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Who Wrote The Of Matthew

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Who Wrote The Of Matthew? Uncovering the Author of the First Gospel

The question of who penned the Gospel of Matthew has intrigued scholars, theologians, and curious readers for centuries. While the book itself does not explicitly name its author, early Christian tradition overwhelmingly attributes it to Matthew, the tax collector who became one of Jesus' twelve apostles. But is this attribution reliable? What does the internal evidence of the Gospel tell us about its writer? In this article, we will explore the historical, textual, and theological clues that help answer the enduring question: **Who Wrote The Of Matthew**? We will examine patristic testimony, literary analysis, and modern critical perspectives to provide a comprehensive overview.

Historical Context: Why Authorship Matters

Understanding the author of any Gospel is crucial because it shapes how we interpret the text. The Gospel of Matthew has long been placed first in the New Testament canon, partly due to its strong Jewish-Christian themes and its careful organization. If Matthew the apostle indeed wrote it, then the Gospel carries the weight of an eyewitness account, albeit one mediated through tradition. If, however, a later anonymous Christian wrote it, the book becomes a theological reflection rather than a direct memoir. The debate over **Who Wrote The Of Matthew**therefore touches on questions of historical reliability, apostolic authority, and the development of early Christian literature.

Early Church Tradition: The Case for Matthew the Apostle

The earliest external evidence for Matthew's authorship comes from Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, writing around 110–130 AD. Papias reportedly said, "Matthew collected the oracles (logia) in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could." This statement, preserved by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, is the cornerstone of the traditional view. Later Church Fathers such as Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) echoed Papias, claiming that Matthew published a Gospel written for the Hebrews in their own language. The consistent testimony of early Christianity—from the late first century onward—points to Matthew the tax collector, also called Levi, as the author.

- Papias of Hierapolis (c. 110 AD) – Earliest extant reference to Matthew as compiler.
- Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180 AD) – States Matthew issued a Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.
- Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 AD) – References Matthew's Gospel as written by the apostle.
- Origen (c. 250 AD) – Lists Matthew as the first Gospel writer.

This nearly unanimous patristic tradition strongly suggests that the early church believed they knew **Who Wrote The Of Matthew**: the disciple himself. However, critics note that Papias's words are ambiguous. "Oracles" might refer to a collection of sayings rather than the full Gospel we have today. Moreover, no early manuscript of Matthew exists in Hebrew or Aramaic; all surviving copies are in Greek. This raises the possibility that the original was Greek from the start, forcing scholars to question whether the tradition misidentified the author or the original language.

Internal Evidence: What the Gospel Says About Its Author

When we look inside the Gospel of Matthew, we find clues that may support or challenge apostolic authorship. The writer demonstrates deep knowledge of Jewish customs, the Old Testament, and the geography of Palestine. He repeatedly cites Scripture to show that Jesus fulfills prophecy—a feature that dominates the Gospel. For instance, the famous “formula quotations” (e.g., “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet”) appear roughly a dozen times. This suggests an author steeped in Jewish tradition, which fits a former tax collector and scribe like Matthew.

Another internal clue is the treatment of tax collectors. In Matthew 9:9, the call of Matthew is brief: “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.” The Gospel does not dwell on Matthew’s past disgrace as a collaborator with Rome—unlike the Gospel of Luke, which calls him “Levi” and emphasizes the feast that Levi threw. Some argue that an apostle writing about himself might modestly omit details, while others see this as evidence of a later writer who revered Matthew. The Gospel also includes the phrase “Matthew the tax collector” in the list of apostles (Matthew 10:3), a self-identification that would be natural for the author to include.

Linguistic and Literary Analysis: Was Matthew Written by an Eyewitness?

Modern New Testament scholars predominantly hold that the Gospel of Matthew was composed in Greek, likely around 80–90 AD, several decades after Jesus’ crucifixion. If the apostle Matthew wrote it, he would have been an elderly man by then, and he would have had to rely on memory and earlier traditions. The Gospel’s structure—five major discourses interwoven with narrative—suggests careful editorial planning. Literary critics note that Matthew appears to draw on two primary sources: the Gospel of Mark (used as a narrative framework) and a collection of sayings known as “Q” (from the German *Quelle*, meaning source). This reliance on Mark is problematic for apostolic authorship: if Matthew was an eyewitness, why would he depend on the account of a non-eyewitness (Mark, a companion of Peter)? Proponents of the traditional view argue that Matthew might have used Mark’s outline to supplement his own memories, but this explanation does not satisfy many critical scholars.

1. Markan Priority – Most scholars believe Matthew used Mark as a source, meaning he was writing after Mark and not as an independent eyewitness.
2. Q Source – Matthew and Luke share material not found in Mark, suggesting a lost sayings collection.
3. Matthean Redaction – The author subtly edits Mark’s stories to emphasize Jesus’ divinity and fulfill prophecy.
4. Greek Style – The Gospel’s Greek is polished and literate, not what one might expect from a rural Galilean tax collector.

These factors lead many biblical scholars to conclude that **Who Wrote The Of Matthew** was not the apostle but a highly educated Jewish Christian, writing in the late first century for a community in Syria (perhaps Antioch). This anonymous author, often called “the Matthean Evangelist,” was likely a scribe or teacher within a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers. He deliberately attached the name of Matthew to the Gospel to give it apostolic authority, a common practice in ancient literature.

Modern Scholarly Consensus: A Spectrum of Views

Today, the spectrum of opinions on Matthew’s authorship ranges from traditional to critical. Conservative scholars, particularly those in evangelical and Catholic circles, continue to defend apostolic authorship. They argue that the external evidence is strong and that internal difficulties can be reconciled—for example, by proposing that Matthew wrote an earlier Hebrew Gospel later translated and expanded into the Greek version we have. Others, including many Protestant mainline scholars, hold that the apostle may have provided oral traditions but that the final Greek composition was by a second-generation Christian.

The majority of New Testament historians, however, view the Gospel as anonymous and secondary. They point out that none of the four Gospels originally bore authorial titles. The headings “According to Matthew,” “According to Mark,” etc., were added in the second century to distinguish them. Thus, the question “Who wrote the Gospel of Matthew?” cannot be answered definitively from internal evidence alone. Yet, the endurance of the tradition suggests a historical connection between the apostle Matthew and the content of the Gospel, even if not through direct writing.

The Role of Papias and the Aramaic Hypothesis

A key piece in the puzzle is Papias’s mention of “Matthew” collecting “oracles” in “the Hebrew language.” Some scholars propose that Matthew (the apostle) compiled a collection of Jesus’ sayings and prophecies in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke). Later, perhaps around 80 AD, a Greek-speaking Christian used this collection along with Mark’s Gospel and other traditions to compose the full Greek Gospel. Under this theory, the apostolic authorship is indirect: Matthew inspired the work, but a later hand wrote it. This reconciles the early church’s testimony with the literary evidence of dependence on Mark and a Greek original.

However, the theory lacks any surviving Aramaic fragments. The Gospel of Matthew we possess is unmistakably Greek, with Semitic influences in grammar and vocabulary but no clear signs of being a translation. If it were translated from Aramaic, we would expect more “translation errors” or awkward Greek idioms. The smooth Greek style suggests the author thought and wrote in Greek. Therefore, the Aramaic hypothesis remains plausible but unproven.

Why Did the Church Choose Matthew?

Regardless of the actual author, the early church had strong reasons to ascribe this Gospel to a tax-collector-turned-apostle. The name “Matthew” means “gift of God,” and his profession as a tax collector—despised by many Jews—made a powerful symbol of grace and transformation. By linking the Gospel to Matthew, the church emphasized that Jesus calls sinners and outcasts. Additionally, Matthew’s Gospel contains unique material, such as the story of the Magi, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Great Commission. An apostolic name lent these traditions greater weight in doctrinal disputes. So even if the historical identity of “Who Wrote The Of Matthew” is uncertain, the name itself serves a theological purpose.

Conclusion

In the end, the question of who wrote the Gospel of Matthew admits no simple answer. The early church consistently identified the author as Matthew the apostle, a tradition that cannot be dismissed lightly. Yet the Gospel’s use of Mark and its polished Greek composition argue against direct apostolic authorship as we understand it today. The most balanced conclusion is that the Gospel of Matthew emerged from a community that cherished the memory and teachings of the apostle Matthew. A gifted scribe or evangelist, steeped in Jewish Scripture and Christian tradition, assembled this Gospel under Matthew’s authority. To ask **Who Wrote The Of Matthew**is to engage with a rich interplay of history, faith, and literary criticism. Whether apostle or anonymous theologian, the author—or authors—left us a profound portrait of Jesus as the Teacher, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

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