

# The Gospel of Matthew

Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri



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To Matthew Thomas Mitch, our fourth son.

-C. M.

To my daughter, Teresa.

-E. S.

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# Contents

Illustrations	7
Editors' Preface	9
Abbreviations	13
Introduction	15
Outline of Matthew	29
A Royal Son: Genealogy and Birth of Jesus (1:1–25)	33
Magi and Flight to Egypt (2:1–23)	49
John the Baptist and Jesus (3:1–17)	60
The Messiah Tested and Revealed (4:1–25)	73
Sermon on the Mount Part 1: The Message of the Kingdom (5:1–48)	84
Sermon on the Mount Part 2: Treasures in Heaven (6:1–34)	102
Sermon on the Mount Part 3: The House Built on Rock (7:1–29)	113
Jesus' Healings (8:1–9:34)	124
The Mission of the Twelve (9:35–10:42)	138
John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah (11:1–30)	150
The Lord of the Sabbath: One Greater than Jonah, Solomon, and the Temple (12:1–50)	162
Parables of the Kingdom (13:1–58)	174
The Martyrdom of John and the Continuing Ministry of Jesus (14:1–15:39)	186
The Messiah's Sonship and Suffering (16:1–28)	201
Jesus Is Transfigured and Instructs His Disciples (17:1–27)	214
True Greatness within the Community (18:1–35)	225
On the Way to Jerusalem Part 1 (19:1–30)	237
On the Way to Jerusalem Part 2 (20:1–34)	252
The King and the Temple (21:1–46)	263

Showdown in the Temple (22:1–23:39)	280
The Coming Judgment Part 1 (24:1–44)	301
The Coming Judgment Part 2 (24:45–25:46)	316
The Messiah Betrayed and Arrested (26:1–75)	329
The Climax of the Cross (27:1–66)	348
The Messiah Is Risen! (28:1–20)	365
Suggested Resources	375
Glossary	377
Index of Pastoral Topics	381
Index of Sidebars	383
Map	384

## Editors' Preface

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord. . . . All the preaching of the Church should be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the power and goodness in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the soul, a pure and perennial fountain of spiritual life.

Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 21

Were not our hearts burning while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?

Luke 24:32

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture aims to serve the ministry of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Since Vatican Council II, there has been an increasing hunger among Catholics to study Scripture in depth and in a way that reveals its relationship to liturgy, evangelization, catechesis, theology, and personal and communal life. This series responds to that desire by providing accessible yet substantive commentary on each book of the New Testament, drawn from the best of contemporary biblical scholarship as well as the rich treasury of the Church's tradition. These volumes seek to offer scholarship illumined by faith, in the conviction that the ultimate aim of biblical interpretation is to discover what God has revealed and is still speaking through the sacred text. Central to our approach are the principles taught by Vatican II: first, the use of historical and literary methods to discern what the

biblical authors intended to express; second, prayerful theological reflection to understand the sacred text “in accord with the same Spirit by whom it was written”—that is, in light of the content and unity of the whole Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith (*Dei Verbum* 12).

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture is written for those engaged in or training for pastoral ministry and others interested in studying Scripture to understand their faith more deeply, to nourish their spiritual life, or to share the good news with others. With this in mind, the authors focus on the meaning of the text for faith and life rather than on the technical questions that occupy scholars, and they explain the Bible in ordinary language that does not require translation for preaching and catechesis. Although this series is written from the perspective of Catholic faith, its authors draw on the interpretation of Protestant and Orthodox scholars and hope these volumes will serve Christians of other traditions as well.

A variety of features are designed to make the commentary as useful as possible. Each volume includes the biblical text of the New American Bible (NAB), the translation approved for liturgical use in the United States. In order to serve readers who use other translations, the most important differences between the NAB and other widely used translations (RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB, and NIV) are noted and explained. Each unit of the biblical text is followed by a list of references to relevant Scripture passages, Catechism sections, and uses in the Roman Lectionary. The exegesis that follows aims to explain in a clear and engaging way the meaning of the text in its original historical context as well as its perennial meaning for Christians. Reflection and Application sections help readers apply Scripture to Christian life today by responding to questions that the text raises, offering spiritual interpretations drawn from Christian tradition or providing suggestions for the use of the biblical text in catechesis, preaching, or other forms of pastoral ministry.

Interspersed throughout the commentary are Biblical Background sidebars that present historical, literary, or theological information, and Living Tradition sidebars that offer pertinent material from the postbiblical Christian tradition, including quotations from Church documents and from the writings of saints and Church Fathers. The Biblical Background sidebars are indicated by a photo of urns that were excavated in Jerusalem, signifying the importance of historical study in understanding the sacred text. The Living Tradition sidebars are indicated by an image of Eadwine, a twelfth-century monk and scribe, signifying the growth in the Church's understanding that comes by the grace of the Holy Spirit as believers study and ponder the word of God in their hearts (see *Dei Verbum* 8).

Maps and a Glossary are located in the back of each volume for easy reference. The glossary explains key terms from the biblical text as well as theological or exegetical terms, which are marked in the commentary with a cross (†). A list of Suggested Resources, an Index of Pastoral Topics, and an Index of Sidebars are included to enhance the usefulness of these volumes. Further resources, including questions for reflection or discussion, can be found at the series website, [www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com](http://www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com).

It is our desire and prayer that these volumes be of service so that more and more “the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified” (2 Thess 3:1) in the Church and throughout the world.

Peter S. Williamson  
Mary Healy  
Kevin Perrotta

### **Note to Readers**

The New American Bible differs slightly from most English translations in its verse numbering of the Psalms and certain other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, Ps 51:4 in the NAB is Ps 51:2 in other translations; Mal 3:19 in the NAB is Mal 4:1 in other translations. Readers who use different translations are advised to keep this in mind when looking up Old Testament cross-references given in the commentary.

# Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew was the most widely diffused Gospel in early Christianity. More often than not, from the second century onward, it was Matthew's account of Jesus that found its way into homilies, pastoral letters, theological writings, and catechetical instructions. Even after the fourfold Gospel canon had begun to crystallize, and orthodox leaders throughout the ecclesiastical world had come to recognize the authority of Mark, Luke, and John, a primacy of honor was still accorded to Matthew. This is not to say that Matthew's Gospel stands on a higher footing than its canonical counterparts, or that its portrait of Jesus is more trustworthy and true. It is simply a fact of history that when the early Church wished to contemplate the life of Christ, or to listen again to his voice, it usually turned first to Matthew.

The reasons for this are not difficult to imagine. Matthew, after all, was the first Gospel to be published bearing the name of one of the twelve apostles. Second, the Gospel is both well written and well organized—two great advantages for assisting memorization in a predominantly oral culture such as prevailed in the early Christian centuries. Third, the Gospel offers a beautifully balanced picture of Jesus, alternating between his mighty deeds and his memorable discourses. Fourth, the Gospel of Matthew has important things to say about the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New, providing the earliest Christians instruction on what it meant to live as the messianic people of God and in what ways this differs from living according to the legal and liturgical traditions of Israel. Finally, the First Gospel insists that the good news is destined for proclamation, not only among the Jewish people but also among the Gentiles. Whatever else can be said about the reasons for its popularity, it is clear that Matthew's Gospel was well suited to the needs of



Christian formation and supplied the ancient Church with a charter for its life and mission in the world.

A measure of insight into Matthew's Gospel may be gained by examining its historical context, its literary composition, and its theological and spiritual content. Analysis of the circumstances that gave birth and shape to the Gospel will help us to appreciate Matthew's unique perspective on the Messiah and his message.

## The Author of Matthew

Early Christian testimony is virtually unanimous in identifying the apostle Matthew as the author of the First Gospel. So far as the evidence available to us indicates, no rival tradition ever circulated that linked the work with the name of any other ancient figure. Everyone from St. Irenaeus in the second century to Origen and Tertullian in the third century to St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century to St. Augustine at the beginning of the fifth century held that the Gospel according to Matthew was a gospel *written by Matthew*. The same verdict is rendered by the earliest extant Greek manuscripts that preserve a title page for Gospel, all of which bear some variation of the heading *Kata Maththaion*, "According to Matthew." On the strength of this tradition, the apostolic and Matthean authorship of the First Gospel went on to become the uncontested position of theological scholarship for most of Christian history.

Today, however, the apostolic authorship of Matthew's Gospel is maintained by only a minority of biblical scholars. The reasons for this change of position are varied and complex. Suffice it to say that a shift took place in nineteenth-century scholarship that subordinated the Gospel of Matthew to the long-neglected Gospel of Mark. Since then, a majority of Gospel specialists have come to hold that the author of Matthew obtained substantial information about Jesus from the Gospel of Mark. This new hypothesis—that Mark was written before Matthew and was utilized as a source for Matthew—has had a direct impact on the question of authorship. If the writer of Matthew made extensive use of Mark, a Gospel that everyone acknowledges was written by a nonapostle, it would seem to follow that the author of Matthew could not have been an apostle either. After all, why would a companion of Jesus, an eyewitness to the Messiah at close range, rely on the work of someone else, much less on an account written by a noneyewitness such as Mark? Such is the reasoning of many scholars today.

From here the discussion of authorship typically proceeds to an analysis of the internal data of the text. The aim of this undertaking is to establish a profile of the evangelist based on what he has written. When this detective work is done, most scholars are convinced that the Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jewish Christian. Several considerations support this verdict: (1) The author of Matthew seems to have known Hebrew. Not only does he write Greek in a noticeable Semitic style, but several of his quotations from the Old Testament are translated directly from the Hebrew original rather than cited from the existing Greek translation, called the Septuagint. Knowledge of Hebrew in addition to Greek was all but unknown in the first century outside the Jewish community. (2) The author displays a marked interest in the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah who accomplished all that was foreseen and foretold in the Old Testament. So saturated was his mind in the biblical tradition that research has turned up nearly two hundred citations, allusions, and verbal parallels to the Jewish Scriptures embedded in the text of the First Gospel! This level of specialized knowledge of Judaism's sacred texts was extraordinarily rare among the Gentiles of the ancient world. (3) The author was familiar with a variety of religious customs and institutions that would hardly constitute common knowledge beyond the sphere of Judaism. On the basis of these observations, the conclusion appears solid that the Gospel of Matthew comes from the hand of a Jewish Christian author, one whose cultural and religious background gave him a firsthand knowledge of the language, writings, and traditions of Israel.

In the final analysis, the view of Christian tradition (the author was Matthew) and the view of critical scholarship (the author was a Jewish Christian) need not be pitted against each other. It is notable that Matthew was a Jewish disciple of Jesus (9:9; 10:3). And being a tax official in Galilee, he would have been conversant in Greek as well as the Semitic tongues of Palestine. Consequently, it is no great leap to suggest that the *person* the Gospels call Matthew fits rather well the *profile* of the evangelist ascertained by modern scholars.<sup>1</sup> This is not to ignore that little is known about the apostle Matthew, or that the profile just examined is too general and nonspecific to make him the obvious

1. Several episodes unique to the First Gospel feature references to currency, debts, investments, and payments (17:24–27; 18:23–35; 20:1–16; 25:14–30; 26:25; 27:3–10; 28:11–15). This could be viewed as favoring Matthew's authorship inasmuch as teachings involving money might be expected to catch the attention of a one-time tax officer. Also, it seems *unlikely* that a gospel intended for Jewish Christians would ever be ascribed to a tax collector unless the claim had some basis in historical tradition, for the Jews generally despised tax collectors as greedy, unclean, and unpatriotic.

choice. But as we read the evidence, the apostle Matthew is as suitable as any potential candidate for the authorship of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

## The Audience of Matthew

Christian scholarship has historically maintained that Matthew's Gospel was written for a Palestinian Christian audience.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish outlook of the book seemed to point in this direction, as did an ancient tradition that Matthew had originally written his Gospel in a Semitic language, either Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>4</sup> Since few Gentiles would have been interested in a work dominated by Jewish concerns, and few communities outside the land of Israel could have read it in a Semitic tongue, every indication was that Matthew's Gospel was intended for the early believers in Palestine.

Biblical scholarship today places Matthew's original readers in the eastern Mediterranean. Some have attempted to locate his target audience in Alexandria, Egypt; others have suggested the Transjordan region directly east of Palestine; still others have opted for a Phoenician port on the coast of Syria, or even Caesarea on the coast of Palestine. The majority of modern scholars, however, think that the Gospel of Matthew was written to a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians in or near the Syrian city of Antioch.

Several factors form the basis of this judgment. (1) Antioch is known to have had a sizeable Jewish population living alongside native Gentiles. This is precisely the demographic situation presupposed in the Gospel, which is noted both for its Jewish emphases and for its open acceptance of Gentiles (24:14; 26:13; 28:19–20). Not only that, but the book of Acts tells us that a group of Jewish Christians fled from Jerusalem to Antioch and there initiated a systematic outreach to Gentiles (Acts 11:19–26). (2) Matthew's Gospel displays a marked interest in the person and authority of Simon Peter (10:2; 14:22–33; 16:13–20; 17:24–27). This is significant insofar as Peter not only ministered in Antioch (Gal 2:11–17) but, according to an ancient tradition, served as bishop in the city before making his way to Rome.<sup>5</sup> (3) St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in

2. Even the hypothesis that Matthew used Mark does not rule out the apostolic authorship of Matthew. One could argue that the apostle Matthew utilized the Gospel of Mark with the awareness that Mark, according to tradition, had written down the preaching of Peter. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), lxxvi.

3. E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.1; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.6; Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 3.

4. This tradition, which is widely attested in early Christian writings, is too complex to be treated adequately within the limited scope of our introduction.

5. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.36.2; Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 1.

the early second century, is one of the first postapostolic authors to allude to the Gospel of Matthew in his writings.<sup>6</sup> Allusions to passages in Matthew are also found in another early document, called the *Didache*, which many scholars trace to the Syrian city of Antioch.<sup>7</sup> (4) It is curious that when the synoptic Gospels narrate Jesus' inaugural mission in Galilee, only Matthew tells us that his fame spread throughout "all of Syria" (4:24).

Though specific locations remain uncertain, it is probable that Matthew's original audience lived somewhere in the Syria-Palestine region. Ancient tradition points in this direction, as do the efforts of modern scholarship. It is there that we find the unique mix of Jewish and Gentile concerns addressed by the First Gospel.

## The Date of Matthew

Scholars widely agree that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the latter half of the first century AD. However, when it comes to narrowing the range of possible dates, opinions divide into a majority camp<sup>8</sup> that dates the Gospel in the 80s or 90s and a minority camp<sup>9</sup> that dates its composition in the 50s or 60s. The many factors underlying this difference of opinion can only be summarized here. The question more or less hinges on the interpretation of three critical issues: the synoptic problem,<sup>10</sup> the fall of Jerusalem, and the Church's relationship with Judaism in the first century.

1. The most widely accepted view of the synoptic problem holds that Mark was the first Gospel to be written, and that Matthew and Luke made independent use of Mark when composing their accounts. The issue, then, concerns the date of Matthew relative to Mark. If Mark was written shortly before or after

6. See, e.g., *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.2 (= Matt 2:2); *Epistle to the Smyrneans* 1.1 (= Matt 3:15); and *Epistle to Polycarp* 2.2 (= Matt 10:16).

7. See, e.g., *Didache* 3.7 (= Matt 5:5); 7.1 (= Matt 28:19); 8.2 (= Matt 6:5, 9–13); and 9.5 (= Matt 7:6).

8. E.g., Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 216–17; William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 127–38; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 92–93.

9. E.g., Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 599–609; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 82–91; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 14–17.

10. This is the name scholars give to the relationship that exists among the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Research devoted to the synoptic problem strives to determine the chronological order in which these Gospels were written and identify which Gospel writer(s) most likely relied on the work of his (or their) predecessor(s).

AD 70, as many scholars hold, then Matthew probably appeared in the late first century. The reason is that sufficient time must be allowed for the Gospel of Mark to have circulated and become an authoritative document in the Christian community. Other scholars, however, think it probable that Mark was written much earlier, perhaps in the 50s. If this chronology is accepted then Matthew could have been written toward the middle of the first century. Finally, for those scholars who adopt a different solution to the synoptic problem, one that sees Matthew as the first written Gospel, the date of Mark is of no consequence except to indicate that Matthew must have appeared sometime in the middle of the first century rather than near its end.

2. All agree that Matthew's Gospel makes reference to the conquest of Jerusalem (22:7) and the demolition of its temple (24:1–28). Historically, these events took place in AD 70 when the Romans marched on the Jewish capital and leveled the sanctuary. The question is whether these Gospel references, which appear in sayings attributed to Jesus, are prophecies in the strict sense or whether they betray knowledge of the events as already accomplished. Scholars who date Matthew in the post-70 period often allege that the evangelist, knowing some of the details of Jerusalem's downfall, adjusted the words of Jesus to conform to contemporary reports of the event. Scholars who date the Gospel in the pre-70 period make the opposite claim, namely, that Jesus' prophecies show no signs of updating based on eyewitness accounts of the city's demise.

3. Scholars of all stripes acknowledge that Matthew's Gospel displays a painful tension between Jesus and the Judaism of his day. They also tend to agree that Matthew highlights this theme because he and his fellow Christians found themselves in a similar situation—at odds with the Jewish community and targets of persecution by Jewish authorities. The agreement ends, however, when it comes to defining more specifically the historical circumstances involved. Advocates of a date in the 80s or 90s generally hold that Matthew's Gospel shows evidence of the rupture between church and synagogue in the late first century. It is said, for example, that the evangelist's recurrent use of the expression "their synagogues" is a thinly veiled reference to Jewish synagogues that had already excluded Jewish Christians (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54). This is significant because the ties between Judaism and Christianity were not formally severed until about AD 85.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Matthew's portrayal of Jesus denouncing the Pharisees is cited as evidence of a late date (12:24–32; 16:11–12; 23:1–36),

11. Scholars often trace the official split between Christianity and Judaism to an ancient synagogue prayer that utters a curse against "heretics" (a group that probably included Christians but was not restricted to them). Talmudic tradition links this with a rabbinic ruling made in the Palestinian town of Yavneh (also called Jamnia) in the 80s of the first century.

because in the aftermath of AD 70 it was the Pharisees who spearheaded the reorganization of Judaism and whose doctrines went on to become the basic tenets of rabbinic theology.

Advocates of a date in the 50s or 60s point out that Christians faced Jewish persecution from the beginning, some of which was more severe than mere exclusion from the synagogue (see Acts 7:57–58; 8:3; 26:9–11). Of greater import, supporters claim, are those features of the Gospel that had direct pastoral relevance only in the period before AD 70. This includes, for example, its warnings and criticisms directed against the Sadducees (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11–12; 22:23, 34). Early on the Sadducees were sworn opponents of the budding Christian movement (Acts 4:1–3; 5:17–18; 23:6); however, they were no longer a factor to be reckoned with in the post-70 period, since the sect was all but exterminated with the devastation of Jerusalem. Likewise, one can understand why Matthew, if he was writing before AD 70, would include Jesus' teaching on the temple tax as a lesson on fostering good relations with the Jewish community (17:24–27). But after AD 70, when the Romans diverted this tax to the temple of Jupiter in Italy, Matthew's presentation of the episode runs the risk of seeming to promote idolatry in the name of Jesus. Proponents of a mid-century date for the Gospel thus contend that Matthew included these traditions in his Gospel because they were live issues faced by his readers at the time of writing.

On the question of dating the Gospel, our view is that placing the Gospel of Matthew in the middle of the first century yields the best sense of the text in relation to its original readers. The commentary will thus proceed from this standpoint, though not to the neglect of Matthew's message for us today.

## The Composition of Matthew

The question of how Matthew composed his Gospel embraces a study of its *sources* as well as its *structure*. Scholarship devoted to these issues considers both the raw materials that went into the work as well as the shape of the final product after it left the hands of the evangelist.

Research aimed at uncovering the *sources* of Matthew's Gospel is within the domain of source criticism, a modern discipline that seeks to identify what written or oral materials were utilized by the evangelist at the time of writing. A small number of scholars, in agreement with early Christian tradition, contend that Matthew was the first of the four Gospels to be written.<sup>12</sup> On this assumption,

12. See Basil C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew: A Critique of the Two-Document Hypothesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Bernard Orchard, *Matthew, Luke, and Mark*, 2nd

it is uncertain what sources Matthew may have utilized, from written accounts to oral traditions to his own eyewitness memories. The belief of most New Testament scholars, however, is that Matthew's Gospel was not written until after the publication of Mark. Based on this chronology of composition, it is commonly said that Matthew drew material from at least three sources. The first is the Gospel of Mark, more than 80 percent of which is paralleled in Matthew. The second is a hypothetical document called Q (an abbreviation for *quelle*, the German word for "source"). This is said to be a lost collection of predominantly "sayings material" that is reconstructed from the teachings of Jesus that appear in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. The third is called M, which stands for those episodes found only in Matthew. The evangelist's M source may have been a written document, a pool of oral tradition, or a combination of both.

Enormous effort has gone into source-critical research in modern times, and yet the uncontested conclusions gained from it have been relatively few. This is not to say that investigation along these lines is misguided or unprofitable. It is only to say that the conclusions so far advanced about the sources of the Gospels remain hypothetical. There is yet no evidence supporting the independent existence of a Q document; interpretive judgments about the extent of any given oral tradition are difficult to verify; and even the question of how the synoptic Gospels are related to one another on a literary level continues to be debated. For these and other reasons, we think it best to build an interpretation of Matthew on the final form of the text as it has come down to us. In our estimation, the canonical Gospel we possess is a more secure starting point for theological and pastoral exegesis than a theoretical reconstruction of how its precanonical parts came together. It is the canonical text that the Church recognizes as the inspired Word of God.

Investigation of the *structure* of Matthew's Gospel is the search for an overall plan of composition that provides clues as to the meaning and flow of the whole. Modern books do this type of work for us by providing a "Table of Contents" page. Ancient books are generally less transparent in their structure, yet these too are capable of revealing their underlying framework. Often the structure is indicated by the repetition of formulas or phrases that a reader, or hearer, will easily note and remember. Matthew appears to utilize such a technique in making the outline of his Gospel open to detection.

Most scholars today accept either a threefold or a fivefold division of Matthew. Proponents of a threefold outline find its structural clue in the formula, "From

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ed. (Manchester: Koinonia Press, 1977); John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992).



that time on, Jesus began,” which appears in 4:17 and 16:21 and which serves to introduce new phases of the story. The claim is that Matthew, in marking off his text in this way, draws our attention first to the person of Jesus (1:1–4:16), then to the proclamation of Jesus (4:17–16:20), and finally to the passion and resurrection of Jesus (16:21–28:20).<sup>13</sup> The simplicity of this scheme is attractive, and it does take note of important transitions in the storyline. Nevertheless, many scholars object that a short phrase that appears only twice in the entire Gospel lacks the prominence necessary to serve as a structural indicator.

More popular is a fivefold outline that finds the structure of Matthew revealed in the refrain, “When Jesus finished these . . .” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This formula occurs five times in the Gospel, each time after Jesus delivers a major sermon. It thus marks five transitions from speech to storyline, indicating that Matthew has given us five discourses of Jesus separated by story reports focusing on his actions. Add to these an initial Infancy account (chaps. 1–2) and a climactic passion account (chaps. 26–28), and what emerges is a gospel made up of alternating blocks of narrative and discourse. It is clear on the basis of this observation that the Gospel of Matthew is a well-crafted piece of literature, a book with an organizational scheme that was carefully thought out in advance. Some would posit a theological purpose behind this structure, saying that the five units of narrative and discourse are deliberately reminiscent of the five Books of Moses.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, Matthew’s back-and-forth movement between story and speech underscores the dual significance of Christ’s works and words as the means of our redemption. An outline illustrating the fivefold structure of Matthew’s Gospel follows this introduction (see page 29).

## The Message of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew is preeminently the Gospel of the kingdom. The first indication of this is statistical: the word “kingdom” appears over fifty times in the Gospel, with its keynote expression, “the kingdom of heaven,” accounting for more than thirty occurrences.<sup>15</sup> The biblical world was no stranger to the concept of a kingdom but this leading motif in Matthew points us to something radically different from the normal fare of historical monarchies.

13. See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 1–37.

14. See Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1930).

15. Matthew’s “kingdom of heaven” occurs twelve times where parallel passages in Mark and Luke read “kingdom of God.” For the meaning of the Matthean phrase, see sidebar at 4:17, page 80.



In Matthew's theology, the kingdom of heaven is the divine perfection of the ancient kingdom of David. As such, it answers the ancient expectation that Yahweh, in fulfillment of his oath (Ps 89:3–4), would establish the kingdom of David forever (2 Sam 7:12–16) by sending a royal messiah, a new and “definitive David,”<sup>16</sup> to reign forever as the heir to his throne (see Isa 9:6–7; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23–24; Hosea 3:5). This prophetic hope has at last become a reality in Jesus. He is the royal Davidic Messiah who reigns as king, not in Jerusalem, where the descendants of David once sat enthroned, but high above “at the right hand of the Power” (26:64), where he wields “all power in heaven and on earth” (28:18). The new and everlasting covenant established through Jesus Christ is thus a transcendent fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of kingship, raising its rule from earth to heaven and extending its reach over the entire creation.<sup>17</sup>

Matthew's kingdom motif radiates throughout the Gospel and colors his presentation of its main themes: Christ, the Church, and the Christian vocation.

1. †*Christology in Matthew*. Matthew's vision of Christ can hardly be captured by any one title or theme in the Gospel. It is simply too rich and multi-dimensional. But since the dominant theme of the Gospel is the kingdom of heaven, it is no surprise that Jesus is frequently portrayed as a king. He stands in the royal Davidic line (1:1–16); he is born a “king” (2:2) in Bethlehem, the hometown of David (2:6); and two of his most prominent titles in the Gospel are “Messiah” and “son of David.”<sup>18</sup> The first means “Anointed One” and was a title once borne by the Davidic kings of Israel (see 2 Sam 22:51; Ps 2:2). In fact, the royal messianism current in Jesus' day was tied to the hope that the Lord would raise up one of David's descendants (12:23) to restore the glories of his kingdom (Mark 11:10). The second was also a royal title that brought to mind the original son of David, King Solomon. He stands out in the Gospel as a †type of messiah inasmuch as Jesus declares himself “greater than Solomon” (12:42) and stages his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to recall Solomon's entrance into the holy city as king of Israel (21:1–11; 1 Kings 1:32–45).

Other christological portraits in Matthew are similarly rooted in the Old Testament. For instance, Jesus is the “Son of Man” envisioned by the prophet Daniel (24:30; 26:64; Dan 7:13–14) as well as the “Servant of Yahweh” foreseen by the prophet Isaiah (8:17; 12:18–21; Isa 42:1–4; 53:4). †Typological

16. The expression is that of Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 10.

17. See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 15–16.

18. France notes that “the title ‘Son of David’ occurs more frequently in Matthew's Gospel than in the whole of the rest of the New Testament” (*Matthew*, 284).

links between the great figures of Israel's history and Jesus also combine to present him as a new and greater Moses (4:2; 17:1–7), as well as a new Jonah (12:38–41; 16:4).

Most spectacular of all is Matthew's teaching that Jesus is the "Son of the living God" (16:16). At this level, nothing could prepare us to embrace the full mystery of the man from Nazareth, who is nothing less than God-with-us (1:23). The Son possesses divine knowledge and enjoys an unparalleled intimacy with the Father in heaven (11:25–27); he is worshipped by his disciples (14:33); he is present amid his disciples gathered in prayer (18:20); and once risen from the dead, he wields universal authority over heaven and earth (28:18–20).

2. *Ecclesiology in Matthew.* Matthew's vision of the Church is closely connected with his messianic conception of Jesus. First, it is noteworthy that Matthew's is the only Gospel to refer explicitly to this ecclesial community. The Greek term *ekklēsia*, meaning "church," appears first in 16:18 and then twice in 18:17. The first passage is significant because it forges a link between the Church and the kingdom of heaven. There Jesus promises to build his Church upon Simon Peter, who will serve as the foundation of God's messianic people, envisioned as a living temple. From this we recall that the Lord's temple in Israel was the architectural sign of God's covenant with David constructed by the original son of David, King Solomon. Now Jesus is cast in this Solomonic role as the builder of the Church. And not only this, but also Jesus entrusts Peter with "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (16:19), an allusion to "the key of the house of David" that the Davidic ruler of Israel would entrust to his chief steward (Isa 22:22). Thus the kingdom of heaven not only finds its historical and visible manifestation in the Church but it also implies that the Church is in some respects modeled on the royal government of David and Solomon. The difference is that the Church's authority is spiritual rather than political; its function is not to manage the earthly affairs of societies and nations, but to transform the temporal order of this world and infuse it with the blessings of heaven.

Ultimately the kingdom of heaven is present in the Church "in mystery."<sup>19</sup> The pilgrim Church on earth is its historical manifestation, but not its final realization. The coming of the kingdom in its fullness remains the joyful hope of the Church, for which she prays daily to the Father (6:10: "your kingdom come"). Only when the Son of Man returns will his kingdom's unseen glory be revealed to all (25:31–46).

3. *Discipleship in Matthew.* Included in Matthew's vision of the kingdom are the principles, priorities, and imperatives that define the Christian way of life.

19. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 3.

Throughout the Gospel the discourses of Jesus urge listeners to embrace the demands of discipleship.

The initial summons of the kingdom is a call to repentance (3:2; 4:17). This is a turn from sinful and selfish ways to Jesus, who has come to save us from our sins (1:21; 26:28). From this starting point, the teaching of the Gospel stretches across a broad canvas of moral and spiritual matters. In terms of priorities, disciples are challenged to put God and his kingdom first in their lives (6:25–33) and to pursue a righteousness that surpasses the letter of the Mosaic Law (5:17–42). The goal of Christian discipleship is nothing less than unconditional love, a form of perfection that imitates God’s love for saints and sinners alike (5:43–48). Commitment to these standards will make believers a light shining in the world and a witness to God’s power to change lives for the better (5:13–16).

Of the many specific injunctions in Matthew, we are told that following Jesus means imitating his humility (11:29) and shouldering the cross of suffering as he did (10:38; 16:24). Disciples should be dedicated to integrity of speech (12:36–37), to exercising a generous mercy toward others (18:21–22), and to performing works of service (25:35–36). Spiritual commitments also include fasting (6:16–18), almsgiving (6:2–4), and communion with the Father in prayer (6:5–13; 7:7–11). All this amounts to building a relationship with Jesus, which is the one true necessity (7:22). The disciple who is known by the Lord is the one who does the will of the Father (7:21) and comes to possess the kingdom in heaven (25:34).

## The Relevance of Matthew Today

Matthew’s Gospel is as potent today as when it first appeared in the cradle of the ancient Church. Despite the centuries that have passed, its power to change lives and to bring men and women into a living relationship with Jesus has not lessened in the least. For the early Christians, it was the precious first witness to the story of Jesus from the pen of an eyewitness apostle. For us too the Gospel of Matthew is the flagship of the fourfold Gospel canon and the first testimony to Christ that appears in the New Testament. Then as now, it comes to us as the word of salvation.

Like all the Gospels, Matthew is designed for proclamation and instruction. It presents us with Jesus the Teacher and allows us to hear his voice in all of its thunderous wonder. Sometimes we are privileged to eavesdrop while he schools his disciples privately and challenges them with the demands of

Christian faith and life. Other times we observe the Lord reaching out to sinners and the “unchurched” of his day with a call to repentance. Given this dual focus in Matthew, the First Gospel is uniquely suited to catechetical instruction and evangelical proclamation.

*Catechesis* has traditionally made extensive use of Matthew, earning it a reputation for being “the catechist’s Gospel.”<sup>20</sup> One thinks of the Sermon on the Mount, where so many essentials of Christian living are brought together into an inspiring vision of the new life made possible by Christ (chaps. 5–7). So too the ecclesial discourse stresses that humility and mercy are the hallmarks of authentic Christian leadership and service to others (18:1–35). One also finds teachings on prayer (6:5–15), celibacy (19:12), marriage (19:1–9), children (19:13–15), and keeping the commandments (19:16–19). At its core, Christian formation involves modeling our lives on Jesus, who says, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (11:29). Now as always, the way of the disciple is the way of imitating the Master.

Of the many catechetical gems in Matthew, one that is often underappreciated is its instruction in reading the Old Testament. Too many of us read the New Testament in isolation from the Old. As a result, we have little sense of how God’s plan of salvation developed to reach the point of fulfillment in Christ. Matthew teaches us to read and ponder the whole Bible with reference to Jesus, for he recognized that our understanding of God and his ways are deeply enriched by discovering the unity of the Father’s plan as it unfolds in the pages of Scripture.

*Evangelization* is also at the heart of Matthew’s Gospel. Not only does Jesus set the example by his actions, but this is also the subject of his final words in the book: “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” (28:19). This missionary mandate still has the force of marching orders for the Church today. At one level, Jesus calls us to engage in personal evangelization, which means sharing the good news with friends and family members, coworkers and business contacts, neighbors and new acquaintances. However, it is also a summons to transform entire nations by inculturating the gospel and shining the light of Christian truth into every corridor of human society and its institutions. This is what it means for disciples to be “the salt of the earth” (5:13) and “the light of the world” (5:14).

Finally, a word should be said about Matthew, evangelization, and the Jewish people. It is a regrettable fact of history that some Christians have invoked the

20. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* 11.

authority of the First Gospel to accuse the Jews of perpetual bloodguilt for the murder of Jesus Christ (on the basis of 27:25). In reality, this is anti-Semitic slander and a serious misreading of the Gospel. It is true that Matthew portrays Jesus engaged in heated polemic with the Jewish authorities of his day (e.g., 23:1–39). But this is precisely what the prophets had done when denouncing the transgressions of Israel and summoning the people to repentance and faith in the Old Testament. The Church therefore insists that responsibility for Jesus' death must not be laid on the Jewish race or religion, as though it followed from Scripture that the Jews are now a rejected or accursed people.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, the New Testament considers them “beloved” by God to this day (Rom 11:28).

In point of fact, Matthew's Gospel should lead us to appreciate the spiritual heritage that Jews and Christians share in common. Clearly a profound reverence for the Torah shines through the pages of the First Gospel (5:17–18). Its moral commandments are as binding on the followers of Jesus as on their fellow Jews (19:16–19); so too are its demands that we love God and neighbor with our whole heart (22:34–40). Most of all, to affirm the messiahship of Jesus is to affirm the messianic hope that was nourished for centuries among the chosen people. In this respect, the faith of Israel has become the faith of the Church now centered on the Jewish man from Nazareth.

21. See Vatican II's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). Other statements of the Church pertinent to this issue include the Catechism 597–98, the Pontifical Biblical Commission document, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002), and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document, *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (1988).

# Outline of Matthew

- I. Prologue: Birth and Infancy of the Messiah
  - A. Genealogy and Birth of Jesus (1:1–25)
  - B. Visit of the Magi (2:1–12)
  - C. Flight to Egypt, Return to Nazareth (2:13–23)
- II. Narrative: Preparations for Ministry in Galilee
  - A. John and the Baptism of Jesus (3:1–17)
  - B. Temptation of Jesus (4:1–11)
  - C. Inauguration of the Galilean Ministry (4:12–25)
- III. First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount
  - A. Beatitudes (5:1–12)
  - B. Vocation of Disciples (5:13–16)
  - C. Fulfillment of the Law (5:17–46)
  - D. Almsgiving, Prayer, and Fasting (6:1–18)
  - E. Wealth and Divine Providence (6:19–34)
  - F. Judgment, Supplication, and Golden Rule (7:1–12)
  - G. Narrow Way, False Prophets, and True Disciples (7:13–23)
  - H. Building on the Word of Jesus (7:24–29)
- IV. Narrative: Nine Miracle Stories
  - A. Three Healings (8:1–15)
  - B. Jesus the Servant and Would-be Followers (8:16–22)
  - C. Calming of the Storm (8:23–27)
  - D. Healing of Demonized Men and a Paralyzed Man (8:28–9:8)
  - E. Call of Matthew and Question of Fasting (9:9–17)
  - F. Healing a Woman and an Official's Daughter (9:18–26)
  - G. Healing the Two Blind Men and a Mute Demoniac (9:27–34)
  - H. Compassion of Jesus and Choosing the Twelve (9:35–10:4)
- V. Second Discourse: The Missionary Sermon
  - A. Instructions for the Twelve (10:5–15)
  - B. Persecution and Witness (10:16–33)
  - C. Divisions and Discipleship (10:34–39)
  - D. Rewards for Receiving Disciples (10:40–42)
- VI. Narrative: Diverse Responses to Jesus
  - A. Inquiry and Witness of John (11:1–19)
  - B. Woes on Unrepentant Towns (11:20–24)
  - C. Prayer and Yoke of Jesus (11:25–30)
  - D. Sabbath Controversies (12:1–14)

- E. Jesus the Servant Messiah (12:15–21)
- F. Beelzebul Controversy and Dangerous Speech (12:22–37)
- G. One Greater Than Jonah and Solomon (12:38–42)
- H. Parable of the Unclean Spirits (12:43–45)
- I. Spiritual Family of Jesus (12:46–50)
- VII. Third Discourse: The Parables of the Kingdom
  - A. Parable of the Sower (13:1–9)
  - B. Mysteries of the Kingdom (13:10–17)
  - C. Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18–23)
  - D. Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (13:24–30)
  - E. Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast (13:31–33)
  - F. Fulfilling the Scriptures with Parables (13:34–35)
  - G. Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat Explained (13:36–43)
  - H. Parables of the Buried Treasure, Costly Pearl, and Dragnet (13:44–50)
  - I. Treasures Old and New (13:51–53)
- VIII. Narrative: More Diverse Responses to Jesus
  - A. Rejection in Nazareth (13:54–58)
  - B. Death of John the Baptist (14:1–12)
  - C. Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13–21)
  - D. Peter, Walking on Water, and Healings (14:22–36)
  - E. Tradition of the Elders (15:1–20)
  - F. Canaanite Woman and Other Healings (15:21–31)
  - G. Feeding the Four Thousand (15:32–39)
  - H. Confrontation with Pharisees and Sadducees (16:1–12)
    - I. Peter’s Confession, First Passion Prediction, Cost of Discipleship (16:13–28)
    - J. Transfiguration and John as Elijah (17:1–13)
    - K. Exorcism and Second Passion Prediction (17:14–23)
    - L. Temple Tax (17:24–27)
- IX. Fourth Discourse: The Ecclesial Sermon on Life in the Community
  - A. Greatness in the Kingdom (18:1–5)
  - B. Temptations to Sin (18:6–9)
  - C. Parable of Lost Sheep (18:10–14)
  - D. Discipline in the Church (18:15–20)
  - E. Parable of Unmerciful Servant (18:21–35)
- X. Narrative: Journey to Jerusalem and Controversy in the Temple
  - A. Marriage, Divorce, Celibacy, and Children (19:1–15)

- B. Rich Young Man and Eternal Life (19:16–30)
- C. Parable of Vineyard Workers (20:1–16)
- D. Third Passion Prediction, James and John, and Two Blind Men (20:17–34)
- E. Triumphal Entry and Temple Cleansing (21:1–17)
- F. Fig Tree Cursed and Authority Questioned (21:18–27)
- G. Parables of Two Sons, Tenants, and Wedding Feast (21:28–22:14)
- H. Taxes, Resurrection, Torah, and David's Son (22:15–46)
- I. Woes against Scribes and Pharisees (23:1–36)
- J. Lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39)
- XI. Fifth Discourse: The Eschatological Sermon
  - A. Prophecy of Temple's Demise (24:1–2)
  - B. Birth Pangs and Great Tribulation (24:3–28)
  - C. Coming of the Son of Man (24:29–35)
  - D. Day and Hour Unknown (24:36–44)
  - E. Parables of Unfaithful Servant, Ten Virgins, and Talents (24:45–25:30)
  - F. Judgment of All Nations (25:31–46)
- XII. Epilogue: The Passion and Resurrection of the Messiah
  - A. Plot in Jerusalem and Anointing at Bethany (26:1–13)
  - B. Treachery of Judas (26:14–25)
  - C. Last Supper and Denial Foretold (26:26–35)
  - D. Agony and Arrest in Gethsemane (26:36–56)
  - E. Trial before Sanhedrin (26:57–68)
  - F. Peter's Denial and Judas' Suicide (26:69–27:10)
  - G. Trial before Pilate (27:11–26)
  - H. Mockery and Crucifixion of Jesus (27:27–44)
  - I. Death and Burial of Jesus (27:45–66)
  - J. Resurrection of Jesus (28:1–15)
  - K. Great Commission (28:16–20)