

Introduction to the bible [series 10]

Gospel of Mathew

We might wonder, if Mark wrote the first gospel why new Testament begins with the gospel of Mathew? The order of books in New Testament simply follows an early Greek manuscript of New Testament called '*Codex Vaticanus*'. In early centuries Mathew's gospel emerged as most popular. Mathew has 1071 verses including infancy narrative, more sayings of Jesus and resurrection narratives.

Historical Settings of Mathew

The author of Mathew's gospel does not reveal his identity directly in the gospel. Mathew, one of the twelve Apostles, also called Levi, the tax-collector [Mark 2:13-17; Mathew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32] is believed to be the author. The author is well instructed in Old Testament scriptures seen in the use of prophetic quotations and in his references to Jewish customs, laws, Sabbath and Temple etc. Mathew's gospel is written sometime after 70 AD, substantiated by its circulation in early 2nd century and referenced by Epistle of Barnabas and writings of Polycarp [69-156 AD]. Mathew used Mark's gospel as his primary source and other unnamed oral and written materials circulating in early decades of Christianity. It is believed that Mathew was influenced by Pauls' writings too!

Mathew's Audience and place of Composition

It is generally accepted that Mathew wrote his gospel primarily for Jewish Christian community [Jews who believed that Jesus was the promised Jewish messiah]. Mathew's gospel narrates the life and concerns of a Christian community. Mathew is the only gospel that uses the word 'Church' [ecclesia] to describe the community of believers [Mathew 16:18; 18:17]. For Mathew, Christian community of Jews and gentiles are continuation of the people of God and not a new religion! According to scholars the place of composition of the gospel of Mathew was Greek speaking Jewish communities in Antioch or Damascus in Syria or Galilee in Palestine.

To be continued...

Father Jose