



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: Matthew and anti-Jewish themes

Talking to the Kids

Our world is filled with all sorts of hatreds toward people that are different. Different skin color, different religion, different genders or gender identities are all examples of ways that people hate other groups of people.

Sometimes, people even use the scriptures to make it seem like it is okay to hate another entire group of people, solely based on one of those types of categories. People who are Jewish are often targeted for hate because the Bible is used to show how Christ is the only way to know God, and if you do not believe in Christ you must be hated. But this is a false teaching. And we must find ways to teach our children over and over again it is not acceptable to hate another group of people let alone use our faith to be the reason for it.

The scriptures teach us that God is love; that we are to love others as God loves us; that our neighbor needs to feel safe and protected in this world.

Week 11: Matthew chapters 21 and 22

- Antisemitism has existed for a very long time. This is the construct where people who are Jewish are hated, and persecuted, just for being Jewish. The Gospel of Matthew has been used as justification for this kind of hatred and persecution, but it is not the only source. The Gospel of John and even some of Paul's writings, and the Book of Revelation, too, have all had verses taken as justification for this evil.
- So, before going further, let me be clear ... it is never acceptable to hate or persecute an entire class of people based on any of the things that make us different, religion, gender, skin color, language, national origin. Any kind of hatred or persecution of any person or whole group of people for a perceived difference like this is completely antithetical to our teachings and understandings of God today.
- Here is some of the passages in just Matthew that are used for this justification.
 - Matthew uses the phrase "Brood of Vipers" to describe the religious leaders of the Jewish people in 12:34 and 23:33
 - Matthew also views these same leaders as "evil" (9:4; 12:34; 16:4) and as representing the devil (15:13; 13:24-30, 36-43)
 - Matthew has Jesus tell these leaders that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces fruit" (21:43).
 - Some interpreters take these examples and others to suggest that the ultimate rejection of God by Jews is why God chooses to cast them aside in favor of a relationship with the faithful and righteous Gentiles.
- Martin Luther, who our denomination is named for, wrote in his later life numerous anti-Jewish statements as he became increasingly mad that the Jews of his own day did not come running once Luther made the gospel accessible again. These writings have been repudiated by our modern day ELCA and demonstrate how even someone who had such good insights to the gospel could also get it so, so, very wrong.
- It is our responsibility today to understand how scripture has caused so much pain in the world, and how some people have used scripture to cause extensive harm to whole classes of people. And not only are we to understand this, but we are to work on untangling ourselves from the bad theology and create spaces for the holy work of growing more in God's love for all humankind.
- We must also know the difference between criticizing a modern nation state and its policies of genocide against neighboring peoples and the persecution of an entire class of peoples based on religion.
- We cannot change the text. We can deconstruct the theology of hate and division and build up within ourselves a theology of love and reconciliation.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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