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8-25-2022

### Introduction to "Matthew"

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#### Recommended Citation

Cortez, Félix H. and Paroschi, Keldie, "Introduction to "Matthew"" (2022). *Faculty Publications*. 4865.  
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# Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew introduces the New Testament and forms a bridge between the Old Testament and New Testament. It records the story of Jesus of Nazareth—the long-awaited Messiah foretold to Israel through the centuries.

## AUTHOR

The author of the Gospel does not identify himself in the text. The title “According to Matthew” first appears in a manuscript from Egypt dated to the early third century AD. However, church fathers from the beginning of the second century (Papias, AD 135, and Irenaeus, AD 175) attributed authorship to Matthew-Levi, one of the twelve apostles. The lack of other traditions associating the Gospel with someone else speaks strongly in favor of Matthew, the tax collector, as its author (Matt. 9:9; 10:3. The Gospels of Mark and Luke call him “Levi”: Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).

## DATE

The Gospel of Matthew does not provide any clear indication of when it was written. Irenaeus (second century AD) mentions that the Gospel was written while Paul and Peter were still alive (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1). Since Matthew shares so much in common with Mark, many believe that Matthew relied upon Mark when writing his gospel, though some believe Matthew was written first. Assuming Mark was written first, sometime in the late 50s or early 60s, Matthew would have to have been written after the completion of Mark’s Gospel, perhaps in the 60s or 70s. The prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 has led some scholars to date Matthew after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. If we believe that Jesus could foretell the future, such reasoning is not convincing.

## AUDIENCE

The Gospel of Matthew seems to have in mind a predominantly Jewish audience. We can see this, for example, in its emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies by several quotations and allusions to Old Testament texts. The Gospel also makes numerous parallels between Jesus and both Moses and David, key figures for Jewish readers. Finally, Matthew does not seem concerned about explaining Jewish customs, such as the use of phylacteries and fringes in Matthew 23:5, suggesting that his audience was already familiar with such practices. Though most scholars agree that the book of Matthew originated in Palestine, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact audience and place of composition. Some suggest Antioch; others favor Galilee.



Date of writing  
before AD 70



## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

The Gospel of Matthew connects the Old Testament with the New Testament, not only because of its position in the biblical canon but also because of its emphasis on demonstrating how Jesus of Nazareth fulfills Israel's expectation of a Messiah. The very first verse of the book immediately indicates that Jesus' connection with Abraham and David validates Him as the One in whom God would fulfill His promises to Israel, thus continuing the development of salvation history.

The Gospel presents Jesus as inaugurating a new community of faith. Consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, the church of God transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries. It is the authority of Jesus, given to Him by God, that endows His teachings with so much power (Matt. 7:28; 9:8; 22:33), and true disciples would seek to follow in Jesus' footsteps. One of Jesus' main concerns in the Gospel of Matthew is that of teaching the values of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:17, 23; 9:35). The word "kingdom" appears 55 times in the book—the most occurrences in the New Testament. This kingdom has already begun with Jesus, but its final fulfillment is still to come.

## STRUCTURE

The book focuses on the two important aspects of Jesus' ministry: His teachings and His deeds. Matthew records five major sermons or discourses of Jesus reported at considerable length: (1) the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29), (2) the discourse on discipleship (9:35–11:1), (3) the Sermon by the Sea (consisting entirely of parables [13:1–53]), (4) the discourse on humility (18:1–19:1), and (5) the discourse on the judgment of Jerusalem and Christ's return, known as the Olivet Discourse. In His teachings, Christ helps His listeners understand the nature of God's law and His kingdom. Matthew alternates each of these discourses with narrative stories.

As you read through Matthew's account, pay attention to how Jesus puts specific teachings into practice in the narrative sections. In seeking to make disciples, it is through these stories that Matthew demonstrates how followers of Jesus are to act in light of what they have learned.

## OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction: Jesus' Background and Preparation for Ministry (1:1–4:11)
  - A. The Birth and Infancy of Jesus (1:1–2:23)
  - B. The Baptism and Testing of Jesus (3:1–4:11)
- II. Jesus Proclaims God's Kingdom in Galilee (4:12–7:29)
  - A. Jesus' Early Ministry in Galilee (4:12–25)
  - B. First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)
- III. The Power of God's Kingdom in Jesus (8:1–11:1)
  - A. The Power of Jesus over Disease, Nature, and Demons (8:1–9:34)
  - B. Second Discourse: Evangelism and Opposition (9:35–11:1)
- IV. Ministry and Opposition (11:2–13:53)

- A. Stories of Belief and Rejection (11:2–12:50)
- B. Third Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1–53)
- V. The Close of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (13:54–18:35)
  - A. Polarized Responses to Jesus and His Message (13:54–17:27)
  - B. Fourth Discourse: Greatness in God's Kingdom (18:1–35)
- VI. The Journey to Jerusalem (19:1–20:34)
  - A. Teaching about Divorce and Wealth (19:1–30)
  - B. A Parable about the Generosity of God (20:1–16)
  - C. Sacrificial Ministry (20:17–28)
  - D. Healing the Blind in Jericho (20:29–34)
- VII. The Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem (21:1–25:46)
  - A. Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem (21:1–22)
  - B. Controversy in the Temple (21:23–22:46)
  - C. Fifth Discourse: the Judgment of Jerusalem (23:1–25:46)
- VIII. Passion and Resurrection (26:1–28:20)
  - A. Betrayal, Arrest, and Trial (26:1–27:31)
  - B. Crucifixion and Burial (27:32–66)
  - C. Resurrection and Post-resurrection Appearances (28:1–20)

## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

One of the most important things in the mind of society during Jesus' time was honor. People in His world measured everything—behavior, character, beliefs—against the question: Is it honorable? Successful orators, philosophers, and teachers were those who were able to show that their teachings and values led to the greatest honor. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as an honorable teacher and demonstrates that it was worth being His follower. Matthew does this by emphasizing Jesus' noble descent (Matt. 1:1), foretold birth (1:23), the astronomical signs surrounding that birth (2:2), and God's approval of Him at His baptism (3:16, 17). Not only that, but Jesus' ministry reveals His honor: the many healings, exorcisms, and noble teachings. Though He died the death of a criminal, Matthew shows that Jesus' death resulted from injustice and betrayal (26:3, 4, 14–16, 59–61). He was innocent (27:19, 54), and no death could be nobler than that of an innocent person voluntarily giving up their life for the sake of others.

At the same time, Jesus reverses common notions of honor. He calls His disciples to follow Him on the way of the cross (5:10, 11; 10:38; 16:24), and He rejects the importance of money and status (6:19–24; 18:4; 20:16). The genealogy of Jesus includes women of questionable reputation (1:3, 5, 6). While the religious leaders frowned upon His association with tax collectors and sinners (9:10, 11), this serves to emphasize once again that the values of the kingdom of heaven Jesus came to inaugurate are different than that of our world. And that is why His disciples have proclaimed to the present day the good news of Jesus (28:18–20).