

Matthew Henry

by

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*To my four grandchildren
Joshua, Nia, Hannah and Joseph*

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Timeline

| | |
|--------|--|
| 1660 | Restoration of the Monarchy |
| 1661 | Corporation Act |
| 1662 | Act of Uniformity; birth of Matthew Henry |
| 1664 | First Conventicle Act |
| 1665 | Five Mile Act |
| 1670 | Second Conventicle Act |
| 1672–3 | Declaration of Indulgence |
| 1673 | Test Act |
| 1676 | Census of Dissent |
| 1680 | Matthew at Doolittle's Academy |
| 1683 | The Rye House Plot to kill Charles II and his brother James |
| 1685 | James II becomes king; the Monmouth Rebellion; Matthew enters Gray's Inn |
| 1687 | Matthew ordained in London; begins his ministry in Chester; marries Katharine Hardware |
| 1688 | The Glorious Revolution |

- 1689 Matthew's first child, Katharine, born; death of his wife
- 1690 Marries Mary Warburton
- 1691 Elizabeth born
- 1692 Death of Elizabeth
- 1693 Birth and death of Mary
- 1694 Esther born
- 1696 Death of Matthew's father, Philip Henry
- 1697 Ann born
- 1698 Death of Ann
- 1700 Philip born; new chapel building opened
- 1701 Act of Settlement; Elizabeth born
- 1703 Sarah born
- 1706 First volume of his *Bible Exposition* published
- 1706/1707 Acts of Union between the English and Scottish Parliaments
- 1708 Theodosia born; second volume of *Bible Exposition* published
- 1710 Third volume of his *Bible Exposition* and *A Method for Prayer* published
- 1711 Mary born; the Occasional Conformity Act
- 1712 Commences his ministry in Hackney; fourth volume of his *Bible Exposition* published

- 1714 Last visit to Chester and death; Schism Act; death of Queen Anne
- 1721 Fifth volume of his *Bible Exposition* published posthumously

Preface

When I was asked to consider contributing to this Bitesize series I had no difficulty in choosing Matthew Henry from the list of names on offer. A lovely set of Matthew Henry's commentaries on the New Testament was displayed prominently in the bookcase of our living room when I was a child, so it was the first commentary I ever consulted as a young man. My father was a blacksmith, but as a Christian he was always eager to share his faith with his workmates. One of them invited us to his home one evening to see whether we were interested in some old books he had in the cellar. To my amazement there was a whole set of the Puritan Thomas Goodwin's works and a large gilded family Bible with illustrated plates. The Bible, unusually, contained only the Old Testament text, but with Matthew Henry's comments. We had some difficulty walking home with these prized possessions, but it was worth the effort.

It was not long before I realized that Matthew Henry was from my part of the world. I come from a village outside Wrexham. Matthew Henry was born and brought up only a few miles from where I lived, and ministered for most of his life a mere eleven

miles from Wrexham. This encouraged me to find out more about him.

During my teenage years I was not too happy with my middle name, Henry, as it was out of fashion at the time and I was often ribbed at school over it. Later, I came to be proud of it when I learned more of Matthew Henry's father, Philip Henry, even though I was not named after him.

It has been a privilege and a humbling experience researching the life and ministry of this wonderful man of God, his family background and his many friends. I pray that the life of Matthew Henry that this Philip Henry has 'fathered' will help to further the memory of an outstanding minister of the gospel and stimulate more people to read at least his most easily accessible books (which can be purchased, borrowed or downloaded).

Introduction

The name of Matthew Henry will always be associated with his famous commentary. All over the world there are Christians who still appreciate the value of his work. For three hundred years his exposition of the biblical text, devotional comments, practical wisdom, warm theology and helpful insights have been of immense value to Christians both in their private devotions and family worship. Preachers and teachers of God's Word have also found his work a useful tool in the preparation of their sermons and Scripture lessons. Matthew Henry died aged fifty-one, greatly respected during his life for his preaching, wise counsel and published works. Since then his catechism and advice on prayer, as well as his popular commentary, have been a source of spiritual nourishment to many.

Matthew Henry lived during a very difficult period for Christians who were not prepared to submit by order of the state to Anglican worship and organization. They were treated as second-class citizens and were often unjustly accused of sedition. The dates of Matthew Henry's life span the years when there was sustained official persecution; and even when the position of the Dissenters, or Nonconformists as they came to be called, eased after the bloodless Revolution of 1688, they were still treated with

suspicion. Bills in Parliament continued to be formulated to curb their freedoms until the year of Matthew's death, 1714, when Tory power and Stuart dynasty gave way to Whig ascendancy and the Hanoverian succession.

In order to appreciate more clearly the situation in which Matthew Henry grew up and later ministered, it is necessary to say more than usual about his father and the circumstances of the time.