

CHAPTER TWO

FOUNDATION BOOKS (1)

Matthew–Mark

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the **synoptic gospels**. *Synoptic* means *taking a common or similar view*. There is a great deal of overlap in these three Gospels; but each arranges the material and tells the story from a particular point of view and for a particular audience. In this chapter we will survey the first two of the Gospels.

40th Book of the Bible Gospel of Matthew The Jewish Gospel

The name *Matthew* means *gift of God*. The author was also known by the name *Levi*. Matthew was *the son of Alphaeus* (Mark 2:14). He had a brother named James who was also chosen by Jesus as an apostle (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). His mother may have been one of several women named Mary in the New Testament. She kept vigil at the foot of the cross with the mother of Jesus (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40).

Before his call to discipleship, Matthew was a tax collector. His tax booth was located at Capernaum on the main north-south highway from Damascus to Egypt. Matthew's duty was to collect

“toll” or “transport” taxes from locals carrying their goods to market as well as from long-distance caravans. He was an employee of Herod Antipas who ruled Galilee as a Tetrarch appointed by Rome. A *Tetrarch* was a king of sorts who ruled a small territory subject to oversight of Roman authorities.

Legend has it that during the early years of the church Matthew traveled to Ethiopia. There he became associated with Candace, identified with the eunuch of Acts 8:27. The legend goes on to relate that Matthew died a martyr’s death in Ethiopia.

Matthew was well qualified to pen the earliest Gospel. First, by training he must have been a meticulous record keeper. He was also an apostle of Jesus. He was therefore an eyewitness of most of the events that he reports in his Gospel.

Matthew’s Gospel contains twenty-eight chapters, 1,071 verses, and 23,684 words. These statistics make Matthew the third largest book of the New Testament.

Situation

Matthew’s Gospel dates to about AD 50. By the year AD 50 the church had survived twenty years without any official or inspired record of the life of her Lord. Most of those who made up the church at this time were of Jewish background. Matthew determined to provide for these believers a teaching manual and an evangelistic tool.

That Matthew had a Jewish target audience is indicated by the content of the book. First, Jews were interested in the Old Testament predictions concerning the Messiah. In the first Gospel Jesus declared that twenty-one prophecies had been fulfilled. Matthew himself pointed out another twenty-one predictions fulfilled in the events of the life of Christ. None of the other Gospels comes close to this number of fulfillment claims.

Second, Jews held the Law of Moses in great respect. They were concerned about the attitude of Jesus toward the Law. Matthew’s Gospel contains many positive statements that Jesus made regarding the Law of Moses.

Third, every religious Jew knew that the Messiah had to come from the line of David. Matthew takes pains to trace the legal ancestry of Jesus (through Joseph his legal father) back to David.

Fourth, Jews were expecting God to establish a glorious kingdom on earth. Matthew mentioned the kingdom fifty-six times, more than any of the other three Gospels.

Plan

The Gospel of Matthew contains sermons and parables of Jesus as well as a narrative account of his ministry. This material is organized in a most orderly format. The former tax collector displays organizational genius. This is especially evident in the way he handles the genealogy of Jesus (1:17) and the account of Jesus' temptation (4:1, 11).

Structural plan. The key word in the structure of Matthew is the word *finished* (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The Gospel is easily divided into seven sections: a beginning and an end with five teaching sections between. These sections of teaching are: 1) the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7); 2) commissioning of the Twelve (ch. 10); 3) sermon by the sea (ch. 13); 4) guidelines for kingdom citizens (ch. 18); and 5) warnings about the end of the age (chs. 24-25). Thus Matthew appears to highlight the teaching ministry of Jesus.

The following outline of Matthew's Gospel is appealing because it brings out the book's emphasis on Jesus' royalty:

- ❖ **Preparation for the King** (1:1-4:11)
- ❖ **Principles of the King** (4:12-7:29)
- ❖ **Power of the King** (8:1-10:42)
- ❖ **Program of the King** (11:1-13:52)
- ❖ **Purpose of the King** (13:53-18:35)
- ❖ **Problems of the King** (19:1-25:46)
- ❖ **Passion of the King** (26:1-28:20)

Geographical plan. The story of Jesus unfolds in what is now Israel. His ministry took place largely in the northern part of the

land around the **Sea of Galilee**. Jesus, however, made several trips to **Jerusalem** in the region of Judea. He also ministered briefly in **Samaria** (the region between Galilee and Judea) and in **Perea** east of the Jordan River. Geographically the material in Matthew falls into four divisions:

- ❖ **Galilee and Judea** (1:1–4:11)
- ❖ **Galilee** (4:12–18:35)
- ❖ **Perea and Judea** (19:1–25:46)
- ❖ **Judea and Galilee** (26:1–28:20)

Chronological plan. Matthew begins with Jesus' birth about 5 BC and concludes with his final commission to his disciples in AD 30. The book covers about thirty-five years, with primary emphasis on the 3.5 years of Jesus' ministry.

Biographical plan. Of course the focus of this Gospel is on Jesus. Matthew shows that the carpenter who became an itinerant preacher is truly the Jewish Messiah and our Savior. Among the disciples, clearly Matthew highlights *Peter*. He was the vocal and impulsive leader of the Twelve. Jesus' antagonists throughout the book are the Pharisees. They were zealous legalists who stressed the traditions of the Jewish elders even at the expense of the plain teaching of the word of God.

Eternal Purpose

The immediate purpose of the Gospel of Matthew is to provide a topical account of the life of Christ for the Jewish Christian community of Syria-Palestine. The ultimate purpose of the book is to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament.

Matthew brackets his entire account between two key thesis statements. In Christ God was uniquely present with us in the flesh (1:23). He will be with us to the end of the present age (28:20). Matthew reinforces his brackets with a supporting thought in 18:20. Jesus continues to be with us whenever two or three gather in his name.

Clearly Matthew had an instructional purpose in writing his Gospel. He systematically presents the claims, credentials, ethical and theological teachings of the Lord Jesus. For this reason Matthew has been used as a teaching manual since the early years of the church.

Acclaim

Matthew paints a portrait of Jesus as the *Promised Sovereign*. The word *promised* refers to Matthew's abundant citation of Old Testament predictions. He saw Jesus as the fulfillment of centuries of Jewish longing for a Messiah (*Anointed One*)—a Prophet, Priest, and King par excellence. The word *Sovereign* refers to Jesus' kingly office. It is this office that is especially highlighted by Matthew. Yet Jesus distanced himself from current notions of a physical, earthly, material throne and reign. Matthew's account begins with the search for a king (2:2). In Jesus' final teaching parable, one recorded only by Matthew, he portrays himself as a King at the final judgment (25:31-46). At the end of Jesus' life Matthew records the mockery of his claim to kingship (27:42).

Keys

The key chapter in the Gospel of Matthew is chapter 12. In this chapter the religious leaders formally reject Jesus' claims to be the Messiah.

The key verse in the book is this: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near* (Matthew 3:2). One could also make an argument that the key verses are 16:16-19 (Peter's great confession) or 28:18-20 (the Great Commission).

Key phrases in the book include *kingdom of heaven* (33) and *might be/was fulfilled* (9).

Key words include *king* (20) and *blessed* (18).

Special Features

Some interesting facts about the Gospel of Matthew that make it stand out in the sacred collection are these:

- ❖ According to ancient authorities, Matthew was originally written in the Hebrew language. If so, it was very

early translated into Greek. The oldest manuscripts that we have of Matthew are in Greek.

- ❖ From the earliest days this Gospel was the most widely read and in some respects the most influential of the four Gospels.
- ❖ Matthew contains the most complete record of what Jesus taught. Fully sixty percent of 1,071 verses in this Gospel contain the spoken word of Jesus.
- ❖ More than any of the other Gospels, Matthew quotes the Old Testament—at least fifty-seven times, compared with thirty in the runner-up, Mark.
- ❖ In Christian symbolism Matthew is represented by a lion.
- ❖ Matthew is the only Gospel to mention the church (16:18; 18:17).
- ❖ Matthew's narrative material is more concise than the parallel narratives in the other Gospels.
- ❖ Matthew records ten parables not recorded in the other Gospels.
- ❖ Matthew records three miracles not recorded elsewhere: the two blind men (9:27-31); the dumb demoniac (9:32-33); the coin in the fish's mouth (17:24-27).
- ❖ In the teaching of Jesus Matthew emphasizes the kingdom of heaven. He points out repeatedly that Christ's kingdom will include Gentiles as well as Jews.

HEAR

Through Matthew's Gospel God has spoken. We, like Samuel of old, must hear the message. From those passages that are unique to the Gospel of Matthew, here are some of the outstanding chapters:

- ❖ Jesus' birth and visit of Magi (Matthew 1-2)
- ❖ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- ❖ Parables: weeds, treasure, and pearl (Matthew 13)
- ❖ Peter's great confession (Matthew 16)

- ❖ Several details about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection are unique to Matthew (Matthew 27–28)
- ❖ Parables of ten virgins and the talents (Matthew 25)

Here are some favorite lines from the first Gospel:

- ❖ *Do to others what you would have them do to you* (7:12).
The Golden Rule.
- ❖ *Man does not live on bread alone* (4:4). A quotation from Deuteronomy.
- ❖ *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth* (5:5).
- ❖ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (28:19).

41st Book of the Bible
Gospel of Mark
The Roman Gospel

The author’s full name was John Mark. He is mentioned eight times in the rest of the New Testament. *John* is the shortened form of a Hebrew name meaning *Yahweh has shown grace*. *Mark* is a shortened form of *Marcus*, a Latin name. It was not uncommon for first-century Jews to have a Greek or Roman name in addition to their Hebrew name.

Mark’s father is never mentioned. His mother was one of several New Testament women named *Mary*. She was a wealthy Christian who lived in a large house in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). *Mary* was related to *Barnabas* (Colossians 4:10).

What direct association Mark had with Jesus, if any, is not stated in the Gospels. An early Christian writer says that Mark “was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord.” Many think, however, that Mark was the anonymous young man of Mark 14:51, who saved himself from arrest in the Garden by fleeing naked.

Mark rubbed elbows with the greatest leaders in the early church. He was a companion of Paul and *Barnabas* on their first missionary journey. He accompanied *Barnabas* on the second

Cyprus campaign (Acts 15:39). Mark was an associate of Peter in Rome (1 Peter 5:13). He was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Colossians 4:10). In Philemon 24 Mark is associated with Luke. He was working with Timothy in ministry when Paul sent for him (2 Timothy 4:11).

The Book of Mark contains sixteen chapters, 678 verses, and 15,171 words.

Situation

Mark was published shortly after the death of Peter about AD 68. As Peter began to age, Mark became concerned about recording his recollections concerning the events in Christ's life. The earliest statement about the origin of the second Gospel describes Mark as "the interpreter of Peter." The same source says that Mark wrote down accurately all that Peter remembered, whether of sayings or deeds of Christ, but not in order.

Since Mark was working in Rome at the time he compiled his Gospel, it is reasonable to assume that he wrote primarily for Romans. This assumption is supported by six pieces of evidence. First, the size of the second Gospel is what would appeal to the Roman mind. They were not a people who were given to flowery literary composition. Second, Mark emphasizes the deeds of Jesus. He records nineteen miracles in the sixteen chapters of the book. Romans were people who appreciated power and action.

Third, the refrain *straightway* (KJV) or *immediately* (NIV) is used thirty-six times by Mark. This presents a picture of Jesus constantly on the go. He is busy, busy, busy. This picture would appeal to the energetic Romans. Fourth, Mark contains few references to the Old Testament. One would hardly expect Romans to appreciate the significance of prophetic fulfillment. Fifth, on occasion Mark uses Latin terms. At times he interjects parenthetical explanations of Jewish phrases and customs, of Israel's geography and of Aramaic words that would be familiar to natives of Palestine (e.g., 7:3). These explanations suggest that he was writing for an audience far removed from Palestine. Finally, Mark gives prominence to Gentiles in his Gospel (11:17; 13:10; 14:9).

Plan

Mark's Gospel does not indicate the careful arrangement of either Matthew or Luke. Mark aimed to produce an action-packed account of Jesus' life such as would appeal to red-blooded Romans. His account jumps from one miracle of Jesus to another, and from one confrontation to another. In this Gospel Jesus silences demons, feeds thousands, calms storms, walks on water, endures suffering heroically, and dies only to rise from the dead.

Mark uses the Greek present tense 151 times to depict action in progress. He thereby draws his readers into the scenes he sketches. Though more selective in the episodes he includes, Mark's vivid descriptions are often more detailed than the parallel accounts in the other Gospels. Mark's vigorous and blunt Greek reflects the language of the common man. For this reason the Gospel of Mark is the favorite of many, especially men.

Structural plan. The second Gospel puts the emphasis on the ministry of God's Servant Jesus. The book has two main divisions with an appropriate introduction and conclusion. The outline of Mark looks like this:

- ❖ **Preparation for the Servant** (1:1-13)
- ❖ **Ministration of the Servant** (1:14–8:30)
- ❖ **Rejection of the Servant** (8:31–15:47)
- ❖ **Exaltation of the Servant** (ch. 16)

Chronological plan. The focus of Mark is narrower than that of Matthew. Mark says nothing of the birth of Jesus. Romans would not particularly be interested in birth stories. So the second Gospel covers only about 3.5 years—from Jesus' baptism to his ascension. Mark, however, does not appear to follow chronological sequence in the arrangement of his book. He seems to be more concerned about facilitating memorization of the material. Stories and sayings are linked by keywords or similarity of subject.

Biographical plan. Of course, Jesus is the star of the Gospel. The supporting cast is the Twelve. Mark mentions the Twelve Apostles more than any other Gospel.

Geographical plan. Mark is similar to Matthew. The first two Gospels focus on action that takes place mostly in Galilee and Jerusalem.

Eternal Purpose

The immediate purpose of the Gospel of Mark is to record for the believers in Rome the recollections of Peter as both a training manual and an evangelistic tool. The ultimate purpose of the book is to demonstrate that Jesus is the powerful servant of the Father.

The basic lesson taught in this book is that we must follow Jesus in the path of service.

Acclaim

Mark paints a portrait of Jesus as the *Powerful Servant*. His power was exhibited throughout his ministry in the numerous miracles Mark records.

Mark focuses on the deeds of Jesus more than his declarations. Because this is the story of God's Servant, Mark omits Jesus' ancestry and birth. He moves right into his public ministry. The way this Servant worked is a model for his followers. Jesus acted *wisely* in his selection of his close associates (1:14-20; 2:13-14; 3:14-19). He acted *authoritatively* in dealing with spiritual and natural forces (1:21-28; 4:35-41; 5:1-43; 6:47-51; 9:14-29). Jesus worked *compassionately* (1:29-34, 40-45), *prayerfully* (1:35; 6:46; 14:32-41), and *unselfishly* (3:20; 6:31). He also acted with *dignity* (11:1-33). Jesus faced his final confrontation with his adversaries *fearlessly* (chs. 14-15).

This Gospel presents a more detailed picture of the suffering of Jesus than do the other three Gospels. In the earlier chapters Mark highlights the pain Jesus endured in his confrontations with spiritual forces and hostile religious authorities. He even experienced rejection from his family and closest friends. The climax of his suffering, however, comes in the concluding chapters of Mark. Over one third of the material in Mark focuses on the last week of Jesus' life.

Keys

The key chapter in the Gospel of Mark is chapter 8. In this chapter Peter confesses Jesus as Christ. For his part, Christ begins to focus his ministry on preparing his disciples for what they will experience in Jerusalem within a few weeks. Prior to chapter 8 the focus is on Christ's service. Following chapter 8 the emphasis is on his sacrifice.

This twofold emphasis of Mark is captured in the key verse: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (10:45).

The key phrases in the book include *in those days* (6) and *verily I say* (15 KJV).

The Key word in Mark is *straightway* or *immediately* (36).

Special Features

Some of the unusual features of the second Gospel that set it apart within the sacred collection are these:

- ❖ In the early days of the church Mark had the nickname *kolobodaktylos* = *stumpy-fingered*. This may refer either to a physical peculiarity on the part of the author or to some strange stylistic features of his Gospel.
- ❖ Mark's Gospel contains fewer teachings of Jesus than any other Gospel.
- ❖ In Christian symbolism Mark is represented by an ox, an animal that connotes service and sacrifice.
- ❖ Of the sixteen chapters in this book, six are devoted to the final week of Jesus' life.
- ❖ To reduce opposition until his mission was complete, Jesus repeatedly told people not to say anything about his identity or what miracles he had done.
- ❖ Jesus used parables as coded messages to his followers—messages hidden from his opponents (Mark 4:10-12).
- ❖ At least 601 of the 678 verses in Mark (89%) repeat verses from Matthew's Gospel.
- ❖ The oldest manuscripts conclude the Gospel of Mark with the women running from the tomb, too afraid to

tell anyone what they had discovered (Mark 16:8). The longer ending, familiar from the KJV, appears in the majority of manuscripts.

- ❖ The majority of Christian scholars regard Mark's Gospel as the earliest of the four primarily because it is the shortest.
- ❖ Mark records over half of Christ's thirty-five miracles, the highest proportion in the Gospels.

H E A R

To sample some of what Mark has to offer in his Gospel, read the following outstanding chapters:

- ❖ Call of the Twelve (Mark 3)
- ❖ Healing of the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5)
- ❖ Jesus and the Phoenician woman (Mark 7)

Here are some famous lines from the Gospel of Mark:

- ❖ *Many who are first will be last, and the last first* (10:31).
- ❖ *I will make you fishers of men* (1:17).
- ❖ *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.* (12:17).