

# **BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ**

## Unit 2 Reading 2

### JFB, “The Gospel According to Matthew”

Presented by the



**LANCASTER BIBLE COLLEGE**  
CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

For Use by the

**Blue Letter Bible Institute**

[Web: Study.Bible](http://Study.Bible)

A Ministry of the

**Blue Letter Bible**

[Web: BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)

## The Gospel According to Matthew

Commentary by DAVID BROWN

THE author of this Gospel was a publican or tax gatherer, residing at Capernaum, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. As to his identity with the "Levi" of the second and third Gospels, and other particulars, see on JF & B for Mt 9:9. Hardly anything is known of his apostolic labors. That, after preaching to his countrymen in Palestine, he went to the East, is the general testimony of antiquity; but the precise scene or scenes of his ministry cannot be determined. That he died a natural death may be concluded from the belief of the best-informed of the Fathers--that of the apostles only three, James the Greater, Peter, and Paul, suffered martyrdom. That the first Gospel was written by this apostle is the testimony of all antiquity.

For the date of this Gospel we have only internal evidence, and that far from decisive. Accordingly, opinion is much divided. That it was the first issued of all the Gospels was universally believed. Hence, although in the order of the Gospels, those by the two apostles were placed first in the oldest manuscripts of the Old Latin version, while in all the Greek manuscripts, with scarcely an exception, the order is the same as in our Bibles, the Gospel according to Matthew is "in every case" placed first. And as this Gospel is of all the four the one which bears the most evident marks of having been prepared and constructed with a special view to the Jews--who certainly first required a written Gospel, and would be the first to make use of it--there can be no doubt that it was issued before any of the others. That it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem is equally certain; for as HUG observes [Introduction to the New Testament, p. 316, FOSDICK'S translation], when he reports our Lord's prophecy of that awful event, on coming to the warning about "the abomination of desolation" which they should "see standing in the holy place," he interposes (contrary to his invariable practice, which is to relate without remark) a call to his readers to read intelligently--"Whoso readeth, let him understand" (Mat 24:15) --a call to attend to the divine signal for flight which could be intended only for those who lived before the event. But how long before that event this Gospel was written is not so clear. Some internal evidences seem to imply a very early date. Since the Jewish Christians were, for five or six years, exposed to persecution from their own countrymen--until the Jews, being persecuted by the Romans, had to look to themselves--it is not likely (it is argued) that they should be left so long without some written Gospel to reassure and sustain them, and Matthew's Gospel was eminently fitted for that purpose. But the digests to which Luke refers in his Introduction (see on JF & B for Lu 1:1) would be sufficient for a time, especially as the living voice of the "eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word" was yet sounding abroad. Other considerations in favor of a very early date--such as the tender way in which the author seems studiously to speak of Herod Antipas, as if still reigning, and his writing of Pilate apparently as if still in power--seem to have no foundation in fact, and cannot therefore be made the ground of reasoning as to the date of this Gospel. Its Hebraic structure and hue, though they prove, as we think, that this Gospel must have been published at a period considerably anterior to the destruction of Jerusalem, are no evidence in favor of so early a date as A.D. 37 or 38--according to some of the Fathers, and, of the moderns, TILLEMONT, TOWNSON, OWEN, BIRKS, TREGELLES. On the other hand, the date suggested by the statement of IRENAEUS [Against Heresies, 3.1], that Matthew put forth his Gospel while Peter and

Paul were at Rome preaching and founding the Church--or after A.D. 60--though probably the majority of critics are in favor of it, would seem rather too late, especially as the second and third Gospels, which were doubtless published, as well as this one, before the destruction of Jerusalem, had still to be issued. Certainly, such statements as the following, "Wherefore that field is called the field of blood unto this day" (Mat 27:8); "And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Mat 28:15), bespeak a date considerably later than the events recorded. We incline, therefore, to a date intermediate between the earlier and the later dates assigned to this Gospel, without pretending to greater precision.

We have adverted to the strikingly Jewish character and coloring of this Gospel. The facts which it selects, the points to which it gives prominence, the cast of thought and phraseology, all bespeak the Jewish point of view from which it was written and to which it was directed. This has been noticed from the beginning, and is universally acknowledged. It is of the greatest consequence to the right interpretation of it; but the tendency among some even of the best of the Germans to infer, from this special design of the first Gospel, a certain laxity on the part of the Evangelist in the treatment of his facts, must be guarded against.

But by far the most interesting and important point connected with this Gospel is the language in which it was written. It is believed by a formidable number of critics that this Gospel was originally written in what is loosely called Hebrew, but more correctly Aramaic, or Syro-Chaldaic, the native tongue of the country at the time of our Lord; and that the Greek Matthew which we now possess is a translation of that work, either by the Evangelist himself or some unknown hand. The evidence on which this opinion is grounded is wholly external, but it has been deemed conclusive by GROTIUS, MICHAELIS (and his translator), MARSH, TOWNSON, CAMPBELL, OLSHAUSEN, CRESWELL, MEYER, EBRARD, LANGE, DAVIDSON, CURETON, TREGELLES, WEBSTER and WILKINSON, &c. The evidence referred to cannot be given here, but will be found, with remarks on its unsatisfactory character, in the Introduction to the Gospels prefixed to our larger Commentary, pp. 28-31.

But how stand the facts as to our Greek Gospel? We have not a title of historical evidence that it is a translation, either by Matthew himself or anyone else. All antiquity refers to it as the work of Matthew the publican and apostle, just as the other Gospels are ascribed to their respective authors. This Greek Gospel was from the first received by the Church as an integral part of the one quadriform Gospel. And while the Fathers often advert to the two Gospels which we have from apostles, and the two which we have from men not apostles--in order to show that as that of Mark leans so entirely on Peter, and that of Luke on Paul, these are really no less apostolical than the other two--though we attach less weight to this circumstance than they did, we cannot but think it striking that, in thus speaking, they never drop a hint that the full apostolic authority of the Greek Matthew had ever been questioned on the ground of its not being the original. Further, not a trace can be discovered in this Gospel itself of its being a translation. MICHAELIS tried to detect, and fancied that he had succeeded in detecting, one or two such. Other Germans since, and DAVIDSON and CURETON among ourselves, have made the same attempt. But the entire failure of all such attempts is now generally admitted, and candid advocates of a Hebrew original are quite ready to own that none such are to be found, and that but for external testimony no

one would have imagined that the Greek was not the original. This they regard as showing how perfectly the translation has been executed; but those who know best what translating from one language into another is will be the readiest to own that this is tantamount to giving up the question. This Gospel proclaims its own originality in a number of striking points; such as its manner of quoting from the Old Testament, and its phraseology in some peculiar cases. But the close verbal coincidences of our Greek Matthew with the next two Gospels must not be quite passed over. There are but two possible ways of explaining this. Either the translator, sacrificing verbal fidelity in his version, intentionally conformed certain parts of his author's work to the second and third Gospels--in which case it can hardly be called Matthew's Gospel at all--or our Greek Matthew is itself the original.

Moved by these considerations, some advocates of a Hebrew original have adopted the theory of a double original; the external testimony, they think, requiring us to believe in a Hebrew original, while internal evidence is decisive in favor of the originality of the Greek. This theory is espoused by GUERICKS, OLSHAUSEN, THIERSCH, TOWNSON, TREGELLES, &c. But, besides that this looks too like an artificial theory, invented to solve a difficulty, it is utterly void of historical support. There is not a vestige of testimony to support it in Christian antiquity. This ought to be decisive against it.

It remains, then, that our Greek Matthew is the original of that Gospel, and that no other original ever existed. It is greatly to the credit of DEAN ALFORD, that after maintaining, in the first edition of his Greek Testament the theory of a Hebrew original, he thus expresses himself in the second and subsequent editions: "On the whole, then, I find myself constrained to abandon the view maintained in my first edition, and to adopt that of a Greek original."

One argument has been adduced on the other side, on which not a little reliance has been placed; but the determination of the main question does not, in our opinion, depend upon the point which it raises. It has been very confidently affirmed that the Greek language was not sufficiently understood by the Jews of Palestine when Matthew published his Gospel to make it at all probable that he would write a Gospel, for their benefit in the first instance, in that language. Now, as this merely alleges the improbability of a Greek original, it is enough to place against it the evidence already adduced, which is positive, in favor of the sole originality of our Greek Matthew. It is indeed a question how far the Greek language was understood in Palestine at the time referred to. But we advise the reader not to be drawn into that question as essential to the settlement of the other one. It is an element in it, no doubt, but not an essential element. There are extremes on both sides of it. The old idea, that our Lord hardly ever spoke anything but Syro-Chaldaic, is now pretty nearly exploded. Many, however, will not go the length, on the other side, of HUG (in his Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 326, &c.) and ROBERTS ("Discussions of the Gospels," &c., pp. 25, &c.). For ourselves, though we believe that our Lord, in all the more public scenes of His ministry, spoke in Greek, all we think it necessary here to say is that there is no ground to believe that Greek was so little understood in Palestine as to make it improbable that Matthew would write his Gospel exclusively in that language--so improbable as to outweigh the evidence that he did so. And when we think of the number of digests or short narratives of the principal facts of our Lord's history which we know from Luke (Luk 1:1-4) were floating about for some time before he wrote his Gospel, of which he speaks by no means disrespectfully, and nearly all of which

would be in the mother tongue, we can have no doubt that the Jewish Christians and the Jews of Palestine generally would have from the first reliable written matter sufficient to supply every necessary requirement until the publican-apostle should leisurely draw up the first of the four Gospels in a language to them not a strange tongue, while to the rest of the world it was the language in which the entire quadriform Gospel was to be for all time enshrined. The following among others hold to this view of the sole originality of the Greek Matthew: ERASMUS, CALVIN, BEZA, LIGHTFOOT, WETSTEIN, LARDNER, HUG, FRITZSCHE, CREDNER, DE WETTE, STUART, DA COSTA, FAIRBAIRN, ROBERTS.

On two other questions regarding this Gospel it would have been desirable to say something, had not our available space been already exhausted: The characteristics, both in language and matter, by which it is distinguished from the other three, and its relation to the second and third Gospels. On the latter of these topics--whether one or more of the Evangelists made use of the materials of the other Gospels, and, if so, which of the Evangelists drew from which--the opinions are just as numerous as the possibilities of the case, every conceivable way of it having one or more who plead for it. The most popular opinion until recently--and perhaps the most popular still--is that the second Evangelist availed himself more or less of the materials of the first Gospel, and the third of the materials of both the first and second Gospels. Here we can but state our own belief, that each of the first three Evangelists wrote independently of both the others; while the fourth, familiar with the first three, wrote to supplement them, and, even where he travels along the same line, wrote quite independently of them. This judgment we express, with all deference for those who think otherwise, as the result of a close study of each of the Gospels in immediate juxtaposition and comparison with the others. On the former of the two topics noticed, the linguistic peculiarities of each of the Gospels have been handled most closely and ably by CREDNER [Einleitung (Introduction to the New Testament)], of whose results a good summary will be found in DAVIDSON'S Introduction to the New Testament. The other peculiarities of the Gospels have been most felicitously and beautifully brought out by DA COSTA in his Four Witnesses, to which we must simply refer the reader, though it contains a few things in which we cannot concur.

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/Mat/Mat\\_000.cfm?a=930001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/Mat/Mat_000.cfm?a=930001)