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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Matthew

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO

MATTHEW

We have now before us,

I. *The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*; so this second part of the holy Bible is entitled: *The new covenant*; so it might as well be rendered; the word signifies both. But, when it is (as here) spoken of as Christ's act and deed, it is most properly rendered a *testament*, for he is the testator, and it becomes of force *by his death* (~~806~~ Hebrews 9:16, 17); nor is there, as in covenants, a previous treaty between the parties, but what is granted, though an estate upon condition, is owing to the will, the free-will, the good-will, of the Testator. All the grace contained in this book is owing to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour; and, unless we consent to him as our Lord, we cannot expect any benefit by him as our Saviour. This is called a *new* testament, to distinguish it from that which was given by Moses, and was not antiquated; and to signify that it should be always new, and should never wax old, and grow out of date. These books contain, not only a full discovery of that grace *which has appeared to all men, bringing salvation*, but a legal instrument by which it is conveyed to, and settled upon, all believers. How carefully do we preserve, and with what attention and pleasure do we read, the last will and testament of a friend, who has therein left us a fair estate, and, with it, high expressions of his love to us! How precious then should this testament of our blessed Saviour be to us, which secures to us all his unsearchable riches! It is *his* testament; for though, as is usual, it was written by others (we have nothing upon record that was of Christ's own writing), yet he dictated it; and the night before he died, in the institution of his supper, he signed, sealed, and published it, in the presence of twelve witnesses. For, though these books were not written for some years after, for the benefit of posterity, *in perpetuam rei memoriam* — *as a perpetual memorial*, yet the New Testament of our Lord Jesus was settled, confirmed, and declared, from the time of his death, as a nuncupative will, with which these records

exactly agree. The things which St. Luke wrote were *things which were most surely believed*, and therefore well known, before he wrote them; but, when they were written, the oral tradition was superseded and set aside, and these writings were the repository of that New Testament. This is intimated by the title which is prefixed to many Greek Copies, *Tes kaines Diathekes Hapanta* — *The whole of the New Testament, or all the things of it*. In it is declared *the whole counsel of God* concerning our salvation, ^{<ACT>}Acts 20:27. As *the law of the Lord is perfect*, so is the gospel of Christ, and nothing is to be added to it. We have it all, and are to look for no more.

II. We have before us *The Four Gospels*. *Gospel* signifies *good news*, or *glad tidings*; and this history of Christ's coming *into the world to save sinners* is, without doubt, the best news that ever came from heaven to earth; the angel gave it this title (^{<LUKE>}Luke 2:10), *Euangelizomai hymin* — *I bring you good tidings; I bring the gospel to you*. And the prophet foretold it, ^{<ISAIAH>}Isaiah 52:7; 61:1. It is there foretold that in the days of the messiah *good tidings* should be preached. *Gospel* is an old Saxon word; it is *God's spell* or *word*; and God is so called because he is good, *Deus optimus* — *God most excellent*, and therefore it may be a good spell, or word. If we take *spell* in its more proper signification for a *charm* (*carmen*), and take that in a good sense, for what is moving and affecting, which is apt *lenire dolorem* — *to calm the spirits*, or to raise them in admiration or love, as that which is very amiable we call charming, it is applicable to the gospel; for in it the charmer *charmeth wisely*, though to *deaf adders*, ^{<PSALM>}Psalms 58:4, 5. Nor (one would think) can any charms be so powerful as those of the beauty and love of our Redeemer. The whole New Testament is the gospel. St. Paul calls it *his gospel*, because he was one of the preachers of it. Oh that we may each of us make it ours by our cordial acceptance of it and subjection to it! But the four books which contain the history of the Redeemer we commonly call *the four gospels*, and the inspired penmen of them *evangelists*, or *gospel-writers*; not, however, very properly, because that title belongs to a particular order of ministers, that were assistants to the apostles (^{<EPHESIANS>}Ephesians 4:11): *He gave some apostles, and some evangelists*. It was requisite that the doctrine of Christ should be interwoven with, and founded upon, the narrative of his birth, life, miracles, death, and resurrection; for then it appears in its clearest and strongest light. As in nature, so in grace, the most happy discoveries are those which take rise from the certain representations of matters of fact.

Natural history is the best philosophy; and so is the sacred history, both of the Old and New Testament, the most proper and grateful vehicle of sacred truth. These four gospels were early and constantly received by the primitive church, and read in Christian assemblies, as appears by the writings of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who lived little more than a hundred years after the ascension of Christ; they declared that neither more nor fewer than four were received by the church. A Harmony of these four evangelists was compiled by Tatian about that time, which he called, *To dia tessaron* — *The Gospel out of the four*. In the third and fourth centuries there were gospels forged by divers sects, and published, one under the name of St. Peter, another of St. Thomas, another of St. Philip, etc. But they were never owned by the church, nor was any credit given to them, as the learned Dr. Whitby shows. And he gives this good reason why we should adhere to these written records, because, whatever the pretences of tradition may be, it is not sufficient to preserve things with any certainty, as appears by experience. For, whereas Christ said and did many memorable things, which *were not written* (~~400~~ John 20:30; 21:25), tradition has not preserved any one of them to us, but all is lost except what was written; that therefore is what we must abide by; and blessed by God that we have it to abide by; it is the sure word of history.

III. We have before us *the Gospel according to St. Matthew*. The penman was by birth a Jew, by calling a publican, till Christ commanded his attendance, and then he left *the receipt of custom*, to follow him, and was one of those that accompanied him *all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day that he was taken up*, ~~402~~ Acts 1:21, 22. He was therefore a competent witness of what he has here recorded. He is said to have written this history about eight years after Christ's ascension. Many of the ancients say that he wrote it in the Hebrew or Syriac language; but the tradition is sufficiently disproved by Dr. Whitby. Doubtless, it was written in Greek, as the other parts of the New Testament were; not in that language which was peculiar to the Jews, whose church and state were near a period, but in that which was common to the world, and in which the knowledge of Christ would be most effectually transmitted to the nations of the earth; yet it is probable that there might be an edition of it in Hebrew, published by St. Matthew himself, at the same time that he wrote it in Greek; the former for the Jews, the latter for the Gentiles, when he left Judea, to preach among the

Gentiles. Let us bless God that we have it, and have it in a language we understand.