

Introduction to Matthew NIV Study Bible

Author

Although the first Gospel is anonymous, the early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was its author. However, the results of modern critical studies—in particular those that stress Matthew’s alleged dependence on Mark for a substantial part of his Gospel—have caused some Biblical scholars to abandon Matthean authorship. Why, they ask, would Matthew, an eyewitness to the events of our Lord’s life, depend so heavily on Mark’s account? The best answer seems to be that he agreed with it and wanted to show that the apostolic testimony to Christ was not divided.

Matthew, whose name means “gift of the Lord,” was a tax collector who left his work to follow Jesus (9:9–13). In Mark and Luke he is called by his other name, Levi.

Date and Place of Writing

Some have argued on the basis of its Jewish characteristics that Matthew’s Gospel was written in the early church period, possibly the early part of a.d. 50, when the church was largely Jewish and the gospel was preached to Jews only (Ac 11:19). However, those who have concluded that both Matthew and Luke drew extensively from Mark’s Gospel date it later—after the Gospel of Mark had been in circulation for a period of time. See essay and chart, p. 1943. Accordingly, some feel that Matthew would have been written in the late 50s or in the 60s. Others, who assume that Mark was written between 65 and 70, place Matthew in the 70s or even later. However, there is insufficient evidence to be dogmatic about either view.

The Jewish nature of Matthew’s Gospel may suggest that it was written in the Holy Land, though many think it may have originated in Syrian Antioch.

Recipients

Since his Gospel was written in Greek, Matthew’s readers were obviously Greek-speaking. They also seem to have been Jews. Many elements point to Jewish readership: Matthew’s concern with fulfillment of the OT (he has more quotations from and allusions to the OT than any other NT author); his tracing of Jesus’ descent from Abraham (1:1–17); his lack of explanation of Jewish customs (especially in contrast to Mark); his use of Jewish terminology (e.g., “kingdom of heaven,” where “heaven” reveals the Jewish reverential reluctance to use the name of God; see note on 3:2); his emphasis on Jesus’ role as “Son of David” (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9,15; 22:41–45). This does not mean, however, that Matthew restricts his Gospel to Jews. He records the coming of the Magi (non-Jews) to worship the infant Jesus (2:1–12), as well as Jesus’ statement that the “field is the world” (13:38). He also gives a full statement of the Great Commission (28:18–20). These passages show that, although Matthew’s Gospel is Jewish, it has a universal outlook.

Purpose

Matthew's main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in his life and ministry fulfilled the OT Scriptures. Although all the Gospel writers quote the OT, Matthew includes nine proof texts unique to his Gospel (1:22–23; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 27:9–10) to drive home his basic theme: Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT predictions of the Messiah. Matthew even finds the history of God's people in the OT recapitulated in some aspects of Jesus' life (see, e.g., his quotation of Hos 11:1 in 2:15). To accomplish his purpose Matthew also emphasizes Jesus' Davidic lineage (see Recipients, p. 1945).

Structure

The way the material is arranged reveals an artistic touch. The whole Gospel is woven around five great discourses: (1) chs. 5–7; (2) ch. 10; (3) ch. 13; (4) ch. 18; (5) chs. 24–25. That this is deliberate is clear from the refrain that concludes each discourse: "When Jesus had finished saying these things," or similar words (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The narrative sections, in each case, appropriately lead up to the discourses. The Gospel has a fitting prologue (chs. 1–2) and a challenging epilogue (28:16–20).

The fivefold division may suggest that Matthew has modeled his book on the structure of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT). He may also be presenting the gospel as a new Torah and Jesus as a new and greater Moses.

Outline

- The Birth and Early Years of Jesus (chs. 1–2)
 - His Genealogy (1:1–17)
 - His Birth (1:18–2:12)
 - His Sojourn in Egypt (2:13–23)
- The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (3:1–4:11)
 - His Forerunner (3:1–12)
 - His Baptism (3:13–17)
 - His Temptation (4:1–11)
- Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:12–14:12)
 - The Beginning of the Galilean Campaign (4:12–25)
 - The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7)
 - A Collection of Miracles (chs. 8–9)
 - The Commissioning of the 12 Apostles (ch. 10)
 - Ministry throughout Galilee (chs. 11–12)
 - The Parables of the Kingdom (ch. 13)
 - Herod's Reaction to Jesus' Ministry (14:1–12)
- Jesus' Withdrawals from Galilee (14:13–17:20)
 - To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (14:13–15:20)
 - To Phoenicia (15:21–28)

- To the Decapolis (15:29—16:12)
 - To Caesarea Philippi (16:13—17:20)
- Jesus' Last Ministry in Galilee (17:22—18:35)
 - Prediction of Jesus' Death (17:22–23)
 - Temple Tax (17:24–27)
 - Discourse on Life in the Kingdom (ch. 18)
- Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (chs. 19–20)
 - Teaching concerning Divorce (19:1–12)
 - Teaching concerning Little Children (19:13–15)
 - The Rich Young Man (19:16–30)
 - The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16)
 - Prediction of Jesus' Death (20:17–19)
 - A Mother's Request (20:20–28)
 - Restoration of Sight at Jericho (20:29–34)
- Passion Week (chs. 21–27)
 - The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as King (21:1–11)
 - The Cleansing of the Temple (21:12–17)
 - The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18—23:39)
 - The Olivet Discourse (chs. 24–25)
 - The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (26:1–13)
 - The Arrest, Trials and Death of Jesus (26:14—27:66)
- The Resurrection (ch. 28)
 - The Earthquake and the Angel's Announcement (28:1–7)
 - Jesus' Encounter with the Women (28:8–10)
 - The Guards' Report and the Jewish Elders' Bribe (28:11–15)
 - The Great Commission (28:16–20)

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