

Matthew: A Review

Major (New) Features of Matthew's Gospel:

- **Genealogy (1:1 - 1:17)**

Matthew traces Jesus' lineage (through his "father" Joseph) from Abraham through David. This genealogy demonstrates that Jesus is in the line of Davidic kings, strengthening his claim as Messiah. Matthew wants to connect Jesus to Jewish history to emphasize continuity with and completion of their traditional beliefs. The genealogy lends *legitimacy* to Jesus as the fulfillment of Prophecy and the Davidic Covenant.

- **Birth Narrative (1:18 - 2:23)**

The birth narrative in Matthew strongly echoes the birth of Moses. This allusion to Moses establishes Jesus as a second, perfected lawgiver and leader of the Jewish people. Paul's letters and the non-Pauline works that draw on them question the validity of Jewish law, even going so far as to challenge it outright. In contrast, Matthew's Jesus does not abolish or challenge the law but rather *fulfills* it.

(The birth narrative also provides legitimacy for Jesus considering the possibly shameful circumstances of his birth.)

- **Post-Resurrection Appearances**
- **Establishment of a Church**

Mark's Gospel originally ended with the women finding the empty tomb. A young man in white instructed them to proclaim the news of Jesus' resurrection, but they ran away in terror. This abrupt ending to the story left the Gospel to be completed by those who read and heard it. They were getting the news of the Messiah's death and resurrection, and it was up to them to continue his teachings.

In Matthew, the women go to tell the disciples and are met by Jesus himself. He later meets with the disciples and tells them to spread his teachings and baptize all the nations of the world.

Mark's abrupt ending perhaps carried a sense of urgency: He could return at any time, and it was essential to spread the word. Matthew's ending seems less urgent. As in the parable of the ten bridesmaids and the parable of the talents, there is a sense that one must make the most of time and be prepared, but Matthew has Jesus command the establishment of a church to spread throughout the

world. This institutionalizing of Jesus' way implies that there is less concern over his *immediate* return and instead an emphasis upon the need to establish his teachings and convert others for his *eventual* return.

Some other things to think about in Matthew:

- The Beatitudes
- Jesus' teachings on the Law and forgiveness.
- The difference between earthly goods and heavenly goods
- Emphasis on living in the present, trusting in God to provide

The Gospel of Luke

What are the some of the changes that Luke makes to the birth and childhood narrative and why?

- Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist

Luke makes a connection between John and Jesus, who are, apparently, related. This emphasizes John's important duty to prepare the way for Jesus by baptizing in order to "turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God" (1:16).

- The Annunciation: Gabriel visits Mary and proclaims the birth of Jesus

Mary plays a much bigger role than in Matthew's text, where Joseph is the one told of Jesus' birth and divinity. Placing Mary at the center of the birth narrative (and retelling the lowly surroundings of his birth) emphasizes his humility and the nature of his sacrifice. It also points to God's power to work through his lowliest servants: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly . . ." (1.52).

Also note that both John and Jesus are named before they were born, signaling their destiny in God's plan for human salvation.

Why does Luke write that the infant Jesus was visited by shepherds rather than the three "wise men" of Matthew?

- Besides the shepherds, Simeon of Jerusalem and the prophet Anna both come to see the infant Jesus and proclaim his greatness and role in the redemption of Israel.

These stories again point to Jesus as part of God's plan for redemption. They also signal his exceptional status: he stands out to those who have been waiting for a blessing from God. Those who know and have faith can see him for who he is: the Messiah.

What's going on with the story of the young Jesus in the temple?

In Matthew, John condemns the Pharisees and the Sadducees who come to him for baptism. In Luke, however, he condemns "the crowds."

What is the significance of this change?

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus brings a new form of Jewish belief to the people of Israel. The Pharisees and the Sadducees are the administrators of the old ways and thus are opposed to anything that might challenge their authority. By condemning them, Matthew signals that the Jewish people must adopt the new covenant brought by Jesus.

Luke, on the other hand, condemns all people as sinful. This makes Jesus ministry more universal and emphasizes his role as redeemer: he has come to offer salvation to *all* people.

What is different in Luke about Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection?

Matthew

Audience: Followers of Judaism

- Uses a genealogy that starts from Abraham, incorporating female ancestors with “questionable pasts”
- Jesus is the messiah of prophecy—ties events to prophecies in Hebrew Bible
- Uses the Moses’ birth story to parallel Jesus’ birth
- Jesus is decidedly anti-Pharisee

Unique to Matthew:

- the church
- Roman guards at tomb get bribed
- Supernatural events at death and resurrection

Luke

Audience: Gentiles and Jews; sees the burgeoning religion as available to all

- Uses a genealogy that starts from Adam
- Links Jesus to Elijah and Elisha
- Relays narratives about Jesus’s interactions with the “margins” of society
- Makes clear that the new religion does not threaten Rome

Unique to Luke:

- the Holy Spirit
- Birth story of John the Baptist
- 12 year-old Jesus
- The Parable of the Prodigal Son (15: 11-32)
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan (not in reading)
- Of the two robbers getting crucified, one asks forgiveness and will go to heaven
- Descriptions of two post-resurrection appearances