

## Who was Matthew in the Bible?

Matthew in the Bible was one of Jesus' disciples. Matthew's Gospel, along with the Gospels of Luke, John, and Mark, is an inspired—and thus accurate and true—history of the life of Christ. His Gospel is the longest of the four, and some scholars believe it was the first to be written.

Before Matthew became a disciple of Christ, he was a tax collector or “publican” in the town of Capernaum (Matthew 9:9; 10:3). Matthew is also called Levi, the son of Alphaeus, by Luke and Mark (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Although Luke and Mark do not come out and say, “Levi and Matthew are the same person,” we can deduce the names refer to the same individual because of context. Matthew's account of his call matches exactly the accounts of Levi's call in Luke and Mark, both in terms of language and chronological placement. Also, it is not uncommon for a person to be given a different name after an encounter with God. Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul. It is likely that Matthew (meaning “gift of God”) was the name Jesus gave to Levi after his conversion.

Tax collectors were absolutely despised by their own culture because they worked for the Roman government and enriched themselves by collecting taxes from their own people—often dishonestly collecting excessive amounts (see Luke 19:8). It is likely that Matthew was well-to-do, since Luke says that Levi hosted “a great banquet for Jesus” with “a large crowd” in attendance (Luke 5:29).

Tax collectors such as Matthew were seen by the religious elite as very sinful people, so sinful that even spending time with them could immediately tarnish a good person's reputation (Matthew 9:10–11). When Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, with many

other tax collectors and sinners present, the Pharisees questioned the disciples about Jesus' choice of companions. Jesus' response is one of the clearest explanations of God's heart and His gospel to man: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13). Jesus came to save not the "good," self-righteous people, but those who knew they were not good—the people who admitted freely that they needed salvation (cf. Matthew 5:3).

It is impossible to save a person who claims not to need saving. Many of Jesus' followers were from the poor, the rejected, the sick, the sinful, the weary (Matthew 11:28). He never condemned those people; He forgave them and encouraged them. Jesus' harshest condemnations were to the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, and the scribes who thought themselves good, worthy, and better than the "tax collectors and sinners" around them (Matthew 9:10; 23:13-15).

Matthew was one of the tax collectors whom Jesus saved. When called by Jesus, Matthew immediately left his tax collection booth and followed the Lord (Matthew 9:9). He left behind the source of his riches; he left his position of security and comfort for traveling, hardship, and eventual martyrdom; he left his old life for a new life with Jesus.