

Introduction to Matthew's Gospel

Matthew, Key Verse: 16:16

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’”

Major Title: Jesus Is the Messiah, the Son of the living God

Matthew in the Context of the Scriptures

There are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They each tell the story of Jesus, but from different perspectives. Three of them: Matthew, Mark and Luke, have a similar view and are called Synoptic Gospels. They introduce Jesus as a human being. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the King. Mark shows that Jesus is the Servant. Luke portrays Jesus' humanity. But after careful observation they all conclude that Jesus is God. However, John declares that Jesus is God from the beginning, and then explains why.

Chronologically, Matthew's Gospel was not the first book to be written in the New Testament. Most Bible scholars believe that Mark's Gospel was written first. However, Matthew's Gospel is the first one listed because it best links the Old and New Testaments. Matthew clearly portrays Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. Matthew's Gospel shows that the New Testament was concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. According to the writings of the early church fathers, Matthew's Gospel was used most widely in the first centuries, due to its inclusion of so many of Jesus' teachings.

Author

Matthew, one of the Twelve apostles, is the author. He was an eyewitness of Jesus' life and ministry. He was the son of Alphaeus, and a tax collector. Most scholars believe that he had two names: “Matthew” and “Levi.” Other Gospels refer to him as “Levi” (Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27), but he called himself “Matthew” (Mt 9:9), which means “the gift of the Lord.” Tax collectors were regarded as public sinners, on the same social level as prostitutes (Mt 9:10; 21:31). People hated them and treated them as traitors of the nation. So he was outcast and very lonely. Though he was rich, he suffered a lot from the sin-sickness of selfishness. No one wanted to be around him. Loneliness and selfishness drove him into a sea of frustration, depression and weariness (Mt 11:28). He lived like a restless wanderer, and became like a bruised reed and a smoldering wick (Mt 12:20). His life seemed ruined and wasted, without hope.

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Then one day, when he was sitting at the tax collector's booth, Jesus came and called him, saying, "Follow me." This one word gave him hope to begin a new life and enabled him to leave everything immediately, follow Jesus, and become his disciple. He experienced Jesus' love and grace and hope. Then, out of great joy, he invited many tax collectors and sinners to share Jesus' grace together (Mt 9:9-10). Jesus embraced all his weaknesses and patiently bore with him. In this way Matthew was transformed inwardly until he became a Gospel writer. His talents of organizing documents, command of the Greek language, and mathematical skills became useful in writing the most beautiful Gospel of Matthew, including the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew had been the most terrible, incorrigible sinner. But after living with Jesus as his disciple for three years, he was transformed into St. Matthew, who reflected Jesus' inner character. He became the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). Tradition says he preached the gospel in Persia, Ethiopia, Syria and even in Greece. He always remembered the grace of Immanuel, which means, "God with us." He began his Gospel by introducing Jesus as Immanuel (Mt 1:23), and finished by quoting Jesus' words "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20). He testifies that the same Jesus is with us, too, to transform us into his image and make us useful to God.

Date and Place of Writing

Most scholars agree that Matthew's Gospel was written before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The most probable place of writing was in Palestine. However, some think it originated in Syrian Antioch, where there were many Greek-speaking Jews (Ac 11:20). Matthew's Gospel has two streams. One appeals to Jews, the other appeals to Gentiles. This suits the environment of Syrian Antioch.

Recipients

Matthew's Gospel was written in Greek and intended for Greek-speaking Jews. The author assumes that his readers are familiar with Jewish customs, society and traditions. So he does not explain Jewish customs, as Mark does. He begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ. He uses "the kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God" because Jewish people were reluctant to use the name of God. Although Matthew's Gospel was written for the Jews, it was not restricted to them. Matthew anticipates the spread of the gospel to the whole world.

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Purpose of Writing

Over just several decades Christianity burst forth and spread rapidly from Jerusalem to Rome. At first it was misunderstood as a branch of Judaism. Later the Jews realized that Christianity was quite distinct from Judaism and threatened to displace it. So they began to persecute Christians. At the same time, Emperor Nero victimized Christians by falsely accusing them of setting fire to Rome. So Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Romans. Matthew was writing to minister to these persecuted Christians as well as to share the gospel with Jewish people yet to believe. He expounds that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham, foretold in the Old Testament (Mt 1:1). He wanted to correct the Jews' political concept of the Messiah. He taught based on the Scriptures that the Messiah would become the glorious King through rejection, suffering, death and resurrection. He wanted the Jews to believe Jesus as the promised Messiah and spread the gospel to all nations (Mt 2:1--2; 4:16; 24:14; 28:19).

Special Characteristics

1. Genealogy. There are two genealogies of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures: Matthew's and Luke's. Matthew's account is unique. It begins with Abraham, the forefather of faith, and also emphasizes that Jesus is the Son of David, born in David's royal lineage. This validates his legal claim to be the King of the Jews. Jesus' birth fulfilled God's promises to both Abraham and David. Though his people had been unfaithful to God, God was faithful to keep his promises to send the Messiah. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus included Gentile women who had faith in God. This shows that people are included in God's work and history based on God's grace alone, and that from the beginning God wanted to include the Gentiles.
2. Immanuel. Matthew describes the meaning of the birth of Jesus as "Immanuel" (which means "God with us") (1:23). Jesus ate and drank with many tax collectors and sinners and became their friend (9:10--11; 11:19). He even included Matthew as one of the Twelve and was always with him until he could be healed. The Risen Jesus promised to always be with those who carry out his mission, to the end of the age (28:20).
3. Magi. Only Matthew records the visit of the Magi from the east to worship the baby Jesus (2:1-12). This shows us that Jesus is the King of the Jews, and not only so, but the Savior of the Gentiles, too (4:15-16; 15:28; 24:14; 25:32; 28:19).
4. Collected Teachings. There are five main discourses. At the end of these discourses, Matthew repeats the phrase "When Jesus had finished saying these things" or something similar (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These discourses are: The Sermon on the Mount (5-7); Instructions for disciples (10); Parables of the

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kingdom (13); Instructions for community life (18); Signs of the end of the age, and how to prepare (24-25).

5. Parables. Matthew's Gospel contains sixteen parables. Nine parables are unique to Matthew (these are indicated as follows in italics): *The Parables of the Sower (13), the Weeds (13), the Mustard Seed (13), Yeast (13), the Hidden Treasure (13), the Pearl of Great Value (13), the Net (13), the Wandering Sheep (18), the Unmerciful Servant (18), the Workers in the Vineyard (20), the Two Sons (21), the Tenants (21), the Wedding Banquet (22), the Ten Virgins (25), the Bags of Gold (25), and the Sheep and Goats (25).* In contrast, Mark's Gospel has only four parables, while Luke's Gospel has 14.

6. Old Testament Quotations and Fulfillment. Matthew frequently quotes verses from the Old Testament. Afterward, he writes "this is what the prophet has written" or the words "fulfill" or "fulfilled." (See: 1:22; 2:5,15,17,23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9.) As stated above, this was to prove that Jesus really is the promised Messiah.

7. Indictment of Jewish religious leaders. As Jesus proclaimed himself to be the promised Messiah through his words and divine power, the Jewish religious leaders became jealous and felt threatened. They began to slander him and oppose his ministry. Jesus tried to teach them about God's mercy, but they refused to learn (9:12-13; 12:7). He indicted their self-righteousness, legalism and ritualism, and pronounced scathing woes on them in chapter 23. Their rejection of God's promised Messiah was deliberate (21:33--46). Their conflict with him escalated until they conspired to crucify Jesus, and then tried to conceal even the truth of his resurrection (9:3,11,34; 12:2,10,24,38; 15:2; 16:1; 19:3; 21:23; 22:15,23,35; 26:4,47,66; 27:12,20,42; 28:11--15).

8. Church. The word "church" is used three times in Matthew's Gospel by Jesus himself, and does not appear in any other Gospel. When Peter confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus promised to build his church upon that confession (Mt 16:18). So the church is not a building or an organization, but a body of believers who confess Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus is the Lord of the church. The church is the ultimate authority to discipline believers (Mt 18:17).

9. Compassion. Jesus' compassionate heart is uniquely expressed in Matthew's Gospel (8:17; 9:13; 11:28; 12:20; 18:27; 20:34). Matthew described that Jesus carried out his Messianic ministry out of his great mercy. His mercy was expressed through his healing the sick and bearing with sinners.

10. Priority. Matthew wrote, "But seek first his kingdom" (6:33). In Luke's Gospel the word "first" is omitted (Lk 12:31). Matthew, the former tax collector, knew what was most important through his experience. When he sought money first, he became a slave of money, and miserable. But when he sought God's kingdom first, he found the way of true life, and all things were given to him as well.

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11. End times. Matthew speaks comparatively more about the end times than the other Synoptic Gospels (24). Especially, he emphasizes how believers should prepare for this (25).

12. The Great Commission. Based on his death and resurrection, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth. With his authority Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations (28:16-20a).

Main Themes

In Matthew's Gospel there are two main themes. One is that Jesus is the promised Messiah (1:1; 2:2,6; 3:17; 11:2-5; 12:18-21; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 21:9; 22:44; 24:30; 27:11,54; 28:18). Jesus is the one God prophesied about in the Old Testament, whom the Jews awaited for a long time. He is the Son of the living God and the King of Israel. He was not the political, military and economic deliverer the Jews expected; he is the Messiah who delivers us from the power of sin and death. In order to do this, Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). Jesus is the Messiah not only for Israel but also for all nations.

The other main theme is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came to earth to begin his kingdom (4:17, 23). The kingdom is not a geographical location, but wherever Jesus reigns. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray: "Your kingdom come" (6:10). Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven in many parables (13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; 18:23; 20:1; 21:33; 22:1; 25:1, 14). Before Jesus came, Satan ruled people's hearts. Jesus fought against the devil. Jesus has power to cast out devils (12:28). When people accept Jesus as their King, the kingdom of heaven comes into their hearts. The kingdom of heaven will be fully restored at the time of Jesus' Second Coming (8:11; 25:31-32; 26:64).

The Purpose of Our Study

Through this study we pray to accept Jesus as our King so that he may rule our hearts. When we invite him into our hearts, the kingdom of heaven comes and begins to grow in us. But we must put first priority on Jesus and his kingdom.

Jesus calls us to follow him as his disciples. This means to follow his example and to obey all his teachings. As we do so, we can grow to be like him. Furthermore, we can reproduce spiritually. We are to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us.

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Outline

I. Jesus' Birth and Early Years (1:1-2:23)

- a.** The genealogy of Jesus Christ (1:1-17)
- b.** The birth of Jesus (1:18-25)
- c.** The visit of the Magi (2:1-12)
- d.** Jesus' early life (2:13-23)

II. Jesus Begins His Ministry (3:1-4:25)

- a.** John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ (3:1-12)
- b.** Jesus' baptism (3:13-17)
- c.** Jesus' temptation (4:1-11)
- d.** Jesus begins his ministry: preaching, disciple-raising, healing (4:12-25)

III. Jesus Announces the Charter of the Kingdom of God (5:1-7:29)

- a.** The Beatitudes (5:1-12)
- b.** Salt and light (5:13-16)
- c.** Jesus came to fulfill the law (5:17-20)
- d.** New teachings about murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, justice and love (5:21-48)
- e.** New life in the kingdom: giving, prayer, fasting (6:1-18)
- f.** Store up treasures in heaven (6:19-24)
- g.** Seek first his kingdom (6:25-34)
- h.** Do not judge others (7:1-6)
- i.** The golden rule (7:7-12)
- j.** Enter through the narrow gate (7:13-14)
- k.** True and false prophets and disciples (7:15-23)
- l.** The wise and foolish builders (7:24-29)

IV. Jesus Demonstrates His Divine Power Based on Faith (8:1-9:34)

- a.** Jesus heals many (8:1-17)
- b.** Jesus refuses disciple candidates with wrong motives (8:18-22)
- c.** Jesus calms the storm (8:23-27)
- d.** Jesus heals two demon-possessed men (8:28-34)
- e.** Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man (9:1-8)
- f.** Jesus calls Matthew (9:9-13)
- g.** New wine and new wineskins (9:14-17)
- h.** Jesus raises a dead girl and heals a sick woman (9:18-26)
- i.** Jesus heals the blind and the mute (9:27-34)

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V. Jesus Calls and Trains the Twelve Disciples (9:35-10:42)

- a. Jesus prays for sending workers (9:35-38)
- b. Jesus calls and trains the Twelve (10:1-42)
- c. Jesus calls the Twelve (10:1-4)
- d. Jesus trains the Twelve (10:5-42)

VI. Jesus Proclaims His Messiahship Based on Scripture (11:1-12:50)

- a. Jesus commended John the Baptist (11:1-19)
- b. Jesus rebukes unrepentant towns (11:20-24)
- c. Jesus invites the humble to rest (11:25-30)
- d. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (12:1-14)
- e. Jesus is God's chosen servant (12:15-21)
- f. Jesus warns those who are against the work of the Holy Spirit (12:22-37)
- g. Jesus fulfills the sign of Jonah through his death and resurrection (12:38-45)
- h. Jesus' true family (12:46-50)

VII. Jesus Reveals the Kingdom of God with Many Parables (13:1-52)

- a. The parable of the sower (13:1-23)
- b. The parable of the weeds (13:24-30)
- c. The parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32)
- d. The parable of the yeast (13:33-35)
- e. The parable of the weeds explained (13:36-43)
- f. The parable of the hidden treasure (13:44)
- g. The parable of the fine pearl (13:45)
- h. The parable of the net (13:47-52)

VIII. Jesus Reveals Himself as the Son of the Living God (13:53-16:20)

- a. Jesus was rejected by his hometown people (13:53-58)
- b. John the Baptist beheaded (14:1-12)
- c. Jesus feeds the five thousand (14:13-21)
- d. Jesus walks on the water (14:22-36)
- e. Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the religious leaders (15:1-20)
- f. Jesus blesses a Canaanite woman's faith (15:21-28)
- g. Jesus feeds the four thousand (15:29-39)
- h. Jesus rebukes sign seeking people (16:1-4)
- i. Jesus warns against the bad influence of the religious leaders (16:5-12)
- j. Peter's confession of faith (16:13-20)

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IX. Jesus Unveils the Suffering and Glory of the Messiah (16:21-17:27)

- a. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection and tells the way of discipleship (16:21-28)
- b. Jesus Was Transfigured (17:1-13)
- c. Jesus teaches faith to his disciples and heals a demon-possessed boy (17:14-21)
- d. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection a second time (17:22-23)
- e. Jesus pays the temple tax (17:24-27)

X. Jesus Teaches the Community of the Messiah (18:1-20:34)

- a. The lowest is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:1-5)
- b. Jesus warns against causing little ones to stumble (18:6-9)
- c. God cares for the little ones (18:10-14)
- d. Be careful in dealing with sin (18:15-17)
- e. Jesus promises to bless two or three who work together in his name (18:18-20)
- f. The parable of the unmerciful servant (18:21-35)
- g. Jesus teaches on marriage, divorce and celibacy (19:1-12)
- h. Jesus welcomes little children (19:13-15)
- i. Jesus teaches the way of eternal life (19:16-30)
- j. The parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:1-16)
- k. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection a third time (20:17-19)
- l. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (20:20-28)
- m. Jesus gives sight to two blind men (20:29-34)

XI. Jesus Exerts His Authority as King (21:1-25:46)

- a. Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king (21:1-11)
- b. Jesus cleanses the temple (21:12-13)
- c. Jesus welcomes children's praise (21:14-17)
- d. Jesus teaches the power of faith to his disciples (21:18-22)
- e. Jesus answers the question about his authority with two parables (21:23-46)
 - 1. The parable of the two sons (21:28-32)
 - 2. The parable of the tenants (21:33-45)
- f. The parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14)
- g. Jesus confronts the religious leaders (22:15-46)
 - 1. The question about paying taxes (22:15-22)
 - 2. The question about marriage at the resurrection (22:23-33)
 - 3. The question about the greatest commandment (22:34-40)
 - 4. Jesus taught them about his Lordship (22:41-46)

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- h.** Jesus warns about the hypocrisy of religious leaders (23:1-12)
- i.** Jesus pronounces seven woes on the religious leaders (23:13-36)
- j.** Jesus grieves over Jerusalem (23:37-39)
- k.** Jesus talks about the end times (24:1-51)
 - 1.** Jesus predicts the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (24:1-2)
 - 2.** Signs of the end of the age (24:3-14)
 - 3.** The destruction of Jerusalem is the prelude of the last days (24:15-25)
 - 4.** The signs of the coming of the Son of Man (24:26-29)
 - 5.** Jesus' coming on the clouds (24:30-31)
 - 6.** Jesus' coming is sure (24:32-35)
 - 7.** The Son of Man comes suddenly and unexpectedly (24:36-44)
 - 8.** Be a faithful and wise servant (24:45-51)
- l.** How to prepare for Jesus' Second Coming (25:1-46)
 - 1.** Learn from the wise virgins how to keep watch (25:1-13)
 - 2.** Be faithful with a few things (25:14-30)
 - 3.** Serve the needy with the mind of Jesus (25:31-46)

XII. Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection (26:1-28:20)

- a.** Jesus predicted his betrayal; the religious leaders plotted it (26:1-5)
- b.** A woman poured her perfume on Jesus to prepare for his burial (26:6-13)
- c.** Judas betrays Jesus for money (26:14-16)
- d.** Jesus established communion based on the Passover (26:17-30)
- e.** Jesus predicts the disciples' falling away, Peter's denial (26:31-5)
- f.** Jesus prays at Gethsemane (26:36-46)
- g.** Jesus was arrested (26:47-56)
- h.** Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin (26:57-68)
- i.** Peter disowns Jesus three times (26:69-75)
- j.** Judas hangs himself (27:1--0)
- k.** Jesus was tried before Pilate and condemned (27:11-26)
- l.** Jesus was crucified (27:27-44)
- m.** Jesus died as the Son of God (27:45-56)
- n.** Jesus was buried (27:57-66)
- o.** Jesus has risen (28:1-10)
- p.** The Jews conspire to deny the resurrection (28:11-15)
- q.** Jesus commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations (28:16-20)