

MATTHEW

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INTRODUCTION

It is fitting that the New Testament begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. 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 surrounding 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.

The Synoptic Problem

1. *The problem stated.* "Synoptic" comes from the Greek adjective *synoptikos*, which is from two words *syn* and *apses-thai*, "to see with or together." While Matthew, Mark, and Luke have distinctive purposes, they nevertheless view the life of Jesus Christ in a common way. However, some differences in the Gospel narratives must also be accounted for. These similarities and differences raise the question of the sources of the Gospels, thus positing a "Synoptic problem."

Most conservative scholars acknowledge that the Gospel writers made use of various sources. For example, the genealogical records of both Matthew and Luke may have come from temple records or oral tradition. Luke stated at the beginning of his Gospel (Luke 1:1) that many had written down the facts concerning the Lord Jesus. This implies that Luke could have drawn on a number of written accounts. That the individual writers may have used different sources for their material is a valid conclusion. However, this is not what critical scholars mean when they talk about sources. Most critical scholars view the "sources" as extensive writings which were joined together by skilled editors to produce

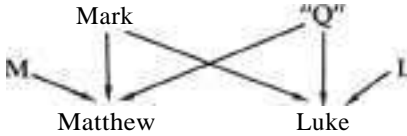
their own accounts. This conclusion has led to several explanations of these sources.

a. *The Urevangelium theory.* Some scholars conclude that an original Gospel (known in German as the *Urevangelium*) now lost, was the source for the biblical editors as they compiled their accounts. The major objection to this view is that no trace of such a writing has ever been discovered. No scholar can point to a document as the possible *Urevangelium*. Also, while such an explanation would account for the similarities, it in no way explains the differences in the Gospel stories of the same events.

b. *The oral tradition theory.* Some have concluded that the basic sources for the Gospels came from oral tradition, an oral testimony that developed around Jesus Christ. Normally such a testimony involved four steps: (1) The event occurred. (2) The event was told and repeated often enough so that it became widely known. (3) The event became fixed so that it was then told exactly the same way. (4) The event was written down in an account. An objection to this view is similar to the *Urevangelium* theory: this view accounts for similarities in the stories but it fails to account for the differences. Furthermore, why would an eyewitness of the events limit himself to stories from oral tradition?

c. *The document theory.* A popular view today is that the biblical editors made use of various written sources to compile their accounts. This viewpoint usually posits the following: (1) The first written account was the Gospel of Mark. A major reason for this position is that only 7 percent of the Gospel of Mark is unique, as 93 percent of Mark can be found in Matthew and Luke. (2) In addition to

Mark a second written document existed which basically contained discourse material. This document is known as "Q", an abbreviated form of the German word for source, *Quelle*. The approximately 200 verses common to Matthew and Luke which are not found in Mark must have come from "Q". (3) The editors used at least two other sources. One source reflects verses in Matthew not found in either Mark or Luke, and the other source reflects verses in Luke not found in either Matthew or Mark. This theory with its lines of dependence could be charted in this way:



This theory has several problems. First, it has difficulty with tradition. Conservative scholars have generally held that Matthew was the first of the written Gospels. While not all conservatives agree, this tradition does have some weight behind it and should not be shrugged off as "mere tradition" as sometimes tradition is correct. Second, this theory cannot account for the fact that occasionally Mark made a comment that neither Matthew nor Luke included. Mark wrote that the rooster crowed a second time (Mark 14:72), but neither Matthew nor Luke included that fact. Third, if Mark were the first Gospel, written after Peter's death around A.D. 67-68, then Matthew and Luke would probably have been written later after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. One would then expect that destruction to have been mentioned as a fitting climax to the Lord's words in Matthew 24-25 or Luke's statement in 21:20-24; however, neither mentioned the event. Fourth, the greatest problem is the whole speculation about the existence of "Q". If such a document existed and were thought of so highly by Matthew and Luke that they quoted extensively from it, why did not the church also regard it highly and preserve it?

d. The form critical theory. This widely held view assumes the document theory, but takes it a step further. When the

Gospel accounts were compiled, a multiplicity of documents existed, not simply four documents (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and "Q"). Interpreters today seek to discover and classify these documents, called "forms," and also to get behind the forms and discover exactly what the first-century church was seeking to communicate through them. The literal facts communicated in the forms are not sufficient in themselves; the truth is discovered by going behind the literal story. The facts in the stories are considered "myths" which the church built up around Jesus Christ. By scraping away the myths or "demythologizing," kernels of truth concerning Jesus are discovered.

While this theory is widely held, it has some serious problems. It is virtually impossible to classify the "forms" into exact categories. It is doubtful if any two interpreters would agree on the classifications. Furthermore, this view says that the first-century church caused these stories to be told the way they were, but the view never adequately explains what caused the church. In other words, this view has purposefully overlooked the living witness of Jesus Christ and the true impact His life and death made on first-century believers.

2. *A proposed solution.* The similarities and differences in the Gospel accounts can be solved through a composite viewpoint. First, the Gospel writers of the first century had extensive personal knowledge of much of the material they recorded. Matthew and John were disciples of Jesus Christ who spent a considerable amount of time with the Lord. Mark's account may be the reflections of Simon Peter near the end of his life, and Luke could have learned many facts through his relationship with Paul and others. These facts would have been used in writing the four accounts.

Second, oral tradition was involved. For example, Acts 20:35 refers to a saying of Christ not recorded in the Gospels. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10 gave a quotation from the Lord; when Paul wrote this, possibly none of the Gospels had yet been written. Third, written documents told some of the stories about Jesus Christ. Luke acknowledged this fact as he began his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). None of these facts, however, gives the dynamic

needed to record an inspired account of Jesus Christ's life that is free from all error. Fourth, another element must be included to help solve the Synoptic problem, namely, the dynamic of the Holy Spirit's ministry of inspiration as the Gospel writers recorded the accounts. The Lord promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of all Jesus had told them (John 14:26). This dynamic guarantees accuracy, whether the author was making use of his memory, passed-down oral traditions, or written accounts available to him. Whatever the source, the direction of the Holy Spirit assured an accurate text. The better one understands the various stories about the Lord, the clearer the "difficulties" become, for there was a divine superintendence over the authors regardless of the sources they used.

The Authorship of the First Gospel.

When one deals with the question of who wrote a particular Bible book, the evidence is normally twofold: evidence outside the book ("external evidence") and evidence within the book itself ("internal evidence"). External evidence strongly supports the view that the Apostle Matthew wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Many early church fathers cited Matthew as its author, including Pseudo Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen. (For further attestation see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, p. 193.) 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.

Internal evidence also supports the fact that Matthew was the author of the First Gospel. This book has more references to coins than any of the other three Gospels. In fact this Gospel 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. The profession of tax collector would necessitate an ability to write and keep records. Matthew obviously had the ability, humanly speaking, to write a book such as the First Gospel.

His Christian humility comes through as well, for Matthew alone continually refers to himself throughout his Gospel as "Matthew the tax collector." But Mark and Luke do not continually use that term of contempt when speaking of Matthew. Also, when Matthew began to follow Jesus, he invited his friends to a "dinner" (Matt. 9:9-10). Luke, however, called the dinner "a great banquet" (Luke 5:29). 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). The internal evidence concerning the authorship of the First Gospel points to Matthew as its most likely author.

The Original Language of the First Gospel.

While all the extant manuscripts of the First Gospel are in Greek, some suggest that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic, similar to Hebrew. Five individuals stated, in effect, that Matthew wrote in Aramaic and that translations followed in Greek: Papias (A.D. 80-155), Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), Origen (A.D. 185-254), Eusebius (fourth century A.D.), and Jerome (sixth century A.D.). However, they may have been referring to a writing by Matthew other than his Gospel account. Papias, for example, said Matthew compiled the sayings (*logia*) of Jesus. Those "sayings" might have been a second, shorter account of the Lord's words, written in Aramaic and sent to a group of Jews for whom it would have been most meaningful. That writing was later lost, for no such version exists today. The First Gospel, however, was probably penned by Matthew in Greek and has survived until today. Matthew's *logia* did not survive, but his Gospel did. This was because the latter, part of the biblical canon and thus God's Word, was inspired and preserved by the Spirit of God.

The Date of the First Gospel. Pinpointing the writing of the First Gospel to a

Matthew

specific year is impossible. Various dates for the book have been suggested by conservative scholars. C.I. Scofield in the original *Scofield Reference Bible* gave A.D. 37 as a possible date. Few scholars give a date after A.D. 70, since Matthew made no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Matthew's references to Jerusalem as the "Holy City" (Matt. 4:5; 27:53) imply that it was still in existence.

But some time seems to have elapsed after the events of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Matthew 27:7-8 refers to a certain custom continuing "to this day," and 28:15 refers to a story being circulated "to this very day." These phrases imply the passing of time, and yet not so much time that the Jewish customs had ceased. 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 would satisfy all the demands mentioned. It would also be early enough to permit Matthew to be the first Gospel account. (For further discussion and an alternate view [that Mark was the first of the four Gospels] see "Sources" under the *Introduction* to Mark.)

The Occasion for Writing the First Gospel. Though the precise occasion for the writing of this account is not known, it appears Matthew had at least two reasons for writing. First, he wanted to show unbelieving Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. Matthew had found the Messiah, and he wanted others to come into that same relationship. Second, Matthew wrote to encourage Jewish believers. If indeed Jesus is the Messiah, a horrible thing had occurred. The Jews had crucified their Messiah and King. What would now become of them? Was God through with them? At this point Matthew had a word of encouragement, for though their act of disobedience would bring judgment on that generation of Israelites, God was not through with His people. His promised kingdom would yet be instituted with His people at a future time. In the meantime, however, believers are responsible to communicate a different message of faith in this Messiah as they go into all the world to make disciples among all nations.

Some Outstanding Characteristics of the First Gospel

1. The Book of Matthew places great emphasis on the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ. Of the Gospel accounts Matthew has the largest blocks of discourse material. No other Gospel contains so much of Jesus' teachings. Matthew 5-7 is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount; chapter 10 includes Jesus' instructions to His disciples as they were sent out to minister; chapter 13 presents the parables of the kingdom; in chapter 23 is Jesus' "hot" denunciation of the religious leaders of Israel; and chapters 24-25 are the Olivet Discourse, a detailed explanation of future events relating to Jerusalem and the nation.

2. Some of the material in Matthew is arranged logically rather than chronologically. As examples, the genealogical tables are broken into three equal groups, a large number of miracles are given together, and the opposition to Jesus is given in one section. Matthew's purpose is obviously more thematic than chronological.

3. The First Gospel is filled with Old Testament quotations. Matthew includes approximately 50 direct citations from the Old Testament. In addition about 75 allusions are made to Old Testament events. This is undoubtedly because of the audience for whom the book was intended. Matthew primarily had Jews in mind as he wrote, and they would have been impressed by the many references to Old Testament facts and events. In addition, if this Gospel was written around A.D. 50, not many New Testament books were available for Matthew to have cited. Those books may not have been known to his readers or even to Matthew himself.

4. The First Gospel shows that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel and explains God's kingdom program (Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, pp. 18-20). "If indeed Jesus is Messiah," a Jew would ask, "what has happened to the promised kingdom?" The Old Testament clearly taught that the Messiah would bring in a glorious Utopian reign on the earth in which the nation Israel would have a prominent

position. Since the nation rejected its true King, what happened to the kingdom? The Book of Matthew includes some "mysteries" about the kingdom, which had not been revealed in the Old Testament. These "mysteries" show that the kingdom has taken a different form in the present Age, but that the promised Davidic kingdom will be instituted at a future time when Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish His rule.

5. The First Gospel has a summary statement in its first verse: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Why does David's name appear before Abraham's? Would not Abraham, the father of the nation, be more significant to a Jewish mind? Perhaps Matthew listed the name of David first because the King who would rule over the nation was to come through David (2 Sam. 7:12-17). Jesus Christ came with a message for His own nation. But in the plan of God, His message was rejected. Therefore a universal message reaches out to the entire world. The promise of blessings for all the nations of the world came through Abraham and the covenant God made with him (Gen. 12:3). It is significant that Matthew did include Gentiles, such as the Magi from the East (Matt. 2:1-12), the centurion with his great faith (8:5-13), and the Canaanite woman who had greater faith than Christ had seen in all Israel (15:22-28). Also the book concludes with the Great Commission to "go and make disciples of *all nations*" (28:19).

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction of the King (1:1-4:11)
 - A. Presentation by ancestry (1:1-17)
 - B. Presentation by advent (1:18-2:23)
 - C. Presentation by an ambassador (3:1-12)
 - D. Presentation through approval (3:13-4:11)
- II. Communications from the King (4:12-7:29)
 - A. Beginning proclamations (4:12-25)
 - B. Continuing pronouncements (chaps. 5-7)

- III. Credentials of the King (8:1-11:1)
 - A. His power over disease (8:1-15)
 - B. His power over demonic forces (8:16-17, 28-34)
 - C. His power over men (8:18-22; 9:9)
 - D. His power over nature (8:23-27)
 - E. His power to forgive (9:1-8)
 - F. His power over traditions (9:10-17)
 - G. His power over death (9:18-26)
 - H. His power over darkness (9:27-31)
 - I. His power over dumbness (9:32-34)
 - J. His power to delegate authority (9:35-11:1)
- IV. Challenge to the King's Authority (11:2-16:12)
 - A. Seen in the rejection of John the Baptist (11:2-19)
 - B. Seen in the condemnation of the cities (11:20-30)
 - C. Seen in the controversies over His authority (chap. 12)
 - D. Seen in the change in the kingdom program (13:1-52)
 - E. Seen in various rejections (13:53-16:12)
- V. Cultivation of the King's Disciples (16:13-20:34)
 - A. The revelation in view of rejection (16:13-17:13)
 - B. The instruction in view of rejection (17:14-20:34)
- VI. Climax of the King's Offer (chaps. 21-27)
 - A. The official presentation of the King (21:1-22)
 - B. The religious confrontation with the King (21:23-22:46)
 - C. The national rejection of the King (chap. 23)
 - D. The prophetic anticipation of the King (chaps. 24-25)
 - E. The national rejection of the King (chaps. 26-27)
- VII. Confirmation of the King's Life (chap. 28)
 - A. The empty tomb (28:1-8)
 - B. The personal appearance (28:9-10)
 - C. The "official" explanation (28:11-15)
 - D. The official commissioning (28:16-20)