

Introduction to Matthew

Lecture by Steve Gregg

I. The Value of Matthew

- Placed first in all the ancient lists of gospels, though the order of the others varies
- The most frequently quoted gospel in the writings of the second-century fathers
- The connecting link between the Old and New Testaments (e.g., the genealogy in ch.1)
- The Sermon on the Mount (chs.5-7) alone has been more influential than any other religious document of comparable length.

—“[Matthew] may well be called the most important single document of the Christian faith, for in it we have the fullest and most systematic account of the life and teachings of Jesus.”

William Barclay (*The First Three Gospels*, p.197)

—“Perhaps the most powerful document ever written”

L.M. Peterson (*Zondervan Bible Encyclopedia*, article on Book of Matthew)

II. Canonicity of Matthew

- accepted as apostolic and authoritative without doubt by the early church
- Barnabas (130 AD) quotes Matthew 22:14 with the formula, “It is written...”
- Justin Martyr’s (d.165 AD) chief source of information about the life and sayings of Jesus
- Included, along with the other three canonical gospels, in Tatian’s *Diatessaron* (173 AD)

III. Origin of the book

A. Authorship

—*Papias (approximately 100 AD, cited by Eusebius):*

—“Matthew composed the *logia* [“oracles”] in the Hebrew tongue, and everyone interpreted them as he was able.”

—*Irenaeus (180 AD, Against Heresies, III:1:1):*

“Matthew also published a book of the gospel among the Hebrews, in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome, and founding the church.”

—*Origen (about 285 AD; cited around 325 AD by Eusebius in Ecclesiastical History VI:25):*

“As I have understood from tradition, respecting the four gospels, which are the only undisputed ones in the whole church of God throughout the world. The first was written according to Matthew, who was once a toll-collector but later an apostle of Jesus Christ. He published it for those who became believers from Judaism, since it was composed in the Hebrew language.”

B. Date of writing

- The earliest canonical gospel?
- An earlier draft in Aramaic?
- The “two-source theory” and the “priority of Mark” theory
- Jesus’ prediction of the fall of Jerusalem (24:1-2, 34)

IV. Purpose:

—to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfillment of Jewish hopes

V. Characteristics

A. The most Jewish gospel

1. More attention to fulfilled prophecy than found in other gospels
 - Seeks to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes
 - Over 50 quotations from the Old Testament (about 1/5 of which are from Isaiah)
 - Most quotes are from the Septuagint, though some (those introduced by “That it might be fulfilled...”) are from the Hebrew Bible.
 - Interprets the Old Testament as a Christian book
2. More attuned to Jewish sensitivities and frame of reference
 - Genealogy of Joseph traced back to Abraham (and no further)
 - Emphasis on Jesus’ relation to David (“Son of David” used 9 times, contrast 3 times each in Mark and Luke)
 - The affirmation of the Torah (5:18-19/ 19:17ff/ 23:23)
 - Assumption of bringing “gift to the altar” (5:23-24)
 - First mission of the twelve limited to “the lost sheep of Israel” (10:5-6)
 - Jesus defines His mission as sent “to the lost sheep of Israel” (15:24)
 - Assumes prior familiarity with “traditions of the elders” (15:2); the temple tax (17:24ff); phylacteries (23:5); and “whitewashed sepulchers” (23:27)
 - Pray for flight not on Sabbath (24:20)
 - Unique use of term “kingdom of heaven,” accommodating Jewish sensitivities
 - (Possible) analogy between the five-discourse structure and the five books of Moses

B. Inclusive of Gentiles

- Records the visit of the (Gentile) magi, as being among the first to worship Jesus (ch.2)
- Predicts conversion of “many” from the East and the West (8:11-12)
- The kingdom taken from Israel and given to another “nation” (21:43)
- Many to be gathered to the feast from the “highways and by-ways” (22:9-10)
- The “elect” gathered from “the four winds” (24:31)
- All nations to be disciplined (28:19)

C. Interest in the Church

1. The only gospel to speak of the “church” —Gr. *ekklesia* (16:18/ 18:17)
2. Defines the essential nature of the church: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I...” (18:20)
3. Defines the mission of the church: uphold Christ’s authority, baptize, teach (28:18-20)

D. Dominated by teaching on the kingdom—the only book that uses the expression “kingdom of heaven” (33 times); contrast the use of “kingdom of God” (5 times).

- Treats the kingdom as a present, growing reality (3:2/ 5:3, 10/ 8:11/ 11:11-12/ 12:28/ 13:18ff, 24ff, 31-33, 44-46/ 16:28)
- Anticipates a future, universal manifestation

E. Emphasis on eschatology

- Major emphasis on coming holocaust (e.g., chs.21, 22, 23, 24)
- The second coming: wheat & tares (13:40-42) / dragnet (13:49-50) / the end of the world (24:35-51/ ten virgins, talents, sheep & goats (ch.25).

F. Use of the term “Father” more than other synoptics

| <i>Compare:</i> | <i>Matthew</i> | <i>Mark</i> | <i>Luke</i> | <i>John</i> |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| “your Father” | 10 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| “my Father” | 13 | 3 | 0 | >20 |
| “the Father” | 3 | 1 | 3 | >60 |

G. Literary features

1. Very organized arrangement of material
2. Topical, rather than chronological, arrangement of Jesus’ sayings
3. Numerical grouping of data
 - Three: groups of fourteen names in genealogy (1:17); temptations (4:1-11); examples of righteousness (6:1-18); symbolic actions (21:1-22);S); parables of Jewish disobedience (21:28—22:14); challenges by partisan critics (22:15-33); eschatological parables (ch.25); denials by Peter (26:34,69-75); prayers in Gethsemane (22:36-46) .
 - Six antitheses (5:21-47)
 - Seven: parables of the kingdom (ch.13); woes upon the Pharisees (ch.23)
 - Eight beatitudes

VI. Contents:

- About 45% of Matthew is shared material with Mark
- An additional 20% is shared with Luke alone
- Thus about 35% of the material in Matthew is unique to his book
- Unique *pericopae* (or *pericopes*):*
 - Chapter 1 (Joseph’s genealogy and lead-up to Christ’s birth)
 - Chapter 2 (Wise men visit, Herod’s wrath, and the holy family’s flight to Egypt)
 - Chs.5-7 (portions of Sermon on the Mount)
 - 9:27-36 (two blind men and a demon-possessed mute healed)
 - 10:15 (more tolerable for Sodom than for obstinate Jewish cities)
 - 10:37-40 (on relative love for relatives, and those who receive disciples)
 - 11:28-30 (“Come unto me, all you who labor...I will give you rest”)
 - 12:11-12 (okay to rescue sheep on Sabbath)
 - 12:15-21 (citation of Isaiah 42:1-4, applied to Jesus’ policies)
 - 12:33-38 (the trees known by their fruit)
 - 13:24-30 (parable of wheat and tares)
 - 13:36-52 (explanation of wheat and tares, plus several unique parables)
 - 14:28-31 (Peter walks on water)
 - 16:17-19 (Peter, the rock and key-holder)

* plural of **pe·ric·o·pe** (puh-RIK-uh-pee): An section or a set of verses from a book, especially Scripture, that forms one coherent unit or thought, thus forming a short passage.

- 17:24-27 (the temple tax)
- 18:15-35 (reconciliation, discipline and forgiveness, including unique parable)
- 19:10-12 (comments about eunuchs)
- 20:1-16 (parable of the day-workers in the vineyard)
- 21:10-11 (Jerusalem's reaction to triumphal entry)
- 21:14-16 ("Out of the mouths of babes...")
- 21:28-32 (parable of two sons)
- 22:1-14 (parable of the wedding invitation and feast)
- 23:8-22 (extended denunciation of scribes and Pharisees)
- 24:42-51 (extended Olivet Discourse)
- 25:1-46 (three unique parables attached to Olivet Discourse)
- 27:3-10 (Judas' suicide)
- 27:51-53 (supernatural phenomena at the time of Jesus' death)
- 27:62-66 (the setting of the guard at the tomb)
- 28:11-15 (the guards paid-off by chief priests)
- 28:16-20 (appearance and commission in Galilee)

VII. Structure of the Book

- A. Two main sections, introduced by the phrase, "From that time, Jesus began to..."
 - 1. ...proclaim: the beginning of Christ's rise to public prominence (4:17)
 - 2. ...show his disciples: the beginning of Christ's decline, culminating at the cross (16:21)
- B. The five-fold structure, including five discourses (chs.5-7/ ch.10/ ch.13/ ch.18/ chs.23-25), each ending with the phrase, "When Jesus had finished..." (7:28/11:1/ 13:53/19:1/ 26:1)
- C. General Outline—

Preparation: Birth, Baptism and Testing by Satan (1:1—4:16)

I. Gathering His team

- A. Action: Calling the fishermen and making first itinerary in Galilee (chs.4:17-25)
- B. Discourse: Instructing His team in godliness (chs.5-7)

II. Training His team

- A. Action: Demonstrating to His team what He is about (chs.8-9)
- B. Discourse: Instructing His team for outreach and sending them (ch.10)

III. Implications of the Kingdom's arrival

- A. Action: (chs. 11-12)
- B. Discourse: parables of the Kingdom (ch. 13:1-52)

IV. Seeking privacy with His team

- A. Action: Retirement, interrupted by necessary miracles and confrontations (chs. 13:53—ch.17)
- B. Discourse: Instructing His team concerning relationships (ch. 18)

V. Final Confrontation with corrupt Judaism

- A. Action: Challenges from religious leaders (chs. 19-22)
- B. Discourse: Denunciation of the leaders and prediction of the end of their tenure (chs.23-25)

Conclusion: Passion and Resurrection (chs.26-28)