

A LOOK AT A BOOK: MATTHEW

January 8, 2012

Gospel: an account of the life of Jesus, proclaiming the good news of God's saving activity.

This gospel, based on a number of citations of early Christian writers, was used more than any of the other gospels. The gospel of Matthew all but eclipsed the other gospels.

Characteristics:

1. Concise

e.g. Death of John the Baptist
Matthew 14:3-12 vs. Mark 6:17-29

Healing of the epileptic child
Matthew 17:14-21 vs. Mark 9:14-29

2. Messianic Interests

Sixty plus Old Testament quotations. Ten times the word "fulfill" is used.
Old Testament predictions which were fulfilled in Jesus
Matthew 2:15 = Hosea 11:1
Matthew 2:17 = Jeremiah 31:15
Matthew 2:23 = Isaiah 11:1?
"that it might be fulfilled"

3. Jewish Interests (a tool in reaching the Jewish community)

Restricted outlook of Jewish Christianity

- a. Not one jot or tittle of the law will become invalid (5:18f.)
- b. The Jewish temple tax is paid (17:24ff.)
- c. The disciples are expected to fast, keep the Sabbath, and bring offerings, as in the Jewish tradition (6:16 ff; 24:20, 5:23f.)
- d. Jesus himself declares that he is sent only to the "lost sheep of Israel" (15:24; see 10:6f.)
- e. the genealogy of Jesus is traced from Abraham and is arranged in three groups of fourteen in rabbinic style (1:1ff.; 1:17)

- f. the recurrent theme of Jesus as the Son of David and the triumphant entry into Jerusalem focus attention upon the Jewish Christian regard for Jesus as the fulfiller of their national hopes.

4. Inclusion

But the significant thing about Matthew's gospel is that inclusion appears alongside this particularism. If Christianity is seen as the ideal Israel, it is also seen as the New Israel, unbounded by the restricted environment out of which it emerged.

- a. At the birth of Jesus, homage is offered by Gentiles according to Matthew's account (2:1ff).
- b. At the conclusion of the gospel Matthew records the great commission which extends to all nations (28:18ff.)
- c. In the parable of the vineyard (21:43ff.) Jesus suggests that another nation will supplant the original husbandmen, who clearly represent the Jewish people.

5. Ecclesiastical Elements

Matthew, alone of the gospels, records any specific teaching about the church. Here only does the word *ecclesia* occur attributed to Jesus. In 16:18, the basis of the church is to be Peter and his confession, and to Peter are given the keys of the kingdom, with authority to bind or loose. In the other passage (18:17f.) similar authority appears to be vested in the church as a whole.

Two other passages may be linked with these to show Matthew's ecclesiastical interests. 18:20 describes the simplest form of the local church, the gathering of two or three in the name of Christ with the promise of his presence. In the concluding commission two statements are made relevant to the future church. Its work is to consist of teaching the nations and baptizing disciples in the triune Name (28:19)

6. Eschatological Interest

Because Matthew's apocalyptic section is much longer than that of Mark (chapter 13), it has been supposed that his gospel reflects a period of deepening interest in the end of the age.

Matthew does not confine his eschatological elements to the material in the great discourse of chapters 24-25, for they are apparent also in some of the parables which he alone records. The interpretation of the parable of the weeds (13:36ff.) and the conclusions to both the parable of the ten virgins (25:13) and

the parable of the talents (25:30), in all of which the end of the age is brought into sharp focus, are peculiar to Matthew.

7. Purpose

- a. To show that the major events in the life of Jesus took place in fulfillment of prophecy. This feature alone would seem to indicate that the author was a Jew writing for Jews. The story begins with a genealogy intended to show our Lord's direct descent from Abraham, and this gives a clear indication of what the author proposes to do. But it is significant that the book ends with a note of universalism in the sending of the disciples to preach the gospel through the world.
- b. To show the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven in the words and deeds of Jesus.
- c. To emphasize discipleship. The word "disciple" is used much more in Matthew and is only used in verbal form in Matthew. Disciples become sons of God (Matthew 5:9, 45) and are brothers (12:49f.) and they are to live in the righteous way of the gospel (Matthew 5-7).

8. Destination and Place of Origin

One suggestion is a Palestinian Jewish environment. It is likely that the readers were a mixed group, mostly Jewish but with an increasing number of Gentiles.

9. Structure

It has more of a careful design than any other of the gospels and this fact may account for its wider use in the early church.

The five great discourse sections.

The most obvious feature of Matthew's structure is the alternation of large blocks of teaching material with narrative sections. These teaching sections are all concluded with a similar formula ("when Jesus had finished these sayings"). The five discourses may be classified as: The Sermon on the Mount (5-7); Missionary Discourse (10); Parable Discourse (13); Church Discourse (18); and Eschatological Discourse (24-25).

It has been suggested that Matthew's fivefold scheme was patterned on the fivefold character of the books of the Law, the idea being that the author was attempting to provide a "Pentateuch" as the new law for the community of the new Israel, that is the Christian church.

10. Authorship

The earliest description of this gospel of which we have any evidence attributes it to Matthew (according to Matthew). This is testified by strong tradition. It was indisputably acknowledged before the close of the second century and there is no positive evidence that the book ever circulated without the title. Indeed it may reasonably be claimed that the title was affixed at least as early as AD 125.

The author's name does not occur in the body of the text and this might suggest that the original copy was anonymous. On the other hand, the absence of any parallel forms to our gospels makes it difficult to be certain whether this literary form lent itself to the personal identification of the author. Even Luke's preface, which uses the first person singular, contains no hint of who is the writer. On the other hand, the apocryphal gospels, which are clearly imitations of the canonical gospels, are frequently attributed to an apostolic author in the body of the text, evidently because an anonymous production was felt to be inadequate (cf. the *Gospel of Peter*).

Supposing the tradition of Matthaean authorship to be correct, are there any incidental supporting evidences from within the gospel itself? It must be admitted that the evidence is slight, but it may be worth mentioning. Whereas both Mark (2:14) and Luke (5:17f.) in describing the call of Matthew name him Levi, in Matthew's gospel he is called Matthew. At the same time, in the lists of the apostles in all the gospels, the name Matthew is used and not Levi. Could it be that for the author of this gospel the name Matthew came to have greater significance than the name Levi, from the time of his dramatic call to follow Jesus?

11. Date

It has been suggested that the historic situation between 50-64 is relevant as a background to Matthew's gospel, in which case a date within this period would be quite reasonable.

Some language and ideas taken from Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Intervarsity Press: 1961) as well as multiple sources and Dr. Batson's own insights.

