

## *An Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas*

THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS provides a fresh look at Jesus as teacher, since its entire content consists of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus. These sayings are the same as or similar to about fifty in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, making more than fifty of them new to the ears of twenty-first-century readers. The Gospel of Thomas has drawn more scholarship and public attention than any other of the fifty-two Nag Hammadi documents.

The New Orleans Council wanted the Gospel of Thomas to be the first gospel in *A New New Testament*, because it is a near-perfect example of how these additional books offer both connections and contours: strong connections to the traditional New Testament and eye-popping new content not previously known.

The Gospel of Thomas was found along with fifty-one other, mostly Christian, manuscripts near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. The Nag Hammadi copy is the only complete copy of this gospel and is written in Coptic, but since its discovery the existence of several other partial copies in Greek have also been identified. The existence of both Coptic and Greek versions indicates that this gospel was probably well known in a number of cultures in the ancient world. Scholars are deeply divided about whether the Gospel of Thomas as it exists in the Nag Hammadi manuscript comes from the first or second century. It seems quite possible that a significantly earlier version, even before Matthew, Mark, and Luke, could have existed. Although most of the manuscript evidence comes from Egypt, a number of scholars have suggested Syria as an original home for this gospel, because of similar content in Syria-based documents and because of the devotion of early Syrians to the figure of Thomas. Although the Gospel of Thomas itself indicates Thomas as the author in its opening, there is no consensus on who actually wrote the book. In the ancient world, authorship was regularly attributed falsely to leaders of previous generations, and this was clearly the case for Thomas and a number of other early Christian books.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Gospel of Thomas lies in its form. It is a sayings gospel: it does not have an overall story of Jesus but simply offers a list of his teachings. These teachings are — like those in Matthew, Mark, and Luke — short and pithy parables, proverbs, and aphorisms. At first, scholars thought that the order of these sayings was arbitrary. Increased study of this gospel, however, now points to an overall organizing principle, but its exact shape and sense has not yet been deciphered.

### Jesus, the Teacher

In a sayings gospels like Thomas, the main significance of Jesus is his role as a teacher. This dimension is worth dwelling on in order to notice how it both reinforces and challenges some conventional pictures of Jesus. Jesus does teach a great deal in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and he teaches very similar material in Thomas, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But the picture of Jesus as teacher in Thomas does not include an emphasis on his saving death, his resurrection, or his healing. The meaning of Jesus comes from the wisdom he communicates, not from any special accomplishments, his position on earth or in heaven, or what fate or triumph he experiences. Here Jesus does not teach about his own significance, or about holy scriptures, but rather on issues of everyday life and practice. Perhaps the clearest theme is that of "the realm of God," which is a direct translation of a Coptic phrase that has most often been translated as "the kingdom of God." In Thomas, "the realm of God" is likened to particular life experiences. So, even when he draws on a term that seems somewhat religious or theological, he places it within the context of ordinary life. This is also true of Jesus's teachings in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but not the gospels of John and Mary.

Thomas's approach is not at all unusual for ancient wisdom literature, which includes many such documents, sometimes with the teacher named and sometimes without a designation of a speaker. Sometimes the meaning of the saying is clear and clever, as in Thomas 53: "His followers said to him, 'Is circumcision beneficial or not for us?' He said to them, 'If it were beneficial their father would beget them circumcised from their mother.'" Sometimes the teaching is poetic, pointed, and eloquent, as in Thomas 50: "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light, the place where the light generated itself and established itself, and has been made manifest in their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children.'" And sometimes the teaching is so pithy it raises more questions than answers, as in Thomas 42: "Jesus said, 'Be passersby.'"

So, these teachings are evocative, but not particularly practical. They are not meant to teach us how to build a house. Even while rooted in everyday experience, they are meant to get us thinking about the intangibles of life. This kind of process of gaining wisdom from one's own thought and experience is itself described in Thomas 70: "When you give birth to the one within you, that one will save you. If you do not have that one within you, that one will kill you."

### The Realm of God in Thomas

As mentioned earlier, one might characterize the theme of Jesus's teachings in Thomas as "the realm of God." The realm of God is considered in Thomas to be primarily an earthly reality, describable, at least by comparison, in events and processes of ordinary life. This is also a major theme in the gospels of Matthew,

Mark, and Luke and the letters of Paul. Similarly to other early Christian literature, the realm of God here is also referred to as "the realm of heaven," but unique to Thomas is the phrase "the realm of the Father."

The more than fifteen teachings about the realm of God in Thomas include these:

If those who lead you proclaim to you: "The realm is in the sky," then the birds of the sky will enter before you. If they proclaim to you: "It is in the sea," then the fish will enter before you. Rather, the realm is within you and outside of you. (3)

The realm of the Father is compared to a woman carrying a jar filled with flour. While she was walking on the road a ways out, the handle of the jar broke. The flour emptied out along the road, but she did not realize it or recognize a problem. (97)

[The realm] will not come by looking for it. It will not be a matter of saying, "Here it is!" or "Look! There it is." Rather, the realm of the Father is spread out upon the earth, but people don't see it. (113)

These fresh teachings allow us to better see that Jesus's teachings about the realm of God may be far broader, even more creative, than is apparent when consulting only the traditional New Testament, and yet these lessons remain quite consistent with those well-worn teachings.

### It's Not the End of the World You Need to Concentrate On, It's the Beginning

Much of early Christian literature pays attention to the impending end of the world. Images of cataclysmic destruction are found in everything from the Gospel of Matthew to the Revelation to John. The Gospel of Thomas not only ignores all such images but explicitly challenges the notion of the end of the world. In Thomas 18, when Jesus is asked by his disciples when the end will come, he answers: "Have you discovered the beginning that you ask about the end? For, in the place where the beginning is, there the end will be. Blessed is the one who takes a stand in the beginning. That one will know the end, and will not experience death."

This focus on the beginning takes on multiple images throughout Thomas. Focusing in Thomas 19 on five trees in the original garden, Jesus proclaims, "Blessed is the one who came into being from the beginning, before he came to be." In several other passages (21, 37) he evokes the nakedness of the Garden of Eden as a positive image. This dependence on the cosmic beginning is mirrored also in the life cycle of individuals in Jesus's teaching that "these little children are like those who enter the realm" (22). In 50, Jesus identifies humans as those who came from where the light itself came into being.

For the Gospel of Thomas the spiritual path of wisdom does not point toward

the end of time and the judgment day, nor does it hold up death as a crucial moment in the life of the individual. Instead, the origins of life and the world are the real signs of God's purpose for human beings.

Thomas's Jesus makes twenty-first-century readers do a double or triple take. Often these teachings sound very much like the standard gospels. On the other hand, between or even in what appear to be traditional sayings, something very new appears, making this gospel one that requires a fresh hearing and offers new possibilities.

### Recommended Reading

Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom*  
 Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*  
 Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*

## The Gospel of Thomas

These are the veiled sayings which the living Jesus spoke and Judas, the Twin, Thomas wrote them down.

1<sup>1</sup> And he said:

"Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not experience death."

2<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Let the one who seeks continue seeking until he finds. <sup>2</sup> And when that one finds he will be disturbed, and once that one is disturbed he will become awed, and will rule as a king over the all."

3<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "If those who lead you proclaim to you: 'The realm is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will enter before you. If they proclaim to you: 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will enter before you. <sup>2</sup> Rather, the realm is within you and outside of you. <sup>3</sup> When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are the children of the Living Father. <sup>4</sup> If, however, you do not come to know yourselves, then you dwell in poverty and you are the poverty."

4<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The old person will not hesitate to ask a small child of seven days about the place of life, and the old one will live. <sup>2</sup> For many who are first will be last. <sup>3</sup> And they will come to be one alone."

5<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Recognize what is right in front of your face, and what is hidden will be revealed to you. <sup>2</sup> For, there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed."

6<sup>1</sup> His followers asked him: "Do you want us to fast? In what way should we fast? Should we give alms? What foods should we not eat?" <sup>2</sup> Jesus said, "Do not tell lies

and do not do what you hate. <sup>3</sup> For all things are revealed before the presence of heaven."

7<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Blessed is the lion which the person eats — and the lion becomes a person. And cursed is the person whom the lion eats — and the lion becomes a person."

8<sup>1</sup> And he said: "The person compares to a wise fisherman: He cast his net into the sea. He drew it up from the sea full of little fish from below. And he found one large fish. The fisherman was wise. He cast the little fish into the sea. He chose the large fish without trouble. <sup>2</sup> Whoever has ears to hear, listen!"

9<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Look, a sower went out with a handful of seeds and sowed them. Some fell on the road. The birds came and gathered them. Others fell on the rock. They did not take root in the soil or produce ears. And others fell among thorns. They choked the seed and were eaten by worms. And some fell upon good soil, and produced fruit up to the sky. Sixty per measure. One hundred and twenty per measure!"

10<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "I have cast fire upon the world. And behold! I watch over it until it burns."

11<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "This heaven will pass away and the one above it will pass away. <sup>2</sup> Those who are dead do not live and those who live will not die. In the days you ate what was dead you were making it alive. When you come to dwell in the light, what will you do? On the day you were one you

became two. But when you become two, what will you do?"

**12** His followers said to Jesus: "We know that you will leave us. Who will become our leader?"<sup>2</sup> Jesus said to them: "In the place where you came from, you will go up to James the Righteous, for whom heaven and earth have come into being."

**13** Jesus said to his followers: "Compare and tell me whom I resemble." Simon Peter said to him: "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to him: "You are like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to him: "Teacher, my mouth will not permit me to say whom you resemble." Jesus said: "I am not your teacher—you are drunk. Because you drank from the bubbling spring that I have measured out."<sup>2</sup> And he took him and departed. He told him three sayings. When Thomas came back to his companions they asked him: "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them: "If I told you the sayings he told me, you would take up stones and cast them at me. And fire would burst out of those stones and burn you."

**14** Jesus said to them: "If you fast, you will produce sin for yourselves. And if you pray, you will be condemned. And if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits."<sup>2</sup> And in whatever land you enter and in which you walk, if they receive you eat whatever is put before you, and heal the sick among them.<sup>3</sup> For, what goes into your mouth will not pollute you; rather, that which comes from your mouth will pollute you."

**15** Jesus said: "When you see one who was not born of woman, fall on your faces and worship him. That one is your Father."

**16** Jesus said: "Perhaps people think that it is peace that I have come to cast upon the world. But they do not know that

a thief is coming, he will keep watch before he comes. He will not let him break into his house and his estate to steal his possessions."<sup>6</sup> But you, keep watch from the beginning of the world; gird up your loins.<sup>7</sup> Ready yourself with a great power so that the thieves do not find a way to get to you. Because they will find the necessities which you guard.<sup>8</sup> Let there be a person of understanding among you. When the grain ripened someone came quickly with a sickle and reaped it.<sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, hear!"

**22** Jesus saw little children being nursed. He said to his followers: "These little children are like those who enter the realm."<sup>2</sup> They said to him: "Will we enter the realm as little children?"<sup>3</sup> Jesus said to them: "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside, and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below. And when you make the male and the female into a solitary one, so that the male is not male nor the female female. And when you make eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and an image in place of an image, then you will enter the realm."

**23** Jesus said: "I will choose you, one from a thousand and two from ten thousand, and they will stand alone."

**24** His followers said: "Show us the place where you are, because it is necessary that we seek it." He said to them:<sup>2</sup> "Whoever has ears to hear, hear!"<sup>3</sup> There is light within a person of light, and that one lights up the entire world. If that one does not shine, there is darkness."

**25** Jesus said: "Love your brother or sister like your soul. Guard each of them like the pupil of your eye."

**26** Jesus said: "You see the sliver in your

brother's eye, but you fail to see the plank that is in your own eye. When you remove the plank from your own eye, then you will be able to see clearly enough to remove the sliver from your brother's eye."

**27** Jesus said: "If you do not fast from the world you will not find the realm. If you do not make the sabbath a true sabbath, you will not see the Father."

**28** Jesus said: "I took my stand in the midst of the world, and I was manifested to them in flesh. I found all of them drunk and none of them thirsting. And my soul throbbed for the children of humanity, for they are blind in their hearts and do not see. For blind they came into the world empty and seek also to leave the world empty. But right now they are merely drunk. When they sober up, then they will turn."

**29** Jesus said: "If the flesh emerged from the spirit, it is a wonder. But if the spirit emerged from the body, that is a wonder of wonders!<sup>2</sup> Yet, I wonder at how this great richness was placed in this poverty."

**30** Jesus said: "Where there are three gods, they are Gods, where there are two or one, I am with them."<sup>2</sup> Lift the stone, you will find me there. Split the piece of wood, I am there."

**31** Jesus said: "No prophet is accepted in his or her own village. No physician heals those who know him."

**32** Jesus said: "They are building a city upon a high mountain and fortifying it! It cannot fall—but it also cannot be hidden."

**33** Jesus said: "What you hear with your ear declare with the other ear from your rooftops.<sup>2</sup> For no one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel, nor does one

put it in a hidden place. Rather, that one puts it on a lamp stand so that everyone who enters and leaves will see its light.”

**34** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “If a blind person leads a blind person, both will fall into a pit.”

**35** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “It is not possible for someone to enter the house of a powerful man and take it by force without binding his hands. Only after binding the powerful man’s hands will he loot the house.”

**36** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said, “Do not worry, from morning to evening and from evening to morning, about your food, about what you’re going to eat, or about your clothing, what you are going to wear. <sup>2</sup> You are far better than the lilies, which do not card nor spin. <sup>3</sup> As for you when you have no clothes, what will you put on? Who might add to your status? <sup>5</sup> That one will give you your clothes.”

**37** <sup>1</sup> His disciples said: “When will you appear to us, and when will we see you?” <sup>2</sup> Jesus said: “When you strip naked without being ashamed, and take up your clothes and put them under your feet like little children, and tread on them. Then you will see the Child of the Living One and you will not be afraid.”

**38** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Many times you longed to hear the sayings that I am telling you, and you have no other to hear them from. The days will come when you seek after me, but you will not find me.”

**39** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and hidden them. They do not enter, nor do they permit those who desire to enter to enter. <sup>2</sup> As for you, be as cunning as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

**40** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “A grapevine has been planted outside the Father. Since it is not

supported, it will be pulled up from the roots and will be destroyed.”

**41** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Whoever has something in her hand, more will be given. And whoever has nothing, even the little that person has will be taken away from that person.”

**42** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Be passersby.”

**43** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to him: “Who are you to say these things to us?” <sup>2</sup> “You do not realize who I am from what I say to you? Rather, you have become like the Judeans: they love the tree, but hate its fruit — and love its fruit, but hate the tree.”

**44** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Whoever blasphemes against the Father will be forgiven. And whoever blasphemes against the Son will be forgiven. <sup>2</sup> But whoever blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither on earth nor in heaven.”

**45** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Grapes are not harvested from thorns, nor are figs picked from thistles, for they do not bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> A good person brings forth good from his storehouse, a bad person brings forth evil from his corrupt storehouse which is in his heart, and he speaks evil. For out of abundance he produces evil.”

**46** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women, no one is honored more than John the Baptist, so that his eyes need not be averted. <sup>2</sup> Yet, I have also said: ‘Whoever among you becomes little will know the realm and will be honored more than John.’”

**47** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “It is impossible for a person to mount two horses and to draw two bows. <sup>2</sup> And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters, for he would honor the one and insult the other. <sup>3</sup> No one wants to drink aged wine and immediately

**54** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor, for the realm of the sky is theirs.”

**55** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Whoever does not hate her father and her mother cannot be a follower of mine. <sup>2</sup> And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and carry his cross as I do, will not be worthy of me.”

**56** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Whoever has come to know the world has found a corpse. And whoever has found the world as a corpse, the world is not worthy of that one.”

**57** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “The realm of the Father compares to someone who had good seed. His enemy came in the night. He sowed a weed amid the good seed. The man did not permit them to pull up the weed. He said to them: ‘When you go to pull up the weed you may also pull up the good seed. On the day of the harvest the weeds will be visible. Then you pull them up and burn them.’”

**58** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Blessed is the one who is disturbed by her discovery. That one has found life.”

**59** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Look after the Living One while you are living, lest you die and seek to see that one. You will not find the power to see.”

**60** <sup>1</sup> He saw a Samaritan carrying a lamb on the way to Judea. He said to his followers: “He is surrounding the lamb.” They said to him: “He does so in order to kill and eat it.” He said to them: “While it is living he will not eat it. Rather, if he kills it, then it will become a corpse and then he can eat it.” They said to him: “There is no other way?” He said to them: “You also, seek after a place of repose, lest you become corpses and get consumed.”

**61** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Two will recline on a couch — one will die, the other will live!”

wants to drink new wine. <sup>4</sup> And new wine is not poured into old wineskins, because they would burst. Nor is old wine poured into new wineskins, because it would spoil. <sup>5</sup> An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, because a tear would result.”

**48** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “If two make peace with each other in the same house, they will say to the mountain, ‘Move away!’ and it will move.”

**49** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “Blessed are the solitary and chosen ones, for you will find the realm, for you are from it and will return there.”

**50** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “If they say to you, ‘Where have you come from?’ <sup>2</sup> say to them, ‘We came from the light, the place where the light generated itself and established itself, and has been made manifest in their image. If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’ say, ‘We are its children, and we are the chosen of the Living Father.’ <sup>3</sup> If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your Father in you?’ say, ‘It is movement and repose.’”

**51** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to him: “When will the repose of the dead take place, and when will the new world come?” <sup>2</sup> He said to them: “That which you look for has come, but you did not recognize it.”

**52** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to him: “Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and all have spoken within you.” <sup>2</sup> He said to them: “You have left out the Living One in your presence, and you spoke only about those who are dead.”

**53** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to him: “Is circumcision beneficial or not for us?” He said to them: “If it were beneficial their father would beget them circumcised from their mother. <sup>2</sup> Rather, true circumcision in spirit is entirely beneficial.”

**2** Salome said: "Who are you to say such things while you recline upon my couch and eat from my table?" Jesus said to her: "I derive from the One who is equal to all. I was merely given by you that which is my Father's." "I am your follower." <sup>2</sup> "Because of this, I say: 'When a person becomes equal that person will be full of light.'"

**62** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "I tell my secrets to those who are worthy of my secrets. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

**63** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "There was a rich man who had an abundance of money. He said: 'I shall put my money to use so that I may sow, reap, and plant and fill my storehouse so that I lack nothing.' Such were his intentions, but that very night he died!" <sup>2</sup> "Whoever has ears, hear!"

**64** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "A man had guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests. He came to the first person. He said: 'My master invites you.' He responded: 'I have money for some merchants who are coming to me this evening and I must place my orders. I cannot attend the dinner.' He went to another person. He said: 'My master invites you.' He responded: 'I just bought a house and am required for the day. I cannot attend.' He went to another person. He said: 'My master invites you.' He responded: 'My friend is getting married, and I am in charge of preparing the meal. I cannot attend the dinner. He went to another person. He said: 'My master invites you.' He responded: 'I have purchased a field and am going to collect the rent. I cannot come. Please excuse me.' The slave left. He said to his master: 'The people you invited to the dinner have asked to be excused.' The master said to his slave: 'Go outside on the streets. Whoever you find, bring them in so that they may dine.'" <sup>2</sup> "Usurers

and merchants will not enter the places of my Father."

**65** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "A usurer owned a vineyard. He leased it to some tenants so that they would work it and he take the fruit from their hands. He sent his slave to collect the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his slave. They beat him, almost to the point of death. The slave went back to his master and told him about what had happened. His master said: 'Perhaps they did not know him.' He sent another slave. The tenants beat that one as well. Then the master sent his son. He said: 'Perhaps they will be ashamed before my son.' The tenants, since they knew he was the heir to the vineyard, seized him and killed him." <sup>2</sup> "Whoever has ears, hear!"

**66** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Show me the stone that the builders rejected — that one is the cornerstone."

**67** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever knows all, if she still needs herself, she still needs all."

**68** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Blessed are you when you are hated and persecuted. <sup>2</sup> For they will find no place where they persecuted you within."

**69** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted within their hearts. They are the ones who have truly known the Father. <sup>2</sup> Blessed are those who are hungry, for they are motivated to alleviate the belly of the one who desires."

**70** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "When you give birth to the one within you, that one will save you. If you do not have that one within you, that one will kill you."

**71** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "I will destroy this house and no one will be able to rebuild it."

**72** <sup>1</sup> A man said to Jesus: "Tell my broth-

ers to divide my father's possessions with me." He said to him: "Oh, sir, who has made me a divider?" He turned to his disciples and said: "I am not a divider, am I?"

**73** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few. Pray to the master that he might send laborers to the harvest."

**74** <sup>1</sup> He said: "Lord, there are many around the well, but there is nothing in it."

**75** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Many are standing at the door, but only the solitary ones will enter the bridal chamber."

**76** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm of the Father is compared to a merchant who had some merchandise. He found a pearl. That merchant was wise. He sold the merchandise. Then he purchased the pearl for himself alone. <sup>2</sup> You also, seek after his treasure, which does not perish, but endures — where neither moth approaches to eat it nor worm destroys."

**77** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "I am the light which is above them all, I am the all. The all has come forth from me, and all has split open before me. <sup>2</sup> Lift the stone, you will find me there. Split the piece of wood, I am there."

**78** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Why have you come out to the field? To see a reed shaken by the wind and to see someone dressed in soft clothes like your kings and powerful men? They are dressed in soft clothes, but they don't know the truth."

**79** <sup>1</sup> A woman in the crowd said to him: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." He said to her: "Blessed are those who have heard the word of the Father and have truly kept it. <sup>2</sup> For there will be days when you will say: 'Blessed is the womb that has not conceived, and the breasts which have not given milk.'"

**80** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever has known the world has found the body. And whoever has found the body, the world is no longer worthy of that person."

**81** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever has grown rich should rule. But whoever has power should renounce."

**82** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the realm."

**83** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The images are shown to humanity, and the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father's light. He will be shown but his image is hidden away in his light."

**84** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "In the days when you looked at your resemblance you rejoiced. When, however, you look upon the images that came into being upon your emergence, which neither die nor manifest themselves, how much you will have to bear!"

**85** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Adam came into being from a great power and a great wealth. But he was not worthy of you. For, if he had been worthy of you, he would not have tasted death."

**86** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The foxes have their dens and the birds have their nests, but the Child of Humanity has no place to lay down his head and rest."

**87** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Damn the body that depends on a body; and damn the soul that depends on these two."

**88** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The messengers and the prophets will come to you. They will give you what is yours and you will give them what you have. You will say to yourselves: 'When will they come and take what is theirs?'"

**89** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Do you not understand that the one who created the inside is also the one who created the outside?"

**90** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Come to me, for my yoke is easy and my lordship is gentle. <sup>2</sup> And you will find rest for yourselves."

**91** <sup>1</sup> They said to him: "Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you." <sup>2</sup> He said to them: "You read the face of the sky and the earth, but you do not know the one who is before you, nor do you know how to read this moment."

**92** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Seek and you will find. But that which you asked me about in those days I did not tell you, but I now desire to tell you, and you no longer seek to know."

**93** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, for they might toss them to the dung pile. Do not toss pearls to pigs, for they might trample them."

**94** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever seeks, will find. Whoever knocks, they will open to that one."

**95** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "If you have money, do not lend it at interest. Rather, lend it to someone who won't pay you back."

**96** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm of the Father is compared to a woman. She took a little yeast and hid it in dough. She made the loaves into leavened bread! <sup>2</sup> Whoever has ears, hear!"

**97** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm of the Father is compared to a woman carrying a jar filled with flour. While she was walking on the road a ways out, the handle of the jar broke. The flour emptied out along the road, but she did not realize it or recognize a problem."

**98** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm of the Father is compared to someone who wanted to kill a powerful man. He drew his sword in his house. He stabbed the wall in order to see whether his hand might hold steady. Then he killed the powerful man."

**99** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to him: "Your brothers and your mother are standing outside." He said to them: "Those who do the will of my Father, they are my brothers and my mother. They are truly the ones who enter the realm of my Father."

**100** <sup>1</sup> They showed Jesus a coin and said to him: "Caesar's people demand taxes from us." He said to them: "Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, give God what is God's. <sup>2</sup> And give me what is mine."

**101** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever does not hate her father and her mother in the same way I do, cannot be a follower of mine. <sup>2</sup> And whoever does not love her father and her mother in the same way I do, cannot be a follower of mine. <sup>3</sup> For my mother birthed my body, but my true mother gave me life."

**102** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said, "Damn the Pharisees for they resemble a dog resting in a manger with oxen, which neither eats nor permits the oxen to eat."

**103** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Blessed is the one who knows where the thieves are going to enter, so that he might arise and assemble his estate, and prepare himself."

**104** <sup>1</sup> They said to Jesus: "Come, today let us pray and fast." Jesus said: "What sin have I committed, or where have I been defeated? Rather when the groom leaves the bridal chamber, then let them fast and pray."

**105** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever knows moth-

er and father will be called the child of a whore!"

**110** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever has found the world and become rich should renounce the world."

**106** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "When you make the two one, you will become children of humanity. And if you say: 'Mountain, move away! it will move.'"

**107** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm compares to a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the other ninety-nine, and he sought after that one until he found it. After such an effort, he said to the sheep: 'I love you more than the other ninety-nine.'"

**108** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me. I myself will become that person, and what is hidden will be revealed to that person."

**109** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The realm compares to a man who had in his field a hidden treasure, but he was unaware of it. And after his death, he left it to his son. The son was also unaware of the treasure. He took the field and sold it. The one who bought the field went plowing and found the treasure. <sup>2</sup> He began to lend money at interest to those he loved."

**110** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Whoever has found the world and become rich should renounce the world."

**111** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "The heavens and earth will be rolled up right before you. <sup>2</sup> And the one who lives from the Living One will not see death. <sup>3</sup> Does not Jesus say: 'Whoever has found oneself, the world is not worthy of that person?'"

**112** <sup>1</sup> Jesus said: "Damn the flesh that depends on the soul, and damn the soul that depends on the flesh."

**113** <sup>1</sup> His followers said to Jesus: "When will the realm come?" <sup>2</sup> "It will not come by looking for it. It will not be a matter of saying, 'Here it is!' or 'Look! There it is.' <sup>3</sup> Rather, the realm of the Father is spread out upon the earth, but people don't see it."

**114** <sup>1</sup> Simon Peter said to them: "Let Mary leave us, for women do not deserve life." <sup>2</sup> Jesus said: "Look! I will lead her so that I might make her male, which will make her into a living spirit resembling you males. <sup>3</sup> For any woman that makes herself male will enter the realm of heaven."

## An Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

**T**HOUGH IT IS POSITIONED IN THE TRADITIONAL New Testament as the first gospel, I have placed the Gospel of Matthew second in the gospels section of *A New New Testament*. This is meant to highlight the many similar teachings in Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas, which immediately precedes it, and to seriously reinforce the opinion of many scholars that Matthew was most likely preceded by other gospels like Thomas.

Most scholars place the writing of the Gospel of Matthew sometime in the 80s, fifty years after the death of Jesus. It is assumed to have been the second gospel written among those in the traditional New Testament. Often it is proposed that Matthew had the Gospel of Mark in hand and expanded it. In contrast to Mark, Matthew has stories about Jesus's birth and a more elaborate picture of Jesus's resurrection. Matthew's additional stories about Jesus's birth and resurrection are quite different from the stories found in the Gospel of Luke, but there are many teachings that occur in both Matthew and Luke but not in Mark and John. Although some speculate that Matthew was first written in Jesus's native tongue of Aramaic, the only existing ancient manuscripts are in Greek. The two most frequent proposals about where this gospel was written are Syrian Antioch and Galilee. Nothing is known directly about "Matthew" as a person. Indeed, the name "Matthew" occurs only in the book's title, which may have been added later.

### A Strikingly Jewish Gospel

Only in Matthew does Jesus proclaim that every bit of Jewish Law (Torah) is valid. Indeed, Jesus announces that every punctuation mark of Torah must be obeyed (5:18-20). It is often hard for people to take this in, as many have been taught that the apostle Paul said that the Jewish Law was death. But Matthew is profoundly and insightfully devoted to Torah.

Jesus's adherence to this Law is portrayed as a deep spiritual devotion that is heartfelt and that can be redemptive for those who follow it. For Matthew's Jesus, subscribing to the Law means taking the true meaning of the Law into one's very person. In a very well-known series of challenges, Jesus says that the commandment not to murder really means one should not hate, the commandment not to commit adultery means not lusting in one's heart, and the commandment to love your neighbor needs to be understood as loving your enemies. In other words, the

Law or Torah is a call to deep, inner devotion to what is right in behavior, feelings, and attitude.

The Gospel of Matthew demonstrates its strong commitment to Judaism in many different ways. It tells the story of Jesus going through the water (of baptism), into the desert, and onto the mountain to give a sermon. This is an explicit participation in the people of Israel's exodus through the Red Sea, into the desert, and onto the mountain of Sinai to receive the Law. This gospel—in good Jewish fashion—has Jesus teaching about the realm of heaven rather than the realm of God (as in the other gospels and the writings of Paul) in order to minimize the explicit naming of God in vain. Matthew quotes the Hebrew Bible more than any other gospel.

In view of the many ways Christians have put down and done harm to Jewish people in the past 1,900 years, it is a treasure to have the New Testament include such an explicit endorsement and spiritually rich exploration of Judaism.

### How to Live Together in a Jesus Community

How do we live together in a community with Jesus at its center? Of all the gospels, only Matthew shows Jesus teaching the process of those in community reconciling with one another. In these instances, a quarrel or conflict has erupted between people in the community. Jesus's response is not to say who is right and wrong in these disputes, such as "when presenting your gift at the altar, if even there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you" (5:23), or "If your brother or sister does wrong" (18:15). Rather, Jesus proposes a process of those in conflict solving the problem between themselves, or with the help of other community members.

Matthew has confidence in the followers of Jesus and their future. In contrast to the Gospel of Mark, in which they seem incapable of doing the right thing, in Matthew, Jesus praises the disciples and predicts a future for the Jesus community under their leadership: "At the new creation, when the Child of Humanity takes his seat on his throne of glory, you who followed me will be seated on twelve thrones, as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28). Similarly, only in Matthew does Jesus promise to give "the keys of the realm of heaven" to Peter (16:19). This gospel takes care, in ways that neither Mark nor John does, to tell Jesus's followers how to behave (how to pray and how to fast) in the coming time. Matthew's message eagerly describes the generation after Jesus as a time of community among his followers. The last words of Jesus in Matthew commission his followers to this future: "Go and make followers of all the nations, baptizing them" (28:19).

Matthew, then, is a special resource for communities and churches where there