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# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

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## The Gospel According to Matthew

There is something about opening a book and starting right on the first page and diving right in. There are really only two places in the Bible where that can happen: Genesis and the Gospel According to Matthew. Because the Bible is divided into two sections, “The Old Testament” and, “The New Testament,” both Genesis



and the Gospel According to Matthew are find places to “begin” reading the Bible. We are about to embark on a long journey through every single verse in Matthew’s Gospel, identifying some key themes and encountering some challenging interpretative issues, as well understanding the historical context that Matthew was writing in. After all of that, we can apply the text and see how God’s Word is indeed, “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

### Who is Matthew?

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who was called to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9). In the corresponding passages to Matthew 9:9, he is called Levi. He is an Apostle, and

The Gospel According to Matthew is the first book in the New Testament.

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his name is included in all three lists of Apostles in the New Testament (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). While the book never ascribes Matthew as the author (nor do any of the Gospels), the inscription, “The Gospel According to Matthew” is found very early in tradition, and scholarship accepts it with little to no issue.

## Date

The most commonly accepted dates for the authorship of the Gospel According to Matthew are between 80 and 100 AD. Because Mark’s Gospel is widely accepted as the first of the four Gospel accounts, happening somewhere between 50 and 70 AD, 80 is likely the earliest that it would have been written.

## Notable Elements

Matthew employs a lot of quotations from the Old Testament, specifically the Greek Old Testament (LXX). He records numerous so-called, “fulfillment prophecies,” which form a unique theme that stands apart from the other three Gospel accounts. His employment of the Greek term, “πληρώω” shades his understanding of prophetic fulfillment very specifically, as this word is understood to mean, “to fill completely.” Matthew’s prophetic fulfillment passages then are probably best seen as Typological rather than directly prophetic, meaning that Jesus completely fills Old Testament prophecies that were already partially fulfilled in their own direct context. This understanding honors the Old Testament historical context while also providing room for Messianic fulfillment.

Imagine that an Old Testament prophecy is a glass that has been filled halfway with water. It’s been “filled,” but not completely. Then, when the New Testament states that Jesus fulfills the same prophecy, it is, “filled completely.” Because of his usage of the Old Testament, it has been said in the past that some of Matthew’s goal is to show Christians of his time how to correctly read their Bibles. One cannot accurately understand Matthew’s Gospel account without some framework of understanding of the Old Testament.

Notable New Testament scholar Leon Morris writes, “There is a Jewishness about this Gospel, as we see, for example... Matthew refers to such Jewish matters as the temple tax (17:24), and phylacteries (23:5); he speaks of the validity of the law (5:18-19); and he says that the teaching (though not the example) of the scribes and Pharisees should be followed (23:2-3). His five great discourse sections invite comparison with the five books of Moses” (*New Testament Theology*, 115). With

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Matthew being the first book of the New Testament, it is an immediate statement to readers: “The Old Testament is still important.”

## Five Discourse Sections

Think of Matthew as any other story you’ve ever read. There are typically portions of the story written from the perspective of the narrator. In this case, the narrator is Matthew. However, in most stories there are also sections where the characters are the ones actually speaking. In Matthew’s Gospel there are five large sections that stray away from Matthew’s narration and focus in on the actual words of Jesus. These are known as “discourse sections.” These sections are different from the rest of the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew in that it isn’t merely a description of what was happening, but it’s more like a script of Jesus’ sermons. These should be observed with that change in mind.

Finally, have fun! The Word of God is living and active, breathed out by God, and a treasure to study. The Psalmist says, “How sweet are your words to my taste!” Treat the Word accordingly!