ALL ABOUT MATTHEW

The gospel of Matthew, while being placed first in the New Testament, is a revised and expanded version of Mark. The writer of Matthew’s gospel was for many years understood to be the tax collector named in the gospel as Matthew (Mt 9:9), but scholars believe the actual composition of this gospel took place over a number of years, and through a complex process, concluding around 85-90 AD.

The gospel of Matthew has quite an elaborate plan and is divided into **five different sections/books** with an **introduction** and a **conclusion**. The writer apparently wanted to supplement the narrative of Mark with teaching and other traditions, particularly the Infancy narrative. This gospel seems to be written for a **largely Jewish community** after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD.

The increasing number of Jewish Christians, and their claim to be the inheritors of the promises of the Hebrew scriptures, led to a sharp divide and animosity with the local Jewish community. While it seems that the majority of members of Matthew’s community had come to believe in Jesus, they had not set aside their Jewish heritage. There was concern about some of the different customs brought in by Gentile converts, which seemed to contravene Jewish law and custom. The Jewish Christians seemed to be under attack from their former Jewish community members, and from the new Gentile believers. This gospel attempts to reconcile their Jewish heritage with the new reality. The writer edited the gospel of Mark and included special material about Jesus from a collection of his sayings, and a number of other traditions.

An important feature of Matthew’s gospel is **presenting Jesus as the** **fulfilment of scripture**, a recurring phrase throughout this gospel (e.g. Mt 1:22). In following Jesus, the Christians of Matthew’s community were not abandoning their heritage, but discovering its full meaning.

Jesus is also the only teacher (Mt 23:10). Matthew adds greatly to Mark’s account, in including many teachings of Jesus. A significant example of this is the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Mt 5-7). Jesus is powerful in both word (teacher) and deed (miracle).

Matthew’s Jesus is the founder of the church, and Peter is often seen as the leader, even though he has significant failures. The members of the community are meant to learn lessons for themselves from these stories.

**ARRANGEMENT OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL**

The arrangement of the content of Matthew’s gospel is often compared to the **five books or Pentateuch** of the OT, and each book consists of **a discourse and narrative**. They are preceded by an **introduction**, and followed by a **conclusion**. The theme of ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ is especially stressed (4:17f) in this *dramatic account in seven acts, of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Most scholars agree on this outline, or some variation of it.

Introduction: The Preparation of the Kingdom in the person of the child-Messiah – Mt 1-2.

Book 1: The formal **proclamation** of the charter of the kingdom to the disciples and the public - **the Sermon on the Mount** - Mt 5-8.

Book 2: The **preaching** of the Kingdom by missionaries - the ‘signs’ of **miracles and instructions** coming from Jesus himself – Mt 8-10.

Book 3: The **obstacles** which the kingdom will meet – expressed in **parables** in Mt 11:1-13:52.

Book 4: The group of disciples with Peter as their head; **rules for this emerging church** – Mt 13:53-18:35.

Book 5: The crisis, provoked by the hostility of the Jewish leaders, preparing the way for the coming of the kingdom – Mt 19-25

Conclusion: Finally, the coming itself, a coming brought about through **suffering and triumph**, in the Passion and Resurrection – Mt 26-28

The Kingdom of God (nearly always called the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in Matthew out of reverence for the name of God) shows that **the Law and prophets are fulfilled**.

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**A THEMATIC WAY OF LOOKING AT MATTHEW’S GOSPEL**

**Together on the Mountain** (<http://johnmckinnon.org/index.php/matthew-gospel>)

**John McKinnon** has titled his commentary on Matthew’s gospel **‘*Together on the Mountain’***, following the frequent choice of that location to highlight significant moments in the ministry of Jesus.

It was on a **high mountain** that Matthew situated Jesus’ encounter with Satan. There, Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour and promised him they could all be his, provided Jesus would fall down and worship him [Mt 4:8-9]. Jesus chose God’s Kingdom.

* It was **‘on the mountain’** that Jesus delivered what is frequently referred to as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, his outline of the life of discipleship in the new community [Mt 5:1].
* Before presenting Jesus walking on water, and hinting at his unique relationship to God, Matthew said that, first, he went ‘**up the mountain**’ by himself to pray [Mt 14:23]
* Jesus went ‘**up the mountain**’, somewhere in Galilee, and sat down. He exercised his ministry of healing, and fed the crowd of four thousand [Mt 15:29-39].
* Similarly, it was ‘**up a high mountain’** that Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, and that his message of suffering preceding death was confirmed by the Father [Mt 17:1-8].
* ‘**Sitting on the Mount of Olives**’, he delivered his apocalyptic discourse to his disciples (Mt 24:3-44). Later in Gethsemane, situated on that same mountain, he entered into his time of trial and prayed earnestly to his Father (Mt 26:36-46).
* Finally, it was **on a mountain in Galilee** that the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples and commissioned them to bring the Good News to the whole world. (28:16-20)

Matthew presents **Jesus** as **God with us**. In the beginning we read that the child is to be named ‘Emmanuel’, which means ‘God is with us’ (Mt 1:23). And at the end of the gospel, the risen Christ promises to be always with his people (Mt 28:20).

The **disciples** are presented more kindly in Matthew, with Jesus responding quite gently to their failures. They follow Jesus faithfully and sometimes struggle to understand him. In the end they are commissioned by the risen Christ and sent on mission. A number of **women disciples** appear in this gospel. Four women appear in the genealogy, and of course Mary of Nazareth (Mt 1:1-18). There are women in the Passion narrative who followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, and remained faithful, along with the mother of Jesus. Some come to the tomb and take the good news of Jesus’ resurrection to the other disciples.

THE FIVE DISCOURSES OF MATTHEW – DISCOURSE ONE

(Mt 5:1 – 7:28)

* In your group, read through the discourse. As you are reading, visualise the events with Jesus on a hillside talking to the crowd gathered. Examine how neatly Matthew begins and ends the discourse.
* In your group, work out a title you would give this whole part of Matthew’s gospel to encapsulate it?
* Count how many individual teachings Matthew puts into this discourse. Share this with the group.
* Have a look at 5: 21-22 and see if you can find other teachings that follow this language pattern? What effect does this language pattern have on an audience? What sort of impression does it give of the speaker? What impression do you get of the speaker’s values or morals? What does it suggest about the authority of the speaker?
* Have a look specifically at the Beatitudes (5:3-12). Note that each of these beatitudes or blessings is constructed in the same way – it begins by stating an experience or state of living that people sometimes go through *now* and then finishes by saying that these people will live differently *one day*.
* Prepare to share these findings with the large group.

THE FIVE DISCOURSES OF MATTHEW – DISCOURSE THREE

(Mt 13: 1-53)

* In your group, read through the discourse.
* In your group, work out a title you would give this whole part of Matthew’s gospel to encapsulate it?
* A major theme in Matthew’s gospel is the kingdom of heaven. Look at the parables in chapter 13. What do they tell us about the kingdom of heaven?
* Prepare to share these findings with the large group.