

The Gospel of Matthew

Declaring the New Kingdom through the Sermon on the Mount

The Gospel of Matthew is generally regarded, along with Mark's, as one of the first Gospels written. Many scholars date Matthew as being written anywhere from the late 40's A.D. to the mid 50's A.D. This Gospel is widely recognized as being written by the Apostle Matthew, and not by someone else under his name.

Most people tend to look at these statements and overlook a basic question, and that is: "Why did it take so long for a gospel to be written?"

Jesus is generally accepted to have died, risen and ascended into heaven when He was 33 years old. Our calendar places year one as the year of His birth. Looking at this we can see that Matthew's Gospel was written 15 to 20 years after these events took place. So, it should be of some interest as to why most all of the early writings were so long after Jesus's death.

There could be several answers that would apply. One is that there were writings earlier than the gospels and epistles that currently make up the New Testament. The Didache is such example.

I believe the best answer is that the early church was convinced that the second coming of Jesus and the "parousia" would happen very soon, and so there would be no reason to plan long term for an event that would happen "any day now".

So, some time passes.

Most converts heard the gospel first hand, from the Apostles themselves, what we in the church today call Tradition.

But this time was not kind: persecutions, leading to martyrdom, and error creeping into the gospel created a demand from the faithful and a desire by the Apostles to write down the "good news" or Gospel of Jesus to keep the message correct.

The gospels also reflect the author's message to his intended audience.

The Gospel of Mark, written from Peter's perspective, was written to the Romans. People of action, Mark uses lots of action verbs to convey the story (for example, the use of the word "immediately").

Matthew's audience is the devout Jews in and around Jerusalem and Israel. These Jews were very knowledgeable of the prophecies regarding the identity of the Messiah.

Matthew's Gospel begins with the "toledoth", or ancestry of Jesus, drawing a direct line from Abraham, through David, proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ or "anointed one" that would fulfill the many prophecies made about the Messiah.

Let's look at some of these prophecies:

Genesis 3:15 ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."***

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 ***"From their own brothers I shall raise up a prophet like yourself; I shall put my words into his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him. Anyone who refuses to listen to my words, spoken by him in my name, will have to render an account to me."***

2 Samuel 7:14 ***"I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me."***

Jeremiah 31:31 ***"The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah."***

Isaiah 7:14 ***"Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."***

Isaiah 52:13-15 ***"See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him-- so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals--So shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it. Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"***

Isaiah 61:1 ***"The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners"***

Jewish thought was very legalistic in the keeping of the "Torah" or law. The laws laid down by Moses in the book of Leviticus were very specific and devout Jews followed these laws down to the minutia. To the Jews of Jesus' time, any attempt by Matthew to portray Jesus as the Messiah must match every criteria exactly. Like pieces of a puzzle they must all fit together perfectly.

The first three chapters of Matthew deal with the infancy of Jesus, and the fourth Chapter deals with the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Starting with chapter 5 and going through chapter 26, we see the teachings of Jesus.

Divided into 5 "books" or discourses, Matthew structures the teachings of Jesus into themes, each concluding with the formula "When Jesus finished these words" or one closely similar (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These are an important structure of the gospel. In every case the discourse is preceded by a narrative section, each narrative and discourse together constituting a "book" of the gospel.

Matthew 5:3-7:27 - The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 10:5-42 - The Missionary Discourse

Matthew 13:3-52 – The Parable Discourse

Matthew 18:3-35 – The Church Order Discourse

Matthew 24:4-25:46 – The Eschatological (End of the Age) Discourse

This study will focus on the First book of Matthew, The Sermon on the Mount.