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Matthew
Scripture: Matthew
Code: MSB40

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, but 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. For a further discussion of some of the issues related to the authorship and dating of this gospel, especially “The Synoptic Problem,” (see Introduction to Mark: Interpretive Challenges).

Background and Setting

The Jewish flavor of Matthew’s gospel is remarkable. This is evident even in the opening genealogy, which Matthew traces back only as far as Abraham. In contrast, Luke, aiming to show Christ as the Redeemer of humanity, 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 OT 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 (cf. 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 the book’s major themes are rooted in the OT 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 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 OT 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 OT prophecies as proofs of Jesus' messianic claims (e.g., 2:17, 18; 4:13–15; 13:35; 21:4, 5; 27:9, 10).

Historical and Theological Themes

Since Matthew is concerned with setting forth Jesus as Messiah, the King of the Jews, an interest in the OT 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 OT 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 (chaps. 5–7); the commissioning of the apostles (chap. 10); the parables about the kingdom (chap. 13); a discourse about the childlikeness of the believer (chap. 18); and the discourse on His second coming (chaps. 24, 25). Each discourse ends with a variation of this phrase: "when Jesus had ended these sayings" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). That becomes a motif signaling a new narrative portion. A long opening section (chaps. 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 in the OT.

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 for 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 heaven with power and great glory” (24:30).

Interpretive Challenges

As noted above, Matthew groups his narrative material around 5 great discourses. He makes no attempt to follow a strict chronology, and a comparison of the gospels reveals that Matthew freely places things out of order. He is dealing with themes and broad concepts, not laying out a timeline.

The prophetic passages present a particular interpretive challenge. Jesus’ Olivet discourse, for example, contains some details that evoke images of the violent destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 Jesus’ words in 24:34 have led some to conclude that all these things were fulfilled—albeit not literally—in the Roman conquest of that era. This is the view known as “preterism.” But this is a serious interpretive blunder, forcing the interpreter to read into these passages spiritualized, allegorical meanings unwarranted by normal exegetical methods. The grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach to these passages is the approach to follow, and it yields a consistently futuristic interpretation of crucial prophecies.

For a discussion of the Synoptic Problem, see Introduction to Mark: Interpretive Challenges.

Outline

I. (Prologue) The King’s Advent (1:1–4:25)

A. His Birth (1:1–2:23)

1. His ancestry (1:1–17)
2. His arrival (1:18–25)
3. His adoration (2:1–12)
4. His adversaries (2:13–23)

B. His Entry into Public Ministry (3:1–4:25)

1. His forerunner (3:1–12)
2. His baptism (3:13–17)
3. His temptation (4:1–11)
4. His earliest ministry (4:12–25)

II. The King’s Authority (5:1–9:38)

A. Discourse 1: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29)

1. Righteousness and happiness (5:1–12)
2. Righteousness and discipleship (5:13–16)
3. Righteousness and the Scriptures (5:17–20)
4. Righteousness and morality (5:21–48)
5. Righteousness and practical religion (6:1–18)

6. Righteousness and mundane things (6:19–34)
7. Righteousness and human relations (7:1–12)
8. Righteousness and salvation (7:13–29)
B. Narrative 1: The Authenticating Miracles (8:1–9:38)

1. A leper cleansed (8:1–4)
2. The centurion's servant healed (8:5–13)
3. Peter's mother-in-law healed (8:14, 15)
4. Multitudes healed (8:16–22)
5. The winds and sea rebuked (8:23–27)
6. Two demoniacs delivered (8:28–34)
7. A paralytic pardoned and healed (9:1–8)
8. A tax collector called (9:9–13)
9. A question answered (9:14–17)
10. A girl raised from the dead (9:18–26)
11. Two blind men given sight (9:27–31)
12. A mute speaks (9:32–34)
13. Multitudes viewed with compassion (9:35–38)

III. The King's Agenda (10:1–12:50)

A. Discourse 2: The Commissioning of the Twelve (10:1–42)

1. The Master's men (10:1–4)
2. The sending of the disciples (10:5–23)
3. Hallmarks of discipleship (10:24–42)
B. Narrative 2: The Mission of the King (11:1–12:50)

1. Jesus' identity affirmed for John's disciples (11:1–19)
2. Woes pronounced on the impenitent (11:20–24)
3. Rest offered to the weary (11:25–30)
4. Lordship asserted over the Sabbath (12:1–13)
5. Opposition fomented by the Jewish leaders (12:14–45)
6. Eternal relationships defined by spiritual ancestry (12:46–50)

IV. The King's Adversaries (13:1–17:27)

A. Discourse 3: The Kingdom Parables (13:1–52)

1. The soils (13:1–23)
2. The wheat and tares (13:24–30, 34–43)
3. The mustard seed (13:31, 32)
4. The leaven (13:33)
5. The hidden treasure (13:44)
6. The pearl of great price (13:45, 46)
7. The dragnet (13:47–50)
8. The householder (13:51, 52)
B. Narrative 3: The Kingdom Conflict (13:53–17:27)

1. Nazareth rejects the King (13:53–58)
2. Herod murders John the Baptist (14:1–12)

3. Jesus feeds the 5,000 (14:13–21)
4. Jesus walks on water (14:22–33)
5. Multitudes seek healing (14:34–36)
6. The Scribes and Pharisees challenge Jesus (15:1–20)
7. A Syro-phoenician woman believes (15:21–28)
8. Jesus heals multitudes (15:29–31)
9. Jesus feeds the 4,000 (15:32–39)
10. The Pharisees and Sadducees seek a sign (16:1–12)
11. Peter confesses Christ (16:13–20)
12. Jesus predicts His death (16:21–28)
13. Jesus reveals His glory (17:1–13)
14. Jesus heals a child (17:14–21)
15. Jesus foretells His betrayal (17:22, 23)
16. Jesus pays the temple tax (17:24–27)

V. The King's Administration (18:1–23:39)

A. Discourse 4: The Childlikeness of the Believer (18:1–35)

1. A call for childlike faith (18:1–6)
2. A warning against offenses (18:7–9)
3. A parable about a lost sheep (18:10–14)
4. A pattern for church discipline (18:15–20)
5. A lesson about forgiveness (18:21–35)

B. Narrative 4: The Jerusalem Ministry (19:1–23:39)

1. Some kingly lessons (19:1–20:28)
a. On divorce (19:1–10)
b. On celibacy (19:11, 12)
c. On children (19:13–15)
d. On surrender (19:16–22)
e. On who may be saved (19:23–30)
f. On equality in the kingdom (20:1–16)
g. On His death (20:17–19)
h. On true greatness (20:20–28)
2. Some kingly deeds (20:29–21:27)
a. He heals two blind men (20:29–34)
b. He receives adoration (21:1–11)
c. He cleanses the temple (21:12–17)
d. He curses a fig tree (21:18–22)
e. He answers a challenge (21:23–27)
3. Some kingly parables (21:28–22:14)
a. The two sons (21:28–32)
b. The wicked vinedressers (21:33–46)
c. The wedding feast (22:1–14)
4. Some kingly answers (22:15–46)
a. The Herodians: on paying taxes (22:15–22)
b. The Sadducees: on the resurrection (22:23–33)
c. The Scribes: on the first and great commandment (22:34–40)
d. The Pharisees: on David's greater Son (22:41–46)

5. Some kingly pronouncements (23:1–39)
a. Woe to the scribes and Pharisees (23:1–36)
b. Woe to Jerusalem (23:37–39)

VI. The King's Atonement (24:1–28:15)

A. Discourse 5: The Olivet Discourse (24:1–25:46)

1. The destruction of the temple (24:1, 2)
2. The signs of the times (24:3–31)
3. The parable of the fig tree (24:32–35)
4. The lesson of Noah (24:36–44)
5. The parable of the two servants (24:45–51)
6. The parable of the ten virgins (25:1–13)
7. The parable of the talents (25:14–30)
8. The judgment of the nations (25:31–46)

B. Narrative 5: The Crucifixion and Resurrection (26:1–28:15)

1. The plot to kill the King (26:1–5)
2. Mary's anointing (26:6–13)
3. Judas' betrayal (26:14–16)
4. The Passover (26:17–30)
5. The prophecy of Peter's denial (26:31–35)
6. Jesus' agony (26:36–46)
7. Jesus' arrest (26:47–56)
8. The trial before the Sanhedrin (26:57–68)
9. Peter's denial (26:69–75)
10. Judas' suicide (27:1–10)
11. The trial before Pilate (27:11–26)
12. The soldiers' mocking (27:27–31)
13. The crucifixion (27:32–56)
14. The burial (27:57–66)
15. The resurrection (28:1–15)

VII. (Epilogue) The King's Assignment (28:16–20)

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