

Introduction

Authorship

While the title of the book, 'The Gospel According to Matthew', was probably not attached to the original document, the universal witness of the early church, as well as suggestive internal evidence, indicates that Matthew, a disciple of our Lord (10:3), composed it.¹ We are not specifically told that Matthew composed the original scroll, he being mentioned without distinction only twice within it (in the enumeration of the disciples he appears eighth in the list [10:2-4] and also in Jesus' call to join His emerging band of intimate followers [9:9]).

What we know from internal evidence is that the author's former profession was that of a tax collector who operated under the client king, Herod Antipas, in the service of the Romans. He resided in Capernaum, a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, situated on the highway called the Via Maris (the Way to the Sea) that ran from Mesopotamia in the East through the Fertile Crescent to the Mediterranean Sea.

Capernaum was the residence of Jesus and the center of His ministry after He left Nazareth (4:12). In Matthew 9, after describing the healing of the paralytic in Capernaum (9:2-7), the text states that 'as Jesus passed from there, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting in a tax booth ...' (9:9). This places Matthew both as a resident of Capernaum, a frequent

1. Compositions at the time were made upon lengthy scrolls that would be rolled up when not in use. When multiple scrolls were in the possession of a church, in order to prevent unnecessary openings, which would damage the fragile document, it became customary to place pieces of paper in the fold of them for accurate identification and ready access.

topic in the gospel (4:13; 8:5; 9:1; 11:23; 17:24), and as a tax collector (it is interesting that the topic of money comes up more frequently in Matthew than in any other gospel [e.g. 17:24, 27; 18:24]).

So the author resided in the Galilee, a region inhabited by Jews and Gentiles ('Galilee of the Gentiles,' [4:15]) and wrote using some Aramaic loan-words suggestive of Gentile influence. Perhaps his pro-Galilean bias becomes most evident when he alone records, in his account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, the instructions of Jesus that His disciples should meet with Him in Galilee (28:10).

It can also be inferred with confidence that the author was Jewish as well as Galilean. Although he does reveal a regional preference for Galilee in contrast to Judea and, while his bias is demonstrated by his stress on what Jesus did in Galilee with little reference to Jerusalem – he records only one journey there, the Passion Week – he is aware of Jewish customs (1:18-20), of the nation's social experience and political context (2:1, 22; 14:1), of social classifications within Jewish culture (2:4; 26:3, 57, 59; 27:2), and a depth of knowledge of its history (1:1-17). Perhaps most telling is his immense knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures evidenced by the plethora of citations throughout the text.

Jesus found Matthew in a tax office pursuing a career in the service of the Roman empire (9:9). Generally, tax gatherers accumulated significant wealth because, while they collected required taxes that the Roman law stipulated, they were also allowed to collect more. For both reasons, they did not ingratiate themselves to their countrymen. The tax that Matthew collected was likely a poll tax. It was used for internal improvements, though its distribution was subject to the wishes of the political establishment connected to the client king, Herod Antipas.

The external evidence for Matthean authorship in the early centuries of the church is abundant. Without specifically ascribing authorship to the disciple, there is evidence that the gospel was not only attributed to Matthew but was also quoted by second-century writers. *The Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 117–c. 132) contains a quotation from Matthew 22:14 ('many are called, few are chosen'),

words only found in this particular gospel.² *The Didache* (c. 140), also denominated as 'The Teaching of the Twelve', an early church manual of discipline, quotes the Lord's Prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 (identifying the source as 'a gospel').³ While Papias' work, *The Sayings of Our Lord* (c. 130), has been lost, it is quoted in *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (c. 260-340). Papias, who was bishop of Hierapolis, is quoted as follows: 'So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted the oracles as he was able' (3:39:16). We have clear evidence that Papias understood that both Mark (3:39:15) and Matthew wrote accounts of the words and works of Jesus. The earliest unambiguous assertion comes from Irenaeus (c. 130-202), bishop of Lyon, who stated that Matthew wrote a gospel account for the Hebrews when Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome.⁴

To state the case succinctly, in every instance where a subsequent writer or later council in identifying a list of canonical books, the 'first' gospel, the book is attributed to *Matthew*, the disciple of our Lord. The earliest listing of books to be read in the churches, the Muratorian Canon, dated in the late second century is available only in fragments; however, the listing of New Testament books begins, '[1] ... at which nevertheless he was present [a reference to Mark], and so he placed [them in his narrative]. [2] The third book of the gospel is that according to Luke ... [9] the fourth of the gospels is that of John [one] of the disciples.'⁵ Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter or Festal Letter of 365/366, in which he enumerated the canonical writings, lists Matthew's gospel first among the New Testament books. Later he wrote, 'Again, it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament.

2. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 4:14.

3. *The Didache*, 8:1-9.

4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1: 'Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church.' Additionally, Irenaeus' statement documents his understanding that the gospel was written prior to the outbreak of hostilities that led to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

5. The Muratorian Canon, 1-9.

These are the four gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.⁶

Matthean authorship was not doubted until the rise of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Unbelief, shrouded in academic and intellectual achievement, then rejected the integrity of the witness of Holy Scripture and regarded as false the assumed divine superintendence of human authorship that overcame the oft-blighted perceptions and distortions. The interpretative clues of the biblical writers were increasingly regarded as the mere observable qualities common to human authors. A spirit of skepticism descended upon rigorous scholarly attainment, leading increasingly to transmuting providence into natural law and limiting divine participation to the distant margins of consideration.

Recent scholarship has put an interesting twist on Matthean authorship postulating that, while the disciple did gather remembrances of the teachings, claims, and accomplishments of Jesus, he did not do so in the form as we have it today. The claim finds traction in a comment made by Papias and recorded by Eusebius. He is quoted as adding the phrase, 'and the same writer uses testimonies from the Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise'.⁷ If the statement is valid, it is not a denial of Matthean authorship, but is a matter concerning the sources and the manner of compilation.

Date

The dating of Matthew's gospel, as is true of literature as a whole, is important because social context provides valuable insight into the meaning of the text. Simply put, entering into the immediate world of the writer tends to increase the understanding of what is read (a position rejected by postmodern literary critics). Within the gospel itself several clues narrow the time of its composition. It is justifiable to suggest that the gospel was written at a distance in time after the events recorded. For example, when Matthew tells how the betrayal fee paid to Judas was used after it was returned to the nation's religious leadership (the purchase of a field

6. Athanasius, *Letter*, 39.4.

7. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.16

for the burial of the poor), he states: 'Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood *to this day*' (27:8), suggesting a lapse of time since the purchase, but yet before the city was destroyed by the Romans. Again, Matthew says that the religious leaders fabricated a lie to cover up the implications of the empty tomb of Jesus by telling those who should have guarded it securely to say robbers stole its contents while they slept (28:11-14). Then he adds this comment: 'And the story has been spread among the Jews *to this day*' (28:15), which suggests a significant period between the event and its recording.

Further, Matthew assumes that the temple and its services were still in operation at the time of writing. For example, when he prefaces Jesus' first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount (5:1), the temple was still in existence. In speaking of the need for purity of heart and its relationship to interpersonal behavior as the criteria of worship, Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, 'So if you are offering your gift there before the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar ... and then come and offer your offering' (5:23-24).

There are clues within the gospel that suggest the city had not yet been ravished by the Romans. In the temptation-of-Christ narrative we are told that Jesus was taken by the devil to the holy city and set on the pinnacle of the temple (4:5); in Christ's instruction in the Sermon on the Mount concerning false oaths we should not swear by Jerusalem because 'it is the "city of the great King"' (5:35); in 24:1-2, Jesus was departing from the temple when the disciples reflected upon its stunning beauty; in 24:15, Jesus speaks of the inner sanctuary of the temple complex, the Holy Place; and in 27:53 we are informed that when the deceased came out of their tombs with Christ's great victory over death 'they went into the holy city'. Though an argument from silence, the writer gives us no hint that the city and temple have been destroyed.

The range that several conservative scholars provide for its composition is sometime in the 50s and 60s. Graham Scroggie stated: 'Matthew's record was written probably about A.D. 58.'⁸

8. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1948), p. 234.

Leon Morris concurred, saying that ‘There is good reason for seeing it as appearing before A.D. 70, perhaps the late 50s and early 60s.’⁹ D. A. Carson states rather succinctly both the lack of scholarly conclusiveness and the acceptance of a pre-70 date: ‘While surprisingly little in the gospel points to a firm date, perhaps the sixties are the most likely decade for its composition.’¹⁰ If the occasion for the gospel was, at least in part, related to the issue of Jewish-Christian duties to carry the news of Jesus to the Gentiles (28:18-20), the new constituency of the people of God, an implication of the promises made to Abraham, it would make sense that the gospel was composed prior to the fatal Jewish uprising in A.D. 66–70.

Place of the Writing

The locale of the composition of the gospel is uncertain as well. Generally, those who hold to a pre-70 date suggest that the location was in Palestine.¹¹ Those who hold that the composition took place there often designate the specific area as Judea, particularly the city of Jerusalem, but the claim lacks supporting evidence. On the contrary, given Matthew’s bias for the Galilee, it seems strange to do so. Among the options of recent scholarship is the suggestion that the gospel was written in Antioch in Syria (which the Romans considered a part of Palestine), where there was a large Christian community (Acts 13:1-2; 14:26-28). There are indications within the gospel of Aramaic influence, which would accord the possibility of Antioch, for that language was widespread in the ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ (4:15) also. There are numerous other suggestions in this regard, yet the evidence for each is slender.

9. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p. 11.

10. D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1917), p. 21.

11. The name by which the geographical area was re-designated by the Emperor Hadrian after the failed Bar Kochva revolt (A.D. 132–34). By so doing, he suggested that the ancient homeland of the Jews was a ruse, the true possessors of the land being the ancient Philistines (hence, ‘*Palestina*'). The British used the designation, the Palestinian Expeditionary Force, following the capture of the city during World War I, a period called the British Mandate. The city of Jerusalem was also renamed Aelia Capitolina by Hadrian in honor of the emperor’s family, but that has been lost in time.

Distinctive Characteristics

As with the discussion of the writer, date, and location of the composition, other topics assist the reader in the interpretative process because it helps to narrow the focus, and, thereby, assist in understanding. In that light, a summary of the emphases within the gospel becomes the motive for indulging in a thematic discussion. What can we learn from the contents of the gospel itself? While Matthew shares much in common with the other gospels, there are unique characteristics in his account, as is true of the other three.

For example, notice has already been made regarding Matthew's focus on Jesus' ministry in the Galilee, noting only one journey, the climactic one, to Jerusalem. John, in contrast, tells of several trips of our Lord to Jerusalem, and he also mentions several post-resurrection appearances in the city, whereas Matthew records only one. He mentions the encounter of 'Mary Magdalene and the other Mary' (28:1) with an angel at the empty tomb who instructed them to tell the disciples that 'he is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him' (28:7). When the two women met Jesus subsequently, He repeated the same instructions: 'go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they shall see me' (28:10). The disciples followed the instructions. Matthew ended the narrative with Jesus' further direction to carry the message abroad (28:16-20).

So, what are those emphases? First, that the original audience was largely, if not exclusively, Jewish as opposed to Gentile is clearly evident from the perfusion of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. There are over sixty direct quotations from them in the gospel, a significant contrast to about thirty in Mark, twenty-five in Luke, and only sixteen in John. Matthew's purpose, at least in part, was to demonstrate that Jesus is the long-promised Messiah, the Christ. Christian faith is 'true Judaism'; it is the culmination of what the prophets of the nation promised, pondered, and awaited. Further, the Jewishness of this gospel is brought out in Jesus' frequent references to the Mosaic Code. The 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus' great commentary on entrance into the kingdom of God (chs. 5-7), contains a declaration of the misuse of the Law by the religious leaders of His day: 'Do not

think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them ... For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (5:17, 20). The same negative evaluation of the use by the scribes and Pharisees of their own sacred texts is found in the seven woes of Matthew 23. In the controversy with the Pharisees, when approached concerning His thoughts of the most important commandment of the 613 that they advocated (Matt. 22:34-40), Jesus distilled the Law into one word (love) expressed toward two entities (God and mankind). The very preamble of the gospel suggests much about the audience: 'The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matt. 1:1). The good news for the early Jewish constituency of the church is the good news of the Jewishness of Jesus!

Second, even as Jesus is the person promised in the Hebrew Scriptures as the Christ, or the Messiah, so Christianity is the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption for mankind. The promise made to Abraham (a 'land' prefigured materially yet ultimately fulfilled in heaven); a 'seed' being Jesus (Gal. 3:16), the one who made the divine promise a reality, and a 'blessing' which is the eternal existence of God's people in His presence [Gen. 12:1-3]), a promise often repeated to His ancient people, finds its ultimate fulfillment in a manner the Jews hardly could have imagined. While the Jewish people, as a whole, failed to embrace the promise in Jesus, grace has been granted without ties to ethnicity or to proselytism into Judaism. The key concepts in Matthew's gospel are (1) 'the Christ' (used seventeen times) to highlight the identity of the redeemer and (2) 'the kingdom of heaven' (thirty-two times), 'the kingdom of God' (five times), 'the kingdom' (six times), and 'the kingdom of the Son of Man' (six times) to emphasize the 'world' that He secured for His people. The long-awaited kingdom has drawn near in Christ and His followers, who are a new entity, the church. Thus, the kingdom, the church, the realm over which Jesus is recognized as Lord, is both a present reality in the church (4:17; 12:28), in shadowed form, and a future reality to be revealed in magnificent splendor. Jesus, by virtue of His

enthronement in heaven now, but also someday on the 'new' earth, as in heaven, will be without opposition. Jesus offered His rule, and it came by virtue of His triumph. It waits its fullest manifestation when His enemies become the footstool under His feet in the final judgment.

Third, Matthew lived, at least when we first encounter him, in the Galilee, an area of Jewish and Gentile constituents, which in part explains Judean attitudes to the region ('Can anything good come from Nazareth?' asked Nathaniel [John 1:46]). The word 'Gentile' is used in two ways: ethnically meaning non-Jews, and religiously meaning the lost. When Jesus began His public ministry, Matthew quotes an Old Testament text (Isa. 9:1) indicating it as a fulfillment of prophecy in the 'Galilee of the Gentiles'. Matthew has an interest in Gentiles, noting Jesus' healing of a Roman centurion's servant (8:13), the Gadarene demoniac (8:32), and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (15:28). Most interesting is that, following the rejection of Jesus by the religious leadership for violating the Law (12:9), Matthew quotes a passage from Isaiah claiming that Jesus' embrace of Gentiles was a fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 42:1-4, the lengthiest Old Testament citing in his composition).

It is apparent that Matthew had an interest in the legitimacy of expanding the constituency of Christ-followers. He is the only gospel writer to use the term 'church' (16:18; 18:17). The gospel famously ends with Jesus' command to carry the good news to the nations: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...' (28:19). In context, it seems to be a not-so-subtle insight that God's people are not limited to His ancient people! It is also interesting that in the two passages where the church is mentioned, we have instruction about the issue of authority and about interpersonal conflict management with procedures for resolution. This gospel is meant for and reflects, in part, the needs of the embryonic church.

Fourth, Matthew's gospel displays a very hostile view of the religious leadership of his day, particularly of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7), for example, is a declaration of the kind of righteousness needed to enter the kingdom that Jesus was offering to the nation. Jesus

makes it clear that Pharisaic righteousness is both inadequate and spiritually destructive. The seven woes of chapter 23 speak for themselves. The Pharisees, in Jesus' and Matthew's view, were 'blind leaders of the blind' (15:14). Matthew cites comments about both religious parties in statements quoted from John's preaching ('You brood of vipers ...' [3:7]). The leadership of the nation, the Sanhedrin, was composed of Sadducees, Pharisees, and elders. Sadducees were of the aristocratic priestly caste; they were a minority party, but they held the power. Pharisees were not priests; they were teachers of the law; they were laymen, and they composed the majority party. Elders were powerful lay nobility. There were serious theological differences among the three groups, but they shared a common hostility towards Jesus. He did not reject all that the Pharisees taught; in His view, their teachings were sometimes more accurate than their lifestyle; he said, '... do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice' (23:3).

Fifth, Matthew's literary technique and style is worthy of reflection; he displays the marks of a careful craftsman, as well as of a master teacher, in the arrangement and presentation of material throughout the gospel. Matthew builds his argument around five discourses of Jesus (chs. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; and 24-25). The teacher in Matthew is brought out in at least two ways: first, he arranges things in threes and sevens. For example, Joseph receives directions from the Lord in three dreams (1:14; 2:13, 19); three times Peter denies the Lord (26:69-74); seven parables are in Matthew 13; and seven woes in Matthew 23. The number fourteen, the double of seven, is a rhetorical device prominent in chapter 1 (1:17). Further, Matthew employs clever teaching devices such as organizing information in trilogies, likely for memory ease (six comments on Pharisaic misuse of Scripture divided into two units of three each [5:21-48], three errant religious practices [6:6-18], and three errant matters of moral conduct [6:19-7:5]).

Additionally, he repeats phrases or tenses of verbs to frame sections. For example, Matthew 4:23-25 is repeated in 9:35, stressing that Jesus taught and performed miracles. Chapters 5-7 comprise a major discourse and chapters 8-9 a major

section of miracles. Of the eight beatitudes, the first and last are in the present tense while those in between are in the future tense. Again, Matthew is revealed to us as more than a former employee in a tax office in the service of a foreign power; he is a master writer-teacher.

Occasion of the Writing

Matthew's gospel, judging from its internal content, clearly suggests several purposes in its composition arising from the situation at the time. First, and perhaps foremost, the original audience was composed of Jewish Christians (the argument for this view is stated above). It may be safely surmised that the rehearsing in literary form of the person, claims, and accomplishments of Jesus Christ had several functions. It would have provided organized data to help those Christians in their witness to their Jewish compatriots, and, in that sense, as is true of the other gospel accounts, it served as an evangelistic manual with apostolic eyewitness authority. Second, the gospel certainly functions to strengthen the early church in their embrace of the good news, and, as such, was a manual on the spiritual life, their walk in the faith.

The gospel was written, it seems, to address a reoccurring problem of adjusting to a new social situation that relates to the constituency of the people of God. In this sense, the issue may have been to address Jewish-Gentile relations in the new entity, the church (this you find as a theme in several New Testament books, but especially in Romans where Paul makes the point that all ethnicities are equal in Christ and we must learn to live in harmony with one another [12:1–15:21]), the theological basis stated in the chapters precede the exhortations. The thought seems to be that Matthew senses the urgency to remind Jewish Christians that they have an obligation to reach out to Gentiles because the promises made to Abraham were for them, though the channel of delivery was through 'true' Israel. This becomes clear in the selection of material in the account, as noted above, such as the centurion's servant, the Gadarene demoniac, and the Canaanite's daughter in the former territory of Phoenicia. A gospel heavily Jewish in orientation ends with the command from Jesus to carry

the good news to the nations. Another hint to possible early Jewish/Gentile tensions in bringing the two groups harmoniously together in the unity of the body of Christ is the specific instruction in handling interpersonal conflicts in the assembly of saints (17:15-20), as well as the stress of the cardinal Christian virtue of humility (18:1-4).

Beyond the possible issue of Jewish-Christian hesitancy to carry the good news to the non-Jew, or at least to display small bias in social discourse and worship, it must not be missed that the gospel contains a great volume of instruction for the general deportment of Christians, truths that are timeless insights. For example, while Jesus repudiates the Pharisaic manner of giving (6:1-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:15-16), He gives us valuable instruction on those subjects. In like manner, Jesus contrasts the moral conduct of the religious leadership on such important topics as wealth-management (6:19-24), worry (6:25-34), and a judgmental spirit (7:1-5) in a way that is certainly timeless.

Theme of the Writing

The central theme of the gospel is twofold. First, Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises in the Hebrew Scriptures; Jesus is the Messiah! This seems validated by the more than fifty direct citations from the Old Testament and some 262 allusions or parallels to it. Further, a unique feature of Matthew is the ten formula-quotations in the gospel, five in the initial two chapters. 'All this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet' (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9), followed in each case by an Old Testament citing. Second, the consequence that Jesus is the Christ is to be lived out practically in the churches and proclaimed to the nations (the gospel ends with a plea for the nations!).

Structure of the Writing

There are three general ways commentators have approached the gospel. The first is to organize the gospel around the five discourses of Jesus (each of the five discourses ends in a similar phrase as the narrative continues [And when Jesus had finished these sayings ...' 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1]). If one

outlines the gospel in this fashion, the work of Michael Green may serve as an excellent example:¹²

- 1–4 Introduction (Genealogy, birth narrative, beginning of ministry)
- 5–7 Teaching #1 (Sermon on the Mount)
- 8–9 Miracles
- 10 Teaching #2 (Mission instruction)
- 11–12 Rejection of John and Jesus
- 13 Teaching #3 (Parables)
- 14–17 Miracles and controversies
- 18 Teaching #4 (The church)
- 19–22 Journey to Jerusalem
- 23–25 Teaching #5 (Judgment and the end of the world)
- 26–28 Death and resurrection

Green takes the view that the gospel has two parts, the division being geographic. Chapters 1–13 take place in the Galilee, 14–28 in Jerusalem. In the telling of the story, Matthew has Jesus leave the Galilee and make a single visit to Jerusalem. The gospel ends with Jesus in the Galilee where Matthew records His post-resurrection appearance. Again, the gospel writers are quite selective in material-choice, seeking to view the events and teachings of Christ from their point of view or a theme they each seek to develop.

A second approach, suggested by the Anglican scholar R. T. France, follows a biographical/geographical/thematic approach.¹³ France sees the gospel divided into six parts with introductory phrases like ‘When he heard that John was arrested, he withdrew into Galilee’ (4:12) or ‘From that time Jesus began to show his disciples ...’ (16:21) marking each section (except for the first and last sections): the introduction of the Messiah (1:1–4:11); the Messiah in Galilee revealed by word and deed (4:12–16:20); the Messiah leaving Galilee for Jerusalem

12. Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Westmont, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), p. 30.

13. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), pp. 2-5.

with pending conflict (16:21–20:34); confrontation with the religious authorities in Jerusalem (21:1–25:34); the Messiah rejected, killed, and vindicated (26:1–28:15); and in Galilee the mission launched (28:16–20). Thus, France emphasizes the instructional aspects of the gospel with a view to the spread of the good news through the early churches by the apostles. In this approach, at least as it is presented, is the downplaying of Jesus' clash with Jewish leadership leading to His death. This influences how one reads, for example, Matthew 5–7.

This approach is followed by Craig Blomberg with slight modification in that he recognizes the phrase 'from that time Jesus began to ...' (4:17; 16:21) as structural dividers in the gospel.¹⁴

The Introduction of Jesus, 1:1–4:16

The Claims of Jesus Presented, 4:17–16:20

The Rejection and Triumph of Jesus, 16:21–28:20

A third way is to see the gospel more thematically, as a retelling of Jesus' life-events and teachings progressing from His birth to the post-resurrection appearance in the Galilee. The development in the gospel would be then as follows: birth and preparation for His ministry (chs. 1–4), the verification of His claims through preaching and the performance of miracles (chs. 5–10), the rejection of the nation's leadership (chs. 11–12), private teaching in preparation for His departure (chs. 13–18), journey to Jerusalem (chs. 19–20), official presentation and rejection (chs. 21–27), and His appearance in the Galilee (ch. 28). Through this grid, the gospel of Matthew appears to pivot on the events of chapter 12 with the official verdict of the nation's leadership about the validity of Christ's claims as Messiah that were confirmed by His miracles ('But the Pharisees went out and conspired together against him, how they might destroy him' [12:14]. 'It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons' [12:24]). From that point Christ turns from public proclamation to either private instruction of His disciples or teaching through parables so that the masses would not understand what He was saying (13:11). As Christ instructs the disciples, and

14. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), pp. 24–25.

increasingly manifests hostility to the religious hierarchy, the leadership becomes increasingly hostile to Him. While this approach is biographical, it focuses upon Jesus' claims as the Christ, His national rejection, the preparation of His disciples for His departure, death and resurrection, and His command to be mission-minded. This proposal will be the structure of the commentary that follows.

I. The Claims of Jesus: The King 1:1–11:1

- A. The Presentation of the King, 1:1–4:11
- B. The Proclamation of the King, 4:12–7:29
- C. The Miracles of the King, 8:1–9:34
- D. The Instruction of the King to the Disciples, 9:35–11:1

II. The Rejection of Jesus: The King, 11:2–27:66

- A. The Responses to and Rejection of the King, 11:2–12:50
- B. The Consequences of Rejecting the King's Teaching, 13:1–52
- C. The Final Ministry of the King in the Galilee, 13:53–16:12
- D. The Final Instructions of the King in the Galilee, 16:13–18:35
- E. The Journey of the King to Jerusalem, 19:1–20:34
- F. The Official Presentation and Rejection of the King, 21:1–27:66
- G. The Conclusive Proof of the King's Claims and Person: The Resurrection, 28:1–20

Applications

1. The grace and mercy of God is seen in Jesus' choice of Matthew. He was a disgrace in his culture, being a tax collector for the Roman oppressors. Yet, in His grace Jesus called him to be a disciple and then to write a gospel about Him for His own people, the Jews. God calls and uses people as He wills, but not according to

merit for we have none without Him! There is hope for all of us that God will show His kindness toward us. Are you not glad that His ways are not ours?

2. Being with Jesus, listening to His words and observing His life, made the disciples willing to tell others about Him. Matthew even authored a gospel to share with others his understanding of Jesus' claims and accomplishments. Does Jesus inspire you to tell others? Are you impressed with who He is?
3. The perception of Jesus by the educated religious leadership is a witness to the darkness and blindness of our faculties. Though the leadership had the Old Testament, they missed the whole point of it. They said that His powers were of supernatural origin, but they said the devil and his colleagues energized Him. Is that not a testimony to the human condition? Knowledge of the Bible does not suggest the correct interpretation of it.
4. The theme of the gospel is so significant it cannot be missed. Jesus is the promised king of God's people, the Jews as well as the Gentiles. He is royal to His people far beyond that of any earthly potentate. He is Lord over all creation and rules the nations. Do you know Him as your sovereign?
5. Matthew did not purpose, nor did the other gospel writers, to write biographies of the life and times of Jesus. Though they are biographical in a secondary sense, their real purpose is to explain Jesus' claim that He came from heaven to become the savior/king over the entire earth. Does He reign in your life?
6. As we study the gospel, think about the Lord as He is presented. He is the king; He is loyal and compassionate toward His people. He is the greatest of all the rulers in the world and yet His kingship is so different from that of other monarchs and potentates in our world. He came in humble circumstances, He spoke words of wisdom and mercy, His miracles affirmed that He was a unique

person, He died through cruelty and political injustice, and then rose victoriously and is enthroned forever as 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

7. Is there insight to be gained concerning how to motivate people towards their religious duties by looking at Matthew's method? Certainly, the gospel ends with a command accompanied by a wonderful promise of God's provision, but he first explains to us the person of Jesus and His accomplishments. He spoke to us of grace and mercy before obligation and duty because the root motivation should be appreciativeness for the gift of Jesus. Do you find yourself motivated by guilt and command before explaining the reason that should motivate all of us?