

The Gospel according to Matthew

General Points

- Matthew is a synoptic gospel, i.e. it has similarities with Mark and Luke. These 3 gospels cover many of the same events in roughly the same order.
- Many experts now think that Mark was the first gospel to be written with Matthew and Luke incorporating Mark into their own works.
- Both Luke and Matthew include additional material. Scholars suggest there may have been an additional collection of Jesus' sayings in circulation. They call this Q, from the German "quelle" which means source. Luke and Mathew may have used this in addition to Mark's gospel.

Authorship

- The author of the gospel was traditionally thought of as Matthew, the tax collector, who became Jesus' disciple, but this is disputed. If the author was the apostle, Matthew, then he would have been an eye witness of Jesus' life. Why would there be so much material in his gospel which seems to have been lifted from Mark's gospel?
- Whoever Matthew is, he appears to have been from a Jewish background. Although written in Greek, his gospel has a definite Jewish flavour with many references to Old Testament Scripture. The author might even have had some rabbinical training.

When

- This is another area open to debate. Some say as early as AD 50, others suggest between AD70 and 90. Certainly if Mark is the first gospel (AD64-69?) then Matthew would probably have been written later in the first century AD.
- Chapter 24 of Matthew has Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple. The temple was indeed destroyed in AD70. It would seem that Matthew was aware of this event, suggesting a later date after the destruction.
- It must have been written before AD 110 because Ignatius of Antioch knows of it.

Purpose

- Matthew's gospel is Jewish in theme and he appears to be writing for a Jewish audience in order to convince this group that Jesus is the Messiah.
- Matthew's aim is to show that the Jewish faith is fulfilled in the person of Christ.
- Perhaps Matthew envisaged it as a sort of handbook of the time for those whose task it was to assume positions of authority in the Early Church.

Some themes

- Matthew is keen to show that **Jesus is the Christ** that the Jewish people had expected. He spends considerable time quoting Jewish prophesy regarding the Messiah in order to emphasise this. He starts his gospel by showing Jesus' Jewish ancestry and his link with David and Abraham.
- Closely related is Matthew's emphasis on the coming of the Kingdom and he repeatedly uses the terms "**Kingdom**" and "**Kingdom of Heaven**." There are also a number of parables about the Kingdom.
- **Justice** is another theme. Belonging to the kingdom involves righteousness and certain demands. We see this in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere.
- Matthew appears to have a special interest in **the Church**. Some scholars believe this to be one of the purposes of the gospel: to provide Church leaders with guidance.

An Outline of the Contents.

The following is a useful outline of the gospel which is mentioned in the New Jerome Bible Commentary. It suggests that we can see each narrative section as being followed by a sermon.

Chapters 1-4	<i>Narrative:</i>	Birth and Beginnings
Chapters 5-7	<i>Sermon:</i>	Blessings, entering the Kingdom
Chapters 8-9	<i>Narrative:</i>	Authority and Invitation
Chapter 10	<i>Sermon:</i>	Mission Discourse
Chapters 11-12	<i>Narrative:</i>	Rejection by this Generation
Chapter 13	<i>Sermon:</i>	Parables of the Kingdom
Chapters 14-17	<i>Narrative:</i>	Acknowledgement by Disciples
Chapter 18	<i>Sermon:</i>	Community Discourse
Chapters 19-22	<i>Narrative:</i>	Authority and Invitation
Chapters 23-25	<i>Sermon:</i>	Woes, Coming of the Kingdom
Chapters 26-28	<i>Narrative:</i>	Death and Rebirth

Bibliography:

1. *The Jerusalem Bible* (Popular ed.; London, Darton, Longman & Todd 1974).
2. Brown R.E, Fitzmeyer J.A, Murphy R.E. (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (2nd ed.; London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1997).