

The Half Hour That Changes the World

The Gospel of Matthew

Book 40

Basic Questions behind the book:

Where are the points of continuity and discontinuity between Jesus & the Old Testament?

Summary of book:

Of the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew is the most Jewish in flavour and most likely the last to be written. It is made up of material from Mark which is peppered throughout, and woven through Matthew's own material (M) and the material that Matthew shares with Luke (Q). Matthew's Gospel was probably written between AD 80 and AD 90. The Jewish flavour is seen in a number of ways:

- It has a long Jewish style genealogy to start the book. Jews were keen on their genealogies. It differs from Luke's genealogy by tracing Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, whereas Luke had gone back to Adam.
- The Nativity story is told through the eyes of Joseph not Mary.
- The book is organised around five blocks of teaching, the most famous being chapters 5 - 7 known as the Sermon on the Mount which is all presented in a typically rabbinic way.
- There are more Old Testament quotations in Matthew than in the other Synoptics, and the point of using the quotations is to show how Jesus fulfils them.
- The Jewish use of hyperbole (exaggeration)
- Jesus is mainly seen as a teacher & preacher; In Mark he was more of a Wonder Worker.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To prove that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

Author: The book is anonymous. All we can say for definite is that it was written by a Jewish Christian. Traditionally it has been associated with the disciple Matthew (Levi) though this may simply have been the employment of a first century literary device called pseudonymous authorship where a book gains recognition by being linked with someone well known. The reason that linking it with Matthew made sense was that structurally it is clearly well thought out and demonstrates an orderly mind, the sort of mind you would expect of a Tax Collector.

Recipients: It is believed that Matthew wrote his Gospel for Jewish Christians with a view to helping them to connect with Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah.

Dating: AD 80 - 90.

Other Reflections:

The unique material to this Gospel includes:

- The dreams of Joseph in which he is guided by angelic intervention, not to abandon pregnant Mary, and to escape to Egypt after the birth of Jesus.
- The visitation of the Magi. This bit is interesting in that the point of the story is to show that Jesus as Messiah is going to be a blessing to all nations, not just the Jews, which wasn't a popular message in Judaism or in early Jewish Christianity.
- Much of the teaching in Matthew is unique to this Gospel, for example the Beatitudes in Chapter 5:1-12, teaching on how to handle persecution, and internal church problems.
- Some of the parables are unique, for example the parable of the sheep & goats (Ch.25).
- The Great Commission in Chapter 28:16-20

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." (5:17)