

Introduction to the Gospel according to Matthew

Where is it in the Bible?

Matthew is the first book in the New Testament and the first of the four Gospels.

Who wrote it?

According to tradition, the author was Matthew, the disciple called by Jesus in Matthew 9:9. However, the book itself does not claim this, and it does not seem to be an eyewitness account since it relies largely on the Gospel according to Mark. Most scholars now feel that Matthew was written by an anonymous Greek-speaking Jewish Christian who was very familiar with Jewish Scriptures and tradition. He might even have been a trained scholar. It was probably written for a community that was in transition from being Jewish followers of Jesus to being Christians.

When was it written?

Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, quoted from Matthew in a document that was written around 110 CE, so the book had to have been written earlier than that. Since it uses the material that is also found in Mark's Gospel and also reflects concerns surrounding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, it was probably written after 70 CE. These clues have led most scholars to date the writing of Matthew to sometime around 90 CE.

What is it about?

The author wanted to present the Gospel in a way that was consistent with Jewish tradition and to show that Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. The book is a manual on discipleship, designed to help the audience understand life within the Christian community and to prepare them for Christian mission outside the community.

How is it structured?

Matthew is structured around five great discourses given by Jesus: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7); the Missionary Discourse (chapter 10); the Parables of the Kingdom (chapter 13); the Community Discourse (chapter 18); and the Eschatological Discourse (chapters 24-25). One way to outline the book is shown below.

- I. The Person of Jesus (1:1-4:16)
 - a. The Genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17)
 - b. The Birth of Jesus (1:18-2:23)
 - c. Jesus and John the Baptist (3:1-17)
 - d. Jesus is tempted by Satan (4:1-11)
 - e. Jesus in Galilee (4:12-16)
- II. Jesus Begins His Ministry of Preaching and Healing (4:17-11:1)
 - a. Jesus calls disciples (4:17-22)
 - b. Jesus teaches (4:23-7:29) (Sermon on the Mount)
 - c. Jesus performs miracles (8:1-9:34)
 - d. Jesus commissions the Twelve (9:35-11:1) (Missionary Discourse)

- III. Opposition to Jesus Begins and Intensifies (11:2- 16:20)
 - a. Confrontations with Jewish authorities (11:2-12:50)
 - b. The Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-52)
 - c. Rejection of Jesus and death of John the Baptist (13:53-14:12)
 - d. Jesus teaches, feeds, and heals (14:13-16:12)
 - e. The disciples confess Jesus (16:13-20)
- IV. Jesus Predicts His Death and Talks about Discipleship (16:21-20:34)
 - a. The revelation of the suffering Messiah (16:21-17:27)
 - b. Life in the kingdom (18:1-20:34) (Community Discourse)
- V. Jesus Goes to Jerusalem (21:1-27:65)
 - a. Jesus enters Jerusalem (21:1-11)
 - b. Jesus in the Temple (21:12-23:39)
 - c. Jesus speaks about the last days (24:1-25:46) (Eschatological Discourse)
 - d. Jesus' trial and crucifixion (26:1-27:66)
- VI. Resurrection and Beyond (28:1-20)

What are some of its themes?

- **Abiding Presence of God:** Matthew emphasizes that God is with us and that as God's people we experience God's presence in our lives through Jesus and his church.
- **Characterization of Jesus:** Jesus is presented as the true Messiah, Emmanuel ("God with us"), the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Lord of the Church. Matthew repeatedly quotes Old Testament prophecies that have been fulfilled by Jesus. This Gospel also highlights his role as a teacher.
- **Discipleship and the Church:** Jesus' five discourses can be read as a manual on discipleship that shows us how to live as his followers. This is particularly true of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew is the only Gospel in which Jesus speaks directly about the church, the community of disciples.