

# HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT WORKS

**Matthew**  
**Mark**  
**Luke**  
**John**  
**Acts**

⤴  
Four stories of Jesus  
and the "Acts" of the  
apostles.

**Romans**  
**1 Corinthians**  
**2 Corinthians**  
**Galatians**  
**Ephesians**  
**Philippians**  
**Colossians**  
**1 Thessalonians**  
**2 Thessalonians**  
**1 Timothy**  
**2 Timothy**  
**Titus**  
**Philemon**

These are letters  
not by Paul. >>

These are the  
letters of Paul.  
<< They are arranged  
from longest  
to shortest.

**Hebrews**  
**James**  
**1 Peter**  
**2 Peter**  
**1 John**  
**2 John**  
**3 John**  
**Revelation**

⤴  
Revelation is the only  
example of an "apocalypse"  
in the New Testament.

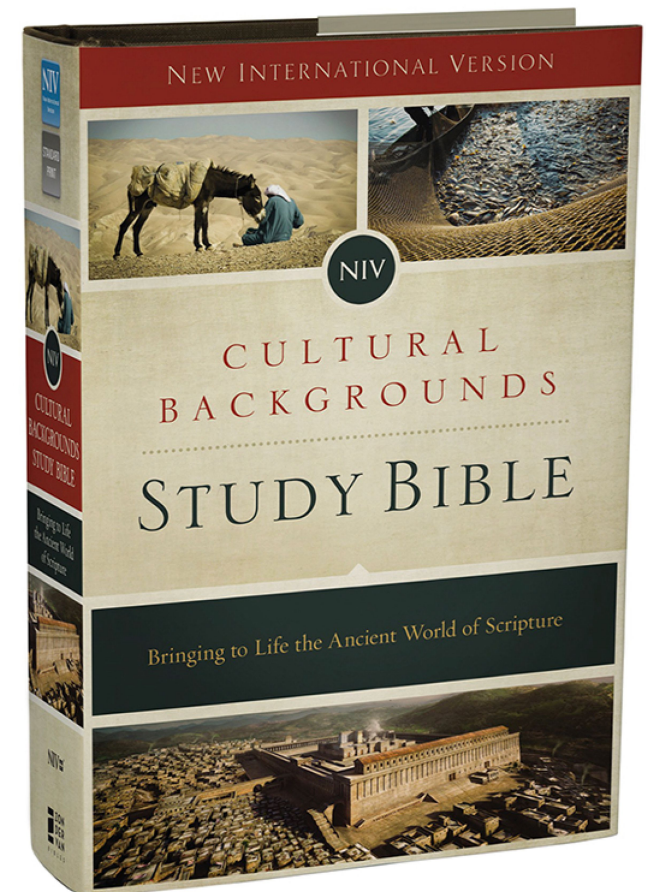
**CLASSICAL LETTERS      PAUL'S LETTERS      EXAMPLE**

<b>OPENING</b>	who it is from. who it is to. blessing: "grace!"	Paul, an apostle... to the Galatians... "Grace and Peace"	Romans 1.1-7
<b>THANKS</b>	a prayer of good will.	a prayer of thanksgiving except Galatians and 1 Tim.	Romans 1.8-15
<b>BODY</b>	like a letter or an email.	1) Theology 2) Life Together	Romans 1.16-11.36 Romans 12.1-15.13
<b>CONCLUDE</b>	personal updates, followed by a farewell	Paul's are super long because he's checking in...	Romans 15.14-16.27

# STUDY BIBLES

**ESV study Bible, archaeological study Bible, cultural backgrounds study Bible**

- 1) Slow down (set a time, not a chapter)**
- 2) Read the introduction (get the backdrop)**
- 3) Use the notes as you go and have fun!**
- 4) Flip to the maps to learn places**







## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Matthew's Position Among the Gospels

As a Gospel, Matthew is an ancient biography, and the information treated in the introduction to the Gospels in general also applies to Matthew. But just as other ancient biographies differed from one another even when they described the same person, so do the four Gospels. Of the four Gospels, Matthew is the most carefully arranged by topic and therefore lends itself most easily to a hierarchical outline. Along with John, Matthew is also an emphatically Jewish Gospel; Matthew moves in a thought world resembling that of the emerging rabbinic movement (the circle of Jewish sages and law-teachers) more than do the other Synoptic Gospels. (Our sources for rabbinic Judaism are later than the NT, but later rabbis avoided early Christian writings, so the frequent parallels—sometimes even in sayings and expressions, for which see, e.g., Mt 7:2; 18:20; 19:3, 24; 21:21; 22:2; 23:25—presumably stem from concepts, customs and figures of speech already circulating among sages in the first century.)

### Authorship

As noted above, the traditions of the Gospels' authorship are very early. Works as large as Matthew's Gospel were major literary undertakings. As suggested for the Gospels generally, in a work this size, authorship would be one of the last matters forgotten. That observation would surely be particularly relevant for Matthew's Gospel, which seems to have enjoyed popularity right from the start. Matthew was the early second-century church's favorite and most-cited Gospel.

Some raise questions about the ancient tradition in the case of Matthew. One reason for these questions is that the earliest tradition about Matthew's Gospel (from a very early second-century church father named Papias) is that he wrote in Hebrew and that other Gospels, probably including Mark, drew on this work. Most scholars agree that our current Gospel of Matthew was not written in Hebrew, nor does it appear to be mostly translated from Hebrew. Most scholars, moreover, believe that our current Gospel of Matthew makes use of Mark's Gospel, casting doubt on Papias's apparent suggestion that Matthew wrote first (although it is possible to interpret Papias differently).

### QUICK GLANCE

**AUTHOR:**  
Matthew, also called Levi

**AUDIENCE:**  
Greek-speaking Jewish Christians

**DATE:**  
Between AD 50 and 90, perhaps in the 70s

**THEME:**  
Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to fulfill OT prophecy.

If Papias was wrong about some details, why should we trust him on others? This is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, some other factors may mitigate the concern. First, some scholars believe that even if Papias does not properly describe our current Gospel of Matthew, he preserves some genuine information; possibly Matthew wrote a collection of Jesus' sayings (fitting the meaning of Papias's word here) in Hebrew or Aramaic, on which others (including Matthew's later Gospel in Greek) drew. Second, people are usually more apt to be correct about the simple fact of a document's authorship than about the circumstances of its writing. So even if Papias was partly or largely wrong, if he knew anything at all about these works written just a generation before him, he likely knew about their authorship.

Another objection that some raise against the traditional belief that Matthew wrote this Gospel is that Matthew, who was one of Jesus' disciples (9:9; 10:3; Mk 3:18), would not need to depend on Mark's Gospel, since Matthew was an eyewitness of most of Jesus' public ministry. Ancient approaches to eyewitness sources differed somewhat from modern approaches, however. Thus when the historian Xenophon writes an account of events in which he participated, he nevertheless depends heavily on an earlier-published work by another author, because the other work was already in wide circulation. By the same token, Matthew could have been an eyewitness and nevertheless used Mark because its wide circulation (or its association with Peter) made it a standard work. None of this proves that Matthew wrote this Gospel. It does, however, call into question the conviction with which some scholars dismiss that early tradition.

### Provenance and Date

There is no consensus and no certain means of resolving Matthew's precise setting or date. Some general considerations may be relevant. Because Matthew, more than any other NT document, addresses Jewish concepts closely paralleled in the emerging rabbinic movement, the common scholarly view that he wrote from the Roman province of Syria (which included Judea and Galilee) makes good sense. Some scholars also find similarities between Matthew and other documents from early Syrian Christianity.

Because Matthew wrote in Greek, which dominated in Syria's urban centers, rather than Aramaic, which dominated in rural areas, Matthew's core audience might have been located in an urban setting. Many scholars thus suggest that Matthew writes especially for Antioch in Syria. Antioch had a large Jewish community, one of the few Jewish communities not devastated by the Judean war; it also was an early Christian center of mission to Gentiles (Ac 11:20; 13:1–3; Gal 2:11–12).

Ultimately, what we can be sure of is that Matthew wrote especially to Jewish believers in Jesus in the eastern Mediterranean world. Whatever specific "core" audience he may have envisioned, as the author of a major literary work Matthew probably hoped that his Gospel would circulate as widely as possible.

Matthew's date is also a matter of much debate. If Matthew was the first Gospel writer, he probably wrote before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. A larger number of scholars, however, believe that Matthew made use of Mark's Gospel, and many thus date Matthew after 70. On this view, it is not surprising that Matthew must urge his Jewish Christian audience to bring the message of the kingdom to Gentiles—many Jewish followers of Jesus at that time would have felt little love for the people who destroyed their holy city and enslaved many of their people. Nevertheless, even before 70, tensions were building toward that climax, so a similar background could be relevant on either dating.

A majority of scholars think that Matthew writes after 70 also because of allusions to the



### The Magi Visit the Messiah

**2** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,<sup>u</sup> during the time of King Herod,<sup>v</sup> Magi<sup>a</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”<sup>w</sup> We saw

**2:1** <sup>u</sup>Lk 2:4-7  
<sup>v</sup>Lk 1:5  
**2:2** <sup>w</sup>Jer 23:5;  
Mt 27:11;  
Mk 15:2; Jn 1:49;  
18:33-37  
<sup>x</sup>Nu 24:17

his star<sup>x</sup> when it rose and have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.  
<sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the

<sup>a</sup> 1 Traditionally *wise men*

of the groom’s parents. Most people in antiquity supposed that a man and woman together alone for even a short time (less than an hour) would give way to sexual temptation. This would be all the more the case with those who were young; young men were considered particularly prone to passion. On average Jewish men married when about 18 to 20, with their brides in their mid-teens (sometimes even as young as 12 to 14). Yet Joseph and Mary abstained from intercourse before Jesus’ birth. On the first night of a wedding feast, intercourse would normally rupture the bride’s hymen, and the bloody sheet could be displayed as proof that she had entered marriage as a virgin. By making love on the first night of their wedding, Joseph and Mary could have proved that she had a virgin conception. Yet God’s plan was not merely a virgin conception, but a virgin birth (v. 23). Joseph and Mary chose God’s honor above their own.

**2:1–2** *Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.* It was common for dignitaries to come and congratulate a new ruler. Magi undoubtedly came with a significant caravan. *Magi.* These were a famous class of astrologers and dream-interpretors who served the Persian king. Their title appears in the most common Greek version of the OT only in Daniel, where it applies to Daniel’s enemies; this is not surprising, since astrology, as a form of divination, was forbidden in Scripture. Yet these Magi come to worship the new king (vv. 2,11); as Matthew often emphasizes, God calls followers from unexpected places (cf. 3:9; 8:10–12; 12:41–42; 21:31). **2:2** *star.* Some scholars think this is a conjunction of the heavenly sign that Persians associated with Judea together with the one they associated with kingship. Others associate it with other reported celestial anomalies about this time.

**2:3** *he was disturbed.* Although Scripture forbade astrol-

ogy, most of the ancient world had come to believe in astrology from the east, considered the “science” of its day. Jewish people generally doubted that the stars controlled Israel’s future, but they granted that the stars predicted the Gentiles’ future. It was also widely believed that comets and other heavenly signs predicted the demise of rulers; for this reason some rulers reportedly executed other members of the elite, so that the other deaths, rather than their own, could fulfill the predicted demise. Herod undoubtedly respected foreign ideas. Besides honoring Israel’s God, Herod built temples for Caesar in Gentile cities.

**6** “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

**2:5** <sup>y</sup>Jn 7:42  
**2:6** <sup>z</sup>2Sa 5:2;  
Mic 5:2  
<sup>a</sup> 6 Micah 5:2,4

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”<sup>a,z</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time

ace. But it is Scripture that specifies the new king’s exact birthplace, and for this Herod consults his own wise men. (There is a parallel to this in one Jewish tradition, in which a scribe warned Pharaoh about the birth of Moses, Israel’s deliverer.) Probably most of the “chief priests and teachers of the law” (v. 4) Herod gathered were members of the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem’s municipal aristocracy. Herod had reportedly killed members of the Sanhedrin that opposed him and replaced them with his own political supporters. These Bible experts know precisely where the expected king should be born: in David’s hometown of Bethlehem, as prophesied in Mic 5:2. Although everyone knows the Magi’s mission (vv. 2–3), there is no indication that the Bible experts join them in their quest. Knowing the Bible is not always the same thing as obeying it.

**2:4–6** *where the Messiah was to be born ... in Judea ... Bethlehem.* If the star specified a king born in Judea, the Magi naturally expected to find him in Jerusalem’s pal-

#### MATTHEW 2:1



## HEROD THE GREAT

**H**erod the Great achieved power in Judea with Roman backing; he brutally suppressed all opposition. Herod was a friend of Marc Antony but, unfortunately, an enemy of Antony’s mistress Cleopatra. When Octavian (Augustus) Caesar defeated Antony and Cleopatra, Herod submitted to him. Noting that he had been a loyal friend to Antony until the end, Herod promised that he would now be no less loyal to Caesar, and Caesar accepted this promise. Herod named cities for Caesar and built temples in his honor.

Ethnically Herod was an Idumean (an Edomite); his ancestors had been forcibly converted to Judaism, and he built for Jerusalem’s God the ancient world’s largest and most magnificent temple. Politically astute, however, Herod also built temples honoring the divine emperor Augustus and made lavish contributions to Gentile cities in or near his territory. Among his other reported politically savvy acts was the execution of members of the old Sanhedrin who opposed him; he replaced those council members instead with his own political supporters. He did not usually tolerate dissent. When some young disciples of religious teachers took down the golden eagle that Herod had erected on the temple, he had them executed.

Most of our sources about Herod focus on his acts in Jerusalem, but the character of Herod that they reveal fits what Matthew says about him. So protective was Herod of his power and so jealous of potential rivals that his more popular brother-in-law, a very young high priest, had a drowning “accident”—in a pool that archaeology shows was very shallow. When his favorite wife Mariamne, a Maccabean princess, was falsely accused of adultery he had her strangled, though he later named a tower in his palace in her honor. He executed two of his sons who were falsely accused of plotting against him. Five days before he died he executed another son (the one who had falsely framed the other two).

*continued on next page*

people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem<sup>y</sup> in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

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So much did Herod crave honor it is said that when he was on his deathbed he ordered many nobles arrested. He thought that if many people were executed on the day that he died, he could ensure that there would be mourning rather than celebration at the time of his death. When he died, however, the nobles were released and the people celebrated. ♦



**A model of Herod’s palace in Jerusalem. The towers were named after important people in Herod’s life: Hippicus (a friend), Phasael (Herod’s brother), and Mariamne (Herod’s wife).**

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