

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

September 12, 2018

Lesson 24 – New Testament Introduction

Political Developments: In 722-721 BC the Assyrians conquered Israel (the Northern Kingdom). The land of Samaria was repopulated with a mixed people – Jews who had been forced to intermarry with Gentiles. Therefore many of these Samaritans were of Israelite ancestry. Because of their mixed blood, their worship, and their rejection of the word of God as revealed through the prophets, they were despised by the Jews (who went so far as to destroy the Samaritan altars). This only increased the hostility and tension between the two groups.

Literary Works

1. Septuagint: Often referred to by the Roman numerals LXX (70 which signifies the number of scribes involved in the translation). It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (250 BC).
2. Talmud: The oral tradition which was committed to writing in the 2nd Century AD. It remains the authoritative teaching for the Jews.
3. Apocrypha: A collection of books written during a period of 400 years. They were widely accepted by most Christians until the time of the Reformation. At the council of Jamnia (90 AD) the Jewish community agreed on the scope of the Old Testament canon but did not include the Apocryphal books.
4. Dead Sea Scrolls: Discovered in 1947 when an Arab shepherd stumbled upon a cave in the hills overlooking the Dead Sea. It contained documents and fragments of documents recorded during this inter-testament period. They greatly increased our understanding of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic and our knowledge of the development of Judaism at that time.

Synagogue: Dispersed throughout the world because of the exile, the Jews struggled to find a meaningful way to worship God without breaking the command that sacrifices could be offered only at the Temple in Jerusalem. Synagogues were set up as places to preach and teach the Law. They were not a place of sacrifice. At the time of Christ this gave the early Christians ready-made preaching sites. Even the titles given to church leaders were carry-overs from those used in the synagogues.

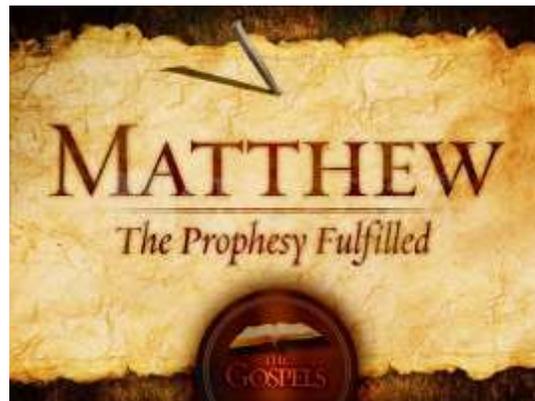
Social Developments

1. Pharisees were interpreters of the oral tradition. They reinterpreted the law to enable the Jews to live righteous lives. They were known for their excessive legalism.
2. Sadducees controlled the high priesthood and predominately the Sanhedrin. They rejected all but the written Pentateuch and they denied any teachings not expressly found in the Law.
3. Scribes were experts in the study of the Law of Moses. During the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, they became a distinct political party and were the originators of the synagogue service (as the spiritual descendants of Ezra). In their effort to apply the Mosaic Law to daily life, they developed their own oral law, which they claimed was more important than the written law.

4. Essenes were a small separatist group which formed during the turbulent Maccabean Revolt. They stressed legalism but rejected much of the Temple rituals and sacrifices believing the priesthood was too corrupt. They considered themselves to be the true remnant and they looked forward to the coming of two Messiahs – one a king and the other a priest.
5. Zealots vehemently opposed Roman rule and attempted numerous revolts during the 1st Century AD.

Other Developments

1. Diaspora: The dispersion of the Jews enabled them to literally inhabit the world. Their religious life was centered in the synagogue and the study of the Torah. The missionaries of the early church (as recorded in Acts) began their ministry among the Diaspora.
2. The Pax Romana (Roman Peace): It was established by Augustus Octavian who became the first and greatest Roman emperor in 27 BC. The Roman Peace allowed for increased trade and free movement throughout the Roman Empire. Palestine was a strategic strip of land in the trade route from eastern Africa to Asia and the Far East. Large numbers of people could travel through Palestine and could be exposed to the message of the gospel.
3. Roman Road System: The Romans were noted for their superior road system, a network of roads holding together the entire empire. Paul, Silas, and Timothy made extensive use of the Via Egnatia (a 500-mile Roman road which ran throughout Greece and Asia Minor).



Matthew is a bridge connecting the gospel with the story of salvation in the Hebrew Bible. It is a literary work meant to interpret the theological meaning of concrete historical events. The meaning of the text is best understood in its original setting.

It may (or may not) speak to our current concerns *

Matthew was influenced (and made use of) religious ideas during the Hellenistic period.

The Septuagint also exercised a profound influence on the composition of this gospel.

Matthew wanted to show that the Jewish Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus and the church.

The *Gospel of Matthew* is not the product of an isolated author.

It reflects the life and concerns of a particular Christian community (the Messianic community).

It is known as the ecclesiastical gospel since it is the only gospel to use the word *church*.

The author emphasized Jewish customs but felt no need to explain them.

In Matthew the strong distinction is made between believers and non-believers in Christ.

In this context the people in Matthew would have lived around the time of the War of 66-70 AD. It was called the *First Jewish-Roman War* or the *Great Revolt* and took place in Judea. It was the first of three major rebellions by the Jews against the Roman Empire. The second war was called the *Kitos War* (115-117) and took place in the Diaspora. The third war was called the *Bar Kakhba Revolt* (132-136) and was back in Judea.

The *Gospel of Matthew* seems to reflect a relatively wealthy urban community. The *poor* and *hungry* in the Q beatitudes become in Matthew the *poor in spirit*. The majority of scholars favor Antioch as the location for the Matthew community. Matthew appears to have been written around 90 AD.

In Matthew the earthly career of a historical figure is exalted as the Lord. Christ is both divine and a truly human servant who suffers and dies. The life of Jesus is portrayed as the definitive line of redemption for the people of God. Within this one life the meaning of the whole of salvation history is disclosed.

During this time the synagogue would have been the primary spiritual home for the Jews. Tensions arose with the Jewish community so the disciples of Jesus became isolated. In some ways they could relate more to the Gentiles than the Jews (of which they were heirs). The gospel also speaks to faith communities experiencing social change. Disciples had to learn how to adapt while being faithful to Scripture and tradition.

Matthew spoke of the disciples as those who committed themselves to following Jesus. Within the group was a central core of twelve who would become leaders of the early church. Peter played a distinct and symbolic role in this gospel. He was called *first* by Jesus and later Jesus designated him as the head of the church. Peter was instrumental in the founding and maintenance of the Christian community.

The *Gospel of Matthew* is a theological document. The subject matter is the saving act of God in Jesus Christ (Jesus appears in almost every scene). It was written to help the Christian community understand, clarify, and share its faith in Jesus. It describes events and records the teachings of Christ in a clear and orderly way.

Outline of Matthew

Chapters 1-2

Genealogy and Nativity Narrative

Jesus is referred to as the *Son of David* and the *Son of Man*

Emphasis is placed on Joseph in the birth narrative

Opposition to the birth of Christ is described

Chapters 3-7

Discipleship

Relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist is defined

The baptism of Jesus is the inauguration of his ministry

The Call of the Disciples

The Sermon on the Mount (4:23-7:29)

✚ Disciples as salt

✚ Disciples as light and a city on a hill

- ✚ Life in community (5:17-7:12)
- ✚ Warnings about life in the community (7:13-27)

- Chapters 8-10 Miracles
 Christ acts on behalf of the marginalized and those excluded
 Christ gathers disciples while facing opposition
 Jesus empowers the disciples and sends them out
 The cost of discipleship is explained as part of their call
- Chapters 11-13 Hidden Revelation in Parables
 A call for discernment to those who confess Jesus as the Son of Man
 Jesus as the servant king (Chapter 12)
 The conflict between the Kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom
 Parables reveal the true nature of the Kingdom of God
- Chapters 13-18 Church Administration
 Peter is the *rock* upon which the church will be built
 More conversation about the cost of discipleship
 Faith will move mountains
 Church discipline is outlined
 Forgiveness is an integral part of life in the church
- Chapters 19-26 Judgment
 Instructions to the disciples as they head into the passion narrative
 Issues of authority
 Judgment on the present and the coming judgment
 Parables reveal warnings to those who do not hear

Ends with the Last Supper, the Arrest of Jesus, the Trial, the Crucifixion and Resurrection



A Study of the *Sermon on the Mount*

A *beatitude* (Latin) or *makarism* (Greek) implies certain people are in a privileged situation. In the secular world it means *well-off* and in the religious realm it means *blessed by God*. Neither Jesus nor Matthew invented the form of these statements. They occur in the Old Testament and in Jewish tradition (wisdom literature and prophecies).

Examples are found in Isaiah 30:18 and 32:20 and Daniel 12:12.
The beatitudes were not meant to be practical advice for successful living.
They are prophetic declarations made toward the coming (and already present) kingdom of God.
They declare an objective reality as the result of a divine act.
They are a declaration of blessedness to those oriented to the future reality of the kingdom.
The indirect imperative makes them into a call that needs a decision.
There were no demands for conversion but these became the *marks of the church*.
However, the community that heard itself as *blessed* could not remain passive in their actions.

The beatitudes are not historical but eschatological (future).
All of them express an orientation to life together in the community of discipleship.
The *poor* are those who do not show arrogance or who do not dwell on their own needs.
They are the ones who know their lives are not in their own control and are dependent on God.

The beatitudes use two words – *are* and *will*.
Each starts in the present tense (already true) and moves to the future tense (ultimate validation).
In this we see that they were not meant to make us successful and calm.
Christianity is not a scheme to reduce stress, lose weight, or keep one from illness.
Christian faith is a way of living based on the firm / sure hope that meekness is the way of God.
Righteousness and peace will finally prevail.
The future with God will be a time of mercy and not cruelty.
Blessed are those who live this life now for in the end they will be vindicated by God.

Blessed are they which
do hunger and thirst after
righteousness:
for they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Assignment for September 19

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 25 on Pages 137-140
Read the *Gospel of Mark* or the portions outlined on Page 140