

## **Gospel of Matthew**

The four Gospels present a fourfold view of the life of Christ.

Except for scant references by Tacitus and Josephus, our entire knowledge of the life of Jesus comes from these gospel accounts.

The early accounts probably were passed on verbally in the Aramaic language and then recorded in Greek manuscripts between A.D. 60 and 90.

All four Gospels build upon genuine historical tradition and preserve different aspects of it.

The basic purpose of the Gospels is to present the gospel message, the Good News of the Redeemer-Savior.

They present Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world.

The Gospels were written so that their readers would come to believe in Christ and receive eternal life (compare John 20:31).

They view Jesus as the Lord of Glory who is presently alive and active in heaven.

**Order of the Gospels:** The order of the Gospels has been generally recognized by the church throughout its history.

“The Gospel of Matthew occupies first place in all extant witnesses to the text of the four Gospels and in all early lists of the canonical books of the New Testament” (R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, page 11).

Matthew’s emphasis on the Old Testament preparation for the gospel makes it an ideal “bridge” from the Old to the New Testament.

The Gospels present four portraits of Jesus, each in its own characteristic manner.

Matthew, the Hebrew tax collector, writes for the Hebrew mind.

Mark, the travel companion of Paul and Peter, writes for the Roman mind.

Luke, Paul’s physician-missionary, writes with the Greek mentality in view.

John’s gospel is different by nature from the other three.

It is an interpretation of the facts of Jesus’ life rather than a presentation of its facts that are in historical sequence.

**Title:** Matthew, meaning “gift of the Lord”, was the other name of Levi (9:9), the tax collector who left everything to follow Christ (Luke 5:27-28).

Matthew was one of the 12 apostles (10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

In his own list of the 12, he explicitly calls himself a “tax collector” (10:3).

Nowhere else in Scripture is the name Matthew associated with “tax collector”; the other evangelists always employ his former name, Levi, when speaking of his sinful past.

This is evidence of humility on Matthew’s part.

As with the other 3 gospels, this work is known by the name of its author.

**Author and Date:** The canonicity and Matthean authorship of this gospel were unchallenged in the early church.

Eusebius (ca. A.D. 265-339), quotes Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254):

Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, by afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism (Ecclesiastical History, 6:25).

It is clear that this gospel was written at a relatively early date, prior to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

Some scholars have proposed a date as early as A.D. 50.

A unique statement within the Book of Matthew provides internal evidence to its authorship.

The account of the call of Matthew (chapter 9), is followed by that of a meal taken by Jesus in the company of “publicans and sinners”.

One valid translation of this passage says the meal took place “at home”.

The parallel account in Mark 2:15 clearly says this feast really took place in Levi’s or (Matthew’s), house”.

Here, therefore, is a phrase that may betray the identity of the author.

### **Background – Setting:**

The Jewish flavor of Matthew’s gospel is remarkable.

This is very evident even in the opening genealogy, which Matthew then traces it back only as far as Abraham.

In contrast, Luke, aiming to show Christ as the Redeemer of humanity, then goes all the way back to Adam.

Matthew's purpose is somewhat narrower.

To demonstrate that Christ is the King and Messiah of Israel.

This gospel quotes more than 60 times from Old Testament prophetic passages, emphasizing how Christ is the fulfillment of all those promises.

The probability that Matthew's audience was predominantly Jewish is further evident from several facts: Matthew usually cites Jewish custom without explaining it, in contrast to the other gospels (compare Mark 7:3; John 19:40).

He constantly refers to Christ as "the Son of David" (1:1; 9:27, 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45).

Matthew even guards Jewish sensibilities regarding the name of God, referring to "the kingdom of heaven" where the other evangelists speak of "the kingdom of God".

All of the book's major themes are rooted in the Old Testament and set in light of Israel's messianic expectations.

Matthew's use of Greek may suggest that he was writing as a Palestinian Jew to the Hellenistic Jews elsewhere.

He wrote as an eyewitness of many of the events he described, giving firsthand testimony about the words and works of Jesus of Nazareth.

His purpose is clear: to demonstrate that Jesus is the Jewish nation's long-awaited Messiah.

His voluminous quoting of the Old Testament is specifically designed to show the tie between the Messiah of promise and the Christ of history.

This purpose is never out of focus for Matthew, and he even adduces many incidental details from the Old Testament prophecies as proofs of Jesus' messianic claims (e.g. 2:17-18; 4:13-15; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10).

### **Historical – Theological Themes:**

Since Matthew is concerned with setting forth Jesus as Messiah, the King of the Jews, an interest in the Old Testament kingdom promises runs throughout this gospel.

Matthew's signature phrase "the kingdom of heaven" occurs 32 times in this book (and nowhere else in all of Scripture).

The opening genealogy is designed to document Christ's credentials as Israel's king, and the rest of the book completes this theme.

Matthew shows that Christ is the heir of the kingly line.

He demonstrates that He is the fulfillment of dozens of Old Testament prophecies regarding the king who would come.

He offers evidence after evidence to establish Christ's kingly prerogative.

All other historical and theological themes in the book revolve around this one.

Matthew records 5 major discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7); the commissioning of the apostles (chapter 10); the parables about the kingdom (chapter 13); a discourse about the childlikeness of the believer (chapter 18); and the discourse on His second coming (chapters 24-25).

Each discourse ends with a variation of this phrase: "when Jesus had finished these words" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

That becomes a motif signaling a new narrative portion.

A long opening section (chapters 1-4), and a short conclusion (28:16-20), bracket the rest of the gospel, which naturally divides into 5 sections, each with a discourse and a narrative section.

Some have seen a parallel between these 5 sections and the 5 books of Moses that are found in the Old Testament.

The conflict between Christ and Pharisaism is another common theme in Matthew's gospel.

But Matthew is keen to show the error of the Pharisees from the benefit of his Jewish audience, not for personal or self-aggrandizing reasons.

Matthew omits, for example, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, even though that parable would have put him in a favorable light.

Matthew also mentions the Sadducees more than any of the other gospels.

Both Pharisees and Sadducees are regularly portrayed negatively, and held up as warning beacons.

Their doctrine is a leaven that must be avoided (16:11-12).

Although these groups were doctrinally at odds with one another, they were united in their hatred of Christ.

To Matthew, they epitomized all in Israel who rejected Christ as King.

The rejection of Israel's Messiah is another constant theme in this gospel.

In no other gospel are the attacks against Jesus portrayed as strongly as here.

From the flight into Egypt to the scene at the cross, Matthew paints a more vivid portrayal of Christ's rejection than any of the other evangelists.

In Matthew's account of the crucifixion, for example, no thief repents and no friends or loved ones are seen at the foot of the cross.

In His death, He is forsaken even by God (27:46).

The shadow of rejection is never lifted from the story.

Yet Matthew portrays Him as a victorious King who will one day return "on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (24:30).