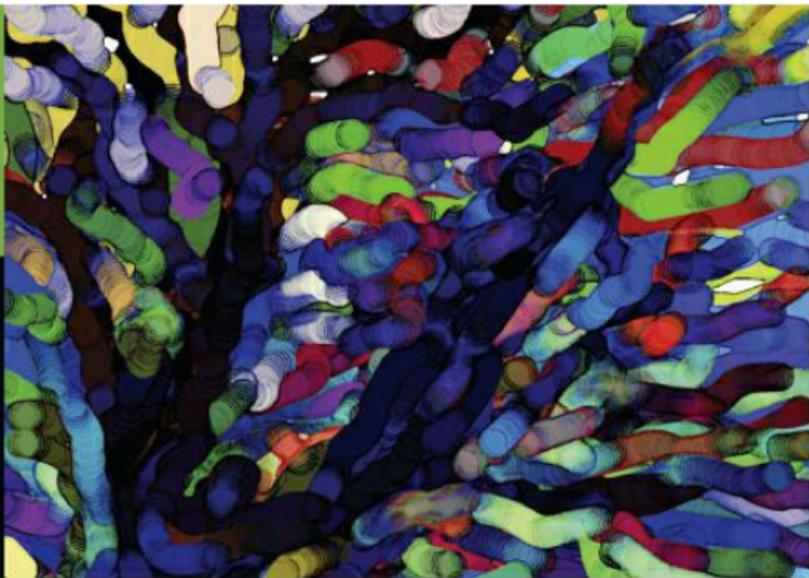


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MICHAEL GREEN

The Message of

Matthew

THE NEW TESTAMENT SERIES EDITOR: JOHN R. W. STOTT

The Message of Matthew

The kingdom of heaven

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*For Jane Holloway
in gratitude for fourteen
years of shared ministry
at St Aldate's Church, Oxford,
at Regent College, Vancouver,
and in the Archbishops' Springboard Initiative*

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General preface

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY describes three series of expositions, based on the books of the Old and New Testaments, and on Bible themes that run through the whole of Scripture. Each series is characterized by a threefold ideal:

- to expound the biblical text with accuracy
- to relate it to contemporary life, and
- to be readable.

These books are, therefore, not ‘commentaries’, for the commentary seeks rather to elucidate the text than to apply it, and tends to be a work rather of reference than of literature. Nor, on the other hand, do they contain the kinds of ‘sermons’ that attempt to be contemporary and readable without taking Scripture seriously enough. The contributors to *The Bible Speaks Today* series are all united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word.

ALEC MOTYER
JOHN STOTT
DEREK TIDBALL
Series editors

Author's preface

This Gospel according to Matthew is among the most influential books ever written. It is one of the four accounts we have of the good news of Jesus which derives from the apostolic circle. The ancient fathers quoted this Gospel more than any other, and with good reason. It is wonderfully complete, linking Jesus with his Jewish origins and Old Testament background, pointing forward to the growth of the Gentile Christian mission, and embodying in a memorably ordered fashion the teaching, actions, parables, miracles, death and resurrection of the central figure. It is the Gospel which not only proclaims the good news of Jesus but does so in such an organized way that it is ideal for any teacher.

I became thrilled with this Gospel some years ago when I was a Professor at Regent College, Vancouver. As I lectured on it, I became aware of the paucity of commentaries that one would want to pick up and actually read. They were often heavily preoccupied with scholarly details but missed the excitement of the material they were handling. So I determined to try to write a running commentary on the Gospel which would excite the readers, and carry them along, but would at the same time be academically responsible. One is never going to get unanimity among scholars in interpreting this Gospel, but I wanted to offer a framework that could be defended academically and would enable the thoughtful reader of the Gospel to gain a deeper understanding without becoming fogged by the minutiae of scholarship. That book, written without footnotes, was published some years ago by Hodder and Stoughton. It was entitled *Matthew for Today*. As a matter of fact I was invited by John Stott at that time to put it in *The Bible Speaks Today* series, and I should probably have done so! At all events, the publishers of *The Bible Speaks Today* came back to me when the designated authors of their exposition of Matthew had had to withdraw, and invited me to contribute the current volume. They asked me to do a thorough revision of my original book, so as to bring it up to date with contemporary scholarship, while retaining the lively, readable style of *Matthew for Today*. This I have tried to do, and I hope this volume will be a spiritual blessing and not merely an academic aid to many students of this wonderful Gospel. I am deeply grateful to my friend the Rev. Dr David Stone for contributing an excellent study guide to the Gospel.

This exposition completes the New Testament series of *The Bible Speaks Today*, and it would be wrong to close this Preface without a glowing tribute to Dr John Stott, whose vision and initiative launched the series many years ago, and whose own superb expositions have enormously enhanced it.

MICHAEL GREEN

Chief abbreviations

mg. margin

NIV New International Version of the Bible (1973, 1978, 1984)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1989, 1995)

REB Revised English Bible (1989)

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT 1946, 2nd edition 1971; OT 1952)

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Introduction

The Gospel according to Matthew is perhaps the most important single document in the New Testament, for in it we have the fullest and most systematic account of the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of the founder of Christianity, Jesus the Messiah. And yet it is a book that poses a number of questions which no commentators have been able to answer with certainty.¹ Let us examine some of them.

Who wrote the Gospel?

We do not know who wrote the Gospel. Like all the others, it is anonymous. The coming of Jesus sparked off an entirely new literary form, the 'Gospel'. It is not biography, though it contains it. It is not history, though it reflects it. A Gospel is the proclamation of good news: the good news of salvation which had long been looked for in Judaism, and which Christians were persuaded had burst upon the world in Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels are utterly captivated by him, and none of them mentions the name of its author.

Second-century writers sought to remedy this situation. They do tell us who wrote them, and they may or may not have been right. In the case of Matthew, it is not at all easy to know whether they were right, because there is a major contradiction in the evidence. The external evidence points uniformly in one direction, the internal in another.

The external evidence is coherent and clear. Indeed, it is unanimous. It makes three main points. First, the Gospel according to Matthew is the earliest of the Gospels. Secondly, it was written in 'Hebrew'. This may mean Hebrew or Aramaic: at all events, it means that the early Christians were confident that it had not originally been penned in the Greek we have before us today. Most of the second-century writers were also persuaded that it was written for those who were converts from Judaism, which is a very likely assumption. The links between the Gospel and the Old Testament are many and obvious. The third conviction of the second-century church was that the Gospel was written by Matthew, one of the twelve apostles.

Such is the consensus of the external evidence, drawn from the second century. Irenaeus, a highly educated Christian bishop who wrote his *Against Heresies* in the last quarter of the second century, was born in the East, studied in Rome, and became Bishop of Lyons. He was the greatest theologian of the second century, and nobody rivalled the breadth of his experience of the worldwide church. He was clear about the origins of the Gospel according to Matthew. 'Matthew published a book of the gospel among the Hebrews, in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church.'²

Origen, another massive intellect who flourished in Alexandria at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third, and who had access to the greatest Christian library in the world at that time, is no less clear. 'The first Gospel was written by Matthew, who was once a tax collector but who afterwards became an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism and published in the Hebrew language.'³

Eusebius, the early fourth-century historian of the early church, says, 'Matthew had first preached to Hebrews, and when he was on the point of going to others [i.e. Gentiles?] he transmitted in writing in his native language the Gospel according to himself.'⁴ And both he and Jerome (the greatest scholar in the ancient church, who published the Vulgate [Latin] translation of the Scriptures) tell us that Pantaenus, a leading and much-travelled Christian in the second century, found the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew letters (i.e. Aramaic) in India.⁵ Jerome is particularly explicit: Matthew is the same person as Levi. He was a tax collector who became an apostle. He composed the Gospel in Hebrew letters and words for those who had come to faith out of Judaism. And he confesses: 'It is not clear who subsequently translated it into Greek. Moreover, the Hebrew text remains extant to this day.'

The origin of this tradition is very early indeed. It springs from Papias, who wrote his *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* about AD 130, if not rather earlier.⁶ He was a disciple of John and companion of Polycarp, the influential bishop of Smyrna. Papias was very close to the earliest Christian tradition. Unfortunately his book has perished, but one tantalizing sentence remains about Matthew's Gospel: 'Matthew therefore composed the oracles (*logia*) in the Hebrew tongue, and each one translated them as he was able.'⁷ To that statement we shall return. It may well be the original basis for the unanimous tradition of the early church that Matthew, the apostle and erstwhile tax collector, wrote the earliest Gospel in Hebrew for converts from Judaism.

However, the internal evidence is strongly against this. Indeed, the careful study of the text of the Gospels over the last 250 years has, until recently, yielded virtual unanimity on the three points cited above. First, Matthew does not seem to be the earliest Gospel. Secondly, it does not seem to have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic. Thirdly, it does not seem to have been written by an apostle, let alone Matthew.

Despite writers like J. Chapman, B. C. Butler and W. R. Farmer,⁸ who maintained that Matthew is the earliest Gospel, hardly anybody else is persuaded. Irrespective of denomination, irrespective of theological position, those who have looked carefully into this matter are broadly convinced that the earliest documents about Jesus which have come down to us are the Gospel of Mark and the sayings of Jesus common to Luke and Matthew, usually known by the symbol Q. The order of events in Mark is clearly the basis for the order in Matthew and Luke, for Matthew and Luke never combine in order against Mark. Mark's order is primary. Moreover, if Matthew's Gospel had been written first, with its clear

beginning, teaching, Lord's Prayer, and post-resurrection appearances, it would have been almost incredible for Mark to come and truncate the beginning and end, and leave out marvellous teaching like the Sermon on the Mount.

This is not the place to set out a detailed defence of the priority of Mark;⁹ suffice it to say that few doubt it. If Mark's Gospel was the first to be written, however, that makes a big hole in the ancient testimony.

An even bigger hole is created by the second consideration. The Gospel does not show any sign of having originally been written in Hebrew or Aramaic. It is a Greek Gospel, and is a fairly polished piece of writing. It irons out many of the stylistic infelicities found in Mark's 'market-place' Greek. Indeed, Mark bears many signs of the Aramaic substratum of the earliest preachers, Peter and others, which lay beneath his record. These signs are almost all removed by Matthew, along with the Aramaic words that are occasionally to be found in Mark. No, Matthew does not show any sign of having originally been translated from Hebrew. But all our ancient testimony relates not to our Greek Matthew but to a supposed lost Hebrew original. So what is that testimony worth?

The third consideration follows logically on from the previous two. How is it possible to imagine an apostle and eyewitness following the account of someone who, like Mark, was neither? It is very hard indeed to suppose that the Greek Gospel of Matthew as we have it, dependent as it is on Mark, could have been written by Matthew or Levi, the former tax collector who became an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The external and internal evidence are, therefore, in strong contradiction. Clearly there was some substantial link between the apostle Matthew and the Gospel that bears his name. If he did not write it, how can we account for his name being attached to it so universally and from such an early date? Three possible answers come to mind, and each of them has had its advocates.

First, the apostle Matthew may have written the sayings collection often called Q. Basic study of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), shows not only that Mark is their common source, but that both Matthew and Luke draw on another source, possibly oral but probably written, which was not known and used by Mark. This material consists entirely of sayings of Jesus. Somebody must have compiled these sayings very early indeed, perhaps in his lifetime. There is nothing surprising about this. The teaching of Jesus broke like a thunderclap on Judea. Nothing like it had ever been heard before. It would have been very surprising if nobody among the thousands who flocked to hear him ever thought of putting pen to paper to record some of that matchless teaching. Matthew, the tax collector, had the skills and the proximity to Jesus. Maybe he did the Christian church the marvellous service of collecting and writing down the sayings of his Master that are now brought to us in the teaching parts of Matthew and Luke. It would make good sense of Papias' cryptic claim that 'Matthew compiled the *logia* in the Hebrew tongue, and each one translated them as he was able.' On this interpretation, the *logia* would be not the Gospel as we have it, but the sayings of Jesus, taken down in Aramaic. People made their own translations of them until they got incorporated in one of the Greek Gospels later on. But, on this view, Matthew would not have written a Gospel himself.

However, there is another possibility, favoured by some. It is plain that Matthew's Gospel makes great play with the theme of fulfilment of the hints, predictions and prophecies of the Old Testament. In particular, it uses a formula such as 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet ...' (1:22). There are ten or so such 'formula quotations' in this Gospel. Could it be that Matthew was the first to see this great theme of fulfilment? Could it be that he compiled the first list of 'testimonies' about Jesus? We know that such lists existed. A fascinating collection of messianic prophecies was discovered in Cave 4 at Qumran, where the Covenanters of the Dead Sea were earnestly awaiting divine intervention and deliverance. We know that Christians had such lists. One is extant from Cyprian, the third-century Bishop of Carthage. Rendel Harris, in his volumes entitled *Testimonies*,¹⁰ argued that the early Christians, with their known interest in the Old Testament and their confidence that Jesus was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and with the example of contemporary Jewish writers before them, wrote down collections of Old Testament prophecies that could be used to back up their convictions about Jesus. Could Matthew have made the first such collection of testimonies? Is this what Papias is referring to by his *logia*? It is by no means impossible: *logia* can mean 'scriptures', not merely 'sayings', and does in fact mean that in Romans 3:2 and *1 Clement* 53. If so, it would not be difficult to see how Matthew's name became so firmly attached to the Gospel, even though he did not write it. He had compiled the testimony collection that formed such a prominent characteristic of it.

There is a third possibility. Matthew found a good deal of oral material about Jesus circulating among the disciples and early preachers of the gospel. He had heard a lot of it himself. He had preached a lot of it himself. And it is clear from the careful plan of the Gospel that he was a highly organized person. His great contribution was to assemble this teaching, and put it into some stereotyped form in which it could readily be handed on to others. This is what the great rabbis had done, and in Judaism the oral form from the rabbinic teacher was always preferred to the written product. There were two sources for authoritative tradition in Israel. One was the written *torah*, deriving from Moses. But the other was also ultimately derived from Moses, they believed. It was the stereotyped tradition of the elders of the nation, pointing back to their predecessors and ultimately to Moses himself. Is it not possible that 'Matthew', who shows some signs of being a sort of Christian rabbi, organized the material about Jesus into an easily remembered form that could be handed down for succeeding generations? No doubt he did so in Hebrew or Aramaic, and everyone translated it as he was able, just as Papias maintained, until a good deal of it was incorporated in the Gospel that subsequently came to bear his name. It is not hard to imagine some such 'shaping' activity going on in Jerusalem or Antioch in the early days while the oral tradition about Jesus was still fluid. Perhaps Matthew gave it the shape and organization that were retained in the Greek Gospel of Matthew, and did so before any of the canonical Gospels was written.

It may be in one of these ways (and I incline towards the first) that some reconciliation can be effected between the external and internal evidence about the authorship of this remarkable Gospel.

What do we know about the tax collector?

Most of what we know about Matthew the tax collector comes from Matthew 9:9–13, with its parallels in Mark 2:13–17 and Luke 5:27–32. We can make a number of very probable inferences.

First, Matthew got a new name. Mark 2:14 calls him Levi, son of Alphaeus. So does Luke 5:27. Clearly his name was originally Levi, son of Alphaeus, and after he began to follow Jesus, he received a new name, just as Simon had. ‘Matthew’ means ‘gift of God’. Jesus saw what Levi was, and anticipated what he would become—God’s gift. It is significant that only Matthew’s account mentions the new name.

Secondly, Matthew belonged to a fascinating family. We learn from Mark and Luke that he was the son of Alphaeus. And so was James (Mark 3:18). They were therefore brothers. And at the end of the apostolic list (for all its variations) we find James ben Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot as the last four mentioned. We know that Simon was a Zealot, that is to say a violent resistance fighter against the occupying Roman forces. Very likely Judas Iscariot was as well: one of the more probable derivations for his name is *sicarius*, the Latin for ‘Zealot’. It is possible that James the son of Alphaeus shared the fierce, nationalistic patriotism of the Zealots. Most of the common people of Israel did in those days. But his brother, Matthew or Levi, was totally different. He farmed taxes for Herod Antipas. He co-operated with the occupying power that his brother seems to have been set on seeking to overthrow with bloody revolution. The quisling and the freedom fighter were brothers in the same family! This is not certain, but it is probable, and has often been noted by the commentators. It took Jesus of Nazareth to bring those two brothers together. Nobody else could.

Thirdly, Matthew was a tax collector, who left everything in his life for Jesus. The *publicani*, or tax collectors, were the people who raised the dues required by the Romans. They were much hated as social pariahs, and the Jews classed them with murderers. They were not even tolerated in the synagogues, and that is why, in the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14, the tax collector stands ‘afar off’. There were two main sorts of tax: the fixed taxes (ground tax, grain and wine taxes, fruit and oil tax, income tax and poll tax) and the more arbitrary taxes levied on customs, transport, exports and imports. The former had a fixed percentage, which was well known. It was in the latter category that there was limitless opportunity for the bribery and extortion that made the *publicani* so hated. Matthew had his tax office at Capernaum, on the main road from Damascus to Egypt, which passed through Samaria and Galilee. He was working under the direct employ of Herod Antipas, who, in turn, had to make massive block tax disbursements to Rome. It was a very lucrative place in which to work. This is the man who changed from his disreputable profession to become a wholehearted follower of Jesus.

Fourthly, Matthew threw a party for Jesus. That was both pathetic and glorious. Pathetic, because apparently he had no other friends apart from his fellow *publicani*, but delightful because his first instinct after discovering Jesus was to reach out to them and invite them to a meal to meet the Master (Matt. 9:10).

Finally, Matthew clearly brought his pen with him when he entrusted his life to Jesus. Most of the disciples of Jesus would have found that a fishing-net came more readily to hand than a pen. Not so Matthew. He was skilled at book work, and if we are to believe the united testimony of the early Christians he used this gift in the service of the gospel.

What can we infer about the author?

So much for Matthew, the man behind the Gospel. What of the actual author of the Gospel as we have it, however much he may have been dependent on Mark, on Hebrew material left by Matthew, on Q, or on a collection of Matthean testimonies? Four characteristics stand out.

First, he was a very humble man. He does not obtrude himself into the story at all. That is remarkable in a man who produced such a masterpiece. I recall that when Michelangelo heard people ascribing his Pietà to a rival, he slipped into the church at night and carved on to the statue the words *Michelangelo fecit*, ‘Michelangelo made it’. It would have been understandable if the author of this Gospel had done something similar. But he did not. He must have been very modest. His gaze is directed towards his Master, not himself.

Secondly, he was a believer. He was clearly on the side of the disciples in his story, not the Pharisees. What he includes in his Gospel he includes because it will be useful for the community of which he is a part. He puts together material that will be valuable in confronting the successors of the Pharisees in his own day, and will serve to build up the believers in his own church. He was no academic author cloistered in his study, but a believer passionately involved in a local church.

Thirdly, he was a teacher. He was clearly among the leadership of his own church, and he must have been a very good teacher. Matthew 5:19 reflects a scribal background and a strong teaching emphasis. Similarly, 28:20 reflects his teaching role. These are only slight hints, to accompany the remarkable organization of the material in this Gospel, but for what they are worth they support the hypothesis that he was himself a gifted teacher concerned to produce educated Christians who knew what they believed and why, and would be able to defend the faith in controversy with hostile opponents and ignorant Gentiles. It is probable that he himself was engaged in obeying the Great Commission (28:18–20), in preparing new believers for baptism (which he alone of the evangelists mentions, 28:19), in debating with the Pharisees, and in building up the church members by what he said and what he wrote. No doubt he helped with the problems that arose in the early church, drawing on the resources which Jesus had left behind him. Matthew’s Gospel handles several issues which do not get treated elsewhere in the Gospels. Clearly the author was a teacher.

Fourthly, he was a ‘fulfilled’ or ‘messianic’ Jew. There is a great deal of material in this Gospel to show that its author remained very much a Jew, ¹¹ with whom Gentiles and tax collectors had everything in common. A Jew he remained, but a Jew whose relationship with Jesus had given him a world vision. No Gospel displays a greater commitment to world

evangelization than Matthew's. It is one of the overriding characteristics of the book. The Magi, the Caananite woman, the centurion and others from Gentile backgrounds crowd into this Gospel set so firmly on Jewish soil. The author was probably a converted teacher of the law (scribe), perhaps leaving his mini-portrait in 13:52: 'Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.' Those words have struck most commentators as a brilliant description of just what the author of the Gospel was and did. He was once a teacher of the law, and now, as Jesus' follower, he uses his scribal background in the service of the gospel. His profession has been totally transformed. He is the interpreter not of a book, but of Jesus, who is the personal fulfilment of the law. This being so, the churches used Matthew's Gospel in debate with his former colleagues, and the material Jesus had left behind on the subject came in very handy. That is why it is preserved in this Gospel rather than in one of the others.

Who were the readers?

Three considerations seem to be significant in determining the readership for which the author wrote.

First, his readers were clearly, in the main, believing Jews, or Jews who were hovering on the verge of confessing Jesus as Messiah. This is very obvious from the large amount of Jewish material in this Gospel, and from all the links that are explicitly made with the Old Testament, from the first chapter onwards. Jews were manifestly in the centre of Matthew's vision. Gentiles were very much part of the original readership too. There was no apartheid in Matthew's church. They were probably not even called Christians yet. They claimed the name of the Messiah (10:40ff.; 19:29; 24:9). They were slaves, brothers, children, little ones of Jesus (5:22–24, 47; 7:3–5; 12:49; 18:1–14; 19:13–14; 23:8). They had most likely come to respond to Jesus through the messengers whom he had commanded to go through the cities of Israel and preach (10:5–23). They had accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord. They had been baptized into his name. And now they wanted to know how best to live for him among compatriots who had branded them as enemies of the law, of the religion and of the people of Israel. They were struggling to find their own pattern of life, distinct both from the Pharisees with their synagogues, and from the Gentiles with their pagan lifestyle. Matthew's Gospel gives them a great deal of help in this area.

Imagine the situation. Here were little 'synagogues' (as the earliest Christian gatherings seem to have been called)¹² of messianic Jews who had come to the conviction that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah promised in the Old Testament. They believed that the Law and the Prophets had been fulfilled in this carpenter of Nazareth. And that is why Matthew's Gospel lays such stress on the theme of fulfilment.¹³ This was the crux of the debate between the infant church and the synagogue. The nub of it was whether Gentiles as well as Jews could enter into the full worship of God (see 4:15–16; 8:11–13; 12:17–21). Christian insistence that they could do so produced strong reaction in the Jewish synagogue. The new sect was questioning behaviour patterns sanctioned for centuries as essential to Jewish life and religion. And here were these ignorant nobodies giving Jesus the status of Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah. They were claiming for him an authority greater than the law, greater than the temple. It was blasphemy! Moreover, if the Gospel was written after AD 70, they would also have attracted much odium because, although they were Jews, the Christians had not joined in the national struggle against Rome from AD 66 to 70. These were no patriots: they were cowards and deserters. Into their homes they accepted harlots, tax collectors and Gentiles. No wonder this Gospel so loudly echoes the bitter hostility that must have arisen between the Christian assembly and the synagogue down the road.

Secondly, it is probable that Matthew's Gospel was primarily addressed to teachers. In those days many people did not read, and so the role of Christian catechists and teachers was very important. They would need something like this Gospel so as to shape the material about Jesus into a memorable and manageable package in which it could be passed on. The church in the earliest period seems to have adopted the patterns of organization, training and worship that were prevalent in Judaism. That was very natural. The local church itself was, as we have seen, called a synagogue. Christian presbyters, or elders, took over from the lay elders who ran the synagogue. And Christian 'teachers of the law' were needed in order to do what their Old Testament counterparts had done. Their influence stemmed from knowledge of the Scriptures, acquaintance with the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures, and the ability to counsel people out of those Scriptures on how to live. These teachers were heirs to Moses' authority (23:2) and were honoured (23:6). They set the tone in prayer, fasting and almsgiving, the three central acts of Jewish piety (6:1–18). They exercised the power to bind or loose; that is to say to issue restricting or releasing enactments (16:19; 18:18; 23:23). Just as orthodox Jews would have asked, 'What do the scribes say?', so 'What do our Christian scribes say?' would have been the question in many an early Christian assembly. Jesus himself had anticipated the emergence of 'prophets and wise men and teachers' to correct the Pharisees (23:34). So I think we can imagine with some probability that Matthew's Gospel was a manual for such people. It was a tool for the Christian scribe. These scribes of Jesus were accredited by the Master himself. They were in line with the prophets of old. They were 'interns' of Jesus, the master rabbi, who had given them the keys to the mysteries of the kingdom (16:19). This Gospel was written for those coming over to Jesus the Messiah from Judaism, but it was written primarily with their teachers in mind. Christian scribes needed just such a tool for their ministry.

Thirdly, if we are to understand the readership of the Gospel properly, we must read the book at two levels.¹⁴ On the one hand, it is the record of what Jesus said and did. On the other, it is written to correlate with Matthew's readers and their situation. The evangelist takes the material from the time of Jesus and intentionally applies it to the lives and times of his readers. And, significantly enough, in most of the chapters of this Gospel, there are three audiences in view. First, there are the disciples; second, the crowds; and third, the teachers of the law and Pharisees. Those three groups are apparent everywhere throughout this Gospel. Why? Surely because there is a correspondence between the audience in

the days of Jesus and the readership for whom Matthew is writing. The ‘disciples’ correspond to the leadership in Matthew’s church; they constitute, if you like, the ‘prophets, wise men and scribes’ of the second generation. The crowds are the ordinary church members, those who overhear what is said and are on the fringe of the action; and the teachers of the law and Pharisees correspond to the largely hostile leaders of the local synagogue. It is like a split-screen television picture: we need to watch both images at once. And all the time the writer is applying the teaching and example of Jesus, which he faithfully records, for the leaders of his own day to assimilate and pass on to the crowds of new Christians who are beginning to flood into the church. Also, he wants to help them all in the unpleasant confrontations they often had to endure with those Jews who were not messianic. When Matthew explains how Jesus trained the Twelve, and met the needs of the crowds, he was also, if you read between the lines, helping his colleagues to care for the ‘little ones’ in their congregations, and to nourish and train Christian leaders of the next generation.

Paul Minear, in his commentary *Matthew: The Teacher’s Gospel*, adopts some such understanding of Matthew’s purpose in writing. I am not persuaded by his detailed breakdown of the material, but, like Krister Stendahl before him, he is surely right in seeing that the Gospel as a whole was a manual to put into the hands of church leaders to help them in their work. Minear sees here a manual for church members (4:23–7:28), a manual for healers (9:35–11:1) a manual of kingdom secrets (ch. 13), a manual of discipline in the church (18:1–19:2) and a manual of signs pointing to the return of Christ (chs. 24–25). I doubt whether we have in the Gospel an amalgam of five manuals. What we do have, without doubt, is a most organized account of the life and teaching of Jesus, admirably adapted for the purposes of those who are called to teach the faith.

What is the plan of the Gospel?

Although it is so manifestly well organized, it is by no means immediately apparent what the pattern of the Gospel is. However, practically everyone who has studied the book carefully would agree that it is built round five great blocks of teaching material given by Jesus, somewhat as follows:

- chs. 1–4 *Introduction: genealogy, infancy (chs. 1–2); baptism and beginnings of the ministry (chs. 3–4)*
- chs. 5–7 *Teaching 1: the Sermon on the Mount*
- chs. 8–9 Jesus’ miracles of healing (three groups of them)
- ch. 10 *Teaching 2: the mission charge*
- chs. 11–12 The rejection of John and Jesus by the Jews
- ch. 13 *Teaching 3: the parables of the kingdom*
- chs. 14–17 Miracles, controversies with Pharisees, Peter’s confession, and the transfiguration
- ch. 18 *Teaching 4: the church*
- chs. 19–22 Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and teaches
- chs. 23–25 *Teaching 5: judgment and the end of the world*
- chs. 26–28 The last days, death and resurrection of Jesus

At first sight it may be surprising that Matthew has grouped material originally given on different occasions into a connected discourse which he presents in one of these major building-blocks of his Gospel. But that is a very western objection. Why should the evangelist *not* arrange material topically rather than chronologically? Most preachers do it every time they speak. That Matthew does make this grouping is rendered certain by the formula with which he brings each block of teaching to a conclusion, such as ‘When Jesus had finished saying these things ...’ (7:28); ‘After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples ...’ (11:1), and similar phrases in 13:53; 19:1 and 26:1. It is no less obvious where he got the idea from; the five books of the Jewish Torah. Just as God had given the old covenant through Moses, so he gives the new covenant through the new Moses, Jesus, the one to whom Moses pointed forward. Matthew is underlining the continuity of the new law with the old, the new leader with the old. Here is one greater than Moses, giving to the people of God a new law, no longer externalized on tablets of stone, but written within their hearts. Nobody can turn the Sermon on the Mount into a legal code. Here are principles that can be applied by the Spirit of God to ever-changing situations. And Matthew has gathered from the teaching of Jesus a collection of such material, which he presents to us in the Sermon on the Mount. The same is true of the other blocks of teaching material. Few would dispute this.

But the divergence comes in different analyses of the contents of the Gospel apart from the five teaching blocks. There are many ways of breaking down that material. It is generally agreed that chapters 8 and 9, which contain nine acts of power by Jesus, complement his powerful teaching in the Sermon that precedes them. But the contents of the other chapters are not so easy to discern.

Perhaps the heart of the matter lies in chapter 13. It is the hinge on which the Gospel turns.¹⁵ It is the break in the middle of the book, and the emphasis thereafter moves from the crowds to the Twelve. It may well reflect the theme of the Gospel, too. For here in chapter 13 we see the different responses to the planting of God's seed in the hearts of men and women: it is both reflective and challenging. And if chapter 13 is the hinge of the Gospel, we find two carefully balanced discourses on either side. Discourses 1 and 5 are similar in length and not dissimilar in subject matter. Both are about entry into the kingdom (now, and at the end-time). Discourses 2 and 4 are also similar in length and subject matter. They are concerned with the sending out of people, and the receiving of people, in the mission of the church and in the name of Jesus. Clearly, some care has been taken over the parallelism. The same evidence of care shows up in the narrative material as well. There are similarities between the accounts of the birth of Jesus and the resurrection. The birth of Jesus proclaims him as Immanuel, 'God with us'. The resurrection account enshrines his promise, 'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (28:20). Matthew's Gospel is very carefully designed indeed.

Nobody has perceived this better than Elizabeth and Ian Billingham, in a little book entitled *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, which is not as well known as it deserves to be. I find it rather persuasive. Their outline is to be found below. They recognize the centrality of the five great blocks of teaching. They recognize the hinge nature of chapter 13. So far so good: there is nothing new here. But thereafter they develop a very detailed structure which, if it is correct, enables us to gain much insight into Matthew's purpose and pattern in writing.

The main division of the Gospel comes at 13:57. Part 1 is enacted in Galilee, Part 2 in Judea. This verse summarizes Part 1 and points forward to Part 2. Thus the rejection of Jesus in Galilee prepares us for a greater rejection in Jerusalem, as Israel turns her back on her rightful king. But although a prophet is rejected, often enough, in his own country, he is frequently accepted outside, and this prepares us for the fact that the cross and resurrection begin to forge a new people of God among the Gentiles. There is thus a superb symmetry between the rejection that concludes Part 1 and the vindication that brings Part 2 to an end. Moreover, John the Baptist launches Part 2, and it is a particularly subtle link. He challenged Herod as Jesus challenged Jerusalem; and he came to a violent end, just as Jesus would. His death is proleptic.

The Pattern of Matthew's Gospel

Part 1: In Galilee (1:1–13:58)

A. BEGINNINGS	B. DISCIPLESHIP	C. ACCEPTING OR REJECTING JESUS
1. Jesus' family tree (1:1–17)	1. The disciples see Jesus' power to heal (8:1–17)	1. Grounds for accepting (11:2–30)
2. Birth and childhood (1:18–2:23)	2. Jesus discourages some, but leads the disciples on. They see his power over nature, demonic forces and sin, and his disregard of convention (his call of Matthew) (8:18–9:13)	2. The Pharisees reject Jesus (12:1–14)
3. The beginning of Jesus' work (3:1–4:25)	3. Those who see, and those who don't (9:14–34)	3. Acceptable to the Father a. Healings—leading to quotation from Isaiah b. Jesus accused of working in power of Beelzebub c. Jesus refuses to give sign d. 'Whoever does the will of my Father ... is my brother ...' (12:15–50)
4. TEACHING Basic teaching for disciples (5:1–7:27)	4. TEACHING Instructions to disciples, as they are sent out to do the work of Jesus (9:35–10:42)	4. TEACHING Parables about the kingdom (13:1–52)

‘When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed ... because he taught them as one who had authority ...’ (7:28–29)

‘After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach ...’ (11:1)

‘When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on ... to his home town ... “Only in his home town ... is a prophet without honour.”’ (13:53–54, 57)

Part 2: To Jerusalem (14:1–28:20)

D. FORESHADOWING THE FUTURE

Introduction: the death of John the Baptist

1. The future for Israel

- a. Feeding 5,000
- b. Jesus and Peter (who will be leader of new Israel, the church) walk on water
- c. Healing
- d. True worship (14:13–15:20)

2. The future for the world

- a. Healing a Gentile girl
- b. Feeding 4,000
- c. Interpreting signs of the times
- d. Peter’s declaration about Jesus (15:21–16:20)

3. The more immediate future—Jesus must go to Jerusalem and suffer (16:21–17:27)

4. TEACHING The kind of behaviour expected of those entering (on earth) the kingdom Jesus is about to set up (18:1–35)

‘When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left

E. JUDGMENT—BY JESUS, OF JESUS, AND THE FINAL JUDGMENT

1. Reversal of human values

- a. On divorce
- b. On children brought to Jesus
- c. On the rich young man
- d. Parable of labourers in vineyard
‘So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’ (19:3–20:1b)

2. ‘Many are invited, but few are chosen.’ (20:17–22:14)

3. The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus into condemning himself (22:15–23:39)

4. TEACHING Predictions and parables about the time of the final judgment (24:1–25:46)

‘When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his

F. THE END—AND THE BEGINNING

1. Events leading to the arrest of Jesus (26:3–56)

2. The trial of Jesus (26:57–27:26)

3. The crucifixion (27:27–66)

4. The resurrection (28:1–20)

‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the

Galilee and went into disciples, "... the region of Judea Passover is two days to the other side of away—and the Son of the Jordan ...' (19:1) Man will be ... crucified.'" (26:1–2)

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (28:10–20)

Throughout the whole account there is a gradualness which ought not to be missed. Despite the formal end of Part 1 in the rejection of Jesus, there is no sudden and cataclysmic change. God's offer to Israel remains open during the chapters that follow, despite her seeming rejection of her Messiah. Yet all the time the new Israel is being formed, slowly and surely, and it is all centred round Peter and his colleagues. Like Peter, the church is to walk with Jesus by faith, despite the storms that assail them (14:33). A glimpse is given in chapter 15 of the coming world mission of the church. Chapter 16 shows Jesus determining to build his church on Peter's confession that he is Messiah and Son of God, and the transfiguration in chapter 17 confirms it. At last Jesus and his followers are ready to go up to Jerusalem for the denouement.

The Billingshams select three elements as worthy of comment from the five blocks of teaching material in the Gospel. First, Matthew is showing the continuity of the people of God throughout the ages. Secondly, Matthew shows how the people of God are Abraham's seed, and the promise of Genesis 15 is honoured. Abraham's descendants go and make disciples of all nations. The Great Commission fulfils God's promise that Abraham's descendants would outnumber the stars. Thirdly, the new Israel receives its new *torah*, law, which must be faithfully committed to succeeding generations.

Each half of the Gospel falls into three sections. B and E, the central sections in each half, are pivotal. Sections A and D, which respectively precede them, prepare the way for the two central themes of 'discipleship' and 'judgment'. Those that follow, C and F, carry these themes forward in such a way as to bring out the full implications of discipleship and judgment. The process comes inexorably to a head. Neutrality is impossible. Men and women have to decide how to respond.

We have, therefore, no simple story about Jesus in this Gospel. It is all very carefully planned to demonstrate authentic Christianity in action, showing the centrality of Jesus to every aspect of the Christian life and faith. Each item in the account has been carefully and precisely placed so as to make the greatest impact on the reader.

Let us examine these two halves a little more closely, beginning with section B, the linchpin of the first half of the Gospel. It is all about discipleship. The powerful presence of Jesus healing, exorcising and cleansing proclaims the kingdom of heaven. To follow him is a costly and serious business. So Jesus discourages those unwilling to pay the cost (8:18–22), and brings those who do into a closer relationship with himself (8:27–9:13). The disciples begin to see the face of the kingdom in the person of Jesus. They are ready for the trial run at mission which follows in chapter 10.

But before section B comes A, setting Jesus in the context of God's historic dealings with Israel by means of the genealogy and the infancy narratives. Matthew needs to show how Jesus' mission is linked with John's life, call to repentance, and arrest (3:1–4:17). He also needs to sketch a clear picture of what it means to be learners under Jesus as he enunciates the life of the kingdom of God. Hence the Sermon on the Mount that follows, and prepares the way for the subsequent central section on discipleship.

Section C emerges naturally from that same central section B. The challenge to discipleship is clarified. The kingdom of God is plainly seen to be embodied in Jesus, who is the kingdom in person. What will people do with the kingdom? What will they do with Jesus? This is the question that comes again and again in this section. First, the grounds for accepting Jesus are made clear through the material about John the Baptist (11:2–19). Jesus refers John in his doubts to the signs Isaiah (35:5–6; 61:1) said would mark the kingdom (11:2–6). Jesus then likens the Jews to unco-operative children playing street games. Refusal to see brings condemnation: but all can respond to his gracious invitation if they will (11:29). Jesus is the bridge between God and humankind; he is the locus of revelation. People should get yoked up with him!

Chapter 12 shows that on the whole the Pharisees are unwilling to accept his invitation. The atmosphere gets harsher. The claims of Jesus (to be Satan's victor, the ultimate judge, a greater than Solomon, Jonah and the temple) are more insistent. And the chapter that begins with the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus ends with the disciples' being welcomed into the most intimate relationship with him. The contrast is plain, and chapter 13, which follows, underlines it. The whole chapter is like a mirror flashed into the face of his hearers so that they can see themselves. Which way are they facing?

The second half of the book also has its crucial central section, E. And the content of that section is judgment. The theme rises to a crescendo in the last and most awesome of the parables, the great judgment.

The basis of judgment is whether people did or did not show mercy to those in need. The emphasis is on obedience to the implicit claims of the great Lover. It is the fitting conclusion of the Christian *torah*.

But this final judgment is preceded by a series of lesser challenges, represented by issues such as divorce (19:3) and marriage (19:10–12), the importance of God's children (19:14) and the matter of money (19:24). God's judgments are not made on the same basis as ours—hence the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (20:1–16). And so to the reversal of human values in the servant motif, rejected by Zebedee's sons, but embodied in Jesus (20:17–28). In that role Jesus enters Jerusalem humbly on a donkey, the Servant-Messiah (21:1–11). Immediately he is moved to act in judgment against the corrupt temple and the barren fig-tree (the emblem of Israel). The chief priests attempt to pass judgment on Jesus (21:23–27) but he shows that they are actually being judged by God (21:28–46). The judgment theme continues in chapter 22 in the parables of the marriage feast, taxes to Caesar, the great commandment, and the decision the Jerusalem leadership has made about messiahship (22:41–46). Chapter 23 contains Jesus' blistering judgments on the attitudes of the religious and on the city of Jerusalem (23:37ff.). This leads straight into the predictions of the end and the parables associated with it in chapters 24 and 25.

Section D precedes this central section E. And it is all about the future. The future of Israel comes under review, as does that of the Gentile world and the church that will penetrate it; so, indeed, does Jesus' own future. The teaching section that concludes it is all about the community of the future, the Christian church.

Section F is all about the end and the beginning. The events leading up to the cross are followed not by any new teaching section, but by the resurrection, the living Christ. The person has replaced the book. And this is a highly significant conclusion to the Gospel. This section spells out the implications of the judgment theme which preceded it in section E, the centrepiece of Part 2; just as section C had drawn out the implications of the discipleship theme in section B. Human judgment of Israel's Messiah is carried out through crucifixion, and that judgment will redound on those who cried out, 'Let his blood be on us and on our children!' (27:25). Yet despite humankind's judgment against God's Messiah, God's purpose is not thwarted. The resurrection is God's supreme vindication of Jesus and his claims, his teaching and his matchless life. 'He is not here; he has risen' (28:6). The crucified and risen Christ confronts people as the good news is proclaimed. And the question he poses is the heart of the whole Gospel. It is the question Pilate wrestled with: 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' (27:22).

It may be that we can argue about some of the detail. But I believe that the Billingshams have made out an excellent case for the centrality of chapter 13, the six sections of the Gospel and the skilful construction of those six panels embracing a central one in each half of the book. It is a pattern that enables us to see the design of the Gospel with some probability and no little clarity.

Why was the Gospel so popular?

Popular Matthew certainly was. In the second and third centuries it was constantly being quoted, whereas Mark was rarely consulted. Today, by way of contrast, it is Mark that enjoys favour, and Matthew is generally rather neglected. Why was it so much in vogue in the early church? Why was it placed first of the four when the Gospel canon emerged in the latter part of the second century?

There are a number of reasons. One of them is clearly that Matthew was the Gospel used by one of the great church centres. Certainty is not possible, but there is a lot to be said for the suggestion that the church at Antioch regularly used it, and thus gave it a lot of prestige. Ignatius, the early second-century Bishop of Antioch and martyr, was soaked in Matthew's Gospel, and there are strong traces of it also in the *Didache*, which seems to have originated in Antioch. The *Didache* was written around the end of the first century AD and comprised early teaching of the church. Interestingly enough, it was only in Antioch that the stater was worth four drachmas, and that is clearly the implication of Matthew 17:24–27. Antioch is a likely guess. In any case, some great city must have taken Matthew's Gospel to its heart if we are to account for its widespread use in antiquity.

A second reason is obviously that it was connected with the name of a great apostle. If Matthew the tax collector did not actually write it (and we have seen that he probably did not), he was widely believed to have done so, and clearly had something very significant to do with its origins, perhaps as the author of Q or of the *testimonia*. Having such an author obviously counted for a great deal.

Thirdly, the very Jewishness of this Gospel not only made it a valuable guide for those coming into Christianity from Judaism, but also provided a wonderful bridge into the Old Testament, showing the continuity and the difference between Christianity and Judaism.

Fourthly, the Gospel was magnificently arranged, as we have seen. It sprang from an orderly mind. It demonstrated a memorable plan. The evangelist arranged events and sayings into groups of three, five, seven or nine. Thus we have seven woes against the Pharisees (ch. 23), three typical examples of Jewish piety (6:1–18), seven parables (ch. 13), nine miracles in groups of three (chs. 8–9) and three series of fourteen generations in the genealogy (not forgetting that fourteen is the numerical value in Hebrew letters of the name David). Add to that the six panels of the Gospel and the five great blocks of teaching, and it is not surprising that this Gospel became so popular. It was easy to find your way around.

Fifthly, this Gospel is the most complete of the four. That is why it served as a manual for Christian teachers just as the *Manual of Discipline* did for the men of Qumran and the *Didache* did for the subapostolic church. Matthew's Gospel is complete, from the Old Testament background and genealogy to the Great Commission. It is an account of the origin, birth, ministry, teaching, mighty deeds, death, resurrection and continuing mission of great David's greater Son. In a word, this Gospel is an apology, defending the Christian faith against Jewish attacks. It is a manual to build up converts in

Christian ethics and life. And it may well, as G. D. Kilpatrick¹⁶ thought, have been used as an early lectionary, helping Christians to live a life of disciplined discipleship based on the words and deeds of Jesus set out in a systematic way that could be read week by week in the worship services.

Finally, Matthew's Gospel was succinct and clear. Matthew almost always shortens Mark's accounts, and his story is smoother, lacking Mark's harsh or vivid details. He also goes to some lengths to clarify what might have been misunderstood in the Markan account: the meaning of Jesus' baptism, for example, and the rumours about the grave-robbing. The faces of the disciples are often spared the blushes that are described in Mark, and there is more reverence about the person of Jesus himself. It all made for brevity and clarity.

When was it written?

We do not know for sure when Matthew was written. And the answer we give will depend very much on how we assess and value the ancient evidence that Matthew the apostle was the first to write a Gospel, and that it was the Hebrew prototype of our Greek Matthew that he composed. There is no compelling reason why, in the unlikely event that this is

the correct attribution of authorship, the Gospel could not have been written in the forties. The Aramaist C. C. Torrey saw no reason why such a date need be rejected. If, however, the Gospel is a refined and polished edition of Mark with the addition of extra material, that makes a lot of difference to the date we give it. There are strong reasons to believe that Mark was written shortly before AD 70. If so, Matthew will have been written some years later, and a majority of scholars (for no very compelling reason, it must be confessed) assign it a date around AD 80. The most important internal hint may be found in 22:7: 'The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.' That certainly looks like an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in AD 70. However, it may be a stock description of a punitive expedition by a typical ancient king. The other bits of evidence can also be argued either way. For example, many scholars are impressed by the ecclesiastical organization (16:19; 18:17), the rise of false prophets (24:9) and the increased reverence paid to the disciples (8:26; 14:33; 16:9) and postulate a late date; but Krister Stendahl is not at all moved by this.^[17] He sees a number of these factors already present in the Qumran community before Jesus was born! The truth is that we do not know the date of this Gospel. It was probably before AD 50 if the ancient fathers are right about its authorship. If they are wrong, somewhere in the 70s is more probable. Whatever the date of origin, it speedily established itself as the most important and most frequently quoted of the four Gospels.

What were Matthew's main concerns?

Among Matthew's many interests and emphases I suggest that these seven figured high.

1. Jesus, the centre of his vision

The author is entirely eclipsed by his subject, and Matthew has organized all his material to focus the reader's attention first on the person of Jesus the Messiah (1:1–4:16),^[18] then on his public ministry (4:17–16:20) and thereafter on his death and resurrection. 'Jesus' is the main name used, and apart from 1:21 it is always a personal name. 'Jesus' is born in Bethlehem (2:1, 5–6), is raised in Nazareth (2:23) as a carpenter's son (13:55), and has brothers and sisters (13:55–56). As an adult he moves to Capernaum, which is called his own town (4:13; 9:1) where he apparently has a house (9:10, 28; 13:1; 17:25). Jesus is the climax of God's self-revelation; 11:27 shows him as both the author and the locus of God's self-disclosure.

The name apart, Jesus is often called 'Messiah' in Matthew's Gospel. The Hebrew word, and its Greek equivalent, *Christos*, simply mean 'the anointed one' (1:16, 18). Very soon it became almost a surname of Jesus, but in Matthew it often retains its basic meaning. Israel knew anointed prophets, priests and kings. After their demise the hope persisted that one day there would arise a figure who would recapitulate in his own person those three anointed strands of old. Those hopes were crystallized in the expectation of a Messiah, or sometimes (as at Qumran), two. The claim of Matthew is that the anointed one has come in Jesus of Nazareth (1:16, 18; 16:20–21). The title of 'prophet' was also accorded him, but it was soon seen to be inadequate (16:14; 21:11). He stands in David's royal line (1:1, 16–17, 20, 25). So 'Son of David' is used in this Gospel to shed light on who he is, especially when he heals those who are of no account in Israel (9:27–31; 12:23; 15:21–28; 20:29ff.). Often these despised folk see what the leaders of Israel are blind to, and Matthew makes full use of the ironic contrast. Jesus is David's anointed Son, and this description of him emphasizes God's faithfulness to his promises long ago, and so heightens the guilt of the chief priests in killing their Messiah.

A third way in which Jesus is described is as 'Lord'. The Greek word, *kyrios*, has a variety of nuances. It may mean no more than 'sir', as it does in modern Greek. That is the meaning in 27:63. It is often used of God, translating the Hebrew 'a *dōnāy*'. Occasionally in the Gospel it is applied to Jesus himself by those who have faith (e.g. 26:22; 16:22; 18:21). As J. D. Kingsbury showed,^[19] this word 'Lord' has nuances of divinity about it when applied to Jesus by disciples. It was a confessional title in the earliest church.^[20]

A fourth title of Jesus found often in this Gospel is 'Son of Man'. It is a public title, used among unbelievers and enquirers. The title is preferred by Jesus. It is always to be found on his lips and his alone. Jesus speaks about himself in this way when he is talking in general about his ministry (8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 40), when he speaks about his cross (17:12, 22; 20:18–19; 26:2) and when he looks ahead to future vindication in glory (10:23; 16:27–28; 24:27, 30; 26:64–65). There was a marvellous ambivalence about it. It could be simply a periphrasis for 'I', as Geza Vermes never tires of stressing.^[21] But it was also rooted in Daniel 7:13, as he is consistently unwilling to notice. And there it unambiguously stands for a towering figure, more divine than human, representing the 'saints, the people of the Most High',^[22] to whom is given 'authority, glory and sovereign power'.^[23] And it is this glorious figure who, as Jesus realized, was destined to stoop to assume the role of the suffering Servant whom Isaiah had long ago seen as the sin-bearer of the people. The highest in Judaism, the Son of Man, was to be identified with the lowest, the suffering Servant (Matt. 17:22). Thereafter God would hold out for him a glorious future seated 'at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven' (26:64).

'Son of God' is the fifth and main title of Jesus in this Gospel. The Messiah is 'God's Son', not merely David's (27:40, 43, 54). In chapter 1 he is revealed as God's Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph (1:18). He is 'God with us' (1:23). In chapter 2 reference is repeatedly made to 'the child and his mother'; at his baptism his divine sonship is stressed (3:17). The temptation assumes it (4:3, 5–6). It is as divine Son that he heals, preaches and teaches, and this comes to a climax in Peter's confession of him as the Son of God (16:16). And so on through the passion to the resurrection. He has a unique relationship with the Father. He does on earth what his Father does in heaven. He has the right to call God Abba, 'dear Father'. Others can call God Father only in a derivative way. He speaks of God as 'my Father' or 'your Father', but

never ‘our Father’, except in words he gives his disciples to say (6:9). His relationship to God is unique and incommunicable. Only he can reveal the Father (11:27ff.). He is totally endued with the Father’s authority (28:18).

There can be no doubt that Jesus is the centre of Matthew’s vision.

2. *The unity of revelation*

Matthew was sure that God had revealed himself in the Old Testament. Every Jew was sure of that. He was the God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had done so by his words and by his actions. That was not an issue in Judaism. Everyone believed it. But if this is Matthew’s conviction, how does he account for Jesus centuries later? How does he relate to God’s revelation in the Old Testament? Matthew’s answer is very clear. Jesus and the Old Testament correspond as fulfilment to promise. That is why Jesus is called by so many Old Testament titles. That is why he picks up so many Old Testament themes. That is why he quotes the Old Testament so freely and confidently, particularly with the ‘formula quotations’: ‘All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet ...’ (1:22).^[24] That is why Matthew stresses that Jesus came not to abolish the *torah* but to fulfil it (5:17). And when Jesus gives his great Sermon on the Mount, he does not scrap the Old Testament, but intensifies it. The commandment said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ To say, ‘Don’t look at a woman lustfully’ does not negate the commandment; it intensifies it (5:27–28). That is what Jesus does time and again with the Old Testament. He applies it to the heart and makes it the more challenging.

It is the same with the formula quotations. When you look at them in their original Old Testament context, many of them seem to have almost nothing to do with the events to which Matthew applies them. They are, in a bizarre way, taken out of context. How can he do such a thing? Simply because he believes so strongly in the unity of revelation. It is not that Matthew dreams up these allusions from the Old Testament. Had he done so, they would fit much better than they do. It is the action of Jesus that is primary. And the early Christians, such as Matthew, reflected, ‘If Jesus really does bring us the final revelation of God, then it *must* be hinted at, however obscurely, in the Scriptures which come to us from God through Moses and the prophets.’ So ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’ (2:15) must be seen, in its fullest sense, as a prediction of what in fact happened when the young Jesus came back from the sojourn he and his family had in Egypt and returned to Nazareth—though in the original passage of Hosea (11:1) no such thought was in the mind of the prophet. It may look like a misuse of the Old Testament, but actually it is not. It is a profound way of saying that the God who has revealed himself in the ancient Scriptures has now given a full and final disclosure of himself in Jesus. ‘In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.’ Those opening words of the letter to the Hebrews could easily have been written by Matthew. He believed passionately in the unity of revelation. The time of fulfilment has come. But that fulfilment was foreshadowed in the Old Testament.^[25]

3. *The life of discipleship*

Matthew’s Gospel is strong on discipleship. He is clear that to decide for Jesus means repudiating old ways of behaviour. The law of the kingdom must mark the lives of the members of the kingdom. God’s love brings us into the kingdom in the first place; that same love must have a practical outworking in our lives. We are the recipients of the love of God, who accepts us just as we are, unqualified tax collectors, sinners and the like. And that love transforms us. The practical outworking is delineated in the Sermon. That is how disciples are called to reflect the *agapē* which won them. The indicative of what members of the kingdom are in Christ is followed by the imperative of how they must behave. It is the outworking of what God works within them. Decision for Christ inevitably leads into discipleship of Christ. The Sermon assumes the indicative: it spells out the imperative. The gospel and ethics cannot be separated. And the ethic of the kingdom is spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount. It is meant to be lived out by the church in the midst of a secular society. We are not to expect everybody else to behave like that, but disciples are called to nothing less. That is the outworking of the love that has reached us in Jesus the Messiah. So discipleship is a major concern of Matthew throughout his Gospel. And undoubtedly he intends the readers of his work to apply this truth to themselves. If Jesus is our rabbi, then discipleship is the name of the game.

4. *The kingdom of heaven*

The phrase ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (literally, ‘the heavens’) is a major concern in Matthew, and is peculiar to him. It shows how deeply rooted was his Judaism, for orthodox Jews used periphrases like ‘heaven’ so as to avoid using the sacred divine name. It means the same as ‘the kingdom of God’ in the other Gospels,^[26] and is a specifically rabbinic trait. We shall look at seven aspects of the phrase.

The meaning of the kingdom

The phrase is used in four ways. First, it expresses the ultimate sovereignty of God over his world. Secondly, it stakes a claim: we, his creatures, should serve the King. Thirdly, it describes the realm in which his kingly rule is acknowledged. Thus you enter the kingdom, you are a child of the kingdom, you receive the kingdom, by responding to his kingly rule and surrendering to the King. And fourthly, it points to a future when God will be all in all, and his will shall be done on earth as in heaven. That is what the kingdom of God means in the Gospels. Thus Matthew speaks of the kingdom as already realized (in the person of the King, e.g. 4:17; 11:11) and yet also future (24–25; 16:28; 20:21). The kingdom of God has both a present manifestation and a future consummation. Men and women enter the kingdom by offering their allegiance to the King. And so the preaching of the kingdom means precisely the same as Jesus’ appeal to people to repent (18:3), believe (18:6) and offer him their total allegiance (13:44–46).

The character of the kingdom

The character of the kingdom is very radical. It is the place where the Lord God is our Father (6:9). The fatherhood of God marks the kingdom into which we are invited. The forgiveness of sins is the very air we breathe (18:23ff.). We are brought into the new and eternal covenant (26:28). But we must not forget that the kingdom is an upside-down kingdom (11:25). It is the new order that means good news for the poor (11:5). It is the age to which the Scriptures pointed (11:2-6). It is the age of the Spirit (12:28). It is radically new and disturbing.

The coming of the kingdom

In one sense the kingdom is eternal and timeless, God's perpetual sovereignty over his world, his standing claim on people's allegiance. But in another sense it was brought in by Jesus. Matthew is clear on this matter. As we have seen, Daniel 7:13-14 are important verses in helping us to understand how Jesus and the kingdom are related. The kingdom spoken of there has three strands: authority, glory and sovereign power. And all three are major factors in the life of Jesus and emerge at major points in it. Take his birth, for example. There was the power of God's Spirit working with the virgin Mary to conceive Jesus. There was the glory of the angelic host worshipping at his birth. And there was the authoritative guidance that saved him from the slaughter of the small children in Bethlehem meted out by Herod. Or take the death of Jesus. It spoke of authority over Satan. It spoke of the power of God at that place of supreme weakness. And it was on the cross that his glory was revealed *par excellence*.

So it will be at the end of the world. It will be a demonstration of the authority of God breaking in to end human history. It will be the Son of Man returning in glory. And he will come to take his sovereign power. Here we have the same three great themes of the kingdom as were foreseen by Daniel long ago.

At the major events of Jesus' life all these three strands are present. At other times, one or other predominates. Thus at Pentecost his power is the main thing; at the ascension and at the transfiguration, his glory; at the destruction of Jerusalem, his authority as judge, a tiny cameo of the last day. This way of looking at the coming of the kingdom may help us to understand some of the difficult verses we find in the Gospel connected with it. Here are three. 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (16:28). What does that mean? Well, it is clear what Matthew thought it meant. His narrative continues, 'After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John ... and ... was transfigured before them' (17:1-2). The evangelist clearly saw the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom as at least prefigured in the transfiguration, which took place six days later. That was the coming in glory.

Or take 26:64: '... you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'. The glory and the authority attributed to Jesus in that verse are manifestly part of his parousia, his return at the end of the age, no longer incognito but as rightful King. Or take 10:23: 'I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.' This looks very much like the coming of the Lord in sovereign power in the judgment of AD 70. It means that they will not have completed the Jewish mission before judgment befalls Israel and the gospel is released widely into the Gentile world. Those are all difficult verses. The 'coming of the kingdom' is progressive and at different levels. But these three strands of authority, glory and sovereign power have a lot to do both with the events concerned and with the verses attached to them.

The demands of the kingdom

God's kingdom makes two main demands. First, you must enter into the kingdom (7:13, 21). This happens when you relate to the King. That is why Jesus called people to himself (11:28). For he is the embodiment of the kingdom (11:11). The Old Testament asserted God's kingly rule over his people Israel. But that idea was sadly marred in practice. On the one hand, the kings of Israel were generally a poor advertisement for God's kingship. They represented him very inadequately. And on the other hand, the people of Israel failed dismally to represent the servant response that is proper to the King. They were always breaking away to do their own thing, and obedience was hardly the supreme characteristic of God's people throughout their history. Both kingship and servanthood were very imperfectly embodied. But with Jesus all that changed. He expressed and embodied in his own person the kingly rule and claims of God Almighty. And he displayed in his perfect obedience all the marks of the Servant of the Lord. King and Servant met in his person. Jesus is thus both the founder and embodiment of the kingdom. He is the kingdom in himself. That is why he can call people to himself when he invites them into the kingdom of God (11:28). That is also why, in Acts, preaching about Jesus is, on occasion, referred to as preaching about the kingdom of God.²⁷ The message of the kingdom was entry by repentance and faith. And that is precisely the way in which to approach Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus tells people to repent (18:3), to believe (18:6) and to offer the allegiance proper to subjects (13:44-46) if they mean to enter the kingdom. The message of the kingdom was rightly and necessarily integrated with the person of the King.

Entry is one condition of the kingdom. The other is ethics. Once we enter in, we are reckoned to be sheep, not wolves; wheat, not weeds; sheep, not goats; good trees, not bad. New birth leads to new behaviour. New life leads to a new lifestyle. We must face the cost of the ethics of the kingdom. We cannot love God and materialism (6:24). In particular we must care for the poor and the powerless, who are called blessed by the King (5:3ff.).

The spread of the kingdom

In one sense it is nonsense to speak of the spread of the kingdom, because God is the ultimate and absolute ruler over all his creation. In another sense it is a good way of describing the growing response of rebel subjects, laying down their arms and surrendering to their rightful King. The circle of light expands as knees bow to acknowledge the King. This is reflected in the parables of the growth of the kingdom. The church carries the gospel to all the nations, and the kingdom

grows as a result, until the parousia. Thus the mustard seed becomes, incredibly, a mighty tree and the birds of the air come and nest in it. This is a picture of empire in Daniel 4:10–17, 22 and Ezekiel 31:6. God's empire expands. It is the same with the leaven, which makes the dough rise until the whole is leavened. It is the same with the net that draws all sorts of fish in from the sea. The kingdom will spread until it reaches its climax in the return of Christ at the end of history.

The church and the kingdom

The church cannot be identified with the kingdom, which is a much broader and more wonderful thing: it would be sad indeed if God's rule on earth were confined to the church! No, it is not the same as the kingdom, but it is a major manifestation of that kingdom here on earth. It is a first instalment of the coming kingdom when God's will shall be perfectly done. It is intended by its message and way of life to be a colony of heaven. The church anticipates what the kingdom will be, but the church is not that kingdom. There is much mistaken talk these days about 'kingdom theology', taking what is ascribed to the kingdom and applying it uncritically to the church. Matthew's Gospel warns against any such facile identification. For the church is not the kingdom, although the association between the two is close. Thus Jesus can say in almost the same breath, 'I will build my church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom' (16:18–19). But the church is like the net, containing fish good and bad. The church is like the harvest field, weeds and wheat together. The church is at present a 'mixed economy', and at the end of time the day of judgment will sort it out. That day will see the final coming of the kingdom. The church is by no stretch of imagination the place where God rules, as yet. By no stretch of imagination is it holy, as yet. There are members of the church who do not understand and do not trust the King (13:19). There are false prophets in the church who lead people astray (7:15–23; 24:11). There are those in the church who collapse under the pressure of persecution (13:21; 24:9–10), or deny Jesus (10:33), or are seduced by wealth (13:12), and much else besides. No, the church cannot be identified with the kingdom, but it does represent that part of God's kingly rule which is no longer in open revolt against the rightful King but professes to have surrendered to him. And it is the job of the church to evangelize, so that the kingdom of God will spread as other rebel subjects come to accept the gracious armistice offered by the King.

The enemy of the kingdom

Jesus makes it plain that there is a determined enemy of God and his kingly rule: Satan. A strong counterpoint runs through the Gospel. Satan is totally opposed to the kingdom of God (6:13; 11:12; 12:24–29; 13:39). Satan, the tempter, the devil, the enemy, the evil one, Beelzebub, the ruler of this age—he is called by all those names—is the implacable foe of the kingdom of God. He assails Jesus constantly (4:1–11). He is the strong one, but Jesus is stronger than the strong (12:28–29). He even assails Jesus through Peter (16:21–23), through Jewish crowds (11:16–17), and Jewish leaders (16:1). He is the usurper prince of this world, and yet he is doomed to destruction, for Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and on the third day he will be raised in triumph (16:21).

Satan assails the kingdom; he assails Jesus; and he assails the church. They will have to face persecution from without (13:39; 5:44; 7:21–23), and attack from within, especially through false prophets (7:15–23; 24:11, 24) who appear to be charismatic prophets but are in reality wolves (7:15), whose lives are loveless (7:10–20) and who lead others astray (24:11–12).

Such is the enemy. But his power is limited, his teeth drawn, and his destiny assured (25:41, 46).

5. The people of the Messiah

The noun 'church' is used twice in this Gospel and nowhere in any of the others. But the idea is much more prevalent than the mention of the word. Through the gracious summons of Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, the disciples of Jesus become children of God and brothers and sisters in the company of the Messiah as they enter the sphere of God's kingly rule. In response to that gracious summons, the disciples begin to reflect in their lives the greater righteousness which eclipses that of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, and they begin to show a deep determination to do the will of God and make it known. That is the theory, and Matthew's Gospel is an attempt to ground theory in practice.

If we are to retain Matthew's 'kingdom' language, then the members of the church are children of the kingdom (13:38). In Jesus they share the forgiveness of the kingdom (26:28). They hear and understand the word of the kingdom (13:19, 23) and so know the secrets of the kingdom (13:11). They seek the righteousness of the kingdom (6:33). They have been entrusted with the keys of the kingdom (16:19). They pray earnestly for the coming of the kingdom (6:10), and produce the fruits of the kingdom (13:8). At the consummation of the age they will enter into the kingdom (25:23) and inherit it (5:3).

Matthew directs the church strongly towards the end-time, because the empirical church is something of a mess, and Matthew knows that fact as well as we do. It is full of status-seeking (23:8–12), even hatred, among members (24:10), lack of love (24:12), luke-warmness (25:26), unwillingness to forgive (18:35). It is often marked by disciples' losing faith (18:6) and despising others in the community (18:10). Matthew encourages them to look towards the consummation, when the full glory of what God intends to do with his church will appear, on the day when the kingdom comes in power.

There is much more directed to the church in this Gospel. There are warnings: against hoarding wealth (19:23), against loss of faith and against presenting stumbling-blocks to others (18:6–7)—above all, against lack of readiness to meet Jesus (24:36–39; 25:11–13). There is also much encouragement: to trust the promises and live by them (5:3–10), to pray (6:9–13), to take up the cross and follow Jesus (10:24–25), to have no fear of enemies (10:28–31), to trust him like a child (18:3–4), to face the music (5:10–12) and to be ready for Jesus at his coming (24:27; 25:10).

6. The end of the world

The end of history is undoubtedly a major interest of the evangelist. The other evangelists all have it, but none to such an extent as Matthew. Jesus, the prince in rags, will come back as the crowned king of the universe. And the world is moving not towards chaos, though there will be plenty of that (24:3–31), but towards Christ and his return. Every movement worth its salt has an eschatology, an expectation of how it will all end. And Christians, Matthew believes, can hold their heads high. Their expectation is solidly grounded in the cross and resurrection. It is certain. That is the theme of chapter 24, distinguishing, as Mark does less clearly, between the fall of Jerusalem and the return of Christ later on. That is the theme of chapter 25 with its parables of the parousia. Christians live between the advents. They should fashion their lives and their ambitions accordingly. The parable of the nocturnal burglar (24:43–44) encourages expectancy among Christ's people; that about the disorderly servants (24:45–51) encourages holiness of life; the parable of the ten virgins speaks of the need for readiness (25:1–13); the parable of the talents stresses reliability (25:14–30), while the parable of the sheep and goats calls for practical love (25:31–46). Those are the characteristics that the expectation of Christ's return should bring about in his people. And in the light of his return they must evangelize.

Matthew and his readers do not rest their hopes on the future alone. They find the clue to the denouement in the middle of the story. The confidence that Christ will return is placed fairly and squarely in the coming and dying and rising of Jesus the Messiah. The ultimate has come into the world of the particular; the beyond has come into the midst. Absolute goodness is not an ideal that is beyond us. It has come to us in the person of Jesus. It has lived and died and risen. And in the last analysis it will prevail. That is why we can have confidence about the future; and that confidence was needed in the difficult days of the 70s and 80s of the first century, just as it is in our own age when people's hearts fail them for fear. Where is our world going? Are we running headlong into disaster? Or are we, like the French Resistance in the Second World War, actually on the side which, against all appearances, will win in the long run? The victory of Jesus in the midst of time points with certainty to his ultimate triumph at the end of time. And to that triumph Matthew looks with quiet but unshakable assurance.

7. *The universality of the good news*

The gospel of the kingdom is meant for Jews and Gentiles alike. Matthew is a very Jewish Gospel, from 1:1 onwards. But although Jesus restricted himself almost entirely to ministry among Jews during his lifetime, there is nevertheless a constant outward thrust to this book. Judaism at its best did not sit comfortably, congratulating itself on its own election. It was meant to be a light to lighten the Gentiles. That was the call of the Servant of the Lord. And they looked for the day when the Gentiles would flow to Mount Zion. Jesus sets out to fulfil the call of the Servant, which nobody in Israel had ever previously undertaken. His mission was to the Jews first, but also to the Gentiles. And there is a surprising amount about the Gentile mission in this Gospel, which is at the same time so Jewish.

Gentile women such as Rahab are among Jesus' forebears (1:5). Gentile astronomers recognize and worship him when Israel's leaders do not (2:1–12). Jesus himself comes to his ministry from Galilee of the Gentiles (4:15). A Gentile centurion is commended for his faith above those in Israel (8:10), and we are told that many (i.e. Gentiles) will come from east and west and will sit down with the patriarchs while the sons of the kingdom will be ejected (8:11–12). In fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy Jesus will proclaim good news to the Gentiles and in his name the Gentiles will put their hope (12:17–21). A Caananite woman is commended for her faith in the Son of David, in striking contrast to the Jewish leaders (15:1–28). The capstone of the corner, rejected by the Jewish builders, will be the foundation of the Gentile mission (21:42–43), and in the parable of the vineyard in the same chapter it is said that 'he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time ... the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit' (21:41, 43).

Finally, there is the Great Commission to go and preach the good news to all the nations (28:18–20). It is not that Matthew has either a Jewish or a Gentile bias. He is well aware that the church must embrace social and political irreconcilables if it is to demonstrate to an unbelieving world that Jesus reconciles all people to God and to each other.

Matthew in recent study

Matthew's Gospel has, in recent years, replaced Luke-Acts as a major storm centre of New Testament studies. It is simply not possible to refer to more than a tiny fraction of the books and monographs that have emerged. So I shall be very selective. ²⁸

The person who wants a warm, devotional commentary designed for daily use can hardly do better than William Barclay's commentary. The best compact and very balanced commentary that faces up to the critical issues is that of R. T. France. Larger but still manageable commentaries have come from the hand of Craig L. Blomberg and Craig S. Keener; I did not find Keener as shrewd or helpful as Blomberg, though it has an impressively complete bibliography. Larger still are D. A. Carson's commentary in *The Expositor's Bible*, and R. H. Gundry's commentary, a solid if unexciting guide. And finally there is the massive New International Critical Commentary by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, which I have not used. I have found the Word Commentary by Donald Hagner to be particularly wise, thorough and illuminating.

If those are only a few of the recent commentaries on Matthew's Gospel, other books which bear on the Gospel are legion. I can mention only a few here. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, is invaluable. It evaluates a great number of views on the Gospel, and then picks out major aspects of the Gospel—the literary character, the fulfilment theme, the place of Israel, Matthew's Gospel and the church and Matthew's portrait of Jesus. It is balanced, comprehensive and full of insight. J. D. Kingsbury's *Matthew as Story* is the pioneer of the literary-critical approach to the Gospel, taking it as a story to be read in its own right and not as the product of editors working with small units of tradition.

Robert Banks has done an exhaustive examination of *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*. Two important authors have given us fresh and much more positive light on Jesus and the Judaism of his day: Jacob Neusner's *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* is a short, irenic book, but E. P. Sanders is much more aggressive towards the traditional understanding of Judaism in his important books *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*; *Jesus and Judaism*; *Judaism: Practice and Belief* and *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. Michael Crosby's *House of Disciples* is an unusual and exhaustive 'reader-response' style of book examining issues of economics and justice in Matthew's church—and ours. He sees Jesus as putting into practice the kingdom ethic of reordering relationships and resources to meet the needs of people with justice.

N. T. Wright's big book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, is very relevant, though it does not specialize in this Gospel. After a detailed assessment of major scholarly works on the historical Jesus he gives his own fascinating interpretation of how Jesus saw his mission (to remake Israel around himself), how he announced God's judgment on the Israel of his day, especially the temple and hierarchy, and how he saw the ministry of himself and his disciples as the fulfilment of Israel's destiny. Coming up to Jerusalem, he saw that he himself would die the death he had predicated of Israel. In obedience to that calling, he came to realize that he was going to do what, in Jewish thought, only God could do. This has the advantage of keeping all the teaching and actions of Jesus in an undeniably first-century framework.

I have found Graham Stanton's *A Gospel for a New People* one of the most seminal books on the subject in recent years. He too surveys much of the contemporary literature on Matthew, and suggests a variety of ways in which the Gospel can be read. Has the old form and redaction criticism anything to teach us still? Should Matthew, as J. D. Kingsbury believes, be read simply as a story without much attention being paid to sources and theological tendencies of the evangelist? Is it, after all, a biography somewhat like Greco-Roman 'Lives'? He is inclined to follow Richard Burridge (*What are the Gospels?*), in believing that it owes more to ancient 'Lives' than had previously been recognized. But he believes there is mileage in all three approaches. Seven chapters are then devoted to 'The parting of the ways' between church and synagogue. Stanton sees Matthew as a learned Jew who wrote for converted Jews who had accepted some Gentiles into their communities. These communities had recently experienced a painful parting from the local synagogue, hence both the anti-Jewish polemic and what he calls the 'legitimizing answers' for the new people of God. In the final part of his book Stanton gives careful attention to the Sermon on the Mount, and to Matthew's use of the Old Testament. Above all, Matthew provided the 'new people' with a story that was new and satisfying, even though it had roots deep in Scripture. So here is a Gospel written about AD 80 as the church and synagogue part ways. I have believed for a long time that such was the case, but here is a major book making precisely this point, as well as offering other penetrating insights.

Can we draw together some agreed conclusions from this welter of academic study? Not many! But the following would command wide acceptance.

1. Matthew's Gospel probably dates to the 70s or 80s, after the fall of Jerusalem and perhaps after the Jewish Test Benedictions, though Gundry and more tentatively France go for a date in the 60s. If Dr Carsten Thiede^[29] is right in believing that we have in the Oxford Magdalen papyrus part of a manuscript which should be dated in the mid- to late first century, then the case for an early date becomes unanswerable.

2. Much less confidence is placed these days in the hypothesis of Matthew's dependence on Mark and Q. Some do not believe in Q (a sayings source common to Matthew and Luke but largely absent from Mark). Some argue that Luke borrowed directly from Matthew. And some revert to the old view that Matthew was the first Gospel to be written! There are no agreed solutions. Scholars are inclined to opt for a rich collection of overlapping sources from which each of the evangelists quarried, sometimes using the same material and coming up with almost identical language. There is no certainty these days about the formation of the Gospel tradition and the priority of one Gospel over another. It would, however, be fair to say that most scholars still hold to the dependence of Matthew on Mark, and consequently reject Augustine's claim that Matthew was written first.

3. Many scholars see the Gospel as a vindication of Jesus and his message in a day when the church and the synagogue were moving in different directions in the last quarter of the first century.

4. Most scholars give some weight to the view (put forward originally by B. W. Bacon) that we should see in the five great discourses of the Gospel an allusion to the five books of Moses, and to Jesus as the new Moses. The organized teaching nature of the book has convinced most people of a catechetical purpose, whether it was, as Paul Minear put it in the sub-title of his valuable commentary, 'the teacher's Gospel' or not.

5. Most scholars now recognize that the Jewish particularity and the Gentile universalism in this Gospel do not contradict each other; the gospel is 'first for the Jew, then for the Gentile'.^[30]

6. Most scholars are persuaded that Matthew had a strong sense of promise and fulfilment, not only in the formula quotations but in the way he used the Old Testament in quotation, in allusion, in typology and in counterpoint with the teaching of Jesus.

7. Matthew's portrait of Jesus, as Son of God, Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man and supremely as God returning to Jerusalem as judge and redeemer, would win wide agreement.

8. Matthew is not an anti-Semitic Gospel, but it is directed against all forms of formalism and self-assertion before God, whether found in Jewish, Christian or other communities.

9. There is an increasing unwillingness among scholars to restrict Matthew to having one purpose only in his Gospel. He seems to have had several.

But now it is high time to allow Matthew to speak for himself.