

“FROM MATTHEW’S POINT OF VIEW”

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

SESSION TWO – THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Matthew, the Person

The list of the twelve disciples in Matthew’s gospel refers to “Matthew the tax collector” (10:3), which harks back to the incident when Jesus called Matthew while he was sitting in the tax office (cf. 9:9). When recounting the call, the first Gospel refers to him as “Matthew” (9:9), while Mark’s Gospel refers to him as “Levi son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14), and Luke’s Gospel refers to him as “Levi” (Luke 5:27).

Speculation surrounds the reason for the variation, but most scholars suggest that this tax collector had two names, Matthew Levi, either from birth or from the time of his conversion.

The name Levi may be an indication that he was from the tribe of Levi and therefore was familiar with Levitical practices. Mark’s record of the calling refers to him as the “son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14), which some have understood to mean that he was the brother of the apostle “James son of Alphaeus” (cf. Mark 3:18). But since the other pairs of brothers are specified as such and linked together, it is unlikely that Matthew-Levi and James were brothers.

Matthew-Levi was called to follow Jesus while he was sitting in the tax collector’s booth. This booth was probably located on one of the main trade highways near Capernaum, collecting tolls for Herod Antipas from the commercial traffic traveling through this area.

“Tax Collector” is the most common title for Matthew’s occupation, but it is better understood as “Toll Collector” or “Customs and Duty Collector.” Joseph Fitzmyer indicates that “tax collector” is an inaccurate translation of the Greek term which technically designates “toll collectors” i.e., those engaged in the collection of indirect taxes such as tolls, tariffs, imposts, and customs. Capernaum was on the border between the tetrarchy of Herod and that of Philip, and there was a toll to be paid on the transportation of goods between the two regions. Rather than tax collection as we understand it, it is more analogous to the collection of customs or duty when cross-border shopping! The position may also have required a quarterly or collection of taxes from all residents. Older bibles sometimes use “publican” for this same word.

Immediately following Matthew’s encounter with Jesus, he arranged a banquet for Jesus at his home, to which were invited a large crowd of tax collectors and sinners (9:10–11; Luke 5:29–30). Since tax collectors generally were fairly wealthy through cooperating with the occupying Roman power, and were despised by the local populace (cf. Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1–10), Matthew’s calling and response were completely out of

the ordinary and required nothing short of a miraculous turn-around in this tax collector's life.

Little else is known of Matthew-Levi, except for the widely attested tradition that he is the author of this Gospel that now bears his name. As one working with the occupying government, keeping extensive records, he would have been trained in secular scribal techniques, and as a Galilean Jewish Christian he would have been able to interpret the life of Jesus from the perspective of the Old Testament expectations. Eusebius said that Matthew first preached to "Hebrews" and then to "others," including places such as Persia, Parthia, and Syria (Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. 3.24.6). He is widely believed to have written his gospel in Syrian Antioch, where there was a strong early community of faith.



The Jesus movement shifts from a predominantly rural movement in Galilee - to an urban movement in Jerusalem - to a cosmopolitan movement in Antioch. Such a rapid transition is virtually unparalleled in antiquity and indicates considerable social flexibility.

Prominent early Christians from (or in) Antioch include Barnabas, Paul (for 1 year), Simeon Niger (sometimes identified as the Simon who carried Jesus' cross), and Manaen, a member of the court of Herod the ruler. He is possibly the husband of Joanna, "the wife of the manager of Herod's household" (Luke 24:1). Tradition places Matthew in Antioch as well.

Followers of Jesus were first called "Christians" in Antioch. It was Paul's starting-(and return) point in his three missionary journeys (Acts 13:1ff; 15:36ff; 18:23), and so was considered the cradle of Gentile Christianity and of Christian missionary enterprise eclipsing even Jerusalem.

As for details of Matthew's life following what we know from the New Testament, there is little reliable history. Some traditions have Matthew bringing the Gospel to Ethiopia, where he was said to have been martyred, dying by the spear. However, these accounts are layered with fantastical details, which render them dubious at best. Other strains of tradition have Matthew establishing communities of faith in Armenia, quite the other direction! The traditions are mixed regarding Matthew's death, with some saying that he died a martyr's death, while others saying that he died a natural death.

Date and Destination

No precise date for the writing of Matthew is known, although Jesus' prophecy of the overthrow of Jerusalem (24:1-28), has recently been used to indicate that this Gospel must have been written after A.D. 70. However, such a conclusion is necessary only if one denies Jesus the ability to predict the future. Since the early church father Irenaeus (c. A.D. 175) indicates that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Paul and Peter

were still alive, the traditional dating has usually settled on the late 50s or early 60s, at least in its early Hebrew form.

The highly influential church at Antioch in Syria, with its large Jewish-Christian and Gentile contingents (cf. Acts 11:19–26; 13:1–3), has often been recognized as the original recipients of this Gospel. This is confirmed in part because of its influence on Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who often quotes from Matthew quite exactly, and on the Didache, a very early collection of apostolic teaching, which also reflect Matthew's wording and content. But Matthew's message was equally relevant for the fledgling church throughout the ancient world, and appears to have been disseminated fairly quickly.

Most scholars believe Mark to be the earliest Gospel, and that Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a source. Many passages are held in common between the three, with Mark usually being the most concise, and Matthew the most developed. There is also the supposition that an additional collection of sayings and deeds of Jesus existed, which all three Gospel writers consulted. This so-called Gospel of Q (Quelle, source) is hypothesised but undiscovered; could it be the very collection of sayings authored by Matthew in Aramaic, and translated by others, to which Papias and Ireneaus refer?

A Comparison between Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24

Matthew - "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

Luke: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

Matthew - "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.

Luke - "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

Matthew: The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Luke: "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry...

Matthew: “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Luke: Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

Matthew “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Matthew’s Purpose

Matthew’s first verse gives the direction to his purpose for writing: It is a book that establishes Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the heir to the promises of Israel’s throne through King David and to the promises of blessing to all the nations through the patriarch Abraham.

Against the backdrop of a world increasingly hostile to Christianity, Matthew solidifies his church’s identity as God’s true people, who transcend ethnic, economic, and religious barriers to find oneness in their adherence to Jesus Messiah. His gospel becomes a manual on discipleship, as Jew and Gentile become disciples of Jesus who learn to obey all he commanded his original disciples.

To prove to a Jewish audience that Jesus is the Messiah:

1. He emphasized Jesus’ fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (e.g., 1:22–23; 2:15);
2. used typical Jewish terminology, such as “kingdom of heaven”;
3. told the story of Jesus as a retelling of the story of Israel (e.g., Jesus came out of Egypt—analogue to the exodus; Passed through the Jordan—analogue to the Red Sea; Suffered in the wilderness—analogue to the wilderness wandering; Gave his law on a mountain—analogue to Sinai; and so forth); and
4. traced Jesus’ ancestry to Abraham and frequently referred to the Messianic title “Son of David” instead of to “Son of God” (as in the Gospel of John).

Outline of Matthew

Matthew follows a structure of narratives, which detail certain actions and events, followed by a Discourse, or longer spoken passages.

1. Introduction: Genealogy and Infancy stories (Matt. 1-2)
2. Early ministry of Jesus (chs. 3-7)
 - Narrative: Galilean ministry (chs. 3-4)
 - Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7)
3. Ministry of healing: Discipleship (chs. 8-10)
 - Narrative: Healing ministry (8:1—9:34)
 - Discourse: Mission of the disciples (9:35—10:42)
4. Second ministry in Galilee (11:1—13:52)
 - Narrative: Traveling and healing (chs. 11-12)
 - Discourse: Teaching in parables (13:1-52)
5. Mission and miracles (13:53—18:35)
 - Narrative: Life of the church (13:53—17:27)
 - Discourse: Church discipline (18:1-35)
6. Ministry in Judea (chs. 19-25)
 - Narrative: Teaching and healing (chs. 19-22)
 - Discourse: Woes on Pharisees and eschatology (chs. 23-25)
7. Conclusion: Passion and Resurrection

Introduction – From “The Story”

FOR 400 YEARS after the Old Testament prophecies, no prophets or leaders rose to the level of inclusion in the record of Holy Scripture. For this reason, the period is sometimes referred to as the “silent years.”

In actuality, these years of social and political upheaval were anything but silent for the Jewish people. The Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids during the second century BC was one of the most heroic eras of Jewish history.

During these 400 years numerous significant writings were produced as well. The Qumran community copied the books of Isaiah, the Psalms, Deuteronomy and other sacred writings. These ancient manuscripts were discovered by a shepherd boy in AD 1947 near the Dead Sea and are known today as the “Dead Sea Scrolls.”

The Deuterocanonical books, or books of the Apocrypha, accepted as Holy Scripture by the Roman and Eastern churches, were written in the years between the Old and New Testament.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was also an important product of the period. It became the Bible for Greek-speaking Jews outside Palestine and later for the early church.

But God's story wasn't finished. "When the set time had fully come," as the apostle Paul put it, God spoke again—this time in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, whose birth, life, death and resurrection changed everything.

Now the prophets' ancient promises of a new Servant-King and kingdom of God, the promises anticipated for so many years, came to life in bold new ways. Now the people could see personified God's gracious, compassionate, unfailing love and dedication to restoring lost relationships through this carpenter and itinerant teacher, Jesus — the Messiah, come to set his people free.

All the wisdom and purposes of God centered in Jesus' mission on planet Earth. He was God's final word. And Matthew, bridging the gap between the Testaments, introduces Jesus to us...

Introduction from "The Message"

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with Jesus. God had been at work for a long time. Salvation, which is the main business of Jesus, is an old business. Jesus is the coming together in final form of themes and energies and movements that had been set in motion before the foundation of the world.

Matthew opens the New Testament by setting the local story of Jesus in its world historical context. He makes sure that as we read his account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see the connections with everything that has gone before. "Fulfilled" is one of Matthew's characteristic verbs: such and such happened "that it might be fulfilled." Jesus is unique, but he is not odd.

Better yet, Matthew tells the story in such a way that not only is everything previous to us completed in Jesus; we are completed in Jesus. Every day we wake up in the middle of something that is already going on, that has been going on for a long time: genealogy and geology, history and culture, the cosmos—God. We are neither accidental nor incidental to the story. We get orientation, briefing, background, reassurance.

Matthew provides the comprehensive context by which we see all God's creation and salvation completed in Jesus, and all the parts of our lives—work, family, friends, memories, dreams—also completed in Jesus. Lacking such a context, we are in danger of seeing Jesus as a mere diversion from the concerns announced in the newspapers. Nothing could be further from the truth.