

# ***Opening the Bible***

## ***The Year of Matthew***

**St Margaret's Uniting Church  
Mooroolbark**

**2017**

**Rev Dr Barry T Brown**



## AN INTERPRETIVE NOTE

- Biblical Criticism is not an exact science
- Scholars differ concerning some matters
- What is presented here is fairly standard  
*'Middle of the Road'* background material

“Each of the four documents in the New Testament that are classified as *Gospels* was written within and as a response to a particular community context”

Vincent Wimbush

(N T Scholar, *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol VIII)

JESUS

ORAL TRADITIONS

ROMAN

PALESTINIAN-  
SYRIAN

CAESAREAN

JUDEAN

EPHESIAN  
or SYRIAN

Miracle Stories  
Conflict Stories  
Parables  
Sayings  
Prophecies  
about the End  
The Passion  
Story

Special  
MATTHEW

Q

Special  
LUKE

Nativity  
Stories

MARK

MATTHEW

LUKE

JOHN

# MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

- Traditionally attributed to Matthew the tax collector. However, this is more likely a matter of 'association' than authorship
- 'Matthew' uses Mark's Gospel extensively, (606 of Mark's 661 verses) including his narrative framework and the Passion Story
- Matthew uses 'Q'. Saying of Jesus (as does Luke)
- Matthew's 'peculiar' source ('M') contains teaching of Jesus that *'fulfil the Scripture'*.

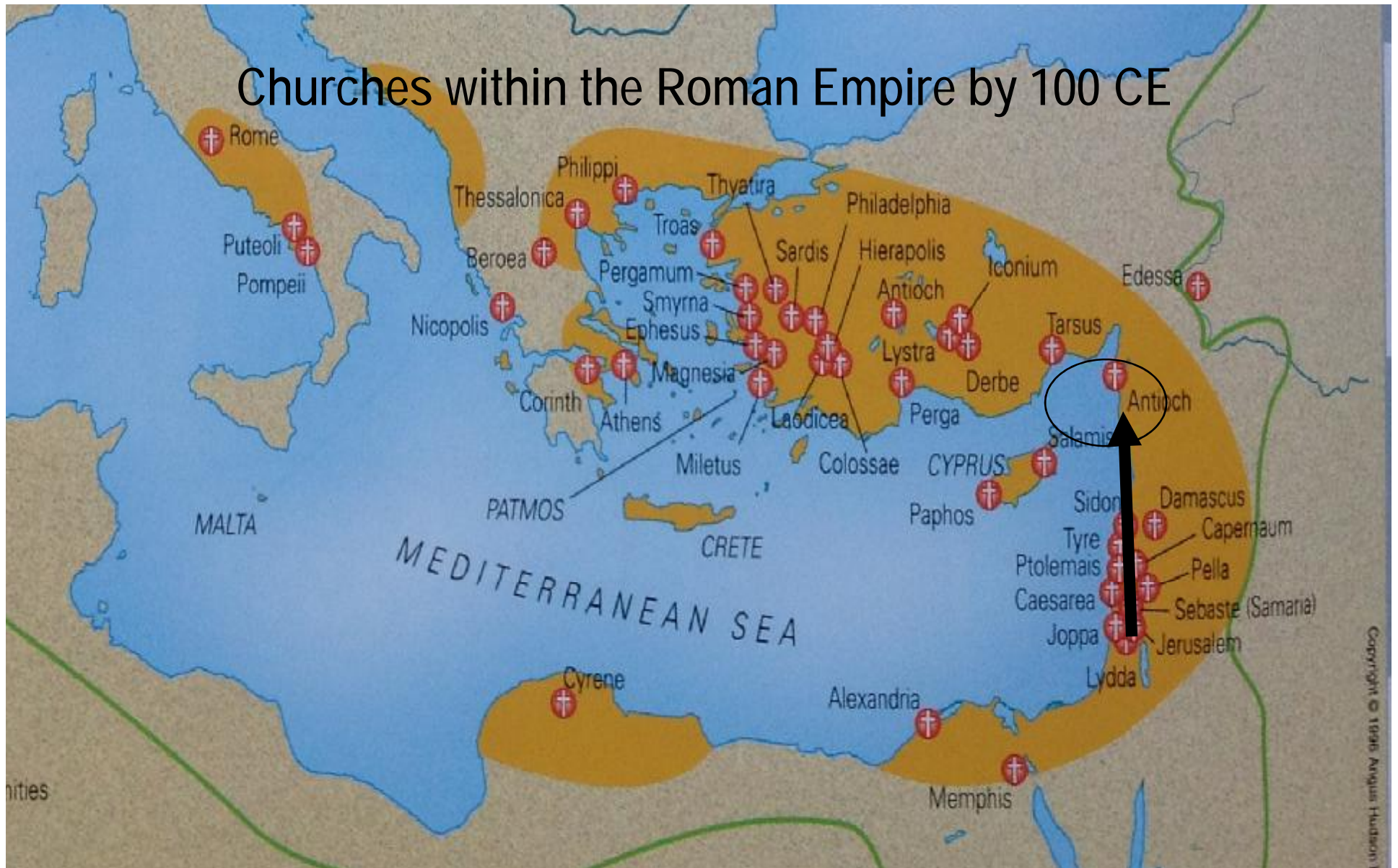
## CRITICAL EVENTS:

- Palestine was under Roman dominance for decades
- The years 65 – 70 CE were critical ‘war years’ during which Rome ‘put down’ Jewish resistance
- Christians were considered a ‘sect’ of the Jewish people (and some were persecuted)
- In 70 CE Jerusalem was destroyed. Many Jews and Christian fled north to Syria, etc

# MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

- Matthew's stresses both the **continuity and discontinuity** of Christianity and Judaism
- It is most likely written within and for a community of **refugee Jewish Christians** living in **Antioch, Syria**, following the fall of Jerusalem
- Scholars suggest it was composed **c 85 CE**

# Churches within the Roman Empire by 100 CE





## MATTHEW'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The Gospel of Matthew is not the product of an isolated author, but reflects the life and concerns of a particular Christian community.

Matthew has long been known as the most ecclesiastical Gospel, the only Gospel to use the word '**church**' (*ecclesia*) to describe the community of Christian believers.

Matthew's *church* has obviously been involved in an intense debate with the dominant Jewish community.

Like early Christianity, Judaism in the late first century was itself in the process of flux and development, seeking its way forward after the catastrophic war of the 65 – 70 CE...

Within this mix the Matthean community was a movement still related in some way to a *re-emerging Judaism* (post 70 CE) and as a group that regarded itself as the authentic people of God, experiencing itself as the persecuted minority at the hands of the dominant Pharisaic leadership...

The Gospel of Matthew does not understand itself to represent a new religion, Christianity, over against a different religion, Judaism.

Nor does it regard the church as the 'new Israel' that replaces the 'old Israel'.

Matthew regards the Christian community of Jews and Gentiles as the continuation of the people of God.

Although Matthew's church may have previously carried on an unsuccessful mission to the Jewish people, it now abandoned a specifically Jewish mission (no longer seeing itself as a renewal movement within Judaism) and engaged in a **mission to the Gentiles** – i.e., a mission to the 'nations,' of which Israel is now one.

Following the beginnings of the reformation of Judaism at **Jamnia**, Matthew's group found not only itself but the synagogue itself in the process of change, and tensions increased.

When the Gospel was written, Matthew and his community were alienated from these developing structures. They refer to their own gathering as '**church**'.

## **STRUCTURAL PATTERNS:**

The Gospel is a narrative largely in chronological order from Jesus' ancestry and birth through his baptism, ministry in Galilee, final journey to Jerusalem, conflict, arrest, crucifixion, resurrection, and concluding commissioning of the disciples...

## SPEECHES (Discourses):

Five times Matthew concludes a major speech of Jesus with almost identical formulae,

*“Now when Jesus had finished saying these things”* (7:28 NRSV, cf 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1).

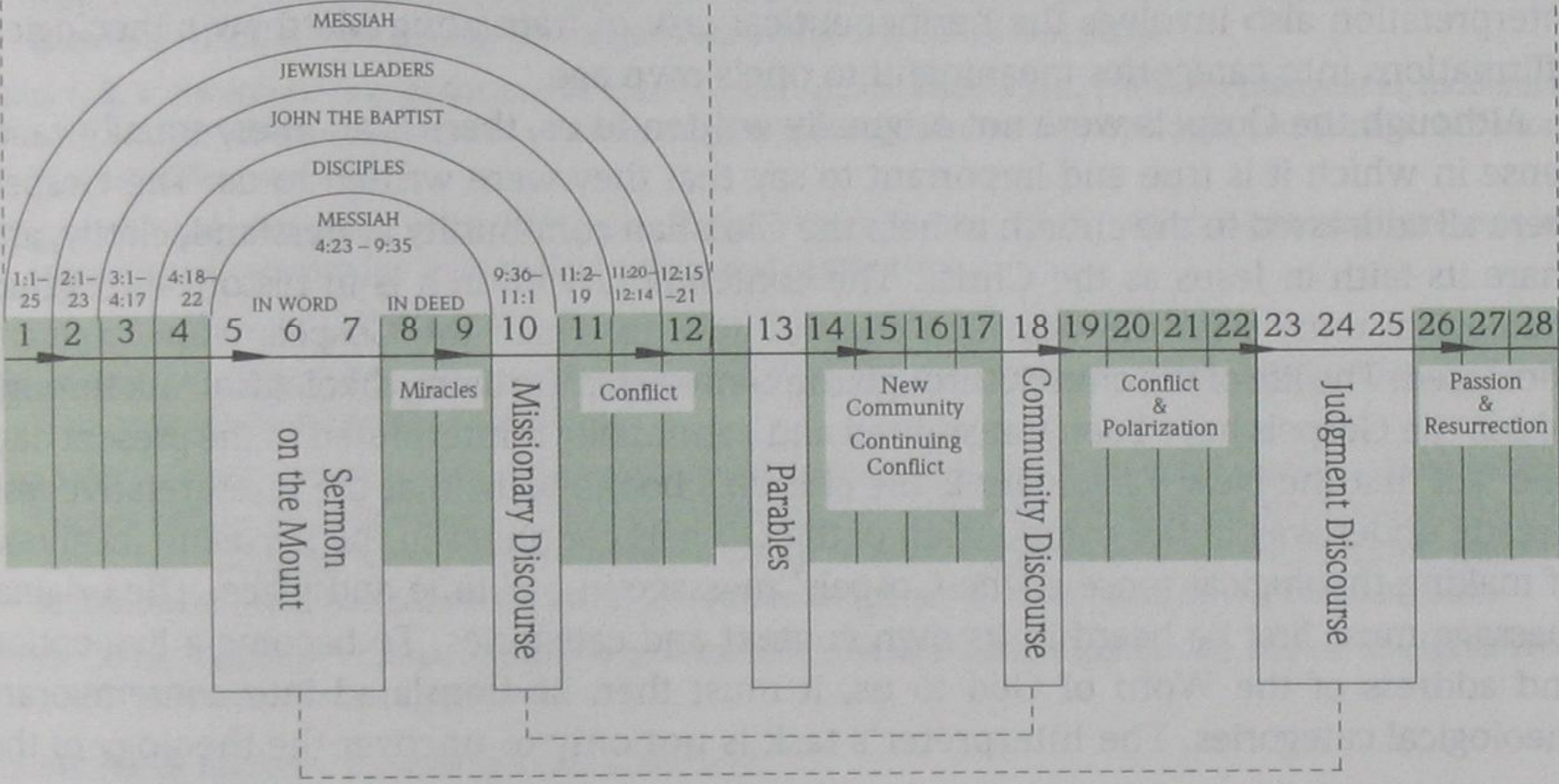
By the second century Matthew was regarded as structuring his Gospel in five ‘books’ in imitation of the Pentateuch (five books) - an echo of the Jewish understanding of the Law.

PART ONE

1:1 – 12:21

PART TWO

12:22 – 28:20





## **Encounter with the Living Lord**

Though cast in a form that follows the pattern of Jesus' life, the gospels are in no way biographies in the modern sense.

Matthew's account of Jesus is shot through with a vision of faith. The essential core of what Christians believe about Jesus is that his death was followed by his resurrection and exultation. This core conviction defines the entire account from beginning to end. It is the lens through which the story of Jesus is to be seen and understood.

## SOME KEY THEMES IN MATTHEW

- ~ The presence of the Living Lord
- ~ Good News for Refugees
- ~ The call to Radical Faithfulness
- ~ Religious Conflict and Turmoil
- ~ Living in a time of Transition
- ~ Living in Continuity & Discontinuity
- ~ Promise and Fulfilment
- ~ Missional Hope and Assurance