

the gospel according to st matthew

The Gospel According to St. Matthew is one of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. It is traditionally attributed to St. Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve apostles, who is believed to have written this gospel to present Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and to address both Jewish and Gentile audiences. This gospel is unique in its structure, themes, and teachings, and it holds a significant place in Christian theology and worship.

Authorship and Historical Context

The authorship of the Gospel according to St. Matthew has been a topic of debate among scholars. Traditionally, it has been attributed to Matthew, the former tax collector and disciple of Jesus. However, some modern scholars argue that the gospel may have been written by a member of Matthew's community or a follower of his teachings.

1. **Date of Composition:** Most scholars date the composition of Matthew's Gospel to around A.D. 80-90. This timeline places it after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which had a profound impact on Jewish society and the early Christian community.
2. **Audience:** Matthew's Gospel was likely written for a mixed audience of Jewish Christians and Gentile converts. This is reflected in its emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and its teachings that bridge Jewish and Gentile perspectives.
3. **Purpose:** The primary purpose of Matthew's Gospel is to establish Jesus as the Messiah and to offer a guide for living a Christian life. Through his genealogy, teachings, and miracles, Matthew aims to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Structure and Content

The Gospel of Matthew is structured in a way that combines narrative and discourse. It consists of a series of stories about Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection interspersed with five major discourses.

1. The Birth and Early Life of Jesus (Chapters 1-2)

Matthew opens with a genealogy that traces Jesus' lineage back to Abraham, emphasizing His Jewish heritage. This genealogy is significant because it connects Jesus to the promises made to the patriarchs.

- **Nativity Narrative:** The birth of Jesus is described with an emphasis on its miraculous nature, including the virgin birth and the visit of the Magi. This narrative reinforces the theme of Jesus as the prophetic fulfillment.

2. The Ministry of Jesus (Chapters 3-20)

This section includes the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, the Sermon on the Mount, and various miracles and parables.

- Sermon on the Mount (Chapters 5-7): This is one of the most famous sections of the Gospel, containing teachings such as the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and ethical guidelines for Christian living. Key themes include love, humility, and righteousness.
- Miracles and Parables: Matthew includes numerous accounts of Jesus performing miracles, which serve as signs of His divine authority. The parables, like the Parable of the Sower, illustrate the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. The Passion and Resurrection (Chapters 21-28)

The final chapters of Matthew focus on the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and the Great Commission.

- Triumphal Entry and Last Supper: Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, His teachings during the Last Supper, and His trial highlight the culmination of His earthly ministry.
- Crucifixion and Resurrection: Matthew provides an account of the crucifixion that emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy. The resurrection is presented as the cornerstone of Christian faith, affirming Jesus' victory over sin and death.
- The Great Commission (28:16-20): The gospel concludes with Jesus commissioning His disciples to spread the gospel to all nations, emphasizing the universal scope of His message.

Theological Themes

The Gospel of Matthew is rich with theological themes that have shaped Christian doctrine and practice.

1. Jesus as the Fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew constantly references Old Testament scriptures to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets. This theme is foundational for understanding Jesus' identity and mission.

2. The Kingdom of Heaven

One of the central themes of Matthew's teachings is the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus uses parables and teachings to describe the nature of this kingdom, highlighting its values, such as:

- Righteousness
- Mercy
- Forgiveness
- Inclusivity

3. Discipleship and Ethical Living

Matthew emphasizes the importance of discipleship and ethical living. The Sermon on the Mount serves as a guide for how followers of Jesus are to conduct their lives, focusing on inner transformation rather than mere external compliance with the law.

Literary Style and Influence

Matthew's Gospel is distinguished by its literary style, which combines narrative, poetry, and teaching.

1. Use of Fulfillment Quotations

Matthew frequently cites Old Testament scriptures to show how events in Jesus' life fulfill prophecies. This technique not only validates Jesus' messianic claims but also serves to connect the New Testament with the Old Testament.

2. Parables and Teachings

The use of parables is a significant feature of Matthew's Gospel. These stories convey profound spiritual truths in a simple, relatable manner, making them accessible to a wide audience.

Impact on Christian Tradition

The Gospel according to St. Matthew has had a lasting impact on Christian theology, liturgy, and practice.

1. Liturgical Use

Matthew's Gospel is frequently used in Christian liturgy, especially in the readings during the liturgical year. Key passages, such as the Beatitudes and the Great Commission, are often referenced in sermons and teachings.

2. Influence on Christian Ethics

The ethical teachings found in Matthew, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, have shaped Christian moral thought. Concepts of love, mercy, and justice continue to resonate in contemporary Christian discussions on social issues.

3. Evangelism and Missions

The Great Commission has inspired countless missionary endeavors throughout history, emphasizing the call to spread the gospel and make disciples of all nations.

Conclusion

The Gospel according to St. Matthew is a rich and multifaceted text that serves as a cornerstone of Christian faith and practice. Through its unique perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus, it emphasizes His role as the fulfillment of prophecy, the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the importance of ethical living and discipleship. As Christians continue to engage with this gospel, its teachings remain relevant, inviting believers to deepen their faith, embody the values of the Kingdom, and share the good news with others. Matthew's Gospel not only records the life of Jesus but also invites us into a transformative relationship with Him, encouraging us to live out the principles of love, mercy, and grace in a world that desperately needs them.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the primary theme of the Gospel according to St. Matthew?

The primary theme of the Gospel of Matthew is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, emphasizing Jesus as the Messiah and King.

How does St. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus differ from those in the other Gospels?

St. Matthew's genealogy traces Jesus' lineage through Joseph back to Abraham, highlighting His Jewish heritage, while the Gospel of Luke traces it back to Adam, emphasizing the universal nature of Jesus' mission.

What unique teachings of Jesus are found in the Gospel of St. Matthew?

The Gospel of Matthew contains several unique teachings, including the Sermon on the Mount, which features the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, focusing on moral and ethical living.

How does St. Matthew portray the relationship between Jesus and the Jewish law?

St. Matthew portrays Jesus as a teacher who fulfills the Jewish law rather than abolishing it, emphasizing the importance of both faith and adherence to the commandments.

What significance does the 'Great Commission' have in St. Matthew's Gospel?

The 'Great Commission' in Matthew 28:19-20 is significant as it commands the disciples to spread the Gospel to all nations, establishing the foundation for the Christian mission.

How does St. Matthew address the issue of discipleship?

St. Matthew emphasizes the cost of discipleship, detailing the sacrifices and commitments required to follow Jesus, particularly through parables and teachings.

What role do women play in the Gospel of St. Matthew?

Women are included in the genealogy of Jesus, and significant female figures like Mary and the women at the tomb illustrate the vital role women play in the narrative of Jesus' life and resurrection.

What are some key miracles performed by Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew?

Key miracles in Matthew include the healing of the sick, raising the dead, feeding the 5,000, and walking on water, which demonstrate Jesus' authority and compassion.

How is the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven presented in St. Matthew's Gospel?

The concept of the Kingdom of Heaven is central to Matthew's Gospel, presented as both a present reality and a future hope, characterized by righteousness, peace, and a relationship with God.

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