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MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the early church Matthew's gospel was used more widely and more extensively than any of the other gospels. The reasons for its popularity are not hard to find. Matthew has ordered his whole gospel most effectively. His prose is rhythmical and often poetic; individual sections contain carefully balanced and readily memorable phrases. Matthew's gospel is nearly half as long again as Mark and contains many more sayings of Jesus.

In the early church the evangelist was widely believed to have been one of the disciples of Jesus. It is probably for this reason that Matthew always heads lists and copies of the four gospels in the early church, even though there are some variations from the order familiar today.

There is a further reason for the popularity of Matthew in nearly all strands of early Christianity. The evangelist has been influenced strongly by the Old Testament and by contemporary Judaism, and his gospel has always been regarded as the most 'Jewish' of the four. But his gospel also includes in a number of passages clear universalist teaching: 'this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations' (Matt. 24: 14; cf. 28: 20). Matthew's gospel is Jewish, anti-Jewish, and pro-Gentile: it is a comprehensive gospel with wide appeal.

Modern readers are often more ambivalent. They find many of the distinctive features of this gospel attractive and fascinating, but are puzzled by some of the evangelist's emphases. Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is widely respected and often referred to, even by non-Christians. It is his versions of the Beatitudes and of the Lord's Prayer, rather than Luke's, which are used universally. The evangelist's full and well-ordered account of the teaching of Jesus is appreciated. But his often awkward way of using

the Old Testament as a set of proof texts puzzles modern readers, as does the severity of his anti-Jewish statements and his harsh comments on judgement.

The structure of Matthew's gospel

This gospel is dominated by five lengthy discourses of Jesus: chapters 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount; chapter 10, the mission discourse; chapter 13, a collection of parables; chapter 18, instructions for the community; chapters 24–5, teaching concerning the future. (The woes against scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23 should probably also be seen as part of the final discourse.) At the end of the first four discourses (7: 28; 11: 1; 13: 53; 19: 1) the same wording is used to mark the transition from the teaching of Jesus to the narratives which follow: 'When Jesus had finished these sayings . . .'. At the end of the fifth discourse the pattern recurs, but the word 'all' is added: once Jesus has finished *all* his discourses, the passion story unfolds.

The five discourses are interspersed with numerous narratives, and also with shorter collections of the sayings of Jesus at 12: 25–45; 16: 21–8; 19: 23–30; 21: 28 to 22: 14. The first discourse is preceded by a lengthy Prologue or introduction which is in two parts: chapters 1–2, the infancy narratives, and chapters 3–4, which record the preaching of John the Baptist and the temptations of Jesus. The fifth discourse is followed immediately by the passion narratives, chapters 26–8.

By giving such prominence to the five discourses, the evangelist stresses the continuing importance of the teaching of Jesus for his own day. This point is made explicitly in the final verse of the gospel where the disciples are sent by the Risen Lord to teach 'all nations' to observe all that Jesus has commanded them (28: 20). In other words, for Matthew's readers (or listeners) the teaching of Jesus lies at the heart of their missionary proclamation.

It has often been suggested that there is a parallel between Matthew's five discourses and the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. On this view the first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, is set on a mountain which recalls Mt Sinai and Jesus is portrayed as a greater lawgiver than Moses. Did Matthew intend to imitate the Pentateuch and to present Jesus as the new Moses who leads a new Exodus? Opinion is

divided. While some scholars emphasize the 'New Moses' theme, others insist that although it can be traced in some of the traditions the evangelist has used, he does not in fact develop the theme himself. They also note that many Jewish and Graeco-Roman writings have five divisions or sections, so Matthew's decision to include *five* major collections of the sayings of Jesus may not have particular significance.

The five discourses have been composed most carefully. The first (chs. 5–7) and the last (chs. 24–5, and probably also ch. 23) are much longer than the other three and correspond to one another. The Sermon on the Mount is a full initial account of the teaching of Jesus; it contains many of the themes which the evangelist stresses in other parts of the gospel. The final discourse looks to the future and contains repeated warnings and exhortations to the disciples—and to Matthew's own community. The second and fourth are related. In chapter 10 Jesus instructs and encourages the disciples to continue his 'mission'—and warns them that they too will face rejection. Chapter 18 contains advice for the internal life of the Christian community which has responded to the missionary proclamation. The central discourse contains a cluster of parables, many of which are concerned with acceptance or rejection of Jesus. All five discourses have been constructed in a similar way. Sayings of Jesus from various sources have been gathered together into discourses which have thematic unity and some internal structure. In all of them the sayings of Jesus have been reshaped by the evangelist and often bear his own distinctive stamp.

Matthew's gospel contains one further major structural feature. The Sermon on the Mount has been juxtaposed with a set of narratives (most of them miracle stories) which are concerned with twin themes which dominate the gospel: the significance of Jesus (Christology) and the nature of discipleship. These five chapters are carefully marked off by the evangelist with an introduction (4: 23) and a conclusion (9: 35) which use almost identical words and which have both been composed by the evangelist himself: 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.' The summaries stress that Jesus is a teacher and preacher, and also a healer. The first half of this long section, the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5–7, presents Jesus as Messiah of Word; the second half, chapters 8 and 9, presents Jesus as Messiah of Deed.

Are there other major structural divisions in the gospel? Many attempts

have been made to discern the evangelist's overall intention from the way he has arranged the traditions at his disposal. But there is no generally agreed conclusion. While it is clear that the evangelist has taken great care over the composition of the five major discourses and of numerous shorter sections, he does not seem to have developed a broad overall structure as a way of underlining his main purposes.

The extent of Matthew's Prologue provides a good example of differences of opinion on the overall structure of the gospel. Many have claimed that the infancy narratives in chapters 1 and 2 form the Prologue: the first major section begins at 3: 1 with the preaching of John the Baptist. Some exegetes have claimed that the Prologue ends at 4: 22, immediately before the summary at 4: 23 which introduces the major section from 4: 23 to 9: 35. Others have insisted that 4: 16 marks the end of the Prologue. On this view (which has been prominent in recent discussion) 4: 17 opens the second main section of the gospel with the words, 'From that time Jesus began . . .', and the same words at 16: 21 introduce the third main section. But 4: 17 does not seem to be a major turning point in the story, for it belongs with 4: 12–16: Matthew wishes to stress that after John was arrested, Jesus, on whom the Spirit had been bestowed, continued John's proclamation of repentance and of the Kingdom of Heaven. Matt. 4: 12, rather than 4: 17, marks the opening of the ministry of Jesus. The return of Jesus to *Galilee* (cf. 2: 22 and 3: 13) is especially important, as his citation of Isa. 9: 1–2 (with its reference to 'Galilee of the Gentiles') in 4: 15–16 confirms. After the lengthy introduction from 1: 1 to 4: 11, the story proper begins in Galilee—where it also ends (28: 7, 10, 16).

The evangelist is particularly fond of triads, i.e. short blocks containing three related traditions. For example, the genealogy is divided into three sections (1: 2–17). The so-called antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount are made up of two groups of three traditions, 5: 21–33 and 33–47, with 5: 48 as a pithy conclusion. In chapter 13 Matthew follows Mark's parable chapter fairly closely (Mark 4: 1–32); he then includes two groups of three short parables (13: 24–33 and 44–50). The three longer parables from 21: 28 to 22: 14 are closely related.

Perhaps this phenomenon (and many more examples could be given) is the outcome of the composition of this gospel for oral delivery. Since it would take about three hours to read the whole gospel aloud, it was probably read in shorter sections, the length of which varied from time to time.

Both readers and listeners would appreciate the care the evangelist took with the structure of shorter sections, but the division of the whole gospel into three, four, or five major sections was less important.

Sources and methods

Matthew's five discourses, his two chapters which narrate the birth of Jesus, and his more frequent quotations from the Old Testament all suggest that this is a very different gospel from Mark. But first impressions are sometimes misleading. Matthew is in fact so closely dependent on Mark that his gospel should be seen as a much expanded and revised second edition of Mark. Although some of Mark's rather verbose pericopae are abbreviated, very few are omitted. Only about 50 of Mark's 662 verses are not found in Matthew.

In the second half of his gospel Matthew follows Mark's order very closely indeed and makes hardly any significant alterations. Between 4: 12 and 11: 1 there are a number of changes from Mark's order, but they are not arbitrary alterations. Many of them are related to Matthew's carefully constructed presentation of Jesus as Messiah of Word and Deed from 4: 23 to 9: 35, to which we have just referred.

Matthew shares with Luke about 230 verses which are not found in Mark. This material, which consists almost entirely of sayings of Jesus, is usually called the Q source. The Q hypothesis (and its rivals) was discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 23–7). If the Q hypothesis is accepted, then Matthew has gathered Q traditions and woven them together with other traditions to form the five great discourses, and several other shorter discourses. While Luke has retained the order of Q much more faithfully than Matthew, the wording of Q has often (but not always) been retained more accurately than by Luke.

In addition to Mark and Q, Matthew has used traditions not found elsewhere in the gospels. This material, which amounts to about one quarter of the gospel, consists of sayings of Jesus and a number of parables, the traditions behind Matthew 1 and 2, the so-called 'fulfilment' citations of the Old Testament, and some narratives, such as the accounts of the fate of Judas in 27: 3–10 and of Pilate's wife's dream in 27: 19. Although this material has sometimes been called the 'M' source, it is so diverse that it

does not come from one written source. However, it is possible that the ten 'M' parables were collected together before the evangelist incorporated them into his gospel.

With the aid of a synopsis it is not difficult to study the methods Matthew has used in adapting his sources. He regularly removes from Marcan narratives redundant phrases so that what he takes to be the main point will stand out more clearly. His traditions are frequently linked together according to their subject matter, often in groups of three.

In addition to abbreviating and tidying his sources, Matthew sometimes expands them. There are a number of passages where he even seems to have 'created' words of Jesus. Almost without exception his intention is to expound and to clarify his traditions. Some examples were given in our discussion of Matthew's longer version of the Lord's Prayer (pp. 8–10) and further examples will be noted later in this chapter in our discussion of the Beatitudes. Matthew is rarely an innovator: nearly every one of his distinctive themes and emphases can be seen as his elaboration and elucidation of an earlier tradition.

In the previous chapter we referred to Mark as a dramatic story. In some ways it is also appropriate to read Matthew in this way. Some themes are developed more fully in narrative and in discourse as the story unfolds. As we shall see, several of Matthew's most prominent themes are already foreshadowed in his lengthy Prologue. But much of the dramatic drive of Mark's narrative is missing.

Matthew's handling of Mark 8: 27 to 10: 52 provides a good example of the difference between the two gospels. In this important section of Mark (see above pp. 48–50) Jesus journeys inexorably towards Jerusalem. Mark clarifies what it means to 'follow the way of Jesus'. Although Jesus is instructing his disciples, the storyline continues. With the exception of just three verses, Matthew retains all this Marcan material—and in exactly the same order! But his equivalent section (16: 13 to 20: 34) is 25 per cent longer. At 18: 1–35 he includes the fourth of his five major discourses, only a few verses of which are taken from Mark. And at 20: 1–16 he has inserted the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. As in many other parts of his gospel, Matthew's catechetical purposes have partly smothered Mark's lively, dramatic style. Whereas in Mark the teaching of Jesus is usually woven into the narratives (and is very much less extensive), in Matthew the storyline stops in the five major discourses and in the several other shorter

discourses. No wonder that narrative critics have not been able to comment effectively on Matthew's great discourses in their expositions of Matthew's storyline, plot, and characterization!

Infancy narratives

In our chapter on Mark we saw how the evangelist introduces his main themes to his readers in his Prologue in 1: 1–13. Matthew's Prologue falls into two parts: the infancy narratives in chapters 1 and 2 (which do not have parallels elsewhere), and the accounts of the preaching of John the Baptist and the temptations of Jesus from 3: 1 to 4: 11 (which are taken from Mark and from Q). Both parts of the Prologue set out theological themes which will be prominent throughout the rest of the gospel, but simply for convenience we shall concentrate in this brief discussion on the infancy narratives.

Many modern readers of the gospels will be very familiar with the traditions about the birth and infancy of Jesus in the opening two chapters of both Matthew and Luke. But they would find it difficult to summarize accurately the infancy narratives found in either one of the two gospels; they would be surprised to learn that there is little overlap between Matthew and Luke. Countless nativity plays and Christmas card scenes have merged together traditions and themes from the two gospels. The result is that the distinctive features of Matthew 1 and 2 and of Luke 1 and 2 are rarely appreciated.

The origin and historicity of many of the details of the infancy narratives in Matthew and in Luke are much disputed. Since Part I of this book is primarily concerned with the teaching of the evangelists, these fascinating but difficult questions cannot be considered here. There would, however, be general agreement that the infancy narratives contain both history and poetry, as well as considerable literary and theological artistry, all of which are closely interwoven and cannot easily be disentangled.

In the paragraphs which follow we shall see how closely some of the most prominent themes in Matthew's infancy narratives are related to the major themes of the whole gospel. In both Matthew and Mark the opening verse makes an important Christological statement. Right at the outset of the story, both evangelists set out clearly for the reader the significance of

Jesus. Like Mark's opening verse, Matt. 1: 1 introduces the Prologue rather than the whole gospel. But there the similarity between the openings of Matthew and Mark ends.

The opening phrase of the gospel 'An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah' is a traditional heading for a biblical genealogy. Jesus is then referred to as the 'son of David', the 'son of Abraham', phrases which hint at major concerns of the evangelist.

The term 'son of David' introduces the single most important point in the whole opening chapter: Jesus the Messiah–Christ comes from David's line. Joseph, who is a son of David, is not the father of Jesus, but Jesus is 'ingrafted' into David's line through his conception by the Holy Spirit (1: 20). As verse 17 stresses, the genealogy is divided into three groups of fourteen names: from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, and from the exile to the Messiah. The number fourteen seems to have been chosen deliberately in order to underline the Davidic descent of Jesus, though surprisingly the third set contains only thirteen names. In Hebrew each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value; the Hebrew form of 'David' has a numerical value of fourteen. In five passages later in the gospel the evangelist adds 'son of David' to his sources (9: 27; 12: 23; 15: 22; 21: 9, 15). While Matthew is certainly stressing that Jesus as son of David is Israel's Messiah, it is not entirely clear why this title is of particular interest to the evangelist.

Jesus is also referred to right at the outset of the gospel as 'the son of Abraham'. Abraham was chosen partly because he was considered to be the father of every Jew and of the nation Israel, and partly in order to obtain the required fourteen generations before David. But there was probably a further reason for the use of this phrase. From Matthew's point of view, the promise given to Abraham at Gen. 22: 18 was extremely important: 'By your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves.' Although this promise was rarely stressed in Jewish circles, the evangelist emphasizes that following Israel's failure to produce the 'fruits of the kingdom' and her rejection of the Messiah, the Kingdom of God would be taken away from her and given to the Gentiles (21: 43).

As we shall see, Matt. 21: 43 with its double emphasis on God's rejection of Israel and his acceptance of Gentiles as part of his 'people' is one of the most important verses in the whole gospel. These twin themes are prominent in the infancy narratives. In chapter 2 the infant 'king' Jesus is hounded

ruthlessly by the Jewish king Herod. In vivid and dramatic stories this chapter narrates the clash between the two kings. The note in 2: 3 that King Herod and all Jerusalem are troubled at the coming of King Jesus is echoed in 21: 10 in a phrase which Matthew adds to Mark's account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem: once again the city is shaken by the arrival of Jesus. In chapter 2 King Herod is apparently all-powerful, but he is unable to destroy Jesus. After Herod's death, the child Jesus, his mother, and Joseph travel safely to Nazareth in order to fulfil Scripture (2: 23). God's hand is upon them rather than on King Herod.

In the second half of the Prologue the rejection theme is developed further. John the Baptist warns the Pharisees and Sadducees (the parallel passage in Luke refers simply to 'crowds') that it is not enough to appeal (with all Jews) to Abraham as their father: they must bear fruit that befits repentance (3: 7–10). Just as the tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down, so will Israel be rejected if she fails to produce the fruits of the kingdom (3: 10).

Acceptance of the Gentiles (as well as Jews) is foreshadowed not only in the reference in 1: 1 to Jesus as 'the son of Abraham' but also in the genealogy itself. A first-century reader would be puzzled by the unexpected references in the genealogy to four women. Why were women referred to instead of men? One of the more likely explanations notes that the women are included because in some first-century Jewish circles they were all considered to be non-Jews. Matthew's point is then that even the genealogy of Jesus shows that with his coming Gentiles as well as Jews will be accepted. The same point is made in chapter 2: the wise men from the east who come to worship the young child are representatives of the Gentile world. Scripture is cited twice as divine sanction for a mission to the Gentiles (4: 15 and 12: 18–21). This theme is developed further in Jesus' acceptance of the faith of the Gentile centurion (8: 10), and in the broad hint that followers of Jesus will be rejected not only by Jewish households, but also by Gentiles (10: 18). Before the end comes, 'this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the earth as a witness to all nations' (24: 14; cf. also 26: 13). In the final command of the Risen Jesus (28: 18–20), which will be considered later in this chapter, earlier hints become a clarion call.

In the important section 1: 18–25 there are two further Christological themes which the evangelist develops later in his gospel. In a dream Joseph

is told by the angel of the Lord to call the son whom Mary would bear Jesus, 'for he will save his people from their sins' (1: 21). Matthew refers to Israel in the traditional manner as God's people: Jesus is Israel's Messiah. In some contemporary Jewish circles the Messiah was expected to set aside or correct the sins of men and women. Later in the gospel Matthew returns to this theme, but develops it in a distinctively Christian (and especially Pauline) way. At 26: 28 Matthew adds an important phrase to the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. In Mark's account, which Matthew uses, Jesus says: 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Mark 14: 24). Matthew adds 'for the forgiveness of sins', thus stressing explicitly that the death of Jesus atones for sins.

At 1: 23 the evangelist cites the Greek translation of Isa. 7: 14 in order to show that the virginal conception and birth of Jesus are a fulfilment of Scripture. Matthew is also especially interested in the Hebrew name *Emmanuel* mentioned in this verse. He translates it 'God *with us*' in order to make sure that his readers understand the full significance of the coming of Jesus. Matthew returns to this theme in the final verse of his gospel. The Risen Lord promises the disciples, 'Remember, I am *with you* always' (28: 20). In a rather 'learned' way which is characteristic of the evangelist Matthew, the same major theological point is made at the beginning and at the end of his gospel: through Jesus people experience God's presence with them.

Although the infancy narratives are not referred to explicitly in later chapters, they are an integral part of the gospel. In Matthew 1 and 2 it is very difficult to isolate with any precision Matthew's redaction of his sources, but the evangelist's own methods and emphases are undoubtedly present.

The way of righteousness: the Beatitudes 5: 3–11

One of the evangelist's most important themes, however, is almost entirely absent from the infancy narratives. In numerous passages the evangelist gives prominence to the demands of Jesus for standards of ethical behaviour which conform to the will of God (in Scripture). In a key verse in the Sermon on the Mount which contains a cluster of Matthew's own favourite words, strong demands are made of followers of Jesus (in

Matthew's day): 'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (5: 20). As we shall see below (pp. 74–6), the communities to which Matthew wrote have almost certainly parted company rather painfully with contemporary Judaism. Like many other minority religious groups at different periods of history, Matthew's Christian communities are urged to adopt higher standards of ethical behaviour than those of the majority from whom they have separated.

The same point is made in 6: 1–18. The traditional Jewish religious practices of giving alms, prayer and fasting are not abandoned in the communities to which the evangelist wrote. They are to be carried out with sincere motives, 'not like the hypocrites' (6: 2, 5, 16). In the context, the opponents whose religious practices are being ridiculed are the scribes and Pharisees of 5: 20. In 6: 1 the 'superior' standards demanded of followers of Jesus are referred to as 'practising righteousness', though this is obscured by the NRSV translation 'beware of practising your piety'.

Matthew's strong ethical emphasis and repeated use of the term 'righteousness' is a feature of the Sermon on the Mount, and, as we shall see, of the Beatitudes in particular. This theme is foreshadowed in two verses in the Prologue. At 1: 19 Joseph is described as a 'just' or 'righteous' man. And in a difficult passage at 3: 15 Jesus and John the Baptist 'fulfil all righteousness'. By allowing himself to be baptized by John, even though he has no need to repent, Jesus carries out God's will and is 'righteous' in God's sight.

The noun 'righteousness' is not found in Mark and it occurs only once in Luke (1: 75). But in Matthew it is used seven times, and in every case the evangelist has almost certainly introduced the word himself. This is one of Matthew's most important and distinctive themes. Whereas Paul uses the word to refer to God's *gift* of grace or salvation by which man is enabled to stand in a right relationship with his Creator, in Matthew the word refers to the righteous conduct which God *demands* of disciples. It would be a mistake, however, to contrast Matthew and Paul too sharply. Like Paul, Matthew emphasizes the importance of baptism (28: 19) and relates forgiveness of sins to the death of Jesus (26: 28).

The evangelist's strongly ethical emphasis is particularly clear in the Beatitudes where 'righteousness' is mentioned twice (5: 6, 10). In Matthew there are nine Beatitudes, only four of which are found in Luke. Most

scholars accept that both Matthew and Luke have taken over and reinterpreted the four Beatitudes found in Q which referred to the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are persecuted. Matthew has added (in part from earlier oral traditions) five further Beatitudes which are found in his gospel alone: the blessings on the meek (5: 5), the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and a second saying concerning persecution (5: 7–10).

Matthew's additional five Beatitudes and the changes he makes to the Q sayings confirm that he is particularly concerned with ethical conduct. In Luke those in desperate need—those who are literally poor, hungry, and weeping (6: 20–1)—are promised that their position will be reversed by God. In Matthew the dominant theme is one of encouragement to disciples—and to followers of Jesus in the evangelist's own day.

The two Beatitudes which refer to righteousness support this general conclusion. The saying at Luke 6: 21 which corresponds to Matthew's fourth Beatitude refers to those who are literally hungry: in their rather desperate state they will be blessed by God and their hunger satisfied. In Luke (but not in Matthew) there is a corresponding 'woe': 'woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation' (6: 24). As we shall see in the next chapter, Luke is particularly interested in poverty and riches. In Matthew, however, God's blessing is promised to a rather different group: to those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' (5: 6), i.e. to those who are 'hungry' to do God's will.

In 5: 10 those who are 'persecuted for righteousness' sake' are promised that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. This saying (like 5: 20, see pp. 67–8) contains so many of Matthew's favourite words that the evangelist may have created it himself. As in several other similar cases, Matthew does not introduce new ideas, but develops themes already present in the sources he is using. The second half of 5: 10, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven', echoes 5: 3 (Q); the first half of 5: 10 underlines the importance of the Q Beatitude which follows in 5: 11 where disciples are encouraged in the face of persecution. Matt. 5: 10 gives the reason for the fierce opposition which is being experienced: followers of Jesus are being pilloried on account of their righteous conduct. Presumably this is a reflection of the hostility being experienced by followers of Jesus in the evangelist's day. A few verses later a more positive note is struck: 'Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your

Father in heaven' (5: 16). Here 'good works' seems to be synonymous with 'righteousness'.

We have now referred to four verses in the Sermon in which the word 'righteousness' is prominent: 5: 6, 10 and 20, and 6: 1. The fifth and final use of this word is instructive. At 6: 33 the Q clause 'strive for his kingdom' (Luke 12: 31) is expanded by Matthew: 'strive *first* for his kingdom *and his righteousness*'. Here the 'righteousness' which is demanded of followers of Jesus is linked explicitly with God's kingdom, or kingly rule. As we saw on p. 9, the same point is made in Matthew's expansion of the shorter Q version of the Lord's Prayer. Matthew explains, as it were, that the petition 'Thy kingdom come' involves 'doing the will of the Father'. A similar expansion of a terse Q saying is found at 7: 21. The Q saying 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you' (Luke 6: 46) becomes: 'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*' For Matthew, the 'way of righteousness' means 'doing the will of the Father'.

Use of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is cited and alluded to in many passages in Matthew in broadly similar ways to those found in the other three gospels. But in addition there is a set of ten quite distinctive 'fulfilment quotations' which have long intrigued scholars. In each case a citation from a passage in one of the prophets is introduced by a set formula: '(this took place) in order that what was declared (by the Lord, or through the prophet) might be fulfilled'. They all function as asides or comments of the evangelist on the significance of a preceding narrative.

For example, at 2: 15 the following comment is added to the brief account of the departure of the child Jesus, his mother, and Joseph to Egypt: 'This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son"'. At the end of a summary account of the healing ministry of Jesus we read: 'This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases"' (8: 17).

Has Matthew himself chosen these passages? Or has he taken them from

a source—perhaps from an early Christian collection of Old Testament passages which were considered to be especially valuable for Christians to use either in catechetical instruction or in debates with Jewish opponents? In order to settle this issue it is necessary to establish which text or translation of the Old Testament is used both within the fulfilment citations and elsewhere in the gospel. At times the passage quoted is closer to the original Hebrew than to the Greek translation of the Old Testament (= LXX, the Septuagint) which is usually used by early Christian writers. In some places the form of the citation seems to have been adapted by the evangelist to fit the narrative to which it is joined. In a few cases there even seem to be traces of the use of the Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew text which are known as the 'targums'.

The evangelist was a learned writer who almost certainly had access to the original Hebrew as well as to Aramaic and Greek translations. But it is often difficult to decide which textual tradition is being used since recent research has shown that both the Hebrew and the Greek textual traditions of the Old Testament were very much more fluid than used to be supposed. The form of any Aramaic targum known to Matthew is even more uncertain. Hence it is not surprising that scholarly opinion is divided and that discussion continues.

Perhaps the most likely solution is as follows: when the evangelist introduces as a fulfilment citation a passage that was already known in Christian usage, he is likely to have reproduced the familiar wording, but if Matthew himself was the first to have seen the possibilities of an Old Testament fulfilment, he is likely to have chosen or adapted a wording that would best suit his own purposes.

In some cases Matthew's choice of an Old Testament verse as a comment on a particular tradition about Jesus seems odd to modern readers. But he is not simply concerned to underline purely incidental agreements between an Old Testament passage and Jesus. His main intention is to use Old Testament prophecy to *interpret* the passage to which it is attached, for he is convinced that the story of Jesus is very much at one with God's purposes.

Matthew clearly believes in the continuing importance of the Old Testament for Christians. He strenuously resists the claim which may have been made by his Jewish opponents that Christians have abandoned the Old Testament. As the introduction to a lengthy collection of sayings on

the attitude of Jesus to the Law (5: 21–48) he sets down this saying of Jesus: 'Do not think (as some do) that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfil' (5: 17).

For Matthew the continuing validity of the Law is important, but even more important is its correct interpretation. The essence of the Law is summed up in two ways. In two Old Testament citations which do not include the fulfilment formula, Matthew appeals to the interpretation of the Law by the Old Testament prophets as the vantage point from which the Law is to be approached. At 9: 13 and again at 12: 7 Pharisaic attitudes to the Law are rejected with a quotation from Hosea 6: 6, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (9: 13; 12: 7).

For Matthew the essence of the Law is also summed up by two sayings of Jesus. When asked to quote the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus refers to the command to love God and then cites the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (22: 36–40).

In an equally important verse at the climax of the Sermon on the Mount the so-called 'golden rule' is cited: 'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you' (7: 12). These words are close to the original Q saying included by Luke at 6: 31, but Matthew adds a most important interpretative comment: 'for this is the law and the prophets'. In other words, for Matthew the Old Testament remains authoritative: it is neither to be discarded nor is it to be interpreted narrowly along the lines used by Matthew's Pharisaic and scribal opponents. The teaching of Jesus strengthens and fulfils the prophets, and it provides the correct criterion for interpretation of the Law.

How are 5: 18 and 5: 19 to be interpreted? At first sight they seem to fit awkwardly with the points made in the preceding paragraphs.

> For truly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (5.18)
> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (5.19)

These two verses seem to imply that even for Christians the Law continues without modification. Many scholars accept that a qualification is

introduced (perhaps by the evangelist himself) with the phrase 'until all is accomplished'. On this view the coming of Jesus does mark the fulfilment of God's purposes and so provides a new perspective from which the Law is to be viewed.

If this explanation is at least plausible, how is 5: 19 to be interpreted? At this point many exegetes accept without further ado that the evangelist is inconsistent: he has taken over without modification a very conservative saying. But it is difficult to believe that Matthew has retained teaching with which he himself does not agree. So some scholars have suggested that the 'commandments' in 5: 19 which are not to be 'broken' are not the Old Testament commandments, but the sayings of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel. It is quite possible that this is how the evangelist understood this saying, for the final verse of the gospel insists that 'all nations' are to be taught to observe *all the commandments of Jesus* (28: 20).

The commissioning of the disciples: 28: 18–20

In the closing three verses of the gospel the evangelist both underlines and develops his earlier themes. These verses have been described as the key to the understanding of the whole book. The evangelist seems to have used the word 'all' to draw together into one unit three originally separate sayings. Although this is often obscured in modern translations, the passage refers to 'all authority', 'all nations', 'all the commandments', and 'all the days'.

Both in this passage and in the gospel as a whole, the evangelist's primary concern is to spell out what he takes to be the full significance of Jesus. In several passages, and most notably in 9: 8 and 11: 27, the evangelist has drawn attention to the authority given to Jesus in his earthly ministry. But now that authority is extended to include heaven as well as earth. In what sense does the exalted Jesus exercise authority in heaven? The evangelist seems to be alluding to Daniel 7: 13–14 where 'one like a son of man' enters the presence of the Ancient of Days (God), 'and to him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him'.

This striking interpretation of the significance of Jesus has been anticipated earlier in the gospel. The evangelist has extended considerably

Mark's strong emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God. And whereas in Mark Jesus is referred to by the disciples as 'teacher' and in Luke as 'master', both simply terms of respect, in Matthew the disciples (but not others) use the much more profound term 'Lord'.

As we have seen, the command to 'make disciples of all nations' is indeed a key to the understanding of this gospel. Israel's rejection of her Messiah has led to God's acceptance of Gentiles (cf. 21: 43). Although the evangelist includes fierce denunciations of the Jewish leaders which most Christians find embarrassing, he does not seem to accept that Israel's rejection is final. 'All the nations' who are to be evangelized include Israel.

The command to the disciples to baptize 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' is quite without parallel in the New Testament. Elsewhere baptism is spoken of as being in or through the name of Jesus (for example, see Acts 2: 38; 10: 48; Rom. 6: 3; 1 Cor. 1: 13, 15 and 6: 11). Matthew's use of the threefold name in baptism is a later development which quickly became the standard Christian formulation.

In the very last verse the continuing importance of the teaching of Jesus is emphasized. If 'making disciples' includes teaching disciples to observe all the commandments of Jesus, it is no surprise to find that Matthew has set out that teaching in systematic fashion in five lengthy discourses. In the final phrases the evangelist returns to Christology, the theme with which this concluding section, and the whole gospel, began.

The setting and purpose of the gospel

Why did Matthew write his gospel? We have stressed the extent to which the evangelist has been influenced by Mark. One of his primary purposes is similar to Mark's: to set out fully his own understanding of the story and significance of Jesus. Like Mark, Matthew is not writing a historical record, but addressing followers of Jesus in his own day. As we have seen, Matthew stresses the ethical conduct demanded of disciples. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Matthew's readers and listeners are urged by Jesus to do the will of their heavenly Father and to hear and obey his words 'like a wise man who built his house upon the rock' (7: 21, 24–7).

Throughout the gospel Matthew's Christian communities are clearly in view. Only in Matthew is the word 'church' used (16: 18; 18: 17). Whereas in

Luke 15: 3–7 the parable of the lost sheep speaks of God's love for those on the margins of society, the tax collectors and sinners, in Matt. 18: 12–14 the parable is used to encourage Christians to care for the 'straying' members of their communities. In the same chapter 'regulations' for settling disputes among Christians are set out (18: 15–18).

Matthew has chosen and 'shaped' his traditions with the needs and concerns of Christians in his own day in mind. Matthew writes as a pastor. But can we be more specific about the circumstances for which he wrote? One of the most distinctive features of Matthew is the ferocity of anti-Jewish polemic and this seems to be related to the evangelist's original purposes. Polemical sayings are found already in Mark and in Q, but Matthew has sharpened and extended these traditions considerably.

In chapter 23 seven strongly worded woes are addressed to the scribes and Pharisees. In the final woe Matthew claims much more explicitly than in the underlying Q tradition that the scribes and Pharisees are the sons of those who murdered the prophets: they, too, are murderers (23: 31). They are then addressed as 'You serpents, you brood of vipers'—the very phrases John the Baptist addresses to the crowds in general at Luke 3: 7, but specifically to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matt. 3: 7. Then follows a reference to the 'Christian' prophets, wise men and scribes whom Jesus is sending to the Jewish leaders, some of whom will be killed and crucified just like Jesus himself. Some will be scourged in the synagogues of the Pharisees and scribes and persecuted from town to town. As a result, God's judgement will come upon those who have persecuted and murdered the followers of Jesus (23: 34–5).

The final verses of this chapter take this point further: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it . . . See, your house is left to you, desolate' (23: 37–8). At 21: 43, in a verse Matthew adds to the Marcan parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mark 12: 1–12), the reader is told that God's kingdom will be taken away from Israel and 'given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom'.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation of Matthew's intensified anti-Jewish polemic is that Matthew's communities have recently parted company with Judaism after a period of prolonged hostility. Opposition, rejection, and persecution from some Jewish quarters is not just a matter of past experience: for the evangelist and his readers the threat is still felt strongly and keenly. Matthew is puzzled—indeed pained—by Israel's

continued rejection of Jesus and of Christian messengers who have proclaimed Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel's hopes. Hence the anger and frustration.

Like many a minority group which feels itself (rightly or wrongly) to be under threat from a dominant group from which it has parted company, Matthew uses polemical denunciations to justify his own stance. This suggested setting for the evangelist's anti-Jewish polemic perhaps explains the harshness of his words, but it does not excuse them. Christians today rightly feel acutely embarrassed by them and by the way they have been used by some in earlier generations to fuel anti-Semitism.

I have defended in some detail the view sketched in the preceding paragraphs (see the Bibliography). But an alternative way of reading the evidence has been proposed by J. A. Overman (1990), A. J. Saldarini (1994), and David C. Sim (1998). Overman insists that many of the issues which are prominent in Matthew were also of great concern to other first-century Jewish groups and 'sects'. Matthew takes his stand *within* Judaism, for Matthew 'does not allow formative Judaism to go one way and his community to go another' (p. 157). Sim claims that the evangelist and his readers observed the law in full: 'the Matthean community was therefore Jewish ... its religious tradition is most aptly described as Christian Judaism' (p. 299).

There are no easy answers. I have sometimes encouraged my students to take sides and to debate the issues in class. Invariably those who take a different view from my own have prevailed!

On some key points nearly all are agreed. The evangelist Matthew is a Jew, and not a Gentile. Matthew's listeners and readers are closely related to Judaism, and yet in some tension with at least some of the strands of the Judaism of their day.

Although it is fashionable to read between the lines of this gospel in order to discern points at which Matthew is at odds with some contemporary Christian or Jewish groups, this will always be a speculative endeavour. We should not lose sight of Matthew's primary purpose: he is primarily concerned to set out the story, the teaching, and the significance of Jesus in order to encourage and exhort followers of Jesus in his own day.

The origin of Matthew's gospel

If Mark was written just before or just after the traumatic events of AD 70, then Matthew's carefully revised and considerably extended edition of Mark must have been written some time later. Most scholars accept that Matthew's version of the parable of the wedding feast reflects the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (22: 1–14). The parable tells how the king (God) has repeatedly sent his servants (the prophets) with an invitation to a marriage feast. Those who are invited spurn the invitation; some reject and kill the servants. At this point Matthew adds a verse which is not found in the similar parable in Luke 14: 16–24: 'The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city' (22: 7). Here the destruction of Jerusalem is almost certainly linked with Israel's rejection of Jesus.

The gospel seems to have been written at some point between about AD 80 and 100, earlier rather than later, but it is impossible to be precise. A date well before AD 115 is probable because at that point Matt. 3: 15 is cited by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, in his letter to the Smyrneans.

Since Matthew was known and used in Antioch by AD 115, it has often been suggested that it was written in that city. This may well have been the case. Although there is no conclusive evidence, there are other factors which are often used to support this suggestion. The central part played by Peter in Matt. 16: 16–19 may point to Antioch, for this city may have come under the influence of Peter after his dispute with Paul in Antioch (Gal 2: 11–14). Matthew's gospel is used by the Didache, a Christian writing which may have originated in Syria, not far from Antioch, by about AD 100. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city which contained several Jewish synagogues; Christianity was very firmly established there by AD 80. So it is not hard to envisage in Antioch the tensions which seem to be reflected in Matthew between dominant Jewish synagogues and Matthew's smaller mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian communities. But Antioch was by no means the only city with well-established Jewish and Christian communities. So our considerable knowledge of Antioch in the final decades of the first century should be used only with caution in the interpretation of this gospel.

Who wrote Matthew's gospel? Like all four gospels, Matthew was

originally anonymous. Early in the second century the name Matthew was attached to the gospel, perhaps in order to differentiate it from other gospels known in the area. In Matt. 10: 3 one of the disciples is named 'Matthew the tax collector', thus identifying him with the tax collector Matthew who, according to Matt. 9: 9, became a follower of Jesus. But this disciple and eyewitness is unlikely to have been the author of our gospel: an eyewitness would not need to depend so heavily on Mark's gospel.

The name Matthew was known to Papias, whom we met in Chapter 3 (see pp. 55–6). In about AD 110 Papias wrote as follows: 'Matthew collected the sayings (or records) in the Hebrew (or Aramaic) language and every person interpreted (or translated) them as he was able.' Unfortunately this comment raises more questions than it answers. The origin and date of the tradition are not entirely clear and the interpretation of almost every word is much disputed. Papias probably believed that Matthew wrote the gospel we now have and not a collection of sayings of Jesus (Q), nor a collection of Old Testament proof texts, nor an early forerunner of the gospel. But our Matthew never did exist in Hebrew or Aramaic; the evangelist wrote in Greek and used both Mark and Q in Greek.

There is one further puzzling fact. The tax collector Matthew referred to in Matt. 9: 9 is called Levi in the original account in Mark! Why was Levi changed to Matthew? And why does this gospel alone refer to the disciple Matthew as a tax collector (10: 3)? Perhaps Matthew the tax collector eventually became a Christian leader and was thought (at first) to have had a hand in collecting some traditions (which can no longer be singled out) of the sayings and actions of Jesus. At a later stage he came to be known as the author of the whole gospel. Since Matthew was not a prominent leader in the early church, it is difficult to believe that his name was linked with this gospel without good reason.