GENERAL

who wrote the of matthew

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Introduction

For centuries, scholars, theologians, and curious readers alike have asked a simple yet profound question: **who wrote the Gospel of Matthew?**This inquiry touches on the foundations of Christian scripture, the identity of early church leaders, and the historical context of the New Testament. In this article, we will explore the evidence, traditions, and scholarly debates that surround the authorship of Matthew, offering a clear, balanced, and engaging overview for anyone seeking to understand this pivotal question.

The Historical Context of the Gospel of Matthew

Why Authorship Matters

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the four canonical gospels that narrate the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Knowing who authored this text helps scholars assess its reliability, interpret its theological emphasis, and place it within the broader tapestry of early Christian literature. Authorship also influences how modern readers perceive the message and authority of the gospel.

Early Church Tradition

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, the church recognized Matthew as the author. The apostle Matthew, also known as Levi, was one of Jesus's twelve disciples. Tradition, preserved by church fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, consistently linked the gospel to the apostle. This tradition is reflected in early manuscripts and the writings of the church fathers, lending significant weight to the claim.

Manuscript Evidence

While no surviving manuscript directly identifies its author, the earliest copies of the gospel—such as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus—are attributed to the apostle in early catalogues. These manuscripts were written centuries after the gospel's composition, but the attribution remained consistent across different traditions, suggesting a strong early consensus.

The Traditional Attribution to Matthew the Apostle

Who Was Matthew?

Matthew, also called Levi, was a tax collector before he became a disciple. His background as a tax collector gave him a unique perspective on Jewish law and the socio-economic conditions of his time. According to the gospel, he was called by Jesus to leave his tax booth and follow Him. His role as a "tax collector" is often interpreted as a metaphor for the gospel's call to repentance and transformation.

Why the Gospel Is Attributed to Him

- Internal Evidence: The gospel contains many references to Jewish law and uses a first-person narrative in some passages, suggesting a personal connection.
- Early Church Fathers: Irenaeus (c. 180–200 AD) explicitly identifies Matthew as the author in his work Against Heresies. He cites a tradition that Matthew wrote the gospel.
- Patristic Consensus: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others repeat the same attribution, reinforcing its

acceptance.

Support from the Gospel's Structure

The gospel is organized around a series of discourses and teachings that echo the apostle's own background. For instance, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) reflects a method of teaching that could be traced back to a former tax collector's systematic approach to record-keeping and instruction. Additionally, the gospel's emphasis on fulfilling Old Testament prophecies aligns with the apostle's deep familiarity with Hebrew scripture.

Modern Scholarly Perspectives

Authorship Debates

While traditional attribution remains strong, modern biblical scholars have raised questions based on linguistic, historical, and textual analysis. The main points of debate include:

1. Linguistic Style: The Greek used in Matthew appears polished and sophisticated, raising doubts about a single author who may have been a tax collector.
2. Source Criticism: Scholars identify the use of the "Q source," a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings, and the "M source," unique material attributed to Matthew. These sources suggest collaborative or editorial processes.
3. Historical Accuracy: Certain events described in the gospel may reflect post-70 AD knowledge, suggesting a later composition date than the apostle's lifetime.

Alternative Theories

Some scholars propose that the gospel was written by a community of early Christians who identified with Matthew's teachings. This group might have compiled the gospel from oral traditions and earlier written materials, attributing it to Matthew to lend authority.

Another view suggests that an anonymous author, possibly a member of the early church, used Matthew's name as a pseudonym. This theory is supported by the practice of early Christian writers who occasionally used pseudonymous authorship to protect themselves or to honor respected figures.

Evidence such as the mention of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (which occurred in 70 AD) indicates that the gospel was likely written after this event. This timing would place the composition in the late 1st century, potentially after the apostle's death.

Key Manuscripts and Their Contributions

Codex Vaticanus (4th Century)

One of the oldest complete manuscripts of the New Testament, Codex Vaticanus lists the authorship of Matthew in its colophon. Although it was written centuries after the gospel's composition, its consistency with other early manuscripts reinforces the traditional attribution.

Codex Sinaiticus (4th Century)

Codex Sinaiticus also attributes the gospel to Matthew. Its presence in multiple early codices suggests a widespread recognition of authorship across different Christian communities.

Papyrus 45 (4th Century)

This fragment contains portions of the Gospel of John but also references Matthew. Its dating and textual content provide valuable insights into the textual tradition of the early church.

Comparative Analysis with the Other Gospels

Matthew vs. Mark

Many scholars believe that Matthew's gospel was written after Mark's, using Mark as a source. This theory is supported by the fact that Matthew's gospel often begins with "In the beginning," a phrase also found in Mark. The use of Mark's material is evident in the narrative structure and certain passages.

Matthew vs. Luke

Luke's gospel shares similarities with Matthew, particularly in its detailed genealogies and emphasis on social justice. Scholars suggest that both authors may have drawn from a common source, often referred to as the "Q source." This hypothesis indicates a collaborative environment where early Christian writers shared material.

Matthew vs. John

The Gospel of John differs significantly in style, theology, and structure. Its distinct approach suggests a different author and possibly a later composition date. However, the presence of certain themes in Matthew, such as the use of symbolic language and the emphasis on Jesus's identity, indicates a shared theological framework across the gospels.

Implications of Authorship on Interpretation

Credibility and Authority

Understanding who wrote the gospel shapes how believers view its authority. If attributed to an apostle, the gospel carries a direct link to Jesus's ministry. Conversely, if written by a later community, the text may reflect evolving theological concerns.

Theological Emphasis

Matthew's gospel places a strong emphasis on Jesus fulfilling Jewish prophecy. This focus aligns with an author deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, supporting the claim that an apostle with a tax-collector background could have authored it. If written by a later group, the emphasis might reflect the community's desire to connect Jesus with Hebrew scripture.

Historical Contextualization

Recognizing the gospel's composition date helps scholars contextualize historical references, such as the destruction of the Temple. Knowing whether the text was written before or after 70 AD can affect the interpretation of Jesus's teachings about the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

The question of **who wrote the Gospel of Matthew?**remains a blend of tradition, textual evidence, and scholarly inquiry. The early church's consistent attribution to the apostle Matthew, supported by patristic writings and manuscript traditions, offers a compelling case for apostolic authorship. Yet, modern critical studies highlight linguistic, source, and historical considerations that suggest a more complex authorship scenario, possibly involving a community of early Christians or a later anonymous writer.

Ultimately, whether the gospel was penned by the apostle himself or by a community inspired by his teachings, the text continues to resonate with millions worldwide. Its teachings, narrative structure, and theological depth remain central to Christian faith and scholarship. By examining the evidence from multiple angles, readers gain a richer

appreciation of this foundational scripture and the enduring mystery of its authorship.

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