

## MATTHEW INTRODUCTION PART 11



The introduction to any book of the Bible is just as important for us to understand as what we find within its pages. As a matter of fact, it is only when we have taken the time to introduce ourselves to the book, that we have the tools necessary to correctly exegete and exposit its content. Such introductory knowledge is obtained by asking the questions of Who? When? Where? What? Why? and How?

### 1. (Who?) is the author of the book?

The external evidence is unanimous that the author is the same as the 8<sup>th</sup> listed apostle, Matthew the tax collector (Mat 10 2-3).

### 2. (When?) was the book written?

Sometime before 70 A.D.

### 3. (Where?) is the relevancy of this book to our Christian lives today?

It is not uncommon to hear people making this kind of a complaint as it relates to the whole Bible (e.g. How could something so ancient, speak to my life today? Where is its relevancy?). However, like all the books of the Bible, Matthew's relevance is easily discernible when one considers the wealth of topics/issues that are addressed through its established instruction.

### 4. (What?) is the historical context of the book?

In other words, what was the geographical, political, economic, sociological and religious setting of the first century world that Jesus lived and ministered in? Interestingly enough, each of those categories present a picture very similar to our present world (i.e. 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S.A.). This was most especially true when considering the level of heresy and apostasy that existed w/in Judaism. Like Evangelical Christianity today, the majority of the Jewish community – including her religious leaders, had convinced themselves that their birth into the family of God and the possession of atoning sacrifice for sin was all that was needed to continue in a saving relationship w/God. Theologically, things differed very little from the antinomian/easy-believism gospel preached today (i.e. salvation requires only faith).

### 5. (Why?) did Matthew NOT write his gospel?

Traditionally, inquiry into the author's purpose is stated in the positive versus the negative as it is here. However, this particular dialectic approach to Matthew's gospel has enormous value – especially when attempting to “root out” modern misconceptions about Jesus, His ministry or the Christian Faith in general. As such, what follows serves as both an explicit apologetic (against the heresies of our day) as well as an implicit guide to Matthew's purpose and intent in writing. Matthew did not write his gospel:

5.1. To proclaim that the dispensation of the Law is over.

5.2. To reveal that God was now good with having a whore for a wife or at least one on the side.

5.3. To portray God the Father as a child abuser.

5.4. To identify Jesus as an insurrectionist.

5.5. To promote humanitarianism in the world.

### 6. (How?) should we read, study and interpret Matthew's gospel?

There is no reading of Scripture that is not- to some degree, also an attempt at interpreting the Scripture. This becomes obvious once we realize the Bible does not provide its own commentary (or study notes). As such, the question which must be considered before endeavoring to study any of its books is, “What hermeneutical (interpretive) principles and presuppositions must be applied?” As it relates to the Matthew's gospel the following are most relevant:

**6.1. Realizing that Jesus (not Paul) is the author of the Christian religion [DISCUSSED].**

**6.2. Possessing the same view of the Bible as Jesus and its human authors [DISCUSSED].**

**6.3. Understanding what it means for Jesus to be the Christ.**

The Old Testament is filled with promises of a coming Christ. And the New Testament – most especially her gospels, are devoted to revealing Jesus as their fulfillment. It is therefore impossible to correctly interpret the Bible's content without first knowing exactly what this term means. More importantly, it is impossible to be a Christian *unless* one can confess this to be true of Jesus (1Jo 5:1). As such, a robust study of this subject was no doubt a part of the apostle's initial preaching – most especially among the Gentiles who possessed no prior knowledge. Likewise, Christians today should be equipped with a proper understanding of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ.

**6.3.1. Claiming Jesus to be the Christ is the same as confessing Him to be the Messiah since the former is simply the Greek equivalent of the latter Hebrew term.**

### 6.3.2. Jesus claims to be the Christ/Messiah.

6.3.3. The word itself (Christ/Messiah) literally means “anointed One” and refers to someone who acts on God’s behalf as a mediator between Himself and human beings<sup>1</sup>.

6.3.4. In the Old Testament there are three offices where a person could function as this special anointed mediator: prophet, priest and king. However, they were not roles/careers available to the general public. Rather, such persons had to be directly appointed and authorized by God.

6.3.5. There were many mediators/messiahs throughout Israel’s history.

"And we have been told also that certain of the themselves [i.e. the Israelites] became, by the act of anointing, Christs in type” - Eusebius

6.3.6. That being said, only one of the three (offices) served the purpose of bringing people into covenant/saving relationship w/God: the priest. As such, any time there has been the possibility of salvation, there has always been a priestly mediator<sup>2</sup>.

6.3.7. However, when the mediators/messiahs (most esp. the priests) disobeyed God by refusing to preserve His Law among the people, God brought His judgment/curses upon the entire covenant community (incl. the removal of His presence among them).

6.3.8. A degree of God’s judgment/curse remained on the Old covenant community from the time of the Babylonian captivity until the time of Jesus.

6.3.8.1. Though the Jews were eventually back in their land (538/9 B.C.), they were in still bondage to the foreign governments (Babylon = 605-575 BC, Medes/Persians = 575-334BC, Greece = 334-30BC, Rome = 30-476AD).

(Deu 17:15 w/28:30-59; Dan 2:31-44; e.g. Chaldeans/Babylonians, Persians - 2Ch 36:17-23)

6.3.8.2. Though the priesthood had been re-established (535 B.C.), it was filled with corruption.

(Mal 1:6-2:9)

6.3.8.3. Though the Temple had been rebuilt (516 B.C.), there was no ark nor the glorious presence of God.

(2Ch 5:1-14 w/Ezr 3:8-12, 6:14-18; also Hag 2:1-3; 1Ch 28:2 w/Lam 2:1)<sup>3</sup>

“Needless to say, the historical return from exile did not usher in the new heavens and earth, nor was it an exodus to make the previous one out of Egypt pale by comparison. As to the rebuilt house of God, many of the elderly priests, Levites and leaders of Jerusalem wept as they recalled the greater splendors of Solomon’s temple – and most devastating, the glory of YHWH never returned to the second temple. These considerations, along with the manifest lack of renewal in the hearts of the Jewish returnees, served to foster the understanding that Israel was indeed still in exile.” – J. Michael Morales

6.3.8.4. Though God’s mercy had once more been extended to Israel, it did not bring w/it the promised (or prophesied) messiah who would restore all things.

(Neh 8:9-12; Dan 9:1-3 but not Dan 7:1-18)

6.3.8.5. In general, this was the view of the Jews, NT writers – even Jesus, in the first century: the nation remained under God’s judgment.

(e.g. Mat 2:16-18 w/Jer 31:1-17; 4:13-16; Luk 1:68-79, 2:25-32, 4:16-22; consider also Paul’s words in Rom 11:26 along w/Isa 59:20)

6.3.9. The OT Scriptures prophesied the “good news” of a messiah/mediator/deliverer/savior who would bring redemption (as a priest), repentance (as a prophet) and the restoration of God’s kingdom (as a king) through the establishment of a new covenant.

(e.g. Jer 30:1-3, 8-9, 20-22, 31:1, 15-20, 27-37, 32:36-41, 33:6-9, 14-26)

6.3.10. The gospels (including Matthew) represent the historical account (and some of the proof) that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of this previously prophesied “good news”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Most often, a mediator is required because the parties in question are in opposition to one another. The purpose therefore of such mediation is the construction of a formal agreement/contract that (w/compliance) guarantees peace between the parties (e.g. a peace treaty). This *is* the reason behind God’s use of a mediator in redemptive history. The Bible calls such peace treaties, “covenants”. As such mediators could also be referred to as deliverers or saviors (e.g. Isa 59:20).

<sup>2</sup> Adam’s rebellion in Eden and the subsequent fall of humanity into sin has not only severed the initial relationship we shared with God at Creation (Isa 59:1-2), but also caused us to become His personal enemies and the recipients of His wrath (Psa 5:5; Rom 1:18; Eph 2:3). Hence the need for a priestly mediator: one who can make atonement.

<sup>3</sup> Ancient historians Josephus and Tacitus both make mention of the fact that when the conquering Roman general Pompey entered the Holy holies, he found no ark.

<sup>4</sup> The gospels are not the only inspired literature containing evidence that Jesus was the Christ. This is also the goal of the rest of the NT Scriptures (2Ti 3:15).