

# The Gospel of Matthew

Context and Characteristics

# Gospel of Matthew: Who?

- 1<sup>st</sup> century, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Christian
- Jewish, and apparently fluent in Hebrew
- Jewish Christian, or Christian Jew?
- Status may have been equally uncertain at the time

# Gospel of Matthew: Where?

- Apparently a prosperous urban community
- Significant populations of both Jews and Gentiles
- Alexandria and other cities are possible
- Antioch is the most popular suggestion in modern scholarship
- Ultimately uncertain

# Gospel of Matthew: When?

- Likely after 70 AD
- Early enough to be authoritative by 115 AD or even 100 AD
  - Quoted by Ignatius of Antioch in 115 AD
  - Likely source of the *Didache* around 105 AD
- Consensus is sometime in the 80s AD

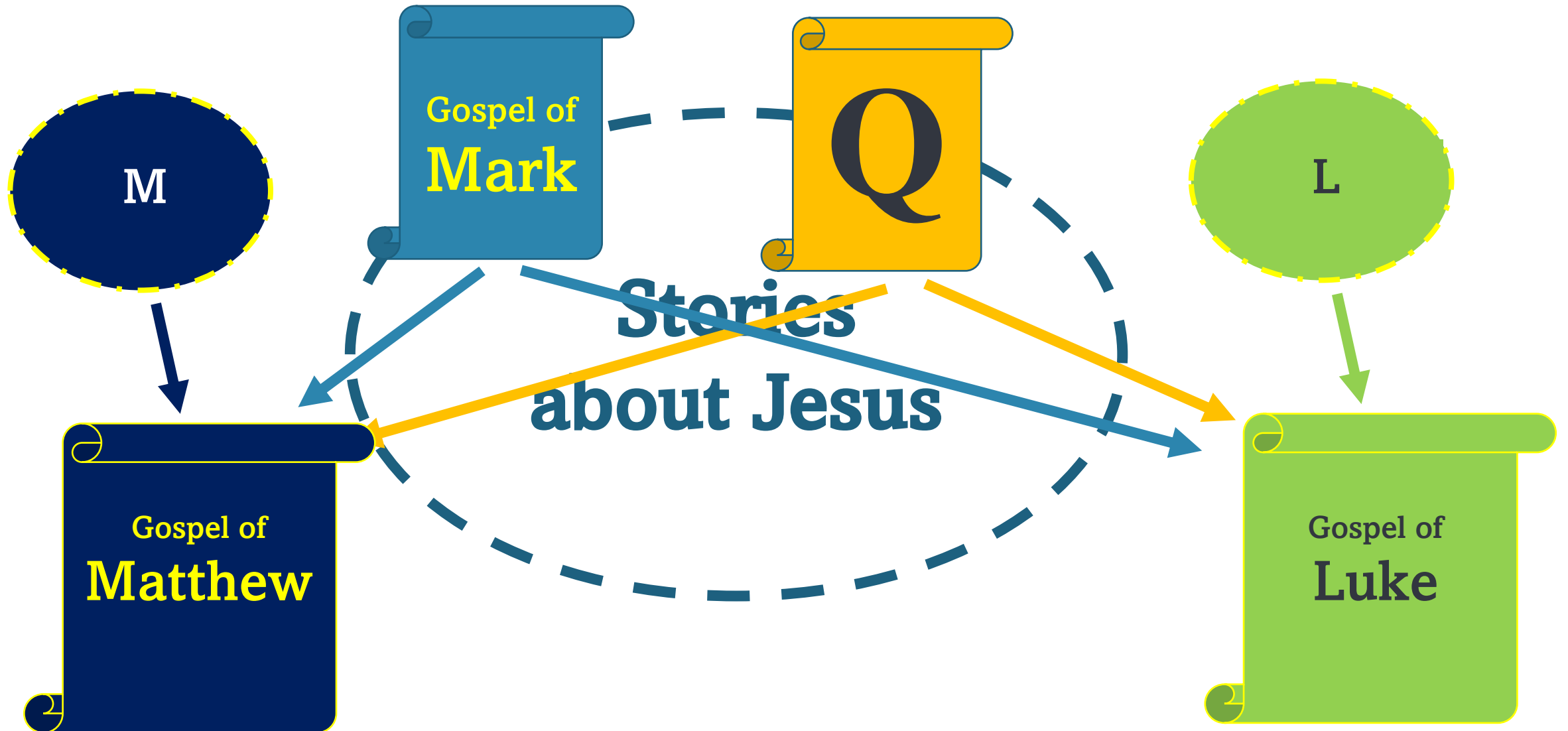
# Gospel of Matthew: Why?

- Relationship to Judaism and Torah
- Intent to replace Mark?
- Present Christ as currently present to followers
- Provide insight for contemporary discernment
- Address the issue of sanctification/progressive discipleship
- Provide grounding for a doctrine of the church

# Gospel of Matthew: What?

- Matthew reproduces almost all of the Gospel of Mark
- Matthew also introduces large amounts of unique material (often called *M*)
- Matthew also includes large amounts of sayings material
- The sayings material is theorized to be from a lost source called *Q*

# The Multiple Source Hypothesis



# Matthew's Editing of Mark

- Organization – pulling like material together
- Abbreviation – “irrelevant” details and characters deleted
- Stylistic Polishing – Mark’s gritty Greek gets cleaned up
- Accuracy – apparent factual inaccuracies are corrected
- Application – fitting material to Matthew’s Jewish community
- Idealization – portrait of Jesus and of disciples cleaned up
- Disparagement – religious leaders portrayed more negatively



## Matthew's Own Material: *M*

- Genealogy from Abraham to Jesus
- Birth narrative focused on Joseph
- Visit of the Magi and Flight to Egypt
- Death of Judas and Washing of Hands
- Large sections of Jesus' teaching and parables

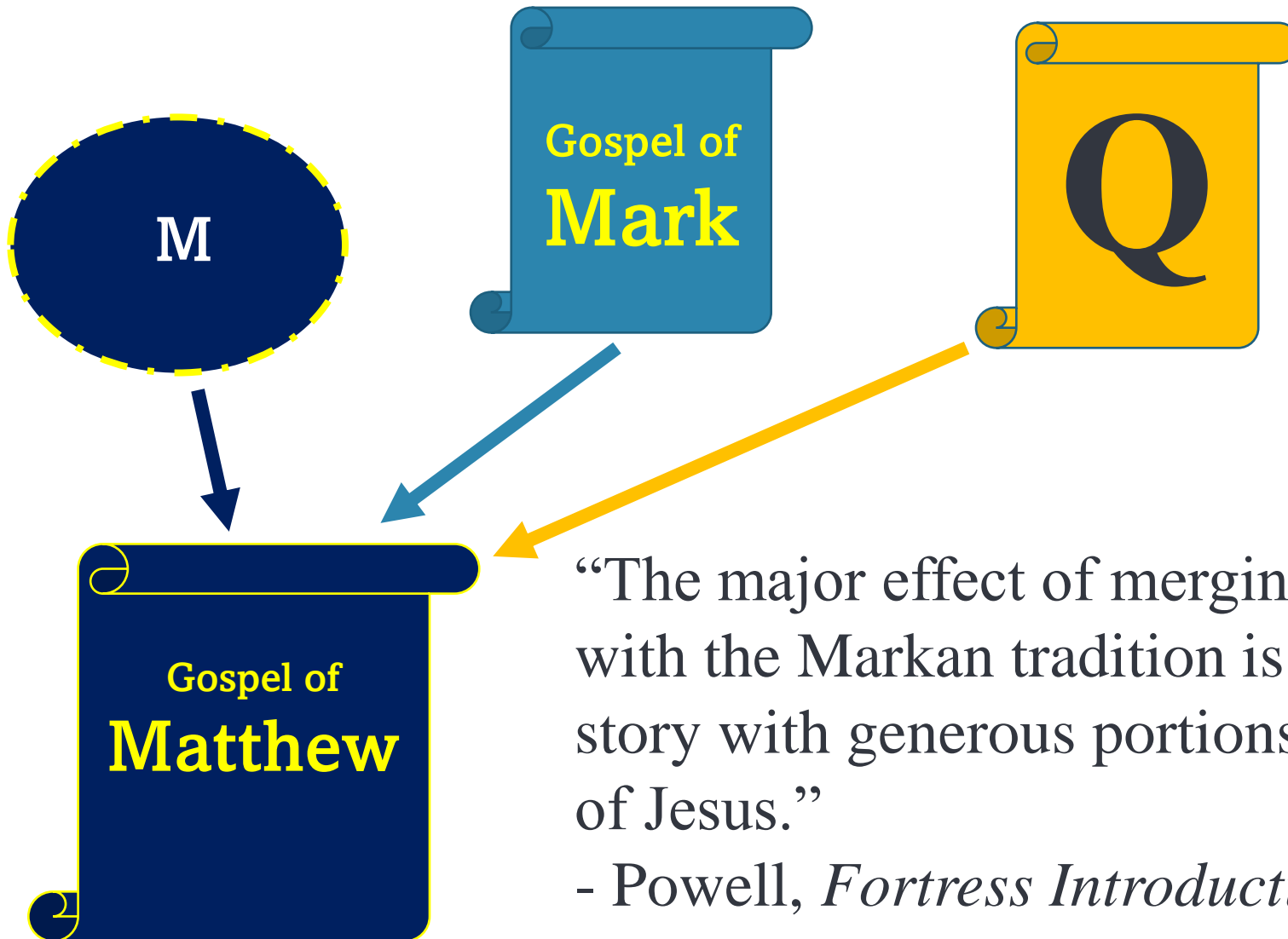
# The Lost Source: *Q*

- Believed to be a very early collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings
- Focus on Jesus' return as judge
- Sayings were a guide to living between now and the return

# Q: A Partial List

- Preaching of John the Baptist
- Temptation narrative
- Beatitudes
- Loving enemies
- Healing the Centurion's servant
- Woe to the Pharisees
- The Lord's Prayer
- Do not worry
- Mustard seed and yeast
- Parable of the Talents
- The Narrow Door
- On Serving God and Wealth
- Parable of Lost Sheep
- Rebuking and Forgiving Sin

# The Result



“The major effect of merging the Q and M material with the Markan tradition is to supplement that basic story with generous portions devoted to the teaching of Jesus.”

- Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*, pg. 61

# Characteristics: Five Sermons

- Sermon on the Mount (Chapters 5-7)
- Missionary Discourse (Chapter 10)
- Parables of the Kingdom (Chapter 13)
- Community Discourse (Chapter 18)
- Eschatological Discourse (Chapter 24-25)

# Characteristics: Organizational Patterns

- Possible parallel between Five Discourses of Jesus and Five Books of Moses
- Exactly twelve fulfillment citations
  - Twelve tribes of Israel
- Three sets of fourteen generations in genealogy
  - Letters in David add up to 14

# Characteristics: Doubling

- Doubling of Characters
  - Two men with demons, two blind men, etc.
  - Stunt Rider Jesus
- Repetition of saying and stories
  - Teaching on divorce
  - Religious leaders asking for a sign
  - Accusation of demonic agency

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# Characteristics: Prominence of Peter

- Matthew includes stories about Peter not found elsewhere
  - Temple tax story (17:24-27)
  - Question about forgiveness (18:21-22)
- Matthew augments some of Mark's stories to emphasize Peter
  - Walking on water (Mark 6:47-52; Matthew 14:28-31)
  - Confession of Jesus as Messiah (Mark 8:27-29; Matt. 16:17-20)

# Characteristics: The Church

- Only Gospel to mention the church as such
  - 16:17-20 (“On this rock I will build my church...”)
  - 18:15-20 (“If a member of the church sins against you...”)
- Matthew describes the church as a presently existing community with rules and boundaries

# Characteristics: Tension with Judaism

- Pro:

- Earthly ministry only to “lost sheep of the house of Israel”
- Disciples told to “go nowhere among the Gentiles”
- Authority of religious leaders acknowledged
- Preference for “reign of heaven” over “reign of God”

- Con:

- Religious leaders called a “brood of vipers” and “evil”
- “...kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given” to others
- Great Commission is to “all nations”

# Characteristics: Torah

- Law is eternal
  - Jesus came not to abolish but fulfill (5:17)
  - Not one jot or tittle will pass from the Law (5:18)
  - Christians are expected to keep dietary and sabbath laws
- *However...*
  - Jesus reinterprets Law (5:21-48; 19:3-9)
  - Great Commission is grounded in commandments of Jesus, not Law

The implication here is, “We do Torah right.”

# Important Note

Jesus, as depicted in the canonical Gospels of the New Testament, preaches and teaches as a Jewish rabbi within a Jewish context. Not only Jesus but all of his followers pre-resurrection are Jews. While some passages of the New Testament have been misused over the last two millenia to justify mistreatment of the Jewish people, such use is an abuse of scripture. There is no excuse for so-called “Christian antisemitism”; it is a heresy and should be rejected and condemned in the strongest possible terms.

# Characteristics: Fulfillment

- Twelve times, Matthew describes events as fulfilling “what was written”
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law *and* the Prophets
- Some of Matthew’s citations are unknown or heavily edited
- Jesus himself makes prophecies
- Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of divine purpose and intent

# Characteristics: Apocalyptic Dualism

- People are good or bad, wheat or weeds, sheep or goats
- Wheat/sheep can go astray and be called to repentance
- Weeds/goats are agents of Satan and should be left alone
- Seemingly minor disputes become symbolic of this larger cosmic reality

# Characteristics: God With Us

- From the very beginning, Matthew assures the reader that “God is with us” (1:23)
- God is present in Jesus and his followers (10:40) and in the temple (23:21)
- Jesus will remain present with his followers always (28:20)
- Divine presence is sometimes hidden or unrecognized



# Major Themes: The Abiding Presence of God

- God is *present in* Jesus, not just *acting through* Jesus (Mark)
- Worshipping Jesus meets with approval
- Jesus is both divine and human
- Jesus remains present to the church between the resurrection and the second coming (Matt. 28:20) unlike in Mark
- The church represents the continuing presence of Jesus to the world
- Matthew's Christology and ecclesiology are inseparable

# Major Themes: Jewish Law and Christian Faith

- Binding and Loosing
- Jesus does this, both radicalizing some parts (e.g., lust and adultery in 5:28) and loosening others (e.g., sabbath healing in 12:12)
- Jesus' teaching, both word and deed, becomes the key for right interpretation of the Law

# Major Themes: Jewish Law and Christian Faith

- Jesus presents principles for interpretation
  - Double love commandment (22:40)
  - Justice, mercy, and faith (23:23)
- The church can now bind and loose, not because they're smarter or more faithful, but because Jesus has chosen to be present there

# Major Themes: People of Little Faith

- 4x Jesus describes the disciples as “you of little faith” (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8)
- Emphasis is on their inadequacy and, by extension, their dependence on him
- Disciples must forgive as they are forgiven
- Struggle with both sin and doubt
- Worship and doubt can go hand in hand

## Worship and Doubt in Chapter 14

<sup>22</sup>Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup>And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup>but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup>And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. <sup>26</sup>But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

# Worship and Doubt in Chapter 14

<sup>28</sup>Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” <sup>29</sup>He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” <sup>31</sup>Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**” <sup>32</sup>When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup>And those in the boat **worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”**

## Worship and Doubt in Chapter 28

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, **they worshiped him; but some doubted.** <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**Literally, “they worshiped him and they doubted”**

# Major Themes: People of Little Faith

- Little faith is at least some faith
- They are accepted as inadequate sinners
- Their faith will grow
- Very high expectations
- Failure is not permanent
- Continue to strive as the fullness of the reign of heaven draws nearer