

Matthew the Apostle.

The Gospel According to Matthew was written in Greek sometime around 63-70 A.D. Matthew certainly wrote his book for a Jewish-Christian church in a strongly Jewish environment.” Even though this is the first book of the four Gospels, many modern scholars favor that Mark was the first Gospel that was printed.

We will be comparing many verses to help understand who Matthew the Apostle was and describe Matthew’s introduction to Jesus. Some of the best verses come from Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-31, and we will refer to others to expand further details. These verses also describe Matthew’s occupation as a tax collector, his father Alphaeus, him being referred to as Levi, and having a great feast at Matthew’s house.

Matthew, the son of Alphaeus

Who was Matthew? Matthew was the son of Alphaeus, which is called out in Mark 2:14. “As He passed by, He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office.” James, one of the other disciples, is also called out in Mark 3:18 to be the son of Alphaeus. However, Mark does not mention Matthew, and James are brothers. It is most likely Matthew and James had separate fathers, each with the name “Alphaeus.” The disciples were very clear about identifying brothers. Here’s evidence of this: In Mark 3:17, Mark states James was the son of Zebedee and John was the James’s brother. In Matthew 4:21, Matthew also confirms James and John were both brothers and the sons of Zebedee. And Luke also confirms the same brother relationship in Luke 5:10, where Luke states, James and John, Zebedee’s sons. In Matthew 4:18, Matthew states Jesus saw two brothers. Simon (later to be named Peter) and Andrew, his brother. Mark also states the same in Mark 1:16. Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, his brother casting a net into the sea. John also states brother relationships in John 1:40-1, stating Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, heard John’s words and followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon telling him, “We have found the Christ!” Luke also states Peter and Andrew’s brother relationship in Luke 6:14. The disciples were obvious to detail and calling out “brothers,” and since not one verse mentions Matthew and James are brothers, we have to conclude they were not brothers, but each had a father with the same name.

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Matthew the Tax Collector

Historians and theologians found Matthew to be very interesting because he was not a beloved man. He was employed as a tax collector, as a Jewish agent for the Roman Empire, in Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. This is referenced from Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, and Luke 5:27. Hebrews at that time deeply distrusted any Jew who worked to help maintain the Roman Empire. They were seen as greedy and selfish traitors. Tax collectors had little accountability. They were told to collect a specific amount. But they could tell people they owed a different amount, and they would pocket the difference. There are some accounts that Hebrews did not allow Jewish tax collectors to marry Jewish women or even worship in the synagogue. Many Jewish leaders considered Jewish tax collectors the lowest of Hebrew society and were most likely hated passionately. Matthew would have been a very unpopular individual. It is noteworthy to mention that only Luke writes in favor of Levi and states in Luke 5:28, "So he left all, rose up and followed Him." Even Matthew himself omitted as such. Luke is referring at that moment that Levi did not think of himself and keep the tax money he was collecting, or even his earnings. Luke states he "left all."

Matthew's Original Name Was Levi

Matthew's original name was Levi, mentioned in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27. Although Mark and Luke do not say Levi and Matthew are the same people, we can conclude that names refer to the same individual because of the similar content. Both versions from Mark and Luke have the same language and same chronological placement. Mark and Luke both state, "As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed him." The only difference was Mark mentioned Levi was the son of Alphaeus. Matthew himself does not call himself out to be called "Levi." However, in Matthew 9:9, Matthew describes the same event with very similar language. "As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him." With all three individuals describing the same event with both Levi and Matthew's names, it is hard to imagine Matthew and Levi are not the same people. Some argue that Levi was the person's tribal name, meaning he belonged to the tribe of Levi. Others have suggested he had the Greek name

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Matthew and Hebrew name, Levi. Yet, others conclude that Jesus wanted to distinctively distinguish the significant difference from “Levi, the tax collector” to “Matthew, the disciple.” Matthew is derived from Hebrew for “Gift of Yahweh.” Perhaps this was Jesus’ gift to Matthew. To have a fresh start. Some of the original disciples also underwent a name change after joining Jesus. Simon became Peter. Bartholomew was also known as Nathaniel. Matthew helps confirm this in Matthew 10:2-4, where he lists the disciples and clearly calls out “Matthew the tax collector.”

The Feast At Levi’s/Matthew’s House

In Luke 5:29, Luke states, “Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and other who sat down with them.” Mark expands further in Mark 2:15 and states, “as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His Disciples.” The many tax collectors and sinners were probably old friends of Levi. The character of a tax collector among the Jews was not respectable, and there is no doubt that Levi also sustained the same disposition. Before Levi’s conversion to Matthew, Levi’s feast was an event to demonstrate his hospitality to Christ’s showing a kindly and praiseworthy act. This was another example that is favorable to Matthew, but Matthew himself omitted it in his writings. This continues to demonstrate the disciples themselves did not praise themselves when acts of kindness were displayed.

How Did Matthew Die?

Some Christian websites state Matthew conducted missionaries in the East, suggesting Ethiopia and Persia. He was finally arrested in Ethiopia. It was there that he was staked and impaled to the earth by spears and then beheaded. Not much beyond this is known since Matthew was in such a remote place in Africa and went where few historians or Christians ventured to go.” This is stated in John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, first published in 1563 with an entry for Matthew states, “The scene of his labors was Parthia and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, AD. 60.” However, National Geographic gives a slightly different version saying according

to legend, Matthew was “stabbed in the back by a swordsman in Ethiopia sent by King Hertacus, after he criticized the king’s morals.”

The Original Lost Hebrew Version

Outside of the Bible, there is an important statement about Matthew that was preserved by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (265-339 AD). The passage came from an early Christian and disciple of the Apostle John known as the Apostolic Father Papias of Hierapolis (60-130 AD). Papias wrote, “So then Matthew composed the Oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could” (in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.39.16). Several scholars believe that this earlier writing was used by the authors Matthew, Mark, and Luke to draw upon as reference. Some scholars also believe Matthew wrote the original first version in Hebrew. With the level of detail of being a tax collector, it is safe to conclude Matthew was also the scribe among the disciples during his time with Jesus. It is also very likely, since Matthew was from Capernaum, that much of what happened in Jesus’ ministry he recorded in the native tongue of Palestine, which would be Aramaic or Hebrew. Unfortunately, this original version has been forever lost. However, if Matthew wrote the Hebrew version in Hebrew, he would use much of the original Hebrew version and translate it into Greek.

Irenaeus, who lived from 130 AD to 202 AD, makes a similar claim in *Against Heresies*: “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church.”