

## **I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS**

### **Matthew's Jewish Messiah in an Anti-Semitic Gospel?**

Matthew is the set gospel for this year in Lectionary. Featured in Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004); charge of being anti-Semitic, use of Matthew 27.24-25. When/why was it written and how can we read and study it today; a biographical approach?

#### **1 THE GOSPELS AS BIOGRAPHIES - What kind of book?**

##### **a) Genre and interpretation**

Genre key convention: a kind of 'contract' between an author and a reader.

##### **b) Genre and the gospels**

Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Rudolf Bultmann: the gospels are unique, *sui generis* - and certainly not biographies of Jesus. Rise of redaction criticism. Work by Charles Talbert and David Aune – back to biography idea.

##### **c) The generic features of the gospels compared with biography**

**Sample:** Isocrates' *Evagoras*, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Satyrus' *Euripides*, Nepos' *Atticus*, Philo's *Moses*, Tacitus' *Agricola*, Plutarch's *Cato Minor*, Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, Lucian's *Demonax* and Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*.

**Formal structure:** continuous prose narrative, between 10,000 and 20,000 words bare chronological outline, inserted material about the subject.

**Content:** ancestry, birth, public debut. Aims include apologetic, polemic or didactic. Concentration *on subject's death – detailed treatment at the end*.

##### **d) The subject of the gospels**

25%-30% of verbs have hero as subject plus another 15% to 30% in sayings, speeches or quotations from the person. Jesus is the subject of 25% of Mark plus 20% spoken by him in his teaching and parables. Matthew and Luke both make Jesus the subject of 18%, while about 40% are spoken by him. About half of John's verbs either have Jesus as the subject or are on his lips.

##### **e) Narrative Christology and biographies of Jesus**

The gospels are neither a clear glass window, nor a polished mirror; more like a piece of stained glass: Christology in narrative form, the story of Jesus.

#### **2) SYMBOLIC READINGS OF GOSPELS - stained glass portraits**

The four living creatures: Ezekiel 1, Revelation 4; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.11.8-9.

##### **a) The roar of Mark's lion**

##### **b) Luke's burden-bearing ox – the Gospel for Gentiles**

##### **c) John's high-flying eagle – the spiritual Gospel?**

### 3) MATTHEW'S HUMAN FACE - the teacher of Israel

#### a) Sources:

Matthew and Luke's use of Mark, plus a collection of teaching, often called Q – from *Quelle* or Source. Dates: 80s/90s? Asia Minor?

Matthew (18,305 words) compared with Mark (11,242):

Of Mark's 661 verses, 90% occur in Matthew (and many in Luke) = 'triple tradition'.

About another quarter of Matthew (200 verses) shared with Luke = 'double tradition'

Final quarter of Matthew is unique material, his own sources or his own work?

Opening chapters, genealogy, birth and infancy stories; five large blocks of teaching material (verbal analysis chart); more Jewish atmosphere yet negative attitude to the Pharisees?; significant additions in the Passion narrative; Resurrection and ascension.

#### b) The opening chapters: Jewish background, genealogy and role of Joseph.

*Biblos geneōs* (1.1); Genealogy 1.1-17: 3 x 14 names; four strange women. 'Emmanuel':

Birth of Jesus; role of Joseph; name (=Joshua); visit of the wise men and flight into Egypt

#### c) Teaching interplays with the narrative of Jesus' deeds and ministry.

Jesus is another Moses, who teaches from mountains (5.1) and fulfils the law and the prophets; Jesus' identity more divine than in Mark, plays down human emotions.

Teaching presented in five great blocks like the Pentateuch, (5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25).

5-7	107 verses	teaching for the present
10	38 verses	the church's mission
13	50 verses	parables of the kingdom
18	33 verses	the church's life
24-25	94 verses	teaching for the future

Another story emerges through the discourses: Jesus teaches Israel how to interpret the law today (5-7); sends disciples on the mission to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10.6); the heart of his teaching is parables about the kingdom of God; further opposition leads to a new community of faith, the Church (18). Woes to the leaders of Israel (23).

#### d) Passion narrative:

More awesome; effect of his additions – Judas and Pilate's wife (Matt. 27.3-10, 17-25).

Cry of abandonment (27.51-54, cp Mark 15.26) answered with signs & earthquake.

e) **Resurrection:** supernatural atmosphere, more earthquakes: appearances of Jesus; the division of Israel and ascension on a mountain; Emmanuel with us always (28.1-20).

f) **Conclusion:** The conflict in the story reflects the conflict in the development of the early messianic community within Judaism; quarrels within a family are often the most painful. Origins of Matthew? Effect on Christian-Jewish relations and history.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Richard A Burridge: *What are the Gospels?*

*A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* CUP 1992/95; Eerdmans 2004.

*Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* SPCK, 1994; 2005; 2013.

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