

The Gospel According to MATTHEW

Gospel: good news

Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, also known as the tax collector Levi (Matthew 9:9), is held to be the eyewitness expert behind this telling of the Good News about Jesus. Matthew does not identify himself as the writer anywhere in the text of the Gospel, nor do other contemporary sources name the disciple as the writer. However, Papias, who wrote in the middle of the second century, records: "Matthew collected the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew tongue, but each man translated them as he was able." The range of dates given to this Gospel is 50 to 90 A.D. The earliest known manuscripts are dated after 70 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman government.

Do I have to read Chapter 1?

Matthew begins by naming Jesus' ancestors. This may seem like a pointless list of unfamiliar names. I do not want this to be an obstacle to you, but I hope you will be patient enough to read through this list. Matthew has several important points to make. Jesus is the Son of David, heir to the throne as King of the Jews. Jesus is the Son of Abraham, king of all nations, for in Abraham, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). Important women are named, too, including Ruth and Rahab, foreigners who have their own impressive stories of faith and action.

Joseph's side of the story

Matthew and Luke are the two Gospels that describe Jesus' birth. Mary's experience is highlighted in Luke 1 and 2. Luke tells of the wondrous events: finding shelter in a world full of strangers, angels declaring peace on earth, amazed shepherds telling everyone, and Mary pondering all these things in her heart.

Matthew points out the threats to Jesus. Joseph is ready to divorce Mary after he learns of her pregnancy. (Their "engagement" was as legally binding as a marriage today, although they had not yet had a marriage ceremony, moved in together or had intercourse. Some translations of the Bible use the term "betrothal.") However, the angel tells

Joseph who the unborn child is. Joseph takes Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son. When the wise men come and worship (Matthew's hint that Jesus is Lord and Savior for all nations), King Herod is on their heels to kill all the babies in and around Bethlehem. However, God's angel warns Joseph. Jesus is safely on his way to Egypt before the soldiers arrive.

Jesus fulfills prophecy

Matthew quotes often from the Old Testament: "For so it has been written," "in order to fulfill the prophet," "in accordance with the Scriptures." All four Gospels quote Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus, but Matthew contains nine additional references which are not found in Mark, Luke, or John. Matthew assumes a Christian audience that places great importance on Hebrew scriptures and Jewish customs.

Jesus the teacher

The Gospel according to Matthew contains many major sections of teaching that do not occur in the other Gospels: Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), additional parables, instructions on forgiveness and Christian community (chapter 18), more teaching in the temple in the week prior to Jesus' death. There is much common material with Mark and Luke, some of it word for word, but Matthew highlights Jesus' teaching.

To the ends of the earth, to the end of the age

Everything in Matthew leads up to Jesus' last supper, trials, crucifixion, and burial. Nor does the story of Jesus end with the resurrection.

Matthew ends with restatement of Jesus' identity and our assignment. When disciples see Jesus in Galilee his last words are "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."