

Matthew – Overview

Author: The early church held that Matthew, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, was the author. Matthew was a tax collector before he was called to follow Jesus. Some early manuscripts have the title “According to Matthew”. D. A. Carson says “The universal testimony of the early church is that the apostle Matthew wrote it”. R. T. France says “Attribution of this gospel to Matthew the apostle goes back to our earliest surviving patristic testimonies, and there is no evidence that any other author was ever proposed.”

When: One of the big questions to answer is whether or not the book was written before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. One argument in favor of a date before the destruction of the temple is the fact that Matthew mentioned the Sadducees 7 times. After the destruction of the temple, the Sadducees were no longer a factor. The second big question to answer is who wrote their gospel first; Matthew, Mark or Luke. Many conservatives favor a date in the sixties. D. A. Carson and R. T. France both favor a date in the sixties, before the destruction of the temple.

Where: It is difficult to determine where the Gospel of Matthew was written. Some say the book was written somewhere in Syria or Palestine. D. A. Carson says “Most scholars take Antioch as the place of composition. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city with a substantial Jewish population; and the first clear evidence of anyone using the gospel of Matthew comes from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century.” R. T. France is not convinced that the book was written in Antioch. He is happy to stick with “somewhere in Syria or Palestine”.

Why: The short answer is that Matthew wrote the Gospel to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the long-expected son of David the king. We don’t need to look any further than the first three chapters to see that Matthew built a case that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. He has the right genealogy. He is descended from king David in fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7:12-15. His birth was proclaimed by an angel who said that he would be called Immanuel, God with us, the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. He was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah 5:2. He was sought out by wise men as the “King of the Jews” and was worshiped by them while he was a very young child. His way was prepared by John the Baptist in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. God the Father testified concerning Jesus at his baptism that “this is my beloved Son”. D. A. Carson compacted his thoughts into 205 words on why Matthew wrote this book. R. T. France is much more concise when he says that “I have argued elsewhere that the central theme of Matthew’s gospel is “fulfillment.” “Fulfillment” seems broad, but there are a lot of Old Testament passages which are shown to be fulfilled by the first coming of Christ. W. Hendriksen said that Matthew contains at least 40 direct Old Testament quotes. R. T. France notes “The UBS *Greek New Testament* lists 54 direct citations of the OT in Matthew and a further 262 “allusions and verbal parallels,” and that is a conservative figure based only on the most widely recognized allusions.” Each person must answer the question that John the Baptist asked Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3) If someone does not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, then they will look past Jesus and wait for someone else. Believing that Jesus is the Christ is the foundation. Once the foundation is laid then we can learn more about who the Messiah is, why he came, and the meaning of his words and actions. There were many misconceptions about the Messiah which Jesus needed to correct. Jesus’ response to John the Baptist was that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5-6; 26:19; 61:1 “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” (11:5) Jesus said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (5:17) Matthew’s list of fulfillments of Old Testament scripture is not exhaustive. The other three Gospels all have direct Old Testament quotes fulfilled by Jesus which are not found in Matthew. John has the most OT quotes not found in Matthew. What Matthew does include is more than enough to prove from the scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ.

Content: The book starts off with the genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham. The rest of the “prologue” contains Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and the eventual move to Nazareth. Jesus’ preparation for ministry included the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism by John. It also included Jesus being tempted by Satan. Matthew 4:12-20:16 includes the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and the surrounding areas. Matthew did not mention Jesus going to Jerusalem between his temptation in 4:5 and his triumphal entry in 21:10. Jesus’ Galilean ministry included many healings and teachings. His main discourses during his Galilean ministry are found in 5:1-7:29 (the Sermon on the Mount), 10:5-42 (instructions to the disciples before sending them out), 13:1-53 (kingdom parables), 18:1-19:1 (Sin and Forgiveness). Matthew 20:17-28:15 includes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his final discourse found in chapter 24 which is on the destruction of the temple and the end times. Matthew also recorded the Last Supper, Jesus’ betrayal, trials, crucifixion and resurrection. The book appropriately ends with the Great Commission (20:16-20). Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ declared that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him. Now it was time for the disciples to make other disciples of all nations and participate in the expansion of Christ’s kingdom of heaven.

Here are some key phrases from Matthew with counts for each of the Gospels.

“kingdom of heaven” 32 times (only occurs in Matthew)

“kingdom of God” 5 times (Mark 14, Luke 32, John 2)

“son of man” 30 times (Mark 14, Luke 25, John 13)

“son of God” 9 times (Mark 3, Luke 6, John 9)

“son of David” 9 times (Mark 3, Luke 3, John 0)

“the Christ” 6 times (Mark 4, Luke 9, John 14)

“weeping and gnashing of teeth” 6 times (Mark 0, Luke 1, John 0)

“king” (βασιλεύς) 22 times (Mark 12, Luke 11, John 16)

Note: “Messiah” is only found 2 times in the NT (John 1:41, 4:25), “Messiah” (Μεσσίας) is from Hebrew/Aramaic. In both cases where John used “Messiah”, he also gave the Greek equivalent “Χριστός” which in English is “Christ”.

The Bible Project has a pretty good overview of the Gospel of Matthew. There are two videos. You have to scroll down a ways to see the video for the second half of the book.

<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-matthew/>