



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Introduction to Matthew: The Gospel of the King

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I am happy to report that our Bible Study this year will take us chapter-by-chapter through the Gospel of Matthew. This promises to be an incredibly profound and beneficial journey of discovery. I hope you will join us on it by attending the weekly Study if you are in the Capitol community. See below for Bible Study times and locations. (I am considering starting an evening study also, so let me know if that would fit your schedule better.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, which means “good news.”

There are four Gospel accounts: *Matthew* (Greek: Matthaion), *Mark* (Markon), *Luke* (Loukan), and *John* (Ioannen). The first three are known as *synoptic* gospels, in that they are similar in their content and style. Each of the four gospels was penned by a different human author via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see last week’s lesson for more on the inspiration of the Bible)¹, and each provides a different vantage point for viewing the one powerful Gospel story – the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish audience and shows Jesus as King. Mark wrote especially to a Roman audience and shows Jesus as servant (Mk 10:45). Luke wrote to broader Gentile audience, highlighting the humanity of Jesus, while John emphasizes the deity of Jesus Christ.²

Why are these four gospels included in the Bible? First, authorship: They were each written either by one of Christ’s original twelve apostles (as is the case with Matthew and John) or by another disciple who was highly respected by the twelve (as with Mark and Luke). Second, attestation: These four books were commonly regarded as Scripture by the early church. Third, accuracy: all four gospels agreed theologically with other accepted scriptures. Though there are other ancient so-called Gospel accounts, such as the fallacious “Gnostic gospels,” none of them passes these three crucial admittance tests required for inclusion in the canon of scripture.³

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW

DATE: The Book of Matthew was written in the first century sometime after the end of Christ’s earthly ministry in about 33 A.D. and arguably before the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.,⁴ though many date it later in the century.⁵

AUTHORSHIP: The author, Matthew, is first introduced in *Matthew 9:9-13*, where we learn that he was employed as a tax-collector before he was called to follow Jesus as one of his twelve apostles.

At the time of Christ’s ministry, Israel had been under Roman domination for over 90 years. One of the worst aspects of this oppression was a brutal system of taxation. Any Roman taxation would have been in and of itself highly offensive to the Jews, since Rome was a Gentile, pagan, domineering empire that demanded revenue for all sorts of immoral and unjust practices. However, Rome’s method of collecting these taxes amplified the offence even more.

Tax collection for the Roman Empire was handled in a decentralized fashion. Senators and other high ranking officials could purchase from the central government at public auction the right to collect the taxes in a given country, province, or region, at a fixed rate over a period of five years. Whatever they collected over and above the required amount was theirs to keep as profit. Those who held such taxing rights were called *publicani*. The *publicani* would hire others, usually citizens of the area being taxed, to do the actual collecting. These tax-collectors were called *telones*. The *telones* had somewhat the same arrangement with the *publicani* that the *publicani* had with Rome - whatever they managed to collect above the amount demanded by the *publicani* they kept as their own profit. Both the *publicani* and the *telones*, therefore, had strong motivation to exact and collect as much tax as possible, all the while knowing they were backed by the full legal and military authority of Rome.⁶

The tax gatherers quite naturally were hated by their own people and considered both extortionists and traitors. In Israel, they were ranked with the lowest of human society – sinners, prostitutes, and Gentiles (Matthew 9:10-11; 18:17; 21:31-32).⁷

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 7:30 A.M., ASSEMBLY RULES CONFERENCE ROOM (3171)

STAFF/LOBBYISTS: WEDNESDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, ROOM 125

CALIFORNIA

Matthew: The Gospel of the King

So, we might say that Matthew, as a *telones*, was something like a government contract employee working for a corrupt ancient version of the IRS or the Franchise Tax Board.

DISTINCTIVES:

1. Matthew was written primarily to a Jewish audience, as is obvious from its frequent explicit (over 60 times) and implicit references to the Old Testament.⁸
2. It quotes Christ's teachings about the church more than any other gospel. (16:13-23, 18:17)
3. It shows a strong Apocalyptic interest (Matt. 24, 25).
4. It includes much about discipleship.
5. It emphasizes Jesus Christ as eternal King.⁹

The most obvious unique trait of Matthew's gospel is its repeated emphasis on Jesus as Israel's long awaited Messiah and the eternal King. References or allusions to Jesus Christ as King or to His Kingdom appear on almost every page.¹⁰

MATTHEW & THE CAPITOL

Matthew's emphasis on Christ as King makes it a very appropriate study for the Capitol community. The political arena is an environment that can quickly foster pride in many people, and it often attracts those who desire to exalt themselves. Matthew's gospel reminds us that we are all called to submit to one greater than ourselves, who is the ultimate authority (Matthew 28:18).

All humans are susceptible to sinful pride. It is, after all, an outgrowth of our depraved, fallen, sinful nature. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn observed, "Pride grows in the human heart like lard on a pig." Government leaders, however, and those who work closely with them, may be especially at risk of hubris. It takes a certain amount of confidence to even run for political office, and winning an election suggests that one has attained to an uncommon level of popularity, prestige, and fame, all of which can brew conceit. Once elected, government leaders are granted immense power and inevitably attract adoring fans (even in our present-day negative political climate). As one State Assemblymember joked, "As soon as I was elected, I suddenly became smarter, funnier, and better looking." A State Senator similarly observed last year that "we are treated like royalty around here," and went on to describe how the palatial Capitol building, attentive staff, and flattering groupies can fuel narcissism.

Legislators and all government leaders are worthy of our respect, if for no other reason than that the Bible commands us to show them honor (1 Peter 2:17). However, wise leaders, and those who work closely with them, are always on guard against pride.

"AS SOON AS I WAS ELECTED, I SUDDENLY BECAME SMARTER, FUNNIER, AND BETTER LOOKING."

- STATE ASSEMBLYMEMBER

Perhaps every government leader and senior staff member should seek out an honest friend like the one president Harry Truman had. When Truman was thrust into the presidency by the death of FDR, a friend took him aside and said, "From here on out, you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put up a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't."¹¹

Though some who read this may be great by the world's standards, none of us, no matter what our title is, can proudly stand before the ultimate King. He alone is the "King of Kings and the Lord of Lords" (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, 19:16) ... or, in our context, we might call him the President of Presidents, the Governor of Governors, and the Legislators of Legislators. Have you bowed your heart to this King today?

¹<http://www.capitolcom.org/california/studies/357/2011/01/12/why-study-the-bible>

² John MacArthur, *Introduction to the Gospels*, in *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2006).

³ For a scholarly summary of this important topic, I recommend F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Intervarsity, 1988).

⁴ John MacArthur, Matthew 1-7 in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Moody, 1985), Introduction xi.

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Eerdmans, 1992), 8-11.

⁶ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* x-xi.

⁷ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* x-xi.

⁸ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1993) liv

⁹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster, 1975), 5-9.

¹⁰ *Matt. 1:1, 2:2, 3:2, 4:17, 4:23, 5:3, 5:10, 5:19-20, 6:10, 6:20, ...*

¹¹ Leadership Magazine, Winter 1997, p. 73.