

Matthew – an overview

Christian Tradition unanimously identifies the apostle Matthew as the author of the first gospel. Prominent church fathers also affirm Matthew, the apostle as the author.

Modern scholarship, however, would see Matthew as the authority behind the work but not its literary author in the strict sense.

Matthew relied upon Mark as one of the primary sources of information about Jesus. Like Mark, Matthew may have got most of his information from the Gospel from Peter. Matthew was a Jewish believer in Jesus. He knew Hebrew and Greek.

Date

Probably in 80's and 90's for first century. Some however would say 50's or 60's.

Destination

He wrote his gospel for Jewish Christians in and around Palestine. His gospel was written originally in Hebrew or Aramaic. Jesus is the Messiah of Jewish expectation. Most of his audience may have been from Antioch where there was a large Jewish population. Matthew sees the gospel as the new Torah. His five discourses represent the 5 books of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament).

Themes

Central theme is the Kingdom of Heaven. This keynote expression appears more than 30 times in Matthew. It's not just an other-worldly concept linked with future blessings but that the Heavenly Father is now working through Jesus the Messiah to establish his will on Earth as it is in Heaven. Through Jesus the Kingdom is made present in the lives of ordinary people. The Kingdom is seed sown - it grows gradually and exerts its influence over time. The Kingdom is rooted in Old Testament expectations of the Messianic Age. It is

especially evident in the book of Daniel (Dan2:7). King David also foreshadows the future King. The Lord swore an oath to establish the Davidic line in perpetuity. Jesus is seen as the messianic Son of David. The Kingdom develops along three lines, ethical, ecclesiastical and eschatological.

Ethical

The Kingdom calls for a human response and summons its hearers to repentance. Seeking the Kingdom is the highest priority. The Kingdom is based on the teaching of the Beatitudes. Kingdom people live with childlike humility and a willingness to forgive, a commitment to prayer, fasting and good works. It offers its adherents Eternal life.

Ecclesial

The Kingdom is made present in the world through the church. Matthew is the only Gospel to make explicit reference to the Church. The role of Peter, head of the church, is highlighted. The apostles spread the Kingdom through preaching and sacramental actions. (27:18-20)

Eschatological fulfilment

The Church foreshadows the Kingdom. It will only come to full flowering in Eternity.