

## Notes on the First Gospel (Gospel of Matthew)

**Authorship and Audience:** The author of the first gospel was a Greek-speaking Jew speaking to the Jewish Christian community in, perhaps, Antioch. This author knows the bible from the Septuagint (Greek translation), not from Hebrew. He is aware of the Pauline community, with whom he wants his followers to work harmoniously, but doesn't seem aware of Pauline mystical doctrine. He has read Enoch's description of sheep as Israelites and his description of fiery punishment at the end time.

**Date and Context:** 85-90 CE. After the temple is destroyed in 70 CE, Jewish leaders struggle amongst themselves to define a future without a homeland and to rethink the nature of the covenant and the Messiah. This author refers to the destruction of the temple and twice says things continue to be true "to this day." Discussion of "the world" and "their synagogues" in 10:16 suggests this gospel was written after Jewish Christians were expelled from synagogues around 85-90 CE. This author argues that Jewish Christians are the true heirs to the Mosaic covenant. Matthew is considered most "contentious" of the gospels.

**Sources:** 90% of Mark; Q (source) text (some parallels with Luke); some unique Matt material. It follows Mark's north/south organization.

**Basis of some later anti-Semitic arguments:** Example, 27:25 when "the people" cry, "His blood be on us and our children!" Though some think "the people" means all Jews, this passage, which is a reference to 2 Samuel 1:16 about the killing of Saul, is supposed to show Jews divided amongst themselves. "Our children" does not refer to all generations but to the generation which survived the loss of the temple (Matthew implies, as punishment for Jesus's death).

**Differences between Mark and Matthew:** Most insertions or revisions are aimed at an audience of Jewish Christians and can be broken into several types:

- A. Detailed midrashic exposition of scriptural passages including law (*haggadah*) and nonlegal material (*halakah*), as well as some "more Jewish" corrections and the rehabilitation of Mark's clueless apostles;
- B. The ranking of Jewish Christians above gentile Christians;
- C. The excoriation of Jewish leadership (especially Priests and Pharisees) and elevation of criminals, poor, illiterate, and rural people above them;
- D. Eschatological material: An anticipation of the last Judgment, in which "the weeds" or "goats" (particularly those Jews who have opposed them) will be weeded out and in which the apostles will sit in twelve thrones and judge all of Israel;
- E. Addition of supernatural details to several events, especially crucifixion
- F. Several new characters (Joseph, Magi, Satan as speaking character, revised list of "the twelve," and the mother of James and John, son of Zebedee)

### Unique Material:

1. Genealogy in 3 parts (1:1 to 1:17). Differs from Luke's; To emphasize role of sinners, emphasizes four gentile women who have "spotted" sexual histories. Genealogy is through Joseph, not Mary
2. Annunciation, based on Greek [mis]translation of 1<sup>st</sup> Isaiah 7:14 (woman translated as "virgin"). This passage doesn't support "perpetual virginity." Emphasizes Joseph (new character) can divorce Mary for "unchastity," a clause also added to Markan material on divorce
3. Infancy narrative (chapter 2). Bethlehem birth and trip to Egypt links Jesus to messianic prophecies of Micah and Hosea; another parallel to Moses. Magi ("wise men") from Armenia; parallels similar story in Suetonius's *Life of Nero*
4. Occasional psalms and references (Chapters 3 and 4 are Markan material except for these)
5. Special Insertions into Mark or Q material
  - a. 12:5 Priests break the Sabbath (added to Mark's Sabbath was made for Man)
  - b. 15:24 Gentile Dog scene from Mark: I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel
  - c. 17:9-13 Elijah = John—apostles "understand"

- d. 17:24 Temple Tax scene. The children (disciples) do not need to pay the tax, but they should get along with Jewish leadership.
  - e. 19:3-10 Can you get divorced (adds "unchastity")
  - f. 19: 16-22 How to earn eternal life? Instead of two commandments (Mark) lists 5 +1 +1.
  - g. 21:28 Basis of authority (Mark): adds warning to Pharisees about prostitutes.
  - h. 20:1 parable of the vineyard (new): challenges the idea of the just or proportionate reward
  - i. 24:32 Fig tree (Mark): adds Two will grinding, one will be taken, one will be left.
  - j. 25: Parable of maidens (virgins)
  - k. 26:27-8 Last Supper: Adds "For this is my blood of the [old] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
  - l. 27: Judas's suicide (new) and the Field of Blood for foreigners. It is called so "to this day."
6. Five Discourses. Each begins with Q or Markan material and then inserts unique instructions to Jews.
- 1. Sermon on the Mount (chapter 5-7). From Q material. Two parts:
    - a. Beatitudes undercut idea from Deuteronomy that material prosperity is a sign of God's approval. Instead, God takes the part of the humble, the grieving, and the suffering.
    - b. The antitheses affirm Torah but reinterpret it. Each is in the form "You have heard.... But I say..."
    - c. 6:2-4 Hypocrites in synagogue; 6:5 pray privately, not like the gentiles
    - d. 7:6 No pearls before swine (keep gentiles away from Eucharist?) echoed in Didache.
  - 2. The Mission and "The World"--Instruction to the Twelve (chap 10) Preach only to Israel's "lost sheep," because time is short. Eschatological: Unfaithful Jews await destruction in Gehenna.
    - a. 10:16-20 alludes to synagogue conflict.
    - b. 10:34 Not peace but the sword (Q material)
  - 3. Parables of the Kingdom (13:10): As in Mark, parables are told to keep the "wrong ones" (here, the Pharisees and the powerful") from understanding (parables are agricultural). Unlike those in Mark, these apostles understand.
    - a. 13:24-30; 13:36-43 Weeds and Wheat (the hidden kingdom). We can't judge good from evil on earth. 16:11: Yeast and weeds are Pharisees and Sadducees.
    - b. Pearl of great price; yeast and the flour; good fish and bad fish (Q).
    - c. Words: 13:28 enemy (anthropos); 13: 38-9 Evil one (Poneros) and Devil (diabolos).
  - 4. Instructions to the Church (New material 18:10).
    - a. More on settling disputes: Start privately, then involve the community. Compares those who won't listen to "gentiles" and tax collectors.
    - b. Forgive debts. Forgive sins 77 times (or 490 times).
  - 5. Critique of Leaders/ Warnings of the Final Judgment: (23)
6. Entry into Jerusalem (21). Jesus no longer on foot; donkey / horse fulfills two Old Test. prophecies
7. Additions to end (27:51-3; 28:2-10; 28:11-end. 1include several post-death appearances to apostles, who are asked to meet in Galilee (rather than flee) and begin teaching according to Jesus's instructions. This "Great Commission" emphasizes Jesus's teaching rather than the Pauline mystery of rebirth through him. Also includes new information of bribing of soldiers by priests.