



Introduction to Matthew—Commentary Notes*

The gospel is the good news that God so loved the world and sent His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to the world to be crucified on the cross for man's sins and resurrected on the third day. He brings the hope of salvation (Mark 1:1; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is very fitting that the New Testament begins with the four Gospels which give accounts of Jesus's life and teachings. We need to consider the relationship between the four Gospels as we begin our study of Matthew's account of the gospel. We will look at: 1) how were they written, 2) the purpose of writing, 3) compare and contrast the four Gospels, and 4) each Gospel's emphasis.¹

1. How were These Four Gospels Written. In the early church, the apostles of Jesus Christ preached the gospel by word of mouth—quoting or repeating what Jesus said. These then became oral accounts. As the apostles and the first witnesses aged and departed, the importance of written accounts of Jesus's life and works became crucial. In addition, Christianity spread rapidly at that time as well as heresies. Hence, an authoritative record of the life and teachings of Jesus became very urgent. From AD 50 to 100, the four Gospels were then written by apostles (namely, Matthew and John) and their students (who were Mark and Luke).²

The accuracy of the Gospels is unquestionable for all that were recorded by the authors came from reliable sources. Matthew and John were the Lord Jesus's apostles who testified concerning their personal experiences. Mark and Luke, although not apostles, received their information from Apostles Peter and Paul. The most important consideration yet, is that these authoritative and infallible accounts of Jesus's life and messages were written through the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:12-15; 2 Tim 3:16).

2. The Purpose of Writing the Four Gospels. The Gospels are the best literary resources for studying Jesus's life. Their main purposes are: 1) to introduce Jesus Christ's life and teachings to the world, 2) to give accounts of Jesus's death on the cross for man's sins, His burial, resurrection, ascension, and His promise to return and 3) that people may come to know Jesus and believe in Him (John 20:31).³
3. Compare and Contrast the Four Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because of the parallelism between them. Synoptic means "seeing all together, synopsis." Though these three Gospels share similar contents and even language, their emphases differ from one another. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, is clearly different from the other three in its content and nature. It emphasizes on teachings such as belief, life, Holy Spirit, and believer's union with Christ. Therefore, John's Gospel is a supplement to the other three Synoptic Gospels.⁴
4. Emphases of the Four Gospels. All four authors of the Gospels recorded Jesus's life and His teachings. However each Gospel had its own intended audience and purpose, so each of their emphasis is different. The Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews to emphasize that Christ was the Messiah, the Almighty King and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Mark's

* Translator Note: These Commentary Notes were originally compiled in Chinese and translated into English for use by Chinese Christian Fellowship International's (CCF International's) English classes. All sources listed in the table (only listed in English when applicable) at the end of these notes were used and consulted in the original Chinese compilation. Please refer to the table for the references of each numbered annotation. For more information on the sources consulted, please contact CCF International. All biblical references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

audience were Romans and it emphasizes that Jesus was the Servant of God who came to the world to serve and to die for men (Mark 10:45). Luke's Gospel was written for Gentiles who were Greek and it introduces Jesus as the perfect Son of Man and the Savior of mankind. Lastly, the Gospel according to John was written for non-believing Gentiles and Jews who were scattered and it emphasizes Jesus's divinity as the Son of God. Because these four Gospels were written from different perspectives, we may now have a clearer and fuller understanding of Jesus Christ and His works. Such was the purpose of God in giving us a panoramic view from the four Gospels so that we may see how rich and mighty our Lord Jesus is.⁵

The following chart compares all four Gospels and helps us to understand their differences.⁶

COMPARISONS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

Gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Author	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Approximate Time of Writing	AD 60	AD 58	After AD 60	AD 98
Location	Galilee			Judea/Jerusalem
Nature	Synoptic Gospels			Supplemental Gospel
Key Verse	27:37	10:45	19:10	20:31
Description of Christ	Mighty King	Obedient Servant	Perfect Son of Man	Holy Son of God
Key Phrase	"Fulfill what was said"	"Right away"	"Son of Man"	"Believe" / "Son of God"
Emphasis	Christ's power	Christ's service	Christ's mercy	Christ's wisdom
Linguistic Characteristics	Doctrinal	Narrative, action packed	Detailed records of events	Emphasized on spiritual truth
Comparing the Description of the Son of Man (Ezekiel 1:10)	Lion	Ox	Man	Eagle
End of the Gospel	Resurrection of Jesus	Believe in Jesus	Coming of the Holy Spirit	Return of Christ

A. Author and Background

Although the book itself did not give a clear indication as to who the author was, the church throughout history has acknowledged that Jesus's disciple Matthew was the author of this Gospel. In addition, there are many evidences from both within the contents of this Gospel and outside of it that gives absolute support to Matthew as the author. Therefore, we do not need to give further proof to its authorship here.

Matthew, whose birth name was Levi, was a Jew and a son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). The meaning of "Matthew" is "God's Gift." Matthew 9:9 recorded how he was called by our Lord. When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth, He called to him, "Follow me!" He got up immediately and followed Jesus. It was very likely that his name was changed to Matthew after he believed in the Lord and became His disciple. Matthew was hated by his own people because Jews detested those who served their conqueror (the Roman Empire) as a tax collector.⁷ Matthew's conversion might not have been easy for he was well-known in his town. He might have been ridiculed or persecuted by his former friends after he decided to believe in Jesus. At the same time, as he abandoned everything and followed Jesus, he would for sure give up a lucrative income and many enjoyments

in life. When Matthew first followed Christ, he immediately threw a feast and invited his other tax collector friends (some might have been Gentiles). They do not follow Jewish laws and were considered to be sinners, but they came and got to know Jesus. As a result, many of them became believers (Matt 9:9-13; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29-32).⁸

During that time, most of Jesus's disciples were fishermen. Rarely did they have the ability or skill of writing. On the other hand, Matthew was gifted in writing. He needed a good educational background for his work as a tax collector. Therefore, he might have known Aramaic and Greek. God used his language training and skill to be one of the compilers of Jesus's teachings. Most biblical scholars today believe that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel accounts in Aramaic, which was a language similar to Hebrew. But as time went on, in order for more people to be able to read his writing, Matthew rewrote this Gospel in Greek.⁹

Though the Gospel according to Matthew may not have been the earliest Gospel written (it came after the Gospel of Mark), it was arranged to be the first of the four Gospels due to its close connections with the Old Testament and its domineering influence in the early church.

Like Matthew, whose friends distanced themselves from him or even persecuted him after he opened his heart to receive Christ, have we experienced friends deserting us because we have put our faith in the Lord? And what price will we be willing to pay to follow our Lord? After Matthew became a believer, he immediately hosted a feast and invited his friends to come and get to know his Savior. Do we take every opportunity so that our friends could get to know our Lord Jesus?

B. Time of Writing

Many scholars believed that the Gospel of Matthew was written after Mark's Gospel because it quotes many passages from Mark.¹⁰ Most also think that this book was written before AD 70 or between the years of AD 60 to 70¹¹ because Matthew did not mention about the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in AD 70. The location of writing might have been in Syria or Palestine.

C. Theme and Purpose of Writing

By choosing to record selected events of Jesus's life, Matthew aimed to prove that Jesus was the Messiah whom God had promised, that the kingdom of God came simultaneous to His arrival, and that those who believed in Jesus would become citizens of God's kingdom. Thus, the purpose for Matthew's writing are threefold. First, He wanted to prove to non-believing Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Christ) whom the Jews had been waiting for and that He would accomplish the work of salvation by His death on the cross. Since Matthew found the Messiah, he also wished for others to have a relationship with this Messiah as well for Jesus Christ who was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The word "fulfillment" appeared fifteen times¹² throughout Matthew's Gospel and is the key word in this book. Second, Matthew wanted to reveal Jesus as the King—a descendant of David and hence the King of the Jews, and that when He returns, He will sit on the throne of David to rule over all nations. Third, Matthew wanted to emphasize Jesus's public ministry and teachings.

D. Characteristics

1. The Gospel of Matthew was a Gospel account that is written particularly for the Jews. The writer's emphasis on how the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets were fulfilled in Jesus was for the Jews to understand that salvation came from Jesus Christ, so that they would confess that Jesus indeed was the Messiah. There is a theme verse in Matthew: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophets." This text was repeated sixteen times on events including but not limited to Jesus's birth (1:21-23), His escape to Egypt (2:14,15), King Herod's killing of infants (2:16-18), Joseph settling in Nazareth, Jesus growing

up in Nazareth (2:23),¹³ and how Jesus taught by using parables (13:34, 35). All of the above were the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies. In addition, the entire Gospel quoted from the Old Testament fifty to sixty times.

2. The Gospel of Matthew is a doctrinal book. This is also why it was placed as the first Gospel account among the four Gospels. In order for his readers to remember all the important events and to understand their meanings, Matthew systematically categorized Jesus's teachings into five sermons between His genealogy (Chs. 1–4) and His crucifixion and resurrection (Chs. 26–28). The Kingdom of God is the main theme throughout the Gospel. The following are the five sermons:¹⁴
 - (1) The Sermon on the Mount or the Laws of the Kingdom (Chs. 5–7)
 - (2) The Sending of the Twelve (Ch. 10)
 - (3) The Parable of the Kingdom (Ch. 13)
 - (4) The Way of Humility and Forgiveness of the Kingdom (Ch. 18)
 - (5) The End Times and the Return of the King (Christ) (Chs. 24–25)
3. The Gospel of Matthew makes special mention of matters concerning the Second Coming of Jesus, the end times, and the final judgment. The recorded words of Jesus in chapter 24 revealed that it is more complete than in other Gospels. Only Matthew's Gospel recorded the parable of the servants receiving talents (25:14–30), the ten virgins (25:1–13), and the parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31–46).¹⁵ Matthew's Gospel also included Gentiles' conversions which fulfilled the covenant between God and Abraham: that all people and nations of the world would be blessed through this promise (Genesis 12:3). For instance, the wise men from the East were seeking baby Jesus (2:1–12), the centurion has shown his great faith (8:5–13), and the Canaanite woman's faith surpassed those of other Israelites (15:22–28). In addition, the Gospel of Matthew also gave the Great Commission, that is, to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19).¹⁶
4. The Gospel of Matthew is the only Gospel that used the word "church." Only Matthew recorded Jesus's words that He "will build His church on this rock" (Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–20) after Peter confessed at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Christ (16:18). Meanwhile, Matthew also mentioned that any arguments among Christians should be settled by the church (18:17). It is obvious that when Matthew wrote his Gospel, the local church was already fairly organized.¹⁷
5. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King. He is the Messiah and the King of the Jews. The evidence was provided at the very beginning by listing His genealogy, thus proving that Jesus was the descendant of David (1:1–17) and hence the promised King. The phrase, "the Son of David" was used more frequently in this Gospel than among the other three Gospels (15:22; 21:9, 15) as the following events show the wise men from the East who came to seek Jesus was born to be the King of the Jews (2:2). Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem while riding on a donkey (21:1–11). Jesus accepts His title as the King of the Jews before Pilate (27:11) and the sign post on His cross reads: "the King of the Jews" (27:37). Jesus gave His final proclamation that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18), and He will sit on the glorious throne to judge all people (19:28; 25:31). Matthew revealed Jesus Christ's kingship to all people so as to manifest that to Him belong all the power, authority, and glory of the kingdom.¹⁸

The entire Bible, including the Gospel of Matthew, is God's authoritative revelation and is written for us—to guide us in our daily deeds, thoughts, and decisions. It is our sincere hope that through God's grace, we may study this Gospel with a humble and sober attitude during this quarter. May God speak to each one of us as we dig into His Word.

Christ not only is the King of the Jews, He is the King of the whole universe. Has He become the King of our lives? We believe that as we commit to studying God's Word, we will experience this King of our lives and His wonderful and trustworthy leading!

E. Outline

- I. The Birth of the King, Lord Jesus Christ (Chs. 1–2)
 1. The Genealogy and Birth of Christ (Ch. 1)
 2. The Childhood of Christ (Ch. 2)
- II. The Preparation Period before the King's Public Ministry (Chs. 3–4)
 1. John the Baptist—the King's Forerunner (3:1-12)
 2. The Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)
 3. The Temptations of Jesus and His Preaching (Ch. 4)
- III. The Public Ministry of the King (Chs. 5–25)
 1. Early Ministry (Chs. 5–13)
 2. Ministry before Peter's Confession that He is the Christ (Chs. 14–16)
 3. Ministry of Training the Disciples prior to His Crucifixion (Chs. 17–20)
 4. Final Week of Ministries in Jerusalem (Chs. 21–25)
- IV. The Crucifixion of the King (Chs. 26–27)
- V. The Resurrection and the Great Commission of the King (Ch. 28)

F. Introduction to Content¹⁹

This Gospel was divided into five sections. The first two (I & II) cover four chapters (1–4) in which the author gave proof to His kingship with the Messiah's birth and His preparation for early ministry. The last two sections (IV & V) cover three chapters (26–28) in which the author described the King's crucifixion, His resurrection, and the Great Commission. The middle section (III), which spans 21 chapters, gives the account that the Messiah's public ministry is the central part of this Gospel. The teachings and doctrines mentioned in this section provide us a holistic view of the Gospel of Matthew so that we may be able to have a clear grasp of the central theme of this book. There were four stages in Jesus's public ministry:

1. His Early Ministry (Chs. 5–13)

- 1) Chapters 5–7 point out that Jesus is the King through His teachings. This Messiah proclaimed the blessings of the citizen of His kingdom. This was the well-known "Sermon on the Mount" which clearly described principles of kingdom living.
- 2) Chapters 8–12 give proofs that Jesus is the King through His miracles and signs and that He was sent by God. Jesus was unlike many politicians today who only talk the talk of empty promises, but lack the ability to carry them out. He proved His authority through miracles. Matthew recorded ten miracles Jesus performed to describe His power over sickness, darkness and its dominions, and death (chs. 8–9). These miracles and signs not only proved Jesus's power to heal both body and soul, but also enabled us to live out the principles of the Sermon of the Mount, which He called His disciples to live. Next, our Lord prepared and sent twelve disciples to go and share His Good News with the people who was like sheep without a shepherd (9:36–38; ch. 10).
- 3) Chapters 11–13 provide us the evidence for the Jew's rejection of this King. During that time, there were four different responses people had toward Jesus's teachings, His miracles and signs, and the sending of His disciples. First, some were like John the Baptist who questioned if Jesus was the Messiah that they had been waiting for (11:2-6). Second, most were indifferent. They only wanted to hear what they liked to hear, but were unwilling to pay the price to accept the truth. (11:16-24). Third, a small percentage was responsive to the Lord with a childlike simplicity (11:25-30). Fourth, the religious leaders publicly opposed Jesus (chapters 11–12). They denied that Jesus was the King and conferred together on

how to do away with Him. The attitude of these Jewish leaders was the reason why the Lord temporarily left the Jews (12:38-45) and passed His salvation on to the Gentiles (12:46-50). Because of these four very different responses, the Lord Jesus changed His style of teaching. He started to speak in parables to the crowd rather than with plain speech and shifted His teaching to focus on His disciples (13:16, 34-36). He prepared them so that they might know that Jesus was the Messiah whom they had been eagerly waiting for. He is the Son of God and the fulfillment of Old Testament's prophecies. Chapter 13 was such an obvious shift. Because the Jews rejected the Kingdom of God and were unwilling to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, God's plan for the Jews had to come to a temporary halt. From that point on, God only revealed the mystery of His Kingdom to His disciples. Thus the period of the church entered. This mystery had never been revealed in the Old Testament.

2. His Ministry before Peter's Confession that He is the Christ (Chs.14–16). The author recorded that the Messiah continued to be rejected along with His response and work. The ministry of Jesus during this period, which caused Peter to recognize Him to be the Messiah may be divided into two parts:
 - 1) Jesus feeds the five thousand and walks on water (Chs.14–16). Jesus performed these miracles so that His disciples might clearly understand that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the everlasting God. After John the Baptist was beheaded by King Herod in 14:1-12, our Lord began to teach His disciples (14:13). With a series of miracles and signs, He revealed His divine nature as the Messiah. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand revealed that the crowd only wanted material gratification and rejected Jesus's messages (John 6:15) and His cross (John 6:60-66). The disciples of the Lord Jesus, on the other hand, recognized His divine nature when He walked on the water (14:28-29), healed the demon-possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman (15:21-28) and all those who came to Him with various diseases (15:30-31), and the feeding of the four thousand (15:32-39). Peter, especially, began to recognize and know that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
 - 2) Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ and Jesus gave His first message about the cross (16:13-28). This passage records Peter (representing other disciples) professing the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah. After this, Jesus began to teach His disciples about the necessity of His crucifixion and resurrection, but such message was rejected by the disciples (16:21-22). Does this sound like many of us Christians today who confess Jesus to be the Son of God yet deny the cross in our lives?
3. His Ministry of training the disciples prior to His crucifixion was the third stage of Christ's ministry on earth (Chs.17–20). Jesus began to prepare His disciples regarding His death (ascension) and trained them to be able to carry out the responsibility of spreading the gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus's teachings during this period included His transfiguration (Ch. 17), humility and forgiveness (Ch. 18), and those lessons taught on His way to Jerusalem (Chs. 19–20). These all followed the prophecy of 16:21 in preparation for His disciples accepting His impending crucifixion and resurrection.
4. His final week of ministries in Jerusalem was the final stage of the Lord Jesus's work on earth (Chs. 21–25). For the very last time, Jesus declared to the opposing Jewish religious leaders that He was the promised Messiah from the Old Testament. He also demonstrated His authority by purifying the Temple (21:1-17). Following this, Jesus told four parables to warn the priests and the Pharisees of God's judgment on them (21:18–22:46). In chapter 23, Christ sternly rebuked the hypocritical religious leaders but was grieved at the same time by their impending judgements. The Lord Jesus wished for their repentance but only to face their rejection of Him.

Chapters 24–25 recorded that Jesus did not only fulfill the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament but that He is coming again. In His final teachings, some of His prophecies were fulfilled soon after (such as the Temple being destroyed in AD 70). Some others are yet to be fulfilled (such as Christ's Second Coming). The Lord Jesus taught His disciples about His coming again so as to give them hope and comfort. Christ was soon to be crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended into heaven. When the Lord is no longer with us physically on earth, those of us who belong to the Lord must be alert and wait while serving Him and man with all diligence (24:32–25:46).

Chapters 26–28 are the fourth and fifth sections of the Gospel of Matthew and they give accounts of the King's crucifixion, resurrection, and His Great Commission. Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection were the climax of His public ministry because all His teachings and public ministry were ended at His death and resurrection for all. Christ's death on the cross and resurrection empower us to carry out His Great Commission. Satan tried with all of his might to keep Jesus in the grave (27:65-66), you who could overcome the power of Jesus Christ the Son of God? Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection (Matt 28:9-10; Mark 16:9-19; Luke 24:13-52; John 20:14, 21:23; 1 Cor 15:5-8). At the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel, we see Jesus commanding His disciples with the authority of the King: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:20).

G. Conclusion

The Gospel according to Matthew is a Gospel of the kingdom of heaven. God called and inspired Matthew to write this first book of New Testament and the Holy Spirit helped him to accurately and clearly record Jesus's life and teachings. Although this book was written for the Jews and desires for them to know that Jesus was the promised Messiah from the Old Testament and that He was to be their King and Savior, this Gospel was also written for us Jesus should be the King and Savior of all mankind. He is the Savior who rescues men from the penalty of sin and He is Lord of all believers.

The Gospel of Matthew is full of abundant truth. We will be richly blessed if we approach it with a simple and teachable heart.

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List of Sources Consulted

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#6. 摩根解經—馬太福音	活泉	6:#20.p36
#7. 認識你的王	播道	7:#3.p8
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