Baptist’s audience, the Pharisees, as the primary recipients of the message to repent. If they need to repent, where does that leave the rest of us? Discuss how we are all sinners and there is nobody who is perfect.
	+ The next step is **baptism** and Jesus models this for us. Remember the Path of the Messiah is simple, we will do the things he did and obey the things he said. Every Christian is called to repent and then be baptized and Jesus shows us how. He did not need to be baptized but He does so to show us the way.

**Matthew 4**

* **Jesus’ Temptation** v.1-11: Right after his baptism, Satan comes to test and destroy his faith.
	+ Jesus responds with the Word of God. Three times He replies, "it is written."
	+ As we follow Jesus, we will also overcome Satan's temptations as well as persecution by knowing the Word of God.
	+ Upon perseverance, God will deliver us and comfort us (v.11).
	+ It will be important for them to understand that right after repentance and baptism, Satan will come and **test their faith**. They will enter into a time of trials and testing and even persecution. They must hold fast to the Word of God if they will persevere through it, just like Jesus did. Jesus is our example. He modeled for us the way. He endured the temptations and trials of Satan by knowing the Word of God and holding fast to it. God did not abandon him but sent angels to minister to him. God will do the same for you. You must begin to prepare seekers/young disciples for the coming persecution.
* **Jesus Gathers Disciples**v.12-25: Right after the season of temptation, Jesus **gathers people together** and begins to preach and teach.
	+ v.18-22 - This passage is a great example of immediate obedience (note that the sons of Zebedee even leave their own father behind).
	+ v.23 - Signs and wonders accompany the proclamation of the Gospel. Expect both to occur.
	+ The Path of the Messiah from Matthew 3-4. We like to say, “the plan is simple but it is not easy.”
		- **Step 1)** Repent
		- **Step 2)** Be baptized
		- **Step 3)** Endure trials, temptation, persecution
		- **Step 4)** Gather people together, preach and teach, expect miracles
	+ So what are we supposed to teach?

**Matthew 5-7**

* **The Sermon on the Mount:** This passage addresses most of the major topics that a Muslim may be curious about (and where there is often the most hypocrisy)—including fasting, praying, lust, marriage, etc.
	+ [You may need to explain v.31-32 (about divorce) if the translation confuses them. The Bible Study App (if accessible/available) has a good explanation.]
	+ Knowing the local culture, you will quickly realize that almost every major area of hypocrisy present in the society is addressed. Do not be surprised if the reader comments about how Jesus must have lived in his neighborhood or known his family. They will also recognize that what Jesus calls for is far superior to what Islam has produced. Matthew 5-7 may be the best subtle apologetic against Islam out there. It doesn’t directly call Mohamed a liar and fake but it goes after the fruit of Islam. They all know a super religious relative who gives to the poor to be seen by others but robs from his own family members. They all know someone who forces others to come to the mosque with them to pray just so that people will think better of him but drinks alcohol or engages in other forbidden activities. They all know people who will ridicule and insult you during Ramadan for not fasting but will sneak some food or a cigarette during the day. Let the text speak, it can hold its own. This passage is also a good starting point to get people hooked on reading the Bible if they are hesitant because it has “been corrupted.” Ask them to read these passages and ask them what is wrong with it. Encourage them to keep reading.

**Matthew 8 & 9**

* **The Miracles of Jesus:** We see the incredible power of God to heal the sick, cast out demons, control nature, etc. And then these chapters close with a request for more laborers for the harvest.
	+ These miracles and admonitions to count the cost of following Jesus begin to lay the framework of what ministry will look like. These are **faith-building** passages. Plant seeds of faith that they will see the same things as they follow Jesus. The sick will be healed, demons will be cast out, the blind will see, the lame will walk.
	+ Who will go? …

**Matthew 10**

* **Jesus Sends Them Out Two by Two:** YOU will go out to share the Gospel.
	+ This is the will of God for *every* believer. Notice that it lists ALL 12 disciples by name.
	+ It includes warnings about persecution, being fearful, violence, etc.
	+ It finishes with a promise of reward.
	+ They are to follow this model. It is simple. It introduces them to the idea of a person of peace. It introduces the concept of filtering—don’t waste more time on people who are not ready to receive.

**Matthew 11**

* **The Promised Prophet –**v.1-18 are filled with crucial points.
	+ v.13 - Jesus is declaring the end of an era, and the big question is: "What comes next?"
	+ Muslims mistakenly believe that Mohamed was prophesied in the Bible, and will even tell you so; however, this passage clearly lays out that the prophet who was prophesied to come (and who is like Elijah) is John the Baptist because it was said of him that:
		- He lived in the wilderness.
		- He had special clothing.
		- He was the prophet who fulfilled what was written in Malachi 3:1 (Matthew 11:10).
		- Consider this another subtle apologetic. Many Muslims mistakenly believe that the Bible prophesies the coming of the prophet Mohamed, the “final prophet.” This passage can be used as a subtle apologetic against this view. Don’t come out and argue that Mohamed is a false prophet (unless you want to start a fight) but rather point out and emphasize that the Bible foretells of a coming prophet, who would be very powerful (like Elijah) who would call the people to repent, who would live in the desert, who would have strange clothing. In fact, he would be the “greatest one born of a woman,” but his name is John the Baptist... and Jesus tells us clearly that he has come and later we see that he would die. After this section they may ask you point blank what you think of Mohamed. One option is to point them back to the passage and explain that John the Baptist was the last prophet, another option is to defer and tell them that Jesus has other things to say about prophets so keep reading and we will see. Another is to say that Jesus teaches us to “judge a tree by its fruit” and so you always look to see the fruit of a teacher or prophet and judge things by the fruit. If it is rotten at the core then the fruit will be rotten (it may look beautiful but it will be rotten inside). If the tree is good it will produce good fruit. You could say, “I haven’t been here long enough (or I haven’t visited many Muslim countries) to judge the fruit of your prophet but you tell me, how is the fruit?”
* **Dealing with Doubt -**We learn from Jesus how to respond to people who have doubts since John the Baptist himself was unsure about whether or not Jesus was truly the Christ (v.2-6). We are to respond to those doubting by:
	+ - Pointing them to the miracles of Christ (healings, life transformations, etc.)
		- Pointing them to the message that is being preached.
		- Sharing how Jesus does not get angry, insult, or berate the doubter (John).
		- Sharing that they will be blessed if they receive this message.
	+ There will always be people who reject the message despite your outreach strategy, conduct as a follower, and the miracles performed in your midst (v.18-24).
	+ Jesus rebukes those who have witnessed signs and miracles and have not repented (v.20-24). This serves as a warning for those on Judgment Day who will face intolerable things.
* **True Rest** - True rest for your soul can be found in Jesus (v.25-30). The locals will constantly talk about how tired and fed up they are, and we can point them to the solution of Christ.

**Matthew 12**

* **The Sabbath** v.1-14: Keeping the Sabbath
	+ Some people may have questions regarding the meaning of "Sabbath," as well as which day they should celebrate it.
	+ Help them to acquire a basic understanding of Sabbath and help them to understand the key difference between legalism and following the heart of God.
* **Jesus is God's Chosen Servant** v.15-21
* **A True and False Prophet** v.22-37
	+ Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of demons. When you do the same, people may react negatively.
	+ The tree and its fruit combined with the previous story are a good opening for discussing a true prophet and a false prophet. Ask people to examine the "fruits" of their prophet versus the "fruit" that Jesus provides (healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the masses, etc.)
* **Sign of Jonah** v.38-42
	+ This may require some OT backstory (Queen of Sheba, Jonah, etc.).
	+ Point out that Jesus is predicting his death, burial for 3 days, and resurrection.
* **Return of Unclean Spirit** v.43-45
	+ If the evil spirit is simply removed but is not replaced by a new spirit, then it can leave the person in a worse place than before.
	+ It is not enough to simply get rid of the bad—it must be replaced with something good.
	+ This could be a good bridge into sharing personal victories about how the Holy Spirit has transformed your life.
* **Spiritual Family** v.46-50
	+ Jesus redefines family: It is not just flesh and blood; it is those who do the will of God.
	+ They need to view each other as family.

**Matthew 13**

* **Parable of the Sower** v.1-23
	+ There are 4 types of soil, including only one good type. One goes nowhere and this is obvious from the beginning. The other 3 types of soil look the same at the beginning—they all sprout, but only one yields a harvest 30-, 60-, or 100-fold.
	+ Teach them that they will encounter the same 4 types of people. Emphasize that their role is to sow the seeds. Emphasize that there are people just like them that will reap a harvest 100-fold. Warn them that if their faith is not deeply rooted, it will wither.
	+ As we follow Jesus' model, we may end up sowing as he sowed; namely, using parables to help us determine who has ears to hear. Follow Jesus' example.
* **Parable of Weeds** v.24-30, 36-43
	+ Explains Judgment Day, a concept with which locals are very familiar.
* **Parables of the Mustard Seed & Leaven** v.31-33
	+ Begins to introduce the concept of something starting small and growing into something large.
	+ Combined with the parable of the sower it provides a powerful image to a small group of believers on how they can impact the nation. They must continue to sow seeds, and the seeds will grow into a great tree/forest.
	+ The ills of society will be "leavened" as the Gospel begins to affect the mindset. You could ask, “If all of society did a quarter of Matthew 5-7, what would your country look like? If they did half? If they were all obeying Christ?”
* **Parables of Hidden Treasure & Pearl of Great Price** v.44-46
	+ Emphasize that the Kingdom of God is worth selling everything for, that it is worth more than anything else in this world.
* **Parable of the Net** v.47-52
	+ This talks about Judgment Day again. Don't skip the repeated stories or concepts. Jesus repeats them and you should too. People in many cultures are circular learners, not linear. Repetition of key concepts is part of the program.
* **Rejection by Family and Hometown** v.53-58
	+ It is important to point out that even with all the miracles, signs, wonders, incredible teaching, and perfect life that Jesus was still not received by those closest to him.
	+ As we follow Jesus, the same may occur to us. We need to be prepared for persecution from family and the community. It was that way for Jesus and it will be that way for us as well.
	+ There were very few signs/miracles because of their unbelief (v.58). It is done to people according to their faith (recall Matthew 8-9). Reemphasize that we have to have faith in order to witness God move in powerful ways.

**Matthew 14**

* **Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**
	+ God is our provider (one of His names is "Jireh," which means "the Lord is my provider). Out of His compassion, He will provide our every need.
* **Jesus Walks on Water**
	+ God commands us to not be afraid (v.27).
	+ Because of Peter's faith, he was able to participate in a miracle, but when his faith decreased and he embraced fear, he was not able to continue walking out that miracle.
	+ When our eyes are focused on Christ, we will persevere; when we let fear, that comes from our troubling circumstances control us, we will fall.

**Matthew 15**

* **Traditions and Commandments**
	+ Jesus points out people's tendencies toward hypocrisy and emphasizes the importance of honoring God not just with our lips but with our hearts.
	+ You can share how traditions and commandments that are not connected to Christ (and obeying him from our heart) is vain worship to God.
* **What Defiles A Person**
	+ This may be quite shocking to your Muslim friends because their religion deliberately requires them to abstain from certain foods because they are "unclean." Take this as an opportunity to emphasize again that God sees through our actions and looks at our hearts. How we are, or are not, obeying Him at a heart level is far more important to Him.
* **The Faith of a Canaanite Woman**
	+ The Canaanite Woman had great and persistent faith and, as a result, Jesus answered her request. Help your friend to understand that we must have the same sort of faith—not ceding until we receive a response from the Lord.

The goal is not to walk them through every verse and every section of Matthew, although that can occur. It will be good to start off reading with them to give them confidence. People coming from a Muslim background are often intimidated by the Word of God and often lack the confidence that they can read it for themselves. Even if they are literate they are more used to reciting/chanting (but not reading for comprehension and application). By walking them through the first 10 chapters you should be able to give them a very simple framework: **Jesus is the model. We follow what he does and obey what He says.** While building this framework you are also hopefully addressing key barriers to them or their family members coming to faith (Son of God, Virgin Birth, corruption of Scripture, Christianity is an “easy” religion that permits loose morals, what about Mohamed?, etc.). But you are addressing them in such a way that it doesn’t turn into a full blown debate. The goal is to equip them to keep reading and following Jesus. We often encourage them to keep reading between meetings and that the more times they read, the better they will understand. **At any point they may be ready to follow Christ as Lord and Savior and want to repent, be baptized, endure persecution, gather others to follow Christ and teach them how to obey**. At this point it will be helpful to point out that the same pattern they have followed, the way they have learned, is how they can help others. Start them in Matthew, walk them through the first several chapters, encourage them to keep reading (discovering), sharing, and obeying.