

4.1 The Gospel of Matthew

Core audience: *Jewish Christians first*, then Jews, and Gentiles

A synoptic Gospel: with Luke and Mark relative to John (synoptic = *viewed together*)

They are more similar to each other, and more different as a whole in relation to John.

Gospel history: this is *a sermon* rather than chronological or historiographical reporting.

The writer's perspective

That the apostle, Matthew, is the author of this account comes from very good extra-biblical sources. However, nowhere in the book does the author identify himself not even when the call of Matthew is recorded (9:9). Another interesting thing about the writer is that he uses very little of his own words to tell the gospel story. Most of the time, he quotes the words of Jesus and others. Loosely put we can say that the words of the book fit into three categories: 1) the words of Jesus –which is the largest category, 2) the words of people in dialogue with Jesus or in reaction to Him, and 3) the words of the narrator - the smallest category.

Most interesting to me is the fact that the narrator rarely states his own perspective (that is, he rarely gives it explicitly). He presents his view through the words of others. For example, when people on the boat say, “truly he is the Son of God,” Matthew is expressing this view of the Lord Jesus (14:25-33; cf. 1.22-23, the narrator says that Jesus is God with us in fulfillment of Scripture).

Usually, we hear Matthew, as narrator, in straightforward reporting (1:1; 1:18; 3:1, 13; 4:1, 12) and in transitional statements (3:14-15; “John tried to deter him saying...Jesus replied...Then John consented). For another example, consider the Sermon on the Mount (5-7). The red-letter editions of the NT show 5:1-2 in dark print and the rest of the Sermon in red print. Now turn to 7:28. Matthew presents the crowd's view: **the crowds were astonished**; so is Matthew, so are we as readers! Now note 7:29, **for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes**. There is no quotation. Matthew simply explains (**for**). This is a brief commentary. Contrast this with the *explanation by quotation* of amazement in 8:27: a) **And the men marveled**, b) **saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”** Here we have no comment by Matthew but we know this is his memory of the Lord Jesus that he gives in the words of the marveling men. Recording the question drives us to even deeper meditation (we stand amazed in the presence of Jesus).

As has been said often, Matthew gives accurate history but he is not a historian. He is an Evangelist who gives gospel proclamation. This is theological or doctrinal history. What he includes and what he omits serve to bring out the gospel message (cf. Only Matthew mentions the mother of James and John in the request for greatness, Mat. 20.20). A pure historian doing a biography would not pass over thirty years in silence (as happens between chapter 2 and 3).

Thus, for emphasis, note the writer's way of remembering. He causes us to remember Jesus in terms of our Lord's own words and works with very little commentary (Matthew recedes to the margins). He taught the gospel He secured by His death and resurrection. As redeemer and healer of afflicted sinners, He saves the whole person body and soul through His resurrection.

A way to read the Gospels

I recommend that you read the Gospels looking for the narrator's perspective; this makes for interesting reading and opens the way to some of the richness of the accounts (to more than one perspective at the same time).

How the story unfolds

Can we outline the book (to capture its message) based on the formula Matthew uses in 7.28, 11.1, 13.53, 19.1, and 26.1? How do we do this?

...when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching (7.28)

...when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples (11.1)

...when Jesus had finished these parables (13.53)

...when Jesus had finished these sayings (19.1)

...when Jesus had finished all these sayings (26.1)