

## Introduction to Matthew

### Author and Date

Matthew was probably written in the late 50s or early 60s AD. The author is Matthew (also called Levi), the former tax collector who became Jesus' disciple.

### The Gospel in Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is focused on explaining what the gospel is and how it should be applied in the lives of Jesus' disciples. For Matthew, the gospel is the good news that God has inaugurated the final stage of his plan to reclaim the world from the destruction of sin and establish his just and merciful reign over it ([4:23](#); [9:35](#); [11:5](#)). God has given the central role in this final stage of his work to Jesus, his long-awaited and specially designated King ([2:2](#); [21:5](#); [25:34](#)). Where Jesus is present in Matthew's Gospel, God and his kingdom are present ([1:23](#); [12:28](#)). The reign of God is evident when Jesus banishes demons; heals the sick, the lame, and the blind; and gathers together a group of people whose lives are to demonstrate God's just and merciful character ([4:23](#); [5:16](#); [9:35](#); [11:4-5](#); [12:28](#)).

All this is cause for celebration to those who know they need deliverance from sin—to the poor in spirit ([5:3](#)), the grieving ([5:4](#)), those who long to see justice done ([5:6](#), [10-11](#)), those who know they need forgiveness for their sins ([6:12](#); [9:10-13](#); [11:19](#)), and those laboring under the burden of religious rule-keeping ([11:28-30](#)). When Jesus, like his predecessor John the Baptist, preaches the need to turn from sin and follow Jesus in light of God's coming kingdom ([3:1-17](#); [4:17](#)), these people embrace this message of deliverance without hesitating ([4:20, 22](#)) and with joy ([13:44](#)). Matthew also paints a sobering picture of those who reject Jesus and his message.

Surprisingly, Jesus' most energetic opponents are religious leaders who value so highly the recognition that comes from their positions of leadership and their clever interpretations of Scripture ([23:1-7](#); see also [6:2, 5, 16](#)) that they have become blind to its more basic principles ([23:23](#)). They would rather talk about the fine points of blasphemy, Sabbath, and tithing law than show compassion to the needy ([9:1-7](#); [12:1-14](#); [23:23](#)). They would rather find subtle ways around the fundamental principles of God's law, such as honoring parents, than make the sacrifices necessary for keeping it ([15:3-9](#)). This radical contrast between the evil that is in their hearts and their outward piety and concern for God's law shows that they are moving toward eternal destruction ([23:15, 33](#)).

Even more disturbing, however, is Matthew's portrait of those who claim to be followers of Jesus but whose claims will be found empty on the day of judgment. Like Jesus' real disciples they will have done much in his name, but Jesus will order them to depart from him because they were

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lawless ([7:21-23](#); [22:11-14](#); [25:11-12](#)) and because they neglected his disciples who needed food, clothing, medical attention, and support while in prison ([25:41-46](#)).

This does not mean that Matthew sees good works as the basis for entering God's kingdom. Instead, the condition of the heart will determine who enters God's kingdom on the day of judgment, and one's deeds will be the outward manifestation of that condition. The healthy tree bears good fruit and the diseased tree bears bad fruit ([7:17-20](#); [12:33-37](#)). The condition of the heart defiles a person, says Jesus, and the heart's condition is revealed in the evil thoughts, words, and actions that come out of it ([15:10-20](#)). This is why Jesus can say that, on the day of judgment, people will be either justified or condemned by their words: these words reveal their heart condition ([12:36-37](#)).

How can one's heart be in the right condition? Those for whom following Jesus is more important than anything else in life can be sure they are on the road to eternal life ([16:24-27](#)). This is what Jesus means when he insists on perfection from his disciples ([5:48](#); [19:21](#)). They certainly are not capable of being morally perfect in this life. Indeed, Jesus has deep compassion for sinners who need his forgiveness ([9:9-13](#); [11:19](#)). He demonstrates this in the restoration of his disciples after their miserable failure during his arrest and execution ([28:7, 10, 18-20](#)).

As a consequence, Jesus' disciples become perfect in the sense that their desires and affections belong to him. They recognize that they must entirely depend upon him to provide what they most need—him. Like the merchant in the parable ([13:45-46](#)), they have found the one person who gives value to life, and they have put everything they have at his disposal (see also [4:20](#), [22:13:44](#); [16:24-26](#); [19:21-22, 27-30](#); [26:6-13](#)). Certainly they will fail, but, unlike Judas, recognition of their failure will send them to Jesus, who blesses the poor in spirit, promises rest to the weary, and gave his own life so that their sins might be forgiven ([5:3](#); [11:28](#); [26:28](#)).

### Outline

- The Arrival of Jesus the Messiah ([1:1-2:23](#))
- John the Baptist Prepares for the Messianic Kingdom ([3:1-17](#))
- Jesus the Messiah Begins to Advance the Messianic Kingdom ([4:1-25](#))
- The Authoritative Message of the Messiah: Kingdom Life for His Disciples ([5:1-7:29](#))
- The Authoritative Power of the Messiah: Kingdom Power Demonstrated ([8:1-9:38](#))
- The Authoritative Mission of the Messiah's Messengers ([10:1-42](#))
- Opposition to the Messiah Increases ([11:1-12:50](#))
- The Messianic Kingdom Revealed in Parables ([13:1-53](#))
- The Identity of the Messiah Revealed ([13:54-16:20](#))
- The Suffering of the Messiah Revealed ([16:21-17:27](#))



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- The Community of the Messiah Revealed ([18:1-20:34](#))
- The Messiah Asserts His Authority over Jerusalem ([21:1-23:39](#))
- The Delay, Return, and Judgment of the Messiah ([24:1-25:46](#))
- The Crucified Messiah ([26:1-27:66](#))
- The Resurrection and Commission of the Messiah ([28:1-20](#))