

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW [TH 312]

Meeting 4. April 15th, 2021:

CHAP. I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL (End: the whole chap.)

A. First place among the Synoptic Gospels?

The Gospel according to Matthew has long been the most popular of the four canonical Gospels and has been a privileged place in ancient Christian literature. It is the most quoted by the Fathers of the Church, not only of all the gospels but also of all the other books of the New Testament¹. Moreover, whatever the many variations in the order of the gospels in the ancient lists, Matthew constantly comes first².

Reasons for such Pre-eminence in early Church

1°. Generaly: Mt. appears to be the one the early Christians looked to as setting out the essential law of Christianity or Christ.

2°) Other reasons:

a) Belief that it was the first Gospel to be written and therefore nearer to Jesus. Mark was seen as *pedisequus et breviator*, "follower and summarizer" of Matthew (St. Augustine).

b) Apostolic authorship (Unlike Mark and Luke)

"Matthew composed the logia in the Hebrew or Aramaic and every one interpreted them (translating in Greek) as he was able." (Papias).

c) Nature of the Gospel.

The teachings of Jesus more than narrative; ethical and pastoral teachings; teachings presented also in a structured manner.

The important place that Mt gives to the discourses of Jesus made him particularly suitable for the catechesis of the new converts and for the edification of the communities in the ancient Church.

d) The "Jewishness" of the Gospel:
the debate with the Jews;

¹ Cf. E. MASSAUX, *Influence de l'évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant Saint Irénée*, Gembloux, Duculot, 1950.

² Cf. "The Early Church: The Priority of Matthew" in D. BRATCHER, *The Gospels and the Synoptic problem. The Literary Relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Link: <http://www.crivoice.org/synoptic.html> (14/4/2021).

fulfilment of the Old Testament in Jesus;
showing how Christian teaching related to the Old Testament law.

Matthew as the primary source **until the 18th century**, the date of the rise of the analytical study of Scripture as a result of the Enlightenment and of the formulation of the “synoptic problem”.

Change

Today (2021), for the majority, **Mark** is seen as the first sources of other Gospels.

The reasons for such changes: the development of new methods in Biblical Exegesis, especially:

+ 1920s and 1930s: with **Source and Form criticisms**

Schmidt, M. Dibelius and R. Bultmann isolated units of tradition and classified them according to form, which were then assigned to various "life settings" in the early church.

+ 1940s and 1950s: with the appearance of **Redaction Criticism**.

The evangelists were now seen **not as compilers** of the Church's oral traditions but **theologians** in their own right shaping and adapting those traditions to present their own message.

distinguishing between 'traditional material' and 'redactional material' - the former preserving more authentic 'historical' material than the latter. This exercise is said to reveal the evangelist's distinctive ideas.

Matthew and other synoptics, in summary

+ Mk and Lk are more governed by chronology;

+ Mt is more interested in thematic development (RM Kidd).

+ Mt relies heavily on Mk: around **90%** up Mark's content is in Mt.

B. Authorship, provenance and date of Matthew

Nowhere does the author identify himself within the Gospel by name.

But we have two positions:

1. Tradition (espec. the early church): the author is Matthew, the apostle (Levi).

a) Irenaeus of Lyons

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church." (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1.)

b) Papias of Hierapolis (after the testimony of Papias reported by Eusebius of Caesarea)³

He probably belonged to the immediate post-apostolic age in contrast to Irenaeus, who could only claim indirect contact with the apostles.

Papias' statement as recorded by Eusebius (*HE*⁴ III 39 14-16):

"Matthew for his part compiled (composed, put in an orderly way) the oracles (logia) in the Hebrew (Aramaic language) style and each interpreted them as he was able."

+ There have been many interpretations of this statement

- *What exactly does "logia" mean?* Is this the Gospel? Or is it a sayings source which is now part of the Gospel? Was Matthew the author of Q source? Again does logia refer to OT "testamonia" or proof texts compiled by Matt and later incorporated into his Gospel?
- *What does "in the Hebrew language" mean?* Does it mean the Gospel was composed just in Hebrew and then later translated into Greek? Or does Papias' statement refer to the Gospel being composed in the Hebrew style?

³ From Wikipedia, we learn that Papias (Greek: Παπίας) was a Greek Apostolic Father, Bishop of Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale, Turkey), and author who lived 60 –130 AD. He wrote the *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord* (Greek: Λογίων Κυριακῶν Ἐξηγήσεις) in five books. This work, which is lost apart from brief excerpts in the works of Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202 AD) and Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265 – 339/340 AD), is an important early source on Christian oral tradition and especially on the origins of the canonical Gospels."

⁴ *Historia Ecclesiastica* or *Historia Ecclesiae*

- What does '**interpreted**' mean? Does it mean translated? **First**, the Gospel does not read like a translated work. For some scholars, our Greek Gospel of Matthew is a new resension (Hendriksen p. 91) or meticulous revision using Mk. (Wilkenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, 1988). **Second**, for others, when Papias claimed the Gospel was written in the Hebrew language it means in a Semitic style, dominated by Semitic themes; there is no suggestion that any translation was required.

+ Papias' commentary is not based on any solid historical information; in particular, there is no record of an early Aramaic version of Matthew's gospel. Perhaps the disciple Matthew played a role in the community from which the author of the gospel came?

2. Modern Criticism

The Gospel was not written by Matthew or any personal follower of Jesus.

a) Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 121f:

He rejects that the Gospel originated with Matthew the apostle because:

- + Its dependence on the Greek Gospel of a non-disciple.
- + The systematic non-biographical form of its structure.
- + The later apostolic theological position reflected in this book.
- + The Greek language of Matthew. (Not a translated work)

For example, Matthew uses the Greek form Ἰσκαριωτης (10:4; 26:14) instead of the correct Semitic form Ἰσκαριωθ (Mark 3:19, 14:10). This points only to the fact that he is writing in a region where Greek is spoken.

=> "The author of Mt. is completely unknown to us.

"We do not know how the tradition of Matthew as author of Matthew originated".

=> He was probably a **Greek-speaking Jewish Christian** with some rabbinic knowledge.

b) Most exegetes:

Although the apostle's authorship is no longer held today, most exegetes believe that the author is **a Jew by origin**.

Criteria:

- + Centrality of the Law;
- + Importance of the quotations from the Old Testament;
- + Limitation of the mission of the earthly Jesus to Israel;
- + Cf. also Mt 24:20; 117:21-27; 23:1-3, etc.

The most common hypothesis is that the author of the first gospel lived **at the end of the first century**.

Five arguments for this dating:

- + Mt uses Mk (date around 70) as a source;
- + the image of Judaism that he gives is that of a block united around the Pharisees
(a reflection of the post-70 Judaism with which Matthew was confronted);
- + The multiplication of the expression "their synagogues" (4:24; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34) when speaking of the Jews (an indication of a clear separation between the Matthean community and the Pharisee synagogue);
- + The allusion to persecutions which reflects a situation at the end of the first century (see in particular 10:16-42);
- + The possible allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 (cf. 22:7; see also 23:38)

We can conclude that:

+ **Author:**

- *tradition*: Matthew (also called Levi), a former tax collector and one of Jesus' twelve disciples (Mark 3:18; Matt 9:9; 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).
- *Modern criticism*: anonymous, but a Jew by origin. The text of Mt itself implies that the author was an early Jewish Christian who was well-educated and multilingual (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). He was also an interpreter of earlier traditions, adopting and adapting several sources in the telling of his tale (the Gospel of Mark, a hypothetical sayings-source scholars call "Q," the OT, oral tradition, and possibly a "special source" scholars call "M" or "special Matthew").
- + **Provenance and date**: written from Antioch in Syria during the 80's C.E., after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E.

C. Structure and characteristics

1. Structures...

+ Three Major Subdivisions

This structure is marked by a twice-used formula “From that time on Jesus began to” (4:17; 16:21):

- Introduction: Events Prior to Jesus’ Public Ministry (1:1-4:16)
- Body: Representative Sampling of Jesus’ Teachings and Miracles (4:17-16:20)
- Climax: The Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus (16:21-28:20)

+ Another Trifold structure (J.D. Kingsbury and D.R. Bauer)

Kingsbury has taken a new approach to the structure of Matthew by **focusing on its Christology**. Thus, Kingsbury argues that Matthew broadly divides as follows:

- The Person of Jesus Messiah (1:1 – 4:16)
- The Proclamation of Jesus Messiah (4:17 – 16:20)
- The Suffering, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Messiah (16:21 – 28:20)

+ Geographical structure (cf. somehow Mark):

- Prologue : Introducing Jesus (1:1 – 4:11, cf. Mark 1:1-15)
- Jesus’ Journeys through Galilee, Neighbouring Regions and to Jerusalem (4:12 – 20:34, cf. Mark 1:16 – 10:52).
- Jesus’ Ministry in Jerusalem (21:1 – 25:46, cf. Mark 11:1 – 13:37)
- Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection (26:1 – 28:20, cf. Mark 14:1 – 16:8)

+ Structure alternating discourses and narrative blocs (B.W. Bacon):

This is the particularity of Mt among the Synoptics. Each discourse is concluded with a **similar formula**, which acts as a literary link and gives continuity to the whole (a variation of “*When Jesus had finished saying these things*”= καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους” (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1 and 26:1).

In this logic, the whole Gospel has **five major sections, introduced by an prologue and concluded by an epilogue**. In every Book, we have: **Narrative + Discourse+ Formula**. After Bacon, the author of this hypothesis, the whole Gospel constituted ‘The Five Books of Matthew Against the Jews’: in fact, the Gospel is constructed after the fashion of the Mosaic Pentateuch, and if we consider the content, it deals with the Judaism (in contrast, in most of time). So we have:

- Preamble: Infancy Narrative (1-2)
- Section or Book 1 : Discipleship (3-7)
 - Narrative (3-4)
 - Discourse: Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
- Section or Book 2 : Apostleship (8:1-11:1):
 - Narrative (8:1-9:34)
 - Discourse: Mission (9:35-11:1)
- Section or Book 3 : The Hiding of the Revelation (11:2-13:52):
 - Narrative (11:2-12:50)
 - Discourse: Parables (13:1-53)
- Section or Book 4: Church Administration (13:54-18:35):
 - Narrative (13:54-17:27)
 - Discourse: Church Life and Order (18)
- Section or Book 5: The Judgment (19-25):
 - Narrative (19-22)
 - Discourse: Eschatology (23-25)
- Epilogue: Passion Narrative (26-28)

2. Characteristics

For the **characteristics of Mt:** see “*New Testament Theology*”