

Gospel of Matthew - Introduction

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

The Gospel of Matthew is the first written Gospel, containing the entire Bible in itself, and is termed the Genesis of the New Testament.

Scripture: Matthew 1:1, Matthew 2:2, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 24:15, Matthew 25:31

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Biblical Prophecy"

Description

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches on the Gospel of Matthew, highlighting its significance as the Genesis of the New Testament, containing the beginnings of a new dispensation like a mighty tree rooted in the Old Testament promises. Matthew, a despised tax gatherer, was chosen by the Holy Spirit to write this Jewish Gospel, emphasizing the need to understand its dispensational truths to grasp its teachings correctly. The Gospel focuses on the King and the Kingdom, the rejection of the King by His earthly people, the mysteries of the Kingdom, the Church, and the prophetic teachings concerning the end of the age in the Mount of Olivet Discourse.

Transcript

The Gospel of Matthew stands first among the Gospels and in the New Testament, because it was first written and may be rightly termed the Genesis of the New Testament. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, contains in itself the entire Bible, and so it is with the first Gospel; it is the book of the beginnings of a new dispensation. It is like a mighty tree. The roots are deeply sunk in massive rocks while its uncountable branches and twigs extend upward higher and higher in perfect symmetry and beauty. The foundation is the Old Testament with its Messianic and Kingdom promises. Out of this all is developed in perfect harmony, reaching higher and higher into the new dispensation and to the beginning of the millennial age.

The instrument chosen by the Holy Spirit to write this Gospel was Matthew. He was a Jew. However, he did not belong to the religious, educated class, to the scribes; but he belonged to the class which was most bitterly hated. He was a publican, that is a tax gatherer. The Roman government had appointed officials whose duty it was to have the legal tax gathered, and these officials, mostly, if not all Gentiles, appointed the actual collectors, who were generally Jews. Only the most unscrupulous among the Jews would hire themselves out for the sake of gain to the avowed enemy of Jerusalem. Wherever there was still a ray of hope for Messiah's coming, the Jew would naturally shrink from being associated with the Gentiles, who were to be swept away from the land with the coming of the King. For this reason the tax gatherers, being Roman employees, were hated by the Jews even more bitterly than the Gentiles

themselves. Such a hated tax gatherer was the writer of the first Gospel. How the grace of God is revealed in his call we shall see later. That he was chosen to write this first Gospel is in itself significant, for it speaks of a new order of things about to be introduced, namely, the call of the despised Gentiles.

Internal evidences seem to show that most likely originally Matthew wrote the Gospel in Aramaic, the Semitic dialect then spoken in Palestine . The Gospel was later translated into Greek. This, however, is certain, that the Gospel of Matthew is pre-eminently the Jewish Gospel. There are many passages in it, which in their fundamental meaning can only be correctly understood by one who is quite familiar with Jewish customs and the traditional teachings of the elders. Because it is the Jewish Gospel, it is dispensational throughout.

It is safe to say that a person, no matter how learned or devoted, who does not hold the clearly revealed dispensational truths concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God will fail to understand Matthew. This is, alas, too much the case, and well it would be if it were not more than individual failure to understand; but it is more than that. Confusion, error, false doctrine is the final outcome, when the right key to any part of God's Word is lacking. If the dispensational character of Matthew were understood, no ethical teaching from the so-called Sermon on the Mount at the expense of the Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ would be possible, nor would there be room for the subtle, modern delusion, so universal now, of a "social Christianity" which aims at lifting up the masses and the reformation of the world.

How different matters would be in Christendom if its leading teachers and preachers, commentators and professors, had understood and would understand the meaning of the seven parables in Matthew 13, with its deep and solemn lessons. When we think how many of the leaders of religious thought reject and even oppose all dispensational teachings, and never learned how to divide the Word of truth rightly, it is not strange that so many of these men dare to stand up and say that the Gospel of Matthew as well as the other Gospels and the different parts of the New Testament contain numerous contradictions and errors.

Out of this failure to discern dispensational truths has likewise arisen the attempt, by a very well meaning class, to harmonize the Gospel records and to arrange all the events in the life of our Lord in a chronological order, and thus produce a life of Jesus Christ, our Lord, as we have a descriptive life of Napoleon or other great men. The Holy Spirit has never undertaken to produce a life of Christ. That is very evident by the fact that the greater part of the life of our Lord is passed over in silence.

Nor was it in the mind of the Spirit to report all the words and miracles and the movements of our Lord, or to record all the events which took place during His public ministry, and to arrange them in a chronological order. What presumption, then, in man to attempt to do that which the Holy Spirit never attempted! If the Holy Spirit never intended that the records of our Saviour should be strictly chronological, how vain and foolish then, if not more, the attempt to bring out a harmony of the different Gospels!

One has correctly said, "The Holy Spirit is not a reporter, but an editor." This is well said. A reporter's business is to report events as they happen. The editor arranges the material in a way to suit himself, and leaves out or makes comment just as he thinks best. This the Holy Spirit has done in giving four Gospels, which are not a mechanical reporting of the doings of a person called Jesus of Nazareth, but the spiritual unfoldings of the blessed person and work of our Saviour and Lord, as King of the Jews, servant in obedience, Son of Man and the only begotten of the Father. We cannot enter more deeply into this now, but in the exposition of our Gospel we shall illustrate this fact.

In the Gospel of Matthew, as the Jewish Gospel, speaking of the King and the kingdom, dispensational throughout, treating of the Jews, the Gentiles and even the church of God in anticipation, as no other Gospel does, everything must be looked upon from the dispensational point of view. All the miracles recorded, the words spoken, the events which are given in their peculiar setting, every parable, every chapter from beginning to end, are first of all to be looked upon as foreshadowing and teaching dispensational truths. This is the right key to the Gospel of Matthew. It is likewise a significant fact that in the condition of the people Israel, with their proud religious leaders rejecting the Lord, their King and the threatened judgment in consequence of it, is a true photograph of the end of the present dispensation, and in it we shall see the coming doom of Christendom. The characteristics of the times, when our Lord appeared among His people, who were so religious, self-righteous, being divided into different sects, Ritualists (Pharisees) and Rationalists (Sadducees -- Higher Critics), following the teachings of men, occupied with man-made creeds and doctrines, etc., and all nothing but apostasy, are exactly reproduced in Christendom, with its man-made ordinances, rituals and rationalistic teachings. We hope to follow out this thought in our exposition.

There are seven great dispensational parts which are prominent in this Gospel and around which everything is grouped. We will briefly review them.

I. -- The King

The Old Testament is full of promises which speak of the coming, not alone of a deliverer, a sinbearer, but of the coming of a King, King Messiah as He is still called by orthodox Jews. This King was eagerly expected, hoped for and prayed for by the pious in Israel. It is still so with many Jews in our days. The Gospel of Matthew proves that our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the promised King Messiah. In it we see Him as King of the Jews, everything shows that He is in truth the royal person, of whom Seers and Prophets, as well as inspired Psalmists, wrote and sang. First it would be necessary to prove that He is legally the King. This is seen in the first chapter, where a genealogy is given which proves His royal descent. The beginning is, "Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham."* It goes back to Abraham and there it stops, while in Luke the genealogy reaches up to Adam. In the Gospel of Matthew He is seen as Son of David, His royal descent; Son of Abraham, according to the flesh from the seed of Abraham.

*We use a translation of the New Testament which was made years ago by J.N. Darby, and which for correctness is the very best we have ever seen. We can heartily recommend it.

The coming of the Magi is only recorded in Matthew. They come to worship the new born King of the Jews. His royal birthplace, David's city, is given. The infant is worshipped by the representatives of the Gentiles and they do homage indeed before a true King, though the marks of poverty were around Him. The gold they gave speaks of His royalty. Every true King has a herald, so the King Messiah. The forerunner appears and in Matthew his message to the nation is that "The Kingdom of heaven has drawn nigh"; the royal person so long foretold is about to appear and to offer that Kingdom. When the King who was rejected comes again to set up the Kingdom, He will be preceded once more by a herald who will declare His coming among His people Israel, even Elijah the prophet. In the fourth chapter we see the King tested and proven that He is the King. He is tested thrice, once as Son of Man, as Son of God and as the King Messiah. After the testing, out of which He comes forth a complete victor, He begins His ministry. The Sermon on the Mount (we shall use the phrase though it is not scriptural) is given in Matthew in full. Mark and Luke report it only in fragments and John has not a word of it. This should at once determine the

status of the three chapters which contain this discourse. It is teaching concerning the Kingdom, the magna charta of the Kingdom and all its principles. Such a kingdom in the earth, with subjects who have all the characteristics of the royal requirements laid down in this discourse will yet be. If Israel had accepted the King it would then have come, but the kingdom has been postponed. The Kingdom will at last come with a righteous nation as a center, but Christendom is not that kingdom. In this wonderful discourse the Lord speaks as the King and as the Lawgiver, who expounds the law which is to rule His Kingdom. From the eighth to the twelfth chapters, we see the royal manifestations of Him who is Jehovah manifested in the flesh.

This part especially is interesting and very instructive, because it gives in a series of miracles, the dispensational outline of the Jew, the Gentile, and what comes after the present age is past.

As King He sends out His servants and endues them with kingdom power, preaching likewise the nearness of the kingdom. After the tenth chapter the rejection begins followed by His teachings in parables, the revealing of secrets. He is presented to Jerusalem as King, and the Messianic welcome is heard, "Blessed is He who cometh in the name of Jehovah." After that His suffering and His death. In all His Kingly character is brought out, and the Gospel closes abruptly, and has nothing to say of His ascension to heaven; but the Lord is, so to speak, left on the earth with power, all power in heaven and on earth. In this closing it is seen that He is the King. He rules in heaven now and on the earth when He comes again.

II. The Kingdom

The phrase Kingdom of the Heavens occurs only in the Gospel of Matthew. We find it thirty-two times. What does it mean? Here is the failure of the interpretation of the Word, and all error and the confusion around us springs from the false conception of the Kingdom of the Heavens. It is generally taught and understood that the term Kingdom of the Heavens means the church, and thus the church is thought to be the true Kingdom of the Heavens, established in the earth, and conquering the nations and the world. The Kingdom of the Heavens is not the church, and the church is not the Kingdom of the Heavens. This is a very vital truth. May the exposition of this Gospel be used in making this distinction very clear in the minds of our readers. When our Lord speaks of the Kingdom of the Heavens up to the twelfth chapter He does not mean the church, but the Kingdom of the Heavens in its Old Testament sense, as it is promised to Israel, to be established in the land, with Jerusalem for a center, and from there to spread over all the nations and the entire earth. What did the pious, believing Jew expect according to the Scriptures? He expected (and still expects) the coming of the King Messiah, who is to occupy the throne of His father David. He was expected to bring judgment for the enemies of Jerusalem, and bring together the outcasts of Israel. The land would flourish as never before; universal peace would be established; righteousness and peace in the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to cover the earth as the waters cover the deep. All this in the earth with the land, which is Jehovah's land, as fountain head, from which all the blessings, the streams of living waters, flow. A temple, a house of worship, for all nations was expected to stand in Jerusalem, to which the nations would come to worship the Lord. This is the Kingdom of the Heavens as promised to Israel and as expected by them. It is all earthly. The church, however, is something entirely different. The hope of the church, the place of the church, the calling of the church, the destiny of the church, the reigning and ruling of the church is not earthly, but it is heavenly. Now the King long expected had appeared, and He preached the Kingdom of the Heavens having drawn nigh, that is, this promised earthly kingdom for Israel. When John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of the Heavens has drawn nigh," he meant the same. It is all wrong to preach the Gospel from such a text and state that

the sinner is to repent and then the Kingdom will come to him. A very well known English teacher of spiritual truths gave not long ago in this country a discourse on the mistranslated text, "The Kingdom of God is within you," and dwelt largely on the fact that the Kingdom is within the believer. The context shows that this is erroneous, and the true translation is "The Kingdom is among you;" that is, in the person of the King.

Now if Israel had accepted the testimony of John, and had repented, and if they had accepted the King, the Kingdom would have come, but now it has been postponed till Jewish disciples will pray again in preaching the coming of the Kingdom, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven." That will be after the church has been removed to the heavenly places. The history of the Kingdom is given in the second chapter. The Gentiles first, and Jerusalem does not know her King and is in trouble on account of Him.

III. The King and the Kingdom is rejected

This is likewise foretold in the Old Testament, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:25, Psalm 22, etc. It is also seen in types, Joseph, David and others. The herald of the King is first rejected and ends in the prison, being murdered. This speaks of the rejection of the King Himself. In no other Gospel is the story of the rejection so completely told as here. It begins in Galilee, in His own city, and ends in Jerusalem. The rejection is not human but it is Satanic. All the wickedness and depravity of the heart is uncovered and Satan revealed throughout. All classes are concerned in the rejection. The crowds who had followed Him and were fed by Him, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the priests, the chief priests, the high priest, the elders. At last it becomes evident that they knew Him who He was, their Lord and their King, and wilfully they delivered Him into the hands of the Gentiles. The story of the cross in Matthew, too, brings out the darkest side of the rejection. Thus prophecy is seen fulfilled in the rejection of the King.

IV. The rejection of His Earthly People and their Judgment

This is another theme of the Old Testament which is very prominent in the Gospel of Matthew. They rejected Him and He leaves them, and judgment falls upon them. In the eleventh chapter He reproaches the cities in which most of His works of power had taken place, because they had not repented. At the end of the twelfth chapter He denies His relations and refuses to see His own, while in the beginning of the thirteenth He leaves the house and goes down to the sea, the latter term typifies the nations. After His royal presentation to Jerusalem the next day early in the morning He curses the fig tree, which foreshadows Israel's national death, and after He uttered His two parables to the chief priests and elders, He declares that the Kingdom of God is to be taken away from them and is to be given to a nation which is to bring the fruit thereof. The whole twenty-third chapter contains the woes upon the Pharisees, and at the end He speaks to Jerusalem and declares that their house is to be left desolate till they shall say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

V. The mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens

The kingdom has been rejected by the people of the kingdom and the King Himself has left the earth. During His absence the Kingdom of the Heavens is in the hands of men. There is then the kingdom in the earth in an entirely different form than it was revealed in the Old Testament, the mysteries of the kingdom hidden from the world's foundation are now made known. This we learn in Matthew 13, and here, too, we have at least a glimpse of the church. Again it is to be understood that both are not identical. But what is the kingdom in its mystery form? The seven parables will teach this to us. It is seen there in an evil

mixed condition. The church, the one body, is not evil, for the church is composed of those who are beloved of God, called saints, but Christendom, including all professors, is properly that Kingdom of the Heavens in the thirteenth chapter. The parables bring out what may be termed the history of Christendom. It is a history of failure, becoming that which the King never meant it to be, the leaven of evil, indeed, leavening the whole lump, and thus it continues till the King comes back, when all the offences will be gathered out of the kingdom. The parable of the pearl alone speaks of the church.

VI. -- The Church

In no other Gospel is anything said of the church except in the Gospel of Matthew. In the sixteenth chapter Peter gives his testimony concerning the Lord, revealed to him from the Father, who is in the heavens. The Lord tells him that on this rock I will build My assembly -- church -- and hades' gates shall not prevail against it. It is not I have built, but I will build My church. Right after this promise He speaks of His suffering and death. The transfiguration which follows the first declaration of His coming death, speaks of the glory which will follow, and is a type of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:16). Much that follows after the declaration of the Lord concerning the building of the church is to be applied to the church. 15

VII. The Mount of Olivet Discourse

Prophetic Teachings Concerning the End of the Age. This discourse was given to the disciples after the Lord had spoken His last word to Jerusalem . It is one of the most remarkable sections of the entire Gospel. We find it in the 24th and 25th chapters. In it the Lord teaches concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God; Christendom is in it likewise. The order is different. The Gentiles stand last. The reason for that is because the church will be removed first from the earth and the professors of Christendom will be left, and are nothing but Gentiles and concerned in the judgment of nations as made known by the Lord. The first part of Matthew 24 is Jewish throughout. From the fourth to the forty-fifth verse we have a most important prophecy, which gives the events which follow after the church is taken from the earth. The Lord takes here many of the Old Testament prophecies and blends them in one great prophecy. The history of the last week in Daniel is here. The middle of the week after the first three years and a half is verse 15. Revelation, chapters 6-19 is all contained in these words of our Lord. He gave, then, the same truths, only more enlarged and in detail, from heaven as a last word and warning. Three parables follow in which the saved and the unsaved are seen. Waiting and serving is the leading thought. Reward and casting out into outward darkness the twofold outcome. This, then, finds an application in Christendom and the church. The ending of Matthew 25 is the judgment of nations. This is not the universal judgment, a popular term in Christendom, but unscriptural, but it is the judgment of the nations at the time when our Lord as Son of Man sits upon the throne of His glory.

Many of the most interesting facts in the Gospel, the peculiar quotations from the Old Testament, the perfect structure, etc., etc., we cannot give in this introduction and outline, but we hope to bring them before us in our exposition. May, then, the Spirit of Truth guide us into all the truth".

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