

The Gospel of Matthew (NRSVUE): Context, Authorship, and Themes



INTRODUCTION

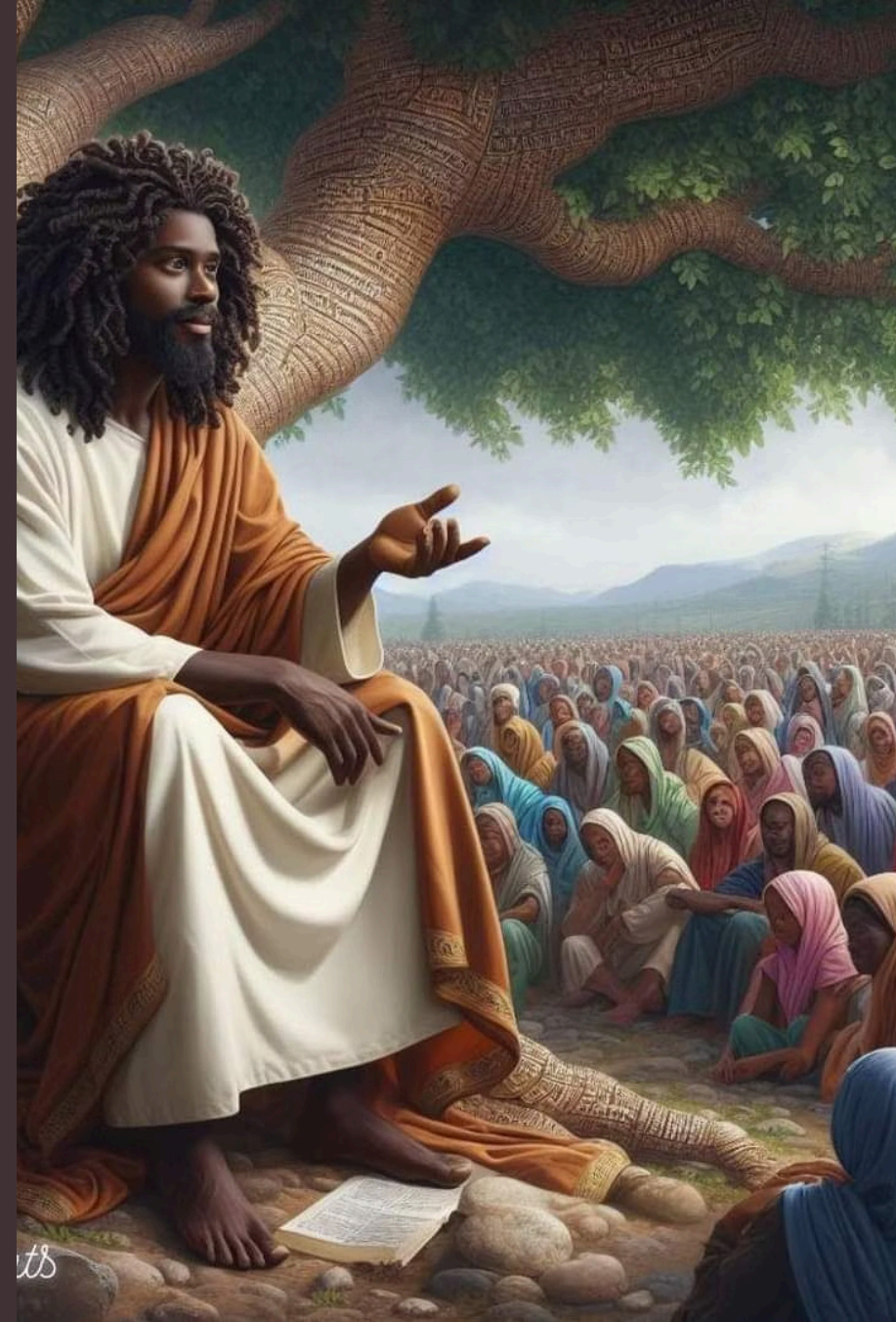
Exploring Matthew's Gospel

Our Purpose

This presentation explores the rich historical background, cultural setting, authorship and formation, and key theological themes of Matthew's Gospel. We will examine how this text emerged from a specific first-century context and what it meant for its earliest audiences.

Core Takeaway

Matthew presents Jesus as Israel's long-awaited Messiah who fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures and forms a renewed people of God—a community defined by faith, obedience, and mission to all nations.





CULTURAL SETTING

The Jewish World of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel emerges from the complex world of Second Temple Judaism, a religious tradition centered on Scripture, Torah observance, Temple worship, synagogue life, and diverse interpretive communities including Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and others.



Intra-Jewish Debates

The first-century Jewish world was marked by vigorous debates: Who truly represents Israel? How should Torah be interpreted in changing times? What does faithfulness to the covenant require?



Urban Mediterranean Setting

Scholars often associate Matthew with an urban environment in the Syrian region, possibly Antioch. This cosmopolitan setting facilitated interaction with Greco-Roman culture, philosophy, and imperial power structures.



Community and Identity

Matthew's community was predominantly Jewish-Christian, navigating a painful process of self-definition after separation from the synagogue. This context of conflict and marginalization profoundly shaped the Gospel's tone and message.

1

Defining Boundaries

The community struggled to articulate its identity as both continuous with Israel's story and distinct from the synagogue

2

Experiencing Conflict

Members faced persecution, polemic exchanges, and the challenge of maintaining cohesion amid external pressure and internal debate

3

Holding Dual Commitments

They maintained deep reverence for Torah and Israel's Scriptures while offering strong critique of certain Jewish leaders whom they saw as hypocritical or misguided

Torah, Righteousness, and Daily Life

Matthew portrays Jesus not as one who abolishes the Torah, but as its authoritative interpreter. The Gospel emphasizes a "greater righteousness" that goes beyond external observance to address the heart's intentions and motivations.

The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus' teaching addresses anger, lust, oath-taking, retaliation, and enemy-love—calling disciples to a radical ethic of mercy, integrity, and reconciliation that exceeds conventional standards.



Almsgiving



Fasting



Reconciliation



Prayer



Forgiveness



Discipline



Gentiles and the Nations

While Matthew's primary audience was Jewish, the Gospel contains subtle yet significant hints of Gentile inclusion from the very beginning. These clues anticipate the Gospel's climactic commission to make disciples of all nations.



Early Hints

The genealogy includes Gentile women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth), the magi from the East worship the newborn king, and a Roman centurion's faith astonishes Jesus



Creative Tension

The community sought to preserve its Jewish identity and covenantal heritage while simultaneously opening its doors to non-Jewish believers



The Great Commission

The Gospel culminates with Jesus commissioning his disciples to go and make disciples of "all nations," baptizing and teaching them to observe all he commanded

Who Wrote Matthew's Gospel?

Traditional View

Early church tradition attributed this Gospel to Matthew (also called Levi), the tax collector whom Jesus called to be one of the Twelve apostles. This attribution aimed to establish apostolic authority and direct eyewitness connection to Jesus.



Modern Scholarly Consensus

Contemporary scholars generally view the Gospel as anonymous, composed by a highly educated Jewish-Christian teacher or scribe. The author demonstrates sophisticated literary skill and deep knowledge of Scripture.



📄 Author's Profile

Whether Matthew the apostle or an anonymous scribe, the author was deeply versed in Israel's Scriptures and employed Jewish interpretive techniques such as formula quotations, typology, and midrashic methods to demonstrate Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy.

Formation of the Gospel

Matthew's Gospel is a carefully crafted literary work that draws on earlier sources, shapes them with theological intentionality, and arranges them for community formation and teaching.



Use of Sources

The author utilized earlier written traditions, including Mark's Gospel as a narrative framework and a sayings collection (often called "Q") shared with Luke



Literary Design

The Gospel features five major teaching discourses that echo the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), presenting Jesus as a new Moses giving divine instruction



Purposeful Arrangement

Narrative and teaching material are organized for catechesis—instructing new believers—and for ongoing community formation and identity construction

"The Gospel of Matthew is not simply a collection of Jesus traditions but a theologically rich, carefully structured document designed to shape communal identity and practice."

Major Theological Themes

Jesus as Messiah and King

Matthew identifies Jesus as "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham," emphasizing his royal lineage and his role as the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. He is the anointed king who inaugurates God's reign.

Fulfillment of Scripture

The Gospel repeatedly uses formula quotations—"this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet"—to demonstrate that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection accomplish what Israel's Scriptures anticipated.

Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom represents both the present and future rule of God, lived out through obedience to Jesus' teaching. It is both "already" (present in Jesus' ministry) and "not yet" (awaiting final consummation).

The New People of God

Matthew envisions a community defined not by ethnic or national boundaries but by faith in Jesus and commitment to discipleship. This renewed Israel includes both Jews and Gentiles united in Christ.

"God With Us"

From the opening declaration of "Emmanuel" (God with us) in Matthew 1:23 to Jesus' final promise "I am with you always, to the end of the age" in Matthew 28:20, the Gospel emphasizes God's abiding presence.

Key Lessons for Today

Matthew's Gospel continues to speak powerfully to contemporary readers, offering wisdom for Christian discipleship, ethical living, and missional engagement in our own complex cultural contexts.

Whole-Life Discipleship

Following Jesus requires more than intellectual assent or emotional experience—it demands concrete obedience and transformation of daily practices, relationships, and priorities

Integrity and Mercy

True righteousness is marked by integrity between inner disposition and outward action, by mercy toward the vulnerable, and by active reconciliation in broken relationships

Rooted and Open

The church's mission holds together deep rootedness in Scripture and tradition with radical openness to all peoples, cultures, and nations—honoring the past while embracing God's expansive future

"Matthew's vision challenges us to embody a faith that is biblically grounded, ethically demanding, and missionally generous—a faith worthy of the One who is Emmanuel, God with us."