

# GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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**Approximate date:** early-to-mid 70s C.E., possibly into the 80s C.E.

**Time period:** the conception/birth of Yeshua to the ascension of Yeshua

**Author:** Matthew the disciple

**Location of author:** Phoenicia, Transjordan, Alexandria, Syrian Antioch (all debated)

**Target audience and their location:** the Jewish Diaspora, possibly Antioch

**People:**

Yeshua the Messiah, Mary, Joseph, the Twelve Disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John (sons of Zebedee), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot (10:2-4), King Herod, Magi, Archaleus, John the Immerser/the Baptist, Pharisees, Sadducees, Satan, centurion (at Capernaum), Peter's mother-in-law, Beelzebul, Yeshua's family: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas (all brothers), Herod the tetrarch, Herodias, Philip (brother of Herod the tetrarch), a Canaanite woman, mother of James and John, Caiphas, Simon the Leper, Pontius Pilate, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, Mary Magdalene, centurion (at Golgotha), Joseph of Arimathea

**People mentioned:**

David, Abraham, Yeshua's patrilineal ancestors (1:1-16), Jeremiah, Rachel, Isaiah, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, Samaritans, Jonah, Solomon, Elijah, Caesar, Abel, Zechariah, Berekiah, Praetorium

**Places:**

Bethlehem, Judea, Jerusalem, Egypt, Galilee, Nazareth, Judean wilderness, Jordan River, Capernaum, Zebulun, Naphtali, Sea of Galilee, Syria, Decapolis, region of the Gadarenes, Korazin, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon, Caesarea Philippi, Jericho, Bethphage, Mount of Olives, Bethany, Gethsemane, Golgotha (Calvary)

**Places mentioned:**

Babylon, Ramah, Nineveh, Sodom, Cyrene

**Key Themes and Events:**

listing of Yeshua's genealogy / conception of Yeshua via the Holy Spirit / appearance of Magi before King Herod / Magi appear before Yeshua and present Him gifts / Joseph and Mary escape with the child Yeshua to Egypt / Joseph and Mary settle in Nazareth / ministry of John the Immerser / immersion of Yeshua by John / temptation of Yeshua in the wilderness / Yeshua begins His ministry in Capernaum /

Yeshua begins to call Disciples to Himself / Yeshua heals the sick / Yeshua delivers His Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7) / people are amazed at Yeshua's teaching abilities / Yeshua heals a man with leprosy / Yeshua heals a centurion's servant with only a word / Yeshua heals Peter's mother-in-law / Yeshua calms the Sea of Galilee during a storm / Yeshua delivers two men from demons, casting the demons into a herd of pigs / Yeshua heals a paralytic and forgives him of his sins / Yeshua is declared a blasphemer / Yeshua calls Matthew the tax collector to follow Him / John the Immerser's disciples ask Yeshua about fasting / a woman with a blood issue is healed by touching Yeshua's garment / Yeshua resurrects a dead girl / Yeshua heals a blind man / Yeshua casts a demon out of a mute man / Yeshua sends out His Twelve Disciples / John the Immerser questions Yeshua's Messiahship from prison / Yeshua speaks favorably of John the Immerser / Yeshua pronounces judgment against unrepentant cities / Yeshua declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath / Yeshua tells the Pharisees that they will be given the sign of Jonah via His death and resurrection / Yeshua proclaims His true family to be those who serve the Father / Yeshua delivers His parable of the sower / Yeshua delivers assorted parables on the Kingdom of God (weeds, mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure and pearl, net of fish) / Yeshua's family and hometown question Him / John the Baptist is beheaded / Yeshua feeds the five thousand / Yeshua walks on water / Yeshua describes the importance that what enters into a person is less important than what comes out / Yeshua admires the faith of the Canaanite woman, honoring her request for her daughter to be delivered / Yeshua feeds the four thousand / Yeshua warns against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees / Peter confesses Yeshua as the Messiah / Yeshua predicts His own death to His Disciples / Yeshua is transfigured before Peter, James, and John / Yeshua tells His Disciples about the deeds they can perform with great faith / Yeshua pays the Temple tax by having Peter catch a fish with a four-drachma coin / Yeshua warns against those who would lead others astray / Yeshua teaches on some important homeetical parables (lost sheep, a brother who sins, the unmerciful servant, a teaching on divorce, the workers in the vineyard) / mother of James and John asks Yeshua to give her sons an exalted position in His Kingdom / Yeshua heals two blind men at Jericho / Yeshua enters triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey / Yeshua drives the moneychangers out of the Temple complex / Yeshua curses a fig tree / the chief priests and elders question Yeshua's authority / Yeshua delivers some key parables to the religious leaders (the two sons, the tenants, the wedding banquet) / some Pharisees try to trick Yeshua into speaking against Caesar / some Sadducees ask Yeshua about the resurrection / Yeshua tells the Pharisees in Jerusalem about the greatest commandment / Yeshua rebukes the Pharisaical leaders for their abuses / Yeshua tells His Disciples about the End of the Age / Yeshua says that no one knows the day or hour of His return / Yeshua issues some eschatological parables (ten virgins, talents, sheep and the goats) / the high priest crafts a plot to seize Yeshua and kill Him / Yeshua is anointed at Bethany / Judas Iscariot agrees to betray Yeshua / Yeshua and His Disciples have their last Passover together / Yeshua tells Peter He will deny Him / Yeshua prays urgently to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane / Yeshua is arrested with a betraying kiss by Judas / Yeshua is taken before the Sanhedrin and proclaimed guilty of blasphemy / Peter denies Yeshua / Yeshua faces Pontius Pilate / Yeshua is mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers / Simon of Cyrene is impressed to carry Yeshua's cross / Yeshua is taken to Golgotha and crucified

painfully / Yeshua dies and the Temple curtain is torn, dead are raised, and an earthquake occurs / the Roman centurion at the cross proclaims Yeshua the Son of God / Yeshua is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea / Yeshua is resurrected from the dead / Yeshua appears to the remaining Eleven Disciples in Galilee / Yeshua delivers the Great Commission

**Key Scriptures:** Matthew 5:14-19; 22:37-40; 25:40; 28:19-20 / **The Infancy Narratives** (1:1-2:23); **The Preparation for the Ministry** (3:1-4:11); **The Galilean Ministry** (4:12-25); **The First Discourse Section: The Sermon on the Mount** (5:1-7:29); **Narrative** (8:1-9:34); **The Second Discourse Section** (9:35-10:42); **Narrative** (11:1-12:50); **The Third Discourse Section: The Kingdom Parables** (13:1-52); **Narrative** (13:53-17:27); **The Fourth Discourse Section: Various Sayings** (18:1-35); **Narrative: The Judean Period** (19:1-22:46); **The Fifth Discourse Section: Eschatology** (23:1-25:46); **The Passion and Resurrection Narratives** (26:1-28:20)<sup>1</sup>

**Theological Summary:** While Matthew is canonically listed as the first of the Gospels in the Apostolic Scriptures, there are a significantly large number of scholars and theologians who do not think that it was the first Gospel compiled. Yet, while Markan priority is often now adhered to in New Testament studies, throughout Christian history the Gospel of Matthew has not only been extremely valued, but it has practically eclipsed the three other Gospels in terms of both its appropriation in liturgy and theological/spiritual examination.<sup>2</sup> While teaching from the four Gospels does seem to be a bit more even among interpreters today, the Gospel of Matthew continues to be highly regarded and remains a key source of much instruction, reflection, and contemporary application for Messiah followers.

An undeniable feature recognized by almost all readers, is that the Gospel of Matthew demonstrates the most Jewish character of the four Gospels, and that the primary readership of Matthew's Gospel was Jewish. This is evidenced by the fact that Yeshua's ancestry from the Patriarchs of Israel is documented (1:1-17); the author does not explain Jewish customs or traditions in the text (which can differ in comparison to Mark and Luke); he makes references to God as "Heaven" or "the Kingdom of Heaven" consistent with First Century Jewish practice that avoided usage of the Divine Name YHWH; and the author emphasizes Yeshua as the "Son of Man" or the "Son of David." The author wants his readers to know in no uncertain terms that Yeshua is the Messiah and the anticipated King of Israel.

In many ways, one can surely recognize the poignancy of Yeshua's word regarding the scribe "who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (13:52), as Matthew is greatly reliant on the Tanach Scriptures and the traditions of Second Temple Judaism, in presenting his readers with the news that the Messiah of Israel has come. There are numerous references to predictive Tanach prophecies of the Messiah, as well as direct and indirect appeals to Tanach accounts that are in some way informative of His life and ministry. These critical factors would not only have helped confirm in the hearts of Jewish Believers that Yeshua was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 57-60.

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:280.

the expected Savior, but also would have aided in spreading the good news to ancient Jewish people who had not yet heard of His ministry and atoning sacrifice.

There can be no doubting the fact that the titular name of this Gospel is of Hebrew/Aramaic origin, as the disciple Matthew was originally called either *Mattiyahu* (מַתִּיתָיָהוּ)<sup>3</sup> or *Mattai* (מַתַּי),<sup>4</sup> which means “gift of God.” It has at least been suggested that there might be a play on words between *Mattiyahu/Mattai*, and the fact that various Greek terms for both “disciple” (noun *mathētēs*, μαθητής) and “to learn” (verb *mathēteuō*, μαθητεύω), sound similar<sup>5</sup>—“disciples” being a definite theme of this text (i.e., 28:19). Matthew was a tax collector before he was a disciple of Yeshua (9:9; 10:3), being known in Mark 2:14 as “Levi the son of Alphaeus,” and in Luke 5:27, 29 as simply “Levi.” The name Matthew may have been another name he went by, although it is also possible it was something given to him by Yeshua. Matthew’s profession could have easily given him the skills needed in composing a record of Yeshua’s ministry and teachings, and conservative scholars have no problem accepting genuine Matthean authorship.

One of the most widespread views among today’s New Testament scholars is that the author of Matthew incorporated previous material from the Gospel of Mark, as well as data taken from another source, in assembling his Gospel. This main, secondary source could have been oral or written. Frequently, it is proposed that there was a document of notes or records on Yeshua’s ministry and teachings accessible, which in many scholastic works has been designated as “Q” (an abbreviation for *Quelle*, the German word for “source”). A two-source or two-document hypothesis for the composition of Matthew does account for how nearly ninety-percent of Mark is repeated in Matthew, with additional information incorporated and expanding the message. While Mark’s Gospel was written largely for a Greek and Roman audience that would have been more interested in the actions of Yeshua, Matthew’s Gospel was written largely for a Jewish audience that would have been most persuaded by His prophetic fulfillment and teachings.

There are various liberal examiners who question Matthew’s authorship, as the author does not identify himself by name in the Gospel. Greek copies of this Gospel started appearing with the words *kata Matthaion* (ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΝ) around 125 C.E.<sup>6</sup> What we know about the authorship of this Gospel comes from later Christian tradition, which ascribes Matthean origin, but also begs some complicated questions about its composition. The Fourth Century historian Eusebius detailed, “Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue and thus supplied the want of his presence to them by his writings” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.6).<sup>7</sup> The statement that receives the most attention among Matthean interpreters,

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<sup>3</sup> This is the proper name form employed by the Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament, and also followed by the Jewish New Testament/Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern.

<sup>4</sup> This is the proper name form employed by the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament and the 1991 UBSHNT.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John P. Meier, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *ABD*, 4:627; Anthony J. Saldarini, “Matthew,” in *ECB*, 1000.

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie, in *New Testament Introduction*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 89.

Further on in Eusebius’ record, he describes how a Christian evangelistic figure named Pantanaeus made it to India, where he encountered “some who were acquainted with the Gospel of Matthew, to whom Bartholomew,

though, appears a little later when Eusebius relays the words of the Second Century C.E. figure Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor:

**“Matthew composed his history [or, ‘Matthew compiled the *Sayings*’]<sup>8</sup> in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able”** (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16).<sup>9</sup>

This one statement by Papias, which appears to have been repeated by some of the other Church Fathers and made its way to Eusebius, has been interpreted in various ways—some ways being rather misleading. Carson and Moo advise examiners how these words are “notoriously difficult to translate,”<sup>10</sup> noting the different options for us:

“Matthew συνετάξετο (*synetaxeto*, ‘composed’? ‘compiled’? ‘arranged [in an orderly form]’?) τὰ λόγια (*ta logia*, ‘the sayings’? ‘the gospel’?) in Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraïdi dialektō*, ‘the Hebrew [Aramaic] language’? ‘Hebrew [Aramaic] style’?) and each ἠερμήνευσεν (*hērmēneusen*, ‘interpreted’? ‘translated’ ‘transmitted’?) them as best he could.”<sup>11</sup>

Controversy over the composition of Matthew’s Gospel ensues over what Papias meant by saying that Matthew either compiled or assembled *ta logia* (τὰ λόγια), as *logion* (λόγιον) is generally a Greek term for “sayings” or “oracles.”<sup>12</sup> Noted with the further description “in the Hebrew dialect,” *Hebraïdi dialektō*, there are four basic ways that Eusebius’ words can be viewed:

1. A complete Gospel text was written by Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic<sup>13</sup>
2. Matthew put together notes of the sayings of Yeshua in Hebrew or Aramaic, possibly what scholars propose as being the Q document, later to be incorporated into our final and complete Greek Gospel
3. The description *Hebraïdi dialektō* is to be regarded as being a Jewish style of composition/writing
4. *Logia* could mean various proof texts from the Tanach Scriptures that support Yeshua’s Messiahship<sup>14</sup>

Conservatives will generally not argue against the disciple Matthew compiling a complete Gospel on behalf of the early Believers, which now bears his name—but how strong is the evidence that the canonical Greek text of Matthew that we have today is a translation of

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one of the apostles, had preached and had left them the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew, which was also preserved until this time” (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.10.3; p 166).

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius: *The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson and Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 104.

<sup>9</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 106.

Repeating Papias’ claim, the Second Century apologist Irenaeus states, “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1; [BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers](#). MS Windows Vista/7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2009-2010. DVD-ROM).

<sup>10</sup> Carson and Moo, 143.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 476.

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, in *New Testament Introduction*, pp 46-48.

<sup>14</sup> Hagner, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *ISBE*, 3:281.

a complete text originally *written* in Hebrew or Aramaic? There are a few modern Christian scholars who hold that the canonical Greek Matthew is an essentially accurate and early translation of an original non-extant Hebrew version, but such claims have been contested. More concerning to be certain, though, are how many in today's Messianic movement feel that the canonical Greek Matthew could be a less-than-authoritative translation of an original Hebrew or Aramaic text, to be approached with a degree of suspicion. (Some Messianics, though, just say that the Greek text of Matthew is invalid.)

Textually speaking, any advocate of an original Hebrew or Aramaic written text for the Gospel of Matthew has a huge uphill mountain to climb. No ancient Hebrew or Aramaic Matthew from the Biblical period, or fragment of such a text, has surfaced that pre-dates our present Greek Matthew. "No Hebrew or Aramaic collection of Jesus' sayings has survived, so its existence must remain hypothetical" (Saldarini).<sup>15</sup> The Aramaic Peshitta, which includes the authorized New Testament for the Syrian Orthodox Church, dates from the Fourth-Fifth Centuries C.E., and is widely recognized as being a translation from the Greek Apostolic Scriptures (although quite an early and valuable one). While there are various editions of a so-called Hebrew Gospel of Matthew floating around, they all date from the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> The most popular of these is the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew edited and translated into English by George Howard. This eclectic version is acknowledged in its introduction as being put together from a Jewish anti-missionary work entitled *Even Bohan* (אבן בוהן) from the Fourteenth Century C.E.,<sup>17</sup> originally intended to refute "Christian claims" about Yeshua being the Messiah. Among its various theological problems,<sup>18</sup> it is also significantly tarnished by using the derogatory form *Yeshu* for the name of the Messiah.<sup>19</sup>

No worthwhile Bible scholar today at all denies that there is both Semitic linguistic influence and Jewish theological significance involved with our canonical Greek Matthew. Yet there is no comprehensive evidence that should cause any faithful Believer to treat the canonical Gospel of Matthew in Greek as being something secondary or under-valued. The present canonical Greek Matthew has no indications of it being a translation of an original Hebrew Matthew. "Matthew's Greek reveals none of the telltale marks of a translation.

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<sup>15</sup> Saldarini, in *ECB*, 1000.

<sup>16</sup> These include the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew (1380), the Sebastian Münster edition (1537), and the duTillet manuscript (1555).

A history of these editions is summarized by Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp 2-4. Regarding these versions he concludes, "[T]he Hebrew Matthews do not present 'a different Matthew' than what we know from the Greek textual witnesses," further concluding how they "do not bear greater weight than the extant Greek manuscripts" (Ibid., 4).

<sup>17</sup> George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), xi.

He later acknowledges how his text "does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages" (Ibid., 178).

<sup>18</sup> These problems include, but are not limited to: the exclusion of the nations from the Kingdom in Matthew 10:5-6 (Ibid., 214), the preaching of the good news to the nations as being the antichrist and Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:14-15 (Ibid., 215), and most especially how "With the possible exception of [Matthew] 16:16...the author of Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew never identifies Jesus with the Christ" (Ibid., 216).

<sup>19</sup> The derogatory acronym *Yeshu* (ישו), *yimach sh'mo u'zikro* (ימח שמו וזכרו), means "may his name and memory be blotted out" (Ibid., 207).

Furthermore, Matthew's OT quotations are derived from the LXX [Septuagint] rather than the Hebrew text" (Hagner, *ISBE*).<sup>20</sup> If anything is to be noted, "The mix of text forms suggests an author writing in Greek but knowledgeable in Semitic languages and therefore able to vary his form" (Carson and Moo).<sup>21</sup> Any Hebraisms or Semitic language forms used in this Gospel and transcribed into Greek, would most likely be oral or from second hand notes, as "the view that Matthew, or any of our four gospels, was originally written in Aramaic, though warmly advocated by several modern scholars, has been almost universally repudiated. The gospel traditions undoubtedly once circulated in oral Aramaic; but the written gospels are Greek books, and the basic source for Matthew and Luke was unquestionably a Greek work, the Gospel According to Mark" (*IDB*).<sup>22</sup>

Among a wide number of modern interpreters, Eusebius' assertion that Matthew wrote in *Hebraïdi dialektō* (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16) is thought to be synonymous to "in a Jewish style."<sup>23</sup> McKnight is one who asserts, "the Greek expression *Hēbraïdi dialektō*, when investigated carefully...means not 'in the Hebrew language' but 'in a Hebrew rhetorical style.'"<sup>24</sup> This would make Matthew's Gospel an originally composed Greek document, which was sure to incorporate Hebraic sources, and as Eusebius notes everyone who read it would have interpreted it as best as possible. This probably regards not only how Matthew was understood by its original recipients, but also how it was integrated into other evangelistic and theological works.<sup>25</sup> McKnight further details, "the most recent scholarship on the Papias logion suggests that the traditional rendering is insufficient and should be understood now in the following manner: In contrast to Mark's unordered, chreia-style Gospel, Papias contends, Matthew composed a more Jewish, orderly styled Gospel. The original language, then, is of no concern to Papias...In all likelihood our Gospel of Matthew was composed originally in Greek and in a Jewish style."<sup>26</sup> Viewing Eusebius' remarks in this way can be very healthy, as it enables one to favorably view the text of the canonical Greek Matthew, while recognizing its Jewish origination and deep roots in the Hebrew Tanach (Old Testament). This, in fact, seems to be the default position of many Matthean examiners.

In our estimation, the two best options for Matthew's linguistic composition—given the extant textual data and the fact that no Hebrew or Aramaic text present pre-dates the canonical Greek Matthew—are (1) that Papias' statements either referred to Matthew compiling Hebrew or Aramaic notes that he later used for a complete Greek composition (perhaps Q), or (2) that a style of writing common to Second Temple Judaism is intended.

<sup>20</sup> Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:281.

Hegg, *Matthew 1-7*, 5 only confirms, "the extant Greek Matthew does not read as a translation of a Hebrew original."

<sup>21</sup> Carson and Moo, 143.

<sup>22</sup> F.C. Grant, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:304.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1556.

<sup>24</sup> S. McKnight, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 527.

This is certainly allowed from the meanings of *dialektos* (δύαλεκτος) as "[manner of] discourse: discussion, debate, arguing" or "a way of speaking, enunciation" (*LS*, 190).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *ISBE*, 3:281.

<sup>26</sup> McKnight, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 527-528.

The language question surrounding the Gospel of Matthew is very much contingent on the fact of establishing where the text originated and who its intended audience was. Saying that the main audience of Matthew was Jewish is entirely reasonable, but claiming that they were all Hebrew-speaking Jews (as many Messianics today will ardently exclaim) ignores the presence of an immensely large Diaspora Jewish population in the First Century, among whom there were huge numbers of Messiah followers. The main candidate city among scholars for Matthew's composition and initial reception is actually Syrian Antioch, although "Other specific suggestions are that the gospel originated in Phoenicia or in a Transjordan situation or in Alexandria" (Guthrie).<sup>27</sup> Caesarea has also been suggested as a place of origin.<sup>28</sup> All of these places are notably adjacent to the Land of Israel, but with the exception of Transjordan, they employed Greek as their primary language. "Most scholars today...opt for Syria as the place of origin" (Carson and Moo).<sup>29</sup>

Meier is a liberal interpreter, who while leaning toward Matthew being composed in the late First or early Second Century C.E. as a second generation Messianic work, nevertheless offers some compelling reasons for Antioch being the place of Matthew being written and originally received:

"[Antioch was] A predominantly Greek-speaking metropolis with the largest Jewish population in Syria, it was the home of a Christian community founded in the late 30s...The Jewish tone of the gospel would have been reinforced by the sizable Jewish population in Antioch. Dialogue and debate with the synagogue are reflected in the focus on Jewish customs and rites, on the Mosaic law, and on the fulfillment of prophecy. Yet the gospel stands on the borderline between the Jewish and gentile world. On the whole, Matthew's gospel employs better Greek than Mark's and uses Greek plays on words. Despite the strong Jewish tone, there are pointers throughout the gospel (2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 27:54) toward the climatic missionary charge in 28:16-20. Antioch supplies the perfect meeting place for the melting pot that is Matthew's gospel" (ABD).<sup>30</sup>

If Matthew's Gospel was indeed originally composed in Antioch or in one of the other notable cities, then it points to a widespread Jewish audience in the Diaspora, which on the whole did not employ Hebrew or Aramaic as its primary language. The likelihood of Matthew being originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic becomes even less probable if the Gospel had been written after 70 C.E. and the fall of Jerusalem.

Even though it is widely acknowledged that the main audience of Matthew's Gospel was Jewish, this should not exclude anyone else from being among its first recipients. While Tanach substantiations for Yeshua's Messiahship would have been expected by Ancient Jews

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<sup>27</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Carson and Moo, 151.

Against: Saldarini, in *ECB*, pp 1000-1001 who prefers Matthew being composed somewhere in either Galilee or Judea because of the Rabbinic style of argumentation present, which from his perspective requires a location closely adjacent to centers of Second Temple Jewish legal jurisprudence.

<sup>30</sup> Meier, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *ABD*, 4:624.

Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 38-39, a conservative theologian, further confirms "that an important centre" for Matthew's composition "is most likely, and what better place than Antioch?"

hearing the good news, this does not mean that non-Jews exposed to the Synagogue and to Israel's God would not have likewise taken interest.<sup>31</sup> Matthew's Gospel certainly has played an important role throughout history in helping to apologetically defend the validity of Yeshua's Messiahship, and for much of Christianity in helping to bridge and bond together the Old and New Testaments.

Scholars are not in uniform agreement as to when the Gospel of Matthew was written, as dates suggested range from the early 60s C.E. all the way to the mid-to-late 80s C.E. Liberals have pushed Matthew as far out as the end of the First to the early Second Century C.E.<sup>32</sup> Much of the dating of Matthew is contingent on the fact of whether or not Yeshua's statement in Matthew 24:2, regarding the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, was written down before Titus' siege or not. Those who accept predicative prophecy, and are largely futurist and pre-millennial in their eschatology, can accept a post-70 C.E. composition date of Matthew (especially given the text's likely reliance on Mark), and this includes many conservative Christians and Messianics. Positing a post-70 C.E. composition for the Gospel of Matthew, possibly into the 80s C.E., is well within the first generation of Messiah followers. The later that the time for Matthew's composition is pushed back, the fewer interpreters favor Matthew Levi the tax collector actually being its author.<sup>33</sup>

Theologically speaking, the Gospel of Matthew can be viewed as the broadest sweeping of all the four Gospels, covering the most amount of material. Its content has been thought to be focused around five specific narratives: the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7), Missionary Discourse (ch. 10), Parable Discourse (ch. 13), Kingdom Discourse (ch. 18), and Eschatological Discourse (ch. 24). More than a few interpreters in the past have tried to explain these, or some other five separate "parts" of Matthew, as the author setting up a parallel to the Torah or Mosaic Pentateuch.<sup>34</sup> While interesting for many to be sure, in actuality such claims sometimes appear to be overstated. Guthrie cautions those who look at Matthew from a five-fold division vantage point, noting how "This suggestion is not without some merit, but is based wholly on speculation."<sup>35</sup> The claim that five central discourses in Matthew are intended to parallel the Torah has been used, at times, to support the idea that Moses' Teaching is significantly inferior to the Messiah's teachings.

Carson and Moo are right to conclude that limiting the Gospel of Matthew to five sections, paralleling the Pentateuch, is problematic on the grounds that it will exclude key aspects of the gospel proclamation:

"Few today think that Matthew intended any link between these five sections and the five books of Moses: proposed connections are just too tenuous. The ties between each narrative and discourse pair are not always very strong, and any outline that relegates the

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:302.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:304.

<sup>34</sup> Although there are different five-fold divisions of Matthew's Gospel proposed, the main intention is basically covered in Grant, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:304; Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *ISBE*, 3:282; and Meier, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *ABD*, 4:629-637.

<sup>35</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 40.

entire passion and resurrection narrative to the status of an epilogue must be seriously questioned.”<sup>36</sup>

Any reader of Matthew’s Gospel knows how imperative it is to understand the Tanach for a proper evaluation of the text, most notably in terms of various “fulfillment” passages where one finds either a quotation from the Tanach or an allusion to something within it (i.e., 1:22-23;<sup>37</sup> 2:15,<sup>38</sup> 17-18,<sup>39</sup> 23;<sup>40</sup> 4:14-16;<sup>41</sup> 8:17;<sup>42</sup> 12:17-21;<sup>43</sup> 13:35;<sup>44</sup> 21:4-5;<sup>45</sup> 27:9-10<sup>46</sup>). It is notable, however, that much of Matthew’s usage of Tanach quotations is done so in a very midrashic style, requiring one to be very familiar with First Century Jewish hermeneutics. In Guthrie’s estimation, though, “Matthew in his approach to the Old Testament differed from that of the rabbis in that he viewed it without being bound by a traditional method of interpretation. As a consequence many passages are treated as messianic which were not so treated by Jewish interpreters.”<sup>47</sup> The same can also remain true up until today, as various Tanach passages viewed as proving Yeshua’s Messiahship in Matthew may not have been viewed as “Messianic” throughout Jewish history from the fall of Jerusalem to the present. Yet, with access to much more Jewish literature and ancient sources, the strength of every Messianic claim from Matthew should be considered on a case-by-case basis—with the Tanach text principally in view.<sup>48</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew does not go to great lengths explaining First Century Jewish customs or traditions, unlike Mark, nor explaining the historical context of the events of Yeshua’s ministry and sacrifice, as Luke does. When reading Matthew, one definitely needs to have a working knowledge of First Century Judaism. Much positive illumination has come in Matthean studies conducted in the past fifty to sixty years, particularly with the greater exposure scholars have had to a wider array of Jewish literature contemporary to the First Century. A familiarity with much of this is now beginning to filter down to the average layperson, particularly via the publication of various study Bibles, even from a theologically conservative perspective (e.g., the 2005 *Archaeological Study Bible* by Zondervan).

Today’s broad Messianic community does tend to highly value the Gospel of Matthew, recognizing how integral it is for Believers to view it in light of the Tanach expectation of the Savior to come and redeem Israel. But while Matthew tends to be positively regarded, many

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<sup>36</sup> Carson and Moo, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 7:14.

<sup>38</sup> Hosea 1:11.

<sup>39</sup> Jeremiah 31:15.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Judges 13:5, 7; Isaiah 11:1; 53:2.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 9:1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 53:4.

<sup>43</sup> Isaiah 42:1-4.

<sup>44</sup> Psalm 78:2.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah 62:11.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 32:6-9.

<sup>47</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Some good resources to access, in terms of understanding Messianic expectation from the Tanach, include Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), and Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010). The various volumes of Michael Brown’s *Jewish Objections to Jesus* series (five so far from: 2000-2010).

Messianic Believers and congregational leaders significantly struggle over the language issue of the text's composition, often failing to really engage with a spectrum of opinions over the statements appearing by Papias in *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16, and with a lack of historical objectivity definitely present. At best, among many Messianics, this has led to a thought that there might be a scroll of an original Hebrew Matthew that will one day be discovered somewhere in Israel—while at worst it has led people to think that the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew.<sup>49</sup> The integrity of the canonical Greek Matthew is, quite sadly and most unfortunately, not highly valued in some Messianic quarters.<sup>50</sup> This has led some to posit various interpretations of Matthean passages that disregard the text as it exists in its final form.<sup>51</sup> To properly combat this, Messianic expositors on Matthew need to learn to carefully respect the integrity of the canonical Greek source text, while at the same time masterfully demonstrate and expound upon this Gospel as a First Century Jewish masterpiece on the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel.

In terms of Matthew's theology, Matthew 5:17-19 are undeniably the most important and impactful verses for the *halachic* orthopraxy of the Messianic movement. Our widespread conviction that Yeshua the Messiah came to uphold the validity and continuance of the Torah in His own ministry, yet with His interpretation of the Law being the correct one, is surely controversial within much of the larger Body of Messiah. In much of today's evangelical Christianity, Yeshua's fulfillment of the Torah is only thought to be in terms of its prophetic function and expectation, *not* that Believers are to necessarily obey the Law of Moses.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to this, Yeshua came to fulfill Moses' Teaching the same way as He came "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15), and this surely includes prophetic, ethical, and authoritative aspects involving our Lord's Messiahship.<sup>53</sup> Various theologians who propose that Believers are to follow an independent "law of Christ" (cf. Galatians 6:2), notably appeal to this being composed in Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7), and so today's Messianics need to probably make the extra effort to not only highly regard Yeshua's message in this teaching—but in expounding upon its definite background in the Torah and Tanach.

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<sup>49</sup> For a review of this, and related issues, consult the author's article "The Hebrew New Testament Misunderstanding" (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

<sup>50</sup> This is across the spectrum and not only includes persons in the largely independent (and in some cases, rogue) Two-House and One Law sub-movements, but also many persons in "mainline" Messianic Judaism.

<sup>51</sup> We are afraid that the Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels translation project into English (DHE), spearheaded by First Fruits of Zion/Vine of David, will ultimately not be very helpful. This is not because the Nineteenth Century Franz Delitzsch translation of the New Testament from Greek into Biblical-period Hebrew is not a worthwhile tool to possess for Messianics, even with an English translation provided of the Hebrew for those needing assistance. It is because the DHE has been marketed as being superior to our canonical Greek Gospels: "[We want] to restore these ancient Jewish teachings to their original linguistic context...[This] work is on some level an attempt to reconstruct the actual Hebrew teachings of Yeshua" (*The Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels: A Hebraic English Translation, Matthew Extract* [Marshfield, MO: Vine of David, 2010], v).

The implication drawn is that the canonical Greek text, employed for centuries by Believers (with many Christians who have highly valued the Law of Moses as a source of morality and ethics), is ultimately limiting/inferior (perhaps even invalid), *not* really containing "the actual" or even true (?) "teachings of Yeshua."

<sup>52</sup> Carson and Moo, 164.

<sup>53</sup> Consult the author's exegesis paper on Matthew 5:17-19, "Has the Law Been Fulfilled?" (appearing in *The New Testament Validates Torah*).

Not to be overlooked for the longer term future of our Messianic faith community, should be the role that Matthew 16:18 plays within our ecclesiology. Was it the Messiah's intention to build a separate *ekklēsia* or "Church" entity, independent from Israel? Or, given the likely linguistic connections between Matthew 16:18 and Jeremiah 33:7 via the Septuagint, is this none other than an affirmative promise for Yeshua to restore the assembly of Israel?<sup>54</sup> A definite area of contention will be how to adopt a proper approach to Matthew 23:2-3 as it relates to the issue of Pharisaical authority, and by extension Rabbinic authority in Judaism up until modern times. Does Yeshua actually tell His followers that they were to blindly follow the Pharisaical-Rabbinic leaders?<sup>55</sup> A resolution of the various Matthean issues germane to the Messianic movement may only come with moderate voices able to control the future discussion, which was unfortunately not that possible in the 2000s.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON MATTHEW:

**1. What event strikes you as being the most important in Matthew's account of Yeshua's early life and/or ministry?**

**2. Reading through Matthew once again, did you notice how much Matthew focuses not just on the actions of Yeshua, but also His teachings? How many of us forget to balance Yeshua's teachings with His actions, and instead focus on only one or the other?**

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<sup>54</sup> Consult the author's article "When Did 'the Church' Begin?" (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).

<sup>55</sup> Consult the author's exegesis paper on Matthew 23:2-3, "Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?", (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*), for a presentation of Yeshua giving the Pharisees and Rabbinic leaders a consultative authority in major matters, but that their rulings and traditions must be tested against their morality and attitudes.

**3. Which of the parabolic teachings of Yeshua do you consider to have the most impact on your current life today? What parables do you think you need to study or examine in more detail?**

**4. From Matthew's Gospel, what interactions between Yeshua and a particular group do you think you need to understand better? Yeshua and: His Disciples? the Pharisees? the Sadducees? the Romans? the common people?**

**5. What distinctly Jewish elements of Matthew's Gospel have you been aware of? Which Jewish elements of this text would you like to examine in more detail?**

**6. If you were a First Century Jew, what do you think would strike you about the portrayal of Yeshua that the Gospel of Matthew represents? Could you be convinced that Yeshua is the means to change your life?**

## REFLECTION ON MATTHEW'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Gospel of Matthew:*