

## **Handout –Who Did Matthew originally Write His Gospel For?**

Biblical scholarship today places Matthew's original readers in the eastern Mediterranean. Some have attempted to locate his target audience in Alexandria, Egypt; others have suggested the Transjordan region directly east of Palestine; still others have opted for a Phoenician port on the coast of Syria, or even Caesarea on the coast of Palestine. The majority of modern scholars, however, think that the Gospel of Matthew was written to a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians in or near the Syrian city of Antioch.

Several factors form the basis of this judgment but the following are among the more prominent:

**(1)** Antioch is known to have had a sizeable Jewish population living alongside native Gentiles. This is precisely the demographic situation presupposed in the Gospel, which is noted both for its Jewish emphases and for its open acceptance of Gentiles (24:14; 26:13; 28:19–20). Not only that, but the book of Acts tells us that a group of Jewish Christians fled from Jerusalem to Antioch and there initiated a systematic outreach to Gentiles (Acts 11:19–26).

**(2)** Matthew's Gospel displays a marked interest in the person and authority of Simon Peter (10:2; 14:22–33; 16:13–20; 17:24–27). This is significant insofar as Peter not only ministered in Antioch (Gal 2:11–17) but, according to an ancient tradition, served as bishop in the city before making his way to Rome.

**(3)** St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in the early second century, is one of the first postapostolic authors to allude to the Gospel of Matthew in his writings. Allusions to passages in Matthew are also found in another early document, called the *Didache*, which many scholars trace to the Syrian city of Antioch.

(4) It is curious that when the synoptic Gospels narrate Jesus' inaugural mission in Galilee, only Matthew tells us that his fame spread throughout "all of Syria" (4:24).

To summarize, though specific locations remain uncertain, it is probable that Matthew's original audience lived somewhere in the Syria-Palestine region. Ancient tradition points in this direction, as do the efforts of modern scholarship. It is there that we find the unique mix of Jewish and Gentile concerns addressed by the First Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mitch, C., & Sri, E. (2010). [\*The Gospel of Matthew\*](#) (pp. 18–19). Baker Academic.