

THE GOSPEL OF  
**MATTHEW**  
*Jesus, the Promised Messiah  
and King*

**FORMAT.** 28 chapters, 1,071 verses

**IMPLIED PURPOSES.** To present evidence that Jesus is the Messiah who had been promised in the Old Testament and to provide an eyewitness narrative of his life and teachings with a view toward instilling belief in Jesus as Messiah and King

**AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE.** Matthew, a Jew writing to fellow Jews, seeks to provide sufficient reason to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. In pursuit of that purpose, Matthew takes pains to demonstrate that the events of Jesus' life are the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Matthew also writes as a disciple of Jesus who observed most of what he included in his Gospel.

**IMPLIED AUDIENCE.** The audience is assumed to be Jewish, steeped in a knowledge of the Old Testament. However, Matthew also has as a secondary strategy to persuade Gentiles that Jesus is the Messiah of the whole world (as in the famous great commission).

**WHAT UNIFIES THE BOOK.** The person and teaching of Jesus; the alternating blocks of narrative and discourse; the story line from Jesus' birth through his earthly ministry to his death and resurrection; the standard ingredients of the Gospel as a genre

**SPECIAL FEATURES.** Recurrent quotation and citation from the Old Testament; emphasis on Jesus as kingly or royal; messianic pre-occupation; orderly arrangement of material, including arrangement in groups of three and seven; apocalyptic (end times) interest; biographical interest (starting with Jesus' birth and ending with his death and resurrection); emphasis on discipleship

**CHALLENGES FACING THE READER OR TEACHER OF THIS BOOK.**

1. The length of the book (It is the Gospel with the most chapters.)
2. Hostility toward Judaism and its representatives

3. Abundance of references to the Old Testament
4. Topical rather than strictly chronological organization of the story

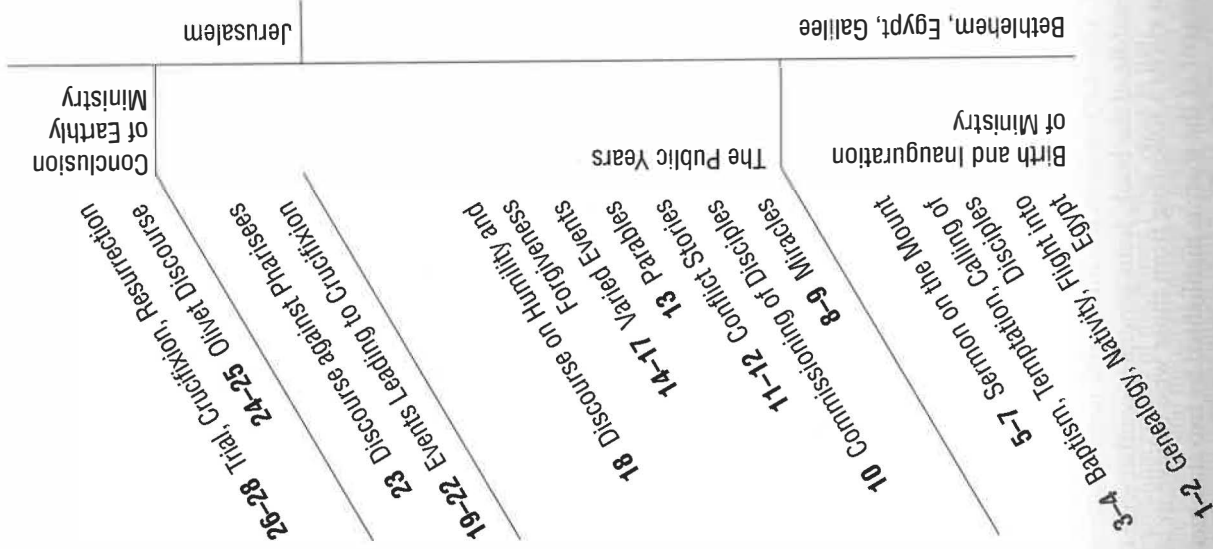
**HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGES.**

1. Regard the length of the book as a virtue resulting in a completeness to the treatment of Christ.
2. The writer was himself a Jew, so his hostility to the Jewish establishment was not racial prejudice but theological conviction.
3. Ponder how the Old Testament references apply to Jesus.
4. We tend to take a topical approach every time we report on an event we attend, so with a little adjustment we can take Matthew's alternating narrative and discourse styles in stride.

FACT SHEET

**P**robably from the first century to the twentieth, students have memorized the outline of *Mathew* by counting off the five discourses on the fingers of one hand. . . . Between each of the following discourses, *Mathew* incorporated stories of Jesus' life. . . : (1) How are citizens of the kingdom to live [5-7]? . . . (2) How are traveling preacher-disciples to conduct themselves on their evangelistic journeys [10]? . . . (3) What were those parables Jesus told [13]? . . . [4] How shall Christians conduct themselves toward each other and as they face persecution [18-20]? . . . [5] How will it all end [24-25]? . . . Note how *Mathew* even marks each of these discourses with the phrase "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (*Matthew* 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1).

SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY  
*The Layman's Guide to the New Testament*



Jesus is the most influential person in human history. What was he really like when he was on earth, and why were his life and teaching so influential? Whatever one's religious convictions, these questions arouse a natural curiosity.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Matthew records twenty miracles of Jesus and twenty-one parables spoken by him. Nine of the parables appear only in Matthew. (Andrew E. Hill, *Guide to Bible Data* [Grand Rapids: World Bible Publishing, 1996]).
- The word *Christ* is from the Greek word for Hebrew *Messiah* and means "anointed one."

**The designations "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" in the Gospels refer to God's rule.**

**The Form of the Book**

The Gospel of Matthew is first of all a narrative, or story. Plot, setting, and character form the basic elements. As with the other Gospels, though, the storyteller devotes as much space to Jesus' teaching as he does to his deeds, which take their place as actual events in the overall story. (For more information on the Gospel as a form of writing, see page 436.)

Several narrative subtypes fill out the picture. There are birth stories, calling stories, miracle stories, parables, pronouncement stories (which pair an event with a memorable saying by Jesus that interprets the event), conflict stories, encounter stories, and passion and resurrection stories.

**The Story**

Matthew is one of two Gospels that begin with Jesus' birth, thereby showing a strong biographical impulse. With the nativity stories serving as the prologue, the main part of the story follows Jesus in roughly chronological fashion through his three years as an itinerant teacher and miracle worker. The story reaches its climax with Jesus' death and resurrection. In the middle of the book, Jesus generates conflict with those who reject him but elicits a following from those who believe in him. The general development of the story is highlighted by two statements that come at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and at the transition point that leads toward the Passion: "Jesus began to preach" (4:17) and "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must . . . be killed" (16:21, ESV).

**The Prayer of Jesus**

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) has special importance because it is the only form of prayer given by the direct instruction of Jesus Christ. Here are some of the most important things that you need to know about the Lord's Prayer:

- It is a flexible pattern for prayer. Although it is appropriate to repeat the exact words that Jesus gave his disciples, especially in public worship, the Lord's Prayer is mainly intended to serve as an outline for prayer that we are free to fill in with specifics.
- The main parts of the prayer are the preface ("Our Father in heaven"); the petitions (1) "May your name be kept holy," (2) "May your Kingdom come soon," (3) "May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," (4) "Give us today the food we need," (5) "Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us," and (6) "Don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one"; and the concluding doxology, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."
- The basic movement of the prayer is from God's glory (as we seek the holy name and heavenly Kingdom of God our Father) to our good (as we request daily provision, daily pardon, and daily protection).
- The prayer is phrased in the plural ("Our Father," "the food we need," "forgive us," "rescue us," etc.). This makes the Lord's Prayer a family prayer in which we do not pray simply for our own daily bread and deliverance from evil but also for the food and safety of all God's children.
- Jesus himself prayed nearly every petition in the Lord's Prayer. He invariably addressed God as his Father, and sometimes as his holy (or "hallowed") Father (e.g., John 17:11). The prayer of his entire life was to do the will of his Father, not his own will (see Matthew 26:39; John 6:38). Jesus prayed for God's blessing when he broke bread (e.g., Matthew 26:26; John 6:11) and for the deliverance of his disciples when Satan tempted them (e.g., Luke 22:31-32; John 17:15). When Jesus died on the cross, he asked his Father to forgive our debts (not his own, of course), and as he did so, he forgave us, his debtors (Luke 23:34). Finally, Jesus prayed for the glory of God's name and Kingdom (see John 17:1).

Although the traditional ending of the prayer ("For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever") does not appear in the earliest New Testament manuscripts, it is thoroughly biblical. Jewish prayers from that time typically ended with some kind of benediction, and the one we use with the Lord's Prayer is drawn from the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29:11.

### The Structure

The most important principle in regard to the structure of this Gospel is that Matthew the bookkeeper (a tax collector by profession), with his penchant for orderly arrangement, has composed a book that is tightly organized around the principle of alternating between action and discourse, as a later section of this chapter will outline. No strict correspondence can be made between the adjacent sections of narrative and discourse.

The second structural principle of Matthew relates to the narrative genre of the book and its cast of characters, which we can view as a series of concentric rings. In the center is Jesus. Immediately around him in frequency of appearance are the disciples. Beyond them are the Jewish leaders, most often referred to as “the Pharisees.” In the outermost ring is the general population, sometimes pictured as a nameless crowd and at other times represented by specific characters.

### The Aim of the Book

Matthew does not state his aim directly, but we can infer it from the content of his Gospel. He has the biographer’s desire to get the facts of Jesus’ life and ministry recorded correctly. Within this documentary, he aspires to provide convincing evidence that of Old Testament messianic prophecies and that of the Davidic line about whom the prophets wrote.

### Unifying Elements

- The formula “when Jesus had finished these sayings” (ESV) to mark the transition from a block of discourse to a narrative section
- The kingship motif
- The relation of events and teachings of Jesus to Old Testament prophecy
- Repeated formulas, such as “Son of David” as a title for Christ, statements to the effect that “this was done that it might be fulfilled what the prophet said,” and “the Kingdom of Heaven is like . . .”
- The conscious use of formal titles for Christ (for example, Son of David, Lord, Son of Man, Son of God)

### OUTLINE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

- prologue: setting and audience (5:1-2)
- portrait of the ideal Christian (5:3-12)
- Jesus’ teaching on being salt and light (5:13-16)
- Jesus’ interpretation of the Old Testament law (5:17-48)
- instructions on three religious observances (6:1-18)
- threefold exhortation about choosing right values (6:19-24)
- discourse on not being anxious (6:25-34)
- instruction on three practices (7:1-12)
- three great contrasts (7:13-27)
- epilogue: response of the crowd (7:28-29)

- A partly topical arrangement of Jesus’ life and teaching
- The Jewish religious leaders’ opposition to Jesus

### Key Places and Characters

Places assume symbolic meanings in Matthew’s Gospel. Bethlehem is the humble place of birth, Egypt the place of refuge, Nazareth the place from which Jesus is regarded as coming, Galilee the place of preaching and ministry, and Jerusalem the place of rejection. Similarly, the desert is the place of John the Baptist’s preparatory ministry and Jesus’ temptation, the sea a place of danger, the Temple a place of conflict with the religious establishment, the mountain a place of transcendence, and the grave the place of death and its conquest.

The main actors in the drama are Jesus, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, the twelve disciples, the Jewish religious leaders, and two political leaders who conduct a trial of Jesus (Caiaphas the high priest and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate).

### Key Doctrines

*Christology.* Matthew has distinctive themes regarding Christ, with emphasis on Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and his identity as King.

*The Kingdom of God.* Numerous discourses and parables of Jesus in this Gospel teach explicitly what it means to enter the Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven).

*Salvation.* The Gospel of Matthew records the salvific (“bringing salvation”) life of Jesus, especially his crucifixion and resurrection, so that we can understand and participate in that salvation.

*The Old Testament Law.* Especially in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives explicit teaching about himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament law.

*Ethics.* Partly (but not wholly) on the strength of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew’s Gospel is a major repository of teaching about what constitutes the moral life (including its dos and don’ts).

*Eschatology*. Especially in the Olivet discourse (chapters 24–25), this Gospel contains extended teaching about the last things.

*The Devotional Life*. Jesus is pictured as a man of prayer, and he teaches about prayer, fasting, and charity.

### Tips for Reading or Teaching the Gospel of Matthew

Your best strategy is to focus on the hero of the story, operating on the premise that you are the observant traveling companion of Jesus during his life as an itinerant teacher and miracle worker.

The five sections of discourse (5:1–7:29; 10:1–42; 13:1–58; 18:1–35; 23:1–25:46) are Matthew's compilation of Jesus' teaching on specific topics; explore these sections as systematic expositions of the topics.

Be receptive to Matthew's apologetic aim to prove that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah, and explore the implications of the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament predictions.

Be ready to shift your expectations when you move from a narrative section to a discourse section, and vice versa.

Remember that the way to organize a study of a story is to pay attention to plot, setting, and character.

## quick overview of the gospel of matthew

- 1:1–4:25 Narrative: Jesus' birth and entry into his ministry
- 5:1–7:29 Discourse: Sermon on the Mount
- 8:1–9:38 Narrative: a collection of miracle stories
- 10:1–42 Discourse: teaching about discipleship
- 11:1–12:50 Narrative: conflict stories
- 13:1–58 Discourse: a collection of Jesus' parables
- 14:1–17:27 Narrative: assorted stories
- 18:1–35 Discourse: teaching about childlike humility and reconciliation/forgiveness
- 19:1–22:46 Narrative: a kaleidoscope of stories
- 23:1–25:46 Discourse: denunciation of the Pharisees and the Olivet discourse on the last things
- 26:1–28:20 Narrative: the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus

### The Flow of the Book

*Nativity Stories (Chapters 1–2)*. As you ponder Matthew's account of Jesus' genealogy, birth, and infancy, look for clues as to why Matthew

## The Last Week of Jesus' Life

Day	Event (All in Jerusalem)	Reference
Sunday	Triumphal Entry (two-mile journey from Bethany, where Jesus stays each night, to Jerusalem)	Mark 11:1–11
Monday	Jesus cleanses the Temple. Religious leaders actively plot to get rid of Jesus.	Mark 11:15–19 Mark 14:1–2
Tuesday	Religious leaders question Jesus' authority: "By what authority are you doing all these things?" Jesus is anointed at Bethany. Judas deserts Jesus and betrays him.	Luke 20:1–8 John 12:2–8 Luke 22:3–6 John 13:1–30
Thursday PM	Last Supper with the disciples (the Passover meal)	John 17
Late Thursday & Early Friday	Garden of Gethsemane: Jesus prays and waits for his arrest.	Mark 14:43–50 John 18:12–24 Mark 14:53–65
Early Friday	Confrontation in the garden and Jesus' arrest First trial before Annas, former Jewish high priest; Jesus suffers initial physical abuse. Jesus appears before Caiaphas, the current Jewish high priest, and the Sanhedrin court and is bloodied by further abuse. Peter denies Jesus.	John 18:15–27 Luke 22:66–71 Luke 23:1–5
	The Sanhedrin formally condemns Jesus. Jesus is handed over to the Romans, who have authority in capital cases, for a hearing before Roman governor Pilate, who declares, "I find nothing wrong with this man." Hearing before Herod Antipas, who has jurisdiction over Galilee and is interested in meeting Jesus. Jesus refuses to answer Herod's questions and is returned to Pilate. Pilate tries repeatedly to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders object. On Pilate's orders, Jesus is tortured and beaten beyond recognition (perhaps in an attempt to appease the Jewish leaders, who demand crucifixion). Pilate orders Jesus' execution.	Luke 23:6–12 Luke 23:13–25
12:00 noon–3:00 PM	Jesus is forced to carry his own cross. Jesus' final hours on the cross	John 19:17–24 Mark 15:33–36
3:00 PM	Death Jesus' burial	Mark 15:37 Mark 15:42–47
Sunday	Jesus' resurrection	Luke 24:1–12

selected this particular material and how he intended it to instruct and edify us.

### KEY VERSE

“Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness” (4:23). This summarizes the story of Jesus’ public ministry up to his death and resurrection. It was an itinerant life of preaching and miracle working.

lives and morality of the citizens.)

*A Collection of Miracle Stories (Chapters 8–9).* The basic ingredients of miracle stories are these: Someone has a need, seeks Jesus’ help, and expresses faith or obedience; Jesus performs a miracle; people respond to the miracle and/or to Jesus. With that as a descriptive grid, analyze the individual stories with a view toward discovering what they say about Jesus and about people in their relationship to Jesus. Another good approach is to assume that the miracles of Jesus teach us about the Kingdom of God: its power, its spiritual battles, and other specific teachings that Jesus intensifies with his miracles.

*Discourse about the Cost of Discipleship (Chapter 10).* The surface action is Jesus’ commissioning of the twelve disciples, accompanied by his teaching about how they are to conduct themselves as traveling evangelists. Through these particulars we are given a glimpse of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus—anywhere, anytime. What are the essential principles?

*Conflict Stories (Chapters 11–12).* To avoid getting lost in this mini-anthology of stories, compile a list of the cast of characters and the

specific events. We can view the miscellaneous nature of the material as giving us “a day in the life of Jesus”—a day that doubtless contained the same range of elements that we find in these two chapters. What do we learn about Jesus and his spiritual kingdom in these stories?

*Parables (Chapter 13).* Although parables are interspersed elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, the author obviously wanted a block of them together. To get maximum mileage out of these parables, apply the general rules for interpreting parables. (See “Parable as a Literary Form” on page 447.)

*Assorted Stories (Chapters 14–17).* This is a miscellaneous collection of material, but again we can profitably regard it as allowing us to share what life was like “on the road with Jesus.” The best-known events in this block of chapters are the death of John the Baptist, two feedings of multitudes, Jesus’ walking on the sea, Peter’s great confession, and the Transfiguration. Here are some good pointers for organizing and analyzing the individual units:

- First, assume that each unit has its own point, or purpose. What is that point or purpose?
- We can also trust someone as orderly as Matthew to have selected and expressed the material in such a way that each unit contributes to the bigger issues of his Gospel as a whole. In what ways does each unit function as a building block in the main edifice?
- The question of what a given unit tells or reinforces about Christ and his Kingdom is always relevant.
- For narrative units, asking the usual questions about plot, setting, and character will yield fruit.

*Further Lessons about the Life of the Disciple: Discourse on Humility and Forgiveness (Chapter 18).* The order of topics in this chapter is (1) the need for disciples to be childlike, (2) the parable of the lost sheep, (3) teaching about reconciliation, and (4) teaching about forgiveness. A good way to approach the chapter is to analyze how these components make up a single coherent discourse.

### KEY VERSE

“It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (10:25, ESV). Matthew says much about the life of the disciple, and in kernel form it means being like Jesus.

**KEY VERSE**

"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (16:21, ESV).

The story of Matthew's Gospel moves toward the climax of Jesus' passion and resurrection.

*Toward Jerusalem: Events Leading up to Jesus' Trial and Execution (Chapters 19–22).* There is no need to try to make the material tidier than it is. While the unit consists mainly of stories, there are interspersed elements of teaching, as well as some parallels. A new development that is just below the surface is that Jesus is now heading toward his climactic confrontation with the Jewish leaders. A fruitful approach is to scrutinize the material to ascertain what might have made Jesus' behavior and teaching controversial and finally exasperating to people who have the mind-set that, by this point in the story, we know the scribes and Pharisees had. Then we can contemplate (1) how we and our acquaintances might be like those religious leaders and (2) what lessons we need to learn in order to love and obey Jesus in light of his revolutionary teachings. In addition, this section is filled with lessons about living as citizens of the heavenly Kingdom.

*Denunciation of the Pharisees (Chapter 23).* This is the single most extended piece of satire in the four Gospels. It is relentless in its attack on the Jewish leaders. Things to note are (1) the specific things for which Jesus attacks the scribes and Pharisees, (2) the positive principles of behavior that Jesus commands as an alternative, and (3) application on how to avoid being numbered with the people whom Jesus denounces.

*The Eschatological Olivet Discourse (Chapters 24–25).* This famous address to Jesus' disciples is the most extended unit of teaching by Jesus about the last days and end of history. The right way to assimilate the address is to see it as an ever-expanding source of information about the end of the age, along with implications for how we should live in order to be ready for eternity.

*Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (Chapters 26–28).* In all four Gospels, the events surrounding the death of Jesus constitute the largest block of material. Here is what Matthew chose to record:

- Jesus' last Passover supper in the upper room and the events surrounding it (26:1–35)
- Jesus in Gethsemane, ending with his arrest (26:36–56)

- Jesus' trial by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and then by Pilate, with separate betrayals by Peter and Judas forming a subplot (26:57–27:26)

- Jesus' crucifixion and burial (27:27–66)
- Jesus' resurrection and the giving of the great commission (chapter 28)

Try to relive these events as fully as possible, and by means of your imagination, participate in the action.

**The Main Themes**

1. Jesus is the predicted Messiah, the apex and culmination of God's eternal plan for the salvation of the human race.
2. We have a reliable record of who Jesus was and what he did and taught.
3. Imitating Jesus and practicing what he taught and commanded prepares people to live as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.
4. To live as Jesus' disciple is demanding and requires great courage because of the opposition of the world, but the life of discipleship as Jesus delineates it is possible.
5. God's revelation of his truth in the Old and New Testaments is a unified revelation, with the New Testament serving as the culmination of the Old Testament.

**Contribution of the Book to the Bible's Story of Salvation in Christ**

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the climax of God's eternal plan of redemption—the very Messiah and Son of David about whom the Old Testament weaves an intricate tapestry. Matthew's Gospel gives variations on the themes of the kingship of Christ as God's anointed Savior and on his fulfillment of all that had been foretold through the centuries.

**Applying the Book**

One application is that of belief. Matthew's Gospel is filled with teaching about Jesus and his message. To apply the material, we need to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior and in the truthfulness of what he taught. In addition, we need to believe in the accuracy of Matthew's account of Jesus' life and teaching.

**KEY VERSES**

"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you" (28:19–20).  
What may appear to be the "Jewish" Gospel is also the universal Gospel: It ends pointing outward to all people.



A second application is practice. In this Gospel, Jesus provides a thorough outline of how Christians are required to live as his disciples. The application is to live in keeping with what Jesus taught and how he lived. In this regard, we need to note how much ethical teaching this particular Gospel contains, with a frequent emphasis on how costly it can be to follow Jesus.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*The most important book ever written.* Ernest Renan

*The most immediately striking characteristic of Matthew's Gospel is what may be loosely termed its "Jewishness." The formula-quotations clearly emphasize . . . that Jesus is the goal of the Old Testament revelation of God.* David Hill

*It is probable that Matthew's Gospel was primarily addressed to teachers . . . [and] was a manual for such people. . . . The Gospel as a whole was a manual to put into the hands of church leaders to help them in their work.* Michael Green

*It is a remarkable fact that, among the variations in the order in which the Gospels appear in early lists and texts, the one constant factor is that Matthew always comes first. . . . The early Christians were conscious, in a way few Christians are today, that their faith had its roots in Judaism.* R. T. France

*[The author] is an earnest and dedicated Christian, and the writing of the Gospel is for him an act of obedience to the risen Christ, who is his Lord. He seeks to honour and serve Christ.* Floyd V. Filson

*In Matthew all is stylized. People are either good or bad, wise or foolish, obedient or disobedient, merciful or merciless.* Michael D. Goulder

*Almost all the elements that a modern reader would demand of a biography are lacking. Matthew has two principal interests: the fulfillment of God's purposes in and through Jesus, and how this fulfillment will find expression in the community which Jesus founded.* W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann