

# Route 66

## *Matthew: King of the Jews*

Part 40 - October 10, 2010



The prophet Jeremiah (31:31) said: “The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.” The NT is a record of that covenant. It begins with four *Gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The gospels (i.e. good news) are the hub and the heart of the Bible. Everything in the OT *leads* to them and the rest of the NT *flows* from them.

These four gospel authors cover a lot of the same ground in telling the story of Jesus; so, why four *separate* accounts? Why didn't they collaborate on one complete biography?

Well, each is writing a *unique* perspective to a *different* audience. Each emphasizes a particular aspect of the Messiah, and records *specific* miracles and teachings to demonstrate their theme.

So, instead of telling the well-known story of Jesus *four times*, I want to tell about the author, the audience, and the theme.

Do you know why Matthew's Gospel is first? It wasn't written first (that was most likely Mark). But, it was placed first because of who Matthew was writing to and why.



We don't know much about Matthew. The only offers three words of *self* description, in a listing of Jesus' twelve disciples.

... Matthew **the tax collector** ... - *Matthew 10:3b NIV*

The KJV reduces it to “the publican”. It's like a man in our culture referring to himself as, “the despised politician”! Matthew might have been honest and fair, but *all* publicans were despised because *so many* were corrupt and cruel. They got *rich* collecting taxes for Rome; to the Jews, an *abhorrent* alliance.

Now, Luke gives us Matthew's *other* name; his very *Jewish* name, when he describes the publican's *immediate* response to Jesus.

... Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of **Levi** sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. - *Luke 5:27-28 NIV*

Why would Matthew leave everything and instantly follow? He records a confrontation that may give us a clue:



Hendrick Terbrugghen, 1616

Jesus said to [the chief priests and elders], “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John [the Baptist] came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but **the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.**” - Matthew 21:31b-32a NIV

I think John laid the groundwork with a forceful message to ...

**Repent**, for the **kingdom of heaven** is near. - Matthew 3:1-2 NIV



Jewish Yarmulke or Kippah

This *right here* is why it was *crucial* for God to find a defiled, Jewish tax collector - *especially* one named *Levi* - to write His opening Gospel.

- Matthew wrote *specifically* to the Jews.
- His theme is Jesus as the Promised King.

This is *why* the early church placed his Gospel first. It best picks up where the Jewish Bible (our OT) leaves off: waiting for the repeatedly-prophesied, Jewish King of all Kings to arrive. Only Matthew (2:2) tells of the Wise Men who were miraculously led to worship the newborn “King of the Jews”. Mark, Luke, and John omit it because they’re not pressing the point of Jesus as *King*.



God promised King David an offspring who would establish God’s kingdom on earth (2 Sam 7:12-13). And He promised Abraham that, through *him*, all people on earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). So, Matthew opens his Gospel by tracing Jesus’ *covenant position* through Abraham, and his *royal bloodline* through King David.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the **son of David**, the **son of Abraham**:  
- Matthew 1:1 NIV

David’s son was a king; Abraham’s son was a sacrifice.

Matthew is writing in order to evangelize the Jewish communities, *and* to strengthen the faith of the Jewish believers. And Matthew is uniquely qualified for this mission because his name is *Levi*. This means he’s most likely from the priestly tribe of Levi, who were set apart for service and worship in the temple. And their children were steeped and trained in OT scripture. In fact, Matthew quotes more OT than the other three Gospels *combined!* Again and again he ends a convincing claim by saying ...

So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets ... - Matthew 2:23b NIV

Matthew chronicles specific teachings, miracles, and a whopping 57 fulfilled OT prophecies to persuade his people that the King has come and His kingdom is ready.

The expression “kingdom of heaven” is found 31 times in Matthew and *nowhere* else in the New Testament! Ten times Matthew quotes Jesus starting a parable with: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...”. The first words that Matthew records Jesus saying are ...

**Repent**, for the **kingdom of heaven** is near. – *Matthew 4:17 NIV*

Matthew’s first impulse upon following Jesus was to gather his friends together for a banquet and introduce them to Jesus.



When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” – *Matthew 9:11-13 NIV*

They were *so* confused, because the common belief and teaching of the time stated five stipulations regarding the coming kingdom:

1. Only the Jews would be allowed in (certainly not *Gentiles*).
2. And then, only the males (females were just property).
3. And then, only the keepers of the law (not known sinners).
4. And then, only the healthy (sickness was a sign of sin).
5. And then, only the wealthy (poverty was God’s reproof).

To enter the coming kingdom, it was believed that you had to be a religiously upright, healthy and wealthy, Jewish male. So Jesus, by associating with tax collectors and known sinners and women and non-Jews, was saying, “You’re all invited!”

Now go back to Matthew’s genealogy, where he strangely, surprisingly spotlights *women* (like Rahab the *prostitute*, and Ruth the *Moabite*, and Bathsheba the *adulteress*). (*Mat 1:5-6*) He’s declaring, right out of the gate, that the kingdom came not as expected; but the *expectations*, not Jesus, missed the mark!

**Repent**, for the **kingdom of heaven** is near. – *Matthew 4:17 NIV*

I think that most people think that “repent” means “shape up”. So they see Jesus’ proclamation as an *intimidating threat*. But Matthew was uniquely qualified (as a defiled, Jewish tax collector) to see it for what it is: a *gracious invitation*. To repent is to turn and then receive (a life of harmony, intimacy, and interaction with God through Jesus)



Mt. Eremos, near Capernaum

Only Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus lays out the ethics and the ideals of his kingdom ... and begins by announcing:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. – *Matthew 5:3 NIV*

His listeners would've gasped! Can it be? Those *not* on the guest list are invited in?! We get access to God?

(Jesus doesn't include the "rich in spirit" because we already know they're blessed.)

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. -  
*Matthew 5:20 NIV*

If you want to enter into His kingdom, you can't settle for an *exterior* righteousness like the Pharisees. It's the superior, interior, attitude of the heart that Jesus desires.

- Transformation can't start on the outside and work in.
- It has to begin on the inside and work its way out.

And this requires ongoing surrender and humility and trust.



Toward the end, when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, is arrested, beaten, and crucified, Matthew's theme comes to a head. Quoting the prophet Zechariah, Matthew writes ...

... See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. - *Matthew 21:5b NIV*

Zechariah adds that *this* king is righteous and brings salvation. (9:9) And when Matthew records Jesus before Pilate ...



... the governor asked him, "Are you the **king of the Jews?**" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. - *Matthew 27:11b NIV*

And the Roman guards ridicule Him:

... Hail, **king of the Jews!** ... - *Matthew 27:29b NIV*

And those witnessing the crucifixion call out:

... He's the **King of Israel!** Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. - *Matthew 27:42b NIV*

And finally ...

Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the **king of the Jews.** - *Matthew 27:37 NIV*

Jesus was slain because He *claimed* to be the promised King. He rose from the dead because He *was* the promised King!

Only Matthew ends with the Great Commission; and that's because it emphasizes a King's authority and command.

... All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have **commanded** you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. -  
*Matthew 28:18-20 NIV*

And that's the promise of the kingdom; it's embodied in Jesus.

Earlier in Matthew, after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had performed miracles among the people. And Matthew records that ...

All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" -  
*Matthew 12:23 NIV*

That's the crucial question that the one-time tax collector, named Levi, wants each of us to answer. How you *regard* Jesus, more than anything else, will influence your life, your thoughts, your relationships, and your eternity.

Is He the King? And if so, is He established on the throne of your heart?