



Matthew

Matthew's Gospel, like all of the gospels, tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew contains a particularly Hebrew emphasis, quoting regularly from the Old Testament, and showing how Jesus fulfilled the expectations so long awaited by God's people. Although it begins with the birth of Jesus, including a visit from wise men from the East, the majority of the story of Jesus' life focuses on his adult life and ministry culminating in his death and resurrection. The Gospel ends with the command to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 2½ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.18-5.12; 15.29-39; 17.1-9; 24-28.



Genre

Gospel – accounts that tell the story of the life of Jesus Christ and the good news he came to bring



Anything tricky?

Different people will find different parts of the Gospel tricky. The passage I find hardest is Matthew 23 which contains a string of woes for the scribes and Pharisees.



Inspiring quotes

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."
(Matthew 5.2-5)

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."
(Matthew 7.7)

"Come to me, all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11.28)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28.19-20)



About the Author

This Gospel, like the other three, is anonymous. The name Matthew was only associated with it by later Christian tradition. This tradition identified Matthew as the tax collector of that name in this Gospel and maintained that he collected traditions in Hebrew about Jesus which were later translated into Greek.

Many modern scholars would argue that when writing the Gospel the author had Mark's Gospel (and/or a hypothetical document they call Q

containing the earliest traditions about Jesus) in front of him as well as a store of his own stories.

What do we know about him?

Frustratingly little, Gospel writers all seemed determined to keep their identities secret, probably to keep our focus on Jesus. The author writes excellent Greek but has a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, in both Hebrew and Greek. Many think it was written in Antioch to tell the story of Jesus there to a largely Jewish community.



About the times

Many would argue that Matthew's Gospel was written around ad 75-90, after Mark's Gospel but before the end of the first century ad.

One of the features that stands out in Matthew is Jesus' conflict with the Jewish leaders of his day. Some suggest that this emphasis comes from the fact that Matthew's community was also in conflict with the Jewish leaders of their day (50-60 years later) and found these stories of conflict helpful for their own situation.

What were people feeling?

If the proposed dating for Matthew is right then people were in turmoil when Matthew's Gospel was written. The Jewish War (ad 66-73) which had culminated in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, left people in disarray. For Jews the question of how they worshipped God without a temple was live and raw, Matthew's Gospel was written into this context.



How is it structured?

Matthew's Gospel strikingly has five 'discourses' or major pieces of teaching in it. These may give us a clue to the structure of Matthew

- 1.1-2.23 Title and birth narratives
- 3.1-7.29 The baptism of Jesus and first discourse (Sermon on the Mount)
- 8.1-10.42 Miracles, calling of disciples and the second discourse (on mission and suffering)
- 11.1-13.52 Conflict with opponents and third discourse (a series of parables)
- 13.53-18.35 Increasing conflict and opposition and fourth discourse (preparation of the disciples for Jesus' absence)
- 19.1-20.34 Jesus travels to Jerusalem and fifth discourse (the coming end)
- 21.1-28.20 Epilogue or Culmination: the last week of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and great commission



What kind of Book is it?

It's a Gospel – a story about the life of Jesus with the intended aim of persuading its readers of who he was.

Matthew's focus in his Gospel seems to have been on demonstrating that Jesus fulfilled the promises that God had made to his people over years.



What could this mean for me?

As you read, ask yourself about the Jesus you meet in the story. What kind of person is he in Matthew? What more can you learn about him as you read?



Look out for...

You will see from the structure above that some see five key 'discourses' in Matthew, each of which round off a section of narratives about Jesus' life. The number five, of course, reminds us strongly of the Torah. Look out for these so-called five teachings as you read. Are you convinced that Matthew was theming his narrative about five key teachings? Does this help you make sense of the Gospel at all?

Another key feature of Matthew is his conflict with the Jewish leaders of his day. Although Jesus clashes with the Jewish leaders in other gospels too, the clash seems more obvious in Matthew. Keep an eye open for this and see if you agree or not.

Matthew points back to the Old Testament a lot. Reflect on this as you read. Why is it such an important theme? Also notice the theme of fulfillment in the Gospel what does this tell us about what Matthew thinks about the significance of the story he is telling?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What did you notice about Jesus' relationship with the Old Testament throughout the Gospel? And about his relationship with the Jewish leaders? Given this do you think 'the Jewish Gospel' is the right or the wrong description of Matthew?
- Did you get a flavour of the Gospel as you read? If you were to say 'Matthew is particularly interested in... about Jesus', how would you fill in the gap?
- Do you think the ending of Matthew ('Go therefore and make disciples of all nations') fits with the rest of the Gospel? If yes, why; if no, why not?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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