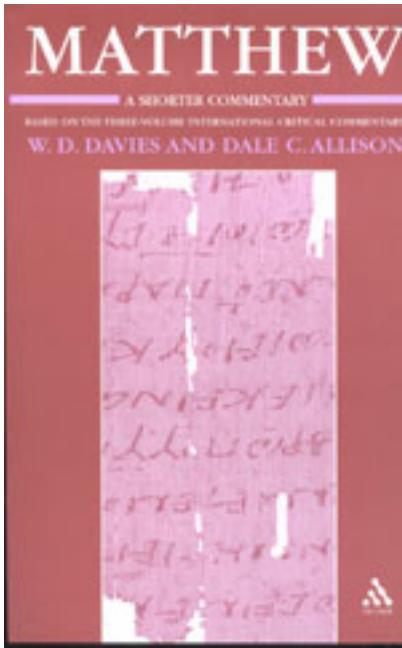


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**Davies, W. D., and Dale Allison**

***Matthew: A Shorter Commentary: Based on the Three-Volume International Critical Commentary***

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The present work is a shorter version of the detailed three-volume commentary of the late W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97). The three-volume version is justly regarded as one of the leading commentaries on Matthew (see D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* [5th ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker; Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2001], 42). In keeping with the precedent of providing abridged versions of significant commentaries in the International Critical Commentary series (e.g., Cranfield’s *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, based on his two-volume commentary on Romans; Ernest Best’s *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary*, based on his Ephesians commentary), Geoffrey Green of T&T Clark invited Allison (Errett M. Grable Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christianity, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) to prepare the present shorter version of the three-volume effort. Allison notes that its target audience is “readers who find the longer version too involved or too difficult” (preface). He further observes that it departs only occasionally from the three-volume edition and does not introduce any serious alterations from it.

Following the preface, Allison provides readers with a selective list of twenty-one works on Matthew that are available in English. He includes two patristic writers (Chrysostom and Theophylact) and Calvin, with the remainder of the list being modern works (spanning 1975–2003) of various levels of detail on Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount (ix–x). Allison next turns to a brief survey of introductory issues (xi–xxix). In this section he discusses authorship (a Jewish author), date (probably between 80 and 95), local origin (uncertain), sources (Mark; Q, a written source; and M, a plurality of sources, oral and/or written), story, structure, plot (alternation of narrative and discourse), theology (implicit theology focusing not on doctrine or correctness of belief but on obedience), genre and moral instruction (a subtype of Greco-Roman biography offering two types of teaching: obedience and example), and purpose and setting in Judaism (an attempt to bridge the gulf between Jewish and Gentile believers in a post-70 context).

Subsequent to the introduction is the commentary proper. In contrast to the three-volume work, which comments directly on the Greek text, Allison has produced his own English translation, which is prefaced to longer literary sections. Following the translation is a list of parallels, where applicable, to the other Gospels, a brief introduction to each pericope, and a running commentary on the text of the pericope.

The style of the commentary is largely descriptive, its perspective moderately critical. Scriptural background and scriptural typology, moreover, remain constantly in readers' view, although at times they may feel that the typology is somewhat overdrawn (e.g., "every major event in Mt 1–5 apparently has its counterpart in the events surrounding Israel's exodus from Egypt" [64]). The book pays attention throughout to Matthew's Christology and eschatology. Regarding the former, Allison notes, relative to the Matthean introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, "Before Jesus utters his commands, the reader has been informed—by OT prophecy, by John the Baptist, by God, and by the devil—who he is: the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God; the fulfiller of prophecies, the bearer of the Spirit, the healer *par excellence*. ... The obligation to obey the commands of Mt 5–7 is grounded in Christology, in the person of Jesus. Matthew sets up his gospel so that one may first recognize Jesus' unique status and then heed his commandments" (63–64). With respect to the latter, Allison observes relative to the Matthean discourses, "Each one of Matthew's five major discourses ... concludes with eschatological warnings and promises. In this way the text reflects the inevitable flow of history: the present is always being swallowed up by the future, which will someday bring eschatological judgement" (116).

Allison is not afraid to state clearly where he stands on the meaning of historically controversial passages. Some samples are as follows. Allison maintains that Matt 10:23b ("you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes")

refers to the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness. Allison responds to the objection that this interpretation renders Matthew's Jesus a false prophet because the Son of Man did not come before the apostles completed their mission by noting that the objection is predicated on a questionable assumption, namely, that Matthew believed the mission to Israel was completed. He contends, rather, that the mission to Israel was never concluded but is subsumed under the "all nations" mission command of 28:19 (see 159). Regarding Matt 16:18, "and on this rock I will build my church," Allison observes, "The most natural interpretation of the Greek is that of Roman Catholic tradition: the rock is Peter" (269). Similarly, on Peter's place, he suggests, "Peter is not just a representative disciple, as so many Protestant exegetes have been anxious to maintain. Nor is he obviously the first holder of an office others will someday hold, as Roman Catholic tradition has so steadfastly maintained. Rather, he is a man with a unique role in salvation-history. ... His significance is the significance of Abraham, which is to say: his faith is the means by which God brings a new people into being" (272). With respect to the referent of activity of the scribes and Pharisees indicted in 23:15 ("you traverse sea and land to make a single convert"), Allison is partial to the view of S. McKnight (unnamed here) in suggesting that this does not establish Judaism as a proselytizing religion before or after A.D. 70. What is probably in view are "attempts to turn into full converts the so-called 'God-fearers' " (395).

There are, of course, some drawbacks to this commentary. Given the nature of it being a shorter commentary, it is necessarily compressed in all sections. As a result, a good many views are put forward without the space to provide the kind of substantiation that the three-volume work was better able to proffer. There are also no indices, which restricts its serviceability somewhat. As with the three-volume work, moreover, one does not always gain a good feel of Matthew's overall literary strategy as one proceeds. It is, however, like its three-volume predecessor, very strong at the descriptive level of the individual pericope and reflects wide knowledge of Israel's literary traditions (scriptural and postscriptural), Jewish customs, and historical issues relevant for understanding the text of Matthew against the backdrop of Palestinian Judaism. Readers will generally gain a good understanding of the basic issues of interpretation of the individual pericopes as they work through each section. In this regard, Allison's *Shorter Commentary* is a welcome edition, particularly for beginning students and busy ministers who will not only benefit from consulting it but can now afford to own a copy of their own. As they read it, moreover, they can do so with the assurance that its present humble form has as its basis a colossus of demonstrated learning in its three-volume predecessor.