

# Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

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**Matthew and The Elephant**

# Our Hosts

**Janet Cheyne McMahon** is a lover of family, dogs, nature, travel, books, and music. Born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she left after 9 months for parts north, landing eventually in Michigan, which will always be “where I’m from.”

Love of learning led Jan to a Bachelor of Arts (History, Political Science) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (Go Blue), and a Master of Arts (Library and Information Science) at the University of South Florida. Amid all that, studied for a time with Rob at Colorado State University, a pivotal time in their lives.

Worked at the U of M-Dearborn Library, and then The Salvation Army Florida Divisional Headquarters, with the greatest reward being in serving as the Divisional Librarian. A librarian is who Jan is “in my soul.”

Jan and Rob have made our home in Florida since 1983, and live now in retirement with their dog, Skye, who makes it all the best adventure. They travel as much as possible, spending time in nature and in diverse places on this amazing planet. It has all been, and continues to be a fascinating journey, with hope of making a difference, in small ways, by being brave enough to speak and act on behalf of others.

**Rob McMahon** is a native Michigander, born in Saginaw and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. Rob attended Michigan State University, graduating in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He did graduate studies at the University of Michigan and the University of South Florida. Rob is retired, having spent 36 years in public education teaching both high school chemistry and biology and middle school science. He worked as a total quality management trainer for the Pinellas County School District and served four years as the president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. Rob cofounded a non-profit total quality management training center, The Learning Co-op, for Teacher Unions interested in applying the W. Edwards Deming continuous improvement principles to their day-to-day operations. He worked with teacher unions in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas and Michigan. He also worked in a similar capacity with Jim Shipley & Associates. In retirement Rob has written a series of science related children’s books, and enjoys traveling with his wife, Jan, and their Black Labrador Retriever, Skye.

**Deanna Cheyne**, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto (1996), studying with such luminaries as Elmer Eisler, Doreen Rao, Greta Kraus, Lois Marshall, and Rosemarie Landry.

Dee taught music at Mississauga Christian Academy, served as music director for Meadowvale Bible Baptist Church (Mississauga, Ontario), served as Assistant Divisional Music Director for The Salvation Army in Florida, is a former member of Tampa’s Master Chorale, and, for the past 18 years, has been a public school teacher.

Dee has visit 36 of the 50 U.S. states, and 12 countries. Her favorite destinations include France, Prague, New Orleans, National Parks, & Hawaii.

Dee & Jim live in Florida with Brigus (Golden Retriever) and Pip (Teacup Yorkie).

**James Cheyne**, born in Galesburg, Illinois, earned a Bachelor of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from Michigan State University (1978); and a Master of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (1981), studying with David Liptak, Salvatore Martirano, and Ben Johnston.

Jim has served as music director for The Salvation Army in Central Illinois & Eastern Iowa, Orlando Area Command, and the Florida Division, served as a pastor with The Salvation Army, and was a public school teacher for 17 years.

In travel so far, Jim has visited 50 states and 27 countries. His favorite travel destinations include National Parks, New Orleans, Newfoundland, Argentina, Prague, & France.

Jim continues to write music and support Dee’s musical endeavors, and cooks whenever absolutely necessary. Jim & Dee live in Florida with their dogs Brigus & Pip.



L-R: Brigus, Jim, Deanna, Skye, Jan, Rob.  
Inset: Pip

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# Matthew and The Elephant

#86 - Season 3; Episode 25

3/4/2026

Host: Jim.

| *The 4 gospels. The blind men and the elephant. The Gospel of Matthew. Jesus and Moses. Jesus and History. Gematria. The women in Jesus' genealogy. Jesus and the prophets.*

[Music]

[Music ends]

**JIM:** For today's adventure, let's visit the land of Matthew. There are some fascinating sights there, and even some off-the-beaten-path secrets hidden in plain view. But I'll begin with a cartoon I saw last Easter.

Jesus is at the Last Supper addressing the disciples. "I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that one of you will betray me this very night. The good news is that four of you are about to get a book deal."

Clever, but it has one glaring problem. Of our four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, of those four book deals, only Matthew and John were actually at the Last Supper. Mark and Luke, how shall we say this? Well, they had leftovers.

The four of us here at Making Our Way, Jan, Rob, Dee, and myself. We were raised with The Salvation Army as our home church. It's a Protestant evangelical offshoot of Methodism, so we attended Sunday school every Sunday, we learned the basics of the faith there, and we learned about the Bible. For some reason, we memorized the order of all of its 66 books. Must have been a contest with prizes or something, I don't recall. We knew where to find the stories about Adam and Eve, and the stories about Moses, and we knew the stories about Noah fit in between those somewhere. We could find the Sermon on the Mount. Someone found the Song of Solomon by accident, and showed us when our parents weren't around.

Since those days each of us has made our own way, sometimes varying right sometimes left, mostly deeper.

For my part in this adventure, let's head over to the mid-70s when I was an undergrad at Michigan State University, and needed to take some humanities courses. I found a New Testament class taught by the head of the religious studies department himself, Reverend Dr. Robert Anderson. And on day one, Professor Anderson warned us not to expect an easy grade in his class. He said students had complained that even St. Paul himself would have barely managed a 3.0.

He gave us what I thought was a rather simple homework assignment that day. Read the

book of Mark. Well, I had grown up reading Mark. Or had I? I had read portions of it, yes, but this was to be the first time reading Mark straight through in one sitting, and I was surprised. Mark is short. And it's missing a lot of stuff. Why is that? I didn't know it at the time, but that assignment launched me on a lifelong adventure exploring how the gospels were put together, and how the Bible as a whole came about. I had grown up thinking the Jesus story was a single narrative divvied up among four gospels. But that was about to change. Why four gospels? Couldn't it be just one? Well, Sunday School had a ready-made explanation.

You've heard the old tale of the blind man encountering an elephant for the first time, haven't you? Each one disagreeing with the other about what an elephant was, because each one was touching a different part of it, one touching a leg, another the trunk, another a tusk, and we would need all of their accounts to get a complete picture of the elephant. Or so the story went. Likewise we need four gospels, each telling its own portion of the story, each with its own viewpoint, to see the whole picture.

Well that's nice and neat, but that's a Sunday school explanation, and I see a problem with it. These gospels came out at different times and in different places, and a couple of generations would pass before the four were collected together in one place. And that meant that the first Christians, maybe the first few generations of Christians, none of them had the complete gospel story themselves. They could not see the whole elephant, and they wouldn't see it for maybe a century or more. And that just didn't make sense to leave the gospel story so incomplete for so long right at the beginning, right at the outset. So, no, the elephant story didn't work for me.

What did work for me was this. Each gospel had not only its own viewpoint, but also its own point of view. Plus, each gospel had to carry the full weight of Jesus' story all by itself for quite a while. And that stirs up some issues, which is a good thing. For instance, I want to know why Matthew had some stories that Mark does not have, or to turn it around, why Mark eliminated some of the great stories we find in Matthew. I want to know how gospels can agree word for word in some passages, but disagree in others, sometimes with incompatible details.

But let's stop right here for a moment because things could get complicated. There's a fork in the road. That way over there are the woods, and we would find amazing things in those woods, like the synoptic problem, and the question of Markan priority, and the Q hypothesis, and questions about who really wrote the gospels, and the manuscript trail the gospels have left, and the dozens of other gospels and writings that didn't make the cut. I've been in those woods several times over the past few years - and by few years I could mean fifty or more. That way will take a very long time to explore, and we have only twenty-five minutes or so. Plus people get lost in there, and are never heard from or seen again.

On the other hand, this way over here leads straight to those fascinating sights in Matthew, and the secrets we can find there. Plus, There are road signs along the way to guide us, three of them: "Jesus and Moses." "Jesus and History." "Jesus and the prophets." Let's see what 25 minutes will bring.

### **Road sign number one: Jesus and Moses.**

When I thought all four gospels were saying pretty much the same thing, I wouldn't have

noticed what Matthew was doing here, what Matthew was doing with Moses. But it's obvious when you look at Matthew by itself, Matthew goes out of his way to pose Jesus as a second Moses. And there are many examples of this, so this list might start to sound like one of those "Lincoln had a secretary named Kennedy" things.

From Matthew's point of view, both Moses and Jesus were hidden at birth and were saved from a ruler who had ordered an infanticide.

Moses fled from Egypt. Jesus returned from Egypt.

Moses passed through the Red Sea and was in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan and was in the wilderness for forty days.

Angels attended to both Moses and Jesus during their wilderness journeys.

Moses delivered his law and covenant from Mount Sinai. Jesus delivered his law and covenant from the Sermon on the Mount.

Moses delivered his teachings in five large books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Jesus delivered his teachings in five large discourses, from the Sermon on the Mount to the Mount of Olives.

John Wilkes Booth had three names, shot Lincoln in a theater, and was captured in a warehouse. Lee Harvey Oswald had three names and shot Kennedy from a warehouse and was captured in a theater.

The point is, the question to ask is, why was Matthew making these comparisons between Moses and Jesus? And there's a really good answer right up ahead. But first we've come to...

### **Road sign number two: Jesus and history.**

What if Professor Anderson, instead of assigning the Book of Mark, had assigned, say, the first ten chapters of First Chronicles, with a quiz to follow. Those first chapters have all that begat stuff. I tell you, I would have dropped the class after about 20 begats. Matthew, you know, also begins with begats, but his genealogy is fascinating.

He starts with the Hebrew people and their genesis in Abraham and follows their ascent from those humble beginnings all the way up to the pinnacle King David, the Messiah, the Anointed One, which as we know is what "Messiah" means. From that high water mark, there follows a tragic decline down to the Babylonian exile. Then, from that lowest of low points, Matthew traces another ascent up to the birth of Jesus, the new anointed one, the new Messiah.

"So all the generations, from Abraham to David," writes Matthew, "are fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon. 14 generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, 14 generations."

Fourteen and fourteen and fourteen and why all the numbers? What's Matthew getting at with these numbers? Steady yourself. There's a patch of woods here.

A little while ago - and by "a little while" I could mean 50 years or more - a little while ago I learned about gematria. I might not have learned how to pronounce it. I think it's "ge-MAH-

tree-uh." Brits probably say "ge-MAY-tree-uh." Anyway, gematria is the practice of using letters to represent not only sounds but also numbers. How does it work? Well, in English, the letter A could represent the number 1. B would then be the number 2, C the number 3, and so on. Now, technically, that's called a cipher because we already have digits to represent numbers in English. The ancient Hebrews and Greeks, however did not. They used letters of their alphabets to represent numbers, which meant a person's name could also be a number. Take "Jim," for example. J is the tenth letter. I the ninth and M the 13th, so "Jim" could be 10 plus 9 plus 13, or 32.

(Note to Jan, did you catch that? 32? And for your part, the tetragrammaton, Y-H-W-H, equals 26, and you're welcome.)

The most notorious example of gematria is in Revelation 13, as we know, the number of the beast. Yes, we're talking about 666. Aren't you glad you tuned in today? 666 is the number of a man, but the author doesn't otherwise identify him. So people have used 666 to slander anyone they disliked, and I mean really disliked. Christians used it against Muhammad. Protestants assigned it to the Pope. Catholics were just sure it had to be Luther. Political figures were, and are, perfect targets as well. Napoleon, Hitler, Gorbachev, Obama, of course, Trump, certainly. It's a game people play. In the 80s, someone noticed that Ronald Wilson Reagan was three six-letter words in a row, and that can't be a coincidence. Among serious scholars, though, those who don't have a score to settle, the general consensus is that 666 referred to Nero whose Greek name using Hebrew letters adds up to 666. But, wait a minute, Nero was Roman, so shouldn't we use his Latin name with Hebrew letters? Sure, and that adds up to 616, and as it happens, the number of the beast in the earliest manuscript of Revelation is, yes, 616. See? One Nero fits all.

Okay, we're clear of those woods. Back to my question. Why was Matthew fixated on the number 14? Quick answer? David. It's all about David, that high point, that pinnacle, that Messiah. "David," when written in Hebrew, is ט (Dalat) ו (Vav) ד (Dalet). Wouldn't it be something if those letters just happened to add up to Matthew's number 14? Let's see, in Hebrew, ט (Dalit) equals 4, ו (Vav) equals 6, so ד (Dalet) plus ו (Vav) plus ט (Dalet) is 4 plus 6 plus 4, which equals - checking my math - yep. It's 14. It's quite possible that Matthew used three groups of fourteen to announce Jesus with "David, David, David."

Or...

There's another possibility. We could also divide those fourteens into sevens. So instead of three fourteens, we'd have six sevens. And no, I didn't do that just so I could say 6-7. That's over. Done. I did it because there's something quite special for Israel in the number seven, as we know. Matthew gives us six groups of seven leading up to Jesus, making Jesus the start of the seventh, well, the seventh something. That seventh something, though, is big. The first one's easy. On the seventh day, labors were to cease. The Sabbath rest. But there's more. In the seventh year, indentured slaves were to be set free. In the seventh year, debts were to be canceled. This is all in Deuteronomy.

Is this what Matthew was getting at? He places Jesus at that seventh position, and it's the seventh year that cancels debt, the seventh year that frees the slaves, and it's the seventh day that is our Sabbath rest. It's an obvious and beautiful thought. And when combined with Jesus as the new David, we have some very appealing ideas. As genealogies go, Matthews has all my attention.

And it holds one more secret. Maybe you've seen it. The Women. Matthew names four women - five if we include Mary. Ancient Hebrew genealogies are patriarchal, and generally record men's names only, so why does Matthew include these women?

Let's be straight up about this. Imagine, if you will, the burden that Mary - and yes, Joseph - imagine the burden carried against all of the whispers, all of the looks, all of the rumors.

"Hey Mary, run this by us one more time, will you? You come to be pregnant how? And before marriage? And Joseph was - what should we say? - uninvolved?"

The situation could hardly have earned Mary any praise or adoration. Matthew will take this on directly in just a few verses when he introduces the virgin birth. But he begins his argument here by presenting four women in Jesus' genealogy who had, let's say, uncertain reputations of their own, but who were used by God nevertheless.

Tamar, a Gentile, tricked Judah into sleeping with her by disguising herself as a prostitute. Rahab, a Gentile, was a prostitute who helped Israel. Ruth, a Gentile, seduced Boaz in a manner that would have brought shame had it been discovered. Matthew then references Bathsheba, but doesn't use her name, calling her only "the wife of Uriah," who was a Gentile. How Bathsheba and David got together is well known. Look into their lives and into the outcomes. And, well here's the polite Sunday school friendly way to say it. Matthew's message is that God can consecrate and use anyone for good, whatever their past, yes, including Gentiles. Forget the rumors you might have heard about Mary, says Matthew. She is fully qualified to be God's faithful servant.

And that brings us to...

### **Road sign number three: Jesus and the prophets.**

If you remember the phrase, "this was done in order to fulfill...", you're likely remembering something from Matthew. It's his pet phrase to bring up prophecy. He does it over a dozen times. But let's be careful with that word "fulfill" here. When Matthew says that Jesus fulfilled a prophecy, he is not saying those prophecies were meaningless until Jesus came along. Those prophecies were not mystery texts, some Nostradamus puzzles no one could decipher until Jesus revealed everything. It's closer to say these prophecies responded to or resonated with events in Jesus' life.

Let me try an illustration.

As a music teacher, when it was time to teach acoustics, I would do this demonstration. I'd go to the piano, hold down the sustain pedal, and play a note on a trumpet. When the trumpet note stopped, you could still hear it sounding inside the piano. You could also hear kids say, "Wow! Magic!" But it's sympathetic vibration. The trumpet sound awakened vibrations in the piano strings that matched the trumpet's pitch.

To me, that's analogous to what's happening when Matthew says that Jesus fulfilled a prophecy. Something in Jesus' life awakened a memory, awakened an echo from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Listen to Matthew.

*"Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son." That echoes Isaiah 7.*

*"Rachel weeping for her children." That echoes Jeremiah 31.*

*"Out of Egypt have I called my son," echoing Hosea 11.*

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," echoing Isaiah 40, and so forth.*

Matthew does this over 20 times, not to claim that those passages were meaningless until Jesus came, not even to say they are repurposed in Jesus, but to show that ancient history resonates with the presence in Jesus' life, that it rhymes, and that Jesus' ministry was well prepared by the past and is intimately connected to it.

There is one prophecy, however, that I think is even stronger than these. And for this one, Matthew doesn't use his "this was done..." formula. He doesn't need it.

Israel had always expected a new, ultimate messiah, ever since Moses said this,

*"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from among your countrymen. You shall listen to him."*

That's Deuteronomy 18, 15. And let's remember that phrase, "listen to him."

Fast forward to Jesus' baptism when the voice out of heaven says,

*"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

And now to the real magic. High on a mountain where Jesus' face shines like the sun, and Moses appears with him to represent the law, and Elijah appears with him to represent the prophets. And the three are in conversation with one another, and again we hear that voice.

*"This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Word for word, as we heard it at the baptism. But this time something new is added.

*"This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."*

Listen to him.

Matthew writes in Greek, and he quotes the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek, and he quotes Moses exactly.

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17.*

Matthew's portrait of Jesus is the size of a mural, and we've just seen the frame and a bit of the corner so far. But time and schedules require us to summarize now and leave the rest for another time.

So, Matthew frames his story with two scandals: the scandal of Jesus' birth, and the scandal of a crucified Messiah. These two events, however, fall not in the realm of disgrace, but in the realm of providence, and between them Matthew fills his story with fulfillments of Israel's story, connections to David and to Moses, and with ultimate appeal to the voice of God himself. This is a powerful narrative arc, one which I might never have seen had it not been for that first assignment from Professor Anderson. This one example encourages us to see the Bible as a whole, yes, but not at the expense of seeing that each author contributes

his or her own point of view. Each writes from and for unique circumstances, and those circumstances and those points of view will, from time to time, resonate with our lives as well.

*[Music]*

Over the years in this podcast, I've offered thoughts on various passages from the Bible, and I'd like to do more. Maybe check out how some of those other book deals worked out. Better yet, I'd like to entice Jan or Rob or Dee to the mic so that they could offer their personal adventures all the way from Sunday school to, well, to wherever they are now.

By the way, I took three classes from Professor Anderson and got a 3.5 each time. I hope St. Paul is paying attention.

For now, thank you for joining me. It was a pleasure to have your company today, as I have been Making My Way.

Until next time.

*[Music ends]*