

# INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW<sup>1</sup>

**AUTHORSHIP:** *Matthew* (surname *Levi* –Mk. 2:14). “Probably Levi was his Jewish name, and Matthew his Christian name.”<sup>2</sup> Scroggie notes that “all tradition affirms” that Matthew wrote this gospel. He was, of course, a tax collector (customs officer, publican) “in the territory of Herod Antipas. As a farmer of Roman taxes he must have had some education, and must have been acquainted with the Aramaic and Greek languages.”<sup>3</sup>

**DATE:** **Later 50’s** (if it was the first gospel written), **or 60’s**. Certainly before A.D. 70, since many things mentioned in it give reference to the temple precincts, etc., and thus appear to require a date prior to the fall of Jerusalem. “References to ‘*the City of the great King*’ (v. 35), ‘*the Temple*’ (xxiv. 1, 2), ‘*the Holy Place*’ (xxiv. 15), impending trouble (xxiv. 16, 20), and to ‘*the Holy City*’ (xxvii. 53), do not favor a date after Jerusalem had fallen. The expression ‘*until this day*’ (xxvii. 8; xxviii. 15) indicates a period of years from the time of the events referred to, but a term of some twenty years would satisfy these passages.”<sup>4</sup> “Although the Gospel has sometimes been dated in the 80’s or 90’s, the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is viewed as an event yet future (24:2) seems to require an earlier date.”<sup>5</sup>

**PLACE OF WRITING:** Most likely Jerusalem, certainly Palestine. Only those who give it a late date hold to such views as Antioch of Syria.

**ANTICIPATED AUDIENCE:** There is little question when one surveys this gospel that it was written to the Jews, and with a Jewish audience in mind. “Tradition is unanimous that Matthew wrote his Gospel for Jews. Irenaeus...Origen...Eusebius... **Though Matthew was not the first to be written of the canonical Gospels (?), it is placed first because of its relation to the Old Testament.** More than any other of the Gospels, Matthew’s is allied with the Hebrew Scriptures in theme and tone...the Messiah, Israel, the Law, the Kingdom, and Prophecy. Jewish ideas and terms characterized the whole record.”<sup>6</sup>

**THEME:** Christ is the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews, *and* the King of all creation. Matthew begins by demonstrating from Christ’s lineage that He is qualified to be the King of the Jews (chapter 1). He then goes on to build a case for Christ’s authority throughout the gospel, bringing the reader to the ultimate conclusion in the final chapter of the treatise (28:18) **that Christ is king not just of the Jews, but of everything, since He possesses all authority** (power-KJV).<sup>7</sup>

**KEY VERSE: Mt. 1:21** – “*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.*” In other words, Christ is the promised Messiah who will redeem mankind.

**KEY WORDS & PHRASES:** “*authority*” (power-KJV) [Mt. 7:29; 8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 20:25; 21:23-24, 27; 28:18]; “*fulfill(ed)...that which was spoken by the prophet*” [Mt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35 cf. 5:18 & 24:34]; “*Son of David*” [1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:2, 32; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45]; “*Kingdom of Heaven*” [33 times-A.V.]. Other significant words or themes running through the book include ‘*the Holy City*’ ... ‘*the Holy Place*’ ... *Jewish customs...the Mosaic Law...the prophets* (39 references)... A key phrase that occurs after five of Jesus’ six discourses contained in Matthew is the phrase ‘*It came to pass when Jesus had finished*’ [7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1].”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Notes compiled by Rev. Mike Edwards, October, 1999. Originally written as part of the course work for a graduate class I took called “*Expository Preaching in Matthew*”-mwe. Revised Sept. 2007 & Jan. 2013, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, West Indies.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Scroggie, *Guide to the Gospels*, p. 246

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p. 248

<sup>5</sup> Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1443

<sup>6</sup> Scroggie, *op cit.*, p. 248

<sup>7</sup> These observations on the emphasis on “authority” in Matthew are taken directly from comments by Dr. Mark Minnick in the graduate class *Expository Preaching in Matthew*, July, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Scroggie, *op cit.*, pp. 254-55, 292

**GENERAL OUTLINE & SUMMARY OF THE BOOK:** **Chapter 1** establishes Christ's right to the Davidic throne. That is followed by three chapters of basic, introductory information and biographical data (**chapters 2-4**). Minnick points out that after having demonstrated that Christ is the Messiah first by His words (**chapters 5-7**) and then by His works (**chapters 8-9**), he then commissions the twelve to do similar things (**chapter 10**), at which point one would assume that they would be welcomed with open arms. But surprise—they encounter opposition and misunderstanding instead (**chapters 11-12**). So Jesus begins to teach in parables, in order to hide things from the masses and reveal them to His true followers (**chapter 13**), beginning with a parabolic explanation of why the good news of the Kingdom has met with such a mixed reaction (i.e. the parable of the Sower). The next few chapters of Matthew (**chapters 14-20**) continue this interplay of miraculous activity & pharisaic opposition, which leads the reader to the story of the Passion week, which is the logical conclusion of this opposition between Jesus and the religious leaders, i.e. His death (**chapters 21-28**).

**THE “DISCOURSES”:** The Gospel of Matthew is built around six extensive discourses of the Lord Jesus (**chapters 5-7; 10; 12; 18; 23; & 24-25**), “...five of which are closed with the same formula: *‘It came to pass when Jesus had finished’*”<sup>9</sup> (see references under “Key words and phrases” above) Everything in the book is intended to lead one to conclude that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, God in the flesh, the redeemer of mankind e.g. Christ's teachings in Chapters 5-7 showed that His *words* had divine authority (7:29), while His miracles in chapters 8-9 demonstrated that same authority by His *works* (9:8).

**MISCELLANEOUS NOTES:**

“Generally speaking, Mark's record of Christ's ministry is chronological, but (**Matthew**)...**does not follow the chronological order of events, but assembles (his book) in a series of groupings.**”<sup>10</sup> It should be noted here that clearly Matthew's Gospel is selective, and was compiled with a definite purpose in view. Minnick, like others, has pointed out that Matthew's gospel has minimal treatment of the first twenty-seven years of Christ's life, focusing instead almost exclusively on his 3 year ministry, with roughly one fourth of the book dealing with the last week of His life alone!

**Nearly all of Mark's Gospel is found in Matthew's Gospel.** “...The substance of 606 of Mark's 661 verses is found (in Matthew)”<sup>11</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew “There are 129 Old Testament references: 53 of them are citations, and 76 are allusions...These references are taken from 25 of the 39 books of the Old Testament, and represent every part of these Scriptures i.e. ‘the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms’ (Luke 24:44) ...the majority of them are taken from the Septuagint... The words of the Messiah occupy about three-fifths of the Record, about 644 of its 1068 verses... If what there is of Mark in Matthew's Gospel is subtracted, *the remainder consists almost wholly of discourses, from which we may infer that it was this Evangelist's design to give prominence to the Sayings of Christ, as Mark had done to His Doings.*”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, pp. 261, 270-71

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p. 255

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p. 61

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, italics added.