

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

CLIFF SABROE

Introduction

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of

Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. (Matt. 1:1-11).

It might seem to a modern reader that Matthew chose an extraordinary way in which to begin his gospel; and it might seem daunting to present right at the beginning a long list of names to wade through. Genealogies do not bear much significance in our modern world and thus we have tendency to usually skim them over. But to a Jew this was the most natural, and the most interesting, and indeed the most essential way to begin the story of any man's life.¹ Matthew was quite intentional in his decision to begin his gospel with this genealogy. Matthew has a clear and precise purpose in his writing and that is to establish and convict the unbelieving Jew in a manner that causes them conclude that Jesus is the promised Messiah. This paper will elaborate upon that theme further, but its purpose is not to give a doctrinal discourse, or even provide an inductive study, instead this paper sets out to give a critical introduction to this grand gospel and thus motivate the reader to delve deeper within the pages of God's word. The Gospel of Matthew has been given many different labels, but the one that seems it fit it best is "The Teacher's Gospel". Many studies formed and conducted with both new and old Christians alike, will often center around this grand book. The New Bible Commentary writes:

Matthew has been called 'the Teacher's Gospel' because its material is so presented that it is very suitable for use in teaching. It was probably for this reason that this gospel was the most widely used of the four in the early church.

¹ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 11

While Mark offers a vivid, flowing narrative, Luke a sensitive study of Jesus' dealings with people, and John a more explicitly theological portrait of Jesus, Matthew collected stories and sayings of Jesus which bear particularly on the regular concerns of the life of the church and put them together in such a way that a teacher in the church could draw on them. Very probably Matthew was himself such a teacher and included in his gospel the material which he was already used to presenting to his own church members²

Authorship

The tradition of the church is very strong that Matthew is the author of the first Gospel. No significant evidence to the contrary has ever gained much of a scholarly following. Matthew, identified with Levi, was a tax collector or publican whom Jesus called to be one of the twelve. Matthew 9:9-13 reads: *“As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?” But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. “But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*³ Matthew 10:3 also reads *“Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus”*⁴

²Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Mal 4:4

³*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Mt 9:9-13

⁴*New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995, S. Mt 10:3

Scripture records a few facts about Matthew. First, he was selected by Jesus to be one of the twelve. Second, he was of the family of Alphaeus. Third, he is also called Levi. Fourth, in his early life, he was a publican (a Roman Tax Collector), and fifth, in appreciation of Jesus' consideration of him he made a feast, inviting Jesus and some of his fellow publicans. Outside of these scripture established descriptions, not much is known of Matthew. After the listing of the apostles in Acts 1:13, Matthew disappears from the record of the New Testament. There are however several quotes in early Christian writings that attribute the first gospel to Matthew. Papias writes "For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those who spoke much, but in those who taught the truth...If then, anyone who had attended on the elders came, I asked immediately after their sayings, what Andrew of Peter said, or what was said by Phillip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the Lord's disciples"⁵. Papias continues in volume 6 of his fragments with this statement "Matthew put together the oracles of the Lord in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them the best he could"⁶. This quote also lends credence to the position that Matthew's gospel was produced originally in Hebrew and translated into Greek around the time of the second century.

The early church writer Irenaeus also lends evidence toward Matthew being the author of the writing that bears his name, he writes: "Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church"⁷. He continues in his fragments:

The gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ should be of the seed of David. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire to establish this point, took particular pains to afford them

⁵ Papias, *Fragments* (1)

⁶ Papias, *Fragments* (6)

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (III,i.1)

convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with an account of His genealogy⁸.

This quote is quite beneficial as well, because he shows that he had a very good grasp on the intended purpose of the book and it is the same purpose that exegetes today attribute to it. There are several other quotes in the writings of the fathers that lay claim to the Matthew authorship of the first gospel, but space does not permit an examination of them all. One more intriguing quote, however, that should be examined is one by Clement where he writes:

But Matthew, meeting his propositions, showed clearly, that whosoever shall not obtain the baptism of Jesus shall not only be deprived of the kingdom of heaven, but shall not be without peril at the resurrection of the dead, even though he be fortified by the prerogative of a good life and an upright disposition⁹.

What is quite striking about the evidence for Matthew being the author of the first gospel is even Tatian (the 2nd century heretic) included Matthew in his Diatessaron. This is all further evidence that it had been accepted by the early church as the work of the apostle himself.

In conclusion, Matthew is the traditional author of the Gospel that bears his name, Papias, Irenaeus and Origen all attribute it to him and it should be assumed that the early church had a better understanding on who wrote the book than us today.

Date of the Writing

Ignatius quotes Matthew so that puts an upper limit on the possible date of the writing of around 115ad. . The period in which most supposed dates fall is A.D 80-100. Many feel that Matthew borrowed from Mark and dates for Mark fall between A.D 55 to 70. When trying to determine the date for the writing there are several items that must factor in.

⁸ Irenaeus *Fragments*. (XXIX)

⁹ Clement, *Recognitions of Clement* (LV)

First off, if the two-source hypothesis about synoptic origins is correct, then Matthew must have been written after Mark, and after the collection of sayings known as Q was in existence. It is the position of this writer, however, that there is not much evidence for the two source position and thus any theory, based upon that theory is formed upon faulty premises. Second, it is widely believed that Matthew was written later than Luke, because 22:7 and 24:3–28 appear to contain direct references to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Again, however, this presumption of course depends on the belief that there can never be such a thing as genuine predictive prophecy, and therefore if Jesus appears to have foretold an event in the future this means the early church must have rewritten the tradition in the light of later circumstances. This writer believes strongly in the inspiration of the writers of the New Testament and any theory that does not take this into account must be re-examined. Drane writes: Even if the possibility of such foresight is allowed, though, Matthew was clearly an intentional literary stylist of some skill, and might easily have formulated the actual phraseology to reflect the details of what happened when the temple was destroyed in fulfilment of an earlier prediction.¹⁰

Drane goes on to say: “It has also been argued that the type of church organization envisaged in Matthew is well developed, and therefore reflects a stage towards the end of the first century. Like all arguments based on the notion of ‘development’, this one is easier to put forward than it is to substantiate”¹¹ The aforementioned arguments are not that strong when Matthew’s teachings about the church are compared with the problems in the Corinthian church in the mid 50’s, it is really difficult to find any substantial differences between the two.

¹⁰Drane, John William: *Introducing the New Testament*. Completely rev. and updated. Oxford : Lion Publishing plc, 2000, S. 208

¹¹ Ibid

The majority verdict is that, taking all these factors into account, Matthew is probably to be dated sometime in the period between about A.D.80 and 100. ¹² Carson writes: Other arguments depend on the relative scheme of dating in both the writing of the NT documents and the development of Jewish—Christian relations which is presupposed. There is little room for dogmatism here, and some scholars regard a date in the early 60s as an attractive alternative to the more commonly proposed date around AD 80. ¹³

The Purpose of Matthew's Gospel

Matthew wrote his Gospel for the distinct purpose of persuading the Jews that Jesus was, in fact, the promised messiah that they had been waiting for. Matthew goes about accomplishing this purpose in many different ways.

First, off Matthew uses several Old Testament quotations to show that Jesus' life and teachings were foretold. Matthew quotes prophecy after prophecy concerning Jesus and almost always says "and so it was fulfilled that which was written". This is done for a distinct purpose. The Jews would have known these prophecies, fulfillment of these prophecies meant that the Messiah, the promised Christ, had arrived. Carson writes:

The first two chapters of the gospel (in which an unusually large concentration of formula-quotations occurs) are devoted primarily to setting out the scriptural grounds for seeing Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. His mission was to fulfil the law and the prophets (5:17), and the rest of ch. 5 explores what that fulfilment means. A series of references to Jesus' ministry as 'greater than' key figures and institutions of the OT in ch. 12 (vs 6, 41, 42) develops an argument for his fulfilment not only of specific

¹²Ibid

NT New Testament

¹³Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Mal 4:4

OT Old Testament

prophecies but of the essential dynamics of OT life and religion. In these and other ways Matthew ‘claims’ the whole OT revelation as the basis of the mission of Jesus.¹⁴

Second, Matthew spends a large portion of his Gospel quoting the teachings of Jesus. He gives large sections of Jesus’ teachings to show His surpassing greatness as a teacher. Matthew tries to show that “He spoke as one with authority, not as one of the scribes” (Matt. 7:29).

Third, Matthew demonstrates time after time that Jesus had power from heaven. He shows that Jesus was able to perform miracles. Matthew illustrates that Jesus had power over nature, illness, death, demons and more. When the “multitudes” (a key word) in Matthew’s gospel observed Jesus performing these miracles they were moved to “follow” (a key word) Him because they were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.

The purpose of Matthew is quite clear to the reader; it is designed from the first chapter to the last to convict the Jew that Jesus is the promised Messiah of the lineage of David. As was quoted earlier, even Ireneas came to the same conclusion when he wrote:

The gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ should be of the seed of David. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire to establish this point, took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with an account of His genealogy¹⁵.

From the birth of Jesus onward, he is shown to be the Messiah. Jesus’ birth proves that He is a Heavenly King. First off, His birth was miraculous (1;18-21). Second, wise men desired to worship Him (2:1-2). When looking at His birth, it is noted that a supernatural event took place in the sky (2:2,9). Along with the various Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Matthew,

¹⁴Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Mal 4:4

¹⁵Irenaeus *Fragments*. (XXIX)

many prophecies are mentioned concerning the birth of Jesus alone. It's time (Daniel 9). It's place (Micah 5:2). It's nature (Isaiah 7:14). In just the account of the birth of Jesus Matthew declares that Jesus is the Messiah. From the birth onward, example after example is given that furthers Matthew's argumentation to his Jewish audience that Jesus is the One that they had been waiting for.

Matthew and its Relation to the Synoptics

The first 3 gospels are referred to as the synoptics. Scholars observed the many similarities between these books and at the same time there differences and determined that there must be some sort of common source that connects them. This is called the synoptic problem.

“The first three gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are known as the Synoptic Gospels because they share a common outline of events as contrasted with the Fourth Gospel”¹⁶. These scholars observe the similarities between Mathew, Mark, and Luke and speculate there origins. It has been said by many that no one could read these Gospels consecutively with attention, without being aware of the resemblances and differences in their contents. It is for this reason that they conclude that there must be a common source that the authors received their information from, or that they possibly obtained their information from each other. Many theories are presented to answer the origin of the synoptic gospels.

To summarize up the major theories, scholars have sought to solve this problem by creating two basic theories: the two source theory and the four source theory. The 2 source theory says that Mark was the first gospel recorded because it is the shortest. Matthew and Luke used Mark (when they agree with Mark) but Matthew and Luke have information that Mark does not. They conclude their must be another source and that other source is called Q. This does not satisfy some critics because it fails to explain the variations between Luke and Matthew. Thus, a

¹⁶ Guthrie 943

four source theory enters. There are two unnamed sources that come into picture, one that Matthew used and Luke did not, and one that Luke used and Matthew did not.

This writer is strongly under the persuasion that the Synoptic Problem is a not real problem for many reasons. First, often times the problem just assumes multiple sources and the absence of divine intervention. The author of this paper approaches scripture with the assumption that God was involved in revealing His message to His inspired authors. What if the common source is the Holy Spirit? Second, the problem assumes that variation in stories is mean contradiction. Two witnesses to the same event will often record and emphasize different things. Third, the whole idea of trying to parallel the gospel accounts makes many fundamental exegetical mistakes. For example, why assume that Matthew, Mark and Luke are always putting events in what they perceive to be chronological order. Also, many assume that if Matthew, Mark and Luke record a teaching of Jesus that sounds similar that it must be the same account, this does not always have to be the case. I feel that the main reason that the Synoptic Problem is such a problem is many fail to understand that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have different purposes that they are trying to convey using the same or similar, historical accounts of Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke and even John had distinct purposes to their writings and record the events and teachings that they do, to further the argumentation contained within their gospels. When context is taken into consideration the reason being Matthew's using a string of accounts becomes evident – because they all have something in common that proves the point he is trying to make. The same is true with Mark and Luke.

Religious Groups in Judaism During the Time of Matthew's Gospel

As has been mentioned previously Matthew's intended audience is that of the nation of Israel. Throughout his account of the life of Christ he references and deals with argumentation

addressed to different sects of Judaism. It benefits one to have a familiarity with these sects when approaching a book such as the Gospel of Matthew.

During the Maccabean Period, Judaism fragmented into a variety of religious parties. Josephus, in his *Wars of the Jews* mentions 4 of the 6 groups, the New Testament references 5 of the 6, but even with all this division in Judaism, most of your everyday working class Jewish individuals did not belong to either party. The ones that were part of a sect or party, seem in scripture to always be the most dogmatic and outspoken

The most referenced Jewish sect in Scripture is the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a powerful group of separatists that often dictated public opinion to kings and priests. The Pharisees were the chief interpreters of the Torah. They accepted as binding three major divisions of the Old Testament: the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings. Although they accepted the Old Testament, they also accepted the oral law of the elders and rabbis that would have been found in such books as the Mishnah. The Pharisees, unlike some of the other sects, believed in coming judgment, the resurrection of the dead, a future life for the soul, eternal rewards and punishments and even a spiritual realm. In scripture it is declared that both Gamaliel and Saul were Pharisees (Acts 5:33,39; 23:6-9).¹⁷

Another prominent sect in first century Judaism were the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a liberal aristocratic group. These Jews seemed to have a policy of cooperation with the Romans because often they were wealthy land owners. They were the ones that controlled the temple, the priesthood and the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees often adopted very Hellenistic customs. The Sadducees view of Scripture stood in glaring contrast to that of the Pharisees. They accepted only Mosaic Law. They denied final judgment, resurrection, future life, and the existence of spiritual beings. Because of their close association with the Temple, when the temple was

¹⁷du Toit, A.B.: *The New Testament Milieu*. Halfway House : Orion, 1998

destroyed in A.D 70 they were reduced to insignificance and thus the Pharisees mirror a lot of what we see in modern day Judaism.

A third group within Judaism was the Essenes. These were Jews who inhabited the area around the Dead Sea, called Qumran. They were the ones that produced and preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls. This group rejected mainstream Judaism and the temple (in fact they felt it was very corrupt). They were often both ascetics and monastics. They held a very high view of scripture, they meditated, studied and copied it. The Essenes were a disciplined group that awaited the coming of the Messiah. They were often very dualistic in their thinking such as: Life vs. Death, Light vs. Darkness, and Good vs. Evil. History and extra biblical writings even show that they practiced such things as ritual baptism and it is thought that John the Baptist may have been part of the Essene community.¹⁸

A fourth group in first century Judaism was the Zealots. They were an intensely patriotic group that advocated the overthrow of Roman control. They were looking for a strong warrior type Messiah. The Apostle Simon was from this sect. In 66 A.D, the Zealots organized a Jewish revolt against Rome. This sparked the beginning of the end for the Jewish nation, because they provoked the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D.¹⁹

Another group in Judaism during the time of Matthew's Gospel is the Herodians. They were a political movement that supported the dynasty of Herod. Matthew mentions them in his Gospel in Matthew 22:16-17, which reads: *They sent to him their disciples along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are truthful, and teach the way of God in*

¹⁸Easton, M.G.: *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897

¹⁹ du Toit, A.B.: *The New Testament Milieu*. Halfway House : Orion, 1998

*accordance with the truth. You do not court anyone's favor because you show no partiality. Tell us then, what do you think? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*²⁰

A final group in Judaism during this period was the scribes. They were those who copied the law. By virtue of their occupation they were often looked at as authorities on the Law.

Matthew mentions them in chapter 23 of his Gospel.

Conclusion

The first Gospel is one that deals with the social setting of the day, is written to a specific group and deals with a specific purpose. Matthew's purpose is to convict the 1st century Jew that this Jesus is the promised Messiah. He shows that the Messiah was promised a prophesied and that Jesus fits those passages. He declares through genealogies that Jesus comes from the right ancestors. Jesus performed great miracles and was shown to be a master teacher. Jesus was the promised Messiah.

²⁰Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006, S. Mt 22:16-17

WORKS REFERENCED

- Arndt, William F. and F. Wilber Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. (Chicago: University Press, 1952).
- Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev.Ed), S. 11
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1962).
- Bercot, David W. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 1999).
- Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Mal 4:4
- Carson, D.A. Douglas J. Moo, Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 1992.
- Coffman, James Burton. *Commentary On Matthew*. (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1974).
- Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1824.
- Davidson, F. *The New Bible Commentary*. E. F. Kevan, A. M. Stibbs. (Grand Rapids: W.M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1963.
- Davis, John. *A Dictionary of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1924).
- Douglas, J.D. *The New Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).
- Drane, John William: *Introducing the New Testament*. Completely rev. and updated. Oxford : Lion Publishing plc, 2000, S. 208
- Dummelow, J.R. *Commentary on the Holy Bible*. (New York: The Macmillan Company) 1937.
- du Toit, A.B.: *The New Testament Milieu*. Halfway House : Orion, 1998
- Easton, M.G.: *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, c1897
- Hastings, James. *Dictionary of the Bible*. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1963).
- Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*. 24 ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House) 1965.

- Harrison, Everett F. *Introduction to the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: W.M.B Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1964.
- Iverach, James . *The Synoptic Gospels*. “The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia” Edited By James Orr. (Grand Rapids: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing) 1946.
- Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. The Anti Nicene Fathers, vol.1 N.p., n.d.; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Kittel, Gerhard. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985).
- Moulton, Harold K. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).
- Perry, Alfred M. *The Growth of the Gospels*. “The Interpreters Bible Vol. 7” (Abingdon Press: Nashville) 1980.
- Tenney, Merrill C. *New Testament Survey*. (London: W.M.B Eerdmans) 1961.
- Thiessen, Henry Clarence *Introduction to the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1966.
- Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Fifth Printing) 2002.
- Vine, W.E. *Vine’s Amplified Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers)1991.
- Smith, William. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*. (Philadelphia: Holman, n.d).
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993).G907.