

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. First, we will learn about the origin of each Bible book: who wrote it and when and where he wrote it. Second, we will learn about how the Bible book may be divided into parts. Third, we will learn the main contents and messages of each Bible book. Finally, we will learn how to understand some difficult parts of the Bible book.

Today's teaching is: THE INTRODUCTION OF MATTHEW - PART 1. Today we will learn how the Gospel of Matthew came into being, its characteristics and its purpose.

### **POINT 1. THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

The very first Gospel is called Matthew, the name of one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ.

#### **First. The writer of notes in the Aramaic language.**

The church father Papias, who lived from A.D. 70-155 said, "Matthew arranged the 'logia' in a Hebrew dialect, and each translated them as he was able". The word 'logia' refers to the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. This means that Matthew wrote "the things said and done by the Lord Jesus Christ" in *the Aramaic language*, which Jesus and Matthew spoke. Later the other evangelists (Gospel writers) translated and used these words and deeds in the Aramaic language to write their Gospels in the Greek language. Probably during the ministry of Jesus from A.D. 26-30, Matthew already made notes of the words and works of Jesus in his own language, Aramaic, which was almost the same as Hebrew. Later, Matthew used his own notes as well as the Gospel of Mark and his own experience and research to write the Gospel of Matthew in the Greek language. Greek was the cultural language spoken all over the Roman Empire and very many Jews lived all over the Roman Empire.

#### **Second. The writer of the Gospel of Matthew in the Greek language.**

The internal evidence and the external witness of the Christian tradition without exception say that Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, was the writer of the first Gospel. During the first century, this fact was well known, but in A.D. 125 the title "according to Matthew" was added to the Gospel so that later generations would not forget who wrote it.

Mark 2:14 says that Matthew was also called "Levi, son of Alphaeus". He is thus a Jew. Matthew is mentioned by name in his own Gospel. Matthew 9:9-10 describes how Matthew became a disciple of Jesus. It says, "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples." Later, in Matthew 10:3, Matthew is chosen as one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. When Matthew received the call to follow Jesus, he was a tax collector in the city of Capernaum in Galilee. Therefore he was probably in the service of Herod Antipas and collected taxes for the Roman rulers of Galilee. The Jews hated the tax collectors, regarded them as traitors and collaborators with the enemy and put them on one line with the worst of 'sinners' in their society. The Roman province of Galilee was known as 'the Galilee of the Gentiles', because many Greek speaking Gentiles lived among the Jews in Galilee. This fact means that Matthew must have known the Greek language as well as his own mother tongue, Aramaic. Matthew's quotations from the Old Testament show that he was acquainted with more than one language. His quotations are sometimes from the Hebrew Old Testament, sometimes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament and sometimes a kind of paraphrase in which elements of both the Hebrew and the Greek languages are used. Moreover, a tax collector's duty was to make written reports of the moneys he collected. Matthew was therefore the logical person to take notes on the words and works of Jesus during the time it happened. Although we do not read much about Matthew in the Four Gospels, this was probably his most important task, *to keep a running record of the words and the works of Jesus while he was still on earth*. Later, he himself and the other Gospel writers used these notes to write their Gospels.

Matthew was an intelligent and deep religious Jew. He certainly knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. Thus when the Holy Spirit later inspired and guided him, he was the kind of man who would be able to interpret the Old Testament prophecies in the light of the fulfilment by Jesus Christ.

The earliest church fathers in history abundantly quote from the Gospel of Matthew. And the church fathers without exception maintain that Matthew wrote "the Gospel according to Matthew".

## **POINT 2. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

Because Matthew made use of the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures, which were written on scrolls and kept in the synagogues, he must have written his Gospel before the time the Christians broke their relationship with the synagogues. Because Matthew makes many references to events and situations in and around Jerusalem, some of which he reports exclusively, Palestine must be the general region where he wrote his Gospel. Therefore, Matthew must have written his Gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and probably from Jerusalem.

The church father Irenaeus says, "Matthew published his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and establishing the church". He uses the word "establishing" not as "founding" the church of Rome, but, as described in Philippians 1:12-18, of "strengthening" the church through his preaching from prison in Rome. As Paul was in Rome till about A.D. 62 and Peter was probably in Rome A.D. 63, we must conclude that the Gospel of Matthew was written about A.D. 62 from Jerusalem.

## **POINT 3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

### **First. The Gospel of Matthew is orderly and beautiful.**

A characteristic of the Gospel of Matthew is that whenever Matthew finds a theme, he dwells on it. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew contains six beautiful and important sermons in between his description of the historic events in the life of Jesus. Matthew's emphasis in his Gospel is "the teachings of Jesus", while the emphasis in the Gospel of Mark is "the actions of Jesus".

### **Second. The Gospel of Matthew is prophetic.**

#### **One. The Gospel of Matthew looks backwards and describes how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.**

More than forty times he says, "What was said through the prophet ... was fulfilled" (2:17). For example, in Matthew 1:23 Jesus fulfilled the prophecy about "Immanuel". In Matthew 2:6 he fulfilled the prophecy that he would be born in Bethlehem as the ruler and shepherd of Israel. And in Matthew 3:3 he fulfilled the prophecy that he was the LORD "JaHWeH" (Isa 40:3!) that took on the human nature and came to earth and that John the Baptist was the one who prepared the way before him. Not only does Jesus fulfil these Old Testament prophecies, but according to the Bible he himself is the Prophet who prophesied through the Old Testament prophets! In 1 Peter 1:10-11 we read, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ (!) in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." Also Revelation 19:10 says, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy!". Thus, Jesus is *the Prophet* in the Old Testament and through his Spirit he prophesied through the Old Testament prophets!

#### **Two. The Gospel of Matthew also depicts Jesus as "the Prophet" in the New Testament!**

In Matthew 12:41 he says that he is greater than the prophet Jonah, and that Jonah's prophecy is a type of Jesus being dead for three days. In Matthew 13:13-15, Jesus prophesies the same prophecy as the prophet Isaiah, that there will be people who hear the Gospel, but because they have hardened their hearts, they will not be able to understand or receive it. And in Matthew 17:5 God himself says that Jesus Christ is the Prophet that Moses in Exodus 18:15-19 prophesied would come. He says, "Listen to him!"

The Gospel of Matthew not only looks backwards, but also looks forward and describes how Jesus as Prophet prophesies his own suffering, death and resurrection. At least five times Jesus prophesies his future suffering in the Gospel of Matthew. For example, in Matthew 16:21 is written, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

In Matthew 23:37-25:46 Jesus as Prophet prophesies vividly in details the future events concerning the fall of Jerusalem, the suffering of the Church and his majestic second coming to judge the believers and unbelievers of the world according to the way they lived. He prophesies that the wicked unbelievers will go to eternal punishment, but the righteous believers will go to eternal life (25:46).

Thus, although each of the Four Gospels picture Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our great Prophet, sympathetic High Priest and eternal King, it is especially his prophetic office that is emphasised in the Gospel of Matthew.

### **Third. The Gospel of Matthew is Jewish.**

Matthew shows that he is a Jew in several ways. When Matthew wrote his Gospel in the Greek language, his Jewish background remains evident all the time.

#### Matthew's quotations from the Old Testament.

They are either his direct translations from the Hebrew Old Testament or his quotations from the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

#### Matthew has a strong sense of divine theology.

He is very convinced about God's plan and its realisation in history. More than Mark, Luke and John, Matthew emphasises the fulfilment of prophecy.

#### Matthew was acquainted with Jewish numerology.

For the Jews the numbers were spiritual symbols. Matthew likes to use the number 'seven'. In Matthew 1:17, he represents Jesus Christ as the climax of the three fourteens, that is, as the beginner of *the seventh seven*. In Matthew 13 Jesus told seven parables of the kingdom. In Matthew 23 he spoke seven woes against the Pharisees.

#### Matthew uses the term 'the kingdom of the heavens'.

He does this more often than the term 'the kingdom of God' (12:28; 21:31), although they essentially mean the same thing. In Greek, Matthew literally uses the plural the kingdom of "the heavens" just as in Genesis 1:1 God created "the heavens". Matthew is thinking of God, not only as the Creator of the heavens, that is, the universe, but also as the Ruler of the heavens, that is, the universe. Matthew is also thinking of the kingdom as being established from heaven, that is, from God, as in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 2:44 the prophet says, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever!" In Daniel 7:15-16 the prophet says, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. ... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." The kingdom of heaven embraces the whole created universe, including everything that is presently ruled over by other kingdoms on earth!

#### Matthew emphasises the importance of the law.

In Matthew 5:17 Jesus says that he did not come to *abolish* the law, but to *fulfil* it. In Matthew chapters 5-7, Jesus teaches the ethical consequences of the law. In Matthew 22:36-40, Jesus teaches that all the books of the Law and the Prophets, that is, the whole Old Testament, is summarised by the great law of loving God and your neighbour. And in Matthew 23:23, Jesus teaches that the important matters in the law are justice, mercy and faithfulness.

#### Matthew stresses the importance that the gospel should first be preached to the Jews.

In Matthew 10:5-7, Jesus commands his disciples not to go to the Gentiles, but rather to the lost sheep of Israel and preach to them that the kingdom of heaven is near (also 15:24). Matthew is the only Gospel which calls Jerusalem 'the holy city' (4:5) and that does not need to explain the Jewish customs, because its original Jewish readers knew their own customs (15:2).

### **Fourth. The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with missionary work in the whole world.**

Although the Gospel of Matthew is primarily directed to the Jews, it is definitely directed to every person in the world! From the very beginning, Matthew clearly shows how the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecy stands in relationship to the whole world and not just to Israel. In Matthew chapters 1-2 he records that the direct ancestors of Jesus included *foreigners* such as Tamar, Rahab and Ruth and that wise men from the East came to worship Jesus at his birth. In Matthew 8:5-13 he heals the servant of a Roman centurion and in Matthew 15:21-28 the daughter of a Canaanite woman. He especially praises the faith of these two foreigners! In Matthew 8:11-12 and 21:43 he prophesies that the kingdom of God will be taken away from the Jews as a nation and will be given to all kinds of people who will produce the fruit of the kingdom. In Matthew 22:9-10 he teaches that the gospel concerning the kingdom of God should be preached to anyone whom his servants can find! Finally, after Jesus Christ finished his work of atonement on the cross, he commissioned his disciples with a world-wide task. He commanded them, "Go and make disciples of all nations!" You may ask the question, how is it possible that the same evangelist (Gospel writer) directs his message at the same time to the Jews and to the Gentiles? The answer is written in Acts 13:46. Paul and Barnabas boldly answered the Jews, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord commanded us, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" And in Romans 1:16 Paul says, "The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." After Christ's completed work on the cross, there is still *only one chosen race*, consisting of all the believers in Christ, no matter to which race or nationality they

belong by nature. The distinctions that marked the Old Testament period have been taken away. This is clearly taught in the following Bible passages: Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:7-9,26-29; Ephesians 2:14-16,19; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9; 7:9 and 22:17.

#### **POINT 4. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

The purpose of the Gospel of Matthew was *to win the Jews for Christ*, either by gaining Jews who were still unconverted or by strengthening the Jews who were already converted. On the one hand, Matthew refutes the nationalistic expectation of the Jews in the days of Jesus that the Messiah would conquer all their earthly enemies and establish an earthly kingdom in the world of which the Jews would be the rulers. Instead, he emphasises that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has been given all authority in heaven and on earth and that he is not establishing a political kingdom on earth, but he is establishing the kingdom of God now in the hearts and lives of Christians and after his second coming over everything on earth. On the other hand, he shows how Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and thus is the long expected Messiah. According to God's providential guidance, the Old Testament prophetic books are immediately followed in the New Testament by the Gospel of Matthew, which shows how these prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In harmony with the rule stated in Romans 1:16, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile", and the command stated in Acts 1:8, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea", the Gospel of Matthew is especially the Gospel directed to the Jews. In contrast, the Gospel of Mark is especially written for the Romans and the Gospel of Luke is especially written for the Greeks. Although all these three Gospels present Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, the Gospel of John stresses the fact that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of people from every nation in the world. Thus it is very true what Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

#### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read through Mark chapters 1 to 5.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".