

# Introduction

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## Matthew—the Historical Record of Jesus Christ

“It seems fitting that the first book of the New Testament—the Gospel of Matthew—begins with these words: ‘the historical record of Jesus Christ.’ This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus truly is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew provides a bridge from the promises of the Old Testament to the fulfillment of those promises in the New Testament. The New Testament begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ—each one from a different perspective and for a unique purpose. “These accounts present the ‘good news’ concerning the Son of God, telling of His life on earth and His death on the cross for the sin of mankind. The first three Gospels take a similar view of the facts surround this Person, while the Fourth Gospel is unique in its presentation. Because of this common view of Jesus Christ the first three New Testament books are called the Synoptic Gospels.”<sup>2</sup>

The word *synoptic* comes from two Greek words that together mean “to see with or together.”<sup>3</sup> “While Matthew, Mark, and Luke have distinctive purposes, they nevertheless view the life of Jesus Christ in a common way”<sup>4</sup> thus they are described as the Synoptic Gospels. “It is important that we understand these sources and what they are trying to accomplish. The Gospels are neither biographies of the life of Christ nor are they a disinterested record of certain events in His life. Each writer wants the reader to know the truth about Jesus and become a disciple. To accomplish this purpose, each Gospel is aimed at a certain audience and each writer is selective of the events he includes.”<sup>5</sup> Notice the unique characteristics of each gospel:<sup>6</sup>

GOSPEL	TARGET	PORTRAYAL OF JESUS	PRIMARY FOCUS
<b>Matthew</b>	Jews	Messiah (Son of David)	Genealogy
<b>Mark</b>	Gentiles (Romans)	Servant (Son of Man)	Ministry/Miracles
<b>Luke</b>	Intellectuals	Perfect Man (Son of Adam)	Jesus’ Humanity
<b>John</b>	Eyewitness Account	God-Man (Son of God)	God Became Man

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<sup>1</sup> *The HCSB Study Bible* 1603.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament* 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Source: [https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_188.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_188.cfm) accessed on September 9, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Circumstances of the Writing of Matthew

### *What do we know about the author of this book?*

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- The author of this book is the Apostle Matthew, also known as Levi the tax collector.
  - Arno Gaebelein explained: “The instrument chosen by the Holy Spirit to write this Gospel was Matthew. He was a Jew. However, he did not belong to the religious, educated class, to the scribes; but he belonged to the class which was most bitterly hated. He was a publican, that is a tax gatherer... Only the most unscrupulous among the Jews would hire themselves out for the sake of gain... For this reason the tax gatherers, being Roman employees, were hated by the Jews even more bitterly than the Gentiles themselves.”<sup>7</sup>
  - “The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection.”<sup>8</sup>
  - “Many early church fathers cited Matthew as its author, including Pseudo Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen.”<sup>9</sup>
  - “Matthew was certainly not one of the more prominent apostles. One might think the First Gospel would have been written by Peter, James, or John. But the extensive tradition that Matthew wrote it strongly commends him as its author.”<sup>10</sup>
- Modern scholars try to dispute the authenticity of Matthew’s authorship.
- Internal Support of a Matthew’s Authorship
  - Identification of this Disciple as Levi (in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27) and repeatedly as “Matthew the Tax Collector” in this gospel.
  - In Matthew 17 and 18, the author “includes three terms for coins that are found nowhere else in the New Testament: ‘the two-drachma tax’ (Matt 17:24); ‘a four-drachma coin’ (17:27), and ‘talents’ (18:24). Since Matthew’s occupation was tax collecting, he had an interest in coins and noted the cost of certain items.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gaebelein, Arno. *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961) 4.

<sup>8</sup> *HCSB Study Bible* 1604.

<sup>9</sup> *TBKC-NT* 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *TBKC-NT* 15.

- “The omissions from the First Gospel are significant too, for Matthew omitted the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) and the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who restored fourfold what he had stolen (Luke 19:1-10).”<sup>12</sup>

### *When was the Gospel of Matthew written?*

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- An exact date of writing is not possible to determine, but most conservative scholars date the writing of this gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
  - The *Scofield Reference Bible* gave the earliest possible date at A.D.37.
  - “Since church tradition has strongly advocated that the Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel account written, perhaps a date somewhere around A.D. 50”<sup>13</sup> would be acceptable since it is believed that the Gospel of Mark was written sometime around A.D. 55.
- Some scholars, however, believe that Mark was the first gospel written. The editors of the *HCSB Study Bible* state: “The date for the composition for Mark is best inferred from the date of Luke and Acts. The abrupt ending of Acts which left Paul under house arrest in Rome implies that Acts was written before Paul’s release... This evidence dates Acts to the early 60s. Luke and Acts were two volumes of a single work, as the prologues to these books demonstrate. Luke was written before Acts... a date in the late 50s is reasonable. If Luke used Mark in writing his own Gospel, as seems likely, by implication Mark was written some time before the late 50s, perhaps the early to mid-50s. Thus, despite Matthew’s dependence on Mark, Matthew may have been written any time beginning in the mid-50s once Mark was completed.”<sup>14</sup>
- Liberal scholars all want to date the writing of the Gospel of Matthew much later than this because a later date allows them to question the veracity of the gospel’s content.

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<sup>12</sup> *TBKC-NT* 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *HCSB Study Bible* 1605.

