

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Introduction

The Gospel according to Matthew both places Jesus within the traditions of the chosen people of God and shows how Jesus takes apart these traditions and brings them to fulfillment. The author goes to great lengths to show how the events in Jesus' life fulfill Old Testament prophecies and therefore, Matthew's Gospel has a very Jewish flavor especially since.

The Gospel uses a series of titles derived from the Old Testament to identify Jesus: *Son of David, Messiah, Christ, Wisdom, Son of Man*, yet no title by itself can describe Jesus.

A major part of the Gospel is to show continuity between the old Israel and God's new work in Christ. Matthew is convinced that God's chosen people and those who will inherit the kingdom are the ones who follow Jesus. For Matthew, the Jews that do not follow Jesus' way are said to belong to "their synagogues" or the "synagogues of the hypocrites"

Source and Structure

A Gospel is a literary form that is very similar to a biography since it follows the story of Jesus of Nazareth from his birth to his death and resurrection. It is a collection of stories that paint a picture of a very powerful and real Jesus. The stories invite the reader to become part of the story of Jesus the Son of God and Messiah. The author of Matthew's Gospel drew from several sources but relied heavily on Mark's Gospel. Additionally, the Gospel's of Matthew and Luke are strikingly similar in about 200 verses which leads us to reasonably assume that although independent of each other, both evangelists used a common source. It is believed by scholars that this source was a collection of Jesus' sayings that was circulated in Greek during the middle of the first century A.D. The source has been named "Q" from the German word meaning "source" (*Quelle*). But Matthew also had access to particular stories and or sayings that are not found in other Gospel accounts. These have been named "M". Matthew's Gospel differs from Mark in that the first two chapters focus on Jesus' birth and infancy whereas Mark's began with Jesus as an adult. Where Mark's Gospel ends with the discovery of the empty tomb, Matthew adds the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples in Galilee.

Authorship and Setting

Authenticity of the author was not an important issue to people at the time the Gospel's were written. The author makes no claim that he is an eyewitness to the events described. What is known is that the author was a Christian who was very familiar with Jewish teaching methods. The author probably lived in Syria (Antioch?) or another area with strong Jewish influence during the last part of the 1st century A.D. (about 85 A.D.). The author's main purpose was to show that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah will inherit the kingdom of God. There is no evidence that Matthew the tax collector turned apostle actually wrote the Gospel. It is plausible that the apostle contributed to the writing or that the Church to which the Gospel was written had taken Matthew the Apostle as its patron saint.

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It appears that the Gospel was written about 50 years after the death of Jesus and about 15 years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. This conclusion is based on what appears to be a description of the events of the Temple destruction in verses 21:41, 22:7, and 27:25.

Matthew's community was probably a mixed group of gentile and Jew but predominantly Jewish Christians. Matthew's Gospel encourages the Jewish Christian community to recognize itself as a legitimate heir of God's promises and that these promises include the gentiles.

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I. The Genealogy of Jesus and His Itinerary 1:1-2:23

The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah 1:1-1-17

The beginning of Matthew's Gospel contains a genealogy that confirms Jesus' place in Jewish tradition. Jesus is a descendant (the son of) Abraham to whom the promises were given at the beginning, and he is also a descendant (the son of) David. The genealogy also shows that Jesus is the continuation of the Davidic line after the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C.

Matthew's genealogy is arranged in three groups of fourteen names each and traces Israel's history to its beginning with Abraham, then to its greatest moment with King David followed by its lowest moment in the Babylonian Exile. From here it comes to fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah. (Luke traces Jesus' roots back to Adam Lk 3:23-38)

Four women are included in the genealogy which is unusual for Jewish genealogies especially since what is known of these women gives them a questionable reputation.

1. Tamar – disguised herself as a prostitute and conceived sons through her relationship with her father-in-law Judah.
2. Rahab – a prostitute living in Jericho and who collaborated with Joshua's spies.
3. Ruth – a Moabite who became part of the Israelite people through marriage.
4. Bathsheba – wife of Uriah. King David arranged for Uriah's death and then took her as his wife.

The inclusion of these four women prepares the reader for the unusual birth of Jesus that is narrated in the following passages.

The Birth of Jesus 1:18-25

The Story of Jesus' birth centers on Joseph's decision to make Jesus an heir to the Davidic promise by assuming the legal obligation of paternity. Throughout the story there is a tension between the miraculous conception and Joseph's paternity.

Upon learning of Mary's condition, Joseph could not take Mary as his wife (see Deut 22:23-27). However, he resolves not to subject Mary to a trial of adultery as would be prescribed by the Law (Num 5:11-31 & Deut 24:1). Joseph's plans to "leave" Mary are interrupted by a dream (similar to the OT account of the birth of Samson in Judges 13), that assures Joseph that Mary's conception is virginal and miraculous. As his legal son, Jesus will be called "Son of David" The name *Jesus* comes from the Hebrew verb for "save". Jesus is also called "*Emmanuel*" meaning "God with us" which expresses the significance of Jesus for Matthew and the early church. This is also evident in the way Matthew ends his Gospel with the verse: "*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age*" (Mt 28:20).

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Joseph follows the instructions given to him in his dream and takes Mary as his wife. The fact that verse 25 says that he did not have sexual relations with Mary before the birth of Jesus in no way affirms or denies Mary's perpetual virginity.

Wise Men Worship Jesus at Bethlehem 2:1-12

Matthew situates Jesus' birth place as Bethlehem during the latter part of the reign of King Herod the Great (37-4 B.C). Three Wise Men from the East who possess knowledge in astronomy and astrology are introduced. They have been observing and following a "star", a symbol that connects Jesus' birth with that of the Messiah. (See Num 24:17). Whether or not we can identify the star is not important. The theme that dominates this section is the contrast between the Magi who are obviously gentiles and Herod King of Israel.

Despite the obvious fact that they are not Jews, the Magi learned of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem from the Jewish Scriptures (see Micah 5:1 & 2Sam 5:2). They travel to from their homeland to Bethlehem for the sole purpose of worshiping the Messiah. Because the Gospel narrative names three specific gifts from the Magi, three men were associated with the Magi. By the eight century names were given to these *Three Wise Men* (Melchior, Gaspar, & Balthasar) which continue to be a part of popular Christian tradition. The Wise Men and Herod reflects the early Church's experience with the Gentiles who readily accepted the Gospel and the slow acceptance by Israel.

Flight into Egypt 2:13-15

The story of the Flight into Egypt is similar to the story of the birth of Jesus in that an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and he is given a command he must follow along with the reason why; his determination to carry out the command and finally a quotation from the OT.

It would not have been uncommon for Jews of that time to seek refuge in Egypt and Jesus will remain there until Herod's death in 4 B.C. The reason for this exile is made clear once Matthew inserts the quote from Hosea 11:1: "*Out of Egypt I called my son*". This quote makes clear that the events are God's will. It also identifies Jesus as the "Son of God". Additionally, this story personifies Israel's exile to Egypt and the Exodus. The story also provides continuity between the old people of Israel and the new people.

Slaughter of Children in Judea 2:16-18

The slaughter carried out by Herod is reminiscent of Pharaoh's slaughter of Israelite boys in Egypt (see Exod. 1:15-22). Jesus' story is thus a reversal of the Israel's exodus. Jesus flees to Egypt to escape the savagery of the King who is obviously the enemy of God's people, just as Pharaoh had been in the past. Although Herod's barbaric actions are seen as consistent with God's will, it is neither condemned nor condoned. Slaughtering

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innocent children would have been consistent with Herod's ruthlessness in defending his claim to the throne of Israel. However, there is no record of this event in any ancient document except for Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus' Arrival in Nazareth 2:19-23

The purpose of this story is to connect Jesus with Nazareth and to explain why he began his public ministry in Galilee. Like the story of the birth and the flight into Egypt, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and gives him a command. The OT quote used in this story however is not certain. Some possible sources are Judges 13:5-7 and Isaiah 11:1.