

# Matthew

## Background on the Gospels

In His providence, God the Holy Spirit recorded and preserved not just one account of the life, the teachings, and the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but four. They are not identical, instead, each of the four evangelists wrote under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit according to a definite plan and for a definite original circle of readers. Although the four Gospels are similar in a general way, each Gospel has its own distinct character as the writer molds his presentation of the life of Christ to the specific needs of his original reading audience. It is important to realize that the four Gospel records *supplement* each other rather than *contradict* each other. As we look at each of the Gospels we will look at the individual characteristics and purposes for each of the four Gospels.

## Title & Holy Writer

Nowhere in this Gospel is the author mentioned by name. The title, “*The Gospel according to Matthew*,” as it occurs in most of our Bibles, is not part of the inspired Word of God, but was added by editors after it was written in order to distinguish it from the other Gospel records. Although none of the New Testament books reveal the identity of the holy writer of this Gospel, the early church and the church fathers were united in naming the apostle Matthew as the holy writer. Therefore, it is fitting that the title of this Gospel should be “*according to Matthew*.”

Matthew, a publican, or tax collector, was also known as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He was called by Jesus to be a disciple, one of the Twelve (Matthew 9:9ff; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27f). Matthew’s quick response to Jesus would indicate that he was already somewhat familiar with the Christ and His teaching. Following his call Matthew gives a dinner to introduce Jesus to his friends – sinners who were in need of God’s forgiveness (Luke 5:29-32). Matthew’s sinful character (Matthew 5:46; 11:19; 18:17) and conversion

illustrates the depth of the grace of God, much as Paul’s conversion does. As a tax collector Matthew would have been an educated man, and well off. Little is known about Matthew other than what the Gospels reveal. His last appearance in Scripture is found in Acts 1:13, among the list of the apostles, though tradition holds that he spent fifteen years preaching in Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension and then went out as a missionary to many foreign nations.

## Position in the New Testament

It is very fitting that the Gospel of Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, since it clearly bridges the 400 year gap between the Old and New Testaments. This Gospel points to the fact that Jesus came not to destroy the Law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). Matthew demonstrates that Christianity was not a new religion which was intended to replace Judaism, but was a fulfillment of the Jewish religion found in the Old Testament and of the promises God made to His Old Testament people. This link is made clear as Matthew refers to the Old Testament over 60 times in his Gospel – far more often than any of the other Gospels (cf. the common use of the phrase, “*that it might be fulfilled...*” in the Gospel of Matthew - 1:22; 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4;26:56; 27:35).

## Purpose

The purpose of the Gospel of Matthew is to present to the Jews the inescapable conclusion, drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah prophesied of in the Old Testament.

As we look closely at the book we realize that it was written by a Jew, and was originally intended for Jews. This is brought out by:

- The many references to the Old Testament scriptures pointing the Jews (who were familiar with the Old Testament) to how it was fulfilled by Jesus.
- In the very first chapter as the genealogy of Jesus is traced

back through David to the Jewish patriarch Abraham (through His father Joseph).

- The fact that Matthew never explains Jewish customs or practices, nor does he give any information concerning the geography of the land as do other Gospel writers.
- The common use of the words *king* (22 times) and *kingdom* (19 times), and the phrases *kingdom of heaven* (32 times - found only in Matthew) and *kingdom of God* (5 times). This was especially important for the Jewish people because they thought of the kingdom as a political force, so Matthew shows them that God's promised kingdom was rather a spiritual kingdom.
- And in the use of the words *righteous* (12 times) and *righteousness* (6 times). Remember that this was a key topic of the Pharisees, and here Matthew gives the correct view of righteousness. It can also be noted that Matthew records more of the clashes between Jesus and the various Jewish sects than the other Gospel writers.

## Time and Original Language

The Gospel of Matthew was probably written sometime between 50-65 A.D. It was probably not written right away after Jesus' ascension since Matthew indicates that a longer amount of time had elapsed since the events recorded originally happened. In his Gospel he refers to two things remaining the same "***to (or until) this day***" (cf. "***Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day***" 27:8; and "***So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day***" 28:15). But since Matthew does not refer to the fall of Jerusalem (which took place in 70 A.D.) but simply speaks of it as a future event (Matthew 24), his Gospel most likely was written prior to that event.

Some believe that Matthew wrote his Gospel first in Aramaic, then again in Greek, since Eusebius (323 A.D.) quotes Papias (140 A.D.) who speaks of an Aramaic writing of this Gospel. While this

may be possible, no Aramaic Gospel of Matthew has ever been found, while the Greek is still with us.

## Contents

The Gospel of Matthew is not laid out in a strict chronological order, but is laid out by similarity of material. It can be grouped into different parts arranged around the numbers three, five, and seven, probably to aid the memory of the reader.

There are three major divisions in the genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17), three illustrations of hypocrisy and piety (6:1-18), and three parables of planting and growth (13:1-32).

Jesus' words are presented in five great discourses (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) and within the Sermon on the Mount the holy writer records five examples which explain the full meaning of God's Law (5:21-48).

Jesus pronounces seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees (23:13-36), and Matthew 13 contains seven parables.

As noted, the purpose of the book of Matthew is to present to the Jews Jesus as their Messiah. He uses at least sixty-five Old Testament quotations and allusions to make his point (cf. 12:29f; 13:13ff,35; 17:5-13; 24:30ff; 12:17-21). Matthew also presents Jesus as their King (1:23; 2:2,6; 3:17; 4:15ff; 21:59; 22:44f; 26:64; 27:11,27-37), and even refers to Jesus as the *Son of David* nine times.

## Outline

### Matthew: The Gospel of the Messiah (Tenney)

- I. The Prophecies of the Messiah Realized (1:1-4:11)
- II. The Principles of the Messiah Announced (4:12-7:29)
- III. The Power of the Messiah Revealed (8:1-11:1)
- IV. The Program of the Messiah Explained (11:2-13:53)
- V. The Purpose of the Messiah Declared (13:54-19:2)
- VI. The Problems of the Messiah Presented (19:3-26:2)
- VII. The Passion of the Messiah Accomplished (26:3-28:20)