

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

Matthew

Matthew is one of the most read and beloved books in the Bible. It leads off and sets the theme for the New Testament — a good reason to soak up its truths.

What is it? First book in the New Testament and first of the four Gospels, reporting Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Why first? Because it relates closely to the Old Testament it follows; or because of the tradition that it was written first in Hebrew; or because of the weight of its influence; or because it has more chapters....

How long? 28 chapters — tied with Acts for most in New Testament. But neither book is longest. Luke has more words than either Matthew or Acts.

Who wrote it? Matthew, tax collector turned disciple; also called Levi. In modest autobiography, he writes his calling, conversion, and celebration with Christ and others (9:9-17). His first career shows through in his book: accounting precious gifts of the wise men (2:11); telling of the Temple tax (17:24-27); relating Jesus' teaching about riches (19:16-30); and many other references to money.

Its content? The words of Christ. To learn what Jesus taught, read the Gospel of the red letter: Matthew. It contains 10 percent more words of Jesus than Luke, 50 percent more than John, and 120 percent more than Mark!

Matthew reports **five major talks from the Lord:**

- Matthew 5-7 – Sermon on the Mount
- Matthew 10 – instruction to the disciples
- Matthew 13 – parables of the kingdom
- Matthew 18 – on humility and forgiveness
- Matthew 24, 25 – Olivet Discourse (on prophecy)

Each of these five sermons is followed with words like “Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings....”

Why did Matthew write? As an evangelist to the Jews, he wrote good news about Jesus, the Hebrew Messiah. Matthew writes more Old Testament than any other New Testament writer (possible exception: Revelation). Some of this is explicit, like tracing Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, father of the Jews (1:1-17), the eight references to Jesus as son of David, and the exclusive mission to Israel (10:5, 6; 15:24). Some of the Old

Testament is implied: Jesus has become the new Moses; the Sermon on the Mount takes the authority of Mt. Sinai; and the kingdom of God is called “kingdom of heaven” as a concession to Jews who avoided the name of Jehovah in common usage.

About 100 Old Testament quotes may be found in Matthew. Many are introduced with the formula “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the

prophet....” Jesus underlines the Torah with emphatic, yet puzzling, words: “Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (5:18).

In dozens of ways, Matthew assures Jewish Christians that acceptance of Jesus as Messiah did not mean repudiation of their former faith. Instead, Christ was the goal toward which the Old Scriptures always pointed!

What is Matthew's major theme?

Easy: the kingdom of heaven, in Christ's words (4:17). It was John the Baptist's theme (3:2) and that of the twelve disciples (10:7). For Jesus, the kingdom was the gospel (9:35). It was yet to come (6:10; 26:29), yet had already come upon those who experienced Christ's power over evil by the Spirit (12:28; 11:11, 12). Faith (8:10, 11) and repentance (4:17) are the keys to this kingdom (16:19). It would be taken from the Jewish elite (8:12; 21:43) and given to those bearing its fruit (7:20, 21). A sign of the end of the age will be preaching of this kingdom in all the world (24:14).

The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) is a declaration of kingdom principles; the word *kingdom* is used nine times. The Beatitudes (5:3-12) are actually “kingdom attitudes.” The sermon outlines ideal behavior for followers of Jesus — citizens of His kingdom. In a central text, the Lord says those who seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness will have their earthly needs provided (6:33).

Most of Jesus' parables in Matthew are kingdom stories, beginning “The kingdom of heaven is like....” Communicating both clarity and mystery, these parables teach kingdom methods, kingdom progress, kingdom values, and the final kingdom separation. Seven of these parables are in chapter 13.

Is Matthew truly good news?

- Jesus, God with us, will save His people from their sins (1:21, 23);
- God comforts and rewards those who humbly mourn and confess spiritual poverty (5:3-5);

- Sins are forgiven, kingdom is promised, in recognition of faith (8:11; 9:2);
- Jesus says “every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men . . .” (12:31);
- Parable of vineyard workers receiving equal wage shows God’s generosity (eternal life) to all who serve Him (20:1-16);
- The life and blood of the Lord are a ransom to many, for remission of sins (20:28; 26:28).

Matthew’s Q & A:

First question: “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” (2:2). Last words answer: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:20).

Among the Gospels, Matthew ...

- sounds like Mark (only 55 verses of Mark are not in Matthew). Matthew is longer than Mark: more words of Christ and more Old Testament quotes.

- is about as long as Luke, with similar words from Christ. Matthew chooses parables and stories especially for Jews; Luke writes for everyone.
- feels most unlike John. Matthew’s focus is historical, from Galilee; John’s is theological, from Judea and Jerusalem.

Without Matthew, we wouldn’t ...

- know of Jesus’ childhood visit from the wise men or His trip to Egypt (2);
- have nine Beatitudes and other sayings in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7);
- know three days and nights in the tomb are in the sign of the prophet Jonah (12);
- have the parables of tares (13), of the unforgiving servant (18), of vineyard wages (20), of two sons (21), of ten virgins (25), of sheep and goats (25);
- know the extent and vehemence of

Matthew in one sentence: Jesus is the Messiah-King in whom Jewish prophecy is fulfilled and through whom the kingdom of heaven comes near!

Jesus’ words against Jewish leaders (23);

- learn that Pilate washed his hands to escape guilt for Jesus’ death (26);
- know the Jews set a watch to secure the tomb (27, 28).

The other Gospel writers do not mention these.

Jesus and the church

Only Matthew records Jesus using the word *church* (KJV) twice. First, the “universal” church: what Christ is building on the rock of Peter’s confession (16:18). Second, the “local” church: whom we tell after a brother has sinned against us and refuses proper correction (18:17).

Confirmation of truth: Jesus predicted “My words will by no means pass away” (24:35). Two thousand years later, the Book still stands! How did Jesus know this, unless He was related to God in a way no others are (11:27)?

Complete these verses from Jesus’ sermon:

“Let your light so shine ...” (5:16).
“But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, ...” (6:15).
“For where your treasure is, ...” (6:21).
“No one can serve ...” (6:24).
“But seek first ...” (6:33).
“Therefore, whatever you want men to do ...” (7:12).
“Not everyone who says to Me, ...” (7:21).

Questions for readers:

Personal: Of the four Gospels, why is Matthew your favorite?

Practical: “Give to him who asks you” (5:42). Does this have limits?

Doctrinal: What did Jesus mean by the statement in 16:28?

(Several brief answers will be published. Send yours by fax, e-mail, or traditional mail. See masthead for addresses.)

The greatest Gospel?

Matthew records **great** elements of our faith:

- the Great Confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16);
- the Great Invitation: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (11:28);
- the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (22:37);
- the Greatest Sermon: “Blessed are the poor in spirit ...” (5, 6, 7);
- the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...” (28:19, 20).

Matthew reveals the **greatness** of our Lord, Jesus Christ:

- Wise men rejoiced with exceeding great joy when He was born (2:10);
- He brought great light to those who sat in darkness (4:16);
- If our eye doesn’t focus on His light, we’re in great darkness (6:23);
- If we don’t build on His teachings, our fall will be great (7:27);
- He turned a great tempest into a great calm, with only a word (8:24, 26);
- He is greater than Solomon in all his glory and wisdom (12:42);
- He is greater than the temple Solomon built (12:6);
- He is greater than Jonah (12:41);
- Women ran with great joy from His empty tomb to tell others (28:8).

Matthew also tells about **great** people:

- A Canaanite woman who persisted in worship and prayer was said to have “great faith” (15:28);
- Those who do and teach the least of His commandments “shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (5:19);
- Whoever humbles himself as a child “is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:4);
- Those who are servants have become the greatest among us (23:11).