

## 4. Who Was the Author of the Gospel of Matthew?

### Traditional Attribution

- The Gospel of Matthew has traditionally been attributed to **Matthew (Levi)**, a tax collector and one of Jesus' twelve apostles (Matthew 9:9, 10:3).
- Early church fathers such as **Papias (c. 110-140 AD)** and **Irenaeus (c. 180 AD)** stated that Matthew wrote a Gospel, but their descriptions raise questions about the exact form and language of his work.

### The Question of Authorship

- **No explicit author** is named in the Gospel itself, which was common in ancient biographies.
- Scholars widely agree that Matthew's Gospel is dependent on Mark's Gospel (written around 65-70 AD), which raises questions: Why would an eyewitness rely so heavily on another's account?
- The Gospel is written in **highly polished Greek**, with sophisticated structuring, making it unlikely to have originated as a simple translation from Aramaic or Hebrew.
- **Papias' statement** about Matthew writing in "Hebrew" (or possibly Aramaic) is debated. Some scholars believe he was referring to a collection of Jesus' sayings rather than the full Gospel we have today.

### The Q Source and Other Influences

- The Gospel of Matthew is believed to have drawn upon **multiple sources**, including the Gospel of Mark and a hypothetical document referred to as "Q."
- **What is Q?** Q (from the German *Quelle*, meaning "source") is a theorized collection of Jesus' sayings that scholars believe was used by both Matthew and Luke.
- **Why do scholars think Q existed?** There are **234 verses** that Matthew and Luke share that are absent from Mark. These shared teachings, such as the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, suggest they both had access to another written or oral source.
- **What was in Q?** It likely contained **sayings and teachings of Jesus** rather than narrative elements like miracles or the Passion.
- **Did Q actually exist?** No physical copy has ever been found, and some scholars argue that these sayings could have been passed down through oral tradition rather than a written source.

### Date and Context of Composition

- Most scholars date the Gospel of Matthew to **80-90 AD**—a generation after Jesus' death.
- Written for a **Jewish-Christian audience**, likely in **Antioch or another major urban center** with a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers.
- The Gospel reflects concerns about Jewish identity, tensions with the Pharisees, and the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

## Key Theological Themes that Suggest a Jewish-Christian Author

- Strong emphasis on Jesus as the **Messiah and fulfillment of Hebrew Scriptures** (e.g., extensive use of Old Testament prophecies).
- **Genealogy links Jesus to David and Abraham**, reinforcing his Jewish lineage (Matthew 1:1-17).
- Heavy focus on **Jewish law and ethics**, but with an openness to Gentiles (e.g., Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20).
- **The role of Peter is elevated**, reflecting early church leadership debates (Matthew 16:18).

## Additional Insights

- **The 'Matthean Community' Theory** – Some scholars suggest that the Gospel was written not by a single author but by a **Jewish-Christian community** that preserved and shaped traditions about Jesus. This helps explain its sophisticated theological structure and engagement with Jewish identity.
- **Matthew's Gospel and the Pharisees** – Matthew has the strongest anti-Pharisee rhetoric of any Gospel (e.g., Matthew 23's "Woes to the Pharisees"), reflecting tensions between Jewish Christians and mainstream Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **A Greek Gospel with Jewish Roots** – Despite being written in Greek, Matthew's Gospel maintains a **very Jewish flavor**, using phrases like "**kingdom of heaven**" instead of "kingdom of God" to align with Jewish reverence for avoiding direct mention of God's name.
- **The Longest Gospel** – With **28 chapters**, Matthew is the longest Gospel and organizes Jesus' teachings into five major discourses, mirroring the five books of the Torah, reinforcing Jesus as the new Moses.
- **Matthew's Gospel and Roman Influence** – While primarily Jewish-Christian, Matthew's Gospel still reflects the reality of a **Roman-occupied world**. The **Roman centurion's faith in Matthew 8:5-13** foreshadows the Gospel's openness to Gentiles.

## Conclusion: A Community's Voice

- While the apostle Matthew may have inspired some of the Gospel's content, most scholars believe the final text was written by **a well-educated Jewish-Christian author (or group of authors)** who shaped the Gospel using sources such as Mark, Q (a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings), and oral tradition.
- The Gospel of Matthew is best understood as a **theological work, not a simple eyewitness account**, crafted to address the concerns of early Jewish Christians navigating their faith in a post-Temple world.