

Introduction

The gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He is the Messiah, the promised offspring of Abraham, the king in the line of David, the Saviour, God with us, righteous Israel, the fulfilment of the Law. Jesus establishes his Messianic kingdom through his incarnation, life, death and resurrection. Many oppose this kingdom, but Jews and Gentiles who repent and believe in the message of the kingdom, the gospel, are the people of his kingdom: the church. Jesus is with his people to the end of this age by his Spirit, enabling them to follow him as disciples and live out the true intent of the law. This is a people on a mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ from all nations.

Big idea: The kingdom of heaven is at hand

While we find no clear, explicit purpose statement in the gospel of Matthew (unlike those found in Luke 1:14 or John 20:30-31, for example), there are several themes that run throughout the gospel. One of these themes is "the kingdom of heaven", a term used uniquely in Matthew, appearing 32 times. Matthew also uses the synonymous term "kingdom of God" four times in this gospel, the term used by the other gospel writers.

John the Baptist's message is "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus' teaching ministry in Matthew begins with the same words: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17). The 12 apostles are sent out to proclaim the same message "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:17). Matthew is the story of how God establishes the

kingdom of heaven through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This kingdom is at hand; it has come near because the king has come. Throughout this series, our big idea is therefore: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand", and we will explore this theme through looking at the nature of this kingdom and what it means.

What, who, and when?

Matthew is the first of the four gospels in our bible. Each of the gospels is history, recounting the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But they are also more than mere history; they are "history with a message" or "history seen through theological eyes".[1]

No gospel explicitly identifies who wrote it in the text, but this one has been known throughout church history as the gospel "according to Matthew". Typically, this Matthew is thought to be Matthew the tax collector who is called to follow Jesus as his disciple in Matthew 9:9. This disciple is called Levi in Mark and Luke. Note that the Hebrew name "Matthew" means "Gift of God" but may be a pun in Greek, where it sounds a lot like the Greek word for disciple (μαθητής or mathētés). Discipleship is another key theme in Matthew; Jesus' followers are apprentices of the king.

Matthew is one of the three "synoptic gospels", along with Mark and Luke. The term "synoptic" comes from the Greek *seen-together*, i.e. these gospels can be seen together, read alongside each other. The accounts of Jesus' deeds and his teaching are similar in all three gospels, but despite the similarities, each gospel has its unique emphases. For example: 90% of Mark is found in Matthew, but Matthew contains more passages of teaching than Mark. Mark and Luke seem to recount events in chronological order more than Matthew, whose arrangement of the material seems to be arranged to drive certain theological points home. There are several different theories about how, when and in which order the synoptic gospels were written. For our purposes, suffice to say that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to compose this gospel in this way from the material he had access to, whether documents we know of, documents that have since been lost, first-hand experience or eyewitness testimony. Matthew is an intentionally structured gospel, and we will be looking for Matthew's intention (sometimes in contrast to or alongside the other synoptics) throughout the series. Note that the gospel of John is the fourth gospel, but has a different structure and approach, while still culminating in the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When was Matthew written? Again, scholars speculate. The answer to this depends in part on the answer to when the other synoptic gospels were written, and how they relate to each other. Irenaeus, a church leader in the second century, said that Matthew was written while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel. Modern scholars are often keen to date Matthew after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem in AD70 due to scepticism about the ability to prophesy the future! However, there are various references to the temple in the gospel that imply that Matthew wrote before the temple's destruction.

[1] Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew,* p.21

Why Is Matthew important?

Matthew has several standout features:

- Matthew has always been considered the first gospel of the four, although there has been more recent debate about whether it was actually the first gospel to be written.
- Matthew has more direct quotations to the Old Testament than any other gospel, which is why it is often seen as the most Jewish of the gospels. But more than being a Jewish gospel, Matthew is at pains to stress how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament, often signalled by fulfilment phrases like "This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah" (Matthew 8:17).
- Indeed, Matthew is far from exclusively Jewish; Matthew contains the so-called "Great Commission" where Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to make disciples of all nations. Matthew sees no discrepancy between Jesus as Jewish Messiah and Lord of all.
- Matthew is the only gospel to explicitly use the term *ekklesia* (gathering or church).
- Matthew contains longer sections of teaching ("discourses") than the other synoptic gospels. Jesus is the new Moses, the new law-giver!

Key themes in Matthew

If the kingdom of heaven is at hand, that immediately prompts several questions that we will seek to explore throughout the series.

- Who is the king? What is he like? How does he rule?
- How does the king fulfil Old Testament Scripture? What is new about this kingdom? What is old?
- Who can enter the kingdom? How?
- How should the people of the kingdom live?
- In what sense has the kingdom of heaven drawn near?
- What is the future of the kingdom?

To these questions, we will explore many other themes such as: God with us, law, faith and works, forgiveness, discipleship, mission etc.

Outline of the series / Breakdown

Matthew is structured around five key sections of discourse preceded by narrative. Each of the five discourses ends with a similar concluding sentence such as "And when Jesus finished these sayings…" (Matthew 7:28). These five sections are bookended by narrative on Jesus' origin and his death and resurrection. This structure allows for long sections of Jesus' teaching where Matthew is portraying Jesus as a new Law-giver like Moses. His suffering, death and resurrection is the climax of the gospel; through this Jesus establishes the kingdom of heaven. We plan to go through Matthew using the breakdown below. Matthew's five discourses are indicated in red in this outline.

- Jesus' origin and preparation for ministry:

    - Matthew 1:1–17
    - Matthew 1:18–25
    - Matthew 2:1–23
    - Matthew 3:1–12
    - Matthew 3:13-17
    - Matthew 4:1–11
- The kingdom message goes out:
    - Matthew 4:12–25
    - Matthew 5:1–16
    - Matthew 5:17–48
    - Matthew 6:1–18
    - Matthew 6:19–34
    - Matthew 7:1–12
    - Matthew 7:13–29
- The kingdom comes with authority:
    - Matthew 8:1–17
    - Matthew 8:18–9:8
    - Matthew 9:9–34
    - Matthew 9:35–10:23
    - Matthew 10:24–11:1
- The wisdom of the kingdom of heaven:
    - Matthew 11:2–19
    - Matthew 11:20–30
    - Matthew 12:1–14
    - Matthew 12:15–21
    - Matthew 12:22–50
    - Matthew 13:1–23
    - Matthew 13:24–53
- Rejection, suffering, glory
    - Matthew 13:54–14:12
    - Matthew 14:13–36
    - Matthew 15:1–20
    - Matthew 15:21–39
    - Matthew 16:1–20
    - Matthew 16:21–28
    - Matthew 17:1–13
    - Matthew 17:14–27
    - Matthew 18:1–20
    - Matthew 18:21–35
- Movement to the cross
    - Matthew 19:1–26
    - Matthew 19:27–20:16
    - Matthew 20:17–28
    - Matthew 20:29–21:11
    - Matthew 21:12–22

- Matthew 21:23–22:14
- Matthew 22:15–46
- Matthew 23:1–12
- Matthew 23:13–39
- Matthew 24:1–35
- Matthew 24:36–25:13
- Matthew 25:14–30
- Matthew 25:31–46

- The passion and resurrection of Jesus
  - Matthew 26:1–30
  - Matthew 26:31–56
  - Matthew 26:57-75
  - Matthew 27:1–26
  - Matthew 27:27–44
  - Matthew 27:45–62
  - Matthew 27:62-28:10
  - Matthew 28:11-20