

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew was placed at the beginning of the New Testament and serves as the introduction to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each gospel is unique and brings to bear a perspective of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords that the Holy Spirit believes is necessary for the world to know. Among the many early writings about Jesus (see Luke 1:1), the Lord saw fit to insure that this one was preserved and published. Our primary occupation in Heaven will be to grow in our depth of knowledge and relationship with our God. What a privilege and blessing it is that “until that day” (Matthew 26:29) we may participate in that heavenly calling by studying afresh the life of our Savior. It is my prayer that this study will produce a greater depth of spiritual knowledge and godliness, the true mark of a relationship with the Lord (2 Timothy 2:19).

Date Written

It is impossible to say exactly when Matthew was written. Most biblical scholars place its date of writing sometime before 70 AD, when the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed. The book of Matthew contains clear prophecy about the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24) and it would likely make some reference to the fulfillment of this prophecy (or perhaps have omitted it as being unnecessary) if it were written after 70 AD. Christ’s personal ministry ended sometime around 33 AD. Therefore, it is likely that the passages we will read were recorded between 10 and 30 years after they took place. Given the probable date of the writing, does the reliability of this book concern you? How could the writer, even if a direct witness to all that transpired, remember the words of Christ verbatim? Read 2 Peter 1:21 and John 14:26. What is unique about the recording of Scripture?

This book was ultimately authored by the Spirit of God. He was able to produce a perfectly Divine book out of a human vessel. The limitations of man are no limitation of God at all. The Spirit directed Matthew in the writing of this book and brought to his recollection exactly what He wanted to record. The critics have already dismissed the possibility of Divine revelation and therefore do not allow this possibility in their “reasoning”.

About the Author

Who wrote this book? The author of Matthew never recorded their name with the Scripture. He never records himself in first person, or provides other hints as to his identity. However, the Apostle Matthew’s name was tied to all the early manuscripts, and men regarded as leaders of the early church attest to his identity as the writer.

Matthew’s original name, or at least a second name, may have been Levi (meaning to join or adhere). He was the son of Alphaeus. Although not directly taught, the name Matthew (meaning Gift of Yahweh), may be a new name given to him by Christ, just as Simon was renamed Peter (compare Matthew 9:9 and Mark 2:14)¹. He lived in Capernaum, on the North side of the Sea of Galilee. He was a tax-collector, also known as a publican in Scripture. The following article is from Bible-History.com.

¹ Matthew never refers to himself as Levi in his gospel. Mark and Luke use both names in reference to Matthew.

THE ROLE OF A TAX COLLECTOR

The Tax Collector or Tax Gatherer is the Greek word "telones" and the King James Version of the Bible translates the word "publican." He was contracted by Rome to collect taxes for the government during New Testament times. The "telones" were really NOT the publicans. Publicans were wealthy men, usually non-Jewish, who contracted with the Roman government to be responsible for the taxes of a particular district of the imperial Roman state. These publicans would often be backed by military force.

The telones tax collectors to which the New Testament refers (with the exception of Zacchaeus?) were employed by publicans to do the actual collecting of taxes within the areas where they lived. These men were Jews, usually not very wealthy, who could be seen in the Temple (Luke 18:13). They were probably very familiar with the people from whom they collected taxes.

The Publican collected income tax for Rome. Sometime around 200 B.C. the Roman Senate found it fitting to farm the vectigalia (direct taxes) and the portoria (customs) to capitalists, who agreed to pay a substantial sum into the publicum (treasury) and so received the name of publicani.

The Roman class who handled the contracts and financial arrangements were called equites. They often went further in their dealings with the publicani and formed a joint-stock *societas* (company) partnership with them or one of their agents *magister* (manager). This manager usually resided at Rome and conducted business and paying profits to all partners through the *submagistri* (officer) who lived among the provinces. Directly under their authority were the *portitores* (customhouse officers) who would examine all goods, whether imported or exported, assess the value, wrote out a ticket and enforced payment. They would live within the province where they were stationed and come into contact with all classes of the population. It was these *portitores* who were referred to as the Tax Gatherers (telones) in the New Testament.

These tax-gatherers were usually Jews and would collect taxes for Rome and it was understood that they were to keep a "fraction" for themselves. There was really no real way to prevent that fraction from assuming great proportions, and in fact fraudulent exactions were encouraged. Although there were some honorable exceptions, the publicans, great and small, were really extortioners.

Luke 3:12-15 "Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

The Jewish people were outraged by the Publicans and regarded them as traitors and apostates. They were considered defiled by their constant contact with the heathen, even Rome's willing instruments of oppression.

Levi or Matthew, gathered the customs on exports and imports and taxes (see Matt 9:9-11 and Mark 2:14). The office for "receipt of custom" was at city gates, on public roads, or bridges. Matthew's post was on the great road between Damascus and the seaports of Phoenicia.²

After the dispersion of the Church at Jerusalem, it is believed that Matthew went to Persia and the area in Persia known as "Ethiopia." It is also possible that he traveled to the Ethiopia in Africa as the Roman Catholic tradition indicates and there is also a belief that Matthew was martyred in Egypt upon his return from Ethiopia in Africa but this is not certain. No clear historical record exists chronicling the remainder of his life.

² Taken from <http://www.bible-history.com/taxcollectors/TAXCOLLECTORSHistory.htm> on September 8, 2009.

Synoptic Gospels

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of their strong similarities. The word synoptic means, “seeing together”. Each provides a separate perspective of the same events, giving us a rich and broad picture of the ministry of Christ. A beautiful picture of Christ is provided by examining the theme of each book.

Matthew presents Jesus as the Sovereign awaited **King**

- Note the lineage in Chapter One (David through Christ).

Mark presents Jesus in His role of a **servant**

- No lineage is found in Mark.

Luke presents Jesus as the Son of **Man**

- Note the lineage found in Chapter Three (Adam through Christ).

John presents Jesus as the Son of **God**

- Note the first three verses of John.

Together, we see the fullness of Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the servant and the King.

The Message of Matthew

As mentioned above, the theme of Matthew is the Kingship of Jesus Christ. He is the long-awaited Messiah. This specific message was most relevant and important to the Jewish audience. Therefore, the gospel of Matthew, more than any other gospel, was written with a Jewish sensitivity in mind. The gospel of Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than any other gospel. Matthew uses the word, “fulfilled” several times. Matthew also employs language more palatable to the Jews. Read the following.

KINGDOM OF GOD VS. KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The phrase, “Kingdom of God” is used only five times in Matthew versus 15 times in Mark, and 32 times in Luke. The phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven” is used exclusively in Matthew, and not in other gospels or any other book of the Bible. Compare Matthew 3:2 and Mark 1:15 as an illustration of this distinction. What you will find is that they are exactly the same. The Jews did not like to use the name of God for fear that they might use it in vain. Therefore, the phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven” was employed to minimize their use of God’s name.

The Organization of Matthew

Matthew is organized chronologically, beginning at the birth of Christ and concluding with His death, burial, and resurrection. The list below provides the basic breakdown of Matthew’s chronology.

- The Birth and Early Years of Jesus (chs. 1-2)

- The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (3:1-4:11)
- Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:12-14:12)
- Jesus' Withdrawals from Galilee (14:13-17:20)
- Jesus' Last Ministry in Galilee (17:22-18:35)
- Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (chs. 19-20)
- Passion Week (chs. 21-27)
- The Resurrection (ch. 28)

In substance, Matthew is organized around six great discourses or sermons that Christ gave during His ministry. There are several shorter messages or statements Christ gave that are recorded in Matthew, but the following list of six make up the bulk of Christ's teaching in this gospel.

1. The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7)
2. The Sending of the 12 Apostles (ch. 10)
3. The Sermon on the Sea (ch. 13)
4. The Explanation of Kingdom Life (ch. 18)
5. Pharasaism Exposed and Rebuked (ch. 23)
6. Olivet Discourse (chs. 24-25)

Our journey through Matthew will be full of meaningful and challenging teachings of Christ. Below is a list of some of the topics we will cover.

- The Kingdom of Heaven/God
- The Unpardonable Sin
- Signs of Christ's Return
- The Meaning of Discipleship
- What the Bible says about Divorce
- The Transfiguration of Christ
- Rank in Heaven
- The Cure for Anxiety
- Judging Others
- The Key to Happiness