

According to Matthew - Introduction

1. **Who wrote Matthew?** All the Gospels remain anonymous making the identification of the author at this point completely academic. But insights help us in both apologetics (defending the authenticity of the Bible) and content (the author can help us with explaining some details).

Internal Evidence

This book is saturated with Judaism. The author often quotes the Hebrew Bible (35 times; Mark - 19; Luke - 13; John - 12). If you include allusions, that number climbs to about 130 times. Jesus' life is paralleled with the prophets; 15 times Matthew states that Jesus fulfills an aspect of Hebrew Messianic prophecy.

The Gentiles are not a focus in this book and are often referred to negatively. Jesus does go to Galilee in the land of the Gentiles, but the disciples are told not to (Matthew 10:5). Jesus' ministry does end up being the hope of the Gentiles as well (Matthew 12:18-21), but it is clear that this account is primarily to the Jewish mind.

The author's unique passages tell us something about what gets his attention:

1. Genealogy of the kings
2. Visit of the magi
3. Flight to Egypt and return
4. Coin found in the fish for the temple tax
5. The intent of the Law of Moses
6. The teaching of forgiveness of debts
7. Strong confrontation and woes against the Scribes and Pharisees
8. Judgment against those who divide Israel and Jerusalem
9. Eleven unique parables
10. Kingdom of heaven – 31 times in Matthew, none in any other book

The internal evidence suggests an educated, calculating, bookkeeping Jew who is entrenched in the Scriptures and well-versed in the political games of the Pharisees.

Two of the apostles possibly fit this description: Nathanael Bartholomew and Matthew (Levi)

External Evidence

The early church is unanimous in acceptance of Matthew (Levi) as the writer of this book. Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaeus, and Origen all report Matthew as the writer of account.

Papias (c. AD 60-130) writes, "Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could."

It is claimed that Pantaeus also confirmed that Matthew was the author of the first Gospel. Eusebius of Caesarea writes that Pantaeus, a church leader in the late 2nd to possibly early 3rd century, came across the Hebrew version of Matthew's Gospel.

"It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew,

According to Matthew - Introduction

one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time.”

Origen and Irenaeus also accept Matthew as writing this account.

The title that was added by copyists in the earliest manuscripts also ascribes this account to Matthew.

While we do not have an ancient Hebrew edition of this account, there are reports that one may have existed. It is possible that the writer penned both a Hebrew and Greek manuscript, but all that remains are the Greek copies. There is no reason to think that someone other than the original writer is responsible for the Greek manuscript.

A study of the person of Matthew will be conducted later.

2. To whom is Matthew addressed?

The content of the book of Matthew mandates that the account was written to Jews. The content of the account would have no impact on Gentiles who have no knowledge of the Messianic claims of the Hebrew Scriptures.

3. Where was Matthew written?

Within the book, there is no evidence of where Matthew was, and scholarly attempts to place him in Antioch Syria are complete guesswork.

4. When was Matthew written?

This question is more important than where it was written. Attempts to have Matthew written between 80-100 AD simply diminish the apostolic authorship since it is generally agreed that Matthew was martyred before then.

Without discussing all the details, there is enough evidence that disproves this late date and demonstrates that Matthew was written between 35-60 AD. The most compelling is the distribution of Matthew in Egypt found in the early to mid 2nd century (100-170 AD) that was already bound in book form (front and back of the same papyri). There is little probability that this kind of distribution could have happened in a short period of time.

In modern times, it has been theorized that Mark was the first Gospel written and Matthew borrowed from him to write his account. This is meaningless speculation and only theorized to diminish the authenticity of the Bible.

There is much similarity between Matthew and Mark, and it is possible that they shared notes. But Mark, being much shorter and less descriptive than Matthew, would have most likely abridged the shared details rather than Matthew expanding on Mark.

Matthew speaks of the temple in the present tense, and there is no mention of people or events that would have been important to the early believers between AD 50-80.

5. What was the occasion of the writing; what situation(s) prompted the writing?

Again, the context dictates that this book was written as a witness to the Jews. There is nothing in the text that would indicate any other occasion that prompted this writing (Not a swan song, persecution, journey).

According to Matthew - Introduction

6. What is the stated purpose for Matthew?

John 20:30-31 – Written to unbelievers, Jew or Gentile, so that they would believe and have eternal life.

Luke 1:1-4 – Written as a historical document to place into chronological order the events of Jesus Christ to inform a believer of the exact truth of things that he had already been taught.

Mark 1:1 – The good news of Jesus Christ the son of God. I have a working hypothesis that Mark is written for the same purpose as Matthew but to Hellenistic Jews who have lost both the language and culture of Hebrew Jews.

Matthew 1:1, 5-6, 16; Matthew 1:22, 2:15, 2:23, 8:17; Matthew 28:16-20; kingdom of heaven – 31 times in Matthew, none in any other book.

What is the purpose of Mathew?

- To demonstrate that Jesus is Christ (the Messiah)
- To write an account of the life and times of Jesus Christ
- To introduce, offer, and prepare the Jews for the kingdom of heaven
- To validate both this testimony and the testimony of all the apostles
- If Israel were to believe in Jesus and accept Jesus as their king, then He would bring the kingdom of heaven into fruition.

7. What were the circumstances of the author when he wrote?

Unknown

8. What were the circumstances of those to whom he wrote?

The Jews were historically oppressed and hated by all the surrounding nations. The initial distribution would have been to religious Hebrew Jews, both local and in the diaspora (Acts 2:5-12, 37-41).